

# 2026 Quality Improvement Awards

## Application Instructions

### Purpose

With funding made available through the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), MRTQ PDN has designed a quality improvement award (QIA) grant to incentivize and support early childhood education programs as they increase their rating in Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System, *Rising Stars for ME*. **Programs eligible for this QIA grant will be currently rated at Star 2 and working toward a Star 3 rating.**

### Timeline

This grant opportunity is available on an **accelerated timeline**. Important dates include:

- **Wednesday, April 22, 2026** – Request for Applications (RFA) released.
- **Wednesday, April 29, 2026, and Thursday, April 30, 2026** – Open office hours via Zoom for questions regarding the Star 3 Standards. Register or submit questions at: <https://forms.gle/FfzA5zmy9rFAAxqU6>. Meetings will be recorded and posted on the MRTQ PDN website.
  - **Wednesday, April 29** – Standards 1, 2, and 3 at 6:00pm
  - **Thursday, April 30** – Standards 4, 5, 6, and 7 at 12:30pm
- **Monday, May 11, 2026** – Electronic applications due to MRTQ PDN no later than 11:59pm. Paper applications must be postmarked by **Monday, May 11, 2026**. Scanned paper copies may be emailed and must be received by **Monday, May 11, 2026**. Hand delivered paper applications will not be accepted.

#### Submit applications to:

- Email: [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu)
- Mail to: MRTQ PDN – QI Awards, Attn. Jenn Wiles, USM, PO Box 9300, Portland, ME 04104-9300
- **Monday, June 1, 2026** – All programs that applied by the deadline will be notified of the Selection Committee's final decision.
- **Monday, June 1, 2026 – Monday, November 30, 2026** – Project implementation period.
- **Monday, November 30, 2026** – Deadline for programs to reapply with *Rising Stars for ME*.

- **Tuesday, December 1, 2026 – Wednesday, December 30, 2026** – Final evaluation period for 2026 QIAs.

## Eligibility and Awards

### Eligibility

To be eligible for this award, a program must be:

- Currently rated at Star 2 with *Rising Stars for ME* and have maintained a rating no higher than Star 2 for the past six months.
- In good standing with Child Care Licensing. Programs with a Conditional License are not eligible for this opportunity.

### Awards

Programs selected for this award opportunity will receive the following:

1. On-site or virtual consultation with an assigned Quality Specialist through MRTQ PDN.
2. A \$1,000 stipend to cover administrative costs associated with implementing the QIA funding.
3. Up to \$5,000 in materials from pre-selected bundles (see Appendix for a list of bundles). **Bundles will be selected in collaboration with the MRTQ PDN Quality Specialist during the implementation period.** The list in the Appendix is provided for reference only.
4. Free enrollment in QIA-exclusive offerings of the following MRTQ PDN trainings:
  - a. Infant Toddler Maine Early Learning and Development Standards (IT MELDS) for up to two staff per program
  - b. Child Care Leadership Institute I, II, or III for one staff per program (for facilities only)
5. Enrollment for up to two staff members in a Professional Learning Community dedicated to creating a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan.

## Application Process

Programs applying for a QIA must complete the following:

- QIA Application – available online at <https://www.mrtq.org/quality-initiatives/> or paper form

- To request a paper application, please email [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu) or call 207-228-8331 and leave a message. Include your first and last name (including the spelling) and your mailing address. Paper applications will be mailed within two business days.

Information required for completing the QIA Spreadsheet:

- *Rising Stars for ME* Recommendations Report
- Current staff list from the MRTQ Registry
- Active Staff Training Overview from the MRTQ Registry

It is recommended that applicants complete the electronic QIA Application spreadsheet using a desktop or laptop computer (not a phone or tablet).

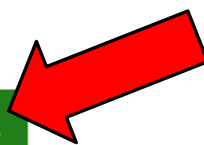
## Application Instructions

- 1. Complete the program information section.** This is the yellow tab on the Application spreadsheet, or the top section of the paper application. **Check to be sure that you are completing the correct application for your program's setting.**
- 2. Locate the program's current Recommendations for moving to Star 3.** The program's Director of Record (DoRA) should log in to [risingstarsforme.org](http://risingstarsforme.org). On the home page, locate the current certified application:

# Your Rising Stars Application

Start or continue your application

Rising Stars Application »



Select the most recent certified application:

# My Application History

Any in-progress Rising Stars for ME applications are listed below. You may resume the application by selecting the "Resume" button next to the application you wish to continue working on. If you have an application that is awaiting certification, you will not be allowed to submit a new application until the first application has been certified.

You don't have any in-process Rising Stars applications. [Start new application](#)

Your Rising Stars for ME applications, are listed below. If you have questions about an application that is "Awaiting Certification," please reach out to your licensing specialist or [risingstarsforme@maine.edu](mailto:risingstarsforme@maine.edu).

	PortfolioApplicationID	LicenseID	CreatedDate	LastEditedDate	LastEditedBy	SubmittedOn	Status
Select	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	2/12/2026 1:28:55 PM	2/28/2026 12:14:11 PM	[REDACTED]	2/28/2026 12:00:00 AM	Star 2
Select	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	5/27/2025 12:07:11 PM	7/2/2025 4:13:25 PM	[REDACTED]	7/2/2025 12:00:00 AM	Star 2

## Select Recommendations:

You are viewing a submitted application.

[return to your history](#)

### Contact Info

Center Name: [REDACTED]  
Mailing Address: [REDACTED]  
Mailing City: [REDACTED]  
Mailing State: ME  
Mailing Zip: [REDACTED]  
License ID: [REDACTED]

### Age Groups Served

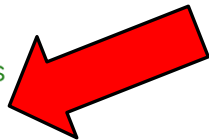
### Staff

### Documents

### Standards Answers

### Recommendations

### Star Report

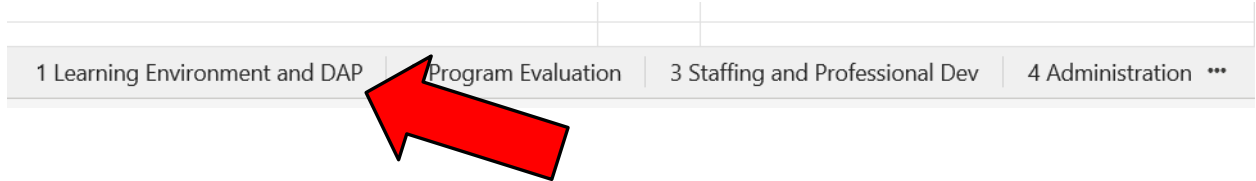


- Use the program's Recommendations to complete the QIA Application.** The focus of the 2026 QIA is supporting programs moving from Star 2 to Star 3. **To complete the QIA Application, programs will focus on the requirements to reach Star 3.**

**Note:** If your program meets all requirements in Star 3 for any of the Standards, your Recommendations will say "Your program receives a Star 4 in [X] Standard." For any Standards that currently receive Star 4, please answer Yes to all requirements on the spreadsheet.

There are multiple tabs in the QIA Application spreadsheet – one for program information, and one for each of the seven *Rising Stars for ME* Standards. **Ensure the Program Information tab is complete before submitting the application.**

Select a Standard from the bottom of the Application:



For each requirement, indicate in Column C whether the program has answered Yes or No on the most current *Rising Stars for ME* application. **If the requirement is not listed on the Recommendations, answer Yes.** If the answer is Yes, the row will become grayed out and can be skipped. If the answer is No, the row will turn BLUE. Complete the row by providing one to two sentences to briefly describe the program’s need to meet this requirement in Column D:

	A	B	C	D
1	Requirement			
2	Standard 1: Learning Environment/Developmentally Appropriate Practice		Yes/No	What does your program need to meet this requirement? (1-2 sentences)
3	1.3.1	The program’s activities and experiences are guided by a general understanding of the developmental domains.	No	
4	1.3.2	The method of planning activities and experiences is based on children’s interests, skills, and abilities.	Yes	

For example, if the program answered No to requirement 1.3.1, the need may be, “We need support for writing a curriculum philosophy to include in our family handbook.”

**NOTE:** Programs can refer to the current employee list and Active Staff Training Overview to determine specific training needs for program staff. Programs are not required to name specific staff for training on the QIA Application, but should indicate any training needs related to Star 3 requirements in Column D.

The remaining columns are **locked** and cannot be edited. These columns outline suggested resources and professional development opportunities, along with the support included as part of the QIA. If selected to receive a QIA, the program will work with their assigned MRTQ PDN Quality Specialist and refer to these resources to refine the plan during the grant period.

**Complete this process for all seven Standards.**

**4. Submit QIA Application via:**

- a. Email to: [mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu](mailto:mrtq.qiawards@maine.edu)

b. Mail to:

MRTQ PDN – QI Awards, Attn. Jenn Wiles  
 USM  
 PO Box 9300  
 Portland, ME 04104-9300

## Evaluation and Selection

Funds for the 2026 Quality Improvement Awards are limited; only 25-30 programs will receive funding during this period. To ensure a fair and transparent selection process, MRTQ PDN will form a Selection Committee to review applications and score them based on the following rubric.

### QIA Application Scoring Rubric

Criteria	0	1	2	3
<b>QIA Application Completeness (Overall)</b>	QIA Application is missing critical information or significant portions are left blank.	QIA Application contains multiple blank rows.	QIA Application contains only one or two blank rows.	QIA Application is complete.
<b>RSM Application Status (Column C)</b>	Program is not currently rated Star 2.	Program is rated Star 2. There is no evidence uploaded to the E-Portfolio and all questions are answered No.	Program is rated Star 2. Evidence is included in the E-Portfolio. More than half of the questions are answered No.	Program is rated Star 2. Evidence is included in the E-Portfolio. Half or fewer of the questions are answered No.
<b>Statement of Program Needs (Column D)</b>	None of the statements address the requirements.	Few of the statements address the requirements.	Most statements address the requirements.	All statements address the requirements.
<b>Readiness: Staffing</b>	Program does not meet 3.3.1 and does not	Program does not meet 3.3.1 and does not	Program does not meet 3.3.1 but has a path	Program meets 3.3.1.

Criteria	0	1	2	3
<b>(Standard 3)</b>	have a path to meet the requirement by 2027.	have a path to meet the requirement by November 2026 but may meet it by 2027.	to meet the requirement by November 2026.	

**Note on scoring:** Due to the short timeline for this funding opportunity, programs that have demonstrated progress toward meeting the Star 3 requirements will receive higher scores for answers in Column C (more Yes responses for meeting requirements will result in a score of 2 or 3). Programs meeting staff requirements for Standard 3 will receive the highest score for Readiness: Staffing.

**However, all programs at Star 2 are eligible and encouraged to apply for a 2026 QIA.** Maximum points can be earned for Application Completeness and for answers in Column D, regardless of the program’s current rating with *Rising Stars for ME*.

A maximum of thirty programs will receive funding. All programs will be notified of the status of their application after the Selection Committee makes the final decisions.

## Appendix: Materials – Bundle Selection

Each funded program will receive approximately \$5,000 in pre-selected materials. Choice of materials is up to the program and can be broken down in one of the following ways:

- Two large bundles (L) and one small bundle (S)
- One large bundle (L) and three small bundles (S)
- Five small bundles (S)

Unless an item is out of stock at the time of purchase, **no substitutions will be allowed.** Programs may decline individual items in a bundle. Individual items in bundles may not be mixed and matched.

MRTQ PDN will arrange for purchasing and shipping of all materials. Programs must provide a street address for shipping. If available, tracking information will be provided to programs.

Items pictured do not represent the entirety of the items in the bundle. Please click the links to view all items included in the bundle.

### Large Bundles




Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
L.I.1	<p><i>Infant Sensory Area</i></p>  <p>The image shows a wooden shelf unit with various toys, a butterfly-shaped sensory toy, and a circular sensory mat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Sensory Area, Birth-12 months</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Soft and Safe Building Blocks</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Set of 4 Swaddle Babies</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Set of 3 Rainbow Crinkle Pockets</a></li> </ul>
L.I.2	<p><i>Infant Learning Materials</i></p>  <p>The image shows a variety of toys including dolls, a play center, blocks, books, and sensory bottles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Social Emotional Competence Support Kit for Infants and Toddlers</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Play and Explore Color Changing Light Center</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">See-Through Colored Blocks</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Safety Wall Mirror (select size)</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Me &amp; My Family Board Book Collection</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">Calm Down Sensory Bottles</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. <a href="#">Peaceful Moments Board Book Collection</a></li> <li>h. <a href="#">Soft and Cozy Book Display</a></li> </ul>
L.T.1	<p><i>Toddler Gross Motor</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Toddler Climber Set</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">See Me Tunnel (2)</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Foam Sensory Boards and Discs</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Toddler Safe Active Play Set</a></li> </ul>
L.T.2 L.P.1	<p><i>Toddler or Preschool Outdoor Calming Area</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Outdoor Privacy Nook</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Outdoor Privacy Nook Cover</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Wicker House Tent</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Outdoor Art Easel</a></li> </ul>
L.P.2	<p><i>Preschool Play House</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Woodcrest Play House Set (set of 4)</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Cleaning Play Set</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Lakeshore Grocery Set</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Kitchen Play Set</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Real Sized Classroom Food Set</a></li> </ul>
L.P.3	<p><i>Preschool Gross Motor</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Gross Motor Solutions Kit</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Choosy Kids Active Learning Kit</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Outdoor Wooden Balance Boards</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		d. <a href="#">See Through Play Tunnel</a>
L.O.1	<i>STEM for Out-of-School Time</i> 	a. <a href="#">Mobile STEM Station</a> b. <a href="#">Early Math Instant Learning Center</a> c. <a href="#">Science of Physics and Math Bundle</a> d. <a href="#">Simple Machines Activity Lab</a> e. <a href="#">Plants Activity Tub</a> f. <a href="#">Insects Activity Tub</a> g. <a href="#">Animals Activity Tub</a>
L.O.2	<i>Out-of-School Time Calming Corner</i> 	a. <a href="#">Mobile Sensory Cart</a> b. <a href="#">Premium Teardrop Beanbag Seats (2)</a> c. <a href="#">Peaceful Kids Classroom Yoga Kit</a> d. <a href="#">Sensory Tunnel</a> e. <a href="#">Wooden Stackers River Stones</a>

### Small Bundles

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
S.I.1	<i>Family and Self for Infants</i>	a. <a href="#">Look-At-Me Mirror Center</a> b. <a href="#">Infant Photo Mat (2)</a>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. <a href="#">Child's View Changeable Display Center</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Multicultural Board Book Collection</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">You Are Extraordinary! Board Book Collection</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">You Are Awesome Board Books</a></li> </ul>
S.I.2	<p data-bbox="354 625 771 657"><i>Infant and Toddler Furnishings</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Playhouse Cube with Mat</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Infant Mirror Tent</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Home Comfort Toddler Mountain</a></li> </ul>
S.C.1	<p data-bbox="354 1119 623 1150"><i>Program Essentials</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Visual Schedule</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Individual Student Visual Schedule (4)</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Exploring Emotions Kit</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Set of Six Floor Pillows</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Time Timer Classroom Set</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">Bulletin Board (choose size)</a></li> </ul>
S.T.1 S.P.2	<p data-bbox="354 1612 529 1644"><i>Mud Kitchen</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Acadia Outdoor Mud Kitchen</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Outdoor Kitchen Playset</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Mud Kitchen Accessory Set</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Stay Dry Water Play Smock (set of 12)</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		
S.T.2	<p><i>Toddler Lights and Mirrors</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Toddler Safe Light Table Bundle</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Silver Boulder Blocks</a></li> </ul>
S.T.3	<p><i>Social Emotional Support Kit</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Social Emotional Competence Support Kit for Toddler Programs</a></li> </ul>
S.T.4	<p><i>Toddler Dolls</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Set of 4 Soft Baby Dolls (11")</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Hardwood Doll Changing Table</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Hardwood Doll Crib</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Doll Bedding Set</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Hardwood Doll High Chair</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">Wooden Doll Care Set</a></li> <li>g. <a href="#">Toddler Dollhouse</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h. <a href="#">Soft and Safe Families Complete Set</a></li> <li>i. <a href="#">Soft and Safe Children with Differing Abilities Complete Set</a></li> </ul>
S.P.1	<i>Preschool Blocks</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Preschool Unit Blocks</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Set of 5 Small Trucks</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">More Village Vehicles</a></li> </ul>
S.P.3	<i>Preschool Families</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Play-All-Around Dollhouse</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Play-All-Around Dollhouse Furniture</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Pose and Play Families Complete Set</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">All Kinds of Families Puzzle Set</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Community Puzzles</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">All Families Are Special Book Set</a></li> </ul>
S.P.4	<i>Preschool Calming Corner</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Calming Corner Bundle</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Classroom Calming Kit</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Bilingual Emotions Dolls Complete Set</a></li> </ul>
S.P.5	<i>Preschool Light Table</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Wooden Preschool Light Table</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. <a href="#">Light Table Manipulatives Center</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Light Table Activity Kit</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Click Builders Classic Prism</a></li> <li>e. <a href="#">Color and Light Matrix</a></li> <li>f. <a href="#">Magnetic Wonder Tiles Master Set</a></li> </ul>
S.O.1	<p><i>Out-of-School Time Outdoor Play</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Nature to Play Loose Parts 40 Piece Set</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">4-Way Indoor/Outdoor Easel</a></li> </ul>
S.O.2	<p><i>Out-of-School Time Light Panels</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Tabletop Light Panel (4)</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Human X-Rays Set of 18</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Click Builders Classic Prism</a></li> <li>d. <a href="#">Light Table Manipulatives Center</a></li> </ul>
S.O.3	<p><i>Out-of-School Time Robots</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Botley 2.0 Coding Robot Classroom Bundle</a></li> <li>b. <a href="#">Exploring STEM Job Skills Kit</a></li> <li>c. <a href="#">Power Tiles Circuit Kit Master Set/8</a></li> </ul>

Bundle No.	Description	Items Included
	