



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

## North Carolina Stronger Connections Grant

(NC SCG)

### Competitive Grant Program

2022-2023 FY23 Apply for Grant in CCIP

2023-2024 FY24 Award/Distribute Funds

## Request for Proposal

### Guidance and Planning Worksheets

Office of Federal Programs

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### **Origin**

On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), an important first step toward reducing the risk of gun violence in our schools and communities. Through this legislation, Congress authorized \$1 billion in formula funding under Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments. North Carolina will appropriate their state allotment of funds under this legislation as the North Carolina Stronger Connections Grant (NC SCG).

### **Purpose**

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) upon approval of the SBE, anticipates funding through the North Carolina Stronger Connections Grant (NC SCG). The NC SCG will provide additional support for selected PSUs to create safer and healthier learning environments for their students, while also providing support for the ongoing needs of families, educators and communities.

### **Eligible Organizations**

Public School Unit recipients (districts, charters, labs and state operated programs) with physical addresses within the 40 most distressed counties in the state are eligible and strongly encouraged to apply. These PSUs are identified on the North Carolina Department of Commerce's annual tier ranking of the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being (Tier I).

North Carolina further defines the high need focus in the 40 Tier I Counties as an PSU experiencing two or more of the following factors:

- high student-to-mental health professional ratio;
- evidence of student suicidal behavior;
- bullying and harassment.
- community and school violence;
- students experiencing trauma;
- youth in care;
- human trafficking;
- substance abuse;
- English Learners;
- immigrant and refugee students;
- high rate<sup>1</sup> of poverty;
- students experiencing housing instability and homelessness;
- students experiencing food insecurity;

- students with chronic illness;
- students experiencing health disparities;
- high rate of chronic absenteeism;
- exclusionary discipline;
- referrals to alternative education placements;
- impacted by a natural disaster or traumatic event; other categories mentioned in Section 4108 20 U.S.C. 7118] Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students.

### **Funding Priorities**

Applicants should demonstrate a strong commitment to the following:

- Implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student’s social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services.
- Engaging students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments.
- Designing and implementing policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

Applicants must ensure the application is completed in its entirety for consideration in the review phase and to avoid a lower score based on the established rubric.

### **Funding Availability**

Grant participants are eligible to receive funds to use in the 2023-2024, 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years in a total award amount of up to \$675,000. An award will be recommended for each of the 40 distressed counties with applicants being scored and ranked in order by county and then an overall ranking will add the remaining awarded PSUs based on the rank score. Each awarded PSU will receive a base amount of \$250,000 and \$1500 per pupil based on the ADM. **(The ADM must match the ADM used to complete the Title I Eligible Schools Summary Report-ESSR).** The total award for a PSU will not exceed \$675,000. The award amount will have an encumbrance date of September 30, 2026, with a standard liquidation period to follow. Awards will be allotted with an initial budget in Fall of 2023-2024(FY24), and a carryover budget submitted annually until 2025-2026(FY26) or until funds are fully expended.

### **Budget Requirements**

A proposed budget must clearly align with program activities, must be allowable, reasonable and necessary, and must provide a breakdown of costs by category.

The NC SCG Budget Worksheet reflecting requested funds by category must be completed and uploaded to CCIP under “Required Documents”.

An applicant awarded NC SCG funds for the 2023-24 funding period that fails to demonstrate compliance may be subject to funds being withheld or disabled. After SBE approval of recommended awardees is announced, NC SCG PSU award recipients will complete a PRC 145 budget in their financial system.

### **Monitoring Expectations**

Grant recipients shall report to NCDPI the progress of their program, including alignment with State academic standards, data collection for reporting student progress and other measures during a NC SCG monitoring event that will occur in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school year based upon an established risk assessment of PSUs. Public school units submitting applications should have the capacity to provide fiscal, programmatic, and student performance data reflective of narratives written in the grant details of the approved application as requested by NCDPI.

### **HOW TO APPLY**

**Complete and submit the Intent to Apply form on or before May 24, 2023.**

Intent to apply will begin on May 8, 2023. Public school units that intend to apply for the NC SCG are encouraged to notify the NCDPI of its intent no later than 5:00 pm May 24, 2023. Information collected will be used to determine the number of reviewers needed for the application review process. Please note that the submission of this intent to apply is not a prerequisite for application of grant funds, nor does it obligate the public-school unit to apply.

For the 2023-24 North Carolina Stronger Connections Grant, all applications must be completed on the web-based grants management system, the North Carolina Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP). Applicants may find it helpful to use the application outline at the end of this document as a planning worksheet to begin collecting the necessary information and to ensure that all narratives are drafted prior to entering the information into the CCIP system.

**Only applications submitted by moving the status to Chief Administrator Approved in CCIP by 12:00 pm Noon EST on or before June 27, 2023, will be reviewed, scored and considered for the funds. Applications received after 12:00 pm EST June 27, 2023, will not be accepted.**

### **Equitable Services to Private School Assurances**

All applicants must review and agree to the Equitable Services to Private School Assurances. The questions must be completed, and the document signed by the agency head or appropriate designee and included as an attachment to each application. **This will not apply to charter/lab schools.**

### **Supplement, Not Supplant**

- NC SCG awards include the federal “supplement, not supplant” provision. Supplement typically means ‘create something to add to a program’; supplant typically means ‘to replace something that already exists.’
- NC SCG funds can only be used to start a new program as prescribed in this RFP or to supplement an existing program. As such, NC SCG funds may not be used to supplant existing programs that are like NC SCG programs or funding that is used for programs that are like existing programs. Any expenditure that supplants existing programs or funding is not allowable. Applicants seeking to supplement an existing NC SCG-like program must clearly describe how the NC SCG funds will supplement and not supplant other funds.

### **Records Retention**

- All subrecipients must maintain appropriate and sufficient documentation to show evidence of compliance with federal, state and local regulations. It is the responsibility of the subrecipient to retain all financial and program records in an auditable manner to be accessed and provided to the USED, SBE, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
- All accounts, records and other supporting documentation pertaining to all costs incurred shall be maintained for five (5) years from the last program activity, typically the submission of the final project disbursement report or longer if there is an ongoing investigation, monitoring or audit.
- Supporting documentation for expenditures is required for all funding methods. Examples of such documentation include but are not limited to invoices with check numbers verifying payment, and/or bank statements; time and effort logs for staff, salary/benefits schedules for staff.

### **Technical Assistance Webinar**

Technical assistance is provided to potential applicants to describe general requirements of the NCSCG and required components of the application for funding. NCDPI will conduct a webinar on May 16, 2023, for all qualifying PSUs in the 40 identified counties. The webinar will be recorded and can be used as a resource during the application period. Webinar registration instructions will be announced in the Office of Federal Program’s weekly update. If you do not receive the weekly update, please notify your regional program administrator or [Timothy.Dryman@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:Timothy.Dryman@dpi.nc.gov) .

For those recipients who are ultimately awarded funds, a second webinar will be held on October 11, 2023. This webinar will discuss reviewing funding awards, budget approvals and processes, and next steps moving forward. Webinar registration instructions will be announced in the Office of Federal Program’s weekly update.

### **Appeals Process**

In accordance with federal rules, NCDPI provides applicants or recipients with the opportunity for a hearing to appeal NCDPI’s final action under an applicable federal program. *See* 34 C.F.R.

§ 76.401(a), 34 C.F.R. § 76.783 and 20 U.S.C. 1231b-2. Specifically, the applicant or recipient must allege that NCDPI violated State or Federal law, rules, regulations, or guidelines in:

1. 1) disapproving or failing to approve its application or program in whole or part,
2. 2) failing to provide funds in amounts in accord with the requirements of laws and regulations,
3. 3) ordering, in accordance with a final State audit resolution determination, the repayment of misspent or misapplied Federal funds, or
4. 4) terminating further assistance for an approved program.

No other grounds for appeal will be accepted or considered.

To request a hearing, the appellant must file a full and complete written appeal, including the issue(s) in dispute, the legal authority or other basis for the appeal position, and the remedy sought within 30 days of the NCDPI's action (e.g., notification of any action under 1 through 4 above). The request must have an original signature of the authorized agent who signed the application, if available. If that individual is not available, the request must have the original signature of another individual who is authorized to sign official documents.

An original and two copies of the request for a hearing must be submitted by one of the following methods.

Certified mailed with a return receipt required (within 30 days based on the postmark) to:

**Mailing Address:**

Dr. LaTricia Townsend, Senior Director  
Office of Federal Programs

Instruction Mail Service Center 6307  
Raleigh, NC 27699

Hand-delivered to:

**Physical Address:**

Dr. LaTricia Townsend, Senior Director  
Office of Federal Programs

Instruction 301 N. Wilmington Street  
Raleigh, NC 27601

Within 30 days of receiving the hearing request, NCDPI will hold a hearing on the record to review its action. Pursuant to *in re Appeal of Clovis Unified School District*,<sup>1</sup> the applicant or

recipient will receive notice of the hearing and can participate and be represented by counsel. The

1 *See In re Appeal of Clovis Unified School District*, U.S. Dept. of Ed. Remand Order (July 10, 1995).

The hearing will be conducted by an impartial hearing officer. During the hearing, the parties will have the opportunity to present and challenge evidence in an orderly fashion before an impartial decision maker.<sup>2</sup> No later than 10 days after the hearing, the hearing officer, as the impartial decision maker, will issue a written ruling on behalf of NCDPI including findings of fact and reasons for the ruling. The parties may waive these deadlines by mutual consent in writing.

NCDPI will rescind its action if it determines the action conflicts with Federal or State laws and regulations governing the applicable program. If after review, NCDPI does not rescind its action, the applicant or recipient may appeal to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education within 20 days of being notified of the result.

NCDPI will make all records pertaining to any review or appeal of the applicant or recipient available at reasonable times and places to the applicant or recipient. This includes records of other applicants.

If an applicant applied for a subgrant under a covered program listed in 34 C.F.R. § 76.401(a), NCDPI will provide an opportunity for a hearing before it disapproves the application. If the applicant applied for a hearing under a program not listed in 34 C.F.R. § 76.401(a), NCDPI will provide an opportunity for a hearing either before or after it disapproves the application.

## North Carolina Stronger Connections Grant Application

### Scoring Rubric Level I

| <b>PROGRAM NEEDS</b>   | <b>Max Pts 30</b> |
|--|-------------------|
| a. Identification of the school(s) to be served and the process used to identify the school(s);  | 5                 |
| b. Identification of the target population(s) to be served;  | 5                 |
| c. Use of data to demonstrate the specific health and safety needs of the target population(s) to be served;   | 5                 |
| d. Identification of the gaps the district and school(s) have in meeting the health and safety needs of the target population(s) to be served;                         | 5                 |
| e. Identification of the gaps the community has in meeting the health and safety needs of the target population(s) to be served; and                                   | 5                 |
| f. Description of the alignment of health and safety needs of identified school(s)/population(s) with the PSU needs assessment.  | 5                 |
| <b>PROGRAM DESIGN</b>  | <b>Max Pts 30</b> |
| a. Description of the program goals and evidence-based interventions/activities proposed to be implemented;  | 5                 |
| b. Description of how <u>educators and other school staff</u> were engaged in identifying proposed interventions/activities and implementation planning;               | 5                 |
| c. Description of how <u>students, parents, families, and the community</u> were engaged in identifying proposed interventions/activities and implementation planning; | 5                 |
| d. Description of rationale for how intervention/activities will impact proposed safety and health outcomes;   | 5                 |
| e. Description of the alignment of proposed intervention/activities with identified school needs; and  | 5                 |
| f. Description of the alignment of proposed intervention/activities with identified target population needs.   | 5                 |



|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>OPERATIONAL CAPACITY</b>  | <b>Max Pts 15</b>  |
| a. Description of district-/school-based resources the PSU will leverage to maximize the efficiency and impact of providing safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments;   | 5                  |
| b. Description of community-based resources the district/school(s) will leverage to maximize the efficiency and impact of providing safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments; and   | 5                  |
| c. Description of PSU’s plan for continued sustainability.   | 5                  |
| <b>EVALUATION CAPACITY</b>   | <b>Max Pts 20</b>  |
| a. Identification of key outcomes (which are aligned with identified goals) that will be used to track and measure the success of the proposed SCG-funded intervention(s)/strategies/activities;   | 5                  |
| b. Description of the organizational plan for collecting and analyzing data that aligns with the identified key outcomes (including measurement tools to be used, target population to be evaluated, <u>and</u> timeline of evaluative efforts); | 5                  |
| c. Description of how evaluation findings will be used to ensure on-going continuous improvements and shared with the larger community (e.g., students, staff, parents, partners, funders); and  | 5                  |
| d. Description of organizational capacity (e.g., data systems, staff expertise) for collecting, maintaining, and reporting high-quality implementation and outcome data.   | 5                  |
| <b>BUDGET NARRATIVE AND ALIGNMENT</b>  | <b>Max Pts 10</b>  |
| a. Description of how costs are aligned to proposed programming; and   | 5                  |
| b. Description of how the proposed budget demonstrates costs are reasonable and necessary including a calculated cost estimate per student served.   | 5                  |
| <b>TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS</b>   | <b>Max Pts 105</b> |

