



U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Elementary & Secondary Education  
Charter School Programs  
FY22 Pre-Application Office Hours Webinar – State Entity  
Competition (ALN 84.282A)  
Session Transcript  
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- [Dr. Hinton] Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the pre-award Office Hours webinar for the FY2022 state entity grant competition. My name is Anna Hinton, and I'm the director of the Charter Schools Program. We have a ton of content to go over, so let's get started. So our agenda for today, first want to get started with just some housekeeping, introductions, talk a little bit about the logistics for the webinar, go over some important reminders and notes.

And then we would like to just recap just a high-level overview of the state entity grant program in terms of funding, amount of funding that is available, estimated awards, touch on eligibility again. And then we will transition into the office hours responses, the office hours, our responses to the questions that you all have submitted.

We've categorized those questions to eligibility, use of funds, priorities, application requirements, and then another category that we're labeling as other. And then we're going to just do, again, a recap reminder of all of the resources that we have available to assist you with submitting your grant application. And then we will close with one final opportunity to answer any questions, depending on the availability of time.

So our co-presenters today, if you joined us on our first webinar on last Monday, July 11th, I noted that our SE team has expanded, and we have welcomed two new members to our team, Dr. Jill Gaitens and Sareeta Schmitt. These program officers are co-presenting with me today.

So welcome Jill and Sareeta. Meeting logistics, again, this is a listen-only session for the most part. We are allowing participants to submit questions via the Q&A function. This session, as was our previous session, it will be recorded and posted to our website. And, again, we are encouraging you to send any and all questions or inquiries concerning the competition to our email boxes, is the best way to communicate and receive timely responses from the SE team.

And just a couple of notes and important reminders. The first is that I do want to encourage all potential applicants to monitor the SE competition website, the department's website.

This is where we will post any corrections, any changes, timeline changes, or any corrections to the notice. This is where we will, you know, sort of acknowledge if there are any changes to eligibility. So this is your official one-stop shop. And so I can't stress enough that you should monitor this website and adhere to the information on this website regarding any eligibility questions, or issues, or competition requirements itself.

And then as always, as a reminder, we strongly encourage potential applicants to read the entire notice inviting applications in the Federal Register. As was the case with our first technical assistance webinar, you know, these slides do not contain a complete listing of all of the requirements, and subparts of the requirements, selection criteria, etc., and do want to stress that you should definitely read, multiple times, the NIA and rely on that particular

document for a complete listing of all of the requirements associated with this grant competition.

And just a reminder, again, on the deadline, so the deadline for the submission of applications is August 5th at 11:59 p.m. However, we strongly encourage you not to wait until the last minute to submit your application. Anything can happen, but at 11:59 p.m., if your application has not been submitted, it likely will not be accepted.

So, again, to avoid any systems delays, we encourage you to submit your application well in advance, a couple of days in advance, actually. So now on to an overview of the state entity grant competition. Again, we are not going to provide an in-depth overview for more details on the state entity grant competition. I would refer you to our webinar that we conducted last Monday on July 11th.

And, again, that webinar along with the recording has been posted to our website. But just to recap, the purpose of the state entity grant program is to provide state entities within a state with grant funds to award subgrants to eligible applicants in their state to open and prepare for the operation of new charter schools and to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools.

For this year's grant competition, we have roughly \$73 million, at least \$73 million available in grant funds. And currently, we're estimating that we will make approximately eight grant awards. Based on, you know, sort of historical performance in our grant competitions, we see that the estimated range of awards has been anywhere between \$2 million and \$25 million per year, with the estimated size of a grant award in any given year being \$10 million.

And, again, these are five-year grants, so the project period is up to five years. Eligibility. And so, state entities with a state statute specifically authorizing the establishment of charter schools may apply to the SE grant program.

However, no state entity may receive a grant under this program for use in a state in which a state entity is currently using a grant received under this program. And we'll talk a little bit more about implications for existing grantees, eligibility implications for existing grantees, that is.

But those entities that are eligible to receive state entity grant funds, a state educational agency, a state charter school board, a governor of a state, or a state charter school support organization. And, again, just to reiterate, no applicant may receive a new award to conduct the same activities that are approved under existing active grants.

And, again, that's related to existing grantees and the eligibility of existing grantees, which I'll touch on next. So, as I mentioned, there have been some sort of increase in questions regarding the eligibility of existing grantees.

And so state entities and states in which a state entity has a current state entity grant that is not in its final budget period nor operating under a no-cost extension are ineligible to apply for a SE grant under this year's competition. And so we've listed on this slide states falling under this provision.

And I won't read off all the names of the states, but you can refer back to the slide deck as well as the SE grant competition for this list. And, again, this next slide sort of presents the same information, just in a different format. So now I will turn it over to Sareeta Schmitt, who will get us started with responding to some of the questions that have been submitted in response to this webinar focused on office hours, and specifically answering...offering office hours to specifically answer your questions.

Sareeta?

- [Sareeta] Thank you, Anna. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Sareeta Schmitt. I'm a new program officer on the SE team, as Anna mentioned. I just want to start by saying, we are grateful for your engagement in the SE grant competition. We have gathered the questions that we didn't get to in last Monday's webinar and those that have come into our competition email to put together responses to just better help you understand this competition. As Anna mentioned, the questions are bucketed into topics.

So we have eligibility, use of funds, priorities, application requirements, and then a final category that captures things that didn't fit elsewhere. There will be some time at the end of the webinar, hopefully, for additional questions, and you can always submit questions to us using our competition email account. In particular, if you have specialized questions for your state or your particular situation, the competition email is a great way to get in touch with us.

So first up, who is eligible to apply for the state entity grant? So you have the state. State entities are those that are eligible to apply, as Anna just walked through. That consists of state education agencies, state charter school boards, governors, and charter school support organizations.

Those are the folks who are eligible to apply. Continuing with that spirit in the next question, what are the states in which state entities are ineligible to receive new awards this year? So under the ESEA, there cannot be two active state entity grants in the same state at the same time. This means that state entities in states with no current CSP SE grants that are not operating under a no-cost extension are ineligible to apply.

The exception to this is that if a current state entity grantee is in its final budget period and has notified the department that it does not intend to request a no-cost extension. And again, they are the states listed in the slide here as well as earlier in the slide deck and, of course, in the NIA, are those that have current CSP SE grants and thus are not eligible.

Next question. So if two eligible state entities apply for this grant, can they both be funded? Should entities within the same state coordinate? Multiple state entities from the same state can apply for the grant.

However, because of the prohibition on more than one active CSP SE grant in a state, as we discussed in the previous question, the grant can only be awarded to one state entity from a particular state. If multiple state entities in a state submit applications that receive high enough scores to be recommended for funding under this competition, only the highest-scoring application among such state entities would be funded.

Our next question. If we were... Sorry. Oh, this was, yes, in the language of grantee. So if we were an eligible charter school support organization in an eligible state and apply, and our state department of ED also applies, could we possibly both get funded? Should we try and find out if our state is applying?

So this is very similar to the previous question, but it specifically looks at a CSO and an SE both applying, but the answer is essentially the same, that multiple state entities from the same state may apply, but only one of them can be awarded per state. Next question on eligibility here.

So may a charter school developer apply for a subgrant under the state entity grant program while awaiting approval of a charter from an authorizer? So, yes, they can. A charter school developer may apply for a CSP SE subgrant from the state entity while waiting on charter approval from the authorizer.

The charter school developer must, however, though, have applied for a charter to be eligible and provide timely and adequate notice of its CSP SE subgrant application to the authorizer. An eligible charter school developer may use planning funds to conduct authorized planning activities under a CSP subgrant prior to receiving an approved charter.

However, subgrantees may not use implementation funds for a charter school under the charter... I'm sorry, until after the charter school has received an approved charter from the authorizer. And we'll talk about this a little bit more in a later question involving use of funds. Next question.

If my charter school is slated to open in 2024, would I apply now for funding or wait until next year? So ultimately, it's up to each applicant to decide what is the right time for them to apply for a subgrant. Under the ESEA, subgrantees are limited to no more than 18 months of planning activities. So that's something you may want to consider as you decide on the appropriate time.

Next question. Where may prospective applicants find more information on state entity eligibility for this grant? So I want to take this opportunity again to plug our competition website, where you can find the link to the NIA and the most up-to-date information regarding the competition.

And as Anna noted, if there are any corrections or changes that ever occur, you'll always find that on our competition website. You can also reach out to our competition email with questions specific to your state or situation. Next question. Are current state entity grantees with grants in a no-cost extension period eligible to apply?

If no, why not? So, yes, if there is a new state entity grant awarded for use in a state in which a state entity has a current CSP state entity grant that is operating under a no-cost extension consistent with the ESEA, the current state entity grantee must obligate all grant funds prior to the end of the current budget period.

So that's to say that the current state entity grantee must complete all grant activities and begin the process of closing out the grant. So liquidation, not incurring new costs prior to the expiration date of the no-cost extension. If the state entity grantee is operating under a no-cost extension and another state entity is awarded a grant, what happens to schools that have not concluded their CSP subgrant activities?

Will the new entity be able to serve them? So if this were to happen, the charter schools would have to apply to the new state entity grantee for a subgrant to enable the charter school to complete the subgrant activities under the previously approved subgrant.

If the subgrant application is approved, the new state entity grantee would have to request a waiver from the department to enable it to award a second subgrant to the charter school to enable it to complete those subgrant activities. And a transition here to use of funds questions next. So can grant funds be used to support charter schools that are not new but have been in operation for several years?

So, yes, the grant opportunity allows state entities to award competitive subgrants to eligible applicants to expand high-quality charter schools. As noted on the slide here, the ESEA defines expand as significantly increasing enrollment or adding one or more grades to the high-quality charter school. As always, we encourage you to review the NIA for full requirements of the grant program.

Can planning funds be expended before securing a lease, or are all funds held, as in not issued in a subgrant award, until a charter has been granted and the school has a facility? So,

yes, we recognize that completing the chartering process and securing a facility are often long and involved processes.

The CSP SE grant allows approved subgrantees to use planning funds to conduct authorized planning activities before they've received their full approved charter from the authorizing body and fully secured a facility in which to operate their school. Subgrantees, however, may not use implementation funds until they have received their charter and have documentation of a facility in which they will operate.

Next question. So this question really focuses on those percentages breakdown of how you would use your funds. So is it correct that at least 90% of CSP SE program funds must be used to award subgrants to charter school developers and charter schools, and that efforts to improve authorizing quality can be funded with the 10% that must be reserved for technical assistance and grant administration?

Yes, that's correct. So at least 90% of grant funds must be used to fund eligible subgrant awards, and at least 7% of program funds must be reserved for TA and activities to improve authorizing quality. Next up, we have applicants approved for funding under this competition must attend a two-day meeting for project directors during each year of the project and are encouraged to include this cost in their proposed budgets.

Where is the project director's meeting? So as the question sort of notes, this is anybody who is awarded CSP funds would attend a two-day annual project directors' meeting for the duration of their project. We do encourage applicants to include the cost of attending this meeting in their budget proposals. While, unfortunately, we don't yet know the exact dates for the upcoming project directors meeting, the meeting will be held in Washington, D.C.

So you can use that as some guidance as you make your plans. All right. Our next question. So how should charter school support organizations, or CSOs, address the absolute priority? Should they describe how they will ensure best practices once they have the grant? Additionally, how does the application requirements in the NIA which requires CSO applicants to discuss how they will work with the state to support the state system of TA and oversight of authorizing activity interact with the absolute priority?

So this is a really great question. It is so helpful when folks engage with us to ensure that we are providing clarity because this is a really important issue that, I think, is not always very clear immediately in the documentation. So we're excited that folks asked this question. So a CSO should describe any steps it has taken to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.

These steps may have included working with the state educational agency in the state to promote best practices in charter school authorizing. The application requirement referred to here requires the state entity to describe how it will work with the state to support the state's system of TA and oversight of the authorizing activity of authorized public chartering agencies.

This means that the absolute priority focuses on what the state entity has already done to ensure that authorizers implement best practices for charter school authorizing, whereas the application requirement focuses on TA and monitoring with respect to how the state entity will work with the state in the future. Our next question on priorities here. So what is an invitational priority, and how does it work?

So invitational priorities are an opportunity for the department to learn more about the field's capacity to address that priority. Applicants are encouraged to address an invitational priority because of its particular interest to the department. However, it is not required, and no additional points are awarded in the competition for it. If a state entity establishes

charter-district collaborations as a priority in the local subgrant competition, can subgrant funds be used to support that activity?

So a state entity may establish a priority for charter-district collaborations in its local subgrant competition. In that case, applicants addressing that priority may use program funds to conduct authorized activities needed for the implementation of that charter-district collaboration. With that, I'm going to hand it over for the next set of questions to my colleague, Jill, and she'll start by addressing application requirements.

- [Dr. Gaitens] Thank you, Sareeta. I'm Jill Gaitens, another new program officer at the SE. We recognize that these slides have a lot of information. As a reminder, please submit any questions you have in the Q&A. A question was submitted asking for clarification on the difference between application requirements and assurances, and some are similar, and if peer reviewers will evaluate applicants' responses to both.

An application requirement requests specific information or documentation from applicants that must be included in the application in order for the application to be approved for funding. An assurance is a promise or a certification that the applicant will take specific action or meet specific requirements if it receives federal funding. Peer reviewers do not evaluate the quality of an applicant's response to an application requirement or whether an applicant provides a required assurance.

CSP staff review applications to ensure that all requirements have been met and all assurances have been provided. Assurances are required that applicants will not hamper the desegregation efforts. Clarification was requested on what constitutes a valid desegregation effort and how applicants will know if the value of desegregation efforts are happening to determine if their proposal will hamper any existing desegregation efforts.

This slide and the next two slides provide guidance on how applicants may address this assurance in their proposal. For the sake of time, I'll highlight sections of this guidance. Applicants should detail in their applications that subgrant applicants will use the best available information to determine if the surrounding school districts from which the proposed charter school is likely to draw students from are under an existing court order.

Some school districts have desegregation obligations under plans or court orders that could affect or be affected by the establishment of a charter school even if that charter school is its own LEA. If a subgrant applicant is uncertain whether the proposed charter school is in a jurisdiction that is covered under an existing desegregation plan or a court order, the subgrant applicant may contact several entities for assistance, including the appropriate LEA, SEA, or CRD.

To assist with this process, the CRD has provided each chief state school officer with a list of LEAs and their state that are subject to the court order. To determine if there's an applicable OCR Title VI desegregation plan, the subgrant applicant may contact the appropriate LEA or OCR office that serves that state.

There are other desegregation plans and orders that do not involve CRD or OCR. In some states and school districts, there may also be other obligations under state local laws and policies, such as those to promote integration or diversity, that could affect or be affected by the proposed charter school.

In these cases, the subgrant applicant should consult the SEA or the appropriate LEA to determine which jurisdiction has desegregation obligations. In the end, applicants and subgrant applicants should give their best assessment of the impact of the proposed charter school and any existing desegregation efforts, assuming this assessment is based on the best available and reasonable information obtained by the applicant and the subgrant applicant.

Are state entities required to award points based on their evaluation of an applicant's need analysis? If the applicant's authorizer reviews the information, can the state entity take that into consideration and not require the submission?

Will you tell state entities that they are not required to award points based on proposed demographics? We appreciate the opportunity to provide the clarification requested in these questions. Although state entities must require subgrant applicants to submit a needs analysis, the state entity is not required to award points based on the quality of the needs analysis. If the applicant has submitted the information required in the needs analysis to its authorizer, then the applicant may submit the same information to the state entity.

We had a question on what states are expected to do with the information about the school's projected demographics. We are requiring state entities to collect this information to help ensure that charter school subgrants are taking appropriate steps to establish and maintain racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies to ensure that they are not increasing racial or socioeconomic segregation or isolation.

When monitoring subgrants for compliance with program requirement and the terms of the subgrant application, state entities will be able to review the demographic information provided in the subgrant application to ensure that the subgrantee is complying with the terms of its approved application. A public hearing is required for each charter school.

As an option, the authorizer may hold public hearings for the charter school that it authorizes provided that the public hearing meets CSP SE program requirements. This is a very good question as state policy varies. How should we handle situations where state policy does not require a public hearing?

Should the SE require it? Regardless of state policy, applicants must meet all SE program requirements in order to qualify for these funds. Under other. Good question. Not all sections of the application will be peer reviewed.

Applicants' response to the selection criteria and certain competitive preference priorities will be evaluated and scored by peer reviewers. The application review information section of the NIA outlines the selection criteria for the grant competition along with the maximum point values for each criterion and the peer review will score. You will find that section of the NIA at the link provided in the Federal Register.

More information about the grant competition, including the grant requirements, is available in the NIA published in the Federal Register and on the CSP SE competition website. We have provided the CSP competition email for you to submit additional questions related to your particular state entity.

We will provide some additional resources to assist you in the application process. Some important reminders as you plan your application process, please check the CSP website often as supportive materials, including the recording of this webinar and slides, will be on this page.

The federal government has transitioned away from the DUNS number to registering via SAM. There is no cost associated with applying and maintaining a unique entity identifier. The process for receiving a UEI is intended to be completed by the entity itself and does not require an outside vendor for this process.

As a reminder, the deadline for transmission for applications is August 5th. As applicants work on their project proposals for this competition, they may want to refer to their state's previously funded CSP SE grant applications or just review the submissions of applicants that received awards in years past.

You can find the applications from the previous competitions for all funded awards on our website under Awards, and the links are provided here. Please note that the awards prior to 2017 fell under the previous NCLB law, so they are on our SEA website rather than our SE grants page. We will now transition to Anna Hinton from our closing remarks and Q&A.

Anna, I think you might be on mute.

- Thank you, Jill. I was. So we do want to pause for a couple of minutes to give you an opportunity to submit any additional questions that you have of us.

We have received one question so far regarding the absolute priority, and the question is, will the peer reviewers review the absolute priority? So an absolute priority is treated just like application requirements in the sense that the department will ensure that all applicants address the absolute priority. In terms of peer reviewers and their evaluation, again, the selection criteria will drive the content and the information that is evaluated and assessed by the peer reviewers.

So we will pause just for a couple of seconds to see if we receive any additional questions. So we've received one more question.

So one question is about a state entity must submit an RFP for TA providers, or can they name a partner in their application via an MOU?

They can name a partner in their application. Additionally, if you have submitted questions that we have not answered...we've attempted to answer all the questions we've received, so I'd ask that you resubmit those questions to our email box or take this opportunity to ask some of the questions.

All right. So with that, I'd like to thank you all once again for your participation and your time. Again, can't stress enough that if you do have questions or concerns, to please contact us via the SE competition email box.

I'd also like to remind you that we have posted on our website recordings of all of our prerecorded... You can access our prerecorded webinars as well as the recording of the first pre-award TA webinar that we conducted last Monday on July 11th. With that, again, thank you for your time and attention.

Again, we strongly encourage you not to wait until the last minute to submit your application. and good luck. Thank you, all.