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# Purpose

The Texas Education Agency seeks to award Texas GEAR UP grants to local education agencies (LEAS) to support college and career readiness, enrollment and persistence.

## Background Information

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federal discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. GEAR UP awards grants at the state level to achieve the following objectives:

* **Objective 1**: Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education of participating students;
* **Objective 2:** Increase the rate of high school graduation and participation in postsecondary education of participating students;
* **Objective 3:** Increase the educational expectations for participating students and family knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation and financing.

As a state grant recipient, Texas GEAR UP seeks to achieve these objectives through a coordinated approach of innovative strategies, outlined below. Core to the vision of Texas GEAR UP is ensuring the scalability and sustainability of programmatic interventions, to foster a long-term exponential impact across Texas. Grantees will participate in a pilot-and-iterate framework of key project initiatives to ensure improvement throughout the lifetime of the grant, inform sustainability planning for grantees, and lay the groundwork for scale across Texas.

* **Strategy 1:** **Increase Academic Rigor** - Facilitate an increase in access to, perceived value of, and student success in academically rigorous courses through extensive professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators, and targeted tutoring for students.
* **Strategy 2:** **Prepare Middle School Students** - Empower students with pathway information early on through individualized college and career advising in middle school and adoption of a high-quality, TEKS-aligned career exploration course.
* **Strategy 3:** **Expand College and Career Advising and Resources for High School Students** - Mitigate the effects of high student-to-counselor ratios and provide robust, individualized college and career advising through the adoption of a Near Peer Advising model in GEAR UP high schools.
* **Strategy 4:** **Leverage Technology** - Expand advisor capacity and amplify high-quality resources through the adoption of targeted, user-centered technology tools for advisors, counselors, administrators, students and parents.
* **Strategy 5**: **Develop Local Alliances** – Establish or expand existing alliances with business, higher education, and community partners that support student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.

## Eligibility Requirements

**Award Philosophy**

Texas GEAR UP aims to select a set of 6-10 grantees across the state whose collective demographics are representative of high-need Texas students as well as the diverse settings and models of Texas districts serving high-need populations.

**Feeder Pattern Eligibility**

Texas GEAR UP programs will follow cohorts starting in seventh grade through graduation from high school. To provide and monitor the success of continuous programming that follows students from middle school through high school, grants will be awarded to feeder patterns that effectively retain students from seventh grade through high school completion. Feeder patterns are defined as a combination of one high school campus and one or more middle school campuses from which a high rate of promoted 8th graders enroll as 9th graders at the feeder high school. Texas GEAR UP’s selection process will prioritize applications from LEAs that demonstrate a high rate of promotion from the middle schools to the high school included in the application feeder pattern. LEAs may submit applications on behalf of one or more feeder patterns within a single district, but a separate application is required for each feeder pattern.

**Application Eligibility Guidelines**

Eligible applicants are LEAs, including districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and regional education service centers (ESCs) that support schools deemed eligible by the criteria defined in this Letter of Interest. LEAs submitting applications should use the checklist below to determine the eligibility of feeder patterns under consideration for review. If all statements are true for all campuses submitted as one feeder pattern, then the feeder pattern is eligible to apply. If one or more statement(s) is not true, then the feeder pattern is not eligible to apply.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Feeder Campus** | **Eligibility Criterion** | **Yes** | **No** |
| **High School Campus** | At least 50% of the high school's students are designated as economically disadvantaged. |  |  |
| **Middle School Campus(es)** | The middle school campus promoted at least 70% of eighth graders to the feeder pattern high school. |  |  |
| **Middle School Campus(es)** | At least 50% of the middle school's 7th and 8th grade students are designated as economically disadvantaged. |  |  |

**In addition, priority points will be awarded to applicants meeting one or more of the following criteria:**

* At least 70% of the feeder pattern’s students are designated as economically disadvantaged.
* All campuses in the feeder pattern met the accountability standard (or the alternative accountability standard) in 2017 and 2016.
* Student-to-counselor ratio in the high school exceeds 450-to-1
* Schools without existing GEAR UP support, whether through statewide or partnership grants

# Critical Dates for Applicants

Please review the critical dates in the chart below and follow the submission instructions listed for each step.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Event** |
| 7/9/2018 | Last day to submit written questions about GEAR UP grant, no later than 5:00 p.m. CT; Send to [specialprojects@tea.texas.gov](mailto:specialprojects@tea.texas.gov) with the subject line: “GU – LOI Question <DISTRICT NAME>” |
| 7/11/2018 | Webinar for LEAs on July 11, 2018 from 10:00 A.M. CT. Register for the webinar at the following URL: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6648195250039603714> |
| 7/13/2018 | TEA responses to submitted questions from the webinar posted |
| 7/20/2018 | Notice of Intent to Submit a Response due to TEA no later than 5:00 P.M. CT; Send to [specialprojects@tea.texas.gov](mailto:specialprojects@tea.texas.gov) with the subject line: “GU – LOI Notice of Intent <DISTRICT NAME>” |
| 8/10/2018 | Applicant responses due to TEA no later than 5:00 P.M. CT; Send to [specialprojects@tea.texas.gov](mailto:specialprojects@tea.texas.gov) with the subject line: “GU – LOI Response Forms <DISTRICT NAME>” |
| 8/2018 | Evaluation and selection process |
| 8/2018 | Grantee award notification |
| 9/2018 | GEAR UP activities begin |

## Informational Webinar

TEA will host a webinar to discuss the key programmatic requirements of the Texas GEAR UP grant proposal, provide an overview of the project vision, review eligibility requirements, and respond to the questions that were received in writing by the due date stated above. The webinar is for informational purposes and will be held on July 11th, 2018, from 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. at: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6648195250039603714>. The webinar will be open to all LEAs eligible to apply to the grant.

## Requests for Additional Information

To ensure that no grant candidate gains a competitive advantage by acquiring information unknown to other candidates, any information that is different from or supplemental to information provided in this LOI will be provided only in response to written inquiries. All responses to written inquiries will be posted in a general FAQ for all candidates to view.

# Project Description and Requirements

The grant is designed to provide resources, support, and leadership to designated schools to empower their success in preparing students who are college and career ready.

## Implementation Model

The US Department of Education outlines two possible implementation models for GEAR UP grantees. However, to maximize impact, and provide services for more students, Texas GEAR UP requires LEAs to implement a hybrid of both implementation models as outlined below.

The **Cohort Model** targets a grade-specific cohort of students with services as they progress through middle school and high school and into postsecondary education. In this model, the **primary cohort** is composed of all students beginning in grade 7 in participating schools within a feeder pattern. Throughout the lifetime of the grant, Texas GEAR UP will continue to serve the original seventh grade primary cohort as they proceed to the first year of postsecondary education.

In addition, LEAs will implement a **Priority Model**. Priority students are defined as students in grades 7-12 who will receive basic GEAR UP services by virtue of attending a GEAR UP campus, both before and after the primary cohort is located at that campus.

## Grant Phases and Funding

Eligible LEAs can apply to receive up to $350,000 annually. Grantees who successfully carry out grant requirements will be awarded up to seven annual grants starting Fall 2018 and ending Fall 2024. To verify their eligibility for each renewal grant and secure continued funding, grantees will be required to submit renewal applications, reporting on key activities and progress towards goals on an annual basis. TEA reserves the right to update program requirements and activities to ensure program design is driving progress towards desired outcomes. Any updates to requirements will be available to grantees in advance of the renewal application period.

## Program Strategies and Required Activities

Grantees are required to perform activities aligned to each of the five program strategies. An overview of required activities for the entire length of the grant is provided in the following section of this document. A more detailed outline of activities and their associated metrics can be found in **Appendix B**. A summary of required activities in Year 1 can be found in **Appendix C**.

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**Strategy 1:** **Increase Academic Rigor** - Facilitate an increase in access to, perceived value of, and student success in academically rigorous courses through extensive professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators, and targeted tutoring for students.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Required Activity Description** | **Years** | **Means** | **Middle School** | **High School** |
| **1.1** Provide professional development to core content teachers | 1-7 | Required Technical Assistance\* |  | x |
| **1.2** Provide professional development to vertical teams | 1-7 | Required Technical Assistance\* | x | x |
| **1.3** Provide college and career advising trainings to counselors | 2-7 | Required Technical Assistance\* | x | x |
| **1.4** Provide targeted tutoring to primary cohort students with failing grades | 1-7 | LEA Provides | x | x |
| **1.5** Increase timely participation in Algebra I | 1-7 | LEA Provides | x |  |

\*See **Appendix A** for additional information on Required Technical Assistance.

**Strategy 2:** **Prepare Middle School Students** - Empower students with pathway information early, though individualized college and career advising in middle school, and adoption of a high-quality, TEKS-aligned career exploration course.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Required Activity Description** | **Years** | **Means** | **Primary Cohort** | **Priority Students** |
| **2.1** Pilot middle school college and career exploration course using open source materials created by TEA | 2-7 | TEA provides / LEA Implements | x | x |
| **2.2** Provide postsecondary and career information through multiple mediums to students and parents | 1-7 | LEA Provides | x | x |
| **2.3** Provide at least one individualized college and career counseling session to students each year. | 1-2 | LEA Provides | x |  |
| **2.4** Facilitate at least one college visit for students per year. | 1-2 | LEA Provides | x |  |
| **2.5** Facilitate enrollment of students in summer program | 1-2 | LEA Provides | x |  |

**Strategy 3:** **Expand College and Career Advising and Resources for High School Students** - Mitigate the effects of high student-to-counselor ratios and provide robust, individualized college and career advising through the adoption of a Near Peer Advising model in GEAR UP high schools.

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| **Required Activity Description** | **Years** | **Means** | **Primary Cohort** | **Priority Students** |
| **3.1** Collaborate with advising provider to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to be approved by TEA, outlining the parameters of Near Peer Advisor management, support, and required and permissible activities. | 1 | LEA with Required Technical Assistance Provider\* |  |  |
| **3.2** Implement, pilot and refine MOU to continually enhance partnership with advisor provider. | 2-7 | LEA with Required Technical Assistance Provider\* |  |  |
| **3.3** Pilot Near Peer Advisor model selected by TEA and host sufficient Near Peer Advisors to maintain a ratio of at least 1 advisor per 250 students enrolled at the feeder high school. | 2-7 | LEA with Required Technical Assistance Provider\* | x | x |
| **3.4** Provide a dedicated physical space for college and career activities, including individual advising sessions, family meetings and group activities. If provision of a dedicated physical space is not possible, applicant must provide a plan for use of common space to accommodate these activities. | 2-7 | LEA provides | x | x |
| **3.5** Allow and support all required Near Peer Advisor activities supporting college and career readiness, in the manner agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding.  **Near Peer Advisors will be responsible for 9 required activities and 8 Success Metrics. Minimum required activities for Near Peer Advisors are outlined in Appendix B, section 3.5. Please review this Appendix carefully.** | 2-7 | LEA complies | x | x |
| **3.6** Provide financial support to cover Near Peer Advisor salary as well as associated program costs assessed at the school level, such as events and materials. Grant funds may be used in the early years of the grant, but grantee must ensure sustainability by covering an increasing proportion of funds from local funds over the course of the grant. **See Appendix B for more information on use of grant funds for advisor salary.** | 2-7 | LEA provides | x | x |

\*See **Appendix A** for additional information on Required Technical Assistance.

**Strategy 4:** **Leverage Technology** - Expand advisor capacity and amplify high-quality resources through the adoption of targeted, user-centered technology tools for advisors, counselors, students and parents.

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| **Required Activity Description** | **Years** | **Means** | **Primary Cohort** | **Priority Students** |
| **4.1** Pilot and implement technology tools developed by TEA to support the work of Near Peer Advisors, including resources for parents, students, counselors and administrators. | 2-7 | Required Technical Assistance | x | x |

**Strategy 5: Develop Local Alliances -** Establish or expand existing alliances with business, higher education, and community partners that support student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Required Activity Description** | **Years** | **Means** | **Primary Cohort** | **Priority Students** |
| **5.1** Form a local Beyond Grad advisory council, including public and higher education personnel, parents, and business and community members to meet quarterly and advise the LEA’s implementation, review progress toward LEA goals and build external community support. | 1-7 | LEA with local partners | x | x |
| **5.2** Facilitate work-based learning opportunities for students through local partnerships. | 1-7 | LEA with local partners | x | x |

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## Beyond Grad Pilot Programs Participation

Participation in Texas GEAR UP is contingent upon willingness to engage in multiple statewide pilots when implementing program strategies. Required pilot initiatives include:

* 1. Implementation of a college and career exploration course **(Strategy 2, Activity 1**);
  2. Implementation of a Near Peer Advisor model **(Strategy 2, Activities 1-6);** and
  3. Implementation of technology tools to support the work of Near Peer Advisors with students, parents and school staff. **(Strategy 4, Activity 1)**

Grantees must agree to the following activities to ensure faithful implementation and assessment of pilot programs, enabling successful scale of these initiatives to the benefit of students throughout Texas.

* Submit to requests for input in gathering initial requirements for development of pilot models or tools. Input requests may come in the form of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, or other modalities.
* Submit to ongoing requests for feedback from relevant stakeholders including but not limited to students, parents, instructors, counselors, administrators, IT staff. Feedback requests may come in the form of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, or other modalities.
* Implement pilot interventions with fidelity according to all TEA or TEA-selected provider guidelines.
* Implement any required changes to pilot interventions with fidelity, according to all TEA or TEA selected provider guidelines.

# Program Administration

To ensure successful implementation, monitoring and management of all GEAR UP activities, Texas GEAR UP requires the following administrative requirements:

* Designate a LEA-level project leader as the GEAR UP coordinator. Direct grant funds may be used to pay for up to 50% of the salary for a grant coordinator.
* Send sufficient and appropriate personnel to two national GEAR UP conferences, the Texas GEAR UP State Conference, and all grant-related meetings.
* In coordination with state designated technical assistance providers:
  + Collect and monitor program participation and performance data and maintain sufficient and appropriate records.
  + Complete and submit all state and federal project evaluation and reporting requirements to appropriate personnel in the format requested and by the stated deadline.
* Participate in bi-weekly status meetings with TEA program staff to monitor implementation, track progress towards metrics and coordinate on best practices.
* Host program staff for site visits as requested by TEA.

# Use of Funds

## Allowable Use of Funds

* Up to 50% of Grant Coordinator salary
* Near Peer Advisor salary
* Materials and supplies for College Center and GEAR UP events
* College visits
* Middle school counseling services for primary cohort students
* Student and parent outreach and education
* Professional development for instructors and administrators
* Tutoring services and resources for primary cohort students
* Facilitating partnerships with business, higher education or community partners
* Travel to and from required conferences and meetings for appropriate personnel

## Non-allowable use of funds:

* More than 50% of grant coordinator salary
* Renovation or remodel of existing buildings

*Grant funds must supplement (increase level of service), and not supplant (replace) state or local funds.*

## Matching Funds

Participating districts are required to provide a one-to-one match for their sub-grant award using state and local funds. TEA will provide advisement to support LEAs in securing and expanding this funding. LEAs will be responsible for maintaining all documentation locally. However, grantees will be required to report status of matching funds on a quarterly basis.

# Overview of Required Application materials

Interested candidates should review and complete Attachments 2A – 2D.

Please notify TEA of your intent to submit a Letter of Interest by emailing **Attachment 2A** **by July 20th, 2018 at 5pm CT**. Submission should be emailed to [specialporjects@tea.texas.gov](mailto:specialporjects@tea.texas.gov) with the subject line “GU – LOI Notice of Intent <DISTRICT NAME>.”

* Please submit your completed Letter of Interest, comprised of **Attachments 2B – 2D by August 10th, 2018 at 5pm CT**. Submission should be emailed to [specialporjects@tea.texas.gov](mailto:specialporjects@tea.texas.gov) with the subject line “GU – LOI Response Forms <DISTRICT NAME>.”

TEA will review the letters of interest and select between 6 and 10 grantees. Successful proposers will be contacted regarding timeline and next steps.

For assistance, please contact Alexis Bauserman, Director of Beyond Grad at [alexis.bauserman@tea.texas.gov](mailto:alexis.bauserman@tea.texas.gov).