

Stronger Connections Competitive Grant

Grant Writers Webinar



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
Public Instruction
Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

Agenda

- Grant Details
- Grant Materials
- Application submission and Portal
- Application Review Process
- Writing an effective grant application



Grant Details

- Authorization
- Project period and purpose
- Eligibility
- Equitable services for private schools
- Funding priorities
- Funding tiers
- Allowable activities
- Evaluation requirements



Authorization

- ❖ **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), 2022**
- Distributed under Title IV Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)



Project Period

February 1, 2024-September 30, 2026

- **One time funding**
- **Funds must be expended by 9/30/26**
- **There is no carryover option for these funds**



Purpose of this Grant Opportunity

SEA must make competitive subgrants to high-need LEAs to establish safe, healthy, and supportive learning opportunities and environments for students.

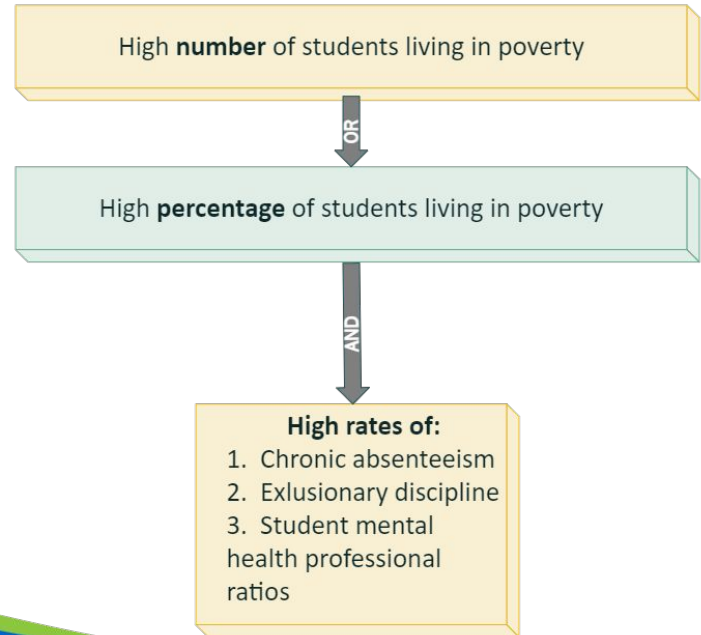
STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT



Eligibility Requirements: High Needs LEAs

2024-2026 Stronger Connections Grant:

Stronger Connections
Competitive Grant Eligibility



Equitable Services for Private Schools

- ❖ **Eligible LEAs must provide for the equitable participation of private school students and educators by consulting with private school officials in LEA's attendance area.**
 - Needs of private school students and staff
 - Interest in participating in the Stronger Connections grant activities
 - Population of private school students to be served



Equitable Service Share calculator
https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/xls/Stronger_Connections_Equitable_Share_Calculator.xlsx

Certification of Equitable Services for Private Schools

EQUITABLE SERVICES FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Eligible high needs LEAs must provide meaningful and ongoing consultation with private schools located within the district boundaries. LEAs must collect a [Stronger Connections Affirmation of Consultation with Private School Officials](#) form for each private school within the LEA boundaries, if applicable. This form indicates whether the private school would like to participate and if yes, summarizes the needs of that private school for inclusion in the application. While these forms will not be collected as part of the application submission, LEAs must certify that this process occurred, list participating private schools, and summarize the needs identified during consultation.

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, CERTIFY that there are no private schools within the boundaries of the LEA.

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, CERTIFY that all private schools within the boundaries of the LEA have been consulted regarding the Stronger Connections Grant and the LEA has a signature from each private school indicating whether they choose to participate in the Stronger Connections grant. For those private schools electing to participate, the needs of each private school are summarized on the equitable services affirmation of consultation form housed with the LEA and the needs are represented in the grant application.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that the following private schools have elected to participate in the Stronger Connections Grant Program should the LEA be awarded funds. List Participating Private Schools [Here](#):

Summarize the needs identified by the private school(s) here:

Name of Applicant Agency Authorizer *First and Last Name*

Title of Applicant Agency Authorizer

Funding Priorities



Funding Tiers

Funding Category	K-12 Enrollment	Maximum Award (one time funding)
Large	≥ 3000	\$400,000
Small	<3000	\$300,000

Wisconsin DPI has \$12.5 Million in funds to award.
This will result in approximately 35 awards.

Allowable Activities

1. Allowable under [section 4108](#)
2. Reasonable and necessary
3. Allocable to the grant
4. Supplements and does not supplant



Allowable Costs and Activities

↑
Allowable Expenses
↓

Social, emotional, mental health and wellness

Comprehensive strategies to address the social, emotional, mental health and wellness of all students, especially the identified target population/s. Providing a continuum of services and supports including prevention, early intervention and treatment and crisis support and increasing student access to these resources.

Creating positive, inclusive and supportive school environments

Strategies that increase connections and a sense of belonging at school. These can include strategies that provide opportunities for authentic family, caregiver and community engagement, relationship building between students and staff and student led initiatives. Strategies may also include those that reduce suspensions, expulsions and the use of seclusion and restraint.

Creating safe and supportive school environments

Strategies that create a safe environment can include comprehensive bullying prevention programs, violence prevention programs, comprehensive school safety plans and risk assessment

Developing safe, supportive systems

Strategies that support systems change to improve policies and practices to increase responsiveness to the needs of students and families most in need, protecting student rights and ensuring dignity and respect for all students and families

**Stronger
Connections
Plan**

Personnel

Salaries and benefits for staff to complete the work of the grant

Salaries for work and training that occurs outside of paid time

Training

Staff training to carry out grant activities

Student training

EBIS program materials

Curriculum, programs and supplies needed to implement the programs

Programs must be evidence based

Purchased Services

Contracting for training, staff support such as mental health navigation, behavioral health screening, and consultation

Non-capital Objects

Books, supplies for student activities, behavioral health screening materials

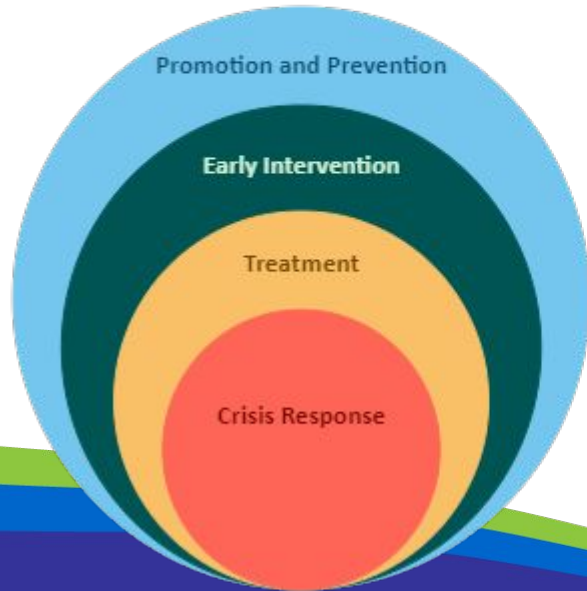
Security equipment (20% max)

← Allowable Activities →

[Guidelines for Using State & Federal Funds for Mental Health and AODA Treatment Costs for Youth](#)

Allowable Costs: A Comprehensive Approach

Continuum of Services and Supports



Promotion and Prevention through universal strategies and programs targeted to all students.

Early Intervention through the use of select and targeted strategies for students needing additional support.

Treatment through access to intensive supports for mental, behavioral and substance use disorders.

Crisis support through crisis response plans, adults trained to recognize, respond to and de-escalate crisis situations, and providing access to crisis services for students in need

Allowable Activities in an MLSS

Promotion and Prevention

- Comprehensive school mental health, SEL, trauma, resiliency, suicide prevention, bullying prevention, violence prevention, substance use prevention, tobacco and vaping prevention, safety drills, safety and crisis planning, behavioral de-escalation
- Restorative Practices
- Stigma reduction
- Building mental health literacy for students and adults (YMHFA)
- Family supports
- Community mental health collaboration
- Policies and procedures review, revision and development
- Building connection between students and adults
- Adult mentoring

Allowable Activities in an MLSS

Early Intervention

- Mental and behavioral health screening
- Group interventions
- Wellness planning
- Mental Health Navigation
- Parent Peer support
- Expert consultation
- Seamless referral and follow-up process
- Substance use interventions such as SBIRT and other harm reduction strategies
- Threat Assessment
- Alternatives to suspension and expulsion
- Restorative Practices
- Mental health interventions such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)

Allowable Activities in an MLSS

Treatment and Crisis Support

- Emergency Operations Plans/Safety Plans
- Wrap around services and treatment
- Mental health services provided by licensed community providers
- Tele-mental Health
- Seamless referral and follow-up process
- Uncovered treatment costs for students (up to 20% of total award) for services provided at the school/LEA building)
- Re-entry plans for students returning from in patient care or incarceration

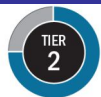
Evidence-based Improvement Strategies

Tiers 1-3: Allowable expenses

Demonstrates and Rationale: Allowable expense with additional review



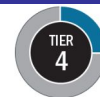
Strong Evidence



Moderate Evidence




Promising Evidence



Demonstrates a Rationale

	TIER 1 Strong Evidence	TIER 2 Moderate Evidence	TIER 3 Promising Evidence	TIER 4 Demonstrates a Rationale
 Study Design	Well-designed and implemented experimental study, meets WWC standards without reservations	Well-designed and implemented quasi-experimental study, meets WWC standards with reservations	Well-designed and implemented correlational study, statistically controls for selection bias*	Well-defined logic model based on rigorous research
 Results of the Study	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	An effort to study the effects of the intervention is planned or currently under way
 Findings From Related Studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	N/A
 Sample Size & Setting	At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school	At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school	N/A	N/A
 Match	Similar population <i>and</i> setting to your setting	Similar population <i>or</i> setting to your setting	N/A	N/A

Evidence Based Improvement Strategies Resources

- [Comprehensive School Mental Health Funding: Selecting High Leverage Activities](#)
 - [Evidence Based Improvement Strategies for SEL and Behavior](#)
 - [National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments: Safety](#)
 - [Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety: School Safety Working Group Report to the Attorney General](#)
- 

Unallowable Costs

- Provide any person a weapon or train them in the use of one
 - This includes funding archery or shooting sports activities
- Construction, renovation or repair of any school facility
- Food except where it is part of a student activity such as a cooking or nutrition class OR when a staff reimbursement during travel
- Capital expenditures must comply with [Federal Uniform Grant Guidance](#)

[Allowable Costs Checklist](#)

Evaluation Requirements

- End of Year Report (EOY)
- Any evaluation activities required by US Department of Education



Grant Materials and Resources



All grant materials: Application, Guidance Document and Grant Rubric can be found on the [Stronger Connections Grant Page](#)

Grant Application

- Application must be submitted via the Qualtrics portal by 4:00 PM on Wednesday, November 15th.
- The link to the Qualtrics application is available on the [Stronger Connections Grant webpage.](#)

Grant Application Sections

- I. General Information and Overview**
- II. Project Abstract**
- III. Federal General Assurances**
 - A. Federal Assurances
 - B. Program Specific Assurances
 - C. Certification Signature
 - D. Certification Regarding Lobbying
 - E. Affirmation of Consultation with Private School Officials
- IV. Readiness**
- V. Plan**
- VI. Do (Action Plan)**
- VII. Study/Check**
- VIII. ACT: Coordination**
- IX. Budget Narrative**



Section by Section instructions can be found in the Guidance Document on page 7.

I. General Information & II. Overview



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
Public Instruction

I. General Information

Agency Information

Applicant Agency

CESA

Street Address

City

Zip

II. Project Abstract

The Project Abstract is the first thing the reviewer will read.

- Provide a clear and concise summary of your whole project
- Include the following for the highest score:
 - Target population/population most in need
 - Summary of the key needs that were identified through your data
 - Summary of the overall plan you will implement to address both the needs and the students most in need

III. Assurances and Signatures

Three signatures will be required with the application submission

- **Signature certifying compliance with federal and program specific assurances**
- **Certification regarding lobbying**
- **Certification of the Equitable Services for Private Schools process**



IV. Readiness



Stakeholders

- Who are the stakeholders identified for this grant project and what are the roles of these stakeholder groups in the implementation of the grant project?
- What input did the stakeholders above provide that informed this grant project?
- How will stakeholders continue to provide input if the grant project is funded?

“Engaging students, parents, families, and community members is critical to the successful implementation of activities supported by Stronger Connection funds.”

V. Plan

“...LEAs to conduct and submit an assessment of local needs related to creating safe, healthy, and supportive schools and other learning settings. Assessments may include school safety assessments, culture and climate assessments, multilingual support assessments, capacity assessments, site assessments, and assessment of need for supportive programming before or after the school day”

BSCA Stronger Connections
Grant Program FAQ, US DOE April 2023 pg 10

Demonstration of Need

- Identify the overall specific need(s) for the target population to be addressed by the grant project. Include the supporting data that is being used to determine the need(s).
- What is the likely root cause(s) (i.e., factors, resource inequities, opportunity gaps, etc.) contributing to the need(s) to be addressed by this grant project?
- Define your Priority Area(s) or Statement(s) to address the root cause of the needs.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is as a systematic examination of the gap that exists between the current state and desired state of an organization and the factors that can be attributed to this gap

[Needs Assessment Guidebook](#)

[Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments](#)

“Need” refers to the gap or discrepancy between a present state (what is) and a desired state (what should be). **The need is neither the present nor the future state; it is the gap between them.**

Desired Results (What should be)	-	Current results (What is)	=	Need
100% of third grade migrant students meet the state proficiency level in reading	-	30% of third grade migrant students meet the state proficiency level in reading	=	70% of third grade migrant children must reach the proficiency level in reading

Root Cause Analysis

“A root cause analysis is a structured team process that assists in identifying factors or causes of identified problems.”

Root Cause Analysis tools:

- 5 Whys?
- Force Field Analysis
- Snowballing
- Fishbone diagram

Bowman, A., & Austin, K. (2022). *Facilitating Improvement Professional Learning Modules—Module 5: Root cause analysis and challenging assumptions* [[Workbook](#)]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West.

Define Your Priorities

Guiding Questions:

1. What Findings, or themes have emerged that, if addressed, will have the greatest potential for impact on student outcomes?
2. How many priorities can be addressed simultaneously?
3. Are there additional data that should be considered in order to make informed decisions about priorities and capacity for implementation?



Cuiccio, C., & Husby-Slater, M. (2018). [Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessment](#). Washington D.C.: State Supporting Network. Partnering for School Improvement. Pg 10

Needs Assessment Resources

Mental and Behavioral Health

- [School Mental Health Quality Assessment \(SMHQA\)](#)
- [Mental Health Needs Assessment](#)
- [Online YRBS](#)
- [AODA Assessment Tool](#)

School Safety & Violence Prevention

- [Safety Readiness Tool](#)
- [Elementary Violence Prevention Assessment Tool](#)
- [Bully Prevention Program Assessment Tool](#)

Other

- [School Climate Survey](#)

Needs Assessment Data Sources

Surveys	School Data	Community Data	Screening
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● YRBS● Climate survey● Family surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Attendance● Suspension● Expulsion● Office referrals● Grade retention● Academic outcomes● Crisis incidents● Implementation assessment tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Medical and behavioral health provider access● Student to MH staff ratios, LEA, county● County Health Rankings● County MH data● #s of uninsured students● Community safety and violence data● County YRBS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Mental/behavioral health screening● SEL competency screening● AODA screening● School safety assessment

VI. Do (Action Plan)

→ The Action Plan Consists of:

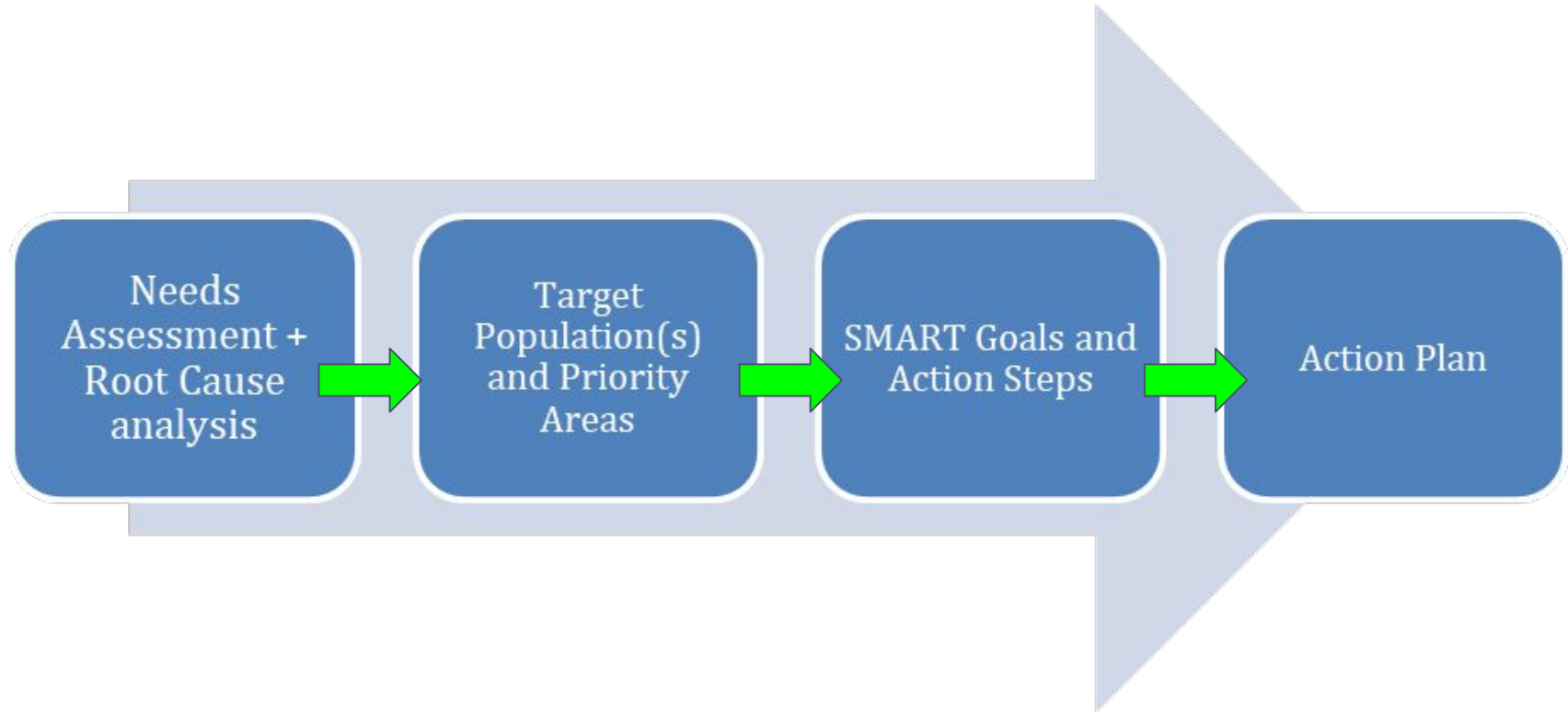
- ◆ SMART Goal to address Priority Area
- ◆ Priority Area and Supporting Data
- ◆ Action Step
- ◆ Timeline/Completion Data
- ◆ Evidence of Completion
- ◆ Personnel Responsible

“LEA plans to create safe, healthy, and supportive schools should reflect a comprehensive set of evidence-based components”

BSCA Stronger Connections
Grant Program FAQ, US DOE April 2023 pg 6



Action Planning



VII. Study/Check

- Process to collect and analyze grant specific data
- Process for changing or making improvements to action steps.
- Process for sharing evaluation results with the public



XIII. ACT Coordination

- **How will the grant project align with existing or available initiative or programs?**
- **What are the protocols for ongoing communication with stakeholders?**



IX. Budget Narrative



Budget Narrative – The budget narrative section informs the reviewers how the funds will be spent.

In this section, address how the grant funds will be used to address identified SMART goals during the grant project period.

Note that Grantees will submit an itemized budget via WISEgrants as part of the award process and **not with the application.**

Grant Guidance Document

Guidance Document can be found on the [Stronger Connections Grant Page](#)



2024-26

Stronger Connections Grant Guidance

Grant Rubric

Grant Rubric can be found on the [Stronger Connections Grant Page](#)

II. Abstract

- Weak (0 points): The abstract had a missing or incomplete summary of the target population, the key needs, and/or the planned implementation approach(es).
- Average (1 point): The abstract included most of the necessary information but there was still missing information in one of the following: the target population, summarized key needs, or summarized planned implementation approach(es).
- Strong (2 points): The abstract summarized the target population, summarized the key needs, and summarized the planned implementation approach(es).

IV. Readiness

1. Stakeholders

1a. Identification of Stakeholders and Stakeholder Roles

- Not Present (0 points): No stakeholders and/or stakeholder roles were identified.
- Beginning (1 point): The stakeholders or stakeholder roles were not adequately described.
- Developing (2 points): The stakeholder team and stakeholder roles were described, but there appeared to be little/no stakeholder representation from the target population.
- Accomplished (3 points): The stakeholder team and corresponding roles were clearly described. These stakeholders represent students who have been historically and/or are currently under-resourced.
- Exemplary (4 points): The stakeholder team and corresponding roles were described in-depth. These stakeholders represent students who have been historically and/or are currently under-resourced and each was chosen specifically for their expertise in working with/representing these under-resourced students.

1b. Stakeholder Input on Proposed Grant Project

- Not Present (0 points): No stakeholder engagement has occurred to inform the proposed grant project.
- Beginning (1 point): Stakeholder engagement was noted but few details were provided.
- Developing (2 points): Stakeholder engagement was described in a limited way but how this engagement informed the project was not clear.
- Accomplished (3 points): Stakeholder engagement occurred and the description highlighted how the stakeholder input was used to inform the grant project.
- Exemplary (4 points): There was an in-depth description of stakeholder engagement including a description of the stakeholder engagement process(es), which ultimately elicited detailed input that informed the proposed grant project.

1c. Stakeholder Input if Grant Project is Funded

- Not Present (0 points): No plan for future stakeholder engagement was provided through which regular feedback to inform the ongoing project can occur.

Application Submission Details



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
Public Instruction

General Information

Agency Information

Applicant Agency

Street Address

City

Zip

- Applications must be submitted via the Qualtrics
- Use a Chrome browser for best results

Before Starting Your Application

You will need:

- contact information for your school administrator, project coordinator for this grant, and your business office.
- A project narrative
- An action plan that includes: timeline, evidence of completions, and personnel responsible
- Project budget narrative

Preparing your application in advance is advised. Refer to the Section by Section Description on page 7 of the Guidance Document for the questions, character limits and exemplary score criteria.

Additional Documents and Uploads

- **Grant Assurances Certification, Certification Regarding Lobbying, and Certification for Equitable Services for Private School will require signatures**
- **All three forms will be on one downloadable document found within the application**
- **This form must be downloaded, completed with all three required signatures and uploaded and submitted with the application**



Application Review Process



External Review

```
graph LR; A[Assigned to Reviewers] --> B[Reviewers Submit Scores]; B --> C[Average Score Calculated]
```

Assigned to
Reviewers

Reviewers
Submit
Scores

Average
Score
Calculated

Internal Review

```
graph LR; A[Applications confirmed for Eligibility] --> B[Applications ranked by Average Score and grouped geographically]; B --> C[Recommendations for funding made based upon Average score and geographic distribution]; C --> D[Recommendations submitted for approval to the Office of the State Superintendent];
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Applications confirmed for Eligibility

Applications ranked by Average Score and grouped geographically

Recommendations for funding made based upon Average score and geographic distribution

Recommendations submitted for approval to the Office of the State Superintendent

Where do I start? Writing an Effective Grant Application



Steps

Identify Partners

Gather data

Analyze data for root causes

ID priority areas and activities for project

Identify the grant writing team and write the application

Review the application

Complete and submit the application

[Sequence and Timeline
Document](#)

Step	Timeline	Who
Identify Partners	October 6, 2023	Applicant
Gather Data and conduct Needs Assessment	October 20, 2023	Applicant and partners
Analyze Data for Root Causes	October 27, 2023	Applicant and partners
Identify all Priority Areas and Activities for this Project	October 27, 2023	Applicant and partners
Write the Application	November 1, 2023	Primary grant writers
Review the Application	November 8, 2023	Individuals not involved in writing the grant
Submit the Application	November 15, 2023	Primary grant writers

Grant Writing Resources

Planning and Writing a Grant Proposal: The Basics

Be a Standout: 10 Tips for Writing Grant Proposals that Get Funded

Show me the Money: Tips and Resources for Successful Grant Writing



General Tips and Tricks

- ★ Align your proposal to the grant purpose
- ★ Do prep work prior to writing your proposal
- ★ Follow directions and answer all questions
- ★ Address all rubric criteria
- ★ Proofread your application
- ★ Authentically engage your partners
- ★ Develop a plan that aligns with your identified needs, priorities and target populations
- ★ Give yourself plenty of time

Questions

Email questions to:

Strongerconnections@dpi.wi.gov

Responses to all questions received will be posted as an FAQ on the Stronger Connections website.

