

Informal Discretionary Competitive (IDC Grant)

LASO 2026-2027 (Cycle 5)

Learning Acceleration Support Opportunities

2026-2027 Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) Program Guidelines

Authorized by General Appropriations Act (GAA), Article III, 89th Texas Legislature, Strategy A.2.4, Rider 32, School Improvement and Governance Support.

Grant Application Due Date

December 1, 2026; 5:00 p.m. CT



Table of Contents

Introduction to the Program Guidelines	3
Requirement for Username and Password	3
Reference to the General and Fiscal Guidelines	4
Errata Notices	4
Overview of LASO Process	4
Email Bulletins	5
Contact for Clarifying Information	5
U.S. Department of Education and/or State Appropriations	5
LASO Timeline	5
Resources Available to Help Applicants Select the Most Appropriate Initiative(s)	7
LASO at a Glance	7
Authorizing Legislation	7
Where to Submit the LASO Application	7
Purpose of Program	8
Eligible Applicants	8
Application Funding	8
TEA anticipates awarding planning and expansion grants using the following methodology:	9
Limitation of Administrative Funds	10
LASO Application Requirements and Assurances	10
Program Elements	13
Allowable Activities and Use of Funds	16
Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds	17
Expenditure Reporting (ER)	18
Attachments	18
Required Program-Related Attachments	18
Required Fiscal-Related Attachments	18
Adding Attachments	18
LASO Scoring and Review	19
LASO Review and Funding Criteria	19
Priority Points	20
Oral Interviews for Funding	20

Introduction to the Program Guidelines

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) administers federal¹ and state grant awards to its subgrantees² to carry out a program. Such entities include primarily school systems (referred to as local educational agencies [LEAs] in statutes), including independent school districts and charter schools; education service centers (ESCs); and, to a lesser degree, institutions of higher education (IHEs), nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and other statutorily allowable organizations. The following Program Guidelines apply to all eligible subgrantees for the designated grant program.

The Program Guidelines, as part of the request for application (RFA), are to be used in conjunction with the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) and any application instructions or other RFA requirements, as listed for the grant on the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page. The Standard Application System (SAS) consists of Application Part 1 (PDF narrative schedules) and Application Part 2 (Excel budget schedules). An eligible applicant must submit both parts of the SAS to apply for funding, unless specifically delineated in these guidelines.

For applicants selected for funding, all guidelines and instructions will be incorporated by reference into the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).

Requirement for Username and Password

To access eGrants and apply for this grant, you must have access to the [TEA Login \(TEAL\)](#). Follow these steps to apply for usernames and passwords on TEAL:

1. Visit the [TEA Login \(TEAL\)](#) page of the TEA website. Select [Request New User Account](#) to begin the process of applying for a TEAL account online.
2. Once you have been assigned a TEA Login (TEAL) account, log into TEAL and under Self-Service select My Application Accounts.
3. The My Accounts tab will open. Select Request New Account, then find eGrants in the list and follow the instructions to submit your request.
4. Entities with existing TEAL accounts but no eGrants accounts should email competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov to ensure proper access to eGrants and this application.
5. If the application does not appear in your "Apply for Eligible Grants" section in your eGrants homepage, please email competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov.
6. For those entities without a prior relationship with TEA, and no TEAL accounts please email competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov with the following information prior to requesting a TEAL account:

¹ TEA is the grantee and pass-through entity for federal education funding. *Grantee* is defined as the legal entity to which a grant is awarded and that is accountable to the federal government for the use of the funds provided. The term "grantee" does not include any secondary recipients, such as subgrantees and contractors, that may receive funds from a grantee pursuant to a subgrant or contract. (34 CFR 77.1) *Pass-through entity* is defined as a recipient or subrecipient that provides a subaward to a subrecipient (including lower tier subrecipients) to carry out part of a federal program. (2 CFR 200.1)

² *Subgrantee* is defined by TEA to be the same as a *subrecipient*, which is defined in 2 CFR 200.1 as an entity that receives a subaward from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal award. The term does not include an individual that is a beneficiary or participant of the program. For purposes of the request for application (RFA), TEA may use the terms *subgrantee*, *grantee*, *subrecipient*, and *applicant* synonymously.

- a. Entity name.
 - b. Entity full address – Street, city, state, zip code.
 - c. County.
 - d. Entity phone number.
 - e. Entity email address.
 - f. Entity Legal Authority - Name, title, email and phone.
 - g. Entity Legal Authority Backup – Name, title, email and phone.
 - h. Vendor ID/FEIN.
7. All requests for TEAL and eGrants accounts must be submitted well in advance of the application deadline to avoid delays. Please note that this application process is both detailed and time intensive. It is the applicant's responsibility to plan accordingly and allocate sufficient time to complete, certify, and submit the application before the deadline.

Late submissions caused by delays in obtaining TEAL or eGrants access, or by technical issues, will not be accepted under any circumstances. To ensure a smooth process, we strongly recommend initiating account setup and application work as early as possible.

Reference to the General and Fiscal Guidelines

The Program Guidelines provide information specifically relevant to this grant program. The [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) provide information relevant to all TEA grant programs. Throughout the Program Guidelines, cross-references are given to applicable sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#). It is critical that the grantee review all cross-referenced sections when preparing the application.

Errata Notices

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Errata Notices.

Overview of LASO Process

The following steps provide a high-level overview of the process for responding to Informal Discretionary Competition (IDC), including submitting an IDC application, and being selected for funding:

1. TEA publishes IDC application and supporting documents on the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#).
2. Eligible applicants submit the LASO application via Qualtrics by the specified deadline in this document.
3. IDC applications are reviewed and scored. Note: The highest scoring applicants may be required to attend an oral interview or respond to questions regarding their IDC application.
4. TEA announces applicants selected for funding on the TEA [Grants Awarded Data](#) webpage.
5. Applicants selected for funding will be required to submit and certify an eGrant funding application including assurances and a budget summary to receive funding. Note: All data submitted in the needs assessment application is incorporated into the eGrants funding application under the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).
6. TEA staff conducts budget negotiations on the IDC application.
7. Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) issued upon successful completion of the negotiation process.

Email Bulletins

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), GovDelivery Bulletins, as applicable.

Contact for Clarifying Information

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *TEA Contacts*.

The following TEA staff member should be contacted with questions:

Primary Program Contact: Tracie Ezell, Manager of Resource and Rural Innovation

Primary Program Contact Email: Tracie.ezell@tea.texas.gov

Primary Program Contact Phone: (512) 463-8788

Additional Program Contact: Chris DeWitt, School System Support Division Director.

Additional Program Contact Email: Christopher.dewitt@tea.texas.gov

Funding Manager: Competitive Grants Unit, Grants Administration Division

Funding Manager Email: competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov

U.S. Department of Education and/or State Appropriations

The following is provided in compliance with the U.S. Department of Education Appropriations Act:

Category	Amount
Total funds available for this project	\$1,960,000
Percentage to be financed with federal funds	0%
Amount of federal funds	\$0
Percentage to be financed from nonfederal sources	100%
Amount of nonfederal funds	\$1,960,000

**Should additional funding become available for this program, the agency may add it to the base amount indicated above and fund additional qualifying awardees until all funding is exhausted.*

LASO Timeline

For all dates related to LASO, including reporting dates, see the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page. If a report due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the report will be due the following business day. All dates except the grant ending date may vary slightly as conditions require.

Date	Event
September 14, 2026	General Webinar Option #1 Registration link 1 Webinar registration link can be found on the LASO website

September 18, 2026	General Webinar Option #2 Registration link 2 Webinar registration link can be found on the LASO website
September 23, 2026	LASO application available LASO individual application links will be emailed to Superintendents on September 23, 2026. Please see the LASO website for more information.
September 28, 2026	FAQ Publishing The FAQs for this grant program will be posted to the TEA Grant Opportunities page and LASO website no later than the date listed on the Grant Timeline. Applicants may email their questions to the LASO central inbox at LASO@tea.texas.gov See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Frequently Asked Questions
October 15, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. CT	Program Specific Webinar #1 Registration links found on the LASO website
October 19, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. CT	Program Specific Webinar #2 Registration links found on the LASO website
November 1, 2026	FAQ question submission deadline
November 4, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. CT	Office Hours Registration links found on the LASO website
December 1, 2026	Due date for the LASO Qualtrics application. The LASO application must be received by the TEA by 5:00 p.m. CT. See TEA Grant Opportunities , LASO Application Due Date and Time
December 2, 2026- January 30, 2027	Application review period, including interviews if necessary See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Review Process
February 8, 2027	Anticipated award announcement
February 8, 2027	eGrants ADC and Application opens for awarded applicants
March 2, 2027	Due Date for eGrants Application
March 2, 2027	Beginning date of grant (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Grant Period
June 2, 2028	Final date to submit an amendment (if selected for funding)
August 31, 2028	End date of grant (if selected for funding)

Resources Available to Help Applicants Select the Most Appropriate Initiative(s)

An applicant that is eligible to apply for more than one initiative is encouraged to carefully review all available program information before submitting an application. To support applicants in determining which initiative or combination of initiatives best aligns with local needs, program goals, and eligibility requirements, the following resources are available:

- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Resource**
Applicants may submit program-specific questions through the FAQ process to obtain clarification regarding eligibility requirements, allowable activities, program priorities, application expectations, and other grant-related topics. Responses to frequently asked questions may also provide additional guidance and interpretation of program requirements that can assist applicants in making informed decisions about which initiative(s) to pursue.
- **Webinars**
The Texas Education Agency (TEA) may offer informational webinars designed to provide an overview of available initiatives, application requirements, timelines, funding considerations, and program expectations. These live virtual presentations may include slide decks, demonstrations, and opportunities to address commonly asked questions. Recordings and presentation materials may be made available for later reference.
- **Office Hours**
TEA program staff may conduct designated office hours to provide technical assistance and support to prospective applicants.
- **Additional Best-Fit Guidance Resources**
TEA has developed supplemental resources to assist applicants in selecting the initiative or combination of initiatives that best aligns with local needs and strategic priorities. These resources include initiative-specific one-pagers, best-fit guidance presentations, and initiative coherence supports designed to help applicants understand program distinctions, identify complementary funding opportunities, and make informed application decisions. Resources can be found via the [LASO Cycle 5 website](#).

Note: Programmatic support is only available via webinars and the FAQ process. Office hours are for technical support only regarding application submittal prior to the application deadline.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to utilize these resources prior to submitting an application. Participation in webinars, review of FAQ guidance, and engagement during office hours can help ensure a clear understanding of program requirements and assist applicants in identifying the funding opportunity that best supports their intended outcomes.

LASO at a Glance

This section provides fundamental information pertinent to the initiative program.

Authorizing Legislation

This initiative is authorized by the Authorized by General Appropriations Act (GAA), Article III, 89th Texas Legislature, Strategy A.2.4, Rider 32, School Improvement and Governance Support.

Where to Submit the LASO Application

LASO individual application links will be emailed to Superintendents and eligible coordinating entities on

September 23, 2026. Please see the [LASO website](#) for more information.

Purpose of Program

The Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program is designed to expand rural students' access to high-quality and high-wage college and career pathways through structured, multi-district partnerships. The program supports regional collaboration among eligible school systems, coordinating entities, and post-secondary or workforce partners to design, implement, and sustain aligned pathways that respond to regional needs and support successful student transitions beyond high school and to promote long-term capacity, accountability, and outcomes.

Eligible Applicants

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Eligibility for Funding.

The eligible applicants are:

For Planning Applications: Organizations that meet the requirements to be an R-PEP Coordinating Entity, defined by TEC, §12.101(a);

- an institution of higher education as defined under Section 61.003;
- an organization that is exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3));
- a governmental entity; or
- a partnership of 2 or more eligible school systems. For Planning grants only, if a coordinating entity has not been selected by the time of the grant application, one participating school system must serve as fiscal agent.

For Expansion Applications: Eligible applicants are Coordinating Entities of current R-PEPs in good standing.

Charter school systems are not eligible to participate in R-PEP.

Education Service Centers (ESCs) are eligible to apply but will need to use alternate application.

Eligibility List

There is not an eligibility list for this grant.

Shared Services Arrangement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Shared Services Arrangements.

Shared services arrangements (SSAs) are not allowed.

Application Funding

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Continuation Funding, Fund Management, and Use of Funds*.

It is anticipated that approximately 7 applicant(s) will be awarded up to \$200,000 for Planning grant awards and approximately 7 applicant(s) will be awarded up to \$80,000 for Expansion grant awards.

**Should additional funding become available for this program, the agency may add it to the base amount indicated above and fund additional qualifying awardees until all funding is exhausted.*

Selection of Applicants for Funding

Applications will first be reviewed for eligibility and completeness requirements. Applicants meeting all eligibility requirements may receive Priority Points as outlined in these guidelines. Applicants with the highest Priority Point totals may be selected as finalists for oral interviews. The number of finalists invited to interview will be determined by TEA based on application volume, scoring results, and available funding. For purposes of award determination, Tier 1 applications will consist of Planning Grants and will be funded first, subject to the availability of funds. Tier 2 applications will consist of Expansion Grants and will be considered for award after Tier 1 awards have been made.

TEA anticipates awarding planning and expansion grants using the following methodology:

- TEA will first verify applicant eligibility and completeness requirements.
- Next, any applicable Priority Points will be added, up to 20 points.
- Applicants with the highest Priority Point totals may be selected as finalists and invited to participate in oral interviews.
- Oral interviews will be scored using published interview criteria for a maximum of 25 points.
- Applicants will be ranked based on total scores earned through Priority Points and Oral Interviews. If eligible applications exceed available funding, TEA may also apply the funding prioritization criteria described in these guidelines when making final award determinations.
- Final scores may include up to 20 Priority Points and up to 25 Interview Points, for a maximum possible score of 45 points.
- For Expansion Grant applicants, projected student participation and anticipated scale of impact will be evaluated as part of the Oral Interview scoring process under the Student Impact and Scale criterion. Applicants should be prepared to discuss projected participation rates and the assumptions used to develop those projections.

The categories below are not additional Priority Points and are used only to prioritize awards if eligible applications exceed available funding. If eligible applications exceed available funding, applications will be prioritized based on the extent to which the proposed grant expands student access to high-quality R-PEP pathways. Priority will be given in the following order:

1. Regional Gap: new R-PEP in a region where no R-PEPs currently exist
2. Current R-PEP expanding to new school system(s).
3. New R-PEP in a region where another R-PEP already exists
4. Current R-PEP expanding to a new pathway, only if the applicant provides evidence that additional students will be served.

Cost Share or Matching Requirement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Cost Share/Match Requirement.

There is no cost share or matching requirement for this grant program.

Supplement, Not Supplant

For supplement, not supplant guidance, see the Supplement, Not Supplant Handbook on the Department of Grant Compliance and Administration's [Training and Other Resources](#) page.

The supplement, not supplant provision does apply to this grant program.

Limitation of Administrative Funds

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Administrative Costs*.

NOTE: Administrative funds include **both** direct administrative costs **and** allowable indirect costs.

Note Regarding Grantee Determination of Grant-Funded Position Functions as Administrative or Programmatic: The grantee is responsible for making case-by-case determinations to determine whether the functions of a grant-funded position are **administrative or programmatic**, or divided between both. There may be overlap in characteristics and activities, and no single factor or combination of factors is necessarily determinative. There are no uniform federal regulations that define how to characterize costs as either direct program or direct administrative costs. However, the organization must be consistent across programs in how they charge these costs. For more information, including considerations for making a determination regarding a grant-funded position, see the [Universal Errata](#) issued by TEA on July 15, 2026.

Direct Administrative Costs

TEA limits the amount of direct administrative costs for this grant program to no more than 15% of the total grant award.

Indirect Costs

For this grant program, the grantee may claim a maximum for allowable indirect costs equal to its current approved restricted indirect cost rate. For IHE and NPO grantees with only an approved unrestricted indirect cost rate, the maximum indirect administrative cost that can be claimed for this grant program is 8%.

To calculate the maximum indirect costs that can be claimed for a grant, complete the [Maximum Indirect Costs Worksheet](#), located on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page.

Pre-Award Costs

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Pre-Award Costs.

Pre-award costs are not permitted for this grant.

LASO Application Requirements and Assurances

This section identifies the types of requirements in which applicants must comply to be eligible for funding:

- Statutory requirements (requirements defined in the authorizing statute)
- TEA program requirements (requirements defined by TEA program staff)

Statutorily Required Responses

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Statutory Requirements

Per Section 22.0834 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#),

Fingerprinting Requirement.

There are no statutory required responses for this Grant opportunity.

TEA Application Required Responses

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), TEA Program Requirements.

In addition to the statutory requirements, TEA has established the following program requirements. Applicants must address within the application how they will achieve the following:

The grant program will be funded by reimbursement once the NOGA has been issued and the grantee submits payment requests through the Expenditure Reporting (ER) system. See [Expenditure Reporting](#). The grantee is required to regularly request payment for allowable expenditures as grant program requirements are carried out.

Statutory or Program-Specific Assurances

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Provisions and Assurances.

1. The applicant provides assurance that program funds will supplement (increase the level of service), and not supplant (replace) state mandates, State Board of Education rules, and activities previously conducted with state or local funds. The applicant provides assurance that state or local funds may not be decreased or diverted for other purposes merely because of the availability of these funds. The applicant provides assurance that program services and activities to be funded from this IDC will be supplementary to existing services and activities and will not be used for any services or activities required by state law, State Board of Education rules, or local policy.
2. The applicant assures that the application does not contain any information that would be protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from general release to the public.
3. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Statutory and TEA Program requirements as noted in the R-PEP Program Guidelines.
4. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Performance Measures, as noted in the R-PEP Program Guidelines, and shall provide to TEA, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the program.
5. The applicant assures that any Electronic Information Resources (EIR) produced as part of this agreement will comply with the State of Texas Accessibility requirements as specified in 1 TAC 206, 1 TAC Chapter 213, Federal Section 508 standards, and the WCAG 2.0 AA Accessibility Guidelines.
6. The applicant acknowledges that Per Section 22.0834 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fingerprinting Requirement.
7. Equal Treatment of All Persons: Consistent with Article I, Section 3a of the Texas Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, federal and State law, and Executive Order No. GA-55, Subrecipient represents and warrants that: 1. All conduct under this Subaward shall be administered and performed in a neutral manner without regard to race of persons; 2. Subrecipient shall not, in the specific performance of this Subaward, elevate one individual person over another, or advantage any one person over another, due to race; 3. Subrecipient shall not, in the specific performance of this Subaward, employ practices or engage in any advancement of the programs known as DEI, critical race theory, affirmative action, or other similar, divisive agendas; 4. Subrecipient's staff, agents, subgrantees, contractors, and subcontractors that are selected and employed in the specific performance of this Subaward shall be selected and employed solely on merit and the ability to perform; and 5. Subrecipient shall ensure that any subgrantees, contractors and their subcontractors participating in the specific performance of this Subaward represent and warrant to the provisions of this clause.
8. Biological Sex and No Preferred Pronouns: Subrecipient represents and warrants that it shall ensure that all actions in specific performance of this Subaward shall comply with federal and state law and reflect that there are only two sexes. Subrecipient's employees, officers, representatives, subgrantees, contractors, subcontractors, and agents shall not, in performance of this Subaward, present, direct, request, or suggest the use of preferred personal pronouns in professional correspondence or presentations.
9. The school system or coordinating entity will maintain current contact information in AskTED to ensure

timely communication.

10. The school system or coordinating entity will regularly submit their expenditures (monthly preferred, quarterly at minimum) to remain on-track for grant expenditures.
11. The school system or coordinating entity will participate in all required meetings and submit evidence of implementation, at a monthly/quarterly cadence.
12. The applicant assures that grant-funded activities must support partnership development, operational readiness, and alignment with requirements for future R-PEP designation.
13. The applicant assures that for partnerships that have not designated a coordinating entity prior to award, the partnership must designate one participating school system to serve as the fiscal agent and administer the grant funds.
14. The applicant assures that designation of a coordinating entity is a required condition of the Spring 2027 application and a prerequisite for participation in the R-PEP program.
15. The applicant assures that grantees must maintain compliance with all applicable statutory and program requirements and must submit documentation related to governance, fiscal management, and partnership structure upon request by TEA. Failure to meet program requirements may impact continued participation in the grant and eligibility for future R-PEP funding opportunities.
16. The applicant assures that the partnership must include eligible school systems that meet the statutory definition for participation in the R-PEP program.
17. The applicant assures that the program must enable an eligible school system to partner with at least one other school system to expand access to a broader array of college and career pathways.
18. The applicant assures that the partnership must offer college and career pathways aligned to regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers.
19. The applicant assures that each partnership must have selected, or plan to select by the time of R-PEP designation application in the spring of 2027, a coordinating entity to manage the partnership that: has the capacity to effectively coordinate the partnership; is an eligible entity as defined by TEC §12.101(a); and includes representatives of participating school systems and regional higher education and workforce organizations on its governing board or advisory body.
20. The applicant assures that the coordinating entity must enter into a performance agreement approved by the board of trustees of each participating school system that: confers authority comparable to an entity operating a school system campus under TEC §11.174; and includes ambitious and measurable performance goals tied to college and career readiness outcomes and post-secondary success.

The program-specific assurances for this LASO program are listed in the Qualtrics application.

Program Elements

Description of Program

The Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program is a statewide initiative designed to expand access to high-quality, high-demand college and career pathways for rural students through structured, multi-school system collaboration. The program enables eligible school systems to partner regionally under a shared governance and accountability model to design, implement, and sustain aligned high-wage, high-demand pathways that individual rural school systems may not be able to offer independently.

Under the R-PEP model, a designated coordinating entity works in collaboration with participating school

systems and post-secondary or workforce partners to support pathway development, regional alignment, and program implementation. Partnerships are designed to leverage shared resources, regional labor market needs, and post-secondary opportunities to create coherent pathways that support students' successful transitions beyond high school.

The R-PEP program emphasizes long-term sustainability, performance accountability, and continuous improvement. Participating partnerships are expected to establish clear roles and responsibilities, formalize collaboration through performance agreements, and implement pathways aligned to statutory requirements under Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.912, with outcomes connected to the R-PEP allotment framework under TEC §48.118. Through this approach, the program builds local and regional capacity, strengthens cross-school system collaboration, and expands equitable access to college and career pathways for students in rural communities.

Planning Grants

Artifact 1: Labor Market Alignment & Program Design

Grantees will produce a comprehensive set of planning artifacts demonstrating strong alignment between regional workforce demand and proposed R-PEP program design. This includes:

- A current, regionally relevant, high-wage, high-demand labor market analysis.
- Programs of study including coherent course sequences and credentials of value (associate degrees, certificates, or industry-based certifications); and a clear rationale connecting labor market demand to student access, equity, and program design (part of R-PEP application).

Artifact 2: Operational Readiness and Organizational Capacity

Grantees will demonstrate readiness to launch an R-PEP through defined organizational structures and operational planning, including:

- If not designated prior to award, the partnership must designate one participating school system to serve as the fiscal agent. Designation of a coordinating entity is a required condition of the Spring 2027 application and a prerequisite for participation in the R-PEP program.
- An established R-PEP organizational structure, including job descriptions for R-PEP full-time equivalent (FTE) positions;
- A comprehensive R-PEP Planning and Implementation Project Plan; and
- Evidence of launch readiness in the following areas: R-PEP master schedule, calendar with adequate instructional days, transportation plan, family engagement and student recruitment plan, instructional effectiveness for college and career, high-quality, rigorous content in all R-PEP pathways, and agreements with IHEs and workforce for dual credit and talent.

Artifact 3: Application, Budget, Governance, and Technical Assistance

Grantees will submit a complete and accurate New R-PEP application, including sufficient documentation and attachments to demonstrate readiness for future designation, such as:

- A draft and final approved Performance Agreement (using the TEA template);
- Draft and final one-year and five-year budgets, including projected revenues and expenditures (using the TEA template); and
- Identification of Advisory Board members, including business and industry partners and/or institutions

of higher education (IHEs).

- Technical Assistance - In addition to planning activities, grantees will use a portion of the grant to fund a technical assistance provider (up to \$50,000). TAs will be responsible for:
 - An in-person planning kickoff convening to build understanding among school system leadership and Board members, develop a project plan, and align on roles and responsibilities to accomplish grant requirements.
 - Facilitating (at least) weekly planning check-in meetings; and
 - Organizing and facilitating at least one learning visit to an existing R-PEP site to observe implementation fidelity.
 - *Awardees must select a technical assistance provider from the State Approved Provider List (SAPL), as published by the agency. Only providers included on the vetted list at the time of contracting are allowable.*
 - **Technical Assistance Provider Contracting Requirement:** *Awardees are responsible for contracting directly with their selected technical assistance provider. School system awardees must follow all applicable local procurement policies and timelines when procuring services. Education Service Center (ESC) awardees must follow applicable Texas Grant Management Standards (TxGMS) procurement requirements and procedures. Applicants are encouraged to consider procurement timelines when planning for grant implementation.*

Expansion Grants

Artifact 1: Expansion Rationale, Evidence of Success, and Governance

Grantees will develop a comprehensive set of planning artifacts that demonstrate strong alignment between regional workforce demand and the proposed R-PEP expansion design. This includes:

- A current, regionally relevant labor market analysis identifying high-wage, high-demand occupations;
- Programs of study that include coherent course sequences and credentials of value (e.g., associate degrees, certificates, or industry-based certifications); and
- A clear rationale connecting labor market demand to student access, equity, and program design.

Artifact 2: Fiscal, Staffing, Implementation Capacity and Technical Assistance

Grantees will submit a complete and accurate R-PEP Expansion Application with sufficient evidence and attachments to demonstrate readiness for expansion including:

- Draft and final approved Performance Agreement, as applicable.
- Draft and final 1-year and 5-year budgets, including projected revenue and expenses.
- Identified additional Advisory Board members, including business/industry and/or IHEs.
- In addition to expansion activities, grantees will use a portion of the grant to fund a technical assistance provider (up to \$30,000). TAs will be responsible for:
 - An expansion kick-off convening (in-person).
 - Implementation planning support for onboarding new school systems or pathways.
 - Implementation planning support for onboarding new school systems or pathways.
 - *Awardees must select a technical assistance provider from the State Approved Provider List*

(SAPL), as published by the agency. Only providers included on the vetted list at the time of contracting are allowable.

- **Technical Assistance Provider Contracting Requirement:** Awardees are responsible for contracting directly with their selected technical assistance provider. School system awardees must follow all applicable local procurement policies and timelines when procuring services. Education Service Center (ESC) awardees must follow applicable Texas Grant Management Standards (TxGMS) procurement requirements and procedures. Applicants are encouraged to consider procurement timelines when planning for grant implementation.

Qualifications and Experience

The applicant agrees to provide data on the qualifications and experience of the existing or future staff members, as required per the program guidelines as follows:

Applications should identify a program manager who has relevant experience supporting rural education initiatives, CCMR pathway development, or grant administration, and that sufficient time and accountability are dedicated to successful implementation.

Performance and Evaluation Measures

The applicant agrees to collect data and report on the following mandatory performance and evaluation measures:

- Student participation in R-PEP-aligned college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) pathways.
- Student enrollment and participation data reported through PEIMS and other required state data systems.
- Implementation fidelity and pathway quality, as measured through required milestone and artifact submissions.
- Results from the R-PEP Fidelity of Implementation (FOI) review tool and/or technical assistance snapshots.

Limits on Contracted Evaluators

Applicants should make every effort to ensure that contracted evaluators are independent and objective.

Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

Refer to the [Budgeting Costs Guidance Handbook](#) on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page for general guidance on allowable activities and use of funds.

Note regarding travel costs, if allowable per guidance below: Any personnel approved in this grant must be reimbursed for travel according to the applicant's written policies and procedures; however, reimbursement may not exceed State of Texas mileage allowance, General Services Administration (GSA) hotel rate, and per diem rate existing in the current Texas State Appropriations Act. The state travel guidelines require only reimbursement of actual costs paid and, therefore, prohibit per diem payments to travelers without reconciliation to actual costs expended. Note: Contractor travel is paid as it is described in the individual contract, not to exceed the State rates, and may or may not be delineated out specifically in the contract.

Allowable activities and use of funds for this Grant include only the following:

General Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

Include from the following list any applicable activities and any other general uses of funds allowed for the Grant program. If programmatic allowable activities are more specific, as appropriate use that language instead. If limitations apply, include them (e.g., specific payroll positions, required contracts, etc.).

- Payroll costs
- Professional and contracted services
- Consumable and durable supplies and materials
- Debt services (lease liabilities for terms greater than 12 months) — allowable costs include:
- Subscription-based Information Technology Arrangement (SBITA) – Principal Costs (6514)
- Subscription-based Information Technology Arrangement (SBITA) – Interest Costs (6526)
- In-state travel as necessary to meet the program requirements of this grant. Travel costs must follow the travel guidance provided at the beginning of this Allowable Activities and Use of Funds section.

Other Allowable Operating Costs Requiring Specific Approval in the Grant Application (6400)

Travel Costs for Officials such as Executive Director, Superintendent, or Board Members

Travel costs for officials such as executive director, superintendent, or board members may be funded under the grant program. Travel cost reimbursement must follow the travel guidance provided at the beginning of this Allowable Activities and Use of Funds section. Only the following travel costs may be allowable for these positions:

- Travel costs related to visiting a currently designated R-PEP
- Travel related to possible R-PEP pathway research

Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds

Refer to the [Budgeting Costs Guidance Handbook](#) on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page for general guidance on unallowable costs.

In addition, unallowable activities and use of funds for this grant include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Debt services (lease liabilities for terms greater than 12 months)
- Capital outlay
- Capital Lease Liability — Principal Costs (6512)
- Capital Lease Liability – Interest Costs (6522)
- Interest on Debt Costs (6523)
- Audit services for state-funded grants
- Cost of membership in any civic or community organization

- Field trips
- Out of state travel
- Travel for students to conferences
- Stipends for non-employees
- Non-employee costs for conferences
- Hosting or sponsoring of conferences
- Advisory council
- Any activity not specified above in the Allowable Activities and Use of Funds section

Expenditure Reporting (ER)

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Cash Management, as well as the [Expenditure Reporting](#) webpage.

The grant program will be funded by reimbursement once the NOGA has been issued and the grantee submits payment (drawdown) requests through the Expenditure Reporting (ER) system. The grantee is required to request payment regularly, at minimum quarterly, for allowable expenditures as grant program requirements are carried out. However, it is best practice to request funds monthly to support program implementation.

Attachments

There are two types of attachments that may be required to be submitted with your Qualtrics application:

Required Program-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Required Program-Related Attachments, for a general description of program-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

No program-related attachments are required for this Grant program.

Required Fiscal-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fiscal-Related Documentation Required to Be on File, for a general description of fiscal-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

Adding Attachments

The instructions in the following sections describe how to attach files to an eGrants application, if applicable.

General Instructions

The size of each attachment cannot exceed 10MB. If you have a larger file, use a different scanning setting or zip the file to make it take up less space.

The only supported browser is Google Chrome. If you are using another browser, please change to Google Chrome before attaching files.

Documents only need to be attached once. Do not attach duplicate documents when completing an amendment. Remove an existing attached document prior to attaching a new version.

Naming Attachments

Name the files you are going to attach with no spaces (for example, 501C3letter.doc or 501C3_letter.doc) and no special characters. Use a meaningful name that identifies the specific document.

Make sure that each attachment has a valid extension (.pdf, .doc, .rtf, .xls, .bmp, .txt, .docx, .xlsx).

Note that attachments with very long names may not be able to be uploaded. If you have difficulty, try renaming the file and starting over.

Scanning Documents

If a document must be scanned to create an electronic copy, use the following hints to ensure that the document size is as small as possible:

Use an OCR or DPI setting of 200 DPI.

Scanned files must be in PDF format.

Ziping Files

If your files are too large, add them to a zip file to save space (download a free version of [WinZip](#) and find instructions on creating zip files).

Attaching Files to an eGrants Application

1. Ensure that the document is saved on your computer, using the naming instructions above.
2. On the Grant application's Table of Contents page, select Attach File.
3. Select the appropriate radio button for a TEA Defined Attachment or an Optional Attachment.
4. Select the Browse button. A standard Windows browser appears. Find the file.
5. Select Attach.
6. Confirm the document title appears under Documents Submitted in This Version; refresh the page if necessary. If the attachment does not appear, you may have to rename your document with a shorter name and start over.
7. Repeat this process to attach all your documents.

LASO Scoring and Review

This section provides information on the scoring and review of LASO applications.

LASO Review and Funding Criteria

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Review Criteria*

Applicants with the highest point totals will be selected as finalists and invited to participate in oral interviews.

Applicants will be ranked based on the following criteria:

- Eligibility Review.
- Completeness Review.
- Priority Points.
- Oral Interview.

Applications that do not meet eligibility and completeness requirements will not advance to the scoring or interview process.

Priority Points

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Priorities for Funding.

Priority points will be awarded as listed below (5 points each):

1. Currently participating in College and Career Readiness School Model implementation (P-TECH, ECHS).
2. Currently participating in Texas Regional Pathways Network (TRPN).
3. If applying for a Planning Grant, Coordinating Entity has been selected and secured.
4. No currently designated R-PEP is located within the partnership's ESC region.

Priority points are intended to incentivize early readiness and do not reflect minimum eligibility requirements.

Oral Interviews for Funding

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Oral Interviews for Funding*.

Oral Interviews will be used to validate information included in the application and assess applicants' readiness, partnership capacity, implementation planning, and ability to successfully achieve program goals and outcomes. Interviews will be scored using criteria aligned to program vision and design, operational readiness, partnership governance, student impact and scale, and sustainability. Additionally, if applicable, applicants will be asked for a plan of implementation if applying for multiple initiatives.

Planning Grant

- If applying as a school system, the lead applicant school system superintendent or authorized designee from the lead school system, as well as all identified partnering school systems.
- If applying as a coordinating entity, selected (or proposed) R-PEP executive director or other individual who will directly oversee R-PEP implementation

Expansion Grant

- Current R-PEP Coordinating Entity executive director or designee

Oral interviews will be scored using the rubric below. Interview scores will be incorporated into final funding determinations as described in the Selection of Applicants for Funding section. For Expansion Grant applicants, projected student participation and anticipated scale of impact will be evaluated during the interview process.

The interviews will be scored using the following rubric:

Interview Criterion	Description	Maximum Points
Program Vision, Design, and Plan for Implementation	Demonstrates a clear understanding of program requirements, pathway design, and alignment to regional workforce needs.	5
Operational Readiness	Demonstrates readiness to implement grant activities, including staffing, project management, timelines, and required deliverables.	5
Partnership Capacity and Governance	Demonstrates strong collaboration among participating entities, clearly defined roles, and effective governance structures.	5
Student Impact and Scale	Demonstrates the potential to increase student access, participation, and post-secondary outcomes through the proposed program.	5
Sustainability and Continuous Improvement	Demonstrates a plan for long-term sustainability, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement.	5
Total Interview Points Possible		25