

2024-2026 Innovative Services for Students with Autism - Cycle 2 Grant FAQ

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS

- 1. Are previous awardees of the Innovative Services to Students with Autism grant eligible to apply for this grant?**

Yes.

- 2. Is the application only for single school districts operating independently of one another?**

Local education agencies (LEAs) may apply individually or as part of a collaboration with other districts or charter schools. Prioritization of funding is given to collaborative applications.

- 3. Can education service centers (ESCs) apply for this grant?**

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.

- 4. Can an institute of higher education (IHE) apply for this grant?**

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.

- 5. Can an IHE partner with more than one school district?**

Yes. LEAs may collaborate or contract with an IHE as part of this grant. An IHE may contract with more than one applicant.

- 6. Does coordination of services with a private or community-based provider include collaboration with an ESC?**

No, an ESC is not considered to be a private or community-based service provider. However, LEAs may collaborate or contract with ESCs.

- 7. 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?**

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.

- 8. Can a cooperative apply for this grant or would each district need to apply separately?**

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

APPLICATION-RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Is this a competitive grant?

Yes, it is a discretionary competitive grant.

2. Can you explain what it means to be a "competitive grant" as opposed to a non-competitive grant?

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.

3. Does this grant require two applications, one through ESC 13 and one through TEA?

ESC 13 is providing grant administration support as allowed previously in TEC 29.026. 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 for funding purposes.

4. When does the grant application open?

The grant application will open on the ESC 13 website in February 2024. The specific date will soon be announced.

5. What is the deadline for submitting the grant application?

The grant application will close in March 2024. The specific date will soon be announced.

6. Are there formatting requirements for the application, including the number of words for each response section.

Yes. There is a restriction on the number of characters for each response section. More information will be provided soon.

7. Who should apply for the grant in each LEA?

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.

8. Can appendices or attachments be added to the application?

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.

9. Is there a limit on the amount of funds an applicant may request?

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 across both years of the grant is part of the application and will be scored as part of the review process.

10. Who will review the grant applications?

Region 13 will convene a group of knowledgeable internal and external reviewers.

PROGRAM-RELATED QUESTIONS

1. 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?

There is no specific requirement regarding previous awardees programming decisions. All applicants should submit an application that conforms to the Application Requirements. Previous awardees of the Innovative Services to Students with Autism grant may go in a new direction or build upon the current program.

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

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

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

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.

4. For the purposes of this grant, what is the definition of “meaningful inclusion?”

Meaningful inclusion provides authentic opportunities for students with autism to have social and communicative interactions with non-disabled peers. In Texas, inclusion is defined as a mindset that promotes practices, actions, responsibilities, and learning environments a school community provides to foster equitable access for students receiving special education services. These intentional practices lead to high-quality education and engagement in both academic and non-academic activities for all students. This belief ensures that specially designed learning is based on individual student strengths, needs, and abilities.

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

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.

6. What would be an example of a collaborative project for the application?

Examples of a collaborative project for this application may include multiple school districts or open-enrollment charter schools coming together to implement staff professional development, parent support, and/or programming for students with autism. These schools would need to enter into a Shared Service Arrangement (SSA), including written agreement as outlined in the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#).

7. Is there a limit for the grant award per grantee?

There is no set limit minimum or maximum amount of award per grantee. Applicants should consider in their application budget the number of students enrolled in their program, as well as the scope of their proposed programming.

8. After this grant award ends, is the LEA responsible for continuing the funding for their program?

Yes. This grant award is only available through school years 2024-2026.

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

TEC 29.026, 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

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

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.

2. Are research costs in partnership with IHEs allowable?

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.

3. Would modifications of buildings be allowable with grant funds?

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.

4. Would sensory room equipment be considered a capital expense?

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.

Additional Questions

1. When can expenditures begin for the selected grantees?

The grantee can begin to encumber expenditures once their application, in reasonable and acceptable form, has been submitted to TEA. Grantees should understand that the application will go through a review process at TEA before a Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) is approved. Grantees should be careful that any expenses they incur be allowable per the Program Guidelines and the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#). If the application and/or budget needs to be adjusted during negotiations, grantees 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.

2. 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?

Yes, however the SSA/cooperative would need to designate a fiscal agent, and roles and responsibilities of the fiscal agent and members should be defined in a written agreement. It is not mandatory that SSAs have a “centralized Special Education program.”

3. Do grantees designated as a fiscal agent have to enter into an SSA with their collaborative applicants?

Yes. 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 refer to 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.

4. Can an LEA apply as a fiscal agent in one application and as a member district in another application?

No. LEAs may only be represented on one application, whether as a fiscal agent or as a member district.

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