



GRANT INFORMATION GUIDE

Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Deadline
May 10, 2023
No later than 5:00 p.m. EST

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Program Description

The Stronger Connections grant program (SCG) was authorized under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) passed on June 25, 2022. Under the BSCA, state education agencies (SEAs) must award these funds competitively to high-need local education agencies (LEAs) to fund activities allowable under § 4108 – *Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students* of the Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant (SSAE) as authorized in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

NAME OF GRANT PROGRAM

Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) Program

Purpose

The purpose of the SCG is to increase the capacity of SEAs and the identified high-need LEAs to:

- provide ALL students with safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.
- increase students' sense of belonging with culturally and linguistically responsive practices where students are surrounded by trusting and caring adults committed to building strong relationships.
- build connections that will make students less likely to bring weapons to school and more likely to report the presence of weapons in school; and
- support students with overcoming challenging and traumatic experiences through nurturing learning environments that provide a sense of emotional and physical safety.

Authorization

[Bipartisan Safer Communities Act \(BSCA\)](#)

Dissemination

This Grant Information Guide (GIG) was released on March 10, 2023.

Deadline

Draft submissions are optional and are due by March 31, 2023. Final proposals are due no later than 5 p.m. on May 10, 2023.

Grant period

The performance period for the SCG is 09/15/2022 to 09/30/2025 with an additional 12 months available from the federal Tydings waiver (i.e., 09/30/2026).

Funding amount available

The SCG is a competitively based grant to high-need LEAs. The funding amount for FY 2023 is **\$16,141,274**.

Estimated number of grants

Based on Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) Eligibility.

Submission instructions

The grant application and required attachments must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. on **April 10, 2023**, via email to donald.corbin@maryland.gov. **LEAs may submit by April 10, 2023, if earlier feedback is desired.**

State responsibilities

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is responsible for providing required information, data, documentation, and technical assistance to facilitate the grantee's performance of the work. The MSDE will provide such additional assistance when requested.

PROGRAM CONTACT

Name: Mary Gable
Title: Assistant State Superintendent
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Eligibility

Under the BSCA, MSDE must award funds competitively to high-need LEAs. Consistent with Congressional intent, the U.S. Department of Education (the ED) encourages SEAs to consider the following criteria for establishing high-need LEAs:

- a high number or percentage of students living in poverty (e.g., at least 40 %).
- a high student-to-mental health professional ratio.
- high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or
- where students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.

Definition of High Need LEAs in Maryland:

The MSDE's definition of a High Need LEA comes from a combination of sources both the [20 U.S. Code § 1021 \(10\)](#) and [Social Vulnerability Index](#) as specified by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is a similar format as reflected in [the GAO's Report to Congress in January 2022](#). [Social Vulnerability Index](#) (SVI) when determining whether a population, or LEA in this instance, is high need. Developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the SVI uses data collected by the U.S. Census on 15 different social factors and groups them into four distinct themes: 1) socioeconomic status, 2) household composition, 3) race/ethnicity/language, and 4) housing/transportation. The MSDE has determined that a High Need LEA has socially vulnerable groups—including children who are low income (has a minimum of 10,000 children with 20% or more from low-income families), minorities, English learners, or living with disabilities, from rural communities, has high teacher turnover, a high percentage of teachers not teaching in the academic subject areas or grade levels in which the teachers were trained to teach; a high percentage of teachers have emergency, provisional or temporary certification or licensure and has high need schools. ***Please see the posted list of LEAs in Maryland that meet the definition of a High Need LEA described above.**

Use of Funds

Under the BSCA, funds may be used for activities allowable under §4108 of Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant as authorized by the ESEA (i.e., *Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students*). See pages 10-13 for a non-exhaustive list of federal examples under §4108. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education encourages prioritizing funds for LEAs that demonstrate a strong commitment to the following:

- Implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student’s social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services.
- Engaging students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments; and
- Designing and implementing policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.
- Under the allowable activities in §4108, funds may be expended on the following:
 - Salaries, wages, stipends
 - Fringe benefits
 - Contracted services
 - Equipment
 - Materials and supplies
 - Travel
 - Up to 2% administrative costs
 - Indirect costs

Funds may not be used for:

- the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon¹ or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under §13401 of the BSCA.
- construction, renovation, or repair of any school facility, except as authorized under SEC. 8526. [20 U.S.C. 7906].
- transportation unless otherwise authorized under this SEC. 8526. [20 U.S.C. 7906].
- developing or distributing materials or operating programs or courses of instruction directed at youth, that are designed to promote or encourage sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual.

¹ Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. Retrieved from: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2938>.

- distributing or to aiding in the distribution by any organization of legally obscene materials to minors on school grounds.
- providing sex education or HIV-prevention education in schools unless that instruction is age appropriate and includes the health benefits of abstinence; or
- operating a program of contraceptive distribution in schools.

Program Requirements

Proposals for funding must contain the following to be considered for funding:

1. Demonstration of consultation with parents, teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, students, community-based organizations, local government representatives (which may include a local law enforcement agency, local juvenile court, local child welfare agency, or local public housing agency), Indian tribes or tribal organizations that may be located in the region served by the LEA (where applicable), charter school teachers, principals, and other school leaders (if such agency or consortium of such agencies supports charter schools), and others with relevant and demonstrated expertise in programs and activities designed to meet the purpose of this subpart.
2. Plan of Operation, Key Personnel, and Project Timeline.
3. The application of the Title IV, Part A comprehensive needs assessment that focuses on the areas outlined below that apply to the SCG grant program:
 - safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.
 - students' sense of belonging.
 - culturally and linguistically responsive practices.
 - commitments to building strong relationships.
 - student connections with trusting and caring adults.
 - support students who have experienced challenging and/or traumatic events.
 - students' sense of emotional and physical safety.
4. Commitment statements with descriptions that detail how the LEA will:
 - implement comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student's social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to school-based interventions and services.
 - engage students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.
 - design and implement policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.
5. Description of Programs/Activities must:
 - be coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs.
 - foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement.

- promote the involvement of parents in activities or programs.
- be conducted in partnership with an Institution of Higher Education (IHE), business, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, or other public or private entity with a demonstrated record of success in implementing activities under this subpart.
- demonstrate how funds will be used for allowable activities under [§4108](#) - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students.
- contain program objectives, intended outcomes, milestones, and evaluations that describe how the LEA, or its partners will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of its SCG program activities.

6. Assurances must:

- demonstrate that the distribution of funds is prioritized to schools based on one or more of several factors, including schools (SVI) that have:
 - a high number or percentage of students living in poverty (e.g., at least 40%).
 - a high student-to-mental health professional ratio.
 - high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse.
 - students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.
- only use funds for allowable activities under [§4108](#) - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students.
- ensure the LEA will not use funds for the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under [§13401](#) of the BSCA.
- demonstrate that the LEA will provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools, including that the LEA will ensure:
 - control of funds for the services and assistance provided to a non-public school with SCG funds.
 - title to materials, equipment, and property purchased with SCG funds is maintained.
 - services to a non-public school with SCG funds are provided by the LEA directly, or through contract with, another public or private entity.
 - equitable services provided with the SCG funds are secular, neutral, and nonideological.
- ensure the LEA follow the supplement and not supplant requirements in §4110 of ESEA.
- track the SCG funds separately from its regular allocation under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA.

7. Equitable Services to Students in Non-Public Schools (see page 16)
8. Compliance with the Internet Safety requirements (see page 16)
9. The General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), Section 427 (see page 16)
10. Detailed budget and budget narrative.

Plan of operation

The Plan of Operation details how the LEA will implement the SCG grant in their respective school system. Specifically, the Plan of Operation identifies the following key elements:

- the proposed activities/programs under [§4108](#) - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students that align to a listed federal example.
- the objectives, outcomes, and milestones for each program/activity.
- the level evidence and supporting citation for each proposed activity/program.
- the evaluation plan for each proposed activity/program.
- the specific implementation plan and timeline for each proposed activity/program.
- the total projected use of funds for each program.

When considering the allowability of programs/activity under [§4108](#) - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students, LEAs must ensure the proposed activity/program satisfies the following conditions:

- the activity/program aligns with one of the federal examples under Safe and Healthy School Initiatives. See [ESEA § 4108 Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students](#).
- the activity/program meets the federal cost principles (i.e., reasonable, necessary, allowable, and allocable). See the [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) §200 Subpart E Cost Principles](#).
- the use of funds supplements and does not supplant other State or local funds that would otherwise pay for the activity / program in the absence of [Title IV, Part A funding. See ESEA §4110 Supplement Not Supplant](#).
- the proposed activity/program is not one of the listed prohibited uses of funds for Title IV, Part A. See [ESEA § 8526 Prohibited Uses of Funds](#), including the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under [§13401](#) of the BSCA.
- the proposed activity/program was identified as a need in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Selecting evidence-based activities – goals and measurable outcomes

SCG stakeholders should select relevant evidence-based activities, when evidence is available, that will have the likelihood of working in the local context. Evidence-based activities are more likely to improve student outcomes, but the effectiveness also depends on the local context (e.g., the alignment of that activity to other efforts underway, the population being served) and local capacity (e.g., funding, staff and staff skills, resources, buy-in from stakeholders). Based on the evidence-based activities indicate the ESSA performance goal(s) to which resources provided by this grant will be targeted. Include measurable objectives and strategies per activity.

ESSA defines an evidence-based activity, strategy, or intervention as one that: (See [ESSA § 8101 \(21\) Definitions](#))

- demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on one of three levels of evidence: or
- demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.

[ESSA § 8101 \(21\)\(B\) Definition for Specific Activities Funded under this Act](#) requires LEAs to prioritize the use of Level I, II, III, or IV activities, strategies, or interventions. The U.S. Department of Education urges LEAs to rely on the strongest types of evidence—i.e., “strong” (Level 1) and “moderate” (Level 2) evidence under the ESEA and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations for SCG activities and programs. The levels of evidence are defined as:

Level 1: Strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study.

Level 2: Moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study of the intervention.

Level 3: Promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias.

Level 4: The practice demonstrates a rationale based on a strong theory of action or logic model, and there is a plan in place to study its impact on outcomes.

Allowable activities

The following section provides information on the activities that LEAs may conduct under [§4108](#) Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students and offers examples of practices that may be helpful to grantees. Generally, LEAs may use funds for a wide variety of activities including, but not limited to, direct services for students, professional development for teachers and administrators, salaries of personnel to carry out identified programs and services including, but not limited to athletic administrators, and supplemental educational resources and equipment. The examples provided below are not an exhaustive list of strategies, but rather describe a range of practices that are illustrative of the possibilities under the law. See [§4108](#) - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students.

Activity key

Listed below is the SCG Activity Key for [§4108](#) Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students. LEAs will use the key and the abbreviated names for the corresponding federal examples when completing the application. Using the key and selecting an abbreviated name for the programs and activities proposed under [§4108](#) will ensure the LEA satisfies the first condition outlined above on page 6 regarding allowability (i.e., the activity and program aligns with the purpose of [§4108](#) (Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students)).

Activity key for activities to support safe and healthy students

This table details the federal activity examples from the statute located in [§4108](#). An abbreviated name is provided for each federal example within the Safe and Healthy Students content area. When inputting the LEA proposed activity, please select the abbreviated federal example that most closely aligns with the proposed activity.

FEDERAL EXAMPLE	ABBREVIATED NAME
<p>Drug and violence prevention activities and programs that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with LEAs in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available) including (i) programs to educate students against the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco products, and electronic cigarettes</p>	<p>Evidence-based drug and violence prevention activities and programs</p>
<p>Drug and violence prevention activities and programs that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with LEAs in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available) including (ii) professional development and training for school and specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members in prevention, education, early identification, intervention mentoring, recovery support services, and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral, as related to drug and violence prevention</p>	<p>Evidence-based professional development and training to prevent drug use and violence</p>
<p>In accordance with sections 4001 and 4111 (i) school-based mental health services, including early identification of mental health symptoms, drug use, and violence, and appropriate referrals to direct individual or group counseling services, which may be provided by school-based mental health services providers</p>	<p>School-based mental health services, including early identification of mental health symptoms, drug use, and violence</p>
<p>In accordance with sections 4001 and 4111 (ii) school-based mental health services partnership programs that (I) are conducted in partnership with a public or private mental health entity or health care entity; and (II) provide comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports and staff development for school and community personnel working in the school that are: (aa) based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with LEAs in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available); (bb) coordinated (where appropriate) with early intervening services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.); and (cc) provided by qualified mental and behavioral health professionals who are certified or licensed by the State involved and practicing within their area of expertise</p>	<p>Comprehensive school-based mental health services partnership programs that provide staff development based on evidence-based trauma-informed practices</p>

Programs or activities that (i) integrate health and safety practices into school or athletic programs	Programs or activities that integrate health and safety practices in schools or athletic programs
Programs or activities that (ii) support a healthy, active lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical education activities and programs, which may address chronic disease management with instruction led by school nurses, nurse practitioners, or other appropriate specialists or professionals to help maintain the well-being of students	Healthy, active lifestyle programs and activities
Programs or activities that (iv) improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment	Programs or activities to improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills and preventing coercion, violence, or abuse
Programs or activities that (v) provide mentoring and school counseling to all students, including children who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, involvement in criminal or delinquent activities, or drug use and abuse	Mentoring and school counseling programs and activities
Programs or activities that (vii) establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports	Providing safe and healthy learning environments, such as integrated systems of student and family supports
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (i) suicide prevention	Suicide prevention training for school personnel
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (ii) effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management	High-quality training for school personnel related to effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management

High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (iii) crisis management and conflict resolution techniques	High-quality training for school personnel related to crisis management and conflict resolution techniques
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (iv) human trafficking (defined, for purposes of this subparagraph, as an act or practice described in paragraph (8) or (9) of section 103 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7102))	Human trafficking training for school personnel
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (v) school-based violence prevention strategies	High-quality training for school personnel related to school-based violence prevention strategies
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (vi) drug abuse prevention, including educating children facing substance abuse at home	Drug abuse prevention training for school personnel
High-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to (vii) bullying and harassment prevention	Bullying and harassment prevention training for school personnel

Additional Resources for Safe and Healthy Schools Activities

- [Best Evidence Encyclopedia \(Center for Data-Driven Reform\)](#)
- [Crime Solutions.gov \(National Institute of Justice\)](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse \(Institute of Education Sciences\)](#)
- [Evidence-Based Intervention Network \(University of Missouri\)](#)
- [National Center on Intensive Intervention \(American Institutes for Research\)](#)
- [Results First Clearinghouse Database \(PEW Charitable Trust\)](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning Interventions under ESSA \(RAND\)](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Registry \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\)](#)

Application

Proposal cover page

The Proposal Cover Page captures standard point-of-contact information. Specifically, the Proposal Cover Page identifies the LEA, the LEA's program manager, mailing address, phone number, email address, and total allocation amount being awarded.

Program abstract

The SCG Project Abstract provides a comprehensive snapshot of how the LEA proposes to utilize the SCG grant to create safe and nurturing learning environments for all students. Specifically, the purpose of the project abstract is to describe how:

- comprehensive, evidence-based strategies will be implemented.
- students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations will be engaged in the planning process.
- policies and practices that advance equity will be designed and implemented.

Consultation

Please see program requirements on page 7, number 1, to complete this section.

Extent of need

To complete a Needs Assessment please see program requirements on page 7, number 3.

Goals and measurable outcomes

Refer to page 10 under selecting evidence-based activities for guidance on submitting goals and measurable outcomes.

Plan of operation, key personnel, and timeline

Refer to page 9 for information on the Plan of Operation. For Key Personnel and Timeline, submit a detailed and time-specific management plan with pre-assigned responsibilities. In this section, present a clear discussion of partners, respective roles in the project, the benefits each expects to receive, and the specific contributions each will make to the project (financial, equipment, personnel, or other resources). It is essential that partner commitments be documented.

The SCG grant should have a core team to govern the project. Duties of the team include establishing major program policies, reviewing interim progress reports, and making recommendations for programmatic change. Core team members should represent the major stakeholders in the project. (e.g., representatives from project partners, parents, principals, Board of Education). SCG program directors act as advisors to the team, the duties, members, and meeting dates of the teams should be identified in this section of the project proposal.

List the staff or personnel involved in the project's implementation. LEA teams will be asked to complete the following management plan chart as part of the application.

Management Plan Worksheet and Project Timeline

The Management Plan and Project Timeline is a list with a column representing the core management activities, the responsible parties, and the dates of completion throughout the grant’s performance period.

List of Core Management Activities (Add rows as needed)	Responsible Party	Date Completed
List of Implementation Activities (Add rows as needed)	Responsible Party	Date Completed
Evaluation Activities (Add rows as needed)	Responsible Party	Date Completed

Evidence of impact

Describe how the proposed activities and strategies being implemented are evidence-based and will lead to the desired impact and outcomes. Include a description of the chosen program or organization’s experience in terms of effective practices (research-based strategies) leading to the desired outcomes.

Learning from Best Practices: The following are examples of high-quality programs shared by the U.S. Department of Education related to the program and potential activities and ideas in line with the federal guidance. These resources should be used as exemplars of programs that align with Stronger Connections. Other sources for guidance can be found at the [USDE’s FAQ resource](#) and the [safer schools best practices clearing house](#). Further exemplars can be found at <https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.gov/events.aspx>. Examples with links to the exemplars are given below:

[The Role of School Mental Health Professionals in Supporting School Safety](#) – The REMSTA Center hosted a webinar which highlights the role of mental health professionals in supporting school safety efforts within their school communities. Presenters shared resources to strengthen mental health professionals’ efforts around climate assessment, behavioral threat assessment, continuity of teaching and learning, and overall plan development.

[Transforming Youth Together: Understanding the Connection between Substance Use, Mental Health, and Student Learning Part 1: What the Data Tells Us](#) – This is a three-part series to help schools and educators effectively address substance use, mental health, and their impacts on learning. Practitioners from schools, districts, and other places of educational instruction will share their lessons learned and best practices.

[Preventing and Intervening in Identity-Based Bullying](#) – This series features lessons learned and best practices from faculty, staff, schools, districts, institutions of higher education, and other places of educational instruction.

[Mental Health/Social-Emotional-Behavioral Well-Being](#) – This article illustrates how the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) is a way to blend PBIS with mental health supports in schools. This framework guides state, district, and community leaders to fund and modify policies and procedures to help every system work more efficiently.

[Integrated Student Supports State Policy Toolkit](#) – This is an example of what is being done by Massachusetts as part of their school toolkit. On page 81 of the toolkit, under the principles of effective practices for integrating student supports, they discuss eight (8) principles: whole school, whole child, mindset, confidentiality, collaboration, coordination, access to services, and partnering with families.

Evaluation and dissemination plan

Evaluation is a means to assess the performance, merit, and worth of a program and should be thorough, meaningful, yield actionable information for improvement, integrated at the beginning of a program or activity, and checked over the course of implementation.

Process evaluations

focus on the implementation process and seek to answer the question, does the intervention work as intended?

Outcome evaluations

Determine the degree to which a program achieves its stated goals and objectives and are what most people think of when they hear the word evaluation. Outcome evaluation, on the other hand, answers the question, does the intervention have the intended impact?

Process and outcome evaluations are also essential to assessing the true impact of the intervention on the intended audiences. A quality evaluation includes both types of evaluation to provide a more complete picture of the success or failure of an intervention, as well as a possible explanation for those outcomes.

Commitment statements

Please see program requirements on pages 7 and 8, number 4, to complete this section.

Description of programs/Activities & (B) Activities to support safe and healthy students

Please see program requirements on page 8, number 5 to complete this section.

Program assurances

Please see program requirements on pages 8 and 9, number 6 to complete this section.

Equitable Services to students in non-public schools

Demonstrate consultation with non-public school officials to identify eligible non-public school students and teachers for participation and service needs.

Internet security

Please complete this page in the application

The general education provisions act (GEPA), section 427

Please complete the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), Section 427. See page 21 of the Grant Information Guide.

Budget and Budget Narrative

The budget narrative is an itemized explanation of your budget and must be able to stand on its own without having to refer to the proposal for information. Although information to justify a line item (such as job descriptions for personnel) might be contained within the grant application, a separate and complete justification for each line item must be provided in the budget narrative. It should include the following information listed below. The grant performance period is from 09/15/2022 to 09/30/2025. The full amount of the LEA's allocation will be released with the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA). Only the year one budget narrative is due on January 17, 2023. A new budget narrative must be submitted after July 1 for each subsequent year of funding that takes into account any unspent funds (i.e., carryover funds) from the previous year. The C-125 should encompass the entire grant performance period (i.e., 09/15/2022 to 09/30/2025) and be amended as needed.

- **Column 1:** List the program/activity number (i.e., 1, 2, 3, etc.) for the program/activity.
- **Column 2:** Category/Program/Object numbers corresponding to where the line item will factor in on the C-1-25 (e.g., Regular Program – Salaries and Wages (203-205 – 01-01); Contract Services – Instructional Staff Development (203-205 – 09 – 02); Equitable Services Share (203-205 – 07 – 08).
- **Column 3:** A description of the specific line item (What is it?).
- **Column 4:** A calculation that mathematically explains how the LEA estimated the requested amount (What formula did you use to arrive at your estimate? Show the details.)
- **Column 5:** Requested amount of funds proposed for the line item.
- **Column 6:** In-Kind contributions (if any are utilized).
- **Column 7:** Overall total amount of funds proposed for the line item.

SAMPLE BUDGET NARRATIVE

Please use the SCG – blank budget narrative

*Content Area: (i.e., Well-Rounded (WRE); Safe and Healthy (SHS); Effective Use of Technology (EUT))

Activity#	Category/Object	Line Item	Calculation	Amount	In-Kind	Total
1	203-205 – 02 / 01	Stipends for summer workshop for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher	1 teacher x 20 days x 175/day	3,500		3.500
	212 / 04	FICA	7.65% of \$3,500	268		268

				Total:		\$3,768
1	203-205 - 02 / 03	Supplemental materials to support instruction	\$314/site x 5 sites	1,570		1,570
				Total:		\$1,570
1	203-205 - 01 / 02	Consultants for professional development training Strategy #	6 days x \$500	\$3,000		3,000
				Total:		\$3,000
2	203-205 - 09 / 04	Membership/registration fees for conferences and workshops for ESOL staff	11 ESOL staff members x \$342.64	3,769		3,769
				Total:		\$3,769
2	203-205 - 02 / 02	Delivery of workshop: "Best Practices for Teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) Students"	\$600/school x 4 schools x 2 days at each school + \$600/school x 3 schools x 1 day	6,600		6,600
				Total:		\$6,600
2	203-205 - 02 / 01	Parent outreach programs	4 schools x \$1,500	6,000		6,000
2	212 / 04	FICA	7.65% of \$6,000	459		459
				Total:		\$6,459
3	203-205 - 01 / 02	Buses for two field trips to art museums	2 x \$450	900		900
				Total:		\$900

N/A	202 - 16 / 08	Transfers	2% Admin costs	585		585
N/A	202 - 16 / 04	Indirect Cost	10%	2,866		2,866
				Total:		\$3,451
				Grand Total:		\$29,517

APPENDIX

The following appendices must be included but not apply to the page limit of the Project Narrative. Include other appendices as deemed necessary.

- Application
- Scoring Rubric
- A [signed C-1-25 MSDE budget form](#)
- A [signed recipient assurances page](#)
- [SCG – Blank Budget Narrative](#)

The Review Process

The review of the grant application includes confirmation of inclusion of all required sections. Incomplete components will require revision to meet the requirements prior to funding.

Project Narrative (90 Points)			
Plan Criteria	Level 3 Exceeds Criteria	Level 2 Meets Criteria	Level 1 Does Not Meet Criteria
Extent of Need (30 Points)	The extent of need includes both quantitative and qualitative data specific to the target population and the school(s) the program will serve. Data sources are described, and collection methods are logical and rational. 30-26	The extent of need for the project adequately defines the problem (e.g., list # of school(s) that has 40% of students living in poverty and lists % of students in this category who are don't have a feeling of belonging) the Stronger Connection Grant program will address. 25-12	The extent of need for the project section fails to define the problem or obstacle the Stronger Connection Grant program will address. 12-0
Goals and Measurable Outcomes (20 Points)	The application articulates multiple exemplary measurable goals, and outcomes. Outcome statements align with the problem/need and tell how the project's target population would improve. An example: 100% of students identified for this program will have improved relationships with peers and staff, increased sense of belonging, feel safe in school, and improved academic performance/school attendance 20-16	The application lists goals and outcomes and includes measures of progress towards meeting the goal. Outcome statements align to the problem/need. An example: 85% of students identified for this program will have mental health support and participate in more school activities because they feel like they belong by the end of Quarter 2. 15-17	The application includes an incomplete identification of goals and outcomes. Statements are vague and not measurable. 7-10
Plan of Operation, Key Personnel, and Project Timeline (20 Points)	There is a detailed plan of operation that addresses items identified in the statement of need. Key Personnel are listed and a breakdown of FTE of their salary is assigned to the grant e.g., Anne Smith 50% FTE \$25,000, and a project timeline that lists which staff members will complete each task and when. 20-16	There is a detailed plan of operation that addresses items identified in the statement of need. Key Personnel are listed, and a project timeline established. 15-17	The plan of operation provided does not address the items identified in the statement of need, key personnel are listed but no project timeline is provided. 7-0
Evidence of Impact (10 Points)	The application significantly describes how all proposed strategies are evidence and research-based and explains how the evidence will lead to desired outcomes. They provide a link to research data and provide data on how students in similar programs have progressed. 10-8	The application adequately describes how proposed strategies are evidence and research based. They provide a link to research data and provide data on how students in their program can progress as part of this program. 7-5	The application does not describe the evidence of impact. 4-0

<p>Evaluation (10 Points)</p>	<p>The application includes an evaluation plan that includes evaluation questions, strategy, and a description of proposed data instruments, collection processes, and analytic methods that are consistent with the project’s goal and objectives. They also list who is assigned to this task and timeline to complete.</p> <p>10-6</p>	<p>The application includes an evaluation plan that includes evaluation questions, strategy, and a description of proposed data instruments, collection processes, and analytic methods that are consistent with the project’s goal and objectives.</p> <p>7-5</p>	<p>The application does not include an evaluation plan, or it doesn’t include all the areas addressed in the GIG.</p> <p>2-0</p>
<p>Budget (10 Points)</p>			
<p>Plan Criteria</p>	<p>Level 3 Exceeds Criteria</p>	<p>Level 2 Meets Criteria</p>	<p>Level 1 Does Not Meet Criteria</p>
<p>Budget Narrative and Worksheet (10 Points)</p>	<p>The application includes a budget and budget narrative that lists and describes budget categories e.g., salaries \$10,000 lists personnel name and job description and amount assigned. Line-item amounts show how the cost of each item was calculated. All line-item costs, including indirect cost, are calculated correctly. Items on the budget narrative are allowable, allocable, and reasonable. The C-1-25 budget, budget narrative and program narrative cost agree. The agency provides additional details than required.</p> <p>10-6</p>	<p>The application includes a budget and budget narrative that lists and describes budget categories e.g., salaries \$10,000 lists personnel name and job description and amount assigned. Line-item amounts show how the cost of each item was calculated. All line-item costs, including indirect cost, are calculated correctly. Items on the budget narrative are allowable, allocable, and reasonable. The C-1-25 budget, budget narrative and program narrative cost agree.</p> <p>5-3</p>	<p>The application lacks a budget and budget narrative or lacks detail and is not itemized. Budget contains errors.</p> <p>2-0</p>

Review team

The team will be composed of representatives from the MSDE's Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, and Educational Policy and the Office of Grants Administration and Compliance. Reviewers will provide feedback and insights for any responses that do not meet or exceed the requirements for a given section.

Award notification

Notification of approval will be sent by email within 30 days of the deadline to submit proposals. Approved proposals may begin implementing the program, as soon as the award notification letter is received. The Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) will be forthcoming within three weeks of the approval letter.

Reporting Requirements

Grantees must comply with the following reporting requirements:

Date	Reporting requirements for each year
September 29, 2023	Interim Progress Report (C-1-25-C)
March 29, 2023	Interim Progress Report (C-1-25-C)
September 27, 2024	Interim Progress Report (C-1-25-C)
December 30, 2024	Final Annual Financial Report (C-1-25-D)

Notes:

Any requests for programmatic amendments must be submitted at least 45 days before the grant period ends and must be submitted using the C-1-25-B form found in the [Grant Budget Forms Workbook](#) on the [MSDE grants webpage](#).

Final invoices must be submitted no later than 60 days after the grant period ends.

Non-Discrimination Statement

The MSDE does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry/national origin, color, disability, gender identity/expression, marital status, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation in matters affecting employment or in providing access to programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. For inquiries related to Department policy, please contact:

Equity Assurance and Compliance Office
Office of the Deputy State Superintendent for Operations
Maryland State Department of Education
200 W. Baltimore Street - 2nd Floor Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595

410-767-0123 - voice
410-767-0431 - fax
410-333-6442 - TTY/TDD

The General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), Section 427

Each application must develop and describe the steps the applicant proposes to take to ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the project or activity to be conducted with such assistance, by addressing the special needs of students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries in order to overcome barriers to equitable participation.

Customer Service Sessions

The Stronger Connections grant program (SCG) was authorized under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) passed on June 25, 2022. Under the BSCA, state education agencies (SEAs) must award these funds competitively to high-need local education agencies (LEAs) to fund activities allowable under § 4108 - Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students of the Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant (SSAE) as authorized in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The MSDE will send out a special transmittal to eligible LEAs 3/14/23 inviting them to apply for this competitive grant.

Customer service sessions are scheduled for:

- [March 29, 2023, 1-2p.m.](#)
- [April 10, 2023, 10-11a.m.](#)
- [May 3, 2023, 10-11a.m.](#)

In addition, MSDE will offer open office hours April 5, 2023, from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. and April 17, 2023, from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., and May 8, 2023, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. details can be found on the [MSDE Grants Program website](#). Please contact Donald Corbin, Program Specialist, Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment, & Educational Policy at donald.corbin@maryland.gov.

Questions

If you have questions about the application or the process, please contact:

Name: Mary Gable
 Title: Assistant State Superintendent
 Phone number: (410) 767-0472
 Email: mary.gable@maryland.gov

or

Name: Donald Corbin
 Title: School Safety Specialist
 Email: donald.corbin@maryland.gov

Grant Timeline

This funding opportunity, including all attachments and updates, are found on the [Every Student Succeeds Act, Title IV, Part A](#) website.

Date	Program Milestone
03/10/2023	The Grant Information Guide and the application for participating are released.

03/31/2023	MSDE will review and provide early feedback on Draft Grant submissions.
03/29/2023, 4/10/2023, and 05/03/2023	The MSDE will hold virtual customer service support sessions for interested applicants.
05/10/2023	The grant application period closes.
05/11/2023	The MSDE begins reviewing applications for completeness and minimum requirements.
6/12/2023	The MSDE Review Committee will convene and evaluate the complete proposal. Then MSDE will notify applicants of the award status.
04/15/2023	The grant period begins.
09/30/2025	The grant period ends.
09/30/2026	Stronger Connections funds are available for obligation by SEAs and LEAs (includes one-year period of fund availability provided under the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), the Tydings Amendment)

Attachment

- Application