Stronger Connections Grant: Awardee Kick-off!

A Welcome from your Support Team - TEA

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Norms for today's call

- Use the Q&A function to submit questions. We are monitoring the Q&A to give you in-time answers and will also put together an FAQ after this week's webinars.

- A recording and slide deck will both be available to registered participants next week.

- The chat function is available, but please use the Q&A feature to submit questions.

Objectives

1. Participants will have a better understanding of the Stronger Connections Grant and TCSS goals and objectives.

2. Participants will feel confident entering the program negotiations and budget workbook stage.

3. Participants will have clear expectations for next steps and action items.

Today's Agenda

Overview & Updates

Negotiations & Budgeting
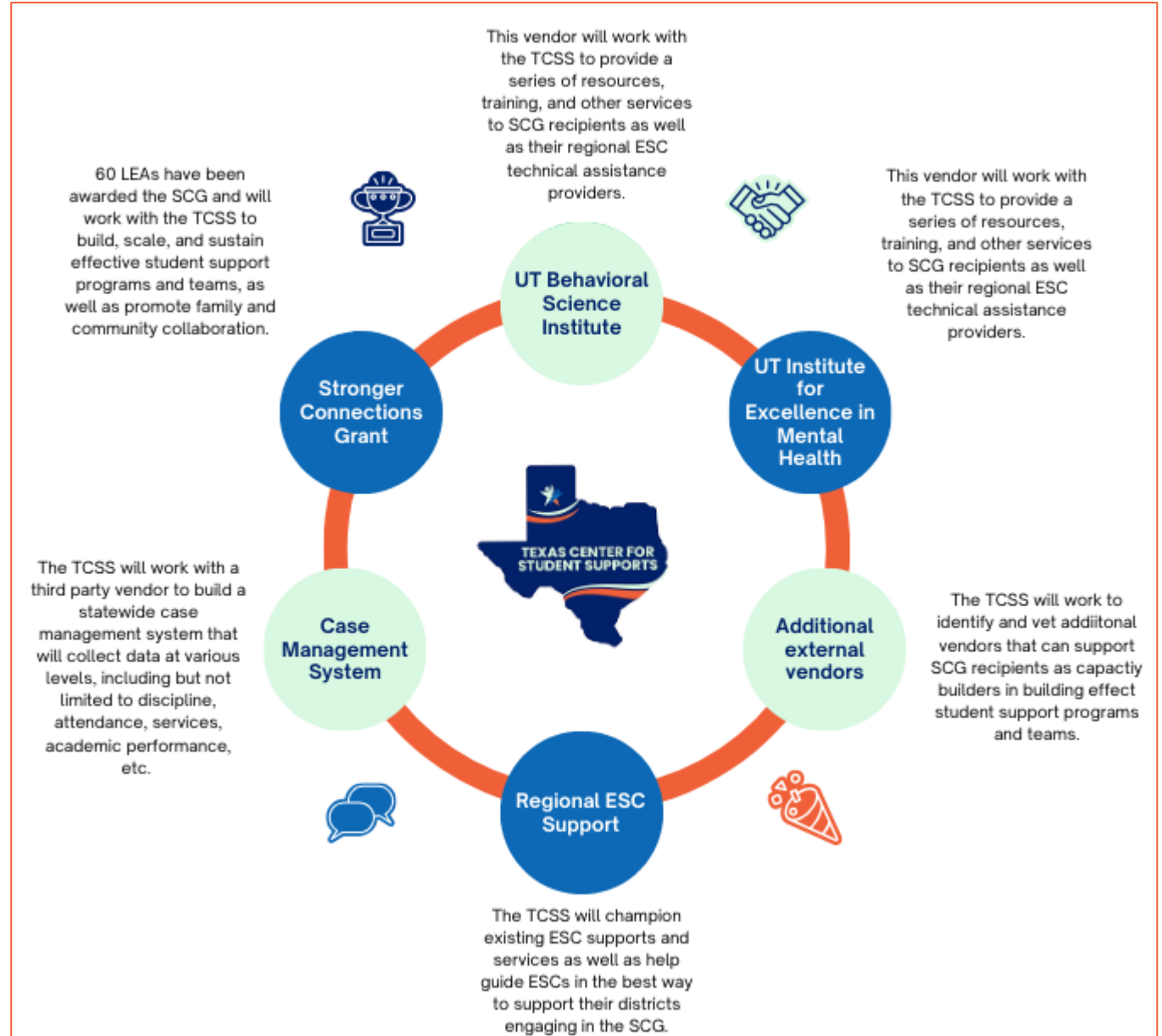
Next Steps & Action Items

Overview and Updates

- **Purpose of SCG:** to provide schools with an opportunity to improve their approach to supporting the nonacademic needs of students in an effort to provide safe, inclusive learning environments.
  - Access to a suite of trainings and supports from the Texas Center for Student Supports
  - Access to a local-level case management tool for identifying struggling students and tracking their progress through tailored services/supports
  - Access to funds that support 1) mental health personnel and contracted providers and 2) additional services and tools to address your identified needs

- **TCSS accomplishments so far:**
  - Advisory groups established- community partners, ESC representatives, district & campus level stakeholders, students
  - Frameworks built- construction of the Student Support Framework and the Parent and Family Engagement Playbook are underway with the support and guidance from internal TEA teams as well as
  - Partnerships with UTBPI and UTIEMH

Overview and Updates

Partnership with TCSS:

1. Student Support Program Framework
2. Professional Learning Content
3. Advisory & Focus Groups
4. Parent & Family Engagement Playbook
5. Data Reporting

This vendor will work with the TCSS to provide a series of resources, training, and other services to SCG recipients as well as their regional ESC technical assistance providers.

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60 LEAs have been awarded the SCG and will work with the TCSS to build, scale, and sustain effective student support programs and teams, as well as promote family and community collaboration.

The TCSS will work with a third party vendor to build a statewide case management system that will collect data at various levels, including but not limited to discipline, attendance, services, academic performance, etc.

The TCSS will work to identify and vet addiitonal vendors that can support SCG recipients as capactiy builders in building effect student support programs and teams.

The TCSS will champion existing ESC supports and services as well as help guide ESCs in the best way to support their districts engaging in the SCG.

UT Behavioral Science Institute

UT Institute for Excellence in Mental Health

Stronger Connections Grant

Case Management System

Additional external vendors

Regional ESC Support

TEXAS CENTER FOR STUDENT SUPPORTS

Negotiations & Budgeting

- **Extension of Grant Period:** We are working with our budgeting department to officially approve an extension of the SCG. Proposed end date is 9/30/**2026**.

- **23/24 SY as a Planning Phase:** The 23/24 SY has been identified as a planning year and will continue to act as a planning year with a possible extension. With that in mind, awardees should be considerate of how that impacts their budget.
  - 23/24 – planning (minimal funds expended)
  - 24/25 – planning/implementation year 1 (payroll & contracted services begin*)
  - 25/26 – implementation year 2 (payroll & contracted services continue)

- **Vendor Notes:** Vendors are very aware of the SCG and have already begun to reach out to TEA about grant funds. Please be mindful that the TCSS is developing both mandatory and vetted optional providers for various SCG technical assistance and capacity building.

- **Impact on Negotiations/Tips for Budgeting:** Everyone will participate in program negotiations even if the program team did not leave any negotiation notes on your SCG application. The budgeting workbook is required of everyone.

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  - **Connecting Dollars to the Work:** every expenditure should reflect what is *reasonable and necessary* to carryout the goals of the grant. Remember this grant aims to address and improve responses to nonacademic needs such as emotional, behavioral, mental health needs. This is not a school safety grant.

  - **Unallowable Costs:** security, officers, SROs to meet state minimums, guards, security hardware or equipment, training related to state minimums (BTA and bullying, for example)

  - **Capital Outlay:** Please check your negotiation notes to see if program approved your capital outlay expenditure or needed more information. Make the appropriate edits and insert your capital outlay expense in the budget workbook. Grants admin. will send us any capital outlay requests for final approval. We need clarification before giving you ultimate approval!

Negotiations & Budgeting

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  - **Payroll:** Project directors and other grant/data support staff could be hired 23/24 SY, however positions related to counselors, mental healthcare contractors, etc. should be budgeted across the 24/25 and 25/26 SYs.

  - **Sustainability:** Please let sustainability drive your budget conversations. Using the money to impact student wellbeing while you have it is important, being forward-thinking about what programs look like post 2026 is critical.

  - **Documentation:** The budget workbook you receive from grants during the negotiations process is comprehensive of the entire grant cycle. Please consider keeping local documentation of how your grant funds will spread out between now and September 2026. We will ask you to submit information on quarterly spending goals that reflect a more discrete break down of funds than what you capture during negotiations.

Next Steps

- **Negotiations Timeline:**
  - Competitive Review concludes – mid-October 2023
  - Preliminary Award Notifications Made – November 1st, 2023
  - Internal Program Negotiations completed – November 3rd, 2023
  - External Program Negotiations period – November X to December
  - NOGAs released – upon successful completion of negotiations
  - Technical Grant Start Date – November 15, 2023

- **Upcoming SCG Programmatic Deliverables:**
  - Program negotiations (ASAP)
  - Mandatory allocations made to regional ESC and TCSS, 6% and 10% respectively (January)
  - Recruitment of local advisory councils (January to March)
  - School Climate surveys as provided by TCSS (February/March)
  - TCSS trainings related to SSP and Family Engagement (Spring 2024)

Next Steps

- **A Look at the FOI Tool:**

  - **Purpose:** The Stronger Connections Grant FOI tool provides districts with an opportunity for self-reflection, formative and summative evaluation, and celebration of strengths. This tool also provides in-time, scaffolded supports to districts concerning the Stronger Connections deliverables and assurances. By implementing this tool, district and campus leadership should notice a stronger, more effective implementation of grant objectives.

  - **Structure:** Leadership teams will gather quarterly to discuss and evaluate their FOI performance measures, rate themselves on the FOI self-reflection rubric, provide short but meaningful narrative responses, and then 1-2 representatives will review that information with the TEA (and their regional ESC SCG rep, as available) on a virtual call.

  - **Timeline:** virtual calls and prerequisite leadership meetings occur quarterly (April 2024, June 2024, October 2024, January 2025, etc.) The actual FOI tool will be sent to LEAs in January.

Next Steps

- **Performance Measures:**

  - *Grant Management* - This PM ensures the LEA is 1) on track to spend down 100% of funds, 2) able to thoughtfully connect the dollars to the grant objectives, and 3) complying with state and federal grant reporting requirements.

  - *Training and Professional Development* - This PM ensures that the LEA is meeting mandatory TCSS training deliverables as well as any additional external vendor trainings, is providing feedback to TCSS on training/PD deliverables, and is utilizing regional ESC technical assistance at the appropriate capacity.

  - *Data Collection* - This PM ensures that the LEA is providing critical data entries using the tools and timeline provided by the TCSS (case management system), as well as completing all quarterly FOI check-ins with TEA.

Next Steps

- **Performance Measures:**

  - *Student Supports Program* - This PM ensures that the LEA is on track to building and maintaining an effective student support program and team according to the parameters set forth by the TCSS. This includes implementation of the parent and family engagement playbook as well as local advisory councils.

  - *SMART Goals and Benchmarks* - This PM allows the LEA to track their progress towards the smart goals they indicated on their application according to the benchmarks they outlined.

  - *Sustainability* - This PM ensures the LEA is integrating sustainability measures into their programmatic decisions.

Action Items

- **Lookout for Negotiations Email!**

- **[Qualtrics Survey](#) Completion ASAP**

- **Review the Kick-off Guide & Points of [Contact](#)**
  - **Recording, slide deck, kick-off guide available week of Nov. 20th**

- **Reach out to info@texascss.net to name recommendations for vetted technical assistance providers.**

- **For Questions...**
  - **Sarah.mccaslin@tea.Texas.gov**
  - **Hank.Weikert@tea.Texas.gov**
  - **info@texascss.net**
  - **Regional ESC contact sheet linked above**

Conclusion

- If you have further questions, please put them into the Q&A box.

- We want to ensure these sessions are meaningful for their intended audience, please take 2 minutes to complete the following exit ticket!
    - https://forms.gle/Ken5YwDFSm9mmLCi6

- ***Thank you!! We look forward to this partnership!***