



## Montana OPI Title IV Part A, Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) 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 IVA 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 1, 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.

### 1. Grant Narrative (70 Points)

The narrative section of the application shall not exceed 1500 words. Each narrative must contain the following components:

- I. **a. Project Description (20 points)** Based on your data and current needs, describe how grant funds will align and be used to implement and support a comprehensive plan incorporating 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 interventions and services.
- b. Goals/Objectives/Outcomes and Timeline (20 points)** Provide a clear description that specifies goals, objectives, and desired outcomes, and a timeline for the proposed project(s), as well as specific indicators of project benchmarks. The plan and timeline must be developed for the period of **SY23/24 & SY24/25**.
- c. Evidence-based activities, programs, and practices (15 points)** Identify proposed evidence-based\* activities, programs, and practices used to meet the outlined goals. The product, strategy, or practice should be such that it will enable the applicant to reach the level of success proposed in the application. It could also include the use of grant funds to address a particular area that resulted in the school identification of CSI or TSI if applicable. Districts may use programs or strategies that align with all four Tiers of evidence; “strong” (Tier 1), “moderate” (Tier 2), “promising” (Tier 3), and “demonstration of a rationale” (Tier 4); however priority points will be given to the LEA’s who implement programs or strategies with the strongest types of evidence—i.e., “strong” (Tier 1) and “moderate” (Tier 2) evidence under the ESEA and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations.  
  
*\*LEAs must identify the level of evidence aligned with each product, strategy, or practice when possible.*
- d. Data Collection/Evaluation Plan (15 points)** Provide a clear description on how the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes will be monitored and evaluated. The evaluation plan should clearly identify what data will be collected and the frequency of monitoring for implementation effectiveness. The outcome of the evidence-based activities, programs, and practices should have direct impact on students. Identify the specific data used to determine the impact on students.

**Special Note:** To provide the most flexibility to districts while still meeting the supplement vs. supplant rule, we are providing the following guidance to districts. On the application when listing the program, activity, item, or position, you will be asked to identify the model of implementation: **New Implementation** or **Growth and Expansion**.

- II. Stakeholder Engagement (10 points)** Provide a description of how the LEA will implement strategies for all voices to be heard. Identify intended strategies for communications with and among school(s) and other stakeholders. Families and communities should know how their feedback was incorporated into final decisions to build and sustain trust. This engagement should begin early in the decision-making process and be ongoing and collaborative. This type of engagement should help facilitate selections of strategies based on a community's values and designed for systemic change that can build long-term buy-in and capacity at the local level.
- III. Budget and Budget Justification (10 Points)**  
Include a cost-effective budget and justification to determine allowability for line items that reflect the goals and priorities of this project. This budget and budget justification must be for **SY23/24 and SY24/25**. Funds should be expended by 9/30/2025. Please note that these competitive grants will carry the same supplement, not supplant and equitable share requirements as the formula Title IVA grants.
- IV. Sustainability (10 Points)**  
Identify actions the LEA will take to continue the program and or activities beyond the life of the grant. Include sufficient resources (human, fiscal, operational, external partnerships, etc.) that support the implementation and sustainability of the evidence-based programs and or activities implemented through this grant.
- V. Bonus Points (up to 5 additional points)**
- **(+1 to +2 Points)** YRBS data related to school safety, mental health, bullying, violence, substance use at a rate higher than the state average.
    - School Safety related (Q#16 High School; Q#11 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
    - Violence related (Q#14, Q#15 and Q#17. Q#18, Q# 19 High School; Q#9, Q#10 and Q#12, Q#13, Q#14 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
    - Suicide related (Qs#s27 through 31 High School; Qs#s 22 through 26 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
    - Mental health related (Q#91 and Q#92 High School; Q#83 and Q#84 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
    - Bullying related (Qs#s 23 through 26 High School; Qs#s 18 through 23 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
    - Substance Use related (Qs#s 32 through 62 High School; Qs#s 27 through 55 Middle School 2021 YRBS)
  - **(+1 Points)** Identified as ESEA Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) or Targeted School Improvement (TSI)
  - **(+1 Point)** High % of students with disabilities (Greater than 10%)
  - **(+1 Point)** High % of students of color (Greater than 5%)

## **VI. Application Submission, Review, Project Award, and 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*

## **VII. Reporting Requirements for Grantees**

Recipients will submit annual progress reports to the OPI in Egrants.

### **School Year 23/24**

- Completion of a School Climate Survey
- End of year Program Report (assigned in Egrants) will include a detailed description of how the project goals were met, as well as any challenges that were encountered. Additionally, the final evaluation will include:
  - Impactful deliverables—data to support planning, implementation, and outcomes by the school—that align directly to the grant’s identified need(s)
  - An explanation of sustainable practices—how partnerships functioned including strengths and challenges, if applicable.
- Updated goals and objectives for the 24/25 SY.

### **School Year 24/25**

- Completion of a School Climate Survey
- End of year Program Report (assigned in Egrants) will include a detailed description of how the project goals were met, as well as any challenges that were encountered. Additionally, the final evaluation will include:
  - Impactful deliverables—data to support planning, implementation, and outcomes by the school—that align directly to the grant’s identified need(s)
  - An explanation of sustainable practices—how partnerships functioned including strengths and challenges, if applicable.

## **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.