

Informal Discretionary Competitive (IDC Grant)

LASO 2026-2027 (Cycle 5)

Learning Acceleration Support Opportunities

2026-2027 Strategic Compensation Cohort (SCC for ETIA) Program Guidelines

Authorized by General Appropriations Act (GAA), Article III, 89th Texas Legislature, Strategy B.3.1, Improving Educator Quality/Leadership; House Bill 2, Article 1, Section 1.02, Texas Education Code (TEC) § 21.3522.

Grant Application Due Date

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



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Introduction to the Program Guidelines

TEA, as the pass-through entity¹, is the grantee² from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and TEA awards subgrants to non-federal entities³ such as local educational agencies (LEAs), including school districts, charter schools, and education service centers, and to a lesser degree institutions of higher education (IHEs), and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) who are the agency's subgrantees⁴. These guidelines apply to all subgrantees of TEA, regardless of whether referenced herein as subgrantee or grantee. For purposes of this document, TEA may use the terms grantee and subgrantee synonymously for its subrecipients.

This part of the request for application (RFA), Program Guidelines, is to be used in conjunction with the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) and any application instructions.

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

Reference to the General and Fiscal Guidelines

The Program Guidelines provide information specifically relevant to this initiative 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 you review all referenced sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) when preparing your application.

Errata Notices

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

Overview of the IDC Process

The following steps provide a high-level overview of the process for responding to a grant opportunity, including submitting an application, and being selected for funding:

1. TEA publishes supporting documents on the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#).
2. Eligible applicants submit the initiative application via Qualtrics by the specified deadline in this document.
1. Initiative 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 award will be required to participate in a supplemental verification process.
6. Eligible applicants submit the initiative application via Qualtrics by the specified deadline in this document.
7. Initiative 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.
8. TEA announces applicants selected for funding on the TEA Grants Awarded Data webpage.
9. Applicants selected for award will be required to participate in a supplemental verification process.

¹ Pass-through entity is defined as a non-Federal entity that provides a subaward to a subrecipient to carry out part of a federal program. (2 CFR 200.74)

² 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. (34 CFR 77)

³ Non-federal entity is defined as a state, local government, Indian tribe, institution of higher education, or nonprofit organization that carries out a federal award as a recipient or subrecipient. (2 CFR 200.69)

⁴ Subgrantee is defined by TEA to be the same as a subrecipient which is defined as a non-federal entity that receives a subaward from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal program; but does not include an individual that is a beneficiary of such program. (2 CFR 200.93) Subgrantee is defined in 34 CFR 77 as the legal entity to which a subgrant is awarded and that is accountable to the grantee for the use of the funds provide

Contact for Clarifying Information

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

following TEA staff member should be contacted with questions:

Primary Program Contact: LaRahia Smith, Strategic Compensation Manager

Primary Program Contact Email: larahia.smith@tea.texas.gov

Primary Program Contact Phone: (512) 463-9497

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	\$1,500,000 for in-kind supports only
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	\$1,500,000 for in-kind supports only

**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 the 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/initiative 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.
October 14, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. CT	Program Specific Webinar #1 schedule Registration links found on the LASO website

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 20, 2026 at 10:30 a.m. CT	Program Specific Webinar #2 schedule Registration links found on the LASO website
November 1, 2026	FAQ question submission deadline
November 3, 2026 at 9:30 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	Supplemental Verification Form shared with awardees
March 8, 2027	Due Date for Supplemental Form
March 31, 2027	Beginning date of grant (if selected for award) See General and Fiscal Guidelines, Grant Period
August 31, 2030	End date of grant (if selected for award)

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.

- **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

Authorized by General Appropriations Act (GAA), Article III, 89th Texas Legislature, Strategy B.3.1, Improving Educator Quality/Leadership; House Bill 2, Article 1, Section 1.02, Texas Education Code (TEC) § 21.3522.

Where to Submit the LASO Application

LASO individual application links will be emailed to Superintendents on September 23, 2026. Please see the [LASO website](#) for more information.

Purpose of Program

Purpose:

TEA's Strategic Priority 1 is to Recruit, Support, and Retain Teachers and Principals. Achieving this priority entails supporting school systems in developing and implementing strategic compensation systems utilizing funds obtained through participation in the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) as well as local school system dollars. **The Strategic Compensation Cohort** seeks to provide direct on-going support to school systems as they replace the traditional step-and-ladder compensation system based on years of experience with a strategic compensation system based on performance that supports and rewards principals, assistant principals, and teachers who demonstrate effective teaching practices that result in increased student outcomes.

Goals and Objectives:

The objective of the grant is to support identified school systems in developing and implementing strategic compensation systems and TIA to earn an Enhanced TIA school system designation by meeting the following goals:

Develop and implement a strategic compensation system consistent with the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) approach for principals and assistant principals.

Develop and implement a TIA-compliant teacher strategic compensation system ensuring substantially all teachers are eligible to earn a designation.

Replace the traditional step and ladder pay system with one based on bands of effectiveness with no more across the board salary raises.

Blend TIA and other funding sources to ensure financial sustainability.

Adopt an approach to teacher assignment based on student need in accordance with Section 28.0062(a)(3).

Support the integration of instructional leadership, HQIM strategies, and strategic compensation.

- Support school systems in earning an Enhanced TIA designation by the end of their third year in the Cohort. Once obtained, this designation allows school systems to access an additional 10% of its TIA funds to support maintaining an Enhanced TIA designation.

Eligible Applicants

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

The eligible applicants are school systems that:

- Demonstrate readiness to expand or have expanded their Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) local designation system to substantially all teachers
- Believe teachers, principals and assistant principals should be compensated based on a rigorous definition of effectiveness designed to increase student outcomes
- School systems with a history of successful implementation and sustainability with multi-year initiatives
- Demonstrate financial integrity as shown through a FIRST rating of “A - Superior Achievement”
- Exhibits strong data systems and processes including a history of successful TIA data validation
- Believe that substantive change is needed to improve education across the state and have the willingness and desire to acknowledge the proactive disruption that ensues due to change
- Not have previously participated in a Strategic Compensation cohort.

Charters not **yet** serving students are not eligible.

***If a charter school closure is pending review, the award will be placed on hold pending a final determination regarding closure. If the final determination is to keep the charter open, the funding will be released. If the determination is to close the charter, making the charter ineligible, the award will be voided and no funds will be disbursed.*

Education Service Centers (ESCs) are not eligible to apply.

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*.

Approximately, 20 to 30 applicants will receive \$140,000 to \$165,000 in in-kind services, through the course of the initiative.

- Year 1: \$50,000
- Year 2: \$50,000
- Year 3: \$40,000
- Year 4: \$25,000 (if applicable)

Continuation awards for Years 2 and beyond are contingent on active participation and fulfillment of the required criteria outlined in the Application Requirements and Assurances.

**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.*

***If a charter school closure is pending review, the award will be placed on hold pending a final determination regarding closure. If the final determination is to keep the charter open, the funding will be released. If the determination is to close the charter, making the charter ineligible, the award will be voided and no funds will be disbursed.*

Selection of Applicants for Funding

Applicants will be selected in rank order based on the prioritization criteria outlined below.

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.

The following requirements are defined in the statute that authorizes this program.

There are no statutory required responses for this grant/initiative opportunity.

TEA Program Requirements (Note: Application Required Responses)

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

TEA has established the following program requirements.

1. Develop and implement a strategic compensation system for principals, assistant principals, and teachers within 3 years
2. Develop a three-year Strategic Compensation Plan with deadlines and person's responsible utilizing a program management platform
3. Update the school board on the progress and direction of the strategic compensation work
4. Execute and return a data sharing agreement with identified technical assistance partner within 30 days of request
5. Attend meetings, collaboration spaces, and step backs with TEA, the Center for Strategic Compensation (CSC), Technical Assistance Providers, and other school systems participating in strategic compensation such as:
 - Monthly Design Team meetings and bi-weekly check-in with Technical Assistance Provider
 - Strategic Compensation Lead community of practice meetings hosted by the CSC
 - Semi-annual program evaluations with TEA
 - Annual Strategic Compensation Convening (In-Person)
 - Annual Teacher Incentive Allotment Conference (In-Person)
6. Develop and complete plans/documents requested by TEA, the ESC, and Technical Assistance Providers within the timeline requested including but not limited to:
 - TIA Expansion Plan to obtain substantially all teachers for TIA eligibility, if applicable
 - Updated TIA Spending Plan aligned to a high-quality strategic compensation system
 - Strategic Compensation Plan and Handbook,
 - Principal, Assistant Principal, and Teacher Effectiveness Score Cards
 - Stakeholder Engagement Plan, and
 - Strategic Staffing Plan.
7. Respond to program evaluation survey requests within the timeline requested
8. Coordinate the Strategic Compensation Plan to ensure the following activities are completed:
 - Develop a strategic compensation system for principals/teachers and/or assistant principals (as applicable)
 - Implement data collection for "hold harmless" year of strategic compensation system for principals/teachers (as applicable)
 - Share effectiveness scorecards with principals, assistant principals, and teachers (as applicable)

Collaborate with TEA-designated Technical Assistance Provider to develop financial budget model for school system.

Statutory or Program-Specific Assurances

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

1. 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.
2. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Statutory and TEA Program requirements as noted in the Program Guidelines.
3. The applicant assures to adhere to all the Performance Measures, as noted in the Program Guidelines, and shall provide to TEA, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the program.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The school system will maintain current contact information in AskTED to ensure timely communication.
9. The school system will participate in all required meetings and submit evidence of implementation, at a monthly/quarterly cadence.
10. The applicant assures that the school system understands that if the initiative assurances are not met by the school system or the school system disengages with the supports/initiatives provided, the TEA reserves the right to terminate the school system's partnership in the LASO grant program.
11. The applicant assures that the school system superintendent has approved participation in all LASO supports that the school system is awarded.

Program Elements

Description of Program

The 2027-28 Strategic Compensation Cohort is a grant-funded opportunity that provides school systems with intensive, multi-year support to design and implement a compensation system that (1) rewards teachers and administrators based on effectiveness and (2) meets the requirements to earn an Enhanced TIA school system designation.

School systems are responsible for developing and maintaining systems that align compensation plans with strategic goals, ensuring compliance with state guidelines, and fostering a culture of performance and growth. School systems will engage in a variation of the following roadmap during the course of the cohort.

Year 1

Administrator Strategic Compensation System Development

- Create a Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Plan
- Create a framework: define eligible roles, finalize categories & effectiveness rubric
- Create a financial model and determine effectiveness levels and salaries
- Announce plan to the community and hold stakeholder engagement meetings
- Continue TIA implementation and data capture
- Expand TIA eligible categories until substantially all teachers are eligible for designation

Year 2*

Administrator Strategic Compensation System Implementation

- Implement a "no-harm" pilot of the administrator strategic compensation plan
- Gather feedback, review framework, and adjust as needed

Teacher Strategic Compensation System Development

- Create a Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Plan
- Create a framework: define eligible roles, finalize categories & effectiveness rubric
- Create a financial model and determine effectiveness levels and salaries
- Announce plan to the community and hold stakeholder engagement meetings
- Continue TIA implementation and data capture
- Expand TIA eligible categories until substantially all teachers are eligible for designation

Year 3*

Administrator Strategic Compensation System Implementation

- Full implementation of administrator strategic compensation plan
- Principals and assistant principals paid by effectiveness

Teacher Strategic Compensation System Implementation

- Implement a "no-harm" pilot of the teacher strategic compensation plan
- Gather feedback, review framework, and adjust as needed
- Continue TIA implementation and data capture
- Expand TIA eligible categories until substantially all teachers are eligible for designation

Enhanced TIA

- School system submits application for Enhanced TIA designation

**Note: School systems who successfully meet performance and evaluation measures will be selected for continuation in Year 2 and 3 of the Strategic Compensation Cohort initiative.*

Performance and Evaluation Measures

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

measures:

- The participants agree to collect data and report on the following mandatory performance measures throughout the three-year Strategic Compensation Cohort:
- Increase percentage of teachers eligible for TIA until substantially all teachers are included
- Development of three-year Strategic Compensation Plan that includes a calendar and person(s) responsible for implementation utilizing a program management platform
- Development and implementation of principal, assistant principal, and teacher effectiveness components for strategic compensation systems

Documents developed to support the implementation of a high-quality Strategic Compensation Plan including but not limited to school system Strategic Compensation Handbook, effectiveness scorecards, salary schedules considered as well as final adopted schedule.

Survey of all school system staff that indicate their level of satisfaction with the school system's strategic compensation plan through the TIA Annual Evaluation survey from Texas Tech University (TTU).

- Participation in semi-annual program evaluations
- Teacher and administrator retention data under the strategic compensation system
- School systems will successfully exit the cohort in the year following attainment of an Enhanced TIA designation

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.

The applicant must upload all program-related attachments for the following questions in the Program Requirements section of the Strategic Compensation Cohort (SCC) for Enhanced TIA initiative application, in a [narrative PDF](#):

1. Describe the school system's rationale, readiness, and long-term plan for implementing strategic compensation through Enhanced TIA. In your response, explain:
 - a. How strategic compensation aligns with and supports the goals of the school system's strategic plan; summarize the research, data, and stakeholder input that informed the decision to pursue strategic compensation;
 - b. Demonstrate the school system's capacity to successfully manage a multi-year initiative by describing a non-TIA initiative from the past two years that positively impacted student achievement, including its goals, outcomes, progress-monitoring processes, leadership roles, timeline, and key implementation decisions;
 - c. Explain how the initiative was designed and supported for long-term sustainability
2. Upload a signed [Strategic Compensation Cohort Participation Agreement and Attestation](#)

Required Fiscal-Related Attachments

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

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*

Criteria	Definition	Points
Narrative Response*	School system's participation in the Strategic Compensation Cohort supports the attainment of school system goals. School system's experience leading robust, multi-year initiatives with leadership roles, program management, measurable outcomes, and structures for sustainability.	35 Points
School System Capacity	School system's ability and willingness to pre-plan to address risks. School system's human resources and data systems capacity.	35 Points
Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) Foundation	- TIA participation status - Percent of teachers TIA eligible - History of successful data validation	25 points
Financial Rating	Finance Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST) score	5 points

Total Standard Points available: **100 Points**

*School systems must secure a minimum of 15 points in the Narrative Response section to be considered for the Cohort. As such, the Narrative Response section should reflect a real school system initiative and not be generated using artificial intelligence.

Priority Points

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

Discuss how priority points will be awarded if utilized.

- The highest scoring school system that meets required qualifications in each ESC with no current participation in a strategic compensation cohort (ESC 3, 16, and 17) will receive an additional 10 points.
- School systems with 10,000 or more students enrolled will receive an additional 10 points.
- School systems fully approved for the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) with a history of successful data validation and not currently identified for system monitoring will receive an additional 5 points.
- School systems with strong teacher participation and a TIA eligibility percentage of 80% or more will receive an additional 5 points.

Oral Interviews for Funding

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

Oral interviews are not applicable to this program