

Ohio's Straight A Fund Overview

PURPOSE

Ohio's new \$250 million Straight A Fund is a competitive grant program to provide Ohio's schools the opportunity to implement new and creative learning options for their students. Grants will be awarded to eligible applicants implementing innovative ideas and programs to better meet the unique learning needs of all of Ohio's boys and girls by directing more money to Ohio's classrooms.

The grants must be used for projects that aim to achieve significant advancement in one or more of the following goals:

- Student achievement;
- Spending reduction in the five-year fiscal forecast; or
- Utilization of a greater share of resources in the classroom.

BACKGROUND

Grants shall be awarded by a nine-member Governing Board consisting of the superintendent of public instruction or the superintendent's designee, four members appointed by the Governor, two members appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives, and two members appointed by the president of the Senate. The Ohio Department of Education will provide administrative support to the Governing Board.

The governing board will select grant advisors with fiscal and education expertise. These advisors will evaluate proposal scores from grant applicants and make recommendations for funding to the Governing Board.

The Governing Board shall issue an annual report to the Governor, the speaker of the House of Representatives, the president of the Senate, and the chairpersons of the House and Senate Education Committees regarding the types of grants awarded, the grant recipients and the effectiveness of the Straight A Fund.

In addition, an advisory committee for the Straight A Program shall be established. The advisory committee shall not consist of more than eleven members appointed by the Governor that represent all areas of the state and different interests. The advisory committee shall annually review the Straight A Program and provide strategic advice to the Governing Board.



ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The Straight A Program will provide grants to city, local, exempted village and joint vocational school districts, educational service centers, community schools, STEM schools, college-preparatory boarding schools, individual school buildings, education consortia (which may represent a partnership among school districts, school buildings, community schools or STEM schools), institutions of higher education, and private entities partnering with one or more of the listed entities. Educational service centers, institutions of higher education and private entities are encouraged to partner with a school or school district, community school or STEM school in order to ensure the Straight A Program goals are met.

A grant awarded to individual entities or entities partnering with private entities shall not exceed \$5 million in each fiscal year. A grant awarded to an education consortia shall not exceed \$15 million in each fiscal year. The superintendent of public instruction may request approval from the Controlling Board to exceed these maximum amounts.

SUBMISSION OF INTENT TO APPLY

All eligible applicants who are interested in submitting a proposal as a lead applicant should submit their *Intent to Apply* by Oct. 4, 2013. The Intent to Apply can be submitted through the Straight A Fund website. Those that submit an Intent to Apply are not required to submit a subsequent Straight A Fund grant application. The Intent to Apply will be used by Straight A Fund administrative staff to identify the number of scorers and grant advisors required for a timely review of all Straight A Fund grant applications.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSAL

Each grant applicant will be required to submit a proposal that includes all of the following:

1. A description of the project for which the applicant is seeking a grant, including a description of how the project's innovative concept that represents bold and visionary thinking will have substantial value and lasting impact;
2. An explanation of how the project will be self-sustaining. If the project will result in increased ongoing spending, the applicant shall show how the spending will be offset by verifiable, credible and permanent spending reductions.
3. A description of a thoughtful implementation plan that identifies quantifiable results of the project that can be benchmarked.



Applications will be scored and the Governing Board shall issue a decisions of “yes,” “no,” “hold” or “edit” within seventy-five (75) days. The process for scoring and evaluation is outlined below.

PARTNERSHIPS AND CONSORTIA

If an education consortium applies for a grant, the lead applicant shall be the school district, school building, community school or STEM school that is a member of the consortia and shall so indicate on the grant application.

If an applicant is a member of a consortia or a partnership, applicants are required to submit a Description of Nature of Partnership or Description of Consortium Relationship that includes the description of the roles and the signatures of all participating entities.

INITIAL SCREENING AND EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

The screening of the application involves a fiscal review of the budget, the five-year financial impact and the corresponding budget narrative. Applications will undergo an initial screening by three separate fiscal sustainability scorers to ensure that the proposal includes an explanation of how the project will be self-sustaining. If the project will result in increased, ongoing spending, the applicant shall show how the spending will be offset by verifiable, credible and permanent spending reductions.

An average score of the three fiscal sustainability scorers will be submitted to the Straight A Fund staff and grant advisors who will evaluate and recommend applications for acceptance or rejection to the Governing Board. Any project that has not met the screening criteria will be rejected.

SCORING AND EVALUATION OF OVERALL PROJECT PROPOSAL

Upon meeting of the screening criteria, the applications and questions will be scored by three programmatic scorers and receive scores based on a 0-5 point scale for each item. In order to receive the maximum number of points, an application must be of the highest quality and the applicant must provide a clear, strong narrative that the project will achieve the goals of the Straight A Fund. The scores of the programmatic scorers will be analyzed, and a final score based on this analysis will be issued for each project. Grant advisors will evaluate the scored proposals and issue a recommendation for funding to the Governing Board.

Informed by the recommendations from both the initial screening and the subsequent evaluation of the overall project proposals, the Governing Board for the Straight A Fund will issue a “yes,” “no,” “hold” or “edit” decision for each application.



AWARDING OF GRANTS

Upon deciding to award a grant to an applicant, the Governing Board shall enter into a grant agreement with the applicant that includes all of the following:

- The content of the applicant's proposal as outlined under the Submission of Proposal section;
- The project's deliverables and a timetable for their completion;
- Conditions for receiving grant funding;
- Conditions for receiving funding in future years if the contract is a multi-year contract;
- A provision specifying that funding will be returned to the Governing Board if the applicant fails to implement the agreement, as determined by the auditor of state.
- A provision specifying that the agreement may be amended by mutual agreement between the Governing Board and the applicant.

Each grant awarded under this section shall be subject to approval by the Controlling Board prior to execution of the grant agreement.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

- Oct. 4, 2013: Deadline for submission of Intent to Apply
- Oct. 14, 2013: Application made available in the Ohio Department of Education Grants Management System, CCIP.
- Oct. 25, 2013: (11:59 p.m. EST): Application deadline
- Dec. 17, 2013: Notification of awards

QUESTIONS

All questions concerning this application may be e-mailed to:
straightafund@education.ohio.gov

