

PROVIDER GUIDELINES FOR VALUE-ADDED AND FLEX FUNDS

Purpose: The Children's Services Council makes Value-Added and Flex Funding available to enable provider programs to meet individual client needs that present barriers to program participation and success and to enhance program participation.

Flex Funds may be used to meet individual client needs that present barriers to program participation and success by providing emergency financial assistance to address the threat of foreclosure, eviction, or termination of utility services; temporary child care expenses; home repairs, food, clothing, back to school supplies, bus passes or gas cards or other services/commodities.

Value-Added Funds should be used to pay for other creative strategies that support the goals of the program and improve participant participation and commitment. Food/refreshments for group activities and incentives, such as gift certificates or tickets to games or shows, are some examples. Providers are encouraged to brainstorm about productive uses and develop responsible parameters for usage and limitations, such as per client and/or per instance funding limits. CSC staffers are always available to help you identify appropriate uses and management of Flex Funds.

Policy: CSC Flex Fund and Value-Added expenditures are payable on a cost-reimbursement basis. The Council will pay the provider for allowable expenditures in accordance with the approved budget and budget narrative for the CSC-funded program. Only expenditures incurred on or after the contract effective date and/or prior to the termination date of the contract are eligible for payment. The maximum amount of Flex Funds and/or Value-Added expenditures is clearly stated in the CSC contract. These funds may not be used for capital equipment expenditures. To be eligible for CSC Flex Funds and/or Value-Added funds, the client must be currently enrolled in or receiving follow-up services subsequent to participation in a CSC-funded program.

Emergency Financial Assistance: To maximize the effectiveness of flex fund usage, providers need to work collaboratively with families to assess client needs, obtain assistance through existing community services, avoid duplication and help families develop workable plans to provide longer term solutions. CSC Flex Funds are to be used as a last resort emergency measure, and providers must ensure that client needs cannot be met through other dedicated resources.

Prior to emergency Flex Fund disbursement, the case manager/counselor assigned to the client must:

- a. Complete a budget with the client. The budget needs to document how the provision of the Flex Funds will enable the client to obtain and/or maintain their financial stability.
- b. The case manager/counselor must identify whether the emergency need is a one-time emergency need, such as funds to buy school supplies, or if the need may be a recurring need, such as the monthly electric bill. If the emergency need is a recurring need, then the case manager/counselor and the client need to develop a plan that demonstrates how this recurring financial responsibility will be addressed in the future. Flex Funds are intended to assist a client through a temporary emergency and are to not be used to pay rent, utilities, or other recurring expenses on an ongoing basis.
- c. It is the case manager/counselor's responsibility to work with the client and/or their creditor, as appropriate, for all flex fund payments, including the counselor calling the bank or landlord to assist clients to work out a payment plan for their mortgage or rent with the bank or landlord prior to approving the award of the flex funds. This type of flex fund payment may not be granted until after the counselor has spoken to the landlord or the bank.

- d. Rent or mortgage requests for payments made to client family members or relatives will not be granted.
- e. The Flex Fund payment will be limited to basic services – no extras such as long distance, call waiting, call forwarding. Flex Funds cannot be used to pay for fines, penalties, advance payments, nonrefundable deposits, restitution or fraud charges.

Documentation: Flex Fund and Value-Added fund usage must be clearly documented and starts with the CSC-approved Flex and Value-Added budgets.

Flex Funds: The Provider should develop a written flex fund policy that includes:

- ☐ Appropriate purposes and uses for flex fund expenditures that clearly support the program.
- ☐ A “chain of approval” so that requests are uniformly accepted, reviewed and approved by appropriate levels of staff.
- ☐ A system for dispensing and tracking flex fund expenditures, such as a running Flex Fund log that captures details such as “who, what, when, why, and how much.”
- ☐ A system for collecting and maintaining records of all checks, requests, receipts and other supporting documentation that can be provided to the Children’s Services Council with the invoice for billing in order to receive appropriate reimbursement.
- ☐ A copy of the budget developed with the client that demonstrates how the Flex Funds will assist the client to obtain and maintain financial stability.

Value-Added Gift Cards: Cards should be purchased and issued to clients on a **quarterly** basis, with all purchased cards distributed by the end of the fiscal year. The provider should develop a written procedure for the safekeeping and distribution of gift cards that includes tracking logs and collection of original store receipts. A system for dispensing and tracking expenditures that captures details such as “who, what, when, why, and how much” and includes client signatures to confirm receipt are required.

Important Note: Never dispense cash. Checks or money orders should be made out to the vendor/company and/or agency (e.g., mortgage company, FPL, etc.) and **never made out to client**. Although, program staff should not be required nor encouraged to use their own personal monies as Flex Funds, staff may be reimbursed for flex fund purchases, if necessary, upon submission of an original receipt and signed statement explaining the usage and circumstances.