Introduction

This document provides an overview of the discretionary (or competitive) grants application process at the U.S. Department of Education (the Department).

Who Should Use This Document?

Prospective applicants, including new potential grantees, for the Department's discretionary grant programs that have never received a grant from the Department and those that are interested in learning more about the process.

1: Department of Education Competitive Grants and How they Work

- **Federal Fiscal Year Cycle**
    - Each Federal Fiscal Year (FY) starts on October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following year (e.g. October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020). The Department generally runs grant competitions in the latter half of the fiscal year.
- **Secretary of Education's Final Supplemental Priorities for Discretionary Grant Programs[i]**
    - Periodically, the Secretary of Education (the Secretary) publishes supplemental priorities that emphasize specific initiatives for our competitive grant programs.
    - The Department recently published final priorities in support of Opportunity Zones[ii] and other Administrative initiatives, such as supporting new potential grantees[iii].
- **Grantmaking Offices at the Department**
    - The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)[iv]; the Office of Postsecondary Education(OPE)[v]; the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services(OSERS)[vi]; the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE)[vii]; and the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA)[viii].
- **Eligible Entities Resources[ix]**
    - Each individual grant program has its own statutory authority of who is eligible to apply (e.g. state educational agencies, institutions of higher education, etc.).
    - Grants.gov also has "Find" capabilities to search on applicant eligibility[x].

2: Where are Funding Opportunities Found

- **FederalRegister.gov[xi]**
    - This journal of the Federal Government is published daily. All the Department's grant competition notice inviting applications (NIAs) and regulations are published here.
    - Sign-ups for daily emails on notices and other happenings are also available.
- **Grants.gov[xii]**
    - This government website allows for funding opportunity searches using the Catalog for Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number or CFDA program title.
- **Department's Grants Webpage[xiii]**
    - This website provides links to open Department grant competitions.
- **Forecast of Discretionary Funding Opportunities[xiv]**
    - This provides a preview of future planned grant competitions and their schedule.

3: Required Steps to be Taken Prior to Applying for Funding

- **Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number[xv]**
    - Before applying for a grant from any Federal agency, you must have a (DUNS) number. There is no charge for registering, but it may take one to two business days to create.

- o On December 31, 2020, the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI or SAMMI) will replace the DUNS number for registration in System for Award Management (SAM). More to come from the Department on this transition.
- **Register in the System for Award Management (SAM)[xvi]**
  - o Before applying for a grant from any Federal agency, you must register and set up an account in SAM.
  - o There is no charge for registering. It may take upwards of several weeks to establish an account, so register well in advance of a competition submission deadline.

4: How the Department Announces Funding Opportunities
- **Notice Inviting Applications (NIA)**
  - o The Department generally publishes NIAs in the *Federal Register* to announce grant competitions. Some agencies call their funding opportunity announcements "Requests for Proposals (RFPs), Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), or Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs)."
  - o Each NIA for a program is unique (e.g. degrees of evidence; priorities; etc.).
  - o Submit your application early; do not wait until the last minute.
  - o Grantees are selected based on peer reviewer scores and Secretary approval.
- **Common Instructions for Applicants to Discretionary Grant Programs[xvii]**
    - ▪ This document provides applicants with a centralized set of instructions for applying to the Department's discretionary grant programs. NIAs reference this document.
- **Technical Assistance to applicants**
  - o General technical assistance to applicants is commonly offered; sometimes this includes pre-application webinars and program application FAQ documents.
  - o These resources are generally available on the grant program's specific website.
  - o However, program offices do not provide substantive guidance on an individual application before submission that would give that application an unfair advantage over others in the competition.

5: How the Department Notifies Successful and Unsuccessful Applicants
- Successful Applicants – The Department's Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs (OLCA) notifies the applicant's U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators. After this notification to Congress has occurred, the Department emails the applicant's certifying representative and grant project director a link to their Grant Award Notification (GAN). The GAN serves as the Department's official notification to grant applicants informing them that their applications have been selected for funding. Successful applications will receive a GAN or a link to access. A hard copy GAN may instead be issued in some cases.
- Unsuccessful Applicants – The Department formally notifies unsuccessful applicants that their applications were not selected for funding.

6. Contacting the Department and Grants.gov
- For questions about the grant competition and application submission, contact the Department's person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section in the grant competition's NIA.
- For questions about submitting an application using Grants.gov, go to [Grants.gov - How to Apply for Grants](Grants.gov).