



Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

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What is a CDA?

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is a nationally-recognized credential that promotes improved performance and recognition of early childhood care and education professionals. You can earn a CDA in the following areas: infant/toddler, preschool, family child care, or home visitor.

The Council for Professional Recognition administers the CDA. The CDA is different than a college certificate, an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree which are issued by community colleges or four-year colleges or universities.

If you have additional questions about the CDA after reading this fact sheet, contact the Council for Professional Recognition: www.cdacouncil.org/

Who would benefit from earning a CDA?

Individuals who are interested in advancing their careers in early childhood care and education would benefit from earning a CDA. To apply for the CDA, you must have a high school diploma, GED, or be a junior or senior in a high school career and technical program in early childhood care and education. Most people earn a CDA after completing high school or a GED and before completing an associate or bachelor's degree.

What are the benefits of earning a CDA?

- Increased knowledge of child development and improved service delivery.
- In Arizona, Head Start employees must meet the following requirements:
 - Infant and toddler teachers are required to have a CDA when hired; and
 - Preschool assistant teachers are required to be enrolled in a CDA program within six months of hire and obtain a CDA within two years.
- Arizona's Professional REWARD\$ Program provides incentives to early childhood teachers in certain parts of Arizona for, among other things, earning a CDA. (<https://tinyurl.com/ArizonaREWARDS>)

- The training completed as part of the CDA can be applied to the training requirements for licensure.
- You can receive course credit for completing a CDA at many community colleges in Arizona through a credit for prior learning program. Ask about this at your community college.

How do I learn a CDA?

1. Complete 120 clock hours of formal education training. At least 10 hours must be completed in each of the areas listed below. The remaining 40 hours can be completed in any of the areas.
 - Planning a safe and healthy environment that invites learning,
 - Advancing children's physical and intellectual development,
 - Supporting children's social and emotional development,
 - Establishing productive relationships with families,
 - Managing an effective program,
 - Maintaining a commitment to professionalism,
 - Observing and recording children's behavior, and
 - Understanding and applying principles of child development and learning.
2. Obtain 480 hours of professional work experience in a center, home or home visiting program with children in the designated age group. This training must be completed within 3 years of submitting the CDA application.
3. Prepare a professional portfolio within 6 months of submitting the CDA application.
4. Find a CDA Professional Development Specialist to perform the Verification Visit. You can find a specialist by searching the directory (<https://tinyurl.com/CDAPDdirectory>), calling the Council for Professional Recognition (www.cdacouncil.org), or asking other early childhood teachers and providers to recommend a specialist. This should be done within 6 months of submitting your application.

5. Apply for the CDA online at www.cdacouncil.org/credentials/apply-for-cda or via paper application found in the CDA Competency Standards Book.
6. Complete a CDA Verification Visit in which you will be observed working with children. The Verification Visit will be completed by a Professional Development Specialist.
7. Pass the CDA Exam. This exam must be scheduled in advance. A Council Committee will review the results of the exam and decide whether to award you a CDA Credential.

Where can I find training to meet the formal education training requirement?

Early childhood professionals may meet the formal education training requirement by completing online courses and training, community-based classes, or community college courses. The training may be completed in multiple states, through different agencies, and in credit (e.g., at a community college) and noncredit (e.g., community-based classes offered by Cooperative Extension) settings.

Online Courses and Training

The Council for Professional Recognition lists institutions that offer online courses that can be used to meet the formal education training requirement here <https://tinyurl.com/CDAOnline523>

Prices vary by institution and each offers its own set of supporting activities. Some of these online courses (usually those offered by community colleges) can be applied toward a college certificate or degree as well as used to meet the education training requirements for a CDA. Some organizations offer online courses and assistance completing the portfolio, observation, and exam. One of these programs is Better Kid Care which is run by Pennsylvania State University and can be completed by people living and working in Arizona: <https://tinyurl.com/BetterKidCare-PSU>

Community-Based Training

The Council for Professional Recognition accepts training from community-based agencies with demonstrated expertise in early childhood professional education. Training offered by private individuals does not count toward the formal education training requirement. You will have to produce verification of the training (e.g., a transcript, certificate, or letter issued by the organization that provided the training). Examples of community-based agencies in Arizona that may offer training include: University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, United Way, Arizona Department of Child Safety, Easterseals Blake Foundation, Child & Family Resources, the Department of Economic Security, Southwest Human Development, and the Association of Supportive Child Care.

The Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry has a list of trainings available in Arizona. (Azregistry.org > Find Training Event > Search Category: Core Knowledge Areas) If you find a training on the AZ Registry site, contact the Council for Professional Recognition to verify that it will count toward the 120 hours of formal education training required for the CDA before completing the training. You can track how many training hours you have completed at Azregistry.org > My Education and Training Report.

Community College Courses

More than 15 community colleges in Arizona grant certificates or associate degrees in early childhood care and education. A certificate or degree from a community college is not a requirement for the CDA, but the classes that community colleges offer may be counted towards the 120 hours of formal education training required to complete a CDA. The Council for Professional Recognition considers one semester credit to be equal to 15 clock hours of formal education training, see cdacouncil.org for more information.

In addition to helping you earn a CDA, credits taken at a community college may be applied toward an associate degree or certificate or may be transferred to a four-year university in Arizona or New Mexico and applied to a bachelor's degree.

See Table 1 for a list of community colleges in Arizona that have early childhood care and education programs.

Table 1. Arizona Community Colleges that have Early Childhood Care and Education Programs

Central Arizona College (centralaz.edu)	Glendale Community College (gccaz.edu)
Chandler-Gilbert Community College (cgc.edu)	Mohave Community College (mohave.edu)
Cochise College (cochise.edu)	Paradise Valley Community College (paradisevalley.edu)
Coconino Community College (coconino.edu)	Phoenix College (phoenixcollege.edu)
Eastern Arizona College (eac.edu)	Pima Community College (pima.edu)
Estrella Mountain Community College (estrellamountain.edu)	Rio Salado (riosalado.edu)
Gateway Community College (gatewaycc.edu)	South Mountain Community College (southmountaincc.edu)

How much does it cost to complete the CDA?

Item	Amount	Description
CDA Competency Standards Book	\$25	This book provides information about the CDA including the steps necessary to apply for and complete the CDA. Purchase the book that is appropriate for the CDA credential that you want to earn (infant/toddler, preschool, family child care, or home visitor credential). These books are available in both English and Spanish here: https://tinyurl.com/CDACompetencyStandards
CDA Application fee (non-refundable)	\$425 (online) \$500 (paper)	The application fee includes the exam fee and on-site assessment. Scholarships are available from First Things First, contact Info@thearizonaregistry.org or 855-818-6613 or visit https://tinyurl.com/FTFScholarship for more information.
Formal Education Training	Varies	This can be free if you use community-based trainings or a First Things First Scholarship for college credit. Contact Info@thearizonaregistry.org or 855-818-6613 or visit https://tinyurl.com/FTFScholarship for more information about scholarships.

Note: These fees are accurate as of May 2021, visit www.cdacouncil.org for the most recent fees.

Are there scholarships for the costs associated with obtaining the CDA?

Yes! Here are a few options:

- **Arizona Early Childhood Career and Professional Development Network** maintains a list of scholarships and incentives for early childhood teachers. <https://tinyurl.com/AZScholarships>
- **Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry First Things First College Scholarships** are for students enrolled in an accredited college or university pursuing a certificate, associate degree or bachelor's degree in ECE. Funds can be used to cover CDA application and assessment fees, as well as tuition, books, and college fees. Scholarship recipients also receive \$150 bonus when they earn their CDA. All applicants must be working at a Quality First site to qualify. <https://tinyurl.com/FTFInfo> and <https://tinyurl.com/FTFApply>

- **The Professional Career Pathway Project** provides tuition for 24 credits per school year of early childhood courses at a community college and a \$20 per credit textbook stipend. <https://tinyurl.com/PCPP-AZ>
- **AzAEYC Rhian Evans Allen and Joshua J. Allen Scholarship** provides a \$1,000 scholarship for one student in Arizona who is attending an accredited university or college and majoring in early childhood education. This scholarship can be applied to the formal education training requirement to earn a CDA. <https://tinyurl.com/AzAEYC>



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This information has been reviewed by University faculty.

extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az1880-2021.pdf

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