

RFP GC23-020 Stronger Connections Grant Program Questions & Answers Summary

1. A quick question on allowable activities for campus physical security and emergency preparedness. On page 21 of the guidance, there is a list of “Allowable Activities” for the program. Under which category would updating mass notification systems, access controls, and other physical plant security features fall? Would they be considered part of Violence Prevention, Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution, or some other category?

The categorization of activities is up to the applicant. Applicants should select the category that best meets the intent and purpose of the selected activity, strategy, or intervention.

2. I am reaching out on behalf of my school district regarding the RFP #GC23-020 - Stronger Connection (SCG) Program application. How are LEAs determining the Total Participating Non-Public School Low-Income Enrollment as of BEDS Day 2022?

The total participating non-public school low-income enrollment should be determined during the timely and meaningful consultation process with non-public schools.

3. On the Calculations of Per Pupil Amount and Maximum Allocation section for the Non-Public School Low-Income Enrollment and Allocation. Do LEAs follow the 'ESSA Non-Public School guidelines' of if the Non-Public School is outside of the district's geographic catchment area, they received only Title I funding and not Title IV funding? If so, when the Non-Public School is outside of the district's catchment area will they be eligible for the SCG funding, or only if they are within the catchment area?

As per Attachment 3A of the RFP, list all nonpublic schools located in your LEA catchment area and whether each will be participating in SCG equitable participation funding for the grant period. Non-public schools located outside of the LEA's geographic catchment area are not eligible for equitable services from that LEA.

4. For the Non-Public School Affirmation and Signature, what documentation will the district use to complete this requirement?

As per page 25 of the RFP, evidence of the appropriate consultation with nonpublic schools is to be included with the submission as Attachment 3A.

5. Would you please provide additional details on the meaningful participation of nonpublic schools?

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials is an essential requirement in the implementation by an LEA of an effective covered ESEA program for eligible private school children and educators. Consultation involves discussions between public and private school officials on key issues that affect the ability of eligible private school children and educators to participate equitably in covered ESEA programs. Successful consultation establishes positive and productive working relationships, makes planning effective, continues throughout implementation of equitable services, and serves to ensure that the services provided meet the needs of eligible private school children and educators. A unilateral offer of services by an LEA with no opportunity for discussion, or the application of a blanket rule, is not adequate consultation. Only after discussing key issues relating to the provision of equitable services may an LEA make its final decisions with respect to those services.

6. Should the nonpublics only be within our district's jurisdiction, or must we also include any nonpublic schools that our students attend out of the district?

Non-public schools located outside of the LEA's geographic catchment area are not eligible for equitable services from that LEA.

7. We have more than 10 nonpublic schools in our district, so each participating nonpublic school will drive up the matching funds required. Which party is responsible for the matching funds for the nonpublic schools - the district applying or the nonpublics?

The Stronger Connections Grant Program does not have a "match" requirement. It has an equitable services requirement. ESEA section 8501 requires an LEA participating in a covered ESEA program, in consultation with appropriate private school officials, to provide eligible private school children and educators with services or other benefits that are equitable to those provided to eligible public school children and educators.

8. Related to the requirement to the statement on page 1 of the RFP, "Each eligible 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))," can you explain/define what is meant by "services and other benefits that are equitable"? And what is the timeframe for providing those services and other benefits?

As per [the USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#): Services that an LEA provides to eligible private school children and educators participating in a covered ESEA program must be equitable in comparison to the services and other benefits provided to public school children and educators. (ESEA section 8501(a)(1); 34 C.F.R. § 299.7(b)(1)). Participation of private school children generally is considered to be equitable if the LEA: (1) addresses and assesses the specific needs and educational progress of public and private school children and educators on a comparable basis; (2) determines the number of private school children and educators to be served on an equitable basis; (3) spends an equal amount of funds, on a per-pupil basis, to serve similar public and private school children and educators, taking into account the number and educational needs of those children and educators; and (4) provides private school children and educators with an opportunity to participate that is equitable to public school children and educators. (34 C.F.R. § 299.7(b)(2)). Generally, if the needs of private school children and educators are different from the needs of public school children and educators, an LEA must provide different services and other benefits. (34 C.F.R. § 299.7(c)).

9. Page 21 of the RFP states, "LEAs must provide eligible nonpublic schools with their proportionate share of services." Please explain/define what is meant by "proportionate share of services."

As per the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#): Services that an LEA provides to eligible private school children and educators participating in a covered ESEA program must be equitable in comparison to the services and other benefits provided to public school children and educators. (ESEA section 8501(a)(1); 34 C.F.R. § 299.7(b)(1)). Participation of private school children generally is considered to be equitable if the LEA: (1) addresses and assesses the specific needs and educational progress of public and private school children and educators on a comparable basis; (2) determines the number of private school children and educators to be served on an equitable basis; (3) spends an equal amount of funds, on a per-pupil basis, to serve similar public and private school children and educators, taking into account the number and educational needs of those children and educators; and (4) provides private school children

and educators with an opportunity to participate that is equitable to public school children and educators. (34 C.F.R. § 299.7(b)(2)). Generally, if the needs of private school children and educators are different from the needs of public school children and educators, an LEA must provide different services and other benefits. (34 C.F.R. § 299.7(c)).

10. Related to the requirement to the statement on page 1 of the RFP, “Each eligible 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)),” can you explain/define what is meant by “timely and meaningful consultation”?

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance, timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials is an essential requirement in the implementation by an LEA of an effective covered ESEA program for eligible private school children and educators. Consultation involves discussions between public and private school officials on key issues that affect the ability of eligible private school children and educators to participate equitably in covered ESEA programs. Successful consultation establishes positive and productive working relationships, makes planning effective, continues throughout implementation of equitable services, and serves to ensure that the services provided meet the needs of eligible private school children and educators. A unilateral offer of services by an LEA with no opportunity for discussion, or the application of a blanket rule, is not adequate consultation. Only after discussing key issues relating to the provision of equitable services may an LEA make its final decisions with respect to those services.

11. Related to the requirement to the statement on page 1 of the RFP, “Each eligible 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)),” who would be considered “appropriate private school officials”?

As per the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#): Consultation begins with contacting appropriate private school officials based on the nature of the program and the entity responsible for providing equitable services. An LEA must contact and begin consultation with school officials representing all private schools located within its boundaries, including independent schools and faith-based schools.

12. Related to the requirement to the statement on page 1 of the RFP, “Each eligible 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)),” if a private school from the list of eligible schools provided in the RFP receives funding, does that private school have to follow a similar procedure and provide equitable services and benefits to the public schools in their regions?

Private schools are not eligible applicants for this RFP. ESEA section 8501 requires an LEA participating in a covered ESEA program, in consultation with appropriate private school officials, to provide eligible private school children and educators with services or other benefits that are equitable to those provided to eligible public school children and educators.

13. Please confirm that applicants are only mailing in hard copies of the FS-10 rather than the full application per instructions on page 2 of the RFP.

As per the RFP: Complete applications must be submitted electronically via the SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System (SEDMON) located within the Business Portal. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 15, 2023.

To access the application, complete the following steps:

1. Go to the Business Portal;
2. Click on the Log In button;
3. Enter your username and password;
4. Click on "SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System" under My Applications;
5. Select "View Surveys for Office of ESSA-Funded Programs";
6. Find the application titled "Stronger Connections Grant Program RFP"; and
7. Click on the "view" to begin/continue to input information.

Please also mail one (1) original and two (2) copies of the FS-10 budget postmarked by September 15, 2023.

**New York State Education Department
Attn: Erica Meaker
Office of ESSA-Funded Programs
320 EB
89 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12234**

14. Page 4 of the RFP mentions that eligible applicants can request up to \$2,000 per low-income student. Does this mean, for example, that a school district with 3,000 students and a 40% economically disadvantaged rate could apply for funding to serve only 40% (1,200) of its students? Or can districts apply for up to \$2,000 for each student enrolled (within the \$200,000 to \$3.6 million limits)?

As per the RFP, eligible applicants can apply for a minimum award amount of \$200,000 per three-year grant period; they can request up to \$2,000 per low-income student, but the maximum three-year award amount is \$3,600,000, except for the New York City Department of Education. (See Attachment 3 for a calculation worksheet to determine the count of low-income students to be used.)

15. What happens if a nonpublic school will not respond to a public school's request for a signature despite earnest attempts by the public school to reach out? Will that public school's SCG application be ineligible for funding?

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance: An LEA may set a reasonable deadline, taking into consideration private school schedules, for private school officials to submit information necessary to provide equitable services. For example, an LEA may set a reasonable deadline for private school officials to indicate their intent to participate or request services and materials. An LEA should provide clear and sufficient notice of the deadline, identify potential consequences for not meeting the deadline, and give adequate time for private school officials to respond.

If a deadline is established in consultation, it would be reasonable for the LEA to inform private school officials that, if the deadline is not met and the private school officials have not notified the LEA of obstacles to meeting the deadline in a timely manner, the LEA may consider the private school officials to have declined services. Generally, however, the ongoing consultation required by the ESEA (see ESEA section 8501(c)(3)) will help prevent this situation from

occurring because consultation throughout the year provides an established forum for private school officials to alert the LEA if there are obstacles to meeting a deadline.

16. For section A2. Comprehensive Needs Assessment, can you provide some guidance on what is acceptable for a comprehensive needs assessment? For example, would a survey of students, staff and families be sufficient?

The response to this section of the RFP is up to the applicant to determine as it is a scored component of the RFP.

17. Please confirm that Attachment 1 is not a required attachment, but can be submitted if the applicant would like to do so.

Attachment 1 is not a required form but can be submitted as part of the response.

18. In section A4, there is mention of a requirement to have local government representatives involved in the design, planning and assessment of the SCG program. Can you define who would be considered local government representatives?

ESEA section 4106(c)(1) indicates local government representatives may include a local law enforcement agency, local juvenile court, local child welfare agency, or local public-housing agency.

19. In section A4, there is mention of a requirement to have non-public schools involved in the design, planning and assessment of the SCG program. If there are no non-public schools within a public school district's boundaries, does this requirement still apply?

If there are no non-public schools located within a public school district's boundaries, the equitable services requirement would not apply.

20. In section A4, there is mention of a requirement to have non-public schools involved in the design, planning and assessment of the SCG program. What if non-public schools refuse to participate?

Non-public schools are not required to participate in the program. The LEA must, in a good faith effort, engage the non-public schools in timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials to determine participation. LEAs should obtain written declinations from all non-public schools who choose not to participate.

21. For section B4, can applicants insert the chart from Attachment 4 to address the questions in this section? Or should the content be in a narrative format instead?

The response to this section of the RFP is up to the applicant to determine as it is a scored component of the RFP. (Note: In the RFP, Attachment 4 (page 74) is described as a template to be used as guidance for creating the Implementation plan/timeline required for Section B, question B3. That should say question B4.)

22. For Attachment 3, what should be included in the column D for administrative costs?

Administrative costs are those that are directly aligned with the administration of the grant.

23. For Attachment 3 and Attachment 3A, can you provide a link to a data site that has information about low-income enrollments at non-public schools, as not all non-public schools are willing to provide this information to public schools.

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance: An LEA is responsible for providing equitable services. Because an LEA may not have all necessary information available to do so, an LEA may need to request assistance from private school officials to obtain information or documentation that enables the LEA to meet its responsibilities. For example, if after timely and meaningful consultation with private school officials, an LEA decides to use a primary home language other than English (PHLOTE) survey to identify children who are eligible for equitable services under Title III, Part A (i.e., those who meet the definition of English learner (EL) in ESEA section 8101(20)), the LEA may obtain a higher response rate to the PHLOTE survey with assistance from private school officials.

Although the ESEA does not impose any requirements on private school officials, the only way to ensure that consultation is timely and meaningful is for the private school officials to participate actively in the consultation meetings. By participating, the private school officials will have an opportunity to:

- **provide input in the development of a timeline for consultation;**
- **provide data and information about the needs of their eligible children and educators;**
- **offer suggestions regarding program design, implementation, and evaluation;**
- **inquire about participation in any discretionary grant programs;**
- **address the use of third-party providers, if appropriate; and**
- **complete any appropriate forms needed by the LEA to ensure the delivery of equitable services. However, such paperwork should not require undue administrative effort for the private school officials or require them to submit operational budget information.**

24. For the budget narrative, how would an applicant go about demonstrating that proposed expenditures are supplemental and do not supplant or duplicate services currently provided per RFP page 27? And how and where should that demonstration be included in Attachment 2?

The response to this section of the RFP is up to the applicant to determine as it is a scored component of the RFP.

25. Is the application submitted through Grants Gateway or SED Monitoring System? The Grant does not appear in Grants Gateway at this time.

As per the RFP: Complete applications must be submitted electronically via the SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System (SEDMON) located within the Business Portal. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 15, 2023.

To access the application, complete the following steps:

1. **Go to the Business Portal;**
2. **Click on the Log In button;**
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Please also mail one (1) original and two (2) copies of the FS-10 budget postmarked by September 15, 2023.

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26. For the equitable share portion of the budget – is funding allocated to in-district non-public schools (only)? Or to both in-district and out-of-district non-publics?

As per Attachment 3A of the RFP, list all nonpublic schools located in your LEA catchment area and whether each will be participating in SCG equitable participation funding for the grant period. Non-public schools located outside of the LEAs geographic catchment area are not eligible for equitable services from that LEA.

27. In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, we created two new social worker positions which have been 100% funded using stimulus funds. We have not established other funding to be able continue these positions. Would funding them through Stronger Connections Grant be considered supplementing rather than supplanting?

Funding the positions through the Stronger Connections Grant would be considered a supplemental expenditure. LEAs cannot fully fund the positions in both grants simultaneously as that would constitute a double dipping scenario.

28. Is there a specific form we should use to document consultation with/participation of non-publics?

Attachment 3A of the RFP will be used to document a portion of the consultation with non-public schools.

29. Are public school districts required to pre-qualify in Grants Gateway?

Public school districts are not required to prequalify in Grants Gateway. Prequalification is required of non-profits, which in the case of this RFP would only include eligible charter schools.

30. Are public school districts required to complete/submit an application in Grants Gateway?

Please see the response to question 29. If you are referring to prequalification, public school districts do not need to prequalify in the Grants Gateway. If you are referring to the application to compete for Stronger Connections Grant funding, that process is completed electronically via the SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System (SEDMON) located within the Business Portal.

31. For the allocation of funds to the in-district private school with low income students, can the funds be used for the entire school population or are the funds only intended to benefit the students who reside in our district but go to the private school? The in-district private school has students attending from other towns around ours. It may not be feasible to only benefit those students as they are part of the larger student population.

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance, under Title VIII, an LEA must provide equitable services based on the number and educational needs of children who are enrolled in private schools within the geographical area served by the LEA that want their eligible children and educators to participate, even if some of the children enrolled in the private schools reside in other districts or States. (ESEA section 8501(a)(1), (4)(A)). A child's residency within the LEA is not a factor.

32. It is understood that the District can apply for up to \$2,000 per low income student. Are these funds only intended to benefit the low income students or the student population at large? For example, if the elementary school has 100 low income students but 500 students altogether can the grant funds benefit all 500 students or is the funding specific to the 100 students?

These funds are intended to benefit the student population at large.

33. We noticed the announcement of this grant opportunity- RFP #GC23-020 on the portal for our school district. Would you please advise if the our school district is required to apply for this grant opportunity since it appeared on our portal or is this just a means to announce the grant opportunity?

This is a competitive subgrant opportunity and applications were published to all eligible entities. It is up to the district whether to apply for funding, and submission of an application does not guarantee an award under this program.

34. Can this funding be used to fund a updated radio system?

A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of a radio system would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

35. Is this funding limited to low income students or are all students allowed to take advantage of programs?

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance, under Title VIII, an LEA must provide equitable services based on the number and educational needs of children who are enrolled in private schools within the geographical area served by the LEA that want their eligible children and educators to participate, even if some of the children enrolled in the private schools reside in other districts or States. (ESEA section 8501(a)(1), (4)(A)). A child's residency within the LEA is not a factor.

36. Can NYSED confirm that all LEAs listed in Attachment 5 have met all eligibility requirements for applying for the grant?

NYSED has determined that all LEAs listed in Attachment 5 meet the eligibility requirements for applying for the grant.

37. Can eligible schools apply jointly and share grant resources? (e.g. Community School Districts, Charter School networks, etc.)

No, consortium opportunities are not available for this award.

38. How is the number of economically disadvantaged students determined in order to determine funding amount for a particular school? Is it based on 2021-22 BEDs enrollment? Or 2022-23 BEDs enrollment?

As per attachment 3 of the RFP, enrollment from BEDS day 2022 should be used.

39. Can charter schools apply? Charter schools are classified as its own LEA.

Yes, charter schools can apply if they are determined to be an eligible applicant. A full list of eligible applicants can be found in Attachment 5 of the RFP.

40. Attachment 3A: Non-Public School List and Budget. If the LEA does not have nonpublic schools within its catchment area but sends students to nonpublic schools outside the district, are those out-of-district nonpublic schools listed in the chart and included in the budget?

As per Attachment 3A of the RFP, list all nonpublic schools located in your LEA catchment area and whether each will be participating in the Stronger Connections Grant equitable participation funding for the grant period. It does not matter if students residing in the district attend nonpublic schools outside the district.

41. Allowable Expenses. Is a partial or full salary of a School Resource Officer an allowable grant expense?

A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of a School Resource Officer would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

42. In completing the grant application they are asking to upload Non public School Affirmation and signature. Do we have to submit any forms if we have no private schools within the LEA? We only have private schools outside of our school district. If we are required to still get affirmations what form are we using? The ESSA Consolidated application forms?

As per Attachment 3A of the RFP, list all nonpublic schools located in your LEA catchment area and whether each will be participating in the Stronger Connections Grant equitable participation funding for the grant period. There is an option available in Attachment 3A to signal if an LEA does not have non-public schools located within the LEA catchment area.

43. We are currently funding some efforts through the ARP funding that will expire in one year. Can these funds be used to continue those initiatives/salaries, at least for a few more years? (Ex: additional Pre-K sections, social workers, counselors)

A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of ARP funded activities would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

44. Can the funds be used to provide professional development? (Restorative practices)

The funds may be able to be used to fund professional development. A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of professional development activities would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

45. Can the funds be used for presenters for anti-bullying programs for students? (Ex: one hour sessions)

The funds may be able to be used to fund presenters. A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of professional development activities would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

46. Staff is currently not in the district for the summer making it difficult to conduct a formal needs assessment. Can discussions captured in meeting minutes be used in its place?

The response to this section of the RFP is up to the applicant to determine as it is a scored component of the RFP.

47. Is private school allocation only for eligible students (similar to Title 1 allocations)?

As per the USDE Non-regulatory guidance, under Title VIII, an LEA must provide equitable services based on the number and educational needs of children who are enrolled in private schools within the geographical area served by the LEA that want their eligible children and educators to participate, even if some of the children enrolled in the private schools reside in other districts or States. (ESEA section 8501(a)(1), (4)(A)). A child's residency within the LEA is not a factor. This is the same as the Title II and IV equitable services requirement.

48. Do public school districts need to be preapproved in Grants Gateway?

No, public school districts do not need to prequalify in Grants Gateway.

49. Are you looking at School Year 2022-23 absentee rates specifically? Or are other school years eligible?

Eligibility determinations were made based on 2022 data.

50. Do tardies count towards absenteeism?

Tardies do not count toward absenteeism.

51. Is there a definition of "chronically absent"?

Students are considered chronically absent if they were enrolled for 10 or more instructional days, in attendance for at least one of those days, and absent (excused or unexcused) for 10% or more of their enrolled instructional days.

52. Is the \$2,000 per student per year of the 3 year grant, or \$2,000 annually for 3 years?

As per the RFP, eligible applicants can apply for a minimum award amount of \$200,000 per three-year grant period; they can request up to \$2,000 per low-income student, but the maximum three-year award amount is \$3,600,000, except for the New York City Department of Education. (See Attachment 3 for a calculation worksheet to determine the count of low-income students to be used and to assist with allocation generation.)

53. Will the non public school participants be able to choose their own emphasis of participation as with ESSA applications, or must they be part of a larger stakeholder effort?

As per the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#): 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 include 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, including any limitations or priorities established by the SEA.

54. Is a Program Coordinator or Director required?

There is no requirement for a Program Coordinator or Director. However, the applicant should have resources available for the proper administration of the grant program.

55. Project partnerships are mentioned, but are they required ?

Funds available under the Stronger Connections grant may support developing partnerships with local community-based programs that use evidence-based practices aligned with the intent and purpose of the program but are not required to receive a subgrant award.

56. Can you let me know where in the NYSED portal the allocation amounts are?

As per the RFP, each eligible applicant can apply for funding for the implementation of high-quality programs that establish safer and healthier learning environments, and to prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence, and hate that impact our school communities at individual and systemic levels, among other programs and activities under section 4108 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Eligible applicants can apply for a minimum award amount of \$200,000 per three-year grant period; they can request up to \$2,000 per low-income student, but the maximum three-year award amount is \$3,600,000, except for the New York City Department of Education. (See Attachment 3 for a calculation worksheet to determine the count of low-income students to be used.) The budget amount does not have to be equal across all three years. For example, an LEA applying for \$3,600,000 could budget \$2,000,000 in year 1 depending on the scope of work, \$1,000,000 in year 2 and \$600,000 in year 3. The New York City Department of Education can apply for a maximum award amount of \$24,000,000 per the three-year grant award period.

57. How does this new grant relate to Title IV?

As per the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#), 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. Because each SEA included Title IV, Part A in its approved ESEA consolidated State plan, an SEA is not required to amend its ESEA consolidated State plan to implement the Stronger Connections program. The fundamental requirements of Title IV, Part A also apply to these funds, including 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.), as described further in Section E. These FAQs address only the Stronger Connections funds under the BSCA; they do not address the general Title IV, Part A formula grant program.

58. Could you please clarify the Title I eligibility component for this application? It sounds like the BEDS Day information should be used to provide a direct count of LEA and non-public students who qualify for this application based on low income status. However, if a district uses SWP status under Title I, can all students in such an LEA building be included in the proposal?

There is no Title I eligibility component for this application. Allocations for this application are generated based on the total LEA Low-Income Enrollment as of BEDS Day 2022. All students enrolled in a Title I SWP school may not meet the definition for low-income. Low-income data should be determined based on the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch counts or, for Community Eligibility Provision Schools, the direct certification data.

59. Are charter schools eligible to apply for this grant?

Yes, charter schools can apply if they are determined to be an eligible applicant. A full list of eligible applicants can be found in Attachment 5 of the RFP.

60. Can you please clarify whether a nonprofit organization can apply for the Stronger Connections grant as the LEA?

As per the RFP, eligible applicants are all high need Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). Nonprofits are not an LEA and therefore ineligible.

61. Is Attachment 5 an exhaustive list of all eligible applicants?

Attachment 5 is an exhaustive list of all eligible applicants.

62. Can SCG funding be used to hire a School Resource Officer (SRO)?

A variety of factors are considered when determining allowability in the use of funds. The allowability of a School Resource Officer would be dependent on the results of the needs assessment, the way in which the proposed cost meets the intent and purpose of the program, and the reasonableness of the proposed cost in carrying out the intent and purpose of the program. More information about allowable uses of funds can be found in the [USDE Non-regulatory guidance](#).

63. We are listed as eligible for this grant however, only one of our buildings meets the 40% threshold. We are listed as the district in the approval, would we be able to apply as a district because we have one building that meets the criteria or would we only be able to apply for that building?

All LEAs identified on Attachment 5 are eligible to apply for this grant opportunity as a whole.

64. Please define chronically absent. Thanks.

Students are considered chronically absent if they were enrolled for 10 or more instructional days, in attendance for at least one of those days, and absent (excused or unexcused) for 10% or more of their enrolled instructional days.

65. I work with several high needs school districts. This is a wonderful opportunity. Is there any possibility to extend the deadline even one week? ESSA Grants are due 8/31, and NYS RECOVS grants are due 8/18. Federally, there is a Full Service Community Schools grant due on 8/8. It is also the start of the school year.

The deadline to complete applications has been extended to September 15, 2023.

66. I work with several districts which qualify for this grant (and NYS RECOVS, also just out with similar emphasis and timeline) and of course there are decisions to be made about which to apply for, etc. This one includes the non public schools, which is different from the other, and helpful to those students. I also work with these districts on ESSA (also due in the same time frame) and it has been the practice of these LEAS to require Title I status of students as of May 15th of the current year in order to have a better snapshot of enrollment for the upcoming school year in the fall. We have been doing this early (the data is due on June 1st) in order to avoid interfering with vacation schedules during the summer, and especially because most non publics close at least two weeks earlier than the public schools. Would it be acceptable to use the already collected numbers (used for ESSA 2023-24) for this application, vs. attempting to contact these schools again in the next week to ascertain eligibility? Many of the districts which I work with are also not at full staffing during the summer due to vacations, and other transitions, so although the funding opportunity is exciting, it is a strong challenge.

As per the USDE Non-Regulatory Guidance, timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials is an essential requirement in the implementation by an LEA of an effective covered ESEA program for eligible private school children and educators. Consultation involves discussions between public and private school officials on key issues that affect the ability of eligible private school children and educators to participate equitably in covered ESEA programs. Successful consultation establishes positive and productive working relationships, makes planning effective, continues throughout implementation of equitable services, and serves to ensure that the services provided meet the needs of eligible private school children and educators. A unilateral offer of services by an LEA with no opportunity for discussion, or the application of a blanket rule, is not adequate consultation. Only after discussing key issues relating to the provision of equitable services may an LEA make its final decisions with respect to those services.

The only way to ensure that consultation is timely and meaningful is for the private school officials to participate actively in the consultation meetings. By participating, the private school officials will have an opportunity to:

- provide input in the development of a timeline for consultation;
- provide data and information about the needs of their eligible children and educators;
- offer suggestions regarding program design, implementation, and evaluation;
- inquire about participation in any discretionary grant programs;

- address the use of third-party providers, if appropriate; and
- complete any appropriate forms needed by the LEA to ensure the delivery of equitable services. However, such paperwork should not require undue administrative effort for the private school officials or require them to submit operational budget information.

67. Will you be posting the RFP for the grant program described below on the SED website rather than just having it available in the business portal? Our grant writing service works with many school districts that might be interested in applying, but as the grant writers, we don't have access to clients' business portals.

The RFP is posted at [NYSED's P-12 website](#). However, please note that complete applications must be submitted electronically via the SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System (SEDMON) located within the Business Portal. The Superintendent, Charter School Leader and whomever they gave data entry rights to will have access to the application. If you do not see the survey please check with the Superintendent or Charter School Leader to determine if data entry rights have been granted.

68. Would requesting a partial or total M/WBE waiver jeopardize our grant application?

Meeting or not meeting MWBE goals has no bearing on selection of grantees. Grants and/or contracts issued pursuant to this proposal will be funded in rank order within each region -- based on scoring outlined in the RFP -- until the funds are exhausted.

However, applicants must make a good faith effort to solicit MWBE firms to meet the participation goals. If efforts are unsuccessful, the bidder may apply for a Partial or Full Request for Waiver. This request MUST be accompanied by documentation demonstrating the efforts made and reasons why the applicant was unsuccessful in obtaining MWBE utilization. The MWBE Coordinator is available to assist bidders throughout the procurement process and can be reached at MWBE@nysed.gov.