LETTER OF INTEREST (LOI) PROGRAM GUIDELINES: 2023–2025 TEXAS CENTER FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS

LOI Application Due Date
11:59 p.m. Central Time, May 30, 2023

Program Authority
PL 117-159 BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT TITLE II SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS (JUNE 25, 2022) BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT (BSCA)

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INTRODUCTION

The Texas Education Agency (TEA), as the pass-through entity[1], is the grantee[2] from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and TEA awards subgrants to non-federal entities[3] such as local educational agencies (LEAs), including school districts, open-enrollment 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 subgrantees[4]. 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 document MUST be used in conjunction with the General and Fiscal Guidelines and the specific program instructions. The Adobe Acrobat Standard Application System (SAS) consists of all forms 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 Letter of Interest (LOI) 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.**

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[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 LOI PROCESS

The following steps provide a high-level overview of the process for responding to a letter of interest (LOI), including submitting an LOI application, and being selected for funding:

1. TEA publishes LOI application and supporting documents on the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) webpage.
2. Eligible applicants submit LOI application, and any required attachments to TEA by the specified deadline.
3. LOI applications reviewed and scored. Note: The highest scoring applicants may be required to attend an oral interview or respond to questions regarding their LOI application.
4. TEA announces applicants selected for funding on the TEA [Grants Awarded Data](#) webpage.
5. *For LOI applicants selected for funding, the LOI application will serve as the grant application. This eliminates the need for selected applicants to submit a separate grant application.*
6. TEA staff conducts budget negotiations on the LOI application.
7. Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) issued upon successful completion of the negotiation process.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND/OR STATE APPROPRIATIONS

The following is provided in compliance with the U.S. Department of Education Appropriations Act:

Category	Amount
Total funds available for this project	$2,759,410
Percentage to be financed with federal funds	100%
Amount of federal funds	$2,759,410
Percentage to be financed from nonfederal sources	0%
Amount of nonfederal funds	$0

APPLICANT ASSISTANCE

The following types of assistance are available to applicants for this grant program.

Contact for Clarifying Information

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *TEA Contacts*.
The following TEA staff member should be contacted with questions about the LOI:

Hank Weikert, Director of Student Supports Implementation
Division of Supportive Schools
hank.weikert@tea.texas.gov
Phone: (512) 463-9270

Errata Notices

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

LOI TIMELINE

Dates, except the grant ending date, may vary slightly as conditions require.

Date	Event
April 28, 2023	LOI available
May 9, 2023	LOI Opportunity presentation to ESC executive directors at the regular monthly CCRS meeting.
May 10, 2023	LOI Opportunity presentation to the ESC core group at the regular bi-monthly Core Group meeting.
May 12, 2023	FAQs due. Submit questions to Hank Weikert, Director of Student Supports Implementation by email at hank.weikert@tea.texas.gov by 5:00 P.M. CDT on Friday, May 12, 2023.
May 16, 2023	FAQs posted to TEA Grant Opportunities page.
May 30, 2023	Due date for the LOI application, which must be submitted via email to **competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov**. The LOI application must be received by the TEA by 11:59 p.m., Central Time. See General and Fiscal Guidelines, ***LOI Application Due Date and Time***
May 30, 2023–June 7, 2023	LOI review period See General and Fiscal Guidelines, ***LOI Review Process***
June 21, 2023	Anticipated award announcement
July 1, 2023	Beginning date of grant (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines, ***Grant Period***
July 2, 2025	Final date to submit an amendment (if selected for funding)
September 30, 2025	Ending date of grant (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines, ***Grant Period***

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

LOI AT A GLANCE

This section provides fundamental information pertinent to the grant program.

Authorizing Legislation
This LOI is authorized by the PL 117-159 BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT TITLE II SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS (JUNE 25, 2022) BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT (BSCA).

Where to Submit the LOI Application
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines: *Where to Submit the LOI Application*

Submission Requirements
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines: *Submission Requirements for LOI Grants*

Note: TEA requires applications to be emailed. Multiple applications per applicant must be submitted in separate emails.

Purpose of Program
The purpose of the program is to establish a Texas Center for Student Supports that will support systemic change in the way that school districts address the academic and nonacademic needs of students by providing safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments resulting in improved academic achievement and mental health, behavioral and emotional health, and physical health and well-being of students. Support will include the selection and management of technical assistance providers across priority areas for the grant program. This project will also provide support to Texas LEAs and ESCs by providing resources and tools to support continuous improvement efforts.

Goal of the Program
The goal of the program is for one of the twenty regional education service centers (ESCs) to establish a Texas Center for Student Supports that will develop content, training, and implementation monitoring tools for a Student Support Program that includes improving school climate, a student support team structure, and behavioral threat assessment implementation. The center will select and manage across a set of high quality technical assistance providers, deliver content and training to staff at the other ESCs, establish a cohort support network for staff at the other ESCs to facilitate the implementation of the Student Support Program, monitor the implementation on the program, and provide coaching and job-embedded professional development to ensure that ESC staff are well supported and can provide necessary services and support to ensure the effective implementation of the program by the LEAs participating in the grant program.

Eligible Applicants
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Eligibility To Apply for LOIs*.

All twenty (20) regional education service centers are eligible to apply for this grant.

APPLICATION ATTACHMENTS
This section describes the required attachments that must be included with the application.

Required Attachments
See the following section of the General and Fiscal Guidelines: *Required Program-Related Attachments*

Provide artifacts/evidence that demonstrate that the ESC has been successful supporting school districts in:

1. establishing and improving school culture resulting in strong relationships between staff and students, reductions in behavioral and disciplinary incidents, reductions in chronic absenteeism, reduction in incidents of bullying and harassment, and improved overall academic outcomes.
2. implementing effective mental health training, support, and resources.
3. implementing effective student support team structures.

The applicant will be required to provide a summary on the application that describes these areas of success and provide attachments that support the written narrative. The applicant will be limited to a maximum of **ten (10)** pages of attachments. Only include attachments that are necessary to document the narrative.

LOI APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND ASSURANCES

This section describes the types of requirements that applicants must assure adherence to in order to be eligible to be considered for funding:

- Statutory requirements (requirements defined in the authorizing statute)
- TEA program requirements (requirements defined by TEA program staff)

Statutory Requirements

See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Statutory Requirements*.

Per TEC §22.0834, 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, which fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Fingerprinting Requirement*.

TEA Program Requirements

See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Program Requirements.*

In addition to the statutory requirements, TEA has established the following program requirements. Applicants must address within the application how they will achieve the following:

Historical Success

1. Describe the success that the ESC has had in supporting LEAs with the following:
    a. selecting and managing technical assistance providers to support LEAs and ESCs resulting in delivery of agreed upon deliverable and measurable outcomes;
    b. establishing and improving school culture resulting in strong relationships between staff and students, reductions in behavioral and disciplinary incidents, reductions in chronic absenteeism, reduction in incidents of bullying and harassment, and improved overall academic outcomes;
    c. implementing effective mental health training, support, and resources; and
    d. implementing effective student support team structures.

Content

2. Describe how the ESC will serve as the statewide Student Support Program content, training, and resource center for all twenty ESCs and participating LEAs. Include a brief description of how the ESC will work with stakeholders, including partnering with technical assistance providers, ESCs, and LEAs, to develop the Student Support team framework, parent and family engagement playbook, and case management system.

Structure

3. Describe the protocols that the ESC will develop to establish and strengthen a clear link between existing school district support systems and the student support team structure including but not limited to behavior threat assessment, mental health needs, suicide prevention, emotional and behavioral health needs, and other needs that create barriers to positive student outcomes.
4. Describe how the ESC will support the management of technical assistance providers agreed upon deliverables.

Professional Learning

5. Describe how the ESC will manage technical assistance providers to provide professional learning to the twenty ESCs and participating LEAs including content delivery, technical assistance, and resources to effectively implement the Student Support Program.

Data Reporting

6. Describe the system that the Texas Center for Student Support will use to support participating LEAs for tracking referrals to the student support team and collecting data on supports and outcomes provided to students and families to monitor effectiveness. Participating LEAs will be required to report this data to the Texas Education Agency.

Capacity

7. Describe the ESCs capacity and expertise to fulfill the program requirements.
8. How many TEA grants is the ESC currently administering?
9. How many TEA grant applications does the ESC have in progress (not including this application)?

Program-Specific Assurances

See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Provisions and Assurances*.

- Formally establish the Texas Center for Student Support (TCSS).
- Dedicate a full-time director level position or above with personnel approved by TEA to lead the planning, execution, and implementation of all TCSS functions.
- Contract with a technical assistance provider or set of providers to:
  - develop a TEA aligned student support team framework that includes protocols for team operation, recommendations for team staffing, standardized forms, resources, and tools that LEAs will use to support their student support teams.
  - develop a parent and family engagement playbook with resources and tools that LEAs can use to partner and build support with parents and families prior to a student support team assessment, and during the student support implementation process, to facilitate a student support partnership with families.

- o establish and implement a campus leader, teacher, parent/family, and student advisory group and use subgroup focus groups to provide feedback and input on needs for services and support and on products developed for the Student Support Program.
  - o develop and implement job-embedded professional learning, technical assistance, and coaching to support LEAs with establishing and implementing student support team structures.
  - o develop and implement a data reporting system to gather and analyze data to monitor efficacy of the implementation of the Student Support Program, including student support team structure, quality of support leading to positive outcomes, and data related to increases in desired outcomes (e.g. increase in student support team referrals for nonacademic needs, increase in effective supports received by students, reduction in disciplinary incidents, reduction in bullying and harassment, increase in referrals for mental health services, reduction in removals from class, etc.).
- Provide timely response to requests from TEA for information and data regarding program development, implementation, and performance and evaluation measures.
- Establish a collaborative partnership through contract procurement with the University of Texas at Austin Behavior Sciences and Policy Institute, and with the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health (TIEMH) at the University of Texas at Austin, to develop the Student Support Program.
- Develop a plan to sustain the TCSS to support ESCs and LEAs beyond the life of the grant cycle.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS
This section provides detailed information about the LOI.

Description of Program
On September 15, 2022, the Texas Education Agency was awarded a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections grant program. The BSCA was established to support the development of safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments in the nation's schools. Under Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) funding was made available to state educational agencies (SEAs) to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments.

Research consistently shows that safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments are associated with improved academic achievement and emotional well-being of students, as well as with reductions in disciplinary actions. Research recommends that effective supportive learning environments have the following goals:

1. Students experience a sense of belonging in school
2. Learning environments provide culturally and linguistically responsive practices
3. Students are surrounded by adults they can trust and who are committed to building strong relationships.
4. Learning environments are nurturing and help students overcome challenging and traumatic experiences and provide a sense of emotional and physical safety.

These supportive learning environments help build connections that make students less likely to engage in harmful, threatening, or violent behavior at school, including bullying and harassment. They also provide benefit to the individual student, their fellow students, educators, and the community at large.

This program will focus on the establishment of a Texas Center for Student Supports that will provide guidance, training, and resources to the twenty regional ESCs to assist LEAs with establishing and implementing safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments through a student support team structure that meets each student's mental health, behavioral and emotional health, and physical health needs and promotes overall student well-being.

Supplement, Not Supplant
For supplement, not supplant guidance, see the Supplement, Not Supplant Handbook on the Grants Administration Division's Administering a Grant page.

The supplement, not supplant, provision **applies** to this grant program.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE
The applicant agrees to provide data on the qualifications and experience of the existing or future staff members, as required per the program guidelines as follows:

- Strong leadership and project management experience.
- Experience with planning and coordinating projects with multiple partners to achieve desired program outcomes.
- Experience with facilitating and successfully navigating through change management processes within organizations.
- Experience with effective instructional coaching and delivering job embedded professional learning.
- Ability to assemble and analyze data along with being data-driven in decision making.

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

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

1. Quarterly report of the number of students referred for and receiving support for non-academic needs disaggregated by type of need, type of support, level of support, time of year, length of support provided as measured through the case management system.
2. Quarterly report of the percentage of ESC cohort participants that positively rate the training in the following areas:
   a. increase knowledge and skills for the implementation of the Student Support Program
   b. training materials and resources are of high-quality
   c. communication and support provided by the Center for Student Support is effective.
3. Quarterly report on the percent of ESCs that demonstrate an increase in the interest and use of resources, tools, and content following an increase in statewide communication and marketing of the Student Support Program.
4. Quarterly report on pre and post training assessments to measure improvement in knowledge and skills related to the Student Support Program

5. Monthly submission and review of agendas, attendance records, and materials used during monthly PLC meetings to increase the understanding of Student Support Program strategy implementation
6. Annual report on data related to the efficiency and effectiveness of overall project management development, communication, timelines and satisfaction through project milestones, online planning platforms, and bi-annual stakeholder surveys and any other reporting requirements the agency may require.
7. End of first year summary and reflection of progress towards the establishment of the center and next steps to advance the support provided to ESCs and LEAs by the TCSS and planning for sustainability.
8. End of project report that includes a summary and reflection of the TCSS support to ESCs and LEAs and the plan for sustainability.

Limits on Contracted Evaluators
Applicants should make every effort to ensure that contracted evaluators are independent and objective.

APPLICATION FUNDING
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines: *Continuation Funding, Fund Management, and Use of Funds*

It is anticipated that one (1) ESC will be awarded an amount up to $2,759,410.

Selection of Applicants for Funding

Applicants will be selected in rank order as determined by the scoring rubric on the quality of the application responses.

Cost Share or Matching Requirement
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Cost Share/Match Requirement*.

There is no cost share or matching requirement.

Limitation of Administrative Funds
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *Administrative Costs*.

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

Direct Administrative Costs
TEA limits the amount of direct administrative costs for this grant program to no more than 2% of the total grant award.

Indirect Costs
The grantee may claim a maximum for indirect costs equal to its current approved restricted indirect cost rate for this federally funded grant.

To calculate the maximum indirect costs that can be claimed for a grant, complete the Maximum Indirect Costs Worksheet, posted on the Administering a Grant page, under the Handbooks and Other Guidance section.

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

Pre-award costs are not permitted for this grant program.

Activities and Use of Funds
See the [Administering a Grant](#) page for general guidance on allowable activities and use of funds.

General Allowable Activities and Use of Funds
- In-state and local travel for those serving in the role of Student Support Program Facilitator or Trainer of Trainer for the Student Support Program.
- Contracted services for research and the development of curriculum, tools, and resources for training and implementation of the Student Support Program.
- Costs associated with the development of resources and tools related to the student support team structure.
- General costs associated with fulfillment of program requirements.
- Stipends for non-employees.

General Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds
In general, refer to the Budgeting Cost Guidance Handbook on the [Administering a Grant](#) page for unallowable costs.

In addition, unallowable activities and use of funds for this grant may include but are not limited to the following:
- Debt service (lease-purchase)
- Field Trips
- Advisory Council
- Cost of Membership in any civic or community organization
- Hosting or Sponsoring of Conferences
- Out-of-State Travel
- Travel Costs for Officials such as Executive Directors, Superintendents, or Board Members
- Travel for students to conferences
- Capital outlay

FEDERAL GRANT REQUIREMENTS
Equitable Access and Participation
See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Equitable Access and Participation*.

This requirement **does** apply to this federally funded program.

Private Nonprofit School Participation
See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Private Nonprofit School Participation*.

This requirement **does not** apply to this federally funded program.

Maintenance of Effort
See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Maintenance of Effort*.

This requirement **does not** apply to this federally funded program.

LOI SCORING AND REVIEW
This section provides information on the scoring and review of LOI applications.

LOI Review and Funding Criteria
See the General and Fiscal Guidelines, *LOI Review Criteria*.

Standard Review Criteria

Area Scored	Points
Historical Success	5
Program Content	5
Program Structure	5
Professional Learning	5
Data Reporting	5
Capacity	5
Qualifications and Experience	5
Budget Narrative	5
Total Standard Review Points	**40**

Program Specific Review Criteria

Area Scored	Points
The number of TEA grants that the ESC is currently administering/applied for.	5
Quality of attachments	10
Total Program Specific Review Points	**15**
Total Points Possible	**55**

For information contact: Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701-1494; email: copyrights@tea.texas.gov.