

Escambia Children's Trust

Policy and Procedure: Direct Client Assistance (DCA)

Policy Number: [Assign Number]

Effective Date: [Insert Date]

Approved By: Escambia Children's Trust Board of Directors

Responsible Department: Program and Grants Management

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define allowable uses and reimbursement procedures for *Direct Client Assistance (DCA)* funds included in program budgets supported by the Escambia Children's Trust (ECT).

DCA is intended to provide short-term, tangible support that directly benefits eligible program participants, reduces barriers to participation, or stabilizes family situations that would otherwise hinder a child's development, safety, or well-being.

II. Definition

Direct Client Assistance (DCA) refers to program-funded goods, services, or financial supports provided directly to or on behalf of a child or family enrolled in an approved ECT-funded program.

DCA expenditures must be **reasonable, necessary, and directly related** to achieving the goals and outcomes of the funded program.

III. Guiding Principles

1. DCA is **not intended as ongoing income support** or to supplant public benefits available through other systems (e.g., TANF, SNAP, Medicaid).
2. DCA must be **clearly connected to the program's service plan and documented in the client's record**.
3. Provider should have an internal policy, consistent with ECT guidelines and policies, that applies to DCA expenditures, including appropriate purposes and uses for DCA expenditures, a system for dispensing and tracking DCA expenditures, and the individuals responsible for approving such DCA requests.
4. Provider's internal policy regarding DCA should also discuss the frequency and maximum amount in which clients can receive DCA. DCA cannot be awarded more than once per quarter. The Executive Director can approve one additional DCA dosage per

quarter, and then the Provider must seek approval from the Board for additional dosage permissions.

5. Providers must ensure assistance is **equitable and consistent** across clients and **supported by written criteria**.
 6. DCA should be the **least restrictive, most cost-effective** intervention necessary to meet the child's or family's immediate need.
 7. To be eligible for DCA, the client must be currently enrolled in or receiving follow-up services subsequent to participation in an ECT-funded program.
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IV. Allowable Uses

Examples of allowable DCA expenditures include, but are not limited to:

- **Basic needs support** (e.g., emergency food, diapers, hygiene products, formula).
- **Transportation assistance** (e.g., bus passes, gas cards, rideshare credits for appointments or program participation).
- **Clothing or uniforms** required for program or school participation.
- **Program participation costs** (e.g., fees for recreation, licensing, or certification required for youth programs).
- **Short-term housing or utility Assistance** to prevent disruption of services when tied to program engagement.
- **Educational or developmental materials** (e.g., books, school supplies, sensory kits, developmental tools).
- **Child safety items** (e.g., car seats, pack-and-plays, safety locks).
- **Health-related supports** not covered by insurance (e.g., eyeglasses, hearing aids, dental emergencies).

V. Unallowable Uses

The following are **not allowable** under DCA:

- Cash disbursements directly to clients (unless approved by ECT in writing for a specific purpose).
- Gift Cards of any kind
- Payments for ongoing rent, utilities, or other recurring household expenses beyond short-term crisis assistance.
- Costs that primarily benefit staff or the provider organization.
- Entertainment, gifts, or incentives not tied to program objectives.
- Reimbursement for items or services covered by other funding sources or public programs.
- Retrospective payments for expenses incurred prior to program enrollment or outside of documented need.
- Fines, penalties, advance payments, deposits, restitution, or fraud charges.

VI. Documentation Requirements

Providers must maintain documentation sufficient to demonstrate:

1. **Eligibility and enrollment** of the client in an approved program.
2. **Justification** of the need for assistance and its connection to program outcomes, including proof that other community resources have been exhausted prior to DCA disbursement.
3. **Proof of purchase** (receipts, invoices, or vouchers).
4. **Acknowledgment of receipt** by the client or notation in case record.
5. **Supervisor approval** (if required by provider's internal policy).

All DCA expenditures are subject to monitoring and audit by ECT.

VII. Reimbursement and Reporting

- Providers may claim reimbursement for DCA through the standard invoicing process using the *Direct Client Assistance* budget line.
- Each claim must include itemized expenditures and supporting documentation including but not limited to participant name, date, amount provided, supporting invoice/receipt and efforts to secure funding elsewhere.
- ECT reserves the right to deny reimbursement for unsubstantiated or noncompliant expenditures.
- Aggregate DCA usage should be summarized in quarterly performance reports, including number of clients served and types of assistance provided.

VIII. Review and Amendments

ECT staff will review this policy periodically to ensure alignment with programmatic goals and fiscal accountability standards. Updates will be recommended to the Board as necessary.

Escambia Children's Trust (ECT)

Provider Guidance: Direct Client Assistance (DCA)

Purpose:

Direct Client Assistance (DCA) funds are available to help remove barriers for children and families participating in ECT-funded programs. These funds can be used for short-term, tangible supports that directly help a child or family achieve the goals of your program.

What DCA Can Be Used For

DCA funds can cover **reasonable, necessary expenses** that:

- Support a child's safety, well-being, or development
- Help a family stay engaged in your program
- Address a short-term crisis or need related to program goals

Examples of allowable DCA costs include:

- **Basic needs:** diapers, hygiene supplies, emergency food
- **Transportation:** bus passes, gas cards, or ride-share credits for program or service appointments
- **Clothing/uniforms:** items required for participation in school or programs
- **Program participation costs:** fees for recreation, certification, or enrichment directly tied to program goals
- **Housing/utility assistance:** short-term help to prevent disruption in services (e.g., one-time payment to avoid eviction or utility shutoff)
- **Educational and developmental materials:** books, learning kits, sensory tools
- **Child safety items:** car seats, pack-and-plays, safety gates, locks
- **Health supports:** eyeglasses, hearing aids, or dental care when not covered elsewhere

If you are unsure whether a DCA expense is allowable, contact your ECT Program Manager before making the purchase.

What DCA Cannot Be Used For

DCA funds **cannot** be used for:

- **Direct cash payments** to clients (unless specifically approved in writing by ECT)
- **Gift cards of any kind**
- **Ongoing or recurring** rent or utility bills

- **Staff or agency expenses** (e.g., office supplies, phones, food for staff)
 - **Gifts or incentives** not tied to participation or program outcomes
 - **Costs covered by other funding sources** or benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF
 - **Expenses incurred before** a client was enrolled in the program
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Documentation You Must Keep

Every DCA expense must be supported by:

1. **Proof of client enrollment** in your ECT-funded program
2. **Description of need** and how it relates to the program's goals (case note or service plan entry)
3. **Receipts or invoices** showing what was purchased and cost
4. **Record of who received** the item or benefit (client signature or documented case note)
5. **Supervisor approval**, if required by your internal policies

ECT may request this documentation during monitoring or audit.

How to Request Reimbursement

- Submit DCA expenses under the *Direct Client Assistance* line on your invoice.
 - Include an **itemized list** (client initials, description of item/service, amount, and date).
 - Keep original receipts and supporting documentation on file for monitoring.
 - ECT reserves the right to deny reimbursement for unallowable or undocumented expenses.
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Reporting and Best Practices

Providers are encouraged to:

- Track DCA usage by **type of support** and **number of families served**.
- Use a consistent internal process for approving requests (e.g., standard form or checklist).
- Share brief success stories or outcome examples in your performance reports to show impact.