

Discretionary Competitive

Program Guidelines

2025-2026 Phone Free Schools Grant Program

IDC Application Due Date

11:59 p.m. Central Time, September 8, 2025

Authorized by SB1 Sec. 18.16. Contingency for House Bill 1481

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Introduction to the Program Guidelines

TEA, as the pass-through entity¹, is the grantee² from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and TEA awards subgrants to non-federal entities³ such as local educational agencies (LEAs), including school districts, charter schools, and education service centers, and to a lesser degree institutions of higher education (IHEs), and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) who are the agency's subgrantees⁴. These guidelines apply to all subgrantees of TEA, regardless of whether referenced herein as subgrantee or grantee. For purposes of this document, TEA may use the terms grantee and subgrantee synonymously for its subrecipients.

This part of the request for application (RFA), Program Guidelines, is to be used in conjunction with the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) and any application instructions. The Standard Application System (SAS) consists of Application Part 1 (PDF – narrative schedules) and Application Part 2 (Excel – budget schedules) to be completed in order for the applicant to be eligible for funding.

For applicants selected for funding, all guidelines and instructions will be incorporated by reference into the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).

Reference to the General and Fiscal Guidelines

The Program Guidelines provide information specifically relevant to this grant program. The [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) provide information relevant to all TEA grant programs. Throughout the Program Guidelines, cross-references are given to applicable sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#). It is critical that you review all referenced sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) when preparing your application.

Errata Notices

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Errata Notices.

¹ Pass-through entity is defined as a non-Federal entity that provides a subaward to a subrecipient to carry out part of a federal program. (2 CFR 200.74)

² Grantee is defined as the legal entity to which a grant is awarded and that is accountable to the federal government for the use of the funds provided. The term “grantee” does not include any secondary recipients, such as subgrantees and contractors that may receive funds from a grantee. (34 CFR 77)

³ Non-federal entity is defined as a state, local government, Indian tribe, institution of higher education, or nonprofit organization that carries out a federal award as a recipient or subrecipient. (2 CFR 200.69)

⁴ Subgrantee is defined by TEA to be the same as a subrecipient which is defined as a non-federal entity that receives a subaward from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal program; but does not include an individual that is a beneficiary of such program. (2 CFR 200.93) Subgrantee is defined in 34 CFR 77 as the legal entity to which a subgrant is awarded and that is accountable to the grantee for the use of the funds provided.

Overview of IDC Process

The following steps provide a high-level overview of the process for responding to Informal Discretionary Competition (IDC), including submitting an IDC application, and being selected for funding:

1. TEA publishes IDC application and supporting documents on [TEA Grant Opportunities](#).
2. Eligible applicants submit IDC application via Qualtrics by the specified deadline in this document.
3. IDC applications are reviewed and scored. Note: The highest scoring applicants may be required to attend an oral interview or respond to questions regarding their IDC application.
4. TEA announces applicants selected for funding on the TEA [Grants Awarded Data](#) webpage.
5. *IDC applicants selected for funding will be required to submit and certify an eGrants funding application including assurances and a budget summary to receive funding. All data submitted in the grants application is incorporated into the eGrants funding application under the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).*
6. TEA staff conducts budget negotiations on the IDC application.
7. Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) issued upon successful completion of the negotiation process.

*Please note. The Letter of Interest competition or LOI has been given a new name of Informal Discretionary Competition or IDC. The process for selecting and awarding applications for this type of competition has not changed.

Email Bulletins

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), GovDelivery Bulletins.

Contact for Clarifying Information

Grant Program Contact

Nick Davis, Department Chief of Staff
Department of Grant Compliance and Administration
Nick.davis@tea.texas.gov
Phone: (737)-308-6086

Funding Grant Contact

Michael Anna Kuntz, Competitive Grant Manager
Grants Administration Division
Michael.kuntz@tea.texas.gov
Phone: (512) 936-6366

US Department of Education and/or State Appropriations

The following is provided in compliance with the US Department of Education Appropriations Act:

Category	Amount
Total funds available for this project	\$20,000,000
Percentage to be financed with federal funds	0%
Amount of federal funds	\$0.00
Percentage to be financed from nonfederal sources	100%
Amount of nonfederal funds	\$20,000,000

IDC Timeline

For all dates related to the grant, including reporting dates, see the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page. If a report due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the report will be due the following business day. All dates except the grant ending date may vary slightly as conditions require.

Date	Event
June 20, 2025	Pre award of grant (if selected for funding), contingent upon state appropriation availability on September 1, 2025. Grants cannot be funded until after September 1, 2025.
August 7, 2025	IDC Application available on the TEA Grant Opportunities page.
August 21, 2025	Last date to submit questions for FAQs to TEA by submitting via this link by 11:59 p.m., Central Time : https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/04a31a35784a4513b5b4fbb83a66be7a See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Frequently Asked Questions
September 4, 2025	FAQs posted to TEA Grant Opportunities page
September 8, 2025	Due date for the IDC Data Application, which must be submitted via Qualtrics : The IDC Data Application must be received by the TEA by 11:59 p.m., Central Time . See General and Fiscal Guidelines , <i>LOI Application Due Date and Time</i>
September 8, 2025 - September 22, 2025	IDC review period See General and Fiscal Guidelines , <i>LOI Review Process</i>
September 22, 2025	Award amount announcement
September 22, 2025	Grant start date (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines , <i>Grant Period</i>
October 1, 2025	Funding application available for grantees in eGrants.
December 10, 2025	Due Date for funding application for grantees in eGrants.

Date	Event
Ongoing	Grant funding applications will be reviewed and processed on an ongoing basis as received.
June 2, 2026	Final date to submit an amendment (if selected for funding)
August 31, 2026	End date of grant (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Grant Period

IDC at a Glance

This section provides fundamental information pertinent to the grant program.

Authorizing Legislation

SB 1 Sec. 18.16. Contingency for House Bill 1481

Purpose of Program

To support school systems in complying with HB 1481, the TEA has been allocated \$20 million in state grant funding. This funding is intended to help school systems purchase secure storage solutions and implement the infrastructure necessary to enforce the personal communication device ban.

Eligible Applicants

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Eligibility for Funding.

The eligible applicants are:

- School districts or open-enrollment charter schools

Eligibility List

An eligibility list is not posted in the Application and Support Information section of the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page.

Shared Services Arrangement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Shared Services Arrangements.

Shared services arrangements (SSAs) are not allowed.

Application Funding

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Continuation Funding, Fund Management, and Use of Funds*.

It is anticipated that applicants will be selected and funded in accordance with the formula outlined in this document.

Selection of Applicants for Funding

Data provided by applicants in the Qualtrics data application will be verified by TEA staff (against existing data sources) and then entered into a formula calculation to determine grant award amounts.

The data elements in the formula for funding are as follows:

1. Number of students 9-12,
2. Number of students 6-8,
3. Number of student K-5
4. Economically disadvantaged percentage (based on SC 5000) in the Title I, Part A application for funding,
5. Total school system enrollment (K-12), and
6. 5-day school or 4-day school week.

The funding allocation process will be as follows based upon data received in the IDC Data Application and existing data sources:

Step One: Priority Point Calculation

Each school system is assigned priority points based on the following criteria:

- Rural Status (3,000 or less total student enrollment): 3 points if rural, if not rural 0 points.
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Student Percentage (based on SC5000 data in the Title I, Part A application for funding):
 - 0 to 24.99% - 0 points
 - 25 to 49.99% - 1 points
 - 50% to 74.99% - 3 points
 - 75% and greater – 4 points
- 5-day or 4-day school week: 3 points if a 5-day school week, if 4-day school week 0 points.

Step Two: School System Ranking

- Total priority points to rank order school systems = 10.
- School systems are ranked in descending order based on their total priority points, with more within the ranking school systems are subsequently ranked by their Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Student Percentage.

Step Three: Funding Allocation Process

- Total available funding: \$20,000,000
- Rates of funding per pupil (based upon October 2024 PEIMS snapshot data):
 - \$12.50 per student for 65% of the total number enrolled in grades 9 to 12 in the school system.
 - \$10 per student for 25% of the total number enrolled in grades 6 to 8 in the school system.
 - \$7.50 per student for 10% of the total number enrolled in grades K-5 in the school system.
- Funds will be awarded in rank order with those school systems with the highest priority score until all funding is exhausted. Partial funding may occur for the final school system who is able to receive funding based upon the rank order.
- If there is funding remaining after the allocation process, TEA will ratably increase school systems until the entire allocation is awarded.

Cost Share or Matching Requirement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Cost Share/Match Requirement.

It is intended that the school system will incur additional costs not covered by this grant program, however, it is not considered a traditional matching or cost sharing requirement.

Supplement, Not Supplant

For supplement, not supplant guidance, see the Supplement, Not Supplant Handbook on the Department of Grant Compliance and Administration's [Training and Other Resources](#) page.

The supplement, not supplant provision does not apply to this grant program.

Limitation of Administrative Funds

TEA does not permit direct administrative costs for this grant program. For this state-funded grant, the grantee may claim a maximum for indirect costs equal to its current, approved restricted indirect cost rate.

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Administrative Costs*.

NOTE: Administrative funds include **both** direct administrative costs **and** allowable indirect costs.

Pre-award Costs

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Pre-Award Costs*.

Pre-award costs are permitted, if requested, from June 20, 2025, to the grant start date, contingent upon state appropriation availability on September 1, 2025. Grants cannot be funded until after September 1, 2025.

IDC Application Requirements and Assurances

This section identifies the types of requirements in which applicants must comply to be eligible for funding:

- Statutory requirements (requirements defined in the authorizing statute)
- Statutory and Program-specific Assurances

Statutorily Required Responses

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Statutory Requirements*.

The following requirements are defined in the statute that authorizes this program. The applicant must comply with each of these requirements in the application to be considered for funding:

1. Must adopt, implement, and ensure the district or school complies with a written policy prohibiting a student from using a personal communication device while on school property during the school day. The policy requires the following elements:
 - The policy must prohibit student use of personal communication devices—as defined in Texas Education Code (TEC), §37.082(d), which includes cell phones, tablets, smartwatches, and other devices capable of telecommunication or digital communication—on school property during the school day. The term does not include an electronic device provided to a student by the district or charter school.

- School systems may comply with the requirement by either:
 - Prohibiting students from bringing devices to campus, or
 - Designating a method to securely store the devices during the school day.
- The policy must include disciplinary measures for violations and may include confiscating a device. School districts may dispose of unclaimed confiscated items after providing written notice to the student's parent or guardian at least 90 days prior to disposal.
- The policy must make exceptions for student use of personal communication devices when:
 - Required to implement an individualized education program (IEP), a Section 504 plan, or similar plan
 - Authorized by a directive from a qualified physician due to documented medical need; or
 - Necessary to comply with a legal health or safety requirement or to implement the school system's safety protocols.
- The policy must be adopted as soon as practicable but no later than **September 18, 2025**.

Statutory and Program-Specific Assurances

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Provisions and Assurances.

2. Must adopt, implement, and ensure the district or school complies with a written policy prohibiting a student from using a personal communication device while on school property during the school day. The policy requires the following elements:
 - The policy must prohibit student use of personal communication devices—as defined in Texas Education Code (TEC), §37.082(d), which includes cell phones, tablets, smartwatches, and other devices capable of telecommunication or digital communication—on school property during the school day. The term does not include an electronic device provided to a student by the district or charter school.
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- The policy must make exceptions for student use of personal communication devices when:
 - Required to implement an individualized education program (IEP), a Section 504 plan, or similar plan
 - Authorized by a directive from a qualified physician due to documented medical need; or
 - Necessary to comply with a legal health or safety requirement or to implement the school system's safety protocols.
 - The policy must be adopted as soon as practicable but no later than **September 18, 2025**.
3. The applicant assures that the application does not contain any information that would be protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from general release to the public.
 4. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Statutory and TEA Program requirements as noted in the 2025-2026 Phone Free Schools Grant Program Guidelines.
 5. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Performance Measures, as noted in the program guidelines for this grant program, and shall provide TEA, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the program.
 6. The applicant assures that any Electronic Information Resources (EIR) produced as part of this agreement will comply with the State of Texas Accessibility requirements as specified in 1 TAC 206, 1 TAC Chapter 213, Federal Section 508 standards, and the WCAG 2.0 AA Accessibility Guidelines.
 7. The applicant acknowledges that Per Section 22.0834 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fingerprinting Requirement.

The program-specific assurances for this grant program can be found on the funding application.

Program Elements

Description of Program

To support school systems in complying with HB 1481, the TEA has been allocated \$20 million in state grant funding. This funding is intended to help school systems purchase secure storage solutions and implement the infrastructure necessary to enforce the personal communication device ban.

Qualifications and Experience

There are no staff requirements for this grant program.

Performance and Evaluation Measures

The applicant agrees to collect data and report on the following mandatory performance and evaluation measures:

1. Number of pouches or containment devices purchased.
2. Type of pouches or containment devices purchased.
3. Percentage of total cost of pouches or containment devices purchased with grant.

Limits on Contracted Evaluators

There are no contracted evaluators for this grant.

Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

Refer to the [Budgeting Costs Guidance Handbook](#) on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page for general guidance on allowable activities and use of funds.

Allowable activities and use of funds for this grant include only the following:

General Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

- Grant funds may only be budgeted in 6200 (professional and contracted services) and/or 6300 (consumable and durable supplies and materials) for the purchase of pouches or other containment devices to implement HB 1481.
- Administrative costs are limited to only the school systems restricted indirect cost rate at a maximum. The school system should minimize the use of indirect costs where applicable.

Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds

Refer to the [Budgeting Costs Guidance Handbook](#) on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page for general guidance on unallowable costs.

In addition, unallowable activities and use of funds for this grant include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Any cost not specified as allowable above.
- Payroll costs (6100)
- Other Operating Expenses (6400)
- Debt services (6500)
- Capital outlay (6600)

Attachments

There are two types of attachments that may be required to be submitted with your application:

Required Fiscal-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fiscal-Related Documentation Required to Be on File, for a general description of fiscal-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

Required Program-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Required Program-Related Attachments, for a general description of program-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

The applicant must submit with the application the following required program-related attachments.

No program-related attachments are required for this grant program.

IDC Scoring and Review

This section provides information on the scoring and review of IDC applications.

IDC Review and Funding Criteria

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *LOI Review Criteria*

Data provided by applicants in the Qualtrics data application will be verified by TEA staff (against existing data sources) and then entered into a formula calculation to determine grant award amounts.

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- If there is funding remaining after the allocation process, TEA will ratably increase school systems until the entire allocation is awarded.

Priority Points

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Priorities for Funding.

Each school system is assigned priority points based on the following criteria:

- Rural Status (3,000 or less total student enrollment): 3 points if rural, if not rural 0 points.
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Student Percentage (based on SC5000 data in the Title I, Part A application for funding):
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 - 50% to 74.99% - 3 points
 - 75% and greater – 4 points
- 5-day or 4-day school week: 3 points if a 5-day school week, if 4-day school week 0 points.
- Total priority points to rank order school systems = 10 points

Oral Interviews for Funding

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *LOI Oral Interviews for Funding*.

Oral interviews will not be conducted for this grant program.