



Child Care Services Start-Up Grant Application Guide

Child Care Services Start-Up Grants assist child care providers and programs who are soon-to-be licensed or have been licensed for less than six months with purchasing items or making improvements that are required by licensing or the Fire Marshall.

Start-up efforts are enhanced by comprehensive support from Child Care Wayfinder. Visit ChildCareWayfinder.org to learn about the one-stop navigation network for starting and growing child care programs in Minnesota.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Who can apply for Start-Up Grants?

Any program that is actively providing early learning services to children ranging in age from birth to school-age and was licensed for the first time within the past six months OR

- Is soon-to-be licensed with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) or Tribal Government and has been visited by a licensor OR
- Is a new program (less than six months in operation) that is licensed or is licensed-exempt OR
- Is an existing program that is expanding to take more children, as indicated on the license as an increase in licensed capacity

If licensed by DHS, a program must have no current negative actions. Licensing violation such as a temporary immediate suspension, revocation, or a maltreatment determination where the facility was found responsible will prevent the issuance of a grant and/or will cause withdrawal of a grant.

You may receive only one Start-Up Grant. A program cannot receive both a Start-Up Grant and a Regional Grant in the same fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

2. How much money can my program apply for?

The limit for Start-Up Grants is \$2,000 for Family Child Care programs and \$3,000 for Child Care Centers.

3. What items can my program apply for?

Programs may apply for funds to support the start-up and expansion of child care and school-age care services. Please refer to the Grants Spending Categories and Eligible Items list included in this guide. All materials must be new and must be purchased from a retail company, an early childhood supplier such as Lakeshore, and not a private individual.

Any items purchased with this grant must be used in accordance with licensing requirements. Please contact your licensor if you have questions about a particular item meeting licensing requirements.

Child product safety information to guide expenditure eligibility or ineligibility can be found at these government resources:

<https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls>

<https://www.cpsc.gov/SafeSleep>

<https://playgroundsafety.org/safetm-resources/guidelines-standards-and-best-practices>

Minor Construction Projects: Grants may be used towards the cost of materials for outdoor play area fencing or other minor construction or renovations to the spaces used for child care as required by licensing to ensure child safety or meet other program standards. All materials must be new and must be purchased from a retail store, not a private party.

In the event that a child care program wishes to have the cost of assembly and/or installation covered by a grant, the labor must be performed by a contractor following applicable state and local laws and regulations regarding registration and licensure. See dli.mn.gov/business/residential-contractors-remodelers-roofers for more information.

Technology: Programs may use grants for technology equipment, software to create, enhance and maintain business management systems, and related subscription fees. This includes costs associated with accessing the internet, such as installation or equipment, and website start-up, maintenance, or ongoing subscription fees.

Eligible items that are for 100% business use will be funded at 100%. Items that are shared with a household or organization (such as a church) will be funded at 50%. The reimbursement rate depends on how the item is used and not the item itself. For example, in one program a refrigerator may be used only for child care food (business use only); and in another program it may be used for child care food and a family's food (shared).

4. What items are not eligible?

Due to a federal rule, Start-Up Grants may not be used for the following:

Major Construction or Renovations: Major renovation means structural changes to the foundation, roof, floor, exterior or load-bearing walls of a facility, or the extension of a facility to increase its floor area; or extensive alteration of a facility such as to significantly change its function and purpose, even if such renovation does not include any structural change. Funds may be expended for minor remodeling of the designated child care space and for upgrading the designated child care space to assure that providers meet state and local child care standards, including applicable health and safety requirements.

Religious-based Curricula, Activities, Materials, or Counseling: Child care programs are allowed to purchase and/or use religious-based curricula or items in their program if they choose, but they must use their own funds; they cannot use Child Care Services Grants.

Expendable Supplies: Expendable supplies (diapers, wipes, soap, paper products), except as it pertains to Personal Protective Equipment (cleaning products, hand sanitizer, masks) used for recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health to keep children and staff healthy and safe.

Office supplies that are not directly used for early childhood quality improvement activities: Ink and paper used to print invoices for families would not be an allowed use of grants. Ink and paper used to print curriculum, worksheets, or a newsletter for families in the program would be allowed.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) federal restrictions can be reviewed online in the National Archives Code of Federal Regulations: Title 45 Subtitle A Subchapter A Part 98 Subpart F § 98.56(b)(1) Restrictions of the use of funds at [eCFR :: 45 CFR 98.56 -- Restrictions on the use of funds](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-a/subchapter-a/part-98/subpart-f/section-98.56).

Grants are not allowed to be spent on items considered to be part of the cost of doing business (such as rent, utilities, taxes, bank service fees, and down payments).

In addition, grant funds are not allowed to be spent on child care tuition (scholarships), nor items prohibited by licensing.

Items are ineligible if someone employed by the program will benefit financially from the purchase itself. For example, purchasing toys from an employee who is a Discovery Toys representative.

5. If my program receives a grant, what requirements do I have to meet?

Your program will need to sign and follow the requirements of a Participation Agreement. Please read the agreement carefully before signing.

6. If my program receives a grant, how will my program receive the money?

All grants are paid on a reimbursement basis and after all requirements are completed.

7. When is this grant available?

It is available on an ongoing basis, subject to available funds.

8. How does my program apply for this grant?

Please contact your local Child Care Aware of Minnesota Grants Administrator for additional guidance about this grant funding. You must fill out the application form and mail it to the address listed at the end of this document.

GRANT SPENDING CATEGORIES AND ELIGIBLE ITEMS

The following charts list items that you may purchase with your Start-Up Grant. This will help you identify eligible items, and which spending category to use when describing your proposed purchases on the budget pages of the application. If you do not see an item listed, it may be ineligible. If you need assistance, please consult with your Grant Administrator to confirm eligibility or ineligibility of an expense.

Assessment and Planning for Each Individual Child Children do better when their teachers and providers know them well, understand their levels of development, and use the information to plan instruction. Assessment information is accurate and fair when it is gathered in a way that includes observation in natural settings, and a child assessment tool that is valid and reliable.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment resources and tools; all books, toys, learning materials, equipment or items related to eligible assessment tools including computer, laptop, or tablet Camera or video camera for recording classroom activities (Does not include special lenses, etc.) Journaling materials 	

Health and Well-Being Children do better when early care and education programs are safe and healthy, provide nutritious meals and snacks, and offer many opportunities for active play. This foundation allows children to take full advantage of learning opportunities.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADA compliance features (fix, add, or replace) necessary for child care program, including parking lot railings and disability ramps Adaptive, special needs items such as positioning equipment, eating utensils, cups and plates, adapted toys Adult furniture needed by staff for work responsibilities and care and education activities (ex: adult size classroom chairs, rocking chair, office furniture, center break room chairs, center meeting table) Antibacterial wall dispensers Background check fees Bathroom that is child care specific - addition, repair, or renovation Bibs and eating utensils, dishes, eating supplies for staff and children to serve and eat food Car seats, child restraint systems for vehicle, appropriate for the ages of the children in care Child care program furniture (cribs, mattresses, pack-n-plays, pack-n-play covers, cots, changing tables, child-size table and chairs, shelves/cabinets, infant seats, cubbies, storage, high chairs, booster seats, toddler chairs, potty chairs, etc.) Child Safety locks such as appliance locks, outlet covers, cabinet locks Child toothbrushes and individual toothpaste containers Child transport wagons and Strollers that meet safety specifications and stroller accessories like sun cover, cup holder Choke prevention tubes (for gauging choking potential of small objects) Closet door latches to prevent a child from being trapped inside a closet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor construction projects that are needed for safety or licensing such as repairing or replacing steps, fencing, windows, doors, minor repairs to fill small potholes or cracks in driveway or parking lot, or chips in sidewalk or patio if posing health/safety risk. This includes minor mud jacking or sidewalk grinding Replacing, repairing interior and exterior doors due to damage. Standard lock and/or hardware, keyed and keyless entry systems, security door locks with wifi codes. Creating sufficient exits per Fire Marshall that do not require a new hole to be cut in an exterior wall. This includes replacement of windows deemed necessary for a fire exit. Outdoor play equipment (such as climbers, swings, slides and accessories that meets safety standards, and the repair of eligible equipment Panic hardware for exterior doors Permit fees and/or required inspection of completed grant-funded project(s) per local municipalities. Playground safety surfacing (for fall protection) Protective panels added to deck railing Protective outdoor clothing/gear for enrolled children to wear while they are in care to create equity and inclusion in the curriculum. This gear does not go home with children, it is strictly for enrolled children to use at child care. Purchase of safe plastics that do not contain polycarbonates for serving food Purchase or repair of appliances (refrigerator, freezer, range, dishwasher, washer, dryer, air purifier, dehumidifier, humidifier, water purifier when needed for safety, etc.) Radon detectors and mitigation, removal of lead paint, mold, asbestos

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete for filling of small cracks, purchase of cement mix for projects that providers would do themselves • Consultation with a Child Care Health Consultant-for health, safety, nutrition, infectious disease control and/or advice on the care of a child with special needs • CPR and First Aid training that is not verified in Develop. First Aid: Pediatric first aid training must be provided by an individual approved as a first aid instructor. CPR: Pediatric CPR training must be provided by an individual approved to provide pediatric CPR instruction. In addition: (1) cover CPR techniques for infants and children and the treatment of obstructed airways; 2) include instruction, hands-on practice, and an in-person, observed skills assessment under the direct supervision of a CPR instructor; and (3) be developed by the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, or another organization that uses nationally recognized, evidence-based guidelines for CPR. • Disease prevention supplies recommended by the Minnesota Department of Health such as masks, certain cleaning supplies, PPE, etc. • Door, if cutting a new door into an exterior wall if necessary to meet licensing requirements • Egress window created from an existing window to meet licensing requirements, add or expand egress window for easier escape access, add stair and rails to access fire escape/egress more easily • Faucet for bathroom that is hands-free • Fence (purchase or repair) - in the child care play space and/or around pools/water sources, providing fence is functionally designed for child safety, including chain-link, privacy and picket - pickets must be close enough together that a child cannot slip through. • Fire escape ladder • Fireplace, heater, and wood-burning stove screen covers. Covers for electric baseboard heaters • First aid kits • Floor cleaning equipment (vacuum cleaner, carpet cleaner, etc.) • Floor covering (permanent) - adding or replacing - due to damage (such as carpet, linoleum, wood, tile, LVP) in areas where children are regularly present only, interior concrete sealing in licensed space • Food group and nutrition activities (food is ineligible) • Garbage cans and wastebaskets that are secured, hands-free covered waste disposal cans • Gates (to prevent falls and access to unsafe areas) • Guardrails, railing, spindles, or additional protective spindles/panels on stairs or deck if spaced too far apart for licensing code if deck is used by child care program and deck is higher than 3' off ground, requiring spindles/rail. • Gun safe • Hand-washing kits and posters, Healthy habits posters, safety posters • Heat source (such as a furnace), air conditioning unit needed to meet licensing requirements for child-use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrigerator thermometer, hot liquid thermometer, food temperature thermometer • Replacement of wooden barriers that contain creosote or arsenic with safe materials • Safety helmets for children riding bicycles or tricycles • Safety kit, disaster kit, emergency kit (bag or container and all appropriate supplies needed for evacuation in accordance with emergency preparedness plan) • Sandbox, sand, and/or covers • Sanitizing equipment (such as ozone or UV cabinet designed for school and child care use) • Sanitizing spray, hand sanitizer or cleaning supplies used for the prevention of Covid-19 • Separation panels (adding or replacing permanent panels) to reduce the spread of germs in child spaces or in parent drop-off locations; adding/replacing sound-proofing or acoustic panels. • Shade canopy, awning for shade, Large outdoor umbrella for shade, structure for shade • Shingles or siding repair or replacement of small section if damaged and when recommended by licensing for health/safety – documentation required • Sick and/or quiet space addition or repair that is separate from the activity area • Smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, fire extinguishers • Soil backfill, grass seed after tree removal/stump grinding directly in play area only (documentation required) • Soil, grass seed, sod, needed for start up or play area expansion, or maintenance of existing grassy areas • Sprinkler/fire suppression system (indoor), repairing/installing within the child care program area when required by fire marshal • Staining, painting, refinishing decks, patios or porches; replacing deck or patio flooring; enclosing or screening deck, patio or porch • Storage bins, crates or baskets, containers designed to hold items within the storage units or cubbies • Tie-down devices for blind and curtain "pulls" and blind and curtain cords • Time of laborer working in the area requested who can provide their business name, address, and phone on quotes prior to grant awards and on receipts for work performed. License number must be documented when a license is required for work performed by State or Local Municipality regulation. Labor must meet permit and quality inspection regulations. • Tree removal and/or stump grinding from within immediate child care playground areas for child safety, and areas outside of the child use area if the child use area is affected by an unsafe tree. • Turn-around space addition, small, in driveway for safety purposes, not larger than a standard parking space (10x12) in which cars may back into to turn around. Eligible only when required or recommended by licensing due to location on a busy road (such as a highway) – documentation required • Video door bell (such as Ring), monitoring equipment; keyless entry systems; security doors; security door locks with wifi codes; any video monitoring system or other security system. Cost of professional installation |
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<p>space. Installation that does not require new ventilation, duct work or pipes etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant bucket swings for outdoor playground swing sets, Swings with soft or flexible seats • Kitchen equipment needed for preparing, storing, and cooking food for children (such as bowls, utensils, measuring cups, BPA free containers, vacuum food saver, pots, pans) • Lead content detectors (for toys and other child items which could be put in the mouth) • Lead-free environment. Lead abatement from child care program use environments (business use and shared use). Cost of removing items, materials, and replacement. • License fees, Fire Marshall fees • Light fixtures replacement with fixtures containing shielded or shatterproof bulbs; adding shatterproof lighting in unfinished ceiling • linens and safe-sleep and age-appropriate bedding • Locks for cabinets or locked storage units for medicines and cleaning agents • Materials and labor needed to install or repair a pathway for riding toys, small bikes, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walls/Ceilings that are internal: minor repair of in child care program space including paint • Water for drinking provision. When water is deemed unsafe for drinking, equipment purchase, installation, and repair, of safe drinking water (reverse osmosis, water purifier, filters). • Water softener when needed to mitigate mineral build up due to hard water • Water source repair or replacement at 100% of the cost regardless of shared use (per DHS). Meaning the minor repair of contaminated well for health/safety reasons (i.e., water does not pass licensing requirements – documentation required) or replacement of damaged well/septic cover for safety. • Window coverings for sleep areas (blinds, curtains) • Wood stairs where none exist if needed as fire exit – documentation required.
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Professionalism

Children do better when their teachers and providers have professional preparation that includes higher education coursework, combined with on-going training and support. These qualifications have been found to be consistent predictors of program quality, strong child-adult interactions, quality learning environments, and positive child outcomes.

- Advertising (Ex: one time web hosting fees, signage, flyers)
- Breakroom, meeting room, and professional supplies such as rug, wastebasket, posters to guide pedagogy (the method and practice of teaching)
- Cell phone for work purposes (service contract is ineligible Ex: Verizon expense)
- Child care association fees
- Early childhood education and child development textbooks, subscriptions to education and professional journals and publications
- Fee-for-service early childhood education mentoring, coaching, and/or consultation (programs seeking out help to improve quality via MNAEYC consultation, professional health consultation, and the like)
- Outdoor signage, adding or replacing, on the program grounds
- T.E.A.C.H. related costs that are required to support a T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship recipient
- Technology devices for teachers to use for training courses, assessment and curriculum tools and planning, such as computers, tablets, and standard components of mouse, keyboard, monitor necessary to operate the computer
- Technology equipment, software to create, enhance and maintain business management systems, and related subscription fees. This includes costs associated with accessing the internet, such as installation or equipment, and website start-up, maintenance, or ongoing subscription fees.
- Training approved in Develop for the purpose of obtaining a Child Development Associate credential (CDA)
- Training that is in-person, online training, and professional early childhood organization conferences approved on Develop.
- Training on the use of an assessment tool or curriculum that is offered by the organization that supplies the assessment tool or curriculum. Training that meets this criteria is eligible even if it is not verified in Develop.
- Wages to pay staff to attend training that is required for a rating or a grant, part of a quality improvement plan, or training that is funded by a grant. Wages for substitute early childhood educators while staff attend training that is required for a rating or a grant, part of a quality improvement plan, or training that is funded by a grant.

Relationships with Families

Children do better when families are engaged in their children’s education and development. Building two-way relationships with families helps strengthen a sense of belonging among all children in the program as they experience respect and support for their home cultures and languages.

- Conferences materials – items needed for an educator to discuss the child’s development and progress with a child’s parent/guardian , establish shared goals for growth and development, and sharing ideas for intentional engagement with the child.
- Event materials for an event that is meant to engage families in the education and development of their child in which children are involved, and parent advisory events. Eligible items include items/activities that parents and children can engage in together, classroom display materials, paper plates, napkins, art supplies, take-home child development and education resources, and speaker fee. (Ineligible: food, items unsafe for children)
- Family message boards, bulletin boards
- Newsletters to enrolled families
- Studies and data reports (and any related consultation) impactful to child and family experience and/or to improve care if the data isn’t available through state or local agencies
- Take-home curriculum kits
- Technology related to communicating with families (text programs, etc.)
- Translating materials costs – if a handbook or any other print material needs to be translated, and/or interpreter services

Teaching and Relationships with Children

Children do better when early care and education teachers and providers are caring and engaging, have quality learning environments, use a research-based curriculum, and support children’s transitions to kindergarten. Teachers and providers make a big difference in children’s lives. These practices help build relationships and give children what they need to learn and grow.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art supplies including stencils and sponges • Balance beams that are safe for age and development • Basketball hoops, balls, ball pump, sports balls • Bicycles, tricycles, wagons, riding toys, scooters, scooter boards, all must be age and developmentally appropriate for children • Bilingual language materials • Block play materials, small design blocks, materials that link, construction sets, large outdoor blocks • Books that are age and developmentally appropriate • Carpets for classroom needed for activities and play • Classroom displays, posters, calendars, weather charts, etc. • Clocks and time activities and materials • Computer printer, Ink and paper used to print eligible print items • Computer table for children • Consultant fees related to designing indoor or outdoor learning environment • Cookbooks for children • Discovery boxes, feely boxes • Dramatic play equipment and supplies (Puppet theater, puppets, costumes, play cameras, play phones, career props, dolls, dollhouses, dollhouse furniture) • Dramatic play toy buildings (e.g., barn, firehouse, school, etc.) • Early childhood curriculum resources and tools. All books, toys, learning materials, equipment or items related to eligible curriculum • Early language concept activities such as object matching, sorting • Educational software | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant/toddler portable playsets including but not limited to Step2, Little Tikes, tunnels, playhouses or other large motor toys; portable play items such as nature “stumps” and outdoor sensory structures any indoor/outdoor play sets/large motor toys • Laminator and laminating sheets for educational displays, labeling classroom items, creating curriculum materials for matching, sorting, storytelling, etc. • Large motor games (such as bean bag, ring toss, parachute) • Learning centers - items needed to create and stock (such as literacy, listening, and block play, puzzles, writing stencils, beads, lacing sets, pegboards, pegs) • Manual dexterity dressing vests for small motor skill development • Materials for safe and supervised child woodworking experiences • Math awareness materials such as geometric forms and boards, materials for pattern / patterning activities • Measurement kits • Multicultural games, activity kits, craft kits and books • Music, Headphones, rhythm instruments • Nature based curriculum learning materials • Phonological awareness materials, print and alphabet awareness • Play Calculators, play money • Play tunnels or hoops • Pounding benches • Rocking boats • Sand and water tables and toys • Science kits, science materials such as magnifying glasses, microscopes, magnets, prisms, minerals / rocks |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration kits, theme boxes/bags for literacy or STEAM for example • Gardening activities with children items, such as raised garden beds, small greenhouse, soil, and seeds, child-safe gardening tools • Infant and toddler toys (teethers, soft blocks, soft dolls and animals, sensory mats, etc.) • Infant/Toddler activity mats and soft indoor climbers, Tumbling mats, yoga mats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory materials and toys • Sheds (small prefabricated or kits) 120 sq ft dedicated to child care program use. Playhouse structure 10x12' max size • Shipping and delivery costs for eligible items • Sight and sound tubes • Storytelling kits and materials • Tactile numbers and number tracing activities • Tools and tool benches • Toy animal collections, plush animals • Toy cooking utensils, pots, pans, and play food items • Wall hangings, unbreakable mirrors, area rugs, throw rugs, play mats, classroom rugs, waste baskets, for areas used by children
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APPLYING FOR A START-UP GRANT

Training Requirement: Participate in 12 hours of training, approved by Achieve, which can be found on Develop (www.developtoolmn.org). All required training must be completed before receiving reimbursement. The cost of participating in this required training is your responsibility. However, you may choose to include the cost of the required training as part of the grant application by applying for dollars within the Professional Development category.

Participation Agreement: Your program will need to sign a Participation Agreement that details all requirements. The agreement lays out the responsibilities of programs receiving grants. Please read the agreement carefully before signing.

Two-Year Requirement: If you are awarded a grant, your program will be required to provide active licensed or license-exempt child care services in Minnesota for a minimum of two years from the date of your award letter. If for any reason your program ceases to provide active child care services within the required timeframe, you will be required to repay grant dollars on a prorated basis.

Reimbursement Timeline: All documents required for requesting reimbursement must be submitted by the date indicated on your award letter for Grant Administrator review. Grant Administrators have the right to:

- Ask for clarification (or pictures) of any grant item before approving AND
- Refuse reimbursement for any purchase that doesn't match the original request or intended purpose

Expenditures: Be specific on your expenditure pages. Only items that were approved on your application will be reimbursed. If any substitution needs to occur, this **must** be approved by your local Grant Administrator, prior to making the purchase. A budget change can only occur once in a grant cycle.

Grant Payment Information: All Start-Up Grants are paid on a reimbursement basis after all requirements are completed.

Grant Application Review Process: Once you submit an application, it will be reviewed by a review committee. Each application is reviewed by three review committee members who recommend the items and the amount to be considered for final approval. A denial or award letter will be sent to you via email or U.S mail.

Before Applying: below is a list of steps to complete prior to completing your application.

- Create a Develop Membership ID (Directions can be found at www.developtoolmn.org).
- Link your Develop Membership ID with your program's Organization ID and list yourself as an employee.
- Please contact your local Grant Administer with questions or concerns.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

Fill out your application form completely in ink. Your application should be neat and easy to read and stapled together in order. Do not submit grant applications in folders or binders, professionally bound or store-bought.

1. Send in one complete packet, including the application with all required attachments stapled to it.
2. Keep one copy of the completed application form and all required attachments for your records. You will need to refer back to your application if you are awarded a grant.
3. Mail or email the original completed application packet to:

Families First of MN
126 Woodlake Drive SE
Rochester MN 55904

Region 9 Dawn Eckhoff dawne@familiesfirstmn.org
Region 10 Angela Tweed angelat@familiesfirstmn.org

Checklist

Your application packet must include:

- ☐ The application form, including the participation agreement, with all questions completed.
- ☐ Copy of your current child care license (*if applicable*).
- ☐ Estimate or bid (*if applicable*). This is required for the installation of fences, windows, or construction, as required by licensing, or equipment assembly projects. If a child care program wishes to have the cost of assembly and/or installation covered by a grant, the labor must be performed by a contractor following applicable state and local laws and regulations regarding registration and licensure. See <https://www.dli.mn.gov/business/residential-contractors-remodelers-roofers> for more information.
- ☐ Pictures (*if applicable*). A picture from a catalog or online is recommended if the item(s) may be questioned by the reviewers.