



STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT

Grant Guidance, Template, and Rubric

STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT IS FUNDED THROUGH TITLE IV, PART A OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT OF 1965 (ESEA) FOR STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES (SEAS) TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH SAFER AND HEALTHIER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

|| STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT

Safe and healthy school communities

On Sept. 15, 2022, Idaho State Department of Education was awarded \$4,833,025 in federal K-12 funding from the U.S. Department of Education under the BSCA Stronger Connections grant program. Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) for state educational agencies (SEAs) to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments. The SDE is awarding these funds through competitive grants to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) that ensure transparency and successful implementation of activities allowable under section [4108 of the ESEA](#) to support the ongoing needs of students, educators, families, and communities. questions or more information, contact kwatkins@sde.idaho.gov.

High-need LEA, for the purposes of the SCG program is defined as follows:

An LEA demonstrating a rate of poverty of at least 35% as demonstrated by the Consolidated Federal and State Grant Application (CFSGA) low income reported for each LEA based on low-income determination submitted by the LEA to the Idaho State Department of Education (spring 2023).

And at least one of the following:

1. In a Mental Health Professional shortage area (all LEAs in Idaho qualify) OR
2. Can provide evidence of high rates of chronic absenteeism (unduplicated number of students absent 10% or more school days during the school year), referrals to the juvenile justice system (at least 2%) or substance abuse through objective measures **OR**
3. Students have recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.

PLEASE NOTE: COVID-19 does not count as a natural disaster or traumatic event, as all LEAs were impacted by the pandemic.

Equitable services will be provided to private school students in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Title IV, Part A competitive grant process and consultation is required for this process.

Grant purpose

The Stronger Connections grant aims to provide funding for Idaho LEAs to develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive approach that prioritizes physical and emotional safety for their unique school community (SEC. 4108 [20 U.S.C. 7118]). Funded activities and practices should prioritize safety, create a sense of belonging, implement trauma-responsive approaches, and teach positive behaviors to provide

safe and supportive learning environments that improve academic achievement and the well-being of students.

Safe and Healthy Allowable Uses

The following list is for safe and healthy allowable uses:

- Drug and violence prevention activities that are evidence-based.
- School-based mental health services
- Comprehensive health education programs
- Integrating health and safety practices into school or athletic programs
- Nutritional education and physical education activities
- Implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports.
- Bullying and harassment prevention
- Activities that improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills
- Prevention of teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violent/harassment
- Mentoring and school counseling
- Establishing or improving school dropout and reentry programs
- Suicide prevention
- Crisis management and conflict resolution techniques
- School-based violence prevention strategies
- Reducing exclusionary disciplinary practices
- Establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources and support for schools.
- Strengthening relationships between schools and communities
- High-quality training for school personnel in effective practices related to any of the above

Note: The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) prohibit the use of these funds for: food, school construction, and providing any person with a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon. *

***A “dangerous weapon” as defined in section 930(g)(2) of title 18 of the United States Code is a weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, animate or inanimate, that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury, except that such term does not include a pocketknife with a blade of less than 2 1/2 inches in length.**

Grant Period

The grant will be for the following consecutive school years (SY); SY 23/24 and SY 24/25. Funds will be available July 1, 2023, and will need to be expended by September 30, 2026. As with any Federal Funds, they are intended to be expended

during the grant period. We do not anticipate any further extension period for these funds.

Recipients will need to submit annual progress reports to the Federal Programs coordinator.

School Year 23/24:

- end of year program report
- completed action plan for the 24/25 SY submitted to Federal Programs at the Idaho State Department

School Year 24/25:

- complete continuing application and submit to Federal Programs
- end of year program report

Application Overview

Getting Started

- Review the hyperlinked resources in the guidance documents.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify the school's needs surrounding a safer and healthier learning environment.
- The school team develops a plan for activities, practices, and programs to include in the application.

Grant Management

For support or additional information contact:

- **Katie Watkins**, kwatkins@sde.idaho.gov
- **Stacie Rekow**, srekow@sde.idaho.gov
- **Jill Mathews**, jmathews@sde.idaho.gov

Application Timeline and Selection Process

- Application opens May 12, 2023
- Submit application **by 4 p.m. on June 12, 2023.**
- Anticipatory notification of award will be July 1, 2023

Award Amounts

LEAs can receive **up to \$150,000** total (\$75,000 per year) based on identified needs and implementation activities justified and outlined in the budget narrative.

Grant timeline is from 2023-2025. Funding must be obligated/encumbered no later than Sept. 30, 2026.

Consortiums

The consortium model will not be allowed for this grant. LEAs must submit their own application.

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- https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/11/BSCA_Stonger_Connections_FAQs_11-2022-FINAL.pdf
- https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/09/BSCA-Stronger-Connections-DCL_9.12_signed.pdf

Program Monitoring

LEAs will complete an End of Year Program Report at the end of the 23/24 SY and 24/25 SY including a detailed description of how the project goals were met, as well as any challenges that were encountered. The final evaluation must include:

- Impactful deliverables – data to support planning, implementation, and outcomes by the school – that align directly to the grant’s identified need(s).
- An explanation of sustainable practices – how partnerships function including strengths and challenges, if applicable.
- Updated goals and objectives for the SY.

Fiscal requirements

Fiscal agents are responsible for administering the Federal funds awarded and ensuring the allowability of approved expenditures. Once awarded, the applicant must identify the fiscal contact for the grant. Even if the fiscal contact serves another role in the grant (i.e., Program Director), they must be identified in the grant process. These funds are tracked separately from other title funds.

Budget

During the process of the application, you will be expected to provide budget projections for both years of the grant.

Allowable and Unallowable Expenditures

Project funds must be used for activities that directly support the accomplishment of the project purpose, priorities, and expected outcomes. All expenditures must be

consistent with applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and guidance. Applicants must bear in mind that SCG funds can be used only to supplement and not supplant any Federal or non-Federal funds used to support current programs.

Application Scoring

Eligibility Review

All applications will receive an initial eligibility review by SDE staff to ensure that the application:

- Is eligible for the grant,
- Was received on time and in the proper format,
- Contains all required sections, signatures, and
- Is responsive to the purpose and requirements of this Request for Proposals.

If an application does not meet these basic requirements, it will be deemed non-responsive at this stage of the review process and will not be scored or funded.

In-Depth Review

Following the eligibility review, each proposal will be assigned to reviewers, each of whom will have attested that they do not have a conflict of interest with the proposal. Each reader will score each proposal independently on its own merits, according to the criteria provided within the Reviewer Scoring Rubric.

Final selection

Allocation of funds is contingent upon successful negotiation of a final budget and/or scope of work, as well as the continued availability of funds. Applicants selected for a subgrant agree to be bound by the terms and conditions of the Grant Award Notification and all fiscal procedures. If there are more applicants that meet the criteria than funding available, awards will be made based on time stamp.