FY 2023 Rural Postsecondary & Economic Development Grant Competition

Frequently Asked Questions

1. ***How should we format our narrative?***
    a. We recommend a limit to no more than 50 pages. This only applies to the application narrative and does not apply to the cover sheet, budget section and budget justification, assurances and certifications, one-page abstract, resumes/CVs, bibliography, or letters of support.
    b. Double space all text in the narrative, including titles, headings, footnotes, quotations, references, and captions.
    c. Use a readable 12-point font (e.g., Time New Roman, Courier, or Arial).

2. ***How should we include the Competitive and Invitational Priorities in our application?***
    a. We recommend that if you are addressing the optional priorities, include no more than 3 additional pages.

3. ***May an applicant request less than the average award size?***
    a. Yes. An applicant may request less than the average award size but cannot exceed $2,227,500 for a single budget period of 48 months.

4. ***What are the eligibility requirements for this competition?***
    a. All applicants must at least meet the eligibility requirements, as well as respond to the Absolute Priorities to be considered for review. Please see these components below:
    b. **Eligible Applicants:** Eligible applicants are IHEs (as defined in section 101 of the HEA (20 U.S.C. 1001)) that are public or private nonprofit IHEs, and public and private nonprofit organizations and agencies that partner with IHEs.
    c. **Absolute Priority 1—Rural Applicants**
        i. Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate one or more of the following:
            1. The applicant proposes to serve a community that is served by one or more LEAs with a locale code of 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43;
            2. The applicant proposes a project in which a majority of the schools served have a locale code of 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43;
            3. The applicant is an institution of higher education (IHE) with a rural campus setting, or the applicant proposes to serve a campus with a rural setting. Rural settings include any of the following: Town-Fringe, Town-Distant, Town-Remote, Rural Fringe, Rural-Distant, Rural-Remote, as defined by the NCES College Navigator search tool.
        ii. **Note:** Applicants are encouraged to retrieve locale codes from the NCES School District search tool (https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/), where LEAs can be looked up individually to retrieve locale codes, and the Public School search tool (https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/), where individual schools can be looked up to retrieve locale codes. Applicants are encouraged to retrieve

campus settings from the NCES College Navigator search tool (https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/), where IHEs can be looked up individually to determine the campus setting.

d. **Absolute Priority 2—Increasing Postsecondary Education Access, Affordability, Completion, and Post-Enrollment Success**
    i. Projects that are designed to increase postsecondary access, affordability, completion, and success for underserved students by addressing one or more of the following priority areas:
        1. Increasing postsecondary education access and reducing the cost of college by creating clearer pathways for students between institutions and making transfer of course credits more seamless and transparent.
        2. Increasing the number and proportion of underserved students who enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs, which may include strategies related to college preparation, awareness, application, selection, advising, counseling, and enrollment.
        3. Supporting the development and implementation of student success programs that integrate multiple comprehensive and evidence-based services or initiatives, such as academic advising, structured/guided pathways, career services, credit-bearing academic undergraduate courses focused on career, and programs to meet basic needs, such as housing, child care and transportation, student financial aid, and access to technological devices.
        4. Supporting the development and implementation of high-quality and accessible learning opportunities, including learning opportunities that are accelerated or hybrid online; credit-bearing; work-based; and flexible for working students.
        5. Supporting the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies to promote students' development of knowledge and skills necessary for success in the workforce and civic life.
        6. Providing secondary school students with access to career exploration and advising opportunities to help students make informed decisions about their postsecondary enrollment decisions and to place them on a career path.

5. "This program does not involve supplement-not-supplant funding requirements." Can you give a practical example of what this actually means? Does it mean that applicants can use grant funding for projects currently underway? Or must projects be something entirely new?

a. A grant under the RPED program is not subject to supplement-not-supplant requirements, which means the grant does not require that Federal grant funds be used to augment the regular educational program. Grant funds can be used to substitute for funds or services that would otherwise be provided during the time period in question.

6. ***Can an institution submit more than one application?***

a. No.

7. ***Criterion 2 under quality of management plan refers to the "project director and principal investigator." Are projects expected to include both a principal investigator and a project director?***
    a. No.

8. ***Can a PD/PI be multiple individuals?***
    a. Yes, but please be sure to outline their experience/qualifications, responsibilities, and level of effort to the grant.

9. ***If we have not hired a project director, whose CV do we upload?***
    a. You may want to include a job description if this person has not yet been hired.

10. ***Should we include letters of support for our partners?***
    a. Yes. You also want to outline their responsibilities to the grant.

11. ***Can we hire students for tutoring or other peer to peer support services?***
    a. Yes.

12. ***Can you please advise if the first year of the project can be a planning year for the RPED program?***
    a. With the short time frame for the project (4 years), and the type of activities you are expected to accomplish, the entire first year should not be used as a planning year. Planning should begin as you are developing your application. However, we understand it may take some time to get your project off the ground and up and running, including conducting outreach, hiring project staff, developing activities, establishing partnerships, developing your evaluation plan and internal controls processes, etc.

13. ***Am I required to submit a logic model with my application?***
    a. Yes. Please refer to the logic model resources in the Pre-Application Webinar slide deck.

14. ***What do I need to submit in the budget section?***
    a. Applicants should prepare a 4-year budget request by filling out the ED524 Budget Form and preparing a budget narrative.

15. ***How will my grant funds be distributed?***
    a. Successful applicants will receive their federal funds for all 4 years up front no later than December 31, 2023.

16. ***What is the performance period for this grant?***
    a. We don't have an exact start date established just yet, as that will depend on the peer review and approval process. Successful applicants will receive their federal funds for all 4 years up front no later than December 31, 2023.

17. ***What population of students should this grant be geared towards?***
    a. Your grant should meet the requirements of Absolute Priority 1 and serve LEA's and/or public schools with locale code 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43, or be an IHE with a rural campus setting serving a rural community and/or a nonrural campus setting serving a rural community. All students served must come from LEA's, schools, and communities within those locale codes.

18. ***Can I hold a RPED grant at the same time as a Title V grant?***
    a. Yes.

19. ***Our institution has been asked to be a subgrantee by another institution. If that grant is funded and we are a subgrantee, would that prohibit us from submitting an application of our own in the competition in 2024?***
    a. You are able to be the lead applicant in one application and be a subgrantee for another. You want to ensure you can meet the responsibilities of both applications, if both were to be awarded, and that there are no duplication of services or double dipping.

20. ***What is the best way to find data to support our response to Absolute Priority 1?***
    a. We recommend starting with the NCES resources provided in the NIA, however you could also work with your institutional research office.

21. ***Can you focus on specific program enhancements as part of the grant - such as nursing pathways or teaching licensure?***
    a. Yes, you can focus on specific career pathways, as long as your application meets the absolute priorities of the competition.

22. ***Can we include non-degree programs and courses in our grant?***
    a. Activities under this program must be part of a degree-seeking program that leads to a certificate and/or degree of completion. Non-credit/non-degree programs are not allowable.

23. ***Is there an evaluation set-aside or a suggested budget amount for evaluation in the grant?***
    a. That would be up to what you and your grant team decide, but you just want to ensure it is a reasonable amount.

24. ***Are there any evidentiary standards or suggestions for sample size, methods, or research questions in the evaluation portion?***
    a. This grant does not require evidence standards, other than a logic model. We don't prescribe the sample size, methods, or research questions, as that would be up to the applicant and their evaluation team.

25. ***If a small group of colleges in the same state want to work together on an identical intervention, is it more competitive to bid together or separately?***

a. Only 1 IHE can be the lead applicant, or a nonprofit that partners with an IHE, however you can include other IHE's as partners on the grant. We do not give preference to applicants for the number of partners they have on the grant.

26. Is there a maximum annual funding limit that can be requested (i.e., $500,000 per year)?

a. No. The maximum amount that an applicant can request for all 4 years is $2,125,000.

27. Is the purchase of equipment an allowable expense?

a. Yes, please refer to the equipment citations here.

28. If purchasing equipment is allowable, is there a limit to the amount an applicant can request?

a. No, but equipment costs should be reasonable and reflect the overall goals and objectives for the grant.

29. Can we use funds to install technology in classrooms to expand our hybrid classrooms?

a. Yes.

30. Is transportation for students to attend grant activities an allowable cost?

a. Transportations costs, other than pre-paid fuel cards will be considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your Program Officer, if awarded. Keep in mind that this grant is intended to support programs to meet basic needs, such as transportation through scalable programs and initiatives that address transportation issues.

31. In our rural region, there is a documented shortage of early childhood professionals, public school teachers (especially in special education, secondary science, and secondary math), and rehabilitation services professionals. Is it possible to focus the grant on supporting postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion in those job sectors? Or, does the focus need to be broader and more aligned with blue collar jobs or conversely technology jobs?

a. The workforce needs are determined by the applicant, depending on the in-demand fields and occupations in the region. Therefore, it is allowable to focus on those sectors you mentioned as well, if there is a documented need.

32. ***Is construction, childcare vouchers, housing stipends, bus pass, pre-paid fuel cards allowable costs?***

a. No. The purpose of the program is to provide services to rural students and to help them access different resources that will support their postsecondary access and completion, and career attainment. Therefore, you could support students to access to those services, but you may not provide funds in the form of vouchers or direct aid specifically. Some services could be providing access to housing assistance programs or community partnerships with organizations that assist with housing.

33. We are a rural diploma nursing school in the coal country of Pennsylvania. Our school census was dwindling. However, we have changed over leadership and begun to offer creative ways for students to achieve scholarships, promissory notes, and tuition waivers. So all of a sudden, we are growing! The school is currently located in a historical building (being kind). We have

the opportunity to renovate the network's property across the street from us, which will allow us space to support 250 students rather than 70. The building we would like to renovate to support students is pre-existing, and no new construction would occur. Does the grant allow renovation projects?

a. No, this wouldn't be allowable, because this type of renovation would be to support a building, rather than providing innovative approaches to improve rates of postsecondary enrollment and completion through the implementation of a program, initiative, or resource.

34. ***Are the four performance measures listed in the Federal Register the only ones we need to address? Are grantees expected to create additional performance measures for this grant project?***
    a. Those are the minimum required performance measures to include in your application narrative, however, you may pose additional performance measures, if you would like to do so.

35. ***Is using a substantial amount of the grant funding to contract with a third-party vendor to carry out some of the grant activities allowable?***
    a. You may contract with a third-party vendor to carry out some of the grant activities, but the third-party vendor is not the lead applicant and should not be fully implementing, managing, and evaluating the overall activities of the grant.
    b. It is important to keep in mind that the lead applicant is responsible for monitoring and a subrecipient according to 2 CFR 200.331-333.

36. ***Does the program require an external evaluation, or can we propose an internal one? If either are appropriate, is there an advantage in terms of scoring criteria to have an external evaluation?***
    a. You can utilize either an internal or external evaluator and there are scoring advantages to either.

37. ***Can you explain how the invitational priorities work and/or their purpose?***
    a. The invitational priorities speak to the needs we have identified in rural communities, as noted in the research in the NIA background section, as well as the purpose of the program. These priorities additionally speak to the priorities for the program set forth by Congress. These are optional to respond to and applicants receive no additional points.

38. ***I am having trouble uploading my documents, what should I do?***
    a. If you have problems submitting to Grants.gov, please contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or email at: support@grants.gov or access the Grants.gov Self-Service Knowledge Base web portal at: https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants

39. ***In the Budget and Budget Narrative, who can be included in the training costs? Only the Project Team? Project Team <u>AND</u> other faculty and staff whose duties may include student advisement? (Example: a department chair whose primary duties are teaching and mentoring***

other department faculty with secondary duties of student advisement from time to time. The department chair is <u>not</u> on the Project Team.)

a. You should only include costs for key personnel who will be part of the grant and support the goals and objectives of the grant and its implementation. If the faculty will be part of the project team, and have responsibilities to the project, you can include them. If they will not be working on the project, you cannot include them.

40. ***Should the SF424 and the ED 524 Budget Summary Form (and accompanying budget narrative) indicate the total amount requested over the 48 months as a single budget period? Specifically, should SF424 Line 18.a. be $2,227,500 if we intend on applying for the maximum award amount? We believe the answer is "yes" but want to verify with you.***
    a. Yes, you should indicate the total amount requested over the 4 years in your SF 424 form. If awarded, you would receive all funds up front, however, your budget in the ED 524 form should break down the budget by year.

41. ***Are institutions that offer mainly online programs eligible for the grant?***
    a. Yes, as long as you meet the eligibility criteria and the requirements of the absolute priorities.

42. ***The guidelines state that an eligible applicant may submit only one grant application. If a product or service is included as a component in multiple submissions, will all of the applications be considered for evaluation, or only one application?***
    a. As long as the lead applicant is a different IHE, or a nonprofit that partners with an IHE, you can include that service in multiple applications. You must ensure that InScribe can effectively meet the responsibilities of those applications, if both were to be awarded.

43. ***Can I receive a blank copy of the template for the RPED Grant APR? Such would help us with outlining our objectives and performance measures.***
    a. You can access APR resources at the following link. Please scroll to the bottom under FIPSE resources.

44. ***Are these funds unrestricted?***
    a. This program utilizes an unrestricted indirect cost rate. All direct costs are subject to the regulations set forth in the Uniform Guidance.

45. ***Can funds be used to support student services such as our college's "HIVE Supply" food pantry?***
    a. You may not build a food pantry on campus. The purpose of the program is to provide services to rural students and to help them access different resources that will support their postsecondary access and completion, and career attainment. Therefore, you could support students to access to those food pantry services by connecting them with food assistance programs or community partnerships with organizations that assist with food insecurity.

46. ***What is the limit on indirect funding and are any funding categories excluded from indirect?***

a. This program utilizes an unrestricted indirect cost rate. For more information regarding indirect costs, please see https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocfo/intro.html or contact indirectcostdivision@ed.gov.
b. Additional resources:
    i. Please refer to the Indirect Cost regulations in the Uniform Guidance.
        1. eCFR :: Appendix III to Part 200, Title 2 -- Indirect (F&A) Costs Identification and Assignment, and Rate Determination for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)
        2. eCFR :: Appendix IV to Part 200, Title 2 -- Indirect (F&A) Costs Identification and Assignment, and Rate Determination for Nonprofit Organizations
    ii. For non-profit organizations:
        1. A Guide for Indirect Cost Rate Determination — Applicable to Nonprofit and Commercial Organizations | U.S. Department of Labor (dol.gov)
        2. A Guide for Indirect Cost Rate Determination (dol.gov)

47. ***What can we use grant funds for/what is allowable?***
    a. All activities and budget items must at least satisfy the absolute priorities as stated in the NIA. There are no program-specific regulations, but activities and budget items must directly align with project objectives and adhere to applicable EDGAR and Uniform Guidance citations that govern the program.
    b. In the big picture a program should be providing supports to students based on what is expected in the absolutely priority, but keep in mind to take an approach that is inclusive and creates systemic change. Think about what you can do to help rural students access, persist and succeed in college and in to a high- need occupation.

48. ***Are direct scholarships, student financial assistance, and/or stipends to students allowable?***
    a. Costs of scholarships, fellowships, and other programs of student aid at IHEs are allowable only when the purpose of the Federal award is to provide training to selected participants and the charge is approved by the Federal awarding agency. However, tuition remission and other forms of compensation paid as, or in lieu of, wages to students performing necessary work are allowable provided that:
        i. The individual is conducting activities necessary to the Federal award;
        ii. Tuition remission and other support are provided in accordance with established policy of the IHE and consistently provided in a like manner to students in return for similar activities conducted under Federal awards as well as other activities; and
        iii. During the academic period, the student is enrolled in an advanced degree program at a non-Federal entity or affiliated institution and the activities of the student in relation to the Federal award are related to the degree program;
        iv. The tuition or other payments are reasonable compensation for the work performed and are conditioned explicitly upon the performance of necessary work; and

v. It is the IHE's practice to similarly compensate students under Federal awards as well as other activities.

49. What are the requirements for meeting Absolute Priority 1?

a. For meeting the requirements of absolute priority 1, you would need to satisfy at least one or more of the following:
    i. The applicant proposes to serve a community that is served by one or more LEAs with a locale code of 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43;
        1. If addressing this component, all LEA's in the project need to fit within these locale codes.
    ii. The applicant proposes a project in which a majority of the schools served have a locale code of 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43;
        1. If addressing this component, all schools in the project need to fit within these locale codes.
    iii. The applicant is an institution of higher education (IHE) with a rural campus setting, or the applicant proposes to serve a campus with a rural setting. Rural settings include any of the following: Town-Fringe, Town-Distant, Town-Remote, Rural Fringe, Rural-Distant, Rural-Remote, as defined by the NCES College Navigator search tool.
        1. You must be a campus with a rural setting serving a rural community within the locale codes above. If you are not a rural campus setting, you must propose to serve a rural campus setting that serves the locale codes above.

50. In reference to the regulation regarding direct student aid? Does the phrase "provide training to selected participants" include coursework that is not college credit-bearing, but instead leads to workforce certifications and/or credentials that may be applied towards coursework at a technical college?

a. No this would be considered tuition remission for coursework completed under the grant and does not necessarily provide training to participants. Furthermore, we do not allow for non-credit coursework under this grant. Providing training to participants would be, for example, providing professional development or financial aid training to students to support the goals and objectives of the grant.

51. Can grant funds can be used to pay stipends to students who are completing an internship?

a. Yes, internship stipends are allowable, but must be aligned to program purpose and goals as it relates to this program. It is important to consider that workforce partnerships are also key to this program, and applicants may want to consider partnering with workforce organizations and employers that can offset that cost.

52. For purposes of tracking students who benefit from services supported by this grant, if my IHE is Town Remote, are all students considered for the purposes of reporting to be "rural," or do I default to my IHE's definition of rural?

a. For the purposes of tracking, you should follow the definitions and locale codes outlined in Absolute Priority 1 when referring to students, and in reporting.

53. ***Are we allowed to construct a greenhouse (damaged by Katina) that provides higher ed and job training services to urban and rural communities?***
    a. Construction is not an allowable activity; therefore, this is not allowable. You may also only provide services to students identified within the NCES locale codes in Absolute Priority 1. This does not include urban students.

54. ***Participant Support Costs are allowable by some federal grants. Are they allowable for this grant?***
    a. Participant support costs are considered on a case-by-case basis and would need to be discussed with your Program Officer.

55. If an LEA has a rural code of 31, but certain schools within the same LEA have codes of 41, can we use 41?
    a. As a reminder, you can respond to multiple criteria within Absolute Priority 1. Therefore, you can include both LEA's and schools, as long as they fit within the NCES locale codes 32, 33, 41, 42, and 43 as outlined in the priority.

56. Does the Project Lead (director or investigator) need to be a full-time position?
    a. No, but you want to make sure that there is adequate time dedicated to the management and implementation of the project, and sufficient key personnel dedicated to accomplish the goals and objectives of the grant.

57. Can I hold a RPED grant at the same time as a TRIO-SSS (Title IV) grant?
    a. Yes.

58. Does it matter if the IHE is headquartered in an area outside the approved locale codes? For instance, if they have a campus site in a rural locale code.
    a. No, as long as you are serving students in either LEA's or schools within the NCES locale codes identified in Absolute Priority 1.

59. We wanted to increase the size of our existing student center. Is that considered renovation or construction?
    a. That would be considered construction and would an unallowable activity.

60. Can furniture to be used by the target students be purchased with grant funds?
    a. Furniture purchases will be considered on a case-by-case basis and would need to be discussed with your Program Officer. Keep in mind that this grant is intended to support programs to meet basic needs and developing innovative approaches to improve rates of postsecondary enrollment and completion through the implementation of a program, initiative, or resource.

61. If we are targeting gang-involved youth in rural communities, can we also secondarily serve urban youth in New Orleans?
    a. You may also only provide services to students identified within the NCES locale codes in Absolute Priority 1. This does not include urban students.

62. Are awards limited to a single applicant per state?
    a. No, there can be multiple applicants per state, as long as the lead applicant is an IHE (as defined in section 101 of the HEA (20 U.S.C. 1001)) that are public or private nonprofit

IHEs, or a public and private nonprofit organizations and agencies that partner with IHEs.

63. ***Can we include costs for instructional supplies for a summer bridge program?***
    a. Yes.

64. ***Can we include costs for food in our grant?***
    a. Food can be included for meetings, workshops, and non-social events that are part of the grant.

65. ***Can we measure the increase of institution-wide rural student numbers for enrollment, persistence, and completion? Or must those PMs only use students receiving direct services from the grant?***
    a. You must include at least those 4 required performance measures, outlined in the NIA, in your grant. These performance measures must speak to students who receive the direct student services from the grant. However, you are able to include additional performance measures that may effectively measure the success of your grant.

66. ***If we are an IHE qualified through Absolute Priority (c) as a "Town: remote" institution, does that make <u>all</u> our students rural, or are they defined by the locale code from the high school they graduated from?***
    a. All students at your institution do not have to be classified as rural, as long as your institution itself is classified by that locale code. However, all the students you serve with the grant must at least have attended a rural school or live in those rural locale codes. Students who are not considered rural, cannot be served by the grant.

67. ***Also, must a student only be qualified as rural to be part of the grant project, or must they also qualify as "underserved?" In other words, must a student be <u>both</u> "rural" and "underserved" to be eligible to receive service from the grant?***
    a. A student must at least be considered rural, according to the requirements in Absolute Priority 1, to be part of the grant.