STRAIGHT A FUND

Grant Information and Guidance for Applicants:

FY 2016 Straight A Fund

Competitive Grant Application

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GRANT INFORMATION

AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

Authority for the Straight A Fund derives from Section 263.350 of Am. Sub. H.B. No. 64 of the 131st General Assembly.

PURPOSE

Ohio's Straight A Fund supports ideas from local educators that promote academic achievement and economic efficiencies within schools and districts. Educators who have innovative, workable ideas that could advance student learning, achieve significant funding reductions, reduce administrative overhead - or all three - now enjoy the opportunity to receive money to jumpstart the transformation they envision.

GENERAL GRANT GUIDANCE

The Straight A Fund is a $30 million statewide competitive grant awarded on the basis of the quality of the application submitted without regard for geographic location or a set number of grants to be awarded.

ROLES OF THE LEAD APPLICANT, CONSORTIUM MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

A lead applicant of this grant may apply individually, individually with grant partners, as the head of a consortium or as the head of a consortium with partners. Responsibilities of a lead applicant include:

- Managing the implementation of the grant fiscally and programmatically;
- Monitoring the implementation of the grant in any consortium members of the grant;
- Reporting fiscal and programmatic data of the lead applicant and consortium members to the Ohio Department of Education's compliance system;
- Providing information on the implementation and operation of the grant for replication purposes to the department; and
- Sustaining the grant for five years after the implementation year of the grant.

Partners in a grant application perform services as contracted by the lead applicant. Grant partners do not receive funds directly, but can be paid for services related to the grant by funds allocated to the lead applicant or consortium member.

Eligibility

The following entities are eligible to apply for grant funding

- City, local, exempted village, joint vocational school districts;
- Individual school buildings;
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Educational service centers (ESC);
- Community schools;
- STEM schools;
- College-preparatory boarding schools;
- Education consortia (representing a partnership among city, local, exempted village, school buildings, community schools, STEM schools, educational service centers, or county boards of developmental disabilities that provide special education and related services to children with disabilities); institutions of higher education; and private entities partnering with one or more of the entities listed above.
- Education consortia must be led by an eligible district, school, ESC, community school, etc. Any consortia led by an ESC must include a client district of that ESC.

Projects funding programs for Pre-K and Higher Education are permitted as long as they are submitted by an eligible lead applicant and meet at least one of the Straight A Fund goals.

Award Amount

Individual applicants can apply for grants up to $1 million and consortium grants can apply for grants up to $15 million. *However, the Straight A Fund Governing Board has indicated a preference for individual and consortium grants under $1 million.*

Timeline for Application and Spending

Applications must be entered online using the Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Planning Application (CCIP) beginning Nov. 19, 2015. The online application will remain open through Dec. 1 at 4 p.m. Selection and approval is anticipated for completion Jan. 29, 2016. Funds will be available to projects following approval by the Controlling Board (TBD). Projects should budget the grant funds to be expended prior to June 30, 2017.

GOALS

Goals for Straight A funded projects include

- Increased student achievement;
- A spending reduction in the five-year forecast or positive performance on other fiscal measures established by the Straight A Fund Governing Board
- A greater share of resources directed into the classroom; and
- Use of a shared services delivery model that demonstrates increased efficiency and effectiveness, long-term sustainability and scalability

Applicants may select one or multiple goals from these. The legislature, however, has required that when selecting from between proposals that are otherwise similar in quality the Governing Board give a preference to those projects with credible evidence of spending reductions. Applicants should be aware that when selecting spending reduction as a goal, the expectation is that there will be cost savings as a direct result of the project activities, and that these cost savings will be tracked and reported annually during the five-year period of sustainability reporting.

In addition, those applicants choosing to demonstrate a greater share of resources available in the classroom should expect to be able to show a shift in the pattern of resource usage. The preferred metric for this is the percentage of resources used for instruction as reported on the annual Ohio School Report Card. Other metrics may be acceptable to track more subtle changes, however the emphasis be on the **share** of resources used for instruction.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Please provide answers to 27 questions.

APPLICANT INFORMATION—QUESTIONS 1-7

In this section applicants provide a **brief** (140 character) introduction to their project (question 2), anticipated counts of students to be impacted (question 3) and contact information for the project personnel (questions 5-7). In entering student counts, the grant year refers to the period to be funded by Straight A Funds and years one through five refer to the following years in which the project is expected to be sustained by the grantee and its partners.

Students that are directly impacted are those **students for whom the project will be providing outcome data**. If there are other students that may derive some benefit but are not the direct focus of the project, you may discuss them in question 4.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION—QUESTIONS 8-10

The project description section asks applicants to provide a coherent outline of the project as follows:

- The current state or problem to be solved (question 8a)
- The proposed innovation and how it will bring an improvement (question 8b)

For each selected goal provide the following information (question 9):

- Outcomes: what this project will accomplish in relationship to the selected goal
- The assumptions that provide a foundation for the belief that this innovation will bring about the outcomes envisioned.
- The basis for those assumptions, which requires a citation from the literature to indicate that what is proposed will likely lead to the outcomes envisioned, or may reference a pilot experience in which this innovation has proved successful and is now being replicated or expanded upon.
- The specific indicators that will track progress in implementing this innovation. These are intermediary goals and accomplishments to demonstrate that things are "on track" in terms of accomplishing the ultimate goals of the project.
- The specific metrics that will serve to indicate that the selected goals are being met. These metrics will form the basis for reporting across the five years of sustainability reporting, and should be very specific. Please provide current (baseline) data.
- A discussion of how the project implementers are prepared to respond to the data in formative ways, or to make needed alterations and corrections throughout the implementation and sustainability phases.

In question 10 select the best fit for the project in terms of any prior history of implementing this particular innovation.

BUDGET AND SUSTAINABILITY—QUESTIONS 11-18

Due to the unique sustainability expectations that are integral to the Straight A Fund, applicants are asked to submit a budget and narrative to describe how grant funds will be spent, but also to forecast the means by which the project will be maintained for an additional five years without causing an increase in the district's five-year-forecast. We anticipate that there will be ongoing costs of sustainability. Legislation establishes two acceptable sources for funding to meet these costs. Projects may be sustained using cost savings derived from efficiencies created by the project itself, OR through reallocation of funds from savings elsewhere within the school or district budget (or a combination of these two).

Allowable Expenditures

The range of allowable grant costs is generally wide, inclusive of personnel, equipment, curricula, training, software licensing, teacher certifications or brick and mortar improvements—**provided these expenses are legitimate implementation (or start-up) costs of the innovation**. Grant funds **may not** be used to cover ongoing costs of sustainability – even if applicants contract to pay those costs up front through multiple-year contracts initiated and paid during the grant period (see additional guidance below). Applicants are also cautioned that any tuition costs for College Credit Plus must be met through foundation deduction as required by law. **Straight A funds may not be used to offset the cost of College Credit Plus tuition.**

Guidance on Multi-Year Contracting

Multi-year contracts are permissible only if designed to handle implementation costs in multiple years. Such allowable contracts generally cover the costs of an external evaluation of the grant or service agreements for items purchased during the implementation year. Many of the service agreements in question which are allowable, include software licensing, access to data, assessments, professional development and other training related to the **implementation** of the grant.

Distinguishing Implementation vs Sustainability Costs in Multi-year Contracting	
Planning/Implementation Costs	**Sustainability Costs**
Guidance: programs that serve elementary, secondary, vocational and special education students; projects must have substantial value and lasting impact.	**Guidance**: Increased ongoing spending related to the grant project must be offset by spending reductions or cost savings that are verifiable and permanent
SOME implementation costs MAY continue beyond the grant or grant carryover year if they are creating a new substantial value and lasting impact, as opposed simply maintaining the program.	Costs incurred in the years following the grant or grant carryover year are generally sustainability costs and must be offset by either cost-savings from the project, or spending reductions elsewhere.
Any planning/implementation costs after the grant year must either be approved under carryover guidelines, or be a part of a pre-paid long-term contract with a reliable vendor (and paid during the grant year, or approved carryover year)	Placing grant funds into a bank account, escrow, or any escrow-like arrangement for future payout of either implementation OR sustainability costs is not a permissible use of Straight A funds
Example: Educating teachers to a new certification level that will enable them to provide college credit to students through a dual enrollment program.	**Example:** Ongoing professional development to support and continue innovations already implemented

Guidance on Multi-Year Contracting

In distinguishing between allowable and non-allowable multi-year contracts consider the following general questions:

1. Is this contract for a one-time set of services, such as evaluation, that is necessitated by the grant project? (*allowable*)
2. Is this a pre-paid contract to be paid during the grant or grant carryover year? (*allowable*)
3. Is this a management or financial contract (such as escrow) that enables payout of grant funds over multiple years (*not allowable*)
4. Is the district satisfied that the contract provides sufficient protection against non-fulfillment of the contract by the service provider? (*required*)
5. Is the contract for services that can legitimately be considered implementation or start-up costs as opposed to ongoing or sustainability costs? (*allowable*)

In addition, the following questions are intended to provide guidance to specific spending areas in which multi-year contracts may be contemplated:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Is there a clear indication (such as certification) of new value resulting from this professional development? (*implementation*)
2. Does this professional development clearly enable the teacher(s) to provide something that was not available to students previously (dual enrollment credit, AP credit, higher level math, etc.)? (*implementation*)
3. Is the value of the professional development primarily coaching/oversight to ensure fidelity with earlier training? (*sustainability*)

EQUIPMENT PURCHASE/FACILITIES

1. Is this a new equipment purchase that is needed to make the initiation of the project possible (implementation) or routine repair/replacement/upgrade of purchased equipment needed to maintain the program (*sustainability*)?
2. Is this equipment purchase needed to expand the project to a larger group of students—as originally outline in you proposal (*implementation*)?

Budget

The project budget, that is the plan for the spending of grant dollars, is entered directly into the project budget sheet found in CCIP. Applications from consortia must also upload a Consortium Budget Worksheet. The budgeted amount must total the amount of the grant request (question 12). Provide a general explanation for the budget in narrative form (question 13)

SUSTAINABILITY

In order to evaluate each proposal in terms of long-term sustainability, each project is required to submit a Fiscal Impact Table (FIT). This represents a long-term forecast of both anticipated costs of continuing the projects and a plan for meeting those costs. Projects should choose either the traditional or non-traditional form to align with their ongoing fiscal coding system.

The FIT has three sections, one for costs associated with the project, one for projected savings as a result of the project and one for any reallocations that are planned to provide for the future sustainability of the project. In order to comply with legislative requirements for sustainability without an increase in the five year forecast, the FIT must demonstrate cost neutrality across the bottom line, which must show zero or less in order to meet the test of sustainability.

Applicants *may not* base sustainability on anticipated revenue increases—whether from the project itself, or elsewhere.

In forecasting the cost of sustaining a program, applicants should consider such routine ongoing costs as equipment replacement and upgrades, any new personnel cost, ongoing refreshers or coaching to ensure implementation of skills and abilities initially developed through professional development, maintenance and utility costs for new or new-use facilities, licensing costs, etc. Please be comprehensive in considerations.

In addition, applicants are asked to calculate what percentage of sustainability cost will be derived from cost savings from the project and what percentage of sustainability cost will be derived from savings elsewhere (reallocations). These percentages are reported in questions 16 and 18. Questions 17 and 19 ask for a narrative explanation of these savings.

Note: any project that has selected cost savings as a goal in question 9 is expected to show cost savings in the FIT Section B and in question 16.

PROJECT EXECUTION AND SUSTAINABILITY—QUESTIONS 20-23

In this section, applicants are asked for a brief timeline of activities associated with each phase of the project (planning, implementation and programmatic sustainability). In this section also, please provide (question 20) a list of team members and what experience, skills and expertise they will provide to ensure the implementation of this project.

SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT AND LASTING VALUE—QUESTIONS 24-27

Straight A anticipates projects that will bring about beneficial and sustainable institutional changes to curriculum, to instruction or to other facets of school operation. This expectation pre-supposes that ongoing attention will be paid to both formative and summative evaluation of the project, and that data collection will continue to provide information on resulting trends across the reporting span of five years following the grant year. Questions 24 through 27 ask for specific details regarding the impact both within the project entity(ies), but also information regarding the likelihood of replication elsewhere, and how this applicant may share what they have learned in order to make that possible.