

## **Introduction**

This document provides an overview of the discretionary (or competitive) grants application process at the U.S. Department of Education (the Department).

### **Who should use this document?**

Prospective applicants, including new potential grantees, for the Department's discretionary grant programs that have never received a grant from the Department and those that are interested in learning more about the process.

**Department's Mission:** To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

**Background:** In accordance with Federal statutes, the Department provides funding for educational and other activities and projects that support the Department's mission through grant programs, under which some funds are distributed through periodic competitions (i.e., "competitive" or "discretionary grants"). General information on these types of grant programs can be found at: <https://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html?src=ft>.

Congress authorizes funding for grant programs government-wide in a cycle geared to the Federal fiscal year (but there can be variations). The Administration proposes a budget for each Federal agency including the Department and, through the appropriations process, Congress deliberates over the budget. When an appropriation bill for an agency is passed by Congress and signed into law by the President, funds for grants become available in accordance with the enacted law.

The Department awards discretionary grants through roughly 80 grant programs, yet not all of these programs are competed each year.

## **1. Department of Education Competitive Grants and How they Work**

- **Federal Fiscal Year (FY) Primer**
  - Each Federal Fiscal Year (FY) starts on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following year (e.g. October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020). The Department generally runs grant competitions in the latter half of the fiscal year.
  - ED does not always get an appropriation at the start of a new fiscal year (the last time this occurred was Fiscal Year 2019).
  - The timeline of the appropriation impacts when competitions for funds are announced, competed and then awarded.
- **Secretary of Education's Final Supplemental Priorities for Discretionary Grant Programs<sup>i</sup>**

- Periodically, the Secretary of Education (the Secretary) publishes supplemental priorities that may be used in particular funding opportunities, and that provide the Secretary’s vision for education. They emphasize specific initiatives for the Department’s competitive grant programs.
- The Department recently published final priorities in support of Opportunity Zones<sup>ii</sup> and other Administrative initiatives, such as supporting new potential grantees<sup>iii</sup>.
- **Grantmaking offices at the Department**

The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education<sup>iv</sup>; Office of Postsecondary Education<sup>v</sup>; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services<sup>vi</sup>; the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education<sup>vii</sup>; and the Office of English Language Acquisition<sup>viii</sup>.
- **Eligible Entities Resources<sup>ix</sup>**
  - Each individual grant program has its own statutory authority of who is eligible to apply (e.g. state educational agencies; institutions of higher education; etc.).
  - Grants.gov also has “Find” capabilities to search on applicant eligibility<sup>x</sup>.
- **USASpending.gov<sup>xi</sup>**

USA Spending tracks federal spending to ensure taxpayers can see how their money is being used in communities across America. It provides citizens with easy access to government contracts, grant, and other award data.

## 2: Where are Funding Opportunities Found

- **FederalRegister.gov<sup>xii</sup>**
  - This daily journal of the Federal Government is published each weekday, and publishes among other things, government agency rules, proposed rules, public notices (including Department grant funding opportunities)
  - All Notices Inviting Applications (NIAs) issued by the Department are published in the Federal Register, which is the formal way for notifying the public of grant funding opportunities (more information about NIAs are on a subsequent page).
  - Sign-ups for daily emails on notices and other happenings also available.
- **Grants.gov<sup>xiii</sup>**
  - This government website allows for funding opportunity searches using the Catalog for Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number or CFDA program title.

- This website also offers applicant resources, including FAQs<sup>xiv</sup>.
- **Department’s Grant Webpage**<sup>xv</sup>
  - The Department’s website provides a listing and links to open Department grant competitions.
  - The website provides information on student loans, and other related education information.
- **Forecast of Discretionary Funding Opportunities for FY20**<sup>xvi</sup>

This provides a preview of future planned grant competitions and their schedule.

### 3: Required Steps to be Taken Prior to Applying for Funding

- **Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number**<sup>xv</sup>
  - Before applying for a grant from any Federal agency, you must have a (DUNS) number. There is no charge for registering, but it may take one to two business days to create.
  - On December 31, 2020, the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI or SAMMI) will replace the DUNS number for registration in GSA’s System for Award Management (SAM). More to come from the Department on this transition.
- **Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN)**
  - If you are a corporate entity, agency, institution, or organization, you can obtain a TIN from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). If you are an individual, you can obtain a TIN from the IRS or the Social Security Administration.
  - If you need a new TIN, please allow two to five weeks for your TIN to become active.
- **Register in the System for Award Management (SAM)**<sup>xviii</sup>
  - Before applying for a grant from any Federal agency, including the Department, a prospective applicant must register and set up an account in the System for Award Management (or “SAM”) website.
  - There is no charge for registering. New potential grantees are encouraged to register early and in advance of a particular grant competition to avoid delays.
  - The SAM registration process may take upwards of several weeks, so register well in advance of a competition submission deadline.

- **The Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIS)**<sup>xix</sup>

FAPIS is the Federal government’s designated integrity and performance system established to aid Federal agencies in determining whether an applicant or grantee is qualified for an award. This contains information of prior performance of federal grantees, and cooperative agreement holders, and it is reviewed by agencies to inform funding decisions. New potential grantees are encouraged to check their status within the system.

#### **4: How the Department Announces Funding Opportunities**

- **Notice Inviting Applications (NIA)**

- The Department generally publishes NIAs in the *Federal Register* to announce its grant competitions. Some agencies call their funding opportunity announcements “Requests for Proposals (RFPs), Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), or Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs)”.
- Each NIA for a program is unique and includes, but is not limited to, the following: (1) Eligible entities (e.g. institutions of higher education (IHEs), nonprofits, local educational agencies (LEAs)) who can compete for funds; (2) Priorities (e.g. Absolute, Competitive Preference, or Invitational); (3) Required entrance Evidence; (4) Project period length; and (5) important dates (e.g. date for intent to apply and application deadline).
- The Department tries to maximize the number of days applicants have to submit applications, but usually applicants have a minimum of 30 to 45 days for existing programs.
- Submit your application early; do not wait until the last minute.
- Grantees are selected based on peer reviewer scores and Secretary approval.

- **Common Instructions for Applicants to Discretionary Grant Programs**<sup>xx</sup>

This document provides applicants with a centralized set of instructions for applying to the Department's discretionary grant programs. NIAs reference this document.

- **Technical Assistance to applicants**

- General technical assistance to applicants is commonly offered; sometimes this includes pre-application webinars and program application FAQ documents.
- These resources are generally available on the grant program’s specific website.

- However, program offices do not provide substantive guidance on an individual application before submission that would give that application an unfair advantage over others in the competition.

- Grant Webinars

Are offered by some programs to provide and clarify information about the application process

- Current grantee abstracts
  - Many current grantee abstracts (and project narratives in some cases) are on the Department's ED.gov website or the individual program page.
  - A few examples of winning proposal abstracts may be viewed [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

## **5: How the Department Notifies Successful and Unsuccessful Applicants**

- Successful Applicants – The Department's Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs (OLCA) notifies the applicant's U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators. After this notification to Congress has occurred, the Department emails the applicant's certifying representative and grant project director a link to their Grant Award Notification (GAN). The GAN serves as the Department's official notification to grant applicants informing them that their applications have been selected for funding. Successful applications will receive a GAN or a link to access. A hard copy GAN may instead be issued in some cases.
- Unsuccessful Applicants – The Department formally notifies unsuccessful applicants that their applications were not selected for funding.

## **6. Contacting the Department and Grants.gov**

- For questions about the grant competition and application submission, contact the Department's person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section in the grant competition's NIA.
- For questions about submitting an application using Grants.gov, go to [Grants.gov - How to Apply for Grants](#).