

SSS Webinar Q&A

Sections:

- 1) Competition/Application logistics**
- 2) Who is eligible**
- 3) What is allowable**
- 4) Project Director related questions**

1) Competition/Application logistics

Q: Where do I find the Student Support Services (SSS) Regulations?

A: The SSS Regulations can be found at: Student Support Services Program (ed.gov) and/or the link <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-646?toc=1> in the FY 2025 SSS Application Booklet which can be downloaded at Grants.gov

Q: Can you provide the direct link to Uniform Guidance?

A: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/guid/uniform-guidance/index.html>

Q: Will all the webinars provide the same information?

A: Yes, all information provided will be the same.

Q: When will awards be made?

A: New awards will be made in the summer of 2025, with a program start date of Sept 1 2025.

Q: Why is this competition being held so early if awards won't be made until 2025?

A: For planning purposes and to inform current project staff in a timely manner, if unsuccessful

Q: What percentage of new award requests are granted in any given cycle?

A: Typically, between 5 and 10% of new awards are made to institutions not currently funded under SSS.

Q: Are there more funds allotted for new projects than continuing awards?

A: It is projected that the SSS program will disburse \$26.8 million dollars for non-competing continuation awards and \$354 million for new awards. Applicants who are successful for the first time may receive an estimated maximum award amount of \$272,364 dollars

Q: Where can we get the SSS Program Profile Form and the SSS Program Assurances form cited in the NIA but not available in editable formats?

A: All applicable forms and assurances can be found in the SSS application booklet which is available at Grants.gov

Q: For purposes of the Need and Objectives section of an SSS proposal, will Pell-grant eligibility be considered a sufficient proxy variable for TRIO low-income status?

A: The data must show a need for the program. You can use data that supports the need for the SSS project.

Q: Are we required to show research in our proposal?

A: You must be able to demonstrate a rationale which means a key project component included in the project's logic model is informed by research or evaluation findings that suggest the project component is likely to improve relevant outcomes.

Q: Are we required to use research for our logic model?

A: You are not required to use research in your logic model.

Q: My institution is submitting two grant applications (STEM and Regular-SSS). I understand we can request that one Program Director oversee both programs, but how should we budget that in case 1 of the 2 applications is not funded?

A: You should submit your application/proposals as though both will be funded.

Q: Where do we find the base award amount for FY 2024 (i.e., 2024-25) when we have not received GANs for that year yet? The application package states, "For applicants currently receiving an SSS Program grant, the maximum award amount is the greater of (a) \$272,364 or (b) 100 percent of the applicant's base award amount for FY 2024."

A: Please refer to box 7 of your most recent GAN for the base award amount for budget period 5/FY24.

Q: I have an existing SSS program funded through 2025. Should I use 2026 figures for year one of new grant?

A: For applicants currently receiving an SSS Program grant, the maximum award amount is the greater of (a) \$272,364 or (b) 100 percent of the applicant's base award amount for FY 2024.

Q: CPP--What does "aligned with classroom" mean in terms of CPP #1? For example, does that mean the SSS program is required to partner with a course/class to accomplish this "hands-on learning" component?

A: It means that the learning that takes place must mirror what happens in a real classroom setting and community-based setting.

Q: Is the required number of participants for each year of the grant? For example, if we are serving teacher prep, do we need to serve 140 students per year? Or 140 over the 5 years of the grant?

A: The required number of participants is per year.

Q: Do we need to include a logic model? If so, in what section?

A: Yes, you need to include a logic model in the Quality of Project Design section.

Q: Where should staff attendance at conferences be included?

A: This should be included in the budget and narrative.

Q: Is it necessary to itemize benefits in the budget?

A: Benefits should be calculated as fringe. Include fringe rate for each staff receiving those benefits.

Q: For new programs, should resumes and job descriptions be included in Quality of Personnel section? Or as attachments?

A: Please do not submit resumes with your grant application. Applicants are encouraged to include job descriptions in the Quality of Personnel section.

Q: Does the 4% include fringes/benefits include in the salary amount?

A: The 4% maximum amount is for staff travel in relation to staff personnel. Fringe is separate. This is covered under 646.30(g) of the program regulations.

Q: Where do we get the waiver to include with the application and where would we place that in the application?

A: There is not an official waiver form. This is something you would request/include in the Plan of Operation, as it refers to the time commitment of key project staff.

Q: What is the regulation for documenting low-income status?

A: You can find the regulations for SSS at CFR Part 646.

Q: If an institution has an existing SSS Classic program that receives few or no prior experience points, will this negatively affect a separate application for a different program, such as Teacher or STEM?

A: All applications will be reviewed and scored individually, based on the merits of the application. Prior Experience Points received will not negatively impact new applications.

Q: If a current SSS project has been serving 180 students, can it increase its minimum number of students served to, for example 250 students and receive an increased budget to fund the need for additional personnel etc.?

A: While a currently funded SSS grantee may increase the number of participants it wants to serve; the maximum award will be (a) \$272,364 or (b) 100 percent of the applicant's base award amount for FY 2024.

Q: The FAQs state "In completing the Federal section of the Project Budget Summary Form, the total requested amounts in years two through five should not exceed the total requested amount in the first year." Does this mean we cannot provide salary COL increases each year?

A: Applicants may not submit a budget that increases in year 2 through 5. This does not mean an applicant cannot design a budget which includes cost of living increases for the out years.

Q: In Demonstrates Rationale, it states research findings cited should be published within 3 years. What if we are unable to find relevant research within 3 years?

A: Applicants should use the most recent data they can find in addressing demonstrates a rationale. Applicants using old or outdated data may lose points.

Q: Will readers be given suggestions about what is ambitious vs attainable?

A: Peer Reviewers will be given detailed instructions on scoring applications. However, please note that the Department relies on the professional judgement of readers.

Q: Will readers penalize applicants who refer to research inside the CPPs older than three years?

A: We cannot verify that Peer Reviewers will not penalize data that they deem too old to be relevant. If you plan to use data older than 3 years, you should include an explanation why this is the best data available.

Q: Can students who are seeking a certificate in a non-curriculum program be eligible to participate in SSS? Or is this for curriculum students only?

A: For two-year institutions, students pursuing a certificate are eligible to receive services.

Q: Related to identifying low-income students, FAFSA utilizes the prior tax year data but by the time the institution receives the information it's almost 2 years old. For instance, the 2024-25 FAFSA data that we have started receiving still only uses the 2022 tax information. When identifying the students who would have been eligible as of 23-24, we would be using 2-year-old data, is that allowable? Please advise. Thank you.

A: The data you use to show a Need is best utilized when the information is no more than 3 years old. So 2 years is good.

Q: I would like to clarify the eligibility criteria for low-income status. Is Pell eligibility (as reported from our financial aid office) is sufficient for documenting a student's low-income status?

A: Yes. Per the NIA, Underserved student means a student in one or more of the following subgroups: (a) A student who is living in poverty or is served by schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty. (b) A student of color. (c) A student who is a member of a federally recognized Indian Tribe. (d) An English learner. (e) A child or student with a disability. (f) A disconnected youth. (g) A student experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. (h) A lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI+) student. (i) A student who is in foster care. (j) A pregnant, parenting, or caregiving student. (k) A student impacted by the justice system, including a formerly incarcerated student. (l) A student who is the first in their family to attend postsecondary education. (m) A student enrolling in or seeking to enroll in postsecondary education for the first time at the age of 20 or older. (n) A student who is working fulltime while enrolled in postsecondary education. (o) A student who is enrolled in or is seeking to enroll in postsecondary education who is eligible for a Pell Grant.

Q: What Works Clearinghouse does not have recent research within the last 3 years to identify key components. Should we use data older than 3 years, or should we search for relevant studies elsewhere?

A: You can site sources from other areas that will relay assurance of your project and type of relevant service plans needed. However, What Works Clearinghouse is a Department connected and vetted site source.

Q: Is there a way to view my institutions Review Form for the previously funded application with reviewer notes?

A: Currently funded grantees should contact your assigned Program Specialist for this information.

Q: How are homeless participants tracked?

A: It is the responsibility of the institution to capture and track this information.

Q: What are the cost per participant guidelines for new applicants?

A: New applicants desiring to serve less than the minimum number of participants required for the selected project type must request a per participant cost not to exceed the following: Regular \$1,945 Disabled \$2,270 ESL, \$2,724 STEM (incl. Health Sciences) \$2,270 Teacher Prep \$1,945 Veterans \$2,270

Q: How are we supposed to work with our financial aid offices when there have been new guidelines and directives from the DOE that tell our Fin Aid offices not to provide information to us?

A: Your SSS program or TRIO department can request income information to determine a student's eligibility for a TRIO grant. However, if the disclosure is not for an application, award, and administration of student aid programs then the disclosure of income information would be prohibited.

Q: If the project is specifically supporting the military connected population - do all the military connected students we would be supporting with the grant also need to low income and first generation?

A: Yes. 646.3-Who is eligible to participate in an SSS project) A student must meet the following criteria to be eligible. The student: Is a citizen or national of the United States or meets the residency requirements for Federal student financial assistance; Is enrolled or accepted for enrollment in the next academic term at the grantee institution; Has a need for academic support, as determined by the grantee, in order to pursue successfully a postsecondary educational program; and Is a low-income individual, a first-generation college student, or an individual with disabilities. Thus, for example, in addition to being low-income and first generation, low-income, or first-generation, or disabled, a project participant must have a "need for academic support" to be eligible for services. You will find the definition of academic need under section 646.7, which lists definitions that apply to the SSS program. and per the NIA, Projects that are designed to improve students' social, emotional, academic, and career development needs, with a focus on underserved students. As mentioned, please refer to the NIA for additional information.

Q: When students apply and are approved to be SSS participants in Year 1 need to reapply each year?

A: The grantee does not have to revalidate a participant's eligibility after the participant's initial selection. Please visit §646.32(b) *Eligibility of participants. (1) A grantee shall determine the eligibility of each participant in the project when the individual is selected to participate.*

Q: Will applicants need to utilize at least one best practice from the What Works Clearinghouse for Competitive Preference Priority questions?

A: Applicants are not required to cite a study from the What Works Clearinghouse in addressing the CPPs in this competition.

Q: We are a multiple-campus community college system without a designated "main campus." Would another of our campuses be considered a "different campus" if it is located in the same city as all other campuses, and we don't have a designated "main campus"?

A: Please see the information on separate campuses: a. Different Campus means an institutional site that is geographically apart from and independent of the main campus of the institution. The Secretary considers a location of an institution to be independent of

the main campus if the location-- b. (1) Is permanent in nature; c. (2) Offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; d. (3) Has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and e. (4) Has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Q: Are the objectives set by the department? Or do we get to set those?

A: Applicants will establish each objective in their proposal.

Q: As a new applicant, should we use projected incoming student data (high school seniors) for project need? Or should we use recent data of current 2-year community college students as an indicator/baseline for project need in terms of students enrolled, persistence/retention, academic problems?

A: We do not prescribe the type of comparison data that institutions should use to establish the need for the program. Instead, we encourage applicants to use meaningful comparison data that is related to the purposes of the program and to the proposed project outcomes. Further, we encourage applicants to define in the application the characteristics of the comparison group and identify baseline data on eligible students.

Q: Are there guidelines regarding what costs may be considered "student support costs" within a budget?

A: The Uniform Guidance states in § 200.68 Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. 58 It is important to note the definition of participant support costs as stated in the Uniform Guidance. §200.75 Participant support costs means direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with conferences, or training projects.

Q: Where would cultural event costs go on Form 524? Should they be under Training since it's participant costs?

A: It can be included on line 8 as it can include "all direct costs not covered on lines 1 through 5." Please see page 73 of the FY 2025 SSS application booklet

Q: To clarify, are all participant costs like cultural events, academic workshops, student travel NOT subject to the 8% indirect costs? Are they subtracted to result in the modified direct costs? Thank you.

A: The Uniform Guidance states in § 200.68 Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. It is important to note the definition of participant support costs as stated in the Uniform Guidance. §200.75 Participant support costs means direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with conferences, or training projects.

Q: Budget narrative summary is provided for 1st year only. The budget form 524 on the top states if you are applying for multiple years, complete budget for all five years, however, the RFP is asking for applicants to complete only the 1st year of the budget only. We are applying for 5 years so do we have to complete the ED Form 524 for all 5 years?

A: First year only.

Do we need to write the budget narrative breakdown exactly how form 524 is written?

A: There is not a prescribed template for your budget narrative, but it would be helpful if it follows your submitted budget

Q: When will we know the percentages for our individual standardized objectives? (how will see them?) We are current grantee.

A: If you are speaking of the achievement of the standardized objectives that were proposed in the application, you see the results once you have submitted the Annual Performance Report (APR)

Q: In the Quality of Project Design section, do we use research for only ONE component of project services? Or do we need to provide research/evidence for more than one service?

A: You must be able to demonstrate a rationale which means a key project component included in the project's logic model is informed by research or evaluation findings that suggest the project component is likely to improve relevant outcomes. Project component means an activity, strategy, intervention, process, product, practice, or policy included in a project. Evidence may pertain to an individual project component or to a combination of project components (e.g., training teachers on instructional practices for English learners and follow-on coaching for these teachers). 34 CFR 77.1.

Q: Can indirect costs be waived?

A: Yes. You will state that you are waiving indirect costs in the budget and narrative submitted.

Q: If we receive Title III funds, do we need to match the grant aid?

A: No

Q. What is the definition of a veteran for Veterans-SSS programs?

A. Veteran means a person who—

(1) Served on active duty as a member of the Armed Forces of the United States for a period of more than 180 days and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable;

(2) Served on active duty as a member of the Armed Forces of the United States and was discharged or released because of a service-connected disability;

(3) Was a member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States and was called to active duty for a period of more than 30 days; or

(4) Was a member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States who served on active duty in support of a contingency operation (as that term is defined in section 101(a)(13) of title 10, United States Code) on or after September 11, 2001.

Q: What is the definition of "Disconnected Students"?

A: The NIA states Disconnected youth means an individual, between the ages 14 and 24, who may be from a low-income background, experiences homelessness, is in foster care, is involved in the justice system, or is not working or not enrolled in (or at risk of dropping out of) an educational institution.

Q: What is the maximum number of points for new applicants and for grantees who received a grant in 2020?

A: The maximum score for all the selection criteria is 105 points. Those applicants eligible for prior experience points may earn up to 15 additional points.

Q: In the "Need" section 3, can we include SSS eligible students served as well as SSS eligible students not served as a continuing program?

A: Yes. Total enrollment of the institution and SSS eligible students not served by project.

Q: Can you please elaborate what majors are considered Health Sciences under the STEM grant application? Our community college considers Nursing and Medical Assistant majors as Health Sciences.

A: Health Sciences provide services only to low-income, first-generation students or individuals with disabilities pursuing disciplines in the following areas as well as other related fields including: physical sciences, engineering, life sciences, math (e.g., number properties and operations, measurement, geometry, data analysis and probability, and algebra), and technology, including technology literacy, hands on workshops, technological innovations, scientific research, biotechnology, electronics, health science, communications and health research project.

Q: If you are primarily a 2-year institution that also offers some 4-year degrees, can you provide SSS services to both 2 and 4-year students in the Teacher Prep track?

A: You can provide the services, but you will be designated as either a 2-year or 4-year institution.

Q: Do we need to provide info on how there will be follow up of participants after they leave to see if they complete degree if they leave institution before degree completion or if at a 2-year school transfer to a 4-year school?

A: If awarded, for each year of the grant you would be required to submit the APR which would provide us with information on student progress. After the 5-year grant is over, you do not need to follow up with participants.

Q: Is it permissible to have a member of key personnel be funded partially by the grant (25%) and partially by institutional funding (25%)?

A: Yes.

Q: Is a Table of Contents required?

A: No, it is not required; however, you should include it.

Q: Can indirect monies be taken if we don't have a negotiated indirect cost agreement with the institution?

A: No, grantees charging indirect costs to a Department grant are required to have a negotiated rate with their cognizant agency (i.e., either the Federal agency from which it has received the most direct funding that is subject to indirect cost support, or a particular agency specifically assigned cognizance by the Office of Management and Budget).

Q: On the bottom of Page 38 (5.(c)) of the Application Instructions packet there is what I think is a typo- it references a "three years", instead of four years for the grad and transfer rate. Can you please confirm if this is a typo or if we are changing to a three year max, rather than a 4 year max?

A: It is 4 years.

Q: What is the difference between a continuation award and a new award?

A: New award refers to awards given to institutions who do not have a current grant. A continuation award is for currently funded grantees.

Q: My institution has a document that shows that its indirect cost agreement says effective date: July 1, 2024 - until amended" What date should I put in the budget section that asks for expiration date, it asks for an exact date?

A: Please use a placeholder date. you can update it post award if funded and the IDC is changed.

2) Who is eligible

Q: Are high school students taking courses at the post-secondary institution eligible to participate in an SSS program?

A: Students participating in dual enrollment programs are eligible to receive SSS services; this includes high school students. A participant may receive services from more than one TRIO project, but the grantee must ensure that services are not duplicated.

Q: Are dual credit students eligible if they meet the low income, disabled, first generational, or other in-needs criteria? If so, is there a cap on that population of students? Meaning, would there be a certain ratio of non-dual credit to dual credit students required in the program if we can have dual credit students?

A: Dual credit students are eligible to receive SSS services as long as they meet the eligibility requirements. There is no cap on the number of students to be served.

Q: Can an applicant identify more than one eligible population? Or should you stick to one? What do you recommend?

A: Your application does not have to stick to one eligible population. However, the applicant must make that determination.

Q: Can graduate students be served by SSS project? For example, undergraduate students who receive services, and then are accepted into a master's program at the same institution.

A: Students who have received a bachelor's degree are not eligible for SSS services. A student who is completing their bachelor's degree and has been accepted into a master's program may continue to receive SSS services until they have received the bachelors.

3) What is allowable?

Q: Can we fund cohort classes or a summer bridge program through grant funds?

A: The cost of remedial/specialized classes are allowable if: the classes are not otherwise available at the institution; or the classes are substantially different than those available to the general student population. Classes funded through SSS are limited to SSS project participants. Please see (646.30–What are allowable costs?)

Q: Can students receive a stipend for work-based learning/apprenticeships? Or are paid internships allowed under this award?

A: No. Tuition, fees, stipends, and other forms of direct financial support for staff or participants are not allowable— except in the form of grant aid for participants. Please see 646.31– What are unallowable costs?

Q: Is mental health counseling a permissible service under this program?

A: If the counseling meets the students' personal matters, then yes. Permissible services include individualized counseling for personal, career, and academic matters provided by assigned counselors.

Q: My university hosts a campus wide cultural event. Can TRIO grant funds be used to partially help fund/host this event?

A: No, SSS funds could not be used to support this event, or other events hosted by the institution that are available to students who are not SSS participants.

Q: Can tutor/mentor personnel be outsourced by a tutoring company?

A: Please reference § 646.4 What activities and services does a project provide? (a) A Student Support Services project must provide the following services: (1) Academic tutoring, directly or through other services provided by the institution, to enable students to complete postsecondary courses, which may include instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, science, and other subjects.

4) Project Director questions

Q: Can a Project Director oversee three projects at once?

A: Yes, but a Project Director cannot have more than 100% level of effort across grants.

Q: Is it acceptable to list the current TRIO Project Director as the contact information person in the new application?

A: Yes. This is acceptable.

Q: Is a full-time Project Director required?

A: The regulations require projects to employ a full-time, 100% level of effort, Project Director to assure ample time for accountability of the project and oversight of activities. However, the regulations further indicate that a waiver of this requirement may be granted if the project director is also administering one or two additional programs serving similar populations of disadvantaged students within the institution. The waiver should be addressed under Plan of Operation.

Q: Can a current Project Director participate in proposal development activities for a renewal?

A: Yes, however, it is important that they do not do this on paid time by the grant.

Q: For the Project Director should we identify if we have a person that would be the Project Director, or should we put down the minimum qualifications and not list a person?

A: List the qualifications of the position only. Do not list a person.

Q: What travel and conferences are allowable for Project Directors?

A: For Project Director's Travel – Per Year : One National Conference; One Regional Meeting; One State Meeting; and Travel for participation in one professional staff development training opportunity under the TRIO Training Program. For Full-time Professional Staff Travel – Per Year One National, Regional, or State Meeting; and Travel for participation in one professional staff development training opportunity under the TRIO Training Program.

[Please visit 646.32 (d) for more guidance on Project Director]