Autism Grant FAQ

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS

Q. Are previous awardees of the Services to Students with Autism grant eligible to apply for this grant?
> A. Yes. All Texas local education agencies (LEAs) are eligible to apply.

Q. Is the application only for single school districts operating independently of one another?
> A. LEAs may apply individually or as part of a collaboration with other districts or charters. Prioritization of funding is given to collaborative applications.

Q. Can education service centers (ESCs) apply for this grant?
> A. No. Only school districts and open-enrollment charter schools are eligible to apply for the grant; however, LEAs may collaborate or contract with an ESC.

Q. Can Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) apply for this grant?
> A. No. Only school districts and open-enrollment charter schools are eligible to apply for the grant; however, LEAs may collaborate or contract with an IHE.

Q. Can an institute of higher education (IHE) partner with more than one school district?
> A. Yes. LEAs may collaborate or contract with an IHE as part of this grant. An IHE may contract with more than one applicant.

Q. Does coordination of services with a private or community-based provider include collaboration with a Regional Service Center?
> A. No, an ESC is not considered to be a private or community-based service provider. However, LEAs may collaborate or contract with ESCs.

Q. Can an ESC serve as the coordinator for a program that is a collaboration between multiple school districts, multiple charter schools, or school districts and charter schools?
> A. The LEA submitting the application is the fiscal agent of multiple school districts and/or open-enrollment charter schools. The collaborating LEAs may collaborate or contract with an ESC.

APPLICATION-RELATED QUESTIONS

Q: Is this a competitive grant?
> A: Yes, it is a discretionary competitive grant.

Q: Can you explain what it means to be a "competitive grant" as opposed to a non-competitive grant?
> A: A competitive grant is a discretionary grant in which a team of reviewers score applications of eligible applicants in order to determine awardees; applications must meet specific submission requirements and other criteria. If statute or the state plan requires competition, the competitive process is formal, but in other circumstances a more informal letter of interest process is followed to make it easier for

eligible applicants to apply. The TEA Grant Basics page may have additional information useful to applicants:https://tea.texas.gov/finance-and-grants/grants/grants-administration/grant-basics

Q: Does the application cover both years of the grant?
A: The application should include information related to programming for both years of the grant award. Selected grantees should expect to submit additional information prior to Year 2 of the grant award.

Q: Does this grant require two applications, one through ESC 13 and one through TEA?
A: ESC 13 is providing grant administration support as allowed by HB 1525. The primary application will be through ESC 13. Applicants who meet the criteria for the grant award will then be selected to submit a streamlined application through the TEA eGrants system for funding purposes.

Q: When does the grant application open?
A: The grant application will open on the ESC 13 website on February 1, 2022.

Q: What is the deadline for submitting the grant application?
A: The grant application will close on March 18, 2022.

Q. Are there formatting requirements for the application, including the number of words for each response section.
A. Yes. There is a restriction on number of characters for each response section.

Q. Who should apply for the grant in each LEA?
A. Only one designee, per school district or open-enrollment charter school, that is approved by the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer should apply for this grant. *Open-enrollment charter schools can apply as an individual organization if an individual County- District-Number (CDN) has been issued.

Q. Can appendices or attachments be added to the application?
A. Yes. For example, if there is an accompanying graphic that may help explain the proposed program, this could be uploaded as an optional attachment in the application.

Q. Is there a limit on the amount of funds an applicant may request?
A. No. An applicant may budget a reasonable amount of funds to implement the planned innovative program. A budget and narrative that provides a rationale for the budget is part of the application and will be scored as part of the review process.

Q. Who will review the grant applications?
A. Region 13 will convene a group of knowledgeable internal and external reviewers.

Q. Will preferential treatment in selection of awardees be given for Texas companies, providers, or vendors who provide services to LEAs?
A. No. There are no provisions regarding specific companies, providers, or vendors.

PROGRAM-RELATED QUESTIONS

Q. If a previous awardee of the Services to Students with Autism grant applies, should the applicant go in a new direction or build upon the current program?

A. All applicants should submit an application that conforms to the Application Requirements.

Q. What forms of data reporting on student achievement and improvement are required?

A. Applicants are asked to propose metrics and methods of data collection and reporting on progress toward goals.

Q. Does the use of technology have to be specific to interventions for children with autism? Or does general technology (laptops, smart boards) qualify?

A. Applicants should describe all proposed uses of technology that the grantee views as crucial to the proposed program. However, funds for this program must be used to supplement (increase the level of services) and not supplant (replace) funds from federal, state, and local funds for similar activities. Any program activity required by state law, State Board of Education (SBOE) rules, or local board policy may not be paid for with these funds.

Q. For the purposes of this grant, what is the definition of meaningful inclusion?

A. Meaningful inclusion provides authentic opportunities for students with autism to have social and communicative interactions with non-disabled peers.

Q. Are after school or summer school programs eligible for this grant?

A. A summer school or after school program could not apply for this grant. Only LEAs are eligible to apply for this grant. The intent of this program is for participating students to be served full-time. LEAs may include partnerships with after school or summer programs or create these types of programs as part of their proposed program.

Q: What would be an example of a collaborative project for the application?

A: Examples of a collaborative project for this application may include multiple school districts or open-enrollment charter schools with separate special education departments coming together to implement staff professional development, parent support, and/or programming for students with autism.

Q: Is there a limit for the grant award per grantee?

A: There is no set limit minimum or maximum amount of award per grantee. However, the total grant award available each of the two years is $35 million ($70 million total). Applicants should consider in their application budget the number of students enrolled in their program, as well as the scope of their proposed programming.

Q: After the two years of this grant award, is the LEA is responsible for continuing the funding for their program?

A: Yes. This grant award is only available for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years.

Q: Would a very large school district still be encouraged to join with another district in order to receive priority for collaboration?

A: TEC 29.026, which was amended by House Bill 1525, states that "...programs that are collaborations between multiple school districts, multiple charter schools, or school districts and charter schools" shall be prioritized for this grant award.

ALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS QUESTIONS

Q. Can this grant be used to hire additional staff to expand a current program for students with autism?

A. Yes. If the existing program conforms to the Application Requirements, this grant can be used to expand a current program, including the hiring of additional staff. LEAs should include information in the application on how the program may be sustained after grant funding ends.

Q. Are research costs, in partnership with IHEs allowable?

A. All costs must be for services directly related to the grant program. Activities that are central to the purposes of the award, including training, professional development, and evaluation are allowable.

Q: Would modifications of buildings be allowable with grant funds?

A: Building modifications may be considered an eligible expense for this grant if certain criteria are met. Please refer to the allowable and non-allowable expenses information for this grant.

Q: Would sensory room equipment be considered a capital expense?

A: Sensory room equipment could be considered capital outlay expenditure if certain criteria are met. Please refer to the allowable and non-allowable expenses information for this grant.

FAQ UPDATE 2.14.2022

Q: When can expenditures begin for the selected grantees?

A: The grantee can begin to encumber expenditures once their application, in reasonable and acceptable form, has been to submitted to TEA in the eGrants system. Grantees should understand that the application will go through a review process at TEA before a Notice of Grant Award is approved. Grantees should be careful that any expenses they incur be allowable per Program Guidelines as well as the General and Fiscal Guidelines, and should their application and/or budget be adjusted during negotiations, they may have to find other sources of funds to cover any costs considered unallowable. Grantees are allowed to submit expenses and draw down grant funds after their NOGA has been approved.

Q: Can a cooperative apply for this grant or would each district need to apply separately?

A: An existing cooperative could apply for this grant, but would need to designate a fiscal agent, as well as list out each district who would be receiving grant funds. Roles and responsibilities should be defined among the collaborative partners.

Q: If an existing SSA does not have any centralized special education programs, and all the school districts in the SSA agree to apply for this grant, would that count as a cooperative application?

A: It is not mandatory that SSAs have a "centralized Special Education program". The SSA/cooperative would need to designate a fiscal agent, and roles and responsibilities of the fiscal agent and members should be defined.

Q: Do grantees have to create a formal SSA agreement or can it be an informal collaborative agreement?

A: SSAs are considered formal agreements with defined legal and fiscal responsibilities for the fiscal agent and with written policies, procedures, and responsibilities that are agreed upon by SSA members

and fiscal agents entering into the arrangement. Please see the General and Fiscal Guidelines, pages 9-10, for more information. Additionally, there are statements of certification written into Application Part 1 in reference to SSAs – signing the application binds them to those statements.

Q: What would be an example of a collaborative project for the application?

A: Examples of a collaborative project for this application may include multiple school districts or open-enrollment charter schools with separate special education departments coming together to implement staff professional development, parent support, and/or programming for students with autism.