

Request for Proposals

Improving Teacher Quality:
State Grants Program

(Federal Public Law 107-110)

2015-2016 Guidelines



Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Eligible Projects	2
Priorities for 2015-2016	3
Project Requirements	3
Criteria for the Evaluation of Proposals	4
Submission and Review Procedures	6
Budget Guidelines	7
Format for the Proposal	8

APPENDICES

1. Excerpts from Federal Statutes Governing Higher Education Partnership Grants
2. LEAs Meeting Federal Definition of High Need
3. Proposal Cover Sheet
4. Budget Summary Forms
5. Statement of Assurances
6. Sample Non-public School Consultation Statement
7. Checklist
8. Use of Federal Funds for Conferences and Meetings
9. Additional US Department of Education Guidelines for Subgrantees

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS – 2015-2016

IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY STATE GRANTS

(authorized under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,
Title II: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The purpose of this program is to increase student academic achievement by helping to ensure that highly qualified teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals have access to sustained and intensive high quality professional development in core academic subjects. The program provides grants to partnerships comprised of Nebraska institutions of higher education and high-need local educational agencies for projects to improve the skills of teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals.

B. Amount of Funds

The Coordinating Commission expects to have approximately \$274,000 to award in grants during the 2015-2016 competition. Although no minimum or maximum has been set for each award, funding typically ranges from \$40,000 to \$70,000.

C. Eligible Applicants

All public and non-profit private institutions of higher education and high-need local educational agencies based in Nebraska may form a partnership and apply for grants. See section IV. for partnership requirements.

D. Calendar

Deadline for Submission of Proposals	November 12, 2015
Project Starting Date	February 1, 2016 or later
Project Ending Date	August 15, 2017 or earlier
Deadline for Final Project Report	90 days after completion of project or August 15, 2017, whichever is earlier

E. Project Duration

The duration of projects may be one to two years. Funds for activities beyond the term of the initial grant are not guaranteed.

II. ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Federal statutes specify that the Commission may make grants to **eligible partnerships** for the following types of activities (see Appendix 1 for relevant portions of legislation, including definitions):

A. Professional Development activities related to **content knowledge** in core academic subjects, including the use of computer related technology. Core academic subjects are English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. Activities can

1. Ensure that teachers and highly qualified paraprofessionals, and, if appropriate, principals, have subject matter knowledge in the academic subjects that teachers teach, or
2. Ensure that principals have the instructional leadership skills that will help the principal work effectively with teachers to help students master core academic subjects.

B. Professional Development activities related to **state academic content and student academic achievement standards and state assessments**. Activities can

1. Ensure that teachers, highly qualified paraprofessionals, and principals are able to use the standards and assessments to improve instructional practices and improve academic achievement, or
2. Intensively prepare an individual who will return to the school to provide instruction related to the professional development in B.1.

C. Professional Development activities related to **improving teaching and learning at low-performing schools** (see 2013-2014 state of the schools report – Federal accountability, PLAS <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov> for schools identified by the Nebraska Department of Education as low-performing). Providing assistance to local education agencies, and the teachers and staff of each agency, for sustained, high-quality professional development activities.

III. PRIORITIES FOR 2015-2016

The Commission invites eligible applicants to submit any proposals consistent with the purpose of this program and the federal statutes. However, the Commission is most interested in projects that address one of the following (order does not indicate priority):

- A. Providing professional development for teachers teaching in K-12 academic shortage areas, especially those who do not currently hold an endorsement in the subject area in which they are teaching. The shortage areas for the 2015-2016 academic year that are applicable to this grant are: world languages, sciences, math, language arts, music, and art. This priority also includes special education teachers who are required to teach content, but are not endorsed in the content area.

- B. Projects that are new, creative, or innovative and, ideally, not previously or recently funded through this grant.

- C. Improving teaching and learning at low-performing schools. (A low-performing school is not necessarily the same as a high-need LEA. Both would be required for this priority.)

IV. PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements apply to all proposals. **Proposals that do not meet these requirements will be disqualified.**

A. Partnership Eligibility

Federal regulations for this program require that funds be awarded only to partnerships that consist of:

1. an institution of higher education and the division of the institution that prepares teachers and principals,
2. a school of arts and sciences, and
3. a high-need local educational agency (See Appendix 2 for the Title II. definition of high-need LEA and a list of Nebraska LEAs that meet this definition. **This list is revised annually.**)

In addition to the required three partners, partnerships may also include one or more of the

following: other local educational agencies (including those that are not classified as high-need), elementary or secondary schools, educational service agencies, nonprofit educational organizations, other institutions of higher education, nonprofit cultural organizations, entities carrying out pre-kindergarten programs, teacher organizations, principal organizations, or businesses.

B. Partnership Documentation

1. The proposal will clearly identify in the narrative the role of each partner.
2. The budget will specify the total amount requested and the amount of funds that each partner will **use**. No single partner can use more than 50% of the total grant amount.
3. Each partner will sign the cover page of the proposal, thereby agreeing to its role as identified in the narrative.
4. The partnership will identify one of the partners to act as fiscal agent.
5. The fiscal agent will sign the Statement of Assurances representing all partners.

C. Coordination

An eligible partnership that receives a grant under the Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund and a grant under section 203 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 shall coordinate the activities of the two grants.

D. Equitable Service for Private School Students and Teachers

Partners must provide the *opportunity* for private school teachers to participate in the professional development activity equivalent to the opportunity provided public school teachers involved in the activities. If a private school is not identified as one of the partners, the proposal will provide a statement indicating that any private school in the geographic area served by the LEA/s involved was consulted and invited to participate (see Appendix 6 for sample).

V. CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSALS

The following criteria will be used in the evaluation of proposals.

A. Demonstrated Need—in addition to basic eligibility of high-need LEA (20 points)

- The proposal clearly describes the need(s) addressed by the project and explains why those needs are important to the improvement of K-12 education in Nebraska.
- A brief description of the research base underpinning the project is provided.

- Consideration is given to the priorities listed in section III above.
- Special consideration is given to priority B. listed in section III above (6 of the 20 points for this section).

B. Plan of Action (20 points)

- The objectives are clearly defined.
- The project activities are clearly and fully described, including the role of each partner, and are related to the successful achievement of the objectives.
- The timetable for the project activities is reasonable and appropriate.
- The plan for recruitment and selection of participants is well developed.
- A plan is in place for state-wide dissemination of results of the project.

C. Applicant's Commitment and Capacity (5 points)

- The key personnel are well qualified to conduct the project. If any of the key personnel has been the project director for a professional development activity previously funded under this program or the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, proposals may include this information; past performance will be considered.
- The equipment, facilities, and other resources required by the project are available.
- The extent of financial support from the partners will also be considered.

D. Budget and Cost Effectiveness (20 points)

- The proposed expenditures are directly related to the objectives and activities of the project. While indirect costs can be included, the degree to which a partnership is willing to reduce the indirect costs charged to the grant will be considered.
- The proposed budget is cost effective as measured by cost per participant and/or the potential impact of the project on the improvement of instruction.
- The proposal includes a detailed explanation for each budget line.
- The proposal includes a break-down of the funds to be used by each partner.

E. Long-Term Impact (25 points)

- The project is of high quality and of sufficient duration and intensity to promote a lasting effect on the improvement of teacher performance and student learning.
- The project will have a long-term impact on other regions or projects in that it could be replicated by other organizations or to serve other populations.
- The project may be scalable, in that the size of the project could be changed to serve the needs of different groups.

- The proposal includes a plan to sustain the project in the future. This does not preclude partnerships from submitting proposals for continuation of previously funded projects. Rather, it encourages partnerships to find a mechanism for long-term support of the project from funding sources other than this grant.

F. Evaluation Plan (10 points)—an external evaluator is encouraged, but not required

- The proposed evaluation plan is related to the objectives.
- The plan is rigorous, comprehensive, and effective.
- The plan includes means to assess increases in teachers' content knowledge.

G. Other Considerations—other characteristics of proposals may be considered in making awards

Among them may be:

- The number of partnerships which receive awards;
- The geographic distribution of the partnerships;
- Other appropriate considerations.

VI. SUBMISSION AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

A. Submission

Applicants must submit the unbound original and eight unbound, three-hole punched copies of the proposal to:

Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education
 Attention: Dr. Kathleen Fimple
 140 N. 8th Street, Suite 300
 P.O. Box 95005
 Lincoln, NE 68509-5005

Proposals must be delivered to the Commission office no later than 5:00 p.m., November 12, 2015, or postmarked no later than November 12, 2015. Proposals that are below the minimum criteria, late, incomplete, or submitted by ineligible partnerships will be disqualified.

B. Review and Award Procedures

The Commission will convene an independent evaluation panel to review the proposals and rank them in order of merit. Panelists shall be free of any direct involvement in any proposal.

The panel may include K-12 teachers or administrators, college or university faculty, staff of the Nebraska Department of Education, representatives of the private sector, and those conversant on work force demands and the needs of the employer community.

The recommendations of the panel may be contingent upon the acceptance by the project director of certain changes in the project or the budget. The recommendations of the panel, along with Commission staff comments or suggestions, will be submitted to the Commission for consideration at its first meeting in 2016.

Grant awards will be made by the Commission. All applicants will be notified in writing of the decisions of the Commission. Non-funded applicants may request information from the Commission staff regarding the concerns of the evaluation panel about the proposal.

VII. BUDGET GUIDELINES

Items to consider when preparing budgets include:

1. Partnerships are encouraged, but not required, to provide some matching funds to support the project. If administrative regulations prohibit a project director from assigning dollar figures to the match, the director may note the categories on the budget form where match is anticipated (using a footnote, "in-kind", or other indicator).
2. Funds may be requested for indirect costs, but partnerships are encouraged to limit the amount charged to the grant (see Section V. D.)
3. Funds are intended to support action projects and may not be used for faculty research.
4. If the project is dependent on funds from other sources, all other sources must be identified and the amount expected from each must be reported on the budget form. Evidence of the commitment of those funds must also be provided.
5. If grant funds are used to pay instructional costs, the institution of higher education may not charge the participants for tuition.
6. The grant should award funds to either the teacher or the school for the teacher's participation in a professional development activity, but not both. For example, if the activity

takes place on a teacher contract day, the grant could reimburse the school for the cost of a substitute. The teacher would not receive a stipend because she/he is already receiving pay from the school for that day. If the activity is on a non-contract day, the teacher would receive a stipend. The project director should determine the policy for the school/s involved since policies for substitutes and teacher time out of the classroom vary.

7. Stipends for participants should fall within current, acceptable stipend ranges. Amounts should be based on required participant activity and not on other considerations such as time lost from summer employment, child care costs, or tuition for any college credit that may be offered.

8. Grant funds cannot be used to pay for food for attendees at a conference or meeting unless doing so is necessary to accomplish legitimate meeting or conference business (see Appendix 8 for U.S. Department of Education memorandum).

VIII. FORMAT FOR THE PROPOSAL

All proposals must include the following:

1. Application cover sheet, signed by all partners. (see Appendix 3 for sample)
2. Abstract of approximately 250 words.
3. Narrative, with numbered pages, that does not exceed ten pages double spaced with one inch margins in font size of 11 or larger and that has clearly identified subsections corresponding to each of the evaluation criteria in Section V. A-G. The narrative should spell out all acronyms the first time they are used.
4. Budget and budget narrative. (see Appendix 4 for budget format)
5. Brief resumes of key personnel. Emphasize experience and skills directly relevant to the proposed project. (two pages per person maximum)
6. Statement of assurances from the fiscal agent. (see Appendix 5)
7. *If there are no private schools or teachers involved in the activity*, a statement that any

private school/s in the same geographic area as that served by the partner LEA/s were consulted and invited to participate. (See Appendix 6 for a sample private school participation statement.)

SPECIAL NOTE

Please see Appendix 9 for additional information from the U.S. Department of Education.