



Montana OPI Title IV Part A, Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) Information and Proposed Application Process

I. Purpose of Grant

The Title IV Part A (T4PA) **Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)** focuses on improving conditions for student learning by encouraging schools to implement a comprehensive plan incorporating evidence-based activities, programs, and practices to create safer and healthier learning environments which promote positive school climates as outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Section 4108.

II. Funding

The Title IV Part A (T4PA) **Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)** must be used to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs within “high need” local educational agencies (LEAs). See eligibility criteria for “high need” designation. Grant activities may be fully or partially funded by these funds. Please note that these competitive grants will carry the same supplement, not supplant and equitable share requirements as the formula Title IV-A grants. Several factors will determine the size of the awards (with a minimum allocation of \$10,000 per LEA); review of submitted applications, potential scope of the project, projected cost for implementation, available funds, and applications that demonstrate a strong commitment to providing the greatest promise for positive impact.

III. Grant Period

The grant will be a two-year award for activities during the 2023-24 and SY 2024-25 school years. Funds are anticipated to be available July 2023 and will need to be expended by September 30, 2025. As with any Federal Funds, they are intended to be expended during the grant period.

IV. Eligibility

The **Stronger Connections Grant (SCG)** funds will be awarded to “high need” LEAs through a competitive grant process and must align and fund activities allowable under section 4108 of the ESEA. The Montana OPI proposes the following criteria for defining “high need” based on ED Guidance:

- LEAs with high rates of poverty (40 % or more) AND
- One or more of the following characteristics:
 - (1) a high student-to-mental health professional ratio;
 - (2) high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or
 - (3) where students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.

V. Application Requirements

[FROM THE DEAR COLLEAGUE LETTER](#): U.S. Department of Education Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program is encouraging States to prioritize funds for LEA applicants that demonstrate a strong commitment to the following:

- Implementing 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.
- Engaging students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.
- Designing and implementing policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

VI. Tentative Timeline

The application must be completed and submitted in Egrants. Due to the competitive nature of this grant, the deadline for applications will not be extended.

- Grant application open: *Projected March 2023*
- Application Deadline: *Projected May 2023*
- Grant Recipients Announced and Awarded: *Projected July 1, 2023*

VIII. Fiscal Requirements for Grantees

- SCG funds must be tracked separately from an LEAs regular allocation under Title IV, Part A.
- Federal law requires the monitoring of Federal Title IV-A programs to ensure compliance with programmatic and fiscal regulations.

IX. Equitable Services

- Equitable services will be provided to private school students in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Title IV, Part A formula grant process. LEAs must provide evidence in their SCG application of meaningful consultation with private school partners to determine what equitable services will look like.