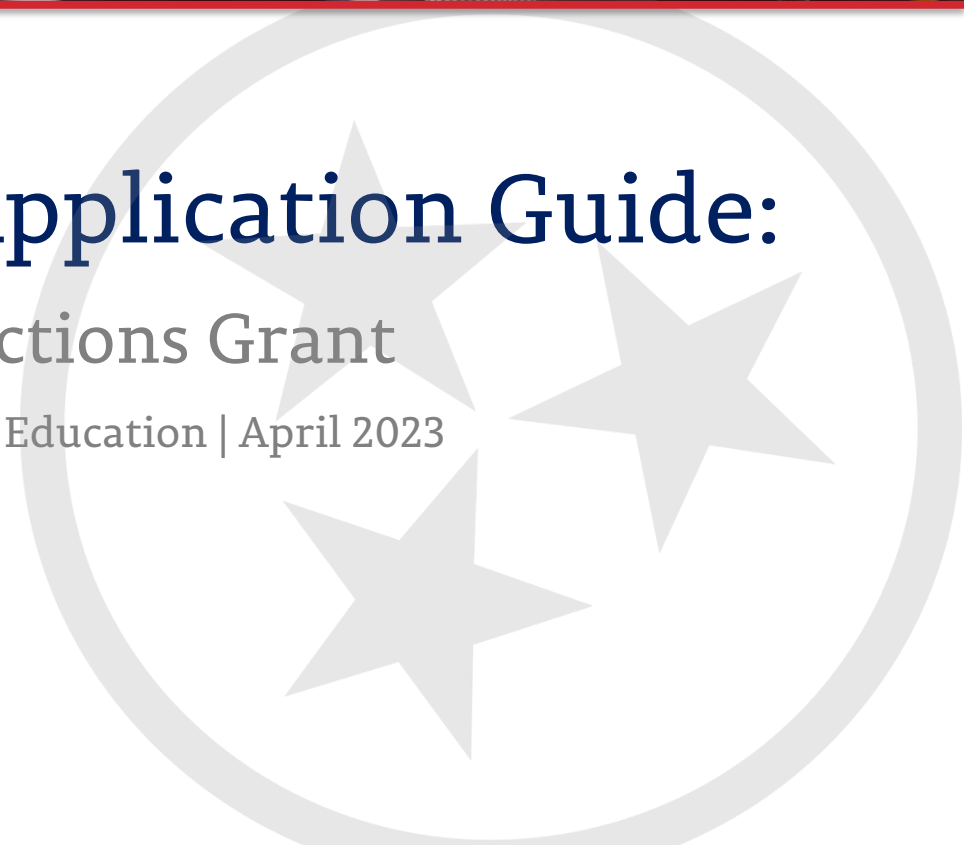




Technical Application Guide:

Stronger Connections Grant

Tennessee Department of Education | April 2023



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Background

On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed into law the [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act \(BSCA\)](#). This legislation expands mental health services and provides additional support for states and local educational agencies (LEAs) to design and enhance initiatives that will promote safer, more inclusive, and positive school environments for all students, educators, and school staff.

The BSCA includes \$1 billion through Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for state educational agencies (SEAs) to competitively award subgrants to high-need LEAs to establish safer and healthier learning environments, and to prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence, and hate that impact school communities at individual and systemic levels, among other programs and activities. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has designated this component of the BSCA the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program.

Under the SCG, an SEA must make subgrant awards on a competitive basis to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), as determined by the SEA, and funds may be used only for activities authorized under ESEA Title IV, Part A § 4108 (i.e. Safe and Healthy Students). **Note:** *Funds allocated under the program must be administered and tracked separately from an SEA's or LEA's regular Title IV, Part A formula allocation.* Detailed information regarding the SCG can be found in ED's [Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) Program Overview

Program Purpose

In September of 2022, ED released a [Dear Colleague letter](#) formally announcing state allocations for the SCG program. The letter also provided important insight into the intent of the grant.

Research consistently shows that safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments are associated with improved academic achievement and emotional well-being of students, as well as with reductions in disciplinary actions.ⁱ Accordingly, students who experience a sense of belonging in school are also more likely to exhibit positive behaviors.ⁱⁱ This includes learning environments that provide culturally and linguistically responsive practices where students are surrounded by adults they can trust and who are committed to building strong relationships.ⁱⁱⁱ Environments like these also help build connections that make students less likely to bring weapons to school and more likely to report the presence of weapons in school.^{iv} Beyond the benefit to the individual student, safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments benefit their fellow students, educators, and the community at large.

Nurturing learning environments can also help students overcome challenging and traumatic experiences and provide a sense of emotional and physical safety. When young people feel connected to school and school staff, they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, be absent from school, or experience emotional distress and are more likely to earn higher grades. Recent research has also begun to identify specific strategies, such as those that teach pro-social behaviors, that can improve school performance and reduce violence in the community at large.^v

Further, within the letter, ED encourages states to prioritize funds for LEAs to do the following:^{vi}

Implement 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.

Engage students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Design and implement policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

Program Eligibility

The BSCA requires SEAs to define “high-need LEA” for the purposes of eligibility for SCG funds. In defining “high-need”, ED encourages SEAs to consider definitions that focus on LEAs with high concentrations of poverty as well as other indicators that might indicate a need for further mental health and social-emotional supports.

In Tennessee, the following LEAs will be eligible to apply for SCG funding:

- LEAs with at least one (1) school with a [school safety index](#) of 1.5% or higher in 2021-22; and
- LEAs reporting 20+ zero tolerance incidents and 20+ bullying/harassment incidents in 2021-22; and
- Highest-Poverty LEAs (as calculated for ESSER MOEquity); and
- LEAs within the Governor’s [FY23 Distressed Counties](#).

Eligible LEAs			
Achievement School District	Fayetteville City Schools	Knox County Schools	Roane County Schools
Alamo City Schools	Fentress County Schools	Lake County Schools	Robertson County Schools
Anderson County Schools	Franklin County Schools	Lincoln County Schools	Rogersville City Schools
Athens City Schools	Greene County Schools	Macon County Schools	Rutherford County Schools
Benton County Schools	Grundy County Schools	Madison County Schools	Scott County Schools
Bledsoe County Schools	Hamilton County Schools	Marshall County Schools	Sequatchie County Schools
Bristol City Schools	Hancock County Schools	Maury County Schools	Sumner County Schools
Campbell County Schools	Hardeman County Schools	Memphis-Shelby County Schools	Sweetwater City Schools
Carter County Schools	Hardin County Schools	Metro Nashville Public Schools	Tennessee School for the Deaf
Cheatham County Schools	Hawkins County Schools	Montgomery County Schools	Tipton County Schools

Eligible LEAs			
Chester County Schools	Haywood County Schools	Morgan County Schools	Union City Schools
Clay County Schools	Henry County Schools	Murfreesboro City Schools	Union County Schools
Cleveland City Schools	Hollow Rock-Bruceton SSD	Newport City Schools	Van Buren County Schools
Cocke County Schools	Humboldt City Schools	Oneida SSD	Warren County Schools
Cumberland County Schools	Jefferson County Schools	Paris SSD	West Tennessee School for the Deaf
Dayton City Schools	Johnson City Schools	Perry County Schools	Williamson County Schools
Dyersburg City Schools	Johnson County Schools	Rhea County Schools	Wilson County Schools
Etowah City Schools	Kingsport City Schools	Richard City Schools	

Stronger Connections Grant Competition Design and Timeline

As previously noted, SEAs are required to award SCG funds to high-need LEAs on a competitive basis. Applications will be submitted in ePlan, and all complete applications meeting the program requirements and received by the department on or before the due date will be forwarded to a grant review committee. The committee will provide each application with a technical merit score based on the review criteria and rubric (see [Appendix A](#)). Technical merit scores will serve as the foundation for grant award decisions. The department anticipates awarding approximately 20 grants with awards varying by LEA based on several factors: LEA need, availability of funds, the number of applicants, and the quality of the subgrant application. The timeline for the initial submission, review, and award of the SCG is below.

Date	Event
April 18, 2023	SCG intent to Apply Letter Due in ePlan
April 21, 2023	SCG application opens in ePlan
April 24, 2023	SCG webinar held
April 25, 2023	SCG office hours begin
May 22, 2023	SCG application due in ePlan
June 23, 2023	SCG awards announced

Allowable Uses of Funds

SCG Focus Areas

In general, SCG funds may be used for activities authorized under [ESEA Title IV, Part A § 4108](#), otherwise known as the **Safe & Healthy Students** focus area. In Tennessee, the SCG will be structured around allowable activities in four (4) focus areas, and all purchases made with SCG funds must fall within one of these focus areas:

1. Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Supports for Students
2. Mental Health/SEL Professional Development (PD) for Educators, SROs, Administrators, and Other Staff
3. Parent and Family Engagement (e.g., training and resources for families focused on mental health/SEL)
4. Improving School Climate and Culture

The table below provides examples of allowable uses of funds within each focus area.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. LEAs should design a SCG grant program based on their needs within the four focus areas.

SCG Focus Area	Example Allowable uses of Funds
Mental Health/SEL Supports for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing student access to mental health services • Establishing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework for students. MTSS is an evidence-based framework for organizing a continuum of practices to support each student’s educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs that integrates academic and behavioral supports and interventions^{vii} • Providing educational resources for students about what mental health is and what it means to care for it • Explicitly meeting students’ social and emotional (student self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) needs through teaching emotional self-regulation and restorative circles or mindful moments • Developing social and emotional skills, including interventions that support positive relationships, resilience, self-control, empathy, persistence, and other aspects of positive social and emotional well-being • Improving instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improving safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment • Implementing violence prevention and intervention activities and programs that are culturally and linguistically inclusive, such as individual and group counseling, crisis management, restorative justice practices, trauma-informed practices, and conflict resolution • Expanding access to integrated social, emotional, and mental health supports for students involved in bullying • Other activities authorized under ESEA § 4108 that meet the intent of this focus area
Mental Health/SEL Professional Development (PD) for Educators, SROs, Administrators, and Other Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing PD and training for all school staff in violence prevention, education, early identification, and supporting and responding to student needs • Providing PD and training for all school staff in trauma identification and trauma-informed care, culturally and linguistically responsive practices, intervention, mentoring, recovery support services and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral • Implementing a high-quality restorative practice program through training (e.g., one-on-one coaching, shadowing, learning through feedback program for teachers and administrators) to understand specific restorative techniques, the reasoning behind the shift from punitive to restorative approaches, and peace building activities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide job-embedded and ongoing professional development and coaching opportunities to educators to support relationship building between students and teachers • Providing PD on tools and strategies to incorporate mindfulness activities in the classroom and school, and gain an understanding of how to educate school leaders, parents, and students as to the value of cultivating mindfulness • Providing job-embedded, ongoing, and high-quality PD for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to bullying and harassment prevention • Other activities authorized under ESEA § 4108 that meet the intent of this focus area
<p>Parent and Family Engagement (training on SEL for families)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for families to learn more about social-emotional well-being and how they build these skills at home • Providing educational resources and training for families about what mental health is, what it means to care for it, and how they can support student mental health • Engaging families in the development of whole-school MTSS or other programs addressing student social-emotional development • Creating a mental health/SEL resource center for families, containing resources or books related to social-emotional development • Other activities authorized under ESEA § 4108 that meet the intent of this focus area
<p>Improving School Climate and Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing practices to increase student connections and a sense of belonging at school to further the creation of a safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environment that supports student well-being, academic success, and other positive outcomes • Implementing a MTSS to collect data, assess students' needs, and provide real-time supports to students in a variety of areas such as academics or social, emotional, or behavioral health • Integrating anti-bullying practices or programs in school to enhance learning and help prevent bullying and harassment • Developing an early detection, screening, or warning systems to identify students who may be at risk, a danger to themselves or others, or in need of additional supports • Designing and Implementing a locally tailored plan to reduce exclusionary disciplinary practices • Using school climate surveys and/or surveys of school organizational conditions to gain a deeper understanding of school instruction, culture, and climate • Actively engaging students in meaningful culturally and linguistically relevant learning experiences rooted in high academic expectations for all students • Engaging communities and families, on an ongoing basis, to assess and revise policies or practices with a connection to bullying or harassment • Adopting a whole-school restorative approach to discipline that includes teachers, administrators, parents, and students – including regular staff

	<p>training and using practices like community building circles that encourage students to take responsibility for their actions and repair relationships with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources (e.g., mental and physical health services, parent engagement classes, housing assistance, recreational and youth development programs, and nutrition programs) and support for schools and strengthen relationships between schools and communities in order to improve student success • Increasing access to full-services community schools by investing in the four pillars of community schools^{viii} • Teaching students and educators how to ask for help when they experience bullying, harassment, or intimidation and cultivate positive student-teacher relationships to ensure each person has a trusted adult they can reach out to for help • Other activities authorized under ESEA § 4108 that meet the intent of this focus area
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Other Considerations

In addition to being allowable under ESSA § 4108 and meeting the intent of one or more of the above focus areas, activities funded with SCG funds must meet the following fiscal requirements:

1. Be **reasonable and necessary** for the performance of the grant;
2. Be **allocable** to the grant;
3. **Supplement and not supplant** other non-Federal funds (i.e., state and local funds) that would otherwise be used to pay for authorized activities;
4. Not be of the prohibited activities in **ESEA § 4001(b) or § 8526** (see [Appendix B](#)); and
5. Be consistent with any other applicable **Uniform Guidance provisions** (see [2 CFR 200 et seq.](#), in particular 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E).

Important: Narrative descriptions within the application and budget pages must contain details making it evident that all purchases and programs meet the above requirements.

Blending Funds

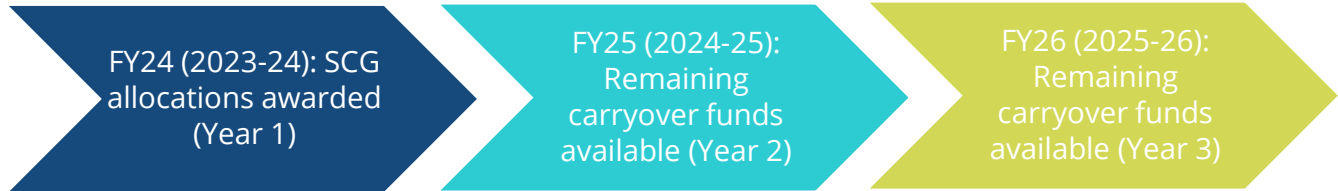
When planning for the SCG, consider how funds **can work together and coordinate** with other funding streams (e.g., other ESSA program funds, ESSER 2.0, ESSER 3.0, 21st Century Learning Center grant funds). How can SCG funds strengthen, build upon, supplement, and/or complement other available programming within the LEA?

The following resources can assist LEAs in planning for the use of SCG funds:

- [Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Dear Colleague Letter: Stronger Connections Grant Program](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education: Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates](#)
- [Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants Guidance](#)
- [Safer Schools and Best Practices Clearinghouse](#)
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- [Schools, Families, and Social and Emotional Learning: for Ideas and Tools for Ideas and Tools for Working with Working with Parents and Families](#)

Funding Timeline and Amounts

The SCG is one time funding, and **LEAs will have until Sept. 30, 2026 to obligate all grant funds.** LEAs who are granted an award will receive their total SCG allocation in FY24 (on or around July 1, 2023). LEAs will be able to submit a multi-year budget and then carry over remaining funds into the next fiscal year through the annual completion of the SCG application in ePlan.



Allocations for the SCG will vary by LEA based on several factors: LEA needs, the amount of funding available, the amount of funding requested, and the quality of submitted applications. SCG award amounts will fall within three tiers.

Tier	Funding per Year	Total Funding
1	\$150,000	\$450,000
2	\$300,000	\$900,000
3	\$450,000	\$1,350,000

In completing the initial SCG application in ePlan, LEAs must select a tier of funding and provide a justification for that selection. The needs identified within the needs assessment; the number of students, educators, and families to be served; the cost of the proposed plan; and other LEA-specific factors (including the estimated costs for required equitable services) should drive the decision for how much funding an LEA should apply. **Note:** LEAs may be granted an award outside of the requested funding tier depending on any of the factors discussed above.

Important: The SCG is a *competitive* grant; therefore, the quality of each LEA's needs assessment, spending plan, budget, and overall application will strongly influence final award decisions. As the SCG application is completed, LEAs are encouraged to utilize the [SCG Review Rubric](#) to ensure all aspects of the application are thoroughly addressed.

Grant Administration

Awarded LEAs may charge up to 2% of grant funds as direct administrative costs. Direct administrative costs are costs associated with the administration of a program. These costs are administrative in nature, but they can still be tracked, charged, and allocated directly to the grant. Direct administrative activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Overall program management, including salaries and related costs
- Activities focused on paying, transporting, exchanging, and maintaining goods and services
- Activities focused on establishing and administering policy, preparing reports, program monitoring etc.
- Activities focused on the program requirements of grantees.

Indirect costs are not allowed for the SCG. All administrative costs must meet the above requirements and be outlined in detail within the SCG application and budget pages.

Stakeholder Involvement

Engaging students, parents, families, and community members is critical to the successful implementation of activities supported by SCG funds. It is essential that LEA leaders and educators consistently engage students, parents, and community partners, paying close attention to their needs and how they are experiencing the implementation of selected policies, strategies, and activities. Further, LEAs must provide ongoing and meaningful opportunities for educators and staff to be involved in the selection of evidence-based strategies and activities implemented under the SCG. Communication and collaboration between LEA leadership and educators and other school staff is crucial to supporting the effective use of SCG funds.

Documentation of stakeholder involvement must be collected and maintained throughout the life of the SCG and may be requested at any time by the department for reporting and/or monitoring purposes.

Examples of documentation may include, but are not limited to:

- Meeting invitations, agendas, sign-in sheets, materials, minutes, etc.
- Surveys and survey results
- Printed materials or other communications regarding the SCG

Stakeholders involved should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Parents
- Teachers
- Principals
- Students
- School leaders
- Charter school teachers, principals, and other school leaders, when applicable
- Non-public school officials, when applicable
- Specialized instructional support personnel
- Local government representatives
- Others with relevant and demonstrated expertise
- Community-based Organizations

LEAs applying for SCG funds must provide a description of how stakeholders were involved in the design of the SCG program and application and how they will be involved in an ongoing manner throughout grant implementation. LEAs are encouraged to utilize existing teams or build a new team during the SCG application process. Examples of already existing teams that could support SCG planning include:

- LEA/school planning teams (i.e., teams utilized for the LEA/school InformTN planning process)
- Mental health teams
- Community supports teams
- Parent advisory councils
- PLC or data teams
- RTI-B teams
- School leadership teams
- School safety teams
- Other advisory or leadership committees

Evidence Based Practices

ESEA emphasizes the use of evidence-based approaches, including activities to support safe and healthy students in § 4108, which identifies appropriate evidence-based strategies and practices to promote a positive school climate along with student and educator wellbeing.

ESEA § 8101(21) defines the term “evidence-based” and the definition includes four tiers of evidence. Specifically, “evidence-based,” when used with respect to an LEA or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:

- **Tier 1:** Strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study
- **Tier 2:** Moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study;
- **Tier 3:** Promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
- **Tier 4:** Demonstrating a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

LEAs are strongly encouraged to invest SCG funds on evidence-based interventions that have been shown to significantly improve student safety and health as well as academic outcomes. **Note: LEAs who provide information and documentation showing that proposed SCG activities are evidence-based will receive priority points during the application review.**

The following resources can assist LEAs in developing a SCG program that includes evidence-based activities:

- [ERIC \(Educational Resources Information Center\)](#)
- [ESSA Tiers of Evidence Overview](#)
- [Evidence for ESSA](#)
- [Evidence-Based Decision Making for ESSA and ESSER Funds Presentation Slides](#)
- [Focus on ESSA Evidence Presentation Slides](#)
- [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#)
- [Safer Schools and Best Practices Clearinghouse](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#)

Equitable Services

Overview

Funding for the SCG program is provided through ESEA Title IV, Part A; therefore, LEAs receiving grant funds must provide equitable services to eligible non-public school students and educators. ESEA § 8501(a)(4) requires an LEA to ensure that its expenditures for equitable services for eligible non-public school students and educators under covered ESEA programs are equal on a per-pupil basis to the expenditures for participating public school students and educators, taking into account the number and needs of the eligible non-public school students and educators. In other words, the proportionate share for participating non-public schools must be based on K-12 total enrollment of the non-public school—just as it works for equitable services under Title IV, Part A.

Consultation Requirements

Under ESEA § 8501(c)(3), an eligible LEA applying for the SCG must consult with appropriate non-public school officials **before** the LEA makes any decision that affects the opportunities of eligible non-public school children and educators to participate. Therefore, it is crucial that LEAs consult with eligible non-public schools (i.e., non-public schools within the LEA’s boundaries) during the SCG program and application design process. Such consultation might include a brief survey of non-public schools or other information gathering to indicate the schools’ interest in participating and the population to be served. Such consultation will allow the LEA to consider the needs of all students and educators, both public and non-public, in developing its application and to consider the projected costs for equitable services in the application.

LEAs awarded an SCG must continue to consult with interested non-public school officials on the specific services the LEA will provide students and educators, consistent with the LEA’s approved application. Documentation of ongoing and meaningful consultation with non-public school officials will be required throughout the SCG.

Equitable Services Requirements for the Initial SCG Application	Equitable Services Requirements for LEAs Awarded SCG Funds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with eligible non-public schools (i.e., non-public schools within the LEA’s boundaries) during the SCG program and application design process, before the LEA makes any decision that affects the opportunities of eligible non-public school children and educators to participate. LEAs may choose to utilize the Stronger Connections Grant Intent to Participate Form for initial information gathering or may design their own method. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to engage participating non-public school public officials in ongoing, timely, and meaningful consultation. LEAs may choose to utilize the Stronger Connections Grant Affirmation and Agreement Form to document the consultation process or may design their own method. Provide equitable services to eligible non-public school students and educators, ensuring that expenditures for equitable services for eligible non-public school students and educators under the SCG are equal on a per-pupil basis to the expenditures for participating public school students and educators, taking into account the number and needs of the eligible non-public school students and educators.
<p>Within the initial SCG application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe how the LEA consulted with eligible non-public schools before the LEA made any decision that affect the opportunities of eligible non-public school children and educators to participate upload documentation of consultation (e.g., intent forms, survey results, program announcements) 	<p>Within the funded SCG application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide a list of participating non-public schools and allocation amounts describe the process and timeline the LEA will utilize to conduct timely and meaningful consultation with non-public school officials describe the services that will be provided to non-public school students with SCG and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the activities connect to one or more of the SCG focus areas, and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ how the activities will be evaluated/assessed. • upload documentation of meaningful consultation (e.g., affirmation forms, final agreements, meeting agendas/minutes) to the SCG application in ePlan before Sept. 1, 2023. • provide a detailed budget for all non-public school purchases
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Equitable Services Templates

As noted above, documentation of timely, meaningful, and ongoing consultation with non-public schools will be required throughout the life of the SCG. To assist LEAs with the implementation of SCG equitable services, the department has developed the following resources. LEAs are encouraged to edit these documents and develop other documents/processes as applicable to ensure the needs of the LEA and non-public school(s) are met and proper documentation is maintained.

- [Stronger Connections Grant Intent to Participate Form](#)
- [Stronger Connections Grant Affirmation and Agreement Form](#)

Questions regarding SCG equitable services should be directed to the LEA’s assigned [ESEA Divisional Coordinator](#) or Brinn.Obermiller@tn.gov.

SCG Application Tips

1. To ensure the initial SCG application is submitted complete and in full, read this technical guide carefully and refer back to it often as the SCG application is being completed.
2. Ensure alignment between all sections of the application. The information in the needs assessment should feed into the spending plan and request for funds sections, and the spending plan should align with the uploaded SCG budget template (and final budget once funds have been allocated).
3. Utilize the SCG Application Rubric (see [Appendix A](#)) to ensure responses are complete and high-quality.
4. Grant reviewers will be looking for high-quality and meaningful goals in the initial grant review. Ensure the SCG goals and objectives entered on the *Spending Plan* page are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
 - **Specific** – clearly state what the goal is
 - **Measurable** – ensure success can be evaluated and measured
 - **Achievable** – set a realistic goal
 - **Relevant** – set a goal relevant to LEA needs and the grant focus areas
 - **Time-Bound** – set a deadline for completion
5. Provide documentation and information regarding ESSA levels of evidence for bonus points during the grant review.
6. Attend [SCG Office Hours](#) during the application window to ask department staff questions and hear from other LEAs on SCG application development.

Stronger Connections Grant Application

ePlan User Access

Users must have the correct ePlan user access role (**LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director**) to access and complete the Stronger Connections Grant application in ePlan. Users with existing ePlan access can check their current user access roles. To view existing access, visit ePlan.tn.gov, navigate to the *Address Book* and *LEA Role Contacts*, and view who is listed with the **LEA Title IV Contact** role. Users who had the **LEA Title IV Contact** role prior to April 2023 were automatically assigned the new LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director role.

New ePlan users and existing ePlan users who need the new **LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director** user access role must request the additional role using the [ePlan User Access Form for LEAs](#). Access the form by navigating to eplan.tn.gov > [TDOE Resources](#) > User Access Forms > [ePlan User Access Form for LEAs](#). Users do not need to log in to ePlan to access *TDOE Resources* in ePlan. Follow the instructions on the *User Access Form*, then email the completed form to ePlan.Help@tn.gov to request additional access roles. User access requests may take up to two business days to process. Users will receive an email reply when access has been granted.

ePlan Role	ePlan Function
LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director (Users with the LEA Title IV Contact role were automatically assigned this new role) LEA Fiscal Representative LEA Authorized Representative	Click Draft Started (or Revision Started for revisions) Respond to application questions, enter budgets
LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director	Click Draft Completed (or Revision Completed for revisions)
LEA Fiscal Representative (CFO or Treasurer)	Click LEA Fiscal Representative Approved (or LEA Fiscal Representative Not Approved) May also request funds after the SCG application is approved
LEA Authorized Representative (Director of Schools)	Click LEA Authorized Representative Approved (or LEA Authorized Representative Not Approved)

After each status change, ePlan automatically sends a notification email to all users in the LEA who have the ePlan role of the next step in the process. For example, after the *LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director* clicks **Draft Completed**, ePlan automatically sends an email to all users in the LEA who have the role of *LEA Fiscal Representative*. The *LEA Fiscal Representative* will then submit the application for approval by the *LEA Authorized Representative*. Once the LEA receives the notification email that the SCG application has been **FPO Stronger Connections Grant Director Approved**, final budgets can be obligated.

SCG Application Access

Navigate to the SCG application from the ePlan homepage by hovering your mouse over the **Funding** tab on the left menu bar, then selecting **Funding Applications**.

Select the desired fiscal year (2024) in the upper left corner of the screen. Funding applications are stored in ePlan according to the **state fiscal year**; 2024 indicates the 2023–24 school year.

Click on the **application name** to open the application.

2024 ▾	All Active Applications ▾
Entitlement Funding Application	
Consolidated	
CTE Perkins Basic	
Competitive Funding Application	
21st CCLC Cohort 2023	
CTE Perkins Reserve	
Lottery for Education: Afterschool Programs (LEAPS)	
Stronger Connections Grant	
Voluntary Pre-K	

Click **Draft Started** to begin the application.

Application Status:	Not Started
Change Status To:	Draft Started

Sections Page

Access each section of the SCG application from the Sections page. For easy navigation, users may return to the Sections page by going to the **Funding** tab on the ePlan blue menu bar and selecting **Sections**.

To submit the SCG application when complete, click the **Messages** link on the Sections page in the column labeled *Validation*. This link provides an overview of the validations that ePlan is running behind the scenes.

Description (View Sections Only View All Pages)	Validation	Print Select Items
All	Messages	Print
Cover Page		Print
Cover Page		Print

Items marked *Warning* are validations that users are not required to address prior to submitting the SCG application. Examples of warnings are not uploading an optional related document or budgeting an entire allocation.

Items marked *Error* are incorrect, and users **must** address each one before submitting the SCG application.

- Click on the link to the left of the word *Error* to go to the identified page to make corrections.
- If the LEA does not address all *Error* validations, ePlan will not allow a user to submit the application.

Examples of errors are (1) budgeting for more than the allocation, (2) not budgeting in a section where there is an allocation, and (3) not responding to a required question.

Once the user clears all errors, the user with *LEA Stronger Connections Grant Director* access must click **Draft Completed** at the top of the [Sections](#) page. This generates an email to the *LEA Fiscal Representative* who must review the draft and click **LEA Fiscal Representative Approved** (or **Not Approved**) at the top of the [Sections](#) page.

When an application is submitted in the status of **LEA Fiscal Representative Approved**, an email notification is sent to the LEA's [FPO Divisional Coordinator](#).

History Log

The *History Log* documents status changes along with the name of the user who prompted the change and the date of the change. Use it to review who submitted or reviewed an application or the date when it was last approved or returned.

Users may place a note in the *History Log* by clicking on the **Create Comment** link. Use **Create Comment** with caution, as comments remain part of the application's permanent record and are viewable by the public on approved applications.

Cover Page

An LEA user must enter the following information:

- LEA Number
- LEA Name, Official Address, and Phone Number
- Director of Schools Name, Email Address, and Phone Number
- SCG Point of Contact Name, Email Address, and Phone Number

Note: *If any of the contact information on this page changes within the school year, an LEA user must update this page.*

Budget Page

Since the SCG is a competitive grant where LEAs request funding based on need, SCG allocations will not be awarded until each application has been reviewed and final funding decisions have been made by the department. Therefore, applicants **will not complete the full application budget pages in the initial grant application**. Rather, applicants will download the application Budget file from the Budget page, then complete the template and upload the SCG Proposed Budget Template to the *Related Documents* section of the application.

Budget

Example (###) Public District - FY 2024 - Stronger Connections Grant - Rev 0 - Stronger Connections Grant

Go To ▶

[Download Budget Data](#)

Action	Account Number	Total
View	71100 - Regular Instruction Program	\$0.00
View	71150 - Alternative Instruction Program	\$0.00
View	72120 - Health Services	\$0.00
View	72130 - Other Student Support	\$0.00
View	72210 - Support Services/Regular Instruction Program	\$0.00
View	72250 - Education Technology	\$0.00
View	72610 - Operation of Plant	\$0.00
View	72710 - Transportation	\$0.00
View	73100 - Food Service	\$0.00
View	99100 - Transfers Out	\$0.00
Total		\$0.00
Adjusted Allocation		\$0.00
Remaining		\$0.00

Go To ▶

To download the Budget file, navigate to the [Budget](#) page, then click the **Download Budget Data** link. Instructions on completing the budget file are available [here](#).

The amounts listed on the SCG Proposed Budget Template *must* align with the information presented on the *Spending Plan* page. LEAs will be permitted to submit a multi-year budget. Specify when a purchase spans several years within the budget narrative. Once applications have been reviewed and award announcements have been made, allocations will be loaded to ePlan (on or around July 1, 2023) and subgrantees will budget their funds at that time.

To upload the completed file, navigate to the [Related Documents](#) page, click the **Upload New link** for the SCG Proposed Budget Template, then upload the Budget file and click the **Create** button.

Related Documents

Example (###) Public District - FY 2024 - Stronger Connections Grant - Rev 0 - Stronger Connections Grant

Go To ▶

Required Documents		
Type	Document Template	Document/Link
Affirmation of Timely/Meaningful Consultation [Upload at least 1 document(s)]	N/A	Upload New
(SCG) ESEA Evidence Documentation [Upload at least 1 document(s)]	N/A	Upload New
(SCG) Proposed Budget Template [Upload at least 1 document(s)]	N/A	Upload New

Create Related Document - (SCG) Proposed Budget Template

Example (###) Public District - FY 2024 - Stronger Connections Grant - Rev 0 - Stronger Connections Grant

Please select a file to upload.

Upload Data File:

Document Name:

Important: For the initial grant application, an allocation of \$.01 will be loaded to the SCG application . Applicants must enter a budget of at least **\$.01** to submit the SCG application. This budget entry must also contain a **Use of Funds budget tag**. See below for more information on required budget tags.

Budget Detail	Narrative Description
Account Number: 71100 - Regular Instruction Program Line Item Number: 446 - Teachers Use of Funds: Mental Health Supports for Students Optional Program Code: Location Code: Achievement School District (985) Quantity: 1.00 Cost: \$0.01 Budget Detail Total: \$0.01	Hold

Once SCG funds have been allocated, LEAs should follow the steps below to complete the budget in ePlan. The ePlan process for entering the SCG application budget is consistent with all other grants in ePlan. Each LEA must have a department-approved budget in ePlan before requesting reimbursement.

Adding Budget Details on the Budget Page

- To access a budget, click the **Budget** link from the *Sections* page.
- For each budget line that the LEA plans to use, click **modify** located to the left of the account number to open the *Budget Detail* page for that line item.
- On the *Budget Detail* page for the line item, Click **Add a Budget Detail**.
- For each Budget Detail:
 - The Account Number auto-populates for the line item that is being modified.
 - Select the appropriate line item number from the dropdown menu.
 - Identify the appropriate budget tag (see below for more information on budget tags).
 - If desired, enter the Optional Program Codes.
 - Add a narrative description for each entry.
 - ePlan auto-populates the Location Code field with the LEA's name and identification number.
 - Enter the Quantity and Cost for the Budget detail. The quantity is most commonly 1.00.
 - ePlan auto-calculates the Line Item total as Quantity multiplied by Cost.
 - Continue to add additional Budget Details as needed for the budget line item. To edit existing Budget details, click the pencil icon. To delete an existing Budget Detail, click the trash can icon.
 - Navigate back to the *Budget* page and repeat this process for each budget line. ePlan auto-calculates the budget totals as budget items and details are entered. ePlan deducts the budgeted amounts from the awarded allocation.
- Once complete, confirm that the amount in the *Remaining* area at the bottom of the *Budget* page is \$0.00.

Budget Filtering:

- Users can filter Budget Details by Account Number, Line Item Number, Location Code, Tags, or Narrative status by using the filtering tool.
- The most useful way to use this tool is by selecting all “Account Numbers” and then filtering Budget Details by Tags.
- To use the Tags filter, users must select at least one “School Type” from the bottom of the filter list, and then at least one Focus Type tag.

Important: Budget Expectations

- Indicate full-time equivalents (FTEs) for all staff paid with grant funds within the budget narratives and match the FTEs within all other areas of the grant application.
- Items and amounts budgeted must be reasonable and necessary for the implementation of grant activities.
- If materials, supplies, or equipment are being purchased, provide examples of what will be purchased.
- LEAs will be permitted to submit a multi-year budget (FY24, FY25, and FY26) within the ePlan application. Specify when a purchase spans several years within the budget narrative.

Major Function Codes

When placing expenditures within the budgets for the SCG, use the following guidelines:

- **71100—Regular Instructional Program:** Expenditures for the direct instruction of students (pre-K–12) in this major function (e.g., salaries and benefits for teachers, educational assistants, contracted services to provide direct instruction, supplies, materials, and equipment used in direct instruction).
- **71150—Alternative Instruction Program:** Expenditures for direct instruction of students (pre-K–12) in an alternative instructional setting
- **72120—Health Services:** Expenditures to provide physical and mental health services that are not direct instruction, including medical and nursing services (e.g., salaries and benefits for providing support for instructional programs in health matters, contracted services for health services for students, supplies, materials, equipment to support health educators, and professional development [PD] costs)
- **72130—Other Student Support:** Expenditures for student supports, other than health services, including guidance, evaluation, testing for general and special education students (e.g., salaries and benefits for guidance counselors, social workers, assessment and support personnel, contracted services for school resource officers [SROs], evaluation and testing services, supplies, materials, equipment for use in support of student support programs, and PD costs)
Note: *If using for special education, only use this account series for line items not available in 72220: guidance personnel, social workers, and attendants. If paying for psychological personnel, those items must be budgeted in 72220.*
- **72210—Support Services/Regular Instruction Program:** Expenditures for assisting instructional staff in direct instruction for students (in grades pre-K–12); this includes activities such as curriculum development, instructional media, coaching, child development, and staff professional development (e.g., salaries and benefits for staff providing instructional support services, contracted services for support services, supplies, materials, equipment related to staff support services, and PD costs)
Note: *Administrative expenditures for ESEA programs are typically included in 72210.*

Object Codes

- **100s—Personnel Services:** Amounts paid to employees of the LEA
- **189—Other Salaries and Wages:** Amounts paid to employees of the LEA

- 200s—*Employee Benefits*: Amounts paid on behalf of employees for benefits; LEAs must budget benefits within the function in which the corresponding salary is recorded
- 399—*Other Contracted Services*: Amounts paid for services rendered by individuals and/or companies who are not employed by the LEA
- 499—*Other Supplies & Materials*: Amounts paid for items that are consumed, worn out, or deteriorated through use (i.e., consumables) such as classroom teaching supplies, office supplies, etc.
- 599—*Other Charges*: Amounts paid for goods and services not falling into any other object code classification; funds carried over to the next fiscal year must be budgeted in 599
- 524—*In-Service/Staff Development Services*: Amounts paid in relation to PD, including travel expenditures, must be budgeted in this object code. Amounts paid for substitute teachers for personnel attending PD activities cannot be budgeted here.

Note: The SCG will not have an allowable indirect cost.

Budget Tags

Important: Budget tags are a **required step** in the SCG application and will populate the amount to be spent in each focus area on the *Program Details* page.

Tags will identify the **SCG grant focus areas** of a budget item without overly relying on the budget narratives and can be used to indicate how the money addresses a specific strategy or initiative.

Budget Detail	
Account Number:	72210 - Support Services/Regular Instruction Program
Line Item Number:	189 - Other Salaries & Wages
Use of Funds (Select at least 1, and up to 1 tag(s))	Select Tag
Optional Program Code:	
Location Code:	Achievement School District (985)
Quantity:	1.00
Cost:	\$0.00
Budget Detail Total:	\$0.00

The SCG budget tags are based on the subgrant focus areas and are shown below:

- Mental Health/SEL Supports for Students
- Mental Health/SEL PD for Staff
- Parent and Family Engagement
- Improving School Climate and Culture
- SCG Administration (2% max)

Cover Page

An LEA user must enter the following information:

- LEA Number
- LEA Name, Official Address, Phone Number, and Website
- Director of Schools Name, Email Address, and Phone Number
- SCG Point of Contact Name, Email Address, and Phone Number

Note: If any of the contact information on this page changes within the school year, an LEA user must update this page.

Personnel Details—System-Wide; Regular School Year; and Summer School

- Complete the applicable personnel pages for any position funded with the SCG.
- Indicate headcounts (HC) for each staff member paid with grant funds. Headcounts must always be whole numbers and must match throughout the section if mentioned more than once.
- Enter both a headcount and an FTE for staff supported with SCG funds. System-wide staff are employees not assigned to a building and work across the LEA in multiple school sites as necessary, but not as part of a planned assignment. Round FTEs to the nearest hundredth as necessary.
- Reference identified staff within the narrative description of administration within the *LEA Program Details* page (titles and FTEs must match).

Note: *FTEs must match FTEs identified in budget narratives (individually and sum). Titles of staff must match titles identified within the budget narratives.*

LEA Program Administration

- Program Administration: The reasonable and necessary costs to manage the federal grant in a compliant and effective manner. Awarded LEAs may charge up to **2%** of grant funds as direct administrative costs.
- Indicate whether:
 - The LEA is utilizing grant funds to administer the Stronger Connections Grant. (Maximum of 2%). Complete the table and narrative prompt; or
 - The LEA is not utilizing grant funds to administer the Stronger Connections Grant. Provide information of how the grant program will be administered, including the title of the staff responsible for the grant administration, the FTE(s), and the other funding sources that will contribute to administrative staff salaries/benefits.

Needs Assessment

Note: *The needs assessment section will be reviewed and scored by the grant review committee during the initial grant review. Forty-five percent (45%) of an LEAs' application score will depend on the quality of the needs assessment section.*

LEAs must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to inform the use of SCG funds. This needs assessment should be conducted in collaboration with students, families, community members, educators, school leaders (see the [Stakeholder Involvement](#) section of this document), LEA staff, and others with relevant expertise and should involve the use of local and school data. Examples of relevant data that may be analyzed as part of the needs assessment include, but are not limited to:

- Demographic and poverty data
- LEA, school, and family survey results
- Student-to-mental health professional ratio
- School Safety Assessment data
- Referrals for behavioral health services
- Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism data
- School discipline data, including exclusionary discipline
- Restraint and isolation data
- Bullying and harassment data
- Substance abuse data
- Juvenile justice system referrals

- Community violence
- Recent traumatic event or natural disaster
- School climate indicators

Considering the stated purposes of the SCG program, what are the greatest challenges/needs to be addressed? Provide a detailed narrative for each of the following prompts.

1. **LEA Data and Analysis:** What sources of data were utilized to identify needs? Provide the data and describe gaps in programming and other challenges identified through this process.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Describe how the LEA has and will provide ongoing and meaningful opportunities for students, families, community partners, educators, and staff to be involved in the selection of evidence-based strategies and activities implemented to be funded through the SCG program. In the response, describe (1) what stakeholder groups have been engaged, (2) how they contributed to the analysis and prioritization of selecting the needs that will inform grant programming, and (3) how the LEA will provide opportunities for ongoing engagement through the life of the grant?
3. **Assessment and Description of Resources Already Available:** Describe the supports/activities that are currently in place for the identified areas of need (either school-based or community-based). How will SCG funds be coordinated with already available supports?
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Describe how the LEA has and will provide ongoing and meaningful opportunities for students, families, community partners, educators, and staff to be involved in the selection of evidence-based strategies and activities implemented to be funded through the SCG program. In the response, describe (1) what stakeholder groups have been engaged, (2) how they contributed to the analysis and prioritization of selecting the needs that will inform grant programming, and how the LEA will provide opportunities for ongoing engagement through the life of the grant?

LEA Program Administration

Program Administration: The reasonable and necessary costs to manage the federal grant in a compliant and effective manner. Awarded LEAs may charge up to **2%** of grant funds as direct administrative costs.

- Indicate whether:
 - The LEA is utilizing grant funds to administer the Stronger Connections Grant. (Maximum of 2%). Complete the table and narrative prompt; or
 - The LEA is not utilizing grant funds to administer the Stronger Connections Grant. Provide information of how the grant program will be administered, including the title of the staff responsible for the grant administration, the FTE(s), and the other funding sources that will contribute to administrative staff salaries/benefits.

Personnel Details—System-Wide; Regular School Year; and Summer School

- Complete the applicable personnel pages for any position funded with the SCG. Click N/A at the top of each page if the LEA is not hiring personnel in that area.
- Indicate headcounts (HC) for each staff member paid with grant funds. Headcounts must always be whole numbers and must match throughout the section if mentioned more than once.
- Enter both a headcount and an FTE for staff supported with SCG funds. System-wide staff are employees not assigned to a building and work across the LEA in multiple school sites as necessary, but not as part of a planned assignment. Round FTEs to the nearest hundredth as necessary.
- Reference identified staff within the narrative description of administration within the *LEA Program Details* page (titles and FTEs must match).

Note: FTEs must match FTEs identified in budget narratives (individually and sum). Titles of staff must match titles identified within the budget narratives.

Spending Plan with Budget Tag Autofill

Note: The spending plan section will be reviewed and scored by the grant review committee during the initial grant review. Forty-five percent (45%) of an LEAs' application score will depend on the quality of the spending plan.

Based on the results of the needs assessment, LEAs must develop a spending plan based on **one or more** of the Stronger Connections Grant program focus areas:

1. Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Supports for Students
2. Mental Health/SEL Professional Development (PD) for Educators, SROs, Administrators, and Other Staff
3. Parent and Family Engagement (e.g., training and resources for families focused on mental health/SEL)
4. Improving School Climate and Culture

For each focus area selected, provide (1) at least one SMART goal, (2) a detailed description of the proposed activity, (3) a description of any external partnerships, (4) a description of how the activity will be evaluated, and (5) a timeline for implementation. LEAs who also provide (6) information and documentation showing that the activities are evidence-based, will receive bonus points during the initial grant review. **Alignment between the needs assessment and the spending plan will be verified throughout the application review process.**

Important: Since funding for the SCG will span three fiscal years (FY24, FY25, and FY26), LEAs may submit a multi-year spending plan if the LEA intends to carry over funds beyond FY24. Descriptions of SCG activities must include information regarding when funds will be spent. For example, if an LEA plans to contract with a mental heal provider for all three years of the grant, it should be clearly stated that this contract would be implemented in FY24, FY25, and FY26.

LEAs are strongly encouraged to use programs or strategies that align with the [four Tiers of evidence](#); "strong" (Tier 1), "moderate" (Tier 2), "promising" (Tier 3), and "demonstration of a rationale" (Tier 4). Priority points will be given to LEA's who implement programs or strategies within one of those four tiers. To earn bonus points, LEAs must provide a narrative description and documentation (e.g., webpage link or uploaded document) illustrating levels of ESSA evidence. Documentation should be uploaded to the Spending Plan page, beneath the SCG focus area section.

Documents		
Type	Document Template	Document/Link
(SCG) ESEA Evidence Documentation [Upload at least 1 document(s)]	N/A	Upload New

Important: For the initial grant application, applicants should also indicate the proposed amount of funds that will be spent in each allowable use of funds category within the narrative box. Include this proposed amount along with the other requested narrative information.

Spending Plan

Select one or more of the Stronger Connections Grant focus areas. For each focus area selected, provide (1) at least one SMART goal, (2) a detailed description of the activity, (3) a description of any external partnerships, (4) a description of how the activity will be evaluated, and (5) a timeline for implementation. LEAs who also provide (6) information and documentation showing that the activities are evidence-based, will receive priority points during the initial grant review. Note: For the initial application, the narrative descriptions provided below should align with the proposed budget that must be uploaded to the Related Documents section

1. Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Supports for Students

\$ Amount

The amount box auto-populates based on inputs from the Budget Page.

Describe the proposed evidence-based activities and use of funds, including (1) at least one SMART goal, (2) a detailed description of the activity, (3) a description of any external partnerships, (4) a description of how the activity will be evaluated, and (5) a timeline for implementation. LEAs who also provide (6) information and documentation showing that the activities are evidence-based, will receive priority points during the initial grant review.

Proposed amount of funds and narrative response goes here.

Once grant funds have been awarded and budgeted, the amount of funds to be spent in support of the focus area auto-populates based on inputs from the budget tags on the *Budget* page.

1. Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Supports for Students

\$ Amount

The amount box auto-populates based on inputs from the Budget Page.

Describe the proposed evidence-based activities and use of funds, including (1) at least one SMART goal, (2) a detailed description of the activity, (3) a description of any external partnerships, (4) a description of how the activity will be evaluated, and (5) a timeline for implementation. LEAs who also provide (6) information and documentation showing that the activities are evidence-based, will receive priority points during the initial grant review.

Request for Funds

Note: The request for funds section will be reviewed and scored by the grant review committee during the initial grant review. Ten percent (10%) of an LEAs' application score will depend on the quality of this section.

LEAs may apply for funding in one of three tiers:

Tier	Funding per Year	Total Funding
1	\$150,000	\$450,000
2	\$300,000	\$900,000
3	\$450,000	\$1,350,000

Complete the table below. Include the amount of funds being requested and provide a rationale for this amount. Discuss funding needs and base requests on the results of the SCG needs assessment, the number of students/educators/families to be served, the projected cost of the program (including equitable services as applicable), and other LEA-specific factors. Note that final award determinations made will be based on multiple factors including the availability of funds, the number of applications received, LEA needs, and the quality of submitted applications. For the initial application, LEAs must complete a SCG budget template for the amount being requested and upload it to the *Related Documents* section of the application.

Stronger Connections Grant Equitable Services

Information regarding initial equitable services must be provided on the *Spending Plan* page.

Initial Consultation Process (to be completed by LEAs with one or more eligible non-public schools within the district boundaries. LEAs with no eligible non-public schools should state that in the responses below.)

- Describe in detail the process utilized to consult with eligible non-public schools during the initial development and design of the Stronger Connections Grant. (Documentation of initial outreach and consultation with eligible non-public schools must be uploaded to the *Related Documents* section of this application (as applicable)).
- If SCG funds are awarded, and the LEA has interested non-public schools, describe the LEA's next steps to ensure equitable services requirements are met, including steps for communicating non-public allocation amounts and continuing the consultation process as required under the SCG and ESEA.

Once SCG funds have been allocated, awarded LEAs must complete the full *Equitable Services* section as follows.

Equitable Services

Formula to Determine Amount for SCG Equitable Expenditures

If there are no non-public schools in the LEA, check the box indicating that this page is not applicable. No more information is needed on this page.

The equitable share of SCG funds for non-public school services must be determined based on a per-pupil share, much like Title IV, Part A. The per-pupil share is determined based on the number of students enrolled in the public school and in participating non-public schools that are geographically located within the LEA. This area calculates the equitable share.

A. Number of Students:

A1. Number of Students: LEAs should enter the same numbers entered for the FY24 Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) *School Eligibility* page.

A2. Participating K-12 Private School Enrollment: LEAs should enter the same numbers submitted by eligible non-public schools on the SCG Intent to Participate form.

A3. Total Enrollment (A1 + A2): ePlan auto-calculates the LEA's total enrollment.

B. Stronger Connections Grant:

B1: This count prepopulates from the *SCG Allocations* page.

B2: LEAs should enter administrative costs being changed to the grant. This amount must include public and non-public school administrative costs. **Note:** LEAs may reserve up to 2% of SCG funds for administrative purposes.

B3: ePlan auto-calculates the total amount of SCG funds available for equitable services. (The LEA allocation minus administrative costs for the public and non-public SCG program.)

C. Per Pupil Rate:

C1: ePlan auto-calculates the per-pupil amount of SCG funds available for every enrolled student.

D. Equitable Services:

D1: ePlan auto-calculates the SCG funds that must be reserved for non-public school services.

E. Non-Public Carryover Amount: There is no carryover for FY24 as this is the first year of the grant. Following FY24, the LEA must calculate this amount and enter it.

F. Total Amount of Non-Public Instructional Funds: This amount auto-calculates by adding the rows D and E. The amount displayed is the total amount of SCG funding available to provide services and programs to participating non-public schools.

Non-Public Equitable Services

- Describe the consultation process between the LEA and eligible non-public school(s). In the response, include (1) important dates, (2) modes of communication, and (3) the information provided to non-public school representatives. (Upload affirmation of consultation(s) and other documentation in *Related Documents*).
- List the non-public schools participating in the SCG program. Provide each school's allocation amount, a brief description of the activities and services that will be provided to each non-public school, and the applicable SCG focus area(s) for the activities. Information provided below should align with the information provided on the budget page. Use the trash can icon to delete a row. Click on *Add Row* to add a row.

List the non-public schools participating in the SCG program. Provide each school's allocation amount, a brief description of the activities and services that will be provided to each non-public school and the applicable SCG focus area(s) for the activities. Information provided below should align with the information provided on the budget page.

Participating Non-Public School Name	SCG Allocation	SCG Activities/Services Description	SCG Focus Area
<input type="text"/>	* \$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Check Spelling"/> <input type="text" value="0"/> of 8000 characters	Select all that apply <input type="button" value="Clear"/> Search... <input type="button" value="Select All"/> <input type="button" value="Deselect All"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Supports for Students <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health/SEL Professional Development (PD) for Educators, SROs, Administrators, and Other Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Parent and Family Engagement (e.g., training and resources for families focused on mental health/SEL) <input type="checkbox"/> Improving School Climate and Culture

- Describe the process used to evaluate/assess SCG non-public school activities and/or services.

Related Documents

All documents uploaded to the SCG application will appear on this page, including any ESEA Evidence documentation uploaded to the *Spending Plan Page*.

- For the initial SCG application, LEAs with eligible non-public schools must upload documentation of initial outreach to non-public schools within their boundaries (i.e., [Stronger Connections Grant Intent to Participate Form](#) and/or other documentation)
- For the initial SCG application LEAs wishing to receive bonus points, must upload documentation of the ESEA tier of evidence on the *Spending Plan* page. Uploaded documents will also appear in *Related Documents*.
- For the initial application, LEAs must upload an SCG Proposed Budget template. Instructions may be found in the [Budget Page](#) section of this guide.
- Once SCG funds have been allocated, LEAs with participating non-public schools must upload documentation of meaningful consultation and final SCG agreements (i.e., [Stronger Connections Grant Affirmation and Agreement Form](#) and/or other documentation)

Assurances

LEAs must review all program assurances thoroughly. All items specified are requirements of Title IV, Part A, the SCG, ESEA legislation, or other regulations. By checking the statement at the top of the page, the LEA is affirming that it has read and understands all requirements and will abide by the same.

The local education agency (LEA) hereby ensures the state education agency (SEA) that the LEA meets each of the following conditions:

- Use fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that ensure proper disbursement of and accounting for federal funds paid to that agency under each program.
- Keep such records, and provide such information to the State, as may be reasonably required for fiscal audit, data reporting, and program evaluation.
- Ensure all salaries are paid from project funds according to LEA rates. State/CONUS travel rates are to be used for project travel expenses. Adequate travel logs, as well as other necessary information, must be maintained to support expenditures.
- Charge amounts for personnel services that are based on payrolls documented and approved in accordance with the generally accepted practice of the LEA. Payrolls must be supported by time and attendance or equivalent records for individual employees. Salaries and wages of employees chargeable to more than one grant program or cost objective, if applicable, must be supported by appropriate time distribution records.
- Use these funds to supplement, and not supplant, the funds that would be made available in the absence of such federal funds, from non-federal sources and not supplant such funds.
- Maintain control of program funds and adhere to allowability procedures for goods and services acquired with federal funds. The LEA shall retain all titles to property acquired with those funds, including equipment placed in private schools pursuant to Section 8501.
- Recognize that state approval of an application does not relieve the LEA of its responsibility to comply with all applicable program and fiscal requirements.
- Comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Office for Civil Rights enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. These civil rights laws enforced by OCR extend to all state education agencies, elementary and secondary school systems, colleges and universities, vocational schools, proprietary schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, libraries, and museums that receive U.S. Department of Education funds. Areas covered may include, but are not limited to: admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, counseling and guidance, discipline, classroom assignment, grading, vocational education, recreation, physical education, athletics, housing, and employment. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, including prohibiting disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.
- Comply with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 (<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>).
- Maintain fiscal effort in accordance with ESEA § 8521.
- Comply with ESEA § 8501 regarding participation by private school children and teachers.

- The Board of Education will comply with all the privacy protections afforded parents and students under section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g), as added by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (section 513 of Public Law 93-380; 88 Stat. 571).
- Termination of Employment and Unpaid Leave. Upon termination, any leave balance paid to a federally funded employee above the amount of leave earned in the current grant year shall NOT be paid from federal funds as detailed in 2 CFR 200.431 (b)(3).
- The LEA has engaged in timely and meaningful consultation, as required by ESEA § 8501(c) and maintains all required documentation to support such consultation.
- The LEA will ensure that all supported activities are approved and provided in a timely fashion, in accordance with agreements made as a result of meaningful consultation with non-public/private school representatives.
- The LEA will obligate all non-public/private school funds during the fiscal year in which allocated and in support of activities agreed upon as a result of required consultation.
- The LEA will engage in ongoing consultation with participating non-public/private school representatives as necessary to ensure continued communication, monitor agreed-upon activities and to determine the effectiveness of provided activities.
- The LEA shall, as requested, report data to the SEA regarding the use of grant funds and progress toward meeting identified goals.
- The LEA shall obtain prior written, informed consent from the parent of each child who is under 18 years of age to participate in any mental-health assessment or service that is funded under this title and conducted in connection with an elementary school or secondary school under this title [ESSA § 4001(a)].
- No funds under this title will be used for medical services or drug treatment or rehabilitation, except for integrated student supports, specialized instructional support services, or referral to treatment for impacted students, which may include students who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime or who illegally use drugs [ESSA § 4001(b)].
- No child will be required to obtain a prescription for a controlled substance, as defined in section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 802) as a condition of receiving an evaluation or other service described under this title; or attending a school receiving assistance under this title [ESSA § 4001(c)].
- Comply with ESSA § 8526 regarding the prohibited use of funds.
- Comply with TN SBE Policy 4.202 - Unsafe School Choice Policy (ESSA § 8532), T.C.A. § 39-17-1309 regarding carrying weapons on school property (ESSA § 8561), and T.C.A. § 39-17-1604 regarding places where smoking and use of vapor products is prohibited (ESSA § 8573).

Appendix A: Stronger Connections Grant Application Rubric

The following rubric and associated criteria will be used to evaluate the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) application. The total points are 100 for all sections. An additional 20 priority points are available to applicants for the use of evidence-based activities. Bonus points will be added separately. Equitable Services requirements will not be scored but will be evaluated as a whole for compliance.

Application Section	Maximum Points	Assigned Points
Needs Assessment - LEA Data and Analysis The applicant describes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the data and sources of data utilized to identify needs and the gaps in programming and other challenges identified in this process. Key Components: There should be evidence that the LEA based the needs assessment on a robust set of data that is clearly connected to the SCG focus areas.	15	
	Strengths:	
	Weaknesses:	
Application Section	Maximum Points	Assigned Points
Needs Assessment - Assessment and Description of Resources Already Available The applicant describes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the supports/activities currently in place for the identified need (either school or community-based). 	15	
	Strengths:	

<p>Key Components: There should be evidence that the LEA has taken into account the supports already available to students, educators, and families that are connected to the SCG focus areas.</p>	Weaknesses:	
<p>Application Section</p>	<p>Maximum Points</p>	<p>Assigned Points</p>
<p>Needs Assessment – Stakeholder Engagement</p> <p>The applicant describes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. what stakeholder groups have been involved in the initial planning of the SCG program; and 2. how the LEA has and will provide ongoing and meaningful opportunities for students, families, community partners, educators, and staff to be involved in the selection of evidence-based strategies and activities implemented to be funded through the SCG program. <p>Key Components: There should be evidence that there was a collaborative process for identifying the needs utilized to inform grant programming and that the LEA has a plan for ongoing stakeholder engagement.</p>	15	<p>Strengths:</p> <hr/> <p>Weaknesses:</p>
<p>Application Section</p>	<p>Maximum Points</p>	<p>Assigned Points</p>
<p>Spending Plan</p> <p>The applicant:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. selects one or more of the SCG focus areas; and 2. for each focus area selected, the applicant provides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least one SMART goal, • a detailed description of the activity, • a description of any external partnerships, 	45	<p>Strengths:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a description of how the activity will be evaluated, and • a timeline for implementation. <p>Key Components: All requested pieces of the plan should be addressed. SMART goals should be complete, the activity description should clearly describe what is being purchased and implemented, and timelines should be detailed enough to illustrate the timely implementation of SCG programming.</p>	Weaknesses:	
Application Section	Maximum Points	Assigned Points
<p>Request for Funds</p> <p>The applicant provides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a request for funds that falls within one of the three SCG funding tiers; and 2. a logical rationale for the funding request that is based on the results of the needs assessment, the number of students/educators/families to be served, the projected cost of the program (including any equitable services), and other LEA-specific factors as applicable. <p>Key Components: The funding request should make sense and be reasonable based on the results of the needs assessment and the size/scope of the proposed programming.</p>	10	
	Strengths:	
	Weaknesses:	

Application Section	Maximum Bonus Points	Assigned Bonus Points
<p>Evidence-Based Activity Bonus Points</p> <p>Within the Spending Plan Section, the applicant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides narrative information and documentation (e.g. webpage link and/or uploaded document) showing that at least one of the proposed SCG activities falls within Tier 3 or Tier 4 of the ESSA tiers of evidence – 10 points; or provides narrative information and/or documentation (e.g. webpage link and/or uploaded document) showing that at least one of the proposed SCG activities falls within Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the ESSA tiers of evidence – 20 points. 	20	
<p>Application Section</p> <p>Equitable Services</p> <p>The applicant:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> describes in detail the process utilized to consult with eligible non-public schools during the initial development and design of the Stronger Connections Grant; provides documentation of initial outreach and consultation with eligible non-public schools in the Related Documents section; and describes the next steps to ensure equitable services requirements are met, including steps for communicating non-public allocation amounts and continuing the consultation process as required under the SCG and ESEA. <p>Key Components: Responses and documentation <u>must</u> meet the equitable services requirements of the SCG and ESEA.</p>	<p>Compliance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Compliance Issues:</p> <p>Equitable Services Improvement Recommendations:</p>	

Section Name	Maximum Points	Assigned Points
Needs Assessment	45	
Spending Plan	40	
Request for Funds	15	
Total Base Points	100	
ESSA Evidence Bonus Points	20	
Total Maximum Points	120	
Is the LEA complaint in equitable services?		Yes / No

Appendix B: Prohibited Uses of Funds

ESEA § 4001(b) [20 U.S.C. § 7101] GENERAL PROVISIONS

(b) PROHIBITED USE OF FUNDS.—No funds under this title may be used for medical services or drug treatment or rehabilitation, except for integrated student supports, specialized instructional support services, or referral to treatment for impacted students, which may include students who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime or who illegally use drugs.

ESEA § 8526 [20 U.S.C. § 7906] PROHIBITED USES OF FUNDS

No funds under this Act may be used—

- 1) for construction, renovation, or repair of any school facility, except as authorized under this Act;
- 2) for transportation unless otherwise authorized under this Act;
- 3) to develop or distribute materials, or operate programs or courses of instruction directed at youth, that are designed to promote or encourage sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual;
- 4) to distribute or to aid in the distribution by any organization of legally obscene materials to minors on school grounds;
- 5) to provide sex education or HIV-prevention education in schools unless that instruction is age appropriate and includes the health benefits of abstinence; or
- 6) to operate a program of contraceptive distribution in schools.

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