

MERIT—Frequently Asked Questions

What early care & education and school-age professionals need to know about the Managed Education and Registry Information Tool



Professional **D**evelopment **P**athways

www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/

General MERIT Questions

1. Why am I not receiving a call back from MERIT staff?

MERIT uses a voicemail messaging and email system, and there is not a live answer service available for telephone inquiries. MERIT technical assistance staff members are currently experiencing high volumes of calls and inquiries. There are no technical issues with MERIT and it is working as designed. If you are currently experiencing difficulty or need assistance learning how to register in MERIT, please use the professional resource links below to first address your questions.

- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Professionals:** http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/licensing/docs/MERIT_FAQ_Professionals.pdf
- **MERIT Quick Steps Guide:** http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/licensing/docs/MERIT_quick_steps.pdf
- **MERIT User Manual:** http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/licensing/docs/MERIT_ProviderManual.pdf

If your questions are not answered using these MERIT resources, please contact MERIT staff at merit@del.wa.gov or call 1.866.482.4325 and choose option 8. We request that you leave only one message or email and MERIT staff will respond as soon as possible.

2. What is MERIT?

The Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is a voluntary, statewide tool to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care & education and school-age professionals. This innovative online tool helps professionals find training opportunities, access information on career pathways, and track their individual career progress. MERIT also identifies approved trainers who provide education to professionals. Over time, MERIT will also be used for:

- Quality assurance and requirements for trainers and trainings to ensure that the workforce is receiving high-quality training that is linked to the state [Core Competencies](#) and [Early Learning Guidelines](#).
- Placement of individuals on a level of the state [Career Lattice](#) based on verified training and education accomplishments.
- Assisting DEL child care licensing staff in ensuring that state requirements for individuals and facilities are met.
- Data collection on the early care & education and school-age workforce in order to identify trends and inform decision-making related to policy and investments.

3. Who can join MERIT?

MERIT is designed as a tool for all those who work with young children and their families in an early care & education or school-age program. This includes licensed child care professionals in family home and center-based care, Head Start professionals, Early Care and Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) professionals, preschool teachers, school-age professionals and administrators who support the direct care of children.

4. **What are the benefits of joining MERIT?**

MERIT is an efficient system to keep track of your ongoing education and training. In addition, professionals can use it as a tool to share qualifications with current and future employers. Trend data that is confidentially collected in MERIT will help the state identify gaps and patterns on a regional and state level. This information can then be used to raise awareness of the workforce issues that impact early care & education and school-age programs. This information is vital to encouraging increased recognition and compensation for knowledgeable and experienced professionals.

Participation in MERIT will help you to:

- Verify and document the education and training experiences that you have achieved.
- Plan your future education and career goals.
- Use verified qualifications to apply for employment or participate in quality initiatives around the state.
- Count yourself as a professional in early care & education and school-age services in Washington.

5. **What does MERIT do for the field of early childhood education?**

DEL is working to increase the quality of early care & education and school-age programs around the state. Quality is directly related to a knowledgeable and skilled workforce and MERIT emphasizes the significance of this profession in children and family's lives. MERIT provides information on career pathways for continued growth and a formalized system to recognize professional development.

6. **What information was transferred from the STARS database to MERIT?**

If you were registered with the STARS database, some of the information was transferred to MERIT, including your STARS ID and your training history.

Other information was not transferred from the STARS database. This was to ensure that only current and accurate information is listed in MERIT. You may sign in to MERIT using your previous STARS ID to update your professional record and apply for a review of your educational qualifications (see question 8). Adding verified education information to your professional record will provide evidence of your successful achievements for employment opportunities and initiatives that have education-based requirements. Requirements for STARS training have not changed and will now be verified and listed in MERIT.

7. **How can I register with MERIT and create my professional record?**

Visit the MERIT webpage at merit.del.wa.gov . For help setting up your professional record, please use the Quick Steps guide available on the MERIT homepage. If you were previously registered in the STARS database, and had a professional STARS ID, then you already have a professional record in MERIT and your STARS ID is still valid. You may send an email to merit@del.wa.gov to request a password to access your record online.

8. **What do I do if I don't have access to a computer or the Internet?**

We encourage all professionals to complete MERIT records and applications online. If you do not have access to a computer, contact your local library or child care resource & referral agency to find out more about public computer usage. If you are not familiar with computer technology, you can register in MERIT, create a MERIT record and apply for any MERIT application through a paper process. Call the MERIT office to request that forms be mailed to you.

MERIT Professional Record Maintenance and Updates

9. **How do I remain current once I have a professional record in MERIT?**

Your MERIT professional record is active for one year from the date you register. (Records were transferred from the STARS database on January 24, 2011, and this will be the registration date for professionals continuing in MERIT.) Each year, MERIT will send email notifications prior to your renewal date. You must update your MERIT record, including any changes in employment, contact information, and confidential workforce data, to remain active. MERIT will send confirmation of your updated status once you complete the record update.

10. **How is my education verified and approved through MERIT?**

You can apply to have your educational qualifications reviewed and added to your MERIT record. Adding educational information to your record can serve as a professional resume tool for current and future employment opportunities. Additionally, educational qualifications are often a requirement to participate in local or state initiatives and education that is verified in MERIT will provide evidence of your accomplishments.

Go to the MERIT homepage, sign in and click on the "Applications" tab. Once you complete the appropriate application, MERIT will alert you to the required documents that must be sent to DEL for a review of your qualifications. Once an application is verified and approved, it will automatically show on your MERIT record.

11. **What is the Washington State Career Lattice?**

The [Washington State Career Lattice](#) for Early Care & Education and School-Age Care Professionals provides a clear pathway for professional development. There are 15 steps on the career lattice that reflect increasing training and education accomplishments that align with career opportunities and/or program standards in licensed child care, ECEAP and Head Start programs in addition to other roles that support family engagement, higher education and community-based training.

You can use the Career Lattice as a professional development tool to plan your career in early learning, including training and educational goals. The Career Lattice was designed to reflect pathways that support professionals who work directly with children birth through 18 years of age. The education verification team will automatically place you on the Career Lattice when your education is verified.

Made available through the [Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge](#) (RTT-ELC) grant opportunity, Early Care & Education (ECE) and School-Age (SA) professionals placed on the Career Lattice are able to request monetary awards beginning in January 2013 as recognition of their education, employment and training accomplishments. Read more about placement on the Washington Career Lattice and available awards at <http://www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/lattice.aspx>. Please note that all financial resources provided by DEL are taxable, and you may be required to complete a 1099 tax form.

We anticipate that work that supports Washington's RTT-ELC grant will strengthen our system and result in future modifications to the Career Lattice.

12. **What if I earned my degree in another country?**

Professionals who hold degree(s) granted outside of the United States must have transcripts evaluated to determine U.S. equivalency. This includes all educational credentials that you would like to have verified and approved for your MERIT record. There are many agencies around the nation that offer this service. A copy of the translated transcripts and/or a letter or statement of equivalency must be submitted in order for the information to be verified and become a permanent part of your professional record in MERIT.

To find an agency that provides evaluation and translation services, visit the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services website at www.naces.org.

13. **Why am I asked for proof of name change when submitting education applications?**

During the education verification process, DEL requires evidence of name change if a different name is listed on an official transcript or educational document. This level of accountability is required due to federal funding that will support professional development incentives tied to the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant. Providers can submit a variety of documents for proof of name change including copies of court records denoting marriage or divorce, driver's license(s), a notarized document stating that proof of the name change has been determined, or other legal records documenting name change.

Verifying former names will allow you to submit other applications without re-submitting a proof of name change and the information will become a permanent part of your professional record.

State-Approved Training and Educational Opportunities

14. **How can I find training in MERIT?**

Visit the MERIT homepage and click on the "Find a Training" link or the "Search MERIT" tab. You can search for training by a variety of methods, i.e. training date, location, age group focus, training delivery method, or trainer. All trainings and trainers listed in MERIT are state-approved for STARS training.

15. **How is training added to my MERIT professional record?**

When you attend a training offered by a state-approved trainer, the trainer will record all information in MERIT. It is the individual professional's responsibility to provide the trainer with a valid STARS ID. It is the trainer's responsibility to determine which training participants have met all requirements for the training and will enter this information directly into MERIT. Once a trainer completes the required information on all participants who attend and pass the training, it will be automatically added to participants' individual MERIT records.

Currently, Washington State Child Care Aware (previously Child Care Resource & Referral) agencies are entering training attendance records into MERIT. A copy of the Child Care Aware (R&R) training history and your MERIT training history may both need to be provided to your employer and/or DEL licensor during this transition.

16. **Is there financial assistance to help with the cost of training?**

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) offers cost reimbursement for training taken from state-approved trainers in Washington. Professionals who currently work in child care facilities licensed or certified by DEL can access this opportunity through their MERIT professional record. Previously, this was offered through a contract with the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC).

Read more about training reimbursements and how to apply here: <http://www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/merit.aspx> . Please note that all financial resources provided by DEL are taxable, and you may be required to complete a 1099 tax form.

17. **Can I get STARS credit for taking training from a non-state-approved trainer?**

You may complete no more than 3 of the total 10 hours of continuing education required per year by a non-state-approved trainer. This includes college coursework that is taken outside of the early childhood department or other training that is not given by a state-approved trainer. Training can only count towards the training requirements for the year in which it was completed. Training by a non-state-approved trainer must be reviewed and approved by DEL in order to add it to your professional record. Submit a request by completing a Continuing Education Proposal application online in MERIT and following the instructions for providing the proper supporting documents.

18. **Can I receive STARS hours for college coursework?**

You may receive STARS credit for college coursework that is taken directly from the early childhood department of an accredited institution of higher education. Each quarter credit is accepted for 10 STARS hours; each semester credit is accepted for 15 STARS hours.

To request that this information be added to your continuing education training history, please send a signed request to DEL that includes your STARS ID, a copy of your transcripts, and an official course description. Your transcripts must include your name, the college/university name, dates of courses completed and credits earned. Official descriptions can include copies of the course catalog or a course syllabus; handwritten descriptions are not accepted.

Washington Resource Documents for Professionals

19. What are the Core Competencies?

There are two sets of Core Competencies; one written for early care and education professionals and one written for school-age professionals. The Core Competencies include standards around content areas with five levels in each area that a professional can achieve. You can find them on DEL's website at <http://www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/core.aspx> .

The Core Competencies:

- Define what professionals need to know and be able to do to provide quality education and care.
- Serve as the foundation for decisions and practices carried out by professionals in all settings and programs.
- Establish a set of standards for care and education to support professionalism in the field and will help to align all state-required trainings tracked in MERIT.
- Are a resource tool that can be used by many people for many purposes:
 - Providers, practitioners and teachers: to assess knowledge and identify areas for future professional development.
 - Directors/administrators: to define training and education requirements for job descriptions, help employees with goal setting and establish a salary scale based on educational achievement.
 - Trainers/training organizations: to plan and organize training opportunities.
 - Higher education: to coordinate and design courses and organize the framework for credentials, certificates and degrees.

20. What are the Early Learning and Development Guidelines?

The Early Learning and Development Guidelines replace the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks, which were first created in 2005 to outline what children from birth through third grade know and are able to do at different stages of their development. You can find them on DEL's website at <http://www.del.wa.gov/development/guidelines/Default.aspx> .

MERIT Policy and Procedure

21. What do I do if I disagree with a decision on a MERIT application?

DEL takes all appeals and concerns seriously and all appeals are handled in a confidential manner. The following items can be appealed if a professional is not satisfied with the decisions provided by the registry:

- Education application decision
- Educational exemption decision
- Continuing education proposal decision
- Denial of trainer application or assigned trainer level
- Denial of training

- Highest level of position noted on education application

The MERIT appeal process is as follows:

- A. Individual completes and submits the [MERIT Appeal Request](#) to MERIT explaining their case and including any additional, necessary documentation to review the appeal. The appeal must be received within 60 days of processing the original application.
- B. The appeal is initially reviewed by the verification team that first processed the application. If there are determined to be no errors in processing, the DEL Professional Development Administrator reviews the appeal and may request additional supporting documentation. The Professional Development Administrator makes an initial decision within 10 business days of receiving all documents necessary to make a determination, and sends written notification to the individual. If the individual does not accept the initial decision, the Professional Development Administrator summarizes the appeal and submits to the DEL Director of Outcomes and Accountability for review within 10 business days.
- C. DEL notifies the individual of the final decision in writing. If granted, appropriate processing is automatically completed within MERIT. If denied, the individual is notified in writing of the decision including information on why the appeal was denied and the actions he/she would need to take to fulfill their request.

22. **What do I do if I have a concern about a state-approved trainer?**

DEL takes all concerns seriously and all reports of unethical or unprofessional behavior are handled in a confidential manner. Please complete and submit the [Trainer Concern Form](#) and include any additional documentation to clarify your concern. The form is reviewed by the DEL Professional Development Administrator who may contact you with questions or request additional information. DEL reviews all trainers on an ongoing basis and requires a renewal of trainer status every three years.

This form is also available in Spanish at: <http://www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/merit.aspx>.

23. **What security protects my information in MERIT?**

MERIT is owned and operated by DEL. DEL has a fully implemented security policy which addresses all applicable standards outlined in the ISB IT Security Standards. DEL has taken a strategic approach to authentication and authorization that is consistent with current internet standards. By using SSL and data access security standards the potential of improper viewing of confidential information is mitigated.

24. **If I have further questions, who can I contact?**

Mailing address:

Department of Early Learning
Attn: MERIT
PO Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Mailing address for educational documents such as transcripts:

Centralia College CFS
Attn: MERIT
600 Centralia College Blvd
Centralia, WA 98531-4035

Other methods of contact:

Website: merit.del.wa.gov
Email: merit@del.wa.gov
Phone: 1.866.482.4325, option 8
Fax: 1.360.586.0052

Family Child Care Home

Questions about the new Washington Administrative Code (WAC) implemented on March 31, 2012.

Related Questions	Answer
Is the requirement for completion of ongoing training based on calendar year (i.e. 2010 – 2011) or is it from anniversary date to anniversary date?	<p>Current licensee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The requirement begins with the implementation of the WAC; March 31st. • The required STARS 10 hours for the licensee will be based on the anniversary date of the license. • If hours were taken prior to March 31st and are within the anniversary year of the license those hours will count <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex. License anniversary date is April 1. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All hours taken from April 1, 2011 through March 31, 2012 will count toward the requirement.
The new WAC requires 10 hours of ongoing STARS training each year prior to the person's anniversary date, but current WAC does not. Do current providers have the first year to become compliant with the new WAC, or do we begin documenting on Facility License Compliance Agreements (FLCA) April 1 of this year if they do not have it by their anniversary date (could be April 2)?	
For current providers who have completed their 20 Hour Basic STARS training, by when (what date) do they need to complete their 10 hours of continuing education? Within the calendar year (i.e. 2010 – 2011)? By the anniversary date of the license? Or the date the WAC went into effect (March 31, 2012)?	
The new WAC requires providers to have their 20 Hour Basic STARS training completed prior to being licensed. How do licensors regulate those who will be on an initial license when the new WAC goes into effect and they have not yet completed the 20 Hour Basic STARS training?	<p>Currently on initial license that was issued prior to March 31, 2012:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must complete the 20 Hour Basic STARS training within the first six months of license. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Licensors should initiate conversation with licensee regarding this requirement to encourage and inform the licensee about the new WAC requirements. ○ Set in place movement for the licensee to get the required 20 Hour Basic STARS training. • Licensee will also have to take the 10 hours of continuing education based on the anniversary date of the license. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex. A license was issued Feb. 2012 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20 Hour Basic STARS training must be completed by August 2012 ▪ 10 hours of continuing education must be completed by end of January 2013.
Some providers were licensed within the six months before March 31, 2012, but did not complete the 20 Hour Basic STARS training by March 31, 2012 - how will we handle that situation?	
What if a licensee applies before March 31, 2012, but they are not licensed until after March 31, 2012 - do they still have to complete the 20 Hour Basic STARS training prior to becoming	Yes, the new WAC states that they must have the required 20 Hour Basic STARS training prior to becoming licensed.

licensed?	
For new providers who are licensed after March 31, 2012 and who will be required to complete the 20 Hour Basic STARS training before getting licensed, by when must they complete their 10 hours of continuing education training? Calendar year? Anniversary date?	All new licensees – the 20 Hour Basic STARS training must be completed prior to becoming licensed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first 10 hours of continuing education training must be completed within the first year of license. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ License was issued on April 1, 2012. ○ 10 hours must be completed by March 31, 2013.
The licensee and the primary staff person must complete the ongoing training requirement each year prior to continuing a non-expiring full license – how will a licensor regulate that?	The licensor will be expected to access the individual's professional record in MERIT each year around their anniversary date to determine if they have complied with this standard. In MERIT, licensors can monitor continuing education training history by selecting training years. Training must be completed each year by the anniversary date (the date they began working). Example: If the provider began work on March 31 st , 2012 the required 10 hours of continuing education must be completed by March 31, 2013.
Will the training be added to the annual compliance list or is this something that will be checked at monitor visits via review of staff files?	
Does an assistant need to complete 20 Hour Basic STARS training prior to their hire date?	Before an assistant or primary staff person is left unsupervised with the children, they must complete the 20 Hour Basic STARS training.
How do I request an exemption from the 20 Hour Basic STARS training requirement, based on my educational background?	You may submit a request for an exemption online through your professional record in MERIT or paper applications are available at: www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/merit . Instructions and eligibility guidelines can be found within the application.