# Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)
# Frequently Asked Questions

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The Ohio Department of Education (the Department) Stronger Connections Grant Frequently Asked Questions document is intended to answer questions regarding the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program. The Department referred to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) Stronger Connections Grant Frequently Asked Questions to inform the answers provided in this document and will edit as new information becomes available. For questions related to the Stronger Connections Grant, please contact strongerconnections@education.ohio.gov.

**What is the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)?**
On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), which provides $1 billion in funding to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) to be distributed under Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The BSCA specifies that SEAs must make competitive subgrants to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), as determined by the SEA, for activities to support safe and healthy students under section 4108 of the ESEA.

**How much funding did Ohio receive through the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated July 7, 2023)**
On Sept. 15, 2022, Ohio received a Stronger Connections Grant award of $35,078,494. The Ohio Department of Education is responsible for the administration of the Stronger Connections Grant program. After accounting for allowable reservations for administrative costs and state activities, the Ohio Department of Education has made $33,324,529 available for competitive subgrants to Local Education Agencies.

**How does Stronger Connections relate to the existing Title IV, Part A formula grant program?**
Congress provided funding in the BSCA for the Stronger Connections grant program under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA but established some requirements unique from the typical Title IV, Part A program. Under Stronger Connections, an SEA must make subgrant awards on a competitive basis to high-need LEAs, as determined by the SEA, and funds may be used only for activities authorized under section 4108 of the ESEA. Funds allocated under the program must be administered and tracked separately from an SEA's or LEA's regular Title IV, Part A formula allocation. The requirements of Title IV, Part A also apply to these funds, including but not limited to the supplement, not supplant requirement (ESEA Section 4110); the maintenance of effort requirement (ESEA Section 8521); and the requirement to provide equitable services to private school students and personnel (ESEA Section 8501 et seq.). These FAQs address only the Stronger Connections funds under the BSCA; they do not address the general Title IV, Part A formula grant program.

**What is the period of availability of the Stronger Connections Grant?**
Stronger Connections funds are available for obligation to SEA recipients and LEA subrecipients through Sept. 30, 2026. This period includes the additional 1-year period of fund availability provided under section 421(b) of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (the "Tydings Amendment").

**Is the Stronger Connections Grant a formula or competitive grant?**
The Stronger Connections Grant is a competitive grant. The SEA, in this case the Department, must develop a Stronger Connections Grant subgrants competition. The competition must seek applications from high-need LEAs to use funds for activities under section 4108 of the ESEA. However, an SEA may design its Stronger Connections LEA subgrant competition in a manner that prioritizes a certain scope of LEA activities within the breadth of one or more specific allowable activities.

**Did the Department consult with Ohio's education community regarding development of the Stronger Connections Grant application process?**
Yes. On Oct. 28, 2022, the Department directly contacted Local Education Agency superintendents, treasurers, federal programs contacts and nonpublic school principals via the CCIP e-grants system to inform them about the Stronger Connections Grant. On Nov. 28, 2022, the Department contacted this same group to provide a proposed high-need definition and competitive application process. Along with this information, stakeholders were given an e-mail address for questions and comments and an invitation to a virtual meeting to provide feedback. The Department also published a call for feedback in the Dec. 5, 2022, edition of the Department's newsletter, EdConnection, which is distributed to a general audience of more than 63,000 subscribers. The article provided information about the grant, links to detailed information about the Department's proposed process and an additional call for feedback either via the SCG e-mail address or the virtual meeting. The Department also worked directly with the Governor's office and partners in the departments of Health, Public Safety, Mental Health and Addiction Services and others in the development of a high-need definition.

**What is Ohio's definition of a High-Need LEA?**
Ohio defines a high-need Local Education Agency (LEA) as an LEA with high rates of poverty, chronically absent students and exclusionary discipline. Ohio also considers important school health and safety indicators to determine an LEA's need, including nonpublic school need, family engagement and commitment to evidence-based health and safety practices.

**What was the Department application process for the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)? (Updated July 7, 2023)**
The Department made a competitive grant application available to eligible Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Ohio within the Department's Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) e-grants system. The Department pre-scored eligible LEAs for Tier 1 and Tier 2 funding based on available poverty, exclusionary discipline and chronic absenteeism data. The Department provided a base amount to all LEA applicants using the existing data. LEAs had to complete the Stronger Connections Grant application to receive an award. LEAs that

did not apply for the Stronger Connections Grant had their base amount removed from the Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) system. The Department provided an additional Tier 3 funding amount to the LEAs that demonstrated the highest need in their SCG application. The chart below shows the tiers of funding that an LEA may have received in the Stronger Connections Grant:

| Priority Tier: | Portion of Ohio's Award: | LEA Recipients: | Description: |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. High Need | 50 percent or $16,662,264 | All eligible LEAs that apply and indicate high health and safety needs. | The Department used Title IV, Part A poverty data to ensure that eligible LEAs that applied received a proportional base amount of funds based on the rate of poverty in the LEA. |
| 2. Higher Need | 25 percent or $8,331,132 | Eligible LEAs with high rates of exclusionary discipline and chronic absenteeism. | The Department used chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline data reported by the LEA in the Electronic Management Information System (EMIS). LEAs in the top 75 percent of total eligible LEAs for a composite of chronic absenteeism rate and exclusionary discipline incidents per 100 students received a weighted amount of Tier 2 funds, controlled for student enrollment. |
| 3. Highest Need | 25 percent or $8,331,132 | Eligible LEAs that demonstrated an exceptional need on the SCG application. | Eligible LEAs that completed the SCG application and have the highest need received additional funds. Additional details can be found below. |

**Which LEAs were eligible for the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated July 7, 2023)**
Traditional public districts, community schools and STEM schools that received a Title IV, Part A award in State Fiscal Year 2023 were eligible to complete the Stronger Connections Grant application. There may be some LEAs that recently came into existence for which the Department did not have sufficient poverty, exclusionary discipline or chronic absenteeism data to competitively score the application and therefore did not receive a Stronger Connections Grant application. Overall, 924 LEAs were eligible in Ohio, which represents over 95 percent of existing LEAs.

**When did Ohio's Stronger Connections Grant application open and close? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

The Stronger Connections Grant application opened on March 1, 2023, and closed on April 1, 2023. Eligible LEAs had to complete the Stronger Connections Grant competitive application to receive an award.

**When did Stronger Connections Grant funds become available for grant recipients? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

For eligible LEAs that submit a completed application in the CCIP within the application window, the substantially approved date for awarded Tier 1 and Tier 2 funds is April 1, 2023. Once the original application is final approved by Department staff, the LEA can submit Project Cash Requests for allowable expenditures on the approved application that occur on or after April 1, 2023. If an LEA was awarded Tier 3 funds, a revised application must be completed in the CCIP to budget the additional funds. The substantially approved date for Tier 3 funds is the date the application revision is submitted in Authorized Representative Approved status.

**How did an LEA apply for the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

The Stronger Connections Grant Application was open from March 1 to April 1, 2023. Eligible LEAs could find the Stronger Connections Grant application in the CCIP, **Fiscal Year 2024**, under the Competitive Funding Application section:

| Competitive Funding Application | Revision | Status | Status Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21st Century | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| ARP Homeless Targeted Support Grant | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Agriculture Education 5th Quarter | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Equity for Each Grant | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Equity for Each Jan 2022 | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| FAFSA Completion Program Grant | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Innovative Workforce Incentive Program Grant 2 | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Reaching All Students | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |
| Stronger Connections Grant | 0 | Not Started | 1/23/2023 |
| Transportation Collaboration Grant FY23 | 0 | Not Started | 2/2/2023 |

The Department loaded a base amount for Tiers 1 and 2 for all eligible LEAs within the Stronger Connections Grant Application Allocation page. An LEA needed to complete the Stronger Connections Grant application in the application window to receive a Stronger Connections Grant award. LEAs that did not apply in the application window had the Tier 1 and Tier 2 base amounts removed from the Stronger Connections Grant Allocation page and reallocated to LEAs that demonstrate the highest need on their competitive application as a part of Tier 3. The Department reviewed applications in the CCIP and approved the base award amount for LEAs that applied. Then, the Department competitively scored the LEAs that indicated an additional need beyond the base award amount. The LEAs that received the highest score on their Competitive Application received Tier 3 funds on the "Reallocated" line on the CCIP Allocations page and need to complete a revision to budget these additional funds.

**How did the Department determine the LEAs with the highest need in Tier 3? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

LEAs that completed the Stronger Connections Grant application and indicated an additional health and safety need beyond the base amount were scored to determine which of these LEAs had the highest need. The Department used the following scoring factors from the Stronger Connections Grant application:

| Scoring Factor from SCG Application[1] | Possible Score |
|---|---|
| **Consultation and Stakeholder Involvement** | **15** |
| LEA involved a broad group of internal and external stakeholders in assessing health and safety needs and implementing evidence-based approaches. | 10 |
| LEA consulted with **all** nonpublic schools in the LEA attendance area to assess health and safety needs, or the LEA does not have nonpublic schools. | 5 |
| **Partnerships** | **5** |
| LEA is working with community partners for the implementation of Stronger Connections Grant programs. | 5 |
| **Implementation** | **20** |
| LEA team will implement comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student's social, emotional, physical and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services. | 5 |
| LEA will implement policies and practices with SCG funds that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential. | 5 |
| LEA team will implement identified health and safety strategies and include team members from internal or external stakeholder groups in the implementation. | 10 |
| **Total:** | **40** |

**How did the Department determine the additional allocation amount in Tier 3 for LEAs with the highest need? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

LEAs that met the Department's quality cut score of 34 or greater were awarded Tier 3 funding. In general, the Department was able to meet the specific Tier 3 requests of LEAs with a score of 34 or higher. The Department first met the $50,000 recommended amount for these LEAs. If an LEA requested more than the recommended amount of $50,000, the Department met these requests in descending order from a cut score of 40 to the minimum quality cut score of 34. LEAs that scored less than the quality cut score of 34 did not receive Tier 3 funding. However, it is important to note that all LEAs that applied during the application window received an award of at least the Tier 1 and Tier 2 base amount.

[1] The scoring factors align with the U.S. Department of Education Letter on the Stronger Connections Grant, published Sep. 15, 2022.

**What happened if an LEA did not apply for the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated July 7, 2023)**
LEAs that did not apply in the application window had the Tier 1 and Tier 2 base amounts removed from the Stronger Connections Grant Allocation page and reallocated to LEAs that demonstrated the highest need on their competitive application as a part of Tier 3.

**Are equitable services required under the Stronger Connections Grant?**
Yes. Because this funding was provided through Title IV, Part A, each LEA receiving a Stronger Connections subgrant must, after timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials, provide eligible private school students and educators services and other benefits that are equitable in comparison to services and other benefits provided with Stronger Connections funds to public school students and educators (ESEA section 8501(a)(1), (3)(A)).

**What is the process for SCG LEA subrecipients to provide equitable services?**
An eligible LEA applying for a Stronger Connections subgrant must consult with appropriate private school officials before the entity makes any decision that affects the opportunities of eligible private school children and educators to participate (ESEA section 8501(c)(3)). Such consultation might include a brief survey of non-public schools or other information gathering to indicate the schools' interest in participating and the population to be served. Such consultation will allow the LEA to consider the needs of all students and educators—both public and private—in developing its application and to consider the projected costs for equitable services in the application. If an LEA is successful in receiving a Stronger Connections subgrant, it must continue to consult with interested private school officials on the specific services the LEA will provide students and educators, consistent with the LEA's approved application.

**How should local education agencies provide equitable services under Ohio's Stronger Connections grant process? (Updated April 5, 2023)**
The ESEA requires the LEA to ensure that its expenditures for equitable services for eligible private school children and educators under covered ESEA programs are equal on a per-pupil basis to the expenditures for participating public school children and educators, taking into account the number and educational needs of the eligible private school children and educators. (ESEA section 8501(a)(4); 34 C.F.R. § 299.7(a)). As a convenience for our Local Education Agencies, the Department has preloaded equitable service amounts for nonpublic schools that are currently participating in Title IVA in the FY23 Consolidated application. However, the LEA must still consult with all nonpublic schools within the attendance area to determine if the schools have health and safety needs and want to participate in the Stronger Connections Grant. There could be instances in which a nonpublic school has an identified service amount but indicates during consultation that it does not wish to participate in the Stronger Connections Grant. In these instances, the LEA should recalculate equitable services in accordance with ESEA Section 8501 and should update the Nonpublic purpose code of the Stronger Connections Grant Budget with the updated total equitable service amount. Similarly, if a nonpublic school does not have a preloaded Stronger Connections equitable

service amount but wants to participate in Stronger Connections Grant, the LEA must calculate the equitable service amount in accordance with ESEA Section 8501 and update the Nonpublic purpose code of the Stronger Connections Grant Budget to reflect the updated total equitable service amount. Pooling of nonpublic equitable services is allowed under Title IV-A, and the district may want to consider pooling as an option to provide Stronger Connections Grant equitable services. It is also important to note that equitable services must be secular and non-ideological and may not lead to permanent improvements of the school.

**Do Stronger Connections Grant funds need to supplement, not supplant state and local funding?**

Yes. The requirements of Title IV, Part A also apply to these funds, including but not limited to the supplement, not supplant requirement (ESEA section 4110) and the maintenance of effort requirement (ESEA section 8521).

**Which stakeholders should be involved with the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated July 7, 2023)**

Districts and schools should provide a team approach to offer ongoing and meaningful opportunities for educators, staff, students and families to be involved in the development of the LEA application and throughout the planning and implementation stages. The team should:

- Meet regularly;
- Include representation from district or school Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and behavioral threat assessment or behavioral health and wellness teams;
- Include representation from partners such as county and local agencies, prevention coalitions, Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Boards, Educational Services Centers (ESCs), state support teams, regional safety liaisons, local health departments, Family and Children First Councils, job and family services, juvenile court, the district liaison or educator supporting students involved in the justice system, homeless liaisons and local law enforcement;
- Consider using the Ohio School Wellness Initiative to explore, implement and sustain processes, supports and resources on a full continuum of care; and
- Consider using the Families and Caregivers as Partners in School Emergency Management resource for tools to engage, communicate and collaborate with students and families when identifying health and safety needs.

**How can the LEA conduct a thorough needs assessment for health and safety? (Updated Mar. 13, 2023)**

LEAs should ensure that the health and safety needs in the Stronger Connections Grant application align with the needs assessment and planning process conducted through the Education Department's System of Tiered E-Plans and Supports (EDSTEPS) One Needs Assessment and One Plan process, specifically the school climate and supports section. As a part of the Stronger Connections Grant competitive application process, the LEA should conduct a thorough needs assessment and express health and safety needs in their One Plan.

To conduct a thorough needs assessment, district and school teams should examine relevant data to understand the most pressing needs of students, schools and educators. The team should:

- Utilize the Ohio Comprehensive School Safety Framework to help determine needs.
- Use available data to inform decision making. This may include data from the district and school's PBIS Team, discipline data, academic and attendance data, data from a school counselor, behavioral health and wellness coordinator, school nurse or school resource officer, data collected through surveys like the Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (OHYES!), other district and school climate data, information collected by a local or county provider agency or student and family stories;
- Identify school health and safety needs and root causes for students and staff through tools such as the K-12 Prevention Education Initiative Self-Assessment;
- Include PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) and Scale Up action plan to identify implementation of the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports to assess the extent to which core features are in place.
- Facilitate focus groups and interviews with school administrators, teachers, school staff, students and parents to ask for their input about school health and safety needs;
- Disaggregate data to identify how subgroups (age, gender, race, ethnicity and grade band) experience school differently;
- Map existing school programs, practices or initiatives to identify gaps in programming and practices to meet student and staff safety and well-being needs; and
- Reference the U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments for additional information on identifying local needs.

**How can the LEA select evidence-based interventions?**

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act established a Federal Clearinghouse on School Safety and Evidence-based Practices. The Clearinghouse, SchoolSafety.gov, provides LEAs with actionable recommendations to create a safe and supportive learning environment where students can thrive and grow.

District and school teams, along with their partners, should select evidence-based interventions that address identified needs and have the capacity to be implemented after local needs have been identified. The team should:

- Use reputable resources that include evidence-based interventions and effective programs, such as: SchoolSafety.gov, What Works Clearinghouse, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Evidence Based Practice Resource Center, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Finding Evidence-based Programs and Practice and Ohio's Evidence-Based Clearing House;
- Select interventions that effectively address the priority risk and protective factor and are a good fit for the school community;

- Select and implement interventions with evidence of effectiveness, fidelity, strong conceptual fit and practical fit;
- Consider implementing activities identified in the U.S. Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions document; and
- Use SAMSHA Guidance for Selecting Best-fit Programs and Practices.

**How should the LEA plan to implement evidence-based interventions?**
The implementation of evidence-based strategies and activities will impact the ultimate success of an intervention and increase student, educator and staff safety and well-being. The team should:

- Engage LEA leaders, students, parents, families and community members;
- Include partners such as partners such as county and local agencies, prevention coalitions, Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Boards, Educational Services Centers (ESCs), regional safety liaisons, local health departments, job and family services, juvenile court, the district liaison or educator supporting students involved in the justice system, homeless liaisons and local law enforcement;
- Implement and align the interventions within the LEA's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework;
- Identify team members that will implement the programs and practices to address identified student health and safety needs;
- Consider program design and the ability to implement effectively;
- Tailor strategies to address the local conditions, lived experiences and needs of the school community;
- Develop an action plan to fund, implement and evaluate SCG evidence-based programs and practices;
- Clearly communicate with students, families and the community;
- Use Ohio's EDSTEPS to document Stronger Connections grant activities;
- Facilitate professional development opportunities for school staff that focus on the dimensions of the evidence-based interventions selected to create a safe and healthy learning environment; and
- Reference the U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments for additional information on implementing an evidence-based program.

**How can the LEA involve community partners as they implement evidence-based interventions?**
The LEA can collaborate with community partners to lay the foundation for staff and student wellness and safety. Community partners can support districts by providing content expertise, data, planning support and human, financial and organizational capital. They may be able to advise LEAs to fill gaps and remove barriers, and they may assist with identifying resources and strategies that align with needs. LEAs and community partners may consider establishing new programs together or expanding existing programs. It is important to note that LEAs must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) when

dealing with student data. LEAs can leverage existing collaborative teams, such as a district leadership team, to engage diverse groups of local stakeholders. LEAs can ensure they are engaging internal and external partners that represent the school's wellness and safety needs by prioritizing and capturing a diverse set of voices.

**What should the LEA do to monitor and evaluate the evidence-based intervention?**
School teams should regularly monitor and evaluate evidence-based interventions to examine how interventions are working with students and staff. The team should:

- Conduct process and outcome evaluations throughout the planning and implementation process with the team;
- Use data collected to determine whether selected programs and practices are having the intended impact with students and staff; and
- Reflect on the outcomes of the strategies implemented, districts and schools must consider continuing, modifying or eliminating practices.

**What are some additional health and safety resources? (Updated January 2, 2024)**
LEAs may consider other resources and information when developing an application and identifying use of SCG funds. Additional resources include:

- The Ohio School Wellness Initiative;
- Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates
- The U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments;
- The Institute of Education Sciences' Regional Education Laboratories Program - Survey Methods for Educators;
- Safer Schools and Best Practices Clearinghouse;
- Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence;
- World Health Organization School-based Violence Prevention;
- Supporting School Wellness Toolkit; and
- Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans.

**What are the allowable activities that LEAs can fund with the Stronger Connections Grant?**
LEAs must use SCG funds for activities allowable under section 4108 of the ESEA. These allowable activities include:

*Student Physical and Mental Health*
a. Drug and violence prevention
b. Health and safety practices in school or athletic programs
c. School-based health and mental health services
d. Healthy, active lifestyle, nutritional education
e. Physical activities
f. Trauma-informed classroom management
g. Preventing use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco, electronic cigarettes
h. Chronic disease management

i. Professional development and training for school staff on student physical and mental health
j. Other training or activity that fosters safety, health and related training for school staff

*Safe and Supportive Schools*
k. Preventing bullying and harassment
l. Relationship-building skills
m. School dropout prevention
n. Re-entry programs and transition services for justice-involved youth
o. Establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports.
p. Child sexual abuse awareness and prevention
q. Reducing use of exclusionary discipline practices and promoting supportive school discipline
r. Suicide prevention
s. Violence prevention, crisis management and conflict resolution
t. Preventing human trafficking
u. Building school and community relationships
v. Culturally responsive teaching and professional development of implicit bias
w. Professional development and training for school staff on safe and supportive schools
x. Other programs or activities that foster safe, healthy, supportive and drug-free school environments including direct student services and professional development and training for school staff

*Cross Cutting Authorized Activities*
y. Mentoring and school counseling
z. Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions
aa. Pay-for-Success initiatives aligned with the purposes of Title IV

LEAs can also reference the Safe and Healthy Students sections of the Non-Regulatory Guidance for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants for additional information and resources related to these allowable uses.

**Are there any activities that are prohibited and cannot be funded with the Stronger Connections Grant? (Updated January 2, 2024)**
Yes. Any activity or program that would require construction is prohibited. Construction means "(A) the preparation of drawings and specifications for school facilities; (B) erecting, building, acquiring, altering, remodeling, repairing, or extending school facilities; (C) inspecting and supervising the construction of school facilities; and (D) debt service for such activities" (20 U.S.C. § 7713(3)). In addition, LEAs cannot use funds for the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under Section 13401 of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which amends Section 8526 of the ESEA. Furthermore, LEAs must ensure that the activity in not one of the prohibited

activities described in ESEA Section 4001(b) or Section 8526 as amended by the ESSA. These sections contain prohibitions against the use of funds for certain medical, drug treatment and rehabilitation services. In addition, funds generally cannot be used for transportation, unless otherwise authorized under ESEA (i.e. if there is specific cost that the Department determines to be meeting the purpose of the grant, allowable, reasonable, and necessary). Per section SEC. 8526. [20 U.S.C. 7906] PROHIBITED USES OF FUNDS under Title IV, Part A - Transportation is a prohibited use of funds.

**What monitoring and reporting will be required for the Stronger Connections Grant?**
The Stronger Connections Grant is a federal award that will require similar methods of reporting as the Title IV-A program. Like the Title IV-A program, the Stronger Connections Grant will use Fund Code 584. LEAs must track SCG funds separately from the regular Title IV, Part A allocation using a special cost center, job code or similar identifier. Funds should also be tracked by state fiscal year. Although the SCG covers multiple years, a Final Expenditure Report will be required at the end of each state fiscal year. In addition, as required with all federally funded activities, there is an expectation that the LEA will monitor the funded programs for effectiveness. As a condition of receiving SCG funds, LEAs will participate, as requested, in any Department monitoring or evaluation of the SCG program and will cooperate with any audit of examination of records with respect to such funds. LEAs should keep records to document all parts of their competitive application which includes consultation with stakeholders, identified needs and the integration of SCG programs into their One Plan. Documentation should also include evidence of the programs provided with SCG funds and the evaluation of their effectiveness.

**Do the uniform grant requirements apply to the Stronger Connections Grant?**
Yes. The Stronger Connections Grant is a Title IV-A program, and the requirements for subrecipients of federal awards apply to this grant. Please see the Department's Grants Manual for more information on the Uniform Grant Guidance and other applicable requirements.

**Were there trainings for LEAs on the Stronger Connections Grant application process and best practices? (Updated July 7, 2023)**
Yes. The Ohio Department of Education hosted a Stronger Connections Grant webinar on Feb. 22 at 11:00 a.m. and as a repeat session on Feb. 23 at 3:00 p.m. The webinar covered the Stronger Connections Grant requirements, the application process, practices for identifying health and safety needs, evidence-based approaches and additional requirements of the Stronger Connections Grant. The Department recorded these webinar sessions and posted them on the Department's Stronger Connections Grant website. In addition, the Department hosted a Stronger Connections Grant session at the Ohio Association of Administrators of State and Federal Programs (OAASFEP) Spring 2023 Conference. The Department will continue to provide technical assistance trainings and support throughout the Stronger Connections Grant period of availability.

**Will LEAs be required to complete a Final Expenditure Report (FER) for each state fiscal year during the Stronger Connections grant period of availability? (Updated July 23, 2024)**
No. LEAs will not complete an FER for FY24 or FY25, only one final FER at the end of FY26 that will cover all three years of expenditures. As it says in CCIP Note 552, Stronger Connections will remain in FY24 within the CCIP. If a LEA has expended all funds prior to FY26, the LEA still must wait until FY26 to complete the FER. If there are extenuating circumstances in which an LEA has completed all its SCG expenditures and feels it must complete an FER at an earlier date due to internal procedures or audit concerns, please reach out to your Stronger Connections Program Specialist from the CCIP Address Book.

**Will our LEA submit need to submit Project Cash Requests (PCRs) in each state fiscal year during the Stronger Connections Grant period of availability? (Updated July 23, 2024)**
No. The LEA will continue to submit PCRs in FY24. The LEA should be sure to select FY24 in the dropdown menu within the PCR page of the CCIP to submit PCRs for the Stronger Connections Grant.

**Can LEAs maintain one Special Cost Center for all three years of the grant, or should we create a new cost center for each state fiscal year? (Updated July 23, 2024)**
The LEA sets its own procedures for its accounting, but the Department recommends that the LEA assign a special cost by state fiscal year, in case the LEA is required to report on the expenditures that occurred within a state fiscal year.

**SCG allows districts to charge an approved indirect cost rate to the award. Please explain how this will work for each fiscal year, since the grant will remain in FY24. (Updated July 23, 2024)**
Grants Management will provide guidance to grantees on how they should account for indirect costs. Please reach out to your Grants Management Specialist from the CCIP Address Book if you plan to charge indirect costs to the Stronger Connections Grant.

**If you have questions regarding the Stronger Connections Grant, please contact strongerconnections@education.ohio.gov.**