

LETTER OF INTEREST (LOI) PROGRAM GUIDELINES: 2020–2023 BLENDED LEARNING GRANT PROGRAM- PLANNING GRANTS

LOI Application Due Date

11:59 p.m. Central Time, September 18, 2020

Program Authority

General Appropriations Act, Article IX, Rider 41, 86th Texas Legislature; Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 29, Subchapter Z, Section 29.924; TEC, Chapter 28, Subchapter A, Section 28.020

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INTRODUCTION

The Texas Education Agency (TEA), as the pass-through entity¹, is the grantee² from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and TEA awards subgrants to non-federal entities³ such as local educational agencies (LEAs), including school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and education service centers, and to a lesser degree institutions of higher education (IHEs), and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) who are the agency's subgrantees⁴. These guidelines apply to all subgrantees of TEA, regardless of whether referenced herein as subgrantee or grantee. For purposes of this document, TEA may use the terms grantee and subgrantee synonymously for its subrecipients.

This document MUST be used in conjunction with the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) and the specific program instructions. The Adobe Acrobat Standard Application System (SAS) consists of all forms to be completed in order for the applicant to be eligible for funding. For applicants selected for funding, all guidelines and instructions will be incorporated by reference into the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).

REFERENCE TO THE GENERAL AND FISCAL GUIDELINES

The Program Guidelines provide information specifically relevant to this grant program. The [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) provide information relevant to all TEA grant programs. Throughout the Letter of Interest (LOI) Guidelines, cross-references are given to applicable sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#). **It is critical that you review all referenced sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) when preparing your application.**

¹ Pass-through entity is defined as a non-Federal entity that provides a subaward to a subrecipient to carry out part of a federal program. (2 CFR 200.74)

² Grantee is defined as the legal entity to which a grant is awarded and that is accountable to the federal government for the use of the funds provided. The term "grantee" does not include any secondary recipients, such as subgrantees and contractors that may receive funds from a grantee. (34 CFR 77)

³ Non-federal entity is defined as a state, local government, Indian tribe, institution of higher education, or nonprofit organization that carries out a federal award as a recipient or subrecipient. (2 CFR 200.69)

⁴ Subgrantee is defined by TEA to be the same as a subrecipient which is defined as a non-federal entity that receives a subaward from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal program; but does not include an individual that is a beneficiary of such program. (2 CFR 200.93) Subgrantee is defined in 34 CFR 77 as the legal entity to which a subgrant is awarded and that is accountable to the grantee for the use of the funds provided.

OVERVIEW OF LOI PROCESS

The following steps provide a high-level overview of the process for responding to a letter of interest (LOI), including submitting an LOI application, and being selected for funding:

1. TEA publishes LOI application and supporting documents on the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) webpage.
2. Eligible applicants submit LOI application, and any required attachments to TEA by the specified deadline.
3. LOI applications reviewed and scored. Note: The highest scoring applicants may be required to attend an oral interview or respond to questions regarding their LOI application.
4. TEA announces applicants selected for funding on the TEA [Grants Awarded Data](#) webpage.
5. *For LOI applicants selected for funding, the LOI application will serve as the grant application. This eliminates the need for selected applicants to submit a separate grant application.*
6. TEA staff conducts budget negotiations on the LOI application.
7. Notice of Grant Award (NOGA) issued upon successful completion of the negotiation process.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND/OR STATE APPROPRIATIONS

The following is provided in compliance with the U.S. Department of Education Appropriations Act:

Category	Amount
Total funds available for this project	\$3,250,000
Percentage to be financed with federal funds	0%
Amount of federal funds	\$0
Percentage to be financed from nonfederal sources	100%
Amount of nonfederal funds	\$3,250,000

Due to current conditions, the amount available to award may change in response to budget reductions that the State is experiencing.

Your Notice of Grant Awards may need to be adjusted to reflect this reduction.

APPLICANT ASSISTANCE

The following types of assistance are available to applicants for this grant program.

Contact for Clarifying Information

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *TEA Contacts*.

The following TEA staff member should be contacted with questions about the LOI:

Eric Kotin, Operations Manager
Division of School Programs
eric.kotin@tea.texas.gov
Phone: (512) 463-9335

Errata Notices

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Errata Notices*.

LOI TIMELINE

Dates, except the grant ending date, may vary slightly as conditions require.

Date	Event
August 10, 2020	LOI available: Request for Letters of Interest for 2020 BLGP Planning Grants posted
August 17, 2020	FAQ Questions Due: Applicants may submit questions up until this date to MIZ@tea.texas.gov . All questions will be answered in a FAQ doc that will be published by 8/24/2020
August 21 at 12pm CT	LOI Webinar: 2020 BLGP Planning Grants Webinar to begin at 12:00 p.m.; Link to Join: https://zoom.us/j/98111434147
August 24, 2020	Notice of Intent to Apply; applicants are requested, but not required, to submit a notice of intent to apply to MIZ@tea.texas.gov
September 18, 2020	LOI Due Date: All applications must be signed by an authorized official and received at loiapplications@tea.texas.gov by this date at 11:59 pm CT. See General and Fiscal Guidelines , LOI Application Due Date and Time
September 18–October 13, 2020	LOI review period See General and Fiscal Guidelines , LOI Review Process
October 2–October 7, 2020	Phone Interviews: TEA will may conduct phone interviews with qualifying applicants.
October 13, 2020	Anticipated award announcement: Anticipated announcement of 2020 BLGP Planning Grants
October 15, 2020	Self-Funded Pathway Notice of Intent Due: Districts interested in the BLGP Self-funded Pathway must submit a Notice of Intent by October 15 at 5pm CT.
October 23, 2020	Beginning date of grant (if selected for funding); Note: <i>Pre-Award Costs are permitted from announcement date</i> See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Grant Period
November 12–November 13, 2020	2020 BLGP Kickoff Summit: Virtual; Attendance at the BLGP/MIZ Kickoff Summit is mandatory for all participating districts and charters and must include the district BLGP PM

Date	Event
March 2, 2023	Final date to submit an amendment (if selected for funding)
May 31, 2023	Ending date of grant (if selected for funding) See General and Fiscal Guidelines , Grant Period

For all dates related to the grant, including reporting dates, see the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page. If a due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the date will be on the following business day. All dates except the grant ending date may vary slightly as conditions require.

LOI AT A GLANCE

This section provides fundamental information pertinent to the grant program.

Authorizing Legislation

This LOI is authorized by the General Appropriations Act, Article IX, Rider 41, 86th Texas Legislature; Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 29, Subchapter Z, Section 29.924; TEC, Chapter 28, Subchapter A, Section 28.020

Where to Submit the LOI Application

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Where to Submit the LOI Application*

Number of Copies

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Copies and Signature for LOI Applications*

Purpose of Program

The Blended Learning Grant Program (BLGP) is a four-year process to design, launch, refine, and scale a high- quality blended learning program. Beginning with a planning year in year 0, districts will grow their blended learning model from a pilot program to a sustainable feeder pattern implementation by year four. Math Innovation Zones (MIZ) uses this approach with a focus on K-8 math blended learning implementation while TEA will also award grants for non-math blended learning pilots.

Eligible Applicants

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Eligibility To Apply for LOIs*.

All school districts and open enrollment charter schools are eligible to apply. Education Service Centers are eligible to apply as project managers on behalf of school districts or open enrollment charter schools. Individual schools are not eligible to apply.

Shared Services Arrangement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Shared Services Arrangements.
Shared services arrangements (SSAs) **are not** allowed for this grant program.

APPLICATION ATTACHMENTS

This section describes the required attachments that must be included with the application.

Required Attachments

See the following section of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Required Program-Related Attachments*. A complete application must include Application Part 1 and Application Part 2 as well as the following Program-related Attachments:

1. **Attachment 1: Completed TEA Provided District Information Form (TEA-supplied .xls document); Submit either:**
 - A. **Attachment 1A:** MIZ Information Form
 - B. **Attachment 1B:** Non-Math Blended Learning Pilot Information Form
2. **Attachment 2: District Created Attachments (District Supplied; Any format accepted)**
 - A. **Letter of Support: District/Charter Champion** - Usually a superintendent in smaller districts or charters or a deputy superintendent at larger districts or charters who will advocate for this work in the district or charter
 - B. **Letter of Support: School Leadership** – Principal or assistant principal who will advocate and implement this work at each proposed school
 - C. **Proposed BLGP Project Manager: Resume** - Resume detailing relevant skills and experience of the person overseeing this work at the district or charter
 - D. **Proposed BLGP Project Manager: Letter of Support**- This is the individual who will allocate at least 50% of his or her time to this project and will directly manage district or charter implementation
 - E. **District/Charter Organizational Chart including BLGP Project Manager** – District/Charter Org Chart to provided evidence that the BLGP PM has the ability to manage this project effectively across the organization based on position within the organizational structure
 - F. **NON-MATH BLENDED LEARNING PILOT APPLICANTS ONLY: Evidence of Software Program Effectiveness** – Include evidence that the use of the proposed software program has led to significant academic gains within the district or a similar district. Evidence should make a compelling case that the use of the software program has contributed to academic achievement.

Please note: Any attachments submitted other than those noted above are discouraged, may not be reviewed, and will not be scored.

LOI APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND ASSURANCES

This section describes the types of requirements that applicants must assure adherence to in order to be eligible to be considered for funding:

- Statutory requirements (requirements defined in the authorizing statute)
- TEA program requirements (requirements defined by TEA program staff)

Statutory Requirements

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Statutory Requirements*.

Per TEC §22.0834, any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including

nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Fingerprinting Requirement*.

TEA Program Requirements

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Program Requirements*.

In addition to the statutory requirements, TEA has established the following program requirements. Applicants must address within the space given in **Application Part 1** how they will achieve the following:

1. **District Commitment:** Explain why your school district wants to join the Blended Learning Grant Program (BLGP) as a Math Innovation Zone (MIZ) or a non-math blended learning pilot. (*Recommended Length: 1.5-2 pages*)
 - a. Describe why the district hopes to become a MIZ site or a non-math pilot and how the BLGP planning and execution process will benefit the district and schools. Include how blended learning is connected to the district's long-term vision and near-term priorities, and demonstrate that the district has the capacity to dedicate time and energy to this work at the present time. If applicable, response may include why COVID has changed the district prioritization of blended learning.
 - b. Describe what problem or set of problems the district and schools are attempting to solve through the use of a blended learning instructional model.
 - c. At its core, blended learning represents innovation in how instruction is delivered. However, we know that through the BLGP's robust planning and execution processes, blended learning can also foster **broader operational benefits** at the district and school levels – these may include changes in staffing, scheduling, finance, etc. Please describe your district's willingness to explore and embrace these kinds of broader operational innovation.
 - d. **Associated Attachment(s):** As an attachment to this letter of interest, please include the following:
 - i. **Letter of Support: District Champion** – Usually a superintendent in smaller districts or a deputy superintendent at larger districts that will advocate for this work in the district.
 - ii. **Letter of Support: School Leadership** – Principal or assistant principal who will advocate and drive this work at each proposed school.
2. **Project Manager:** Who will lead this work at your district by serving as the **BLGP Project Manager** and why is this person the right person for this role? (*Recommended Length: 0.5 page*)
 - a. Include information about the **experience, background, and ability to drive student results** of the BLGP PM.
 - b. Please describe the prospective PM's commitment to and vision for the BLGP in the district. Why is this individual committed to implementing a high-quality blended

- learning model?
- c. Describe how the district will enable the PM to make decisions across functions (C&I, IT, etc.) and influence district leadership to drive instructional and operational change.
 - d. **Associated Attachment(s):** As an attachment to this letter of interest, please include the following:
 - i. **Resume: Proposed District BLGP Project Manager:** Resume detailing relevant skills and experience of the person overseeing this work at the district; If hiring for this role, include job description in lieu of resume.
 - ii. **Proposed BLGP Project Manager: Letter of Support** - This is the individual that will allocate at least 50% of his or her time to this project and will directly manage this work within the district; If hiring for this role, submit a letter of support from the intended manager of the BLGP PM
3. How does the district **use data to drive decision making** about student achievement? (*Recommended Length: 0.5 page*)
- a. Describe the **quantitative goals, metrics, and measures** that the district or charter school network tracks. Describe the progress towards these goals and the evidence the district collects to assess this progress. These indicators can include multi-annual, annual, and during-the-school-year goals. If available, include examples of data from the past few years to demonstrate how the district or open-enrollment charter school is tracking results.
4. **NON-MATH BLENDED LEARNING PILOT APPLICANTS ONLY:** What online curriculum program is intended to be used in the district and schools? (*Recommended Length: 0.5 page*)
- a. Describe why this program best meets the needs of students and teachers in the proposed BLGP site(s) and how a high-fidelity use of this program will lead to gains in student achievement.
 - b. As an attachment to this application, submit evidence of software program effectiveness as noted in the "Attachment 2" section of the Application Requirements section of the BLGP Overview document.

Program-Specific Assurances

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Provisions and Assurances*.

The program-specific assurances are listed below and on the application.

1. The applicant will attend the mandatory BLGP Kickoff Summit. The 2020 BLGP Kickoff Summit will take place virtually on November 12-13, 2020. Attendance at the BLGP Summit is mandatory for all participating districts. The district BLGP Project Manager must be in attendance.

2. The applicant will designate and provide a district-level project manager who will be available to dedicate at least 50% of his or her time to designing and implementing the BLGP plan.
3. The applicant will list the proposed feeder pattern to be included in the district with a rationale as to why each school is included as part of this grant.
4. The applicant will contract with a BLGP Design and Implementation vendor in the fall/winter of the Planning year.
5. The applicant will implement a TEA-approved software program in all grade levels selected to participate in BLGP. Non-math blended learning pilot participants must gain TEA approval for their chosen software program. Different grades participating in the program within a given school (or district) may choose to implement different software programs.
6. The applicant will submit the BLGP Strategic Plan in the spring prior to implementation. The Strategic Design component of the BLGP Strategic Plan is tentatively due to TEA in Jan/Feb of 2021. The remainder of the plan is tentatively due in May of 2021. Exact dates will be sent to grantees by email.
7. The applicant will complete all BLGP Fidelity of Execution Requirements in program implementation, which include:
 - a. Weekly Student Software Progress: Achieve the vendor-specific weekly student software progress metrics of the selected software program
 - b. Weekly Teacher Software Usage: One teacher log-in per week is required
 - c. Weekly Data Driven Instruction (DDI) time: Execute DDI time, provide evidence of DDI time (TEA will provide a template), that will be delivered to TEA
 - d. Monthly Meaningful Learning Experiences (MLE): Execute MLE(s), provide evidence of MLE (TEA will provide a template), that will be delivered to TEA
 - e. Beginning, Middle, and End of Year Interim Assessment: Administer approved interim assessment and send campus growth report to TEA

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

This section provides detailed information about the LOI.

Description of Program

All program elements are described within the [BLGP Overview Document](#).

Supplement, Not Supplant

For supplement, not supplant guidance, see the Supplement, Not Supplant Handbook on the Grants Administration Division's [Administering a Grant](#) page.

The supplement not supplant provision **applies**.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The applicant agrees to provide data on the qualifications and experience of the existing or future staff members, as required per the program guidelines as follows:

The applicant agrees to provide data on the qualifications and experience of the existing or future staff members, as required per the program guidelines as follows:

1. Proposed BLGP Project Manager–Resume (required to be submitted as **Attachment 2C**)

2. Proposed BLGP Project Manager–District Organization Chart (required to be submitted as **Attachment 2E**) including role of BLGP Project Manager

PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION MEASURES

The applicant agrees to collect data and report on the following mandatory performance and evaluation measures:

1. Planning Phase Data Collection:
 - a. Blended Learning Strategic Plan
2. Execution Phase Data Collection
 - a. Weekly Data Collection:
 - i. Student Software Progress Reports to be submitted by software vendor after BLGP/MIZ Project Manager approval
 - ii. Teacher Software Usage Reports to be submitted by software vendor after BLGP/MIZ Project Manager approval
 - iii. Submission of DDI Template to be completed by the District or School BLGP/MIZ Project Managers; Click here to access the form: [Submission Form](#)
 - b. Monthly Data Collection:
 - i. Submission of Meaningful Learning Experience Template to be completed by the District or School BLGP/MIZ Project Managers; Click here to access the form: [Submission Form](#)
 - c. Three Times Annual Data Collection:
 - i. Submission of Interim Reports by BLGP/MIZ participating Grade Level
3. Reflection:
 - a. Annual Reflection and Revision Stepback (survey [link](#), for reference)

TEA may request additional data as needed.

Limits on Contracted Evaluators

Applicants should make every effort to ensure that contracted evaluators be independent and objective.

APPLICATION FUNDING

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#): *Continuation Funding, Fund Management, and Use of Funds*

It is anticipated that up to 30 grantees will be awarded up to \$125,000 each.

Selection of Applicants for Funding

Applicants will be selected in rank order.

Cost Share or Matching Requirement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Cost Share/Match Requirement*.

There is no cost share or matching requirement.

Limitation of Administrative Funds

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Administrative Costs*.

NOTE: Administrative funds include **both** direct administrative costs **and** allowable indirect costs.

Direct Administrative Costs

TEA limits the amount of direct administrative costs to no more than 5% of the total award.

Indirect Costs

For this state-funded grant, the grantee may claim a maximum for indirect costs equal to **the lesser** of its current, approved restricted indirect cost rate or 15%.

To calculate the maximum indirect costs that can be claimed for a grant, complete the [Maximum Indirect Costs Worksheet](#), posted on the Administering a Grant page, under the Handbooks and Other Guidance section.

Pre-Award Costs

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *Pre-Award Costs*.

Pre-award costs **are** permitted. Pre-award costs are permitted from the award announcement date to the grant start date.

Activities and Use of Funds

See the [Administering a Grant](#) page for general guidance on allowable activities and use of funds.

Allowable activities and use of funds may include but are not limited to the following:

Advisory Council

An advisory council may be funded under the grant program. If funding an advisory council with grant funds, written approval must be obtained from the TEA Program Manager.

Hosting or Sponsoring of Conferences

Hosting or sponsoring conferences may be funded under this grant program. Conferences must be managed to minimize costs to the grant award and must be approved by the TEA Program Manager.

Hosting or Sponsoring of Conferences will require a written justification form to be maintained locally and made available to TEA upon request. To access the cost of Hosting or Sponsoring of Conferences Justification form, refer to the [Administering a Grant page](#).

Out-of-State Travel

Out-of-state travel costs may be funded under this grant program. Out-of-state travel costs should be minimal. Travel costs are allowable as long as the expenses for transportation, lodging, subsistence, and related items are only incurred by employees on official business of the grantee and follow the grantee's regular business operations and written travel policy.

If funding out of state travel costs with grant funds, written approval must be obtained from the TEA Program Manager.

Out-of-State Travel will require a written justification form to be maintained locally and made available to TEA upon request. To access the Out-of-State Travel Justification form, refer to the [Administering a Grant page](#).

Travel Costs for Officials such as Executive Director, Superintendent, or Board Members

Travel costs for officials such as the executive director, superintendent, or board members may be funded under the grant program. If funding these travel costs with grant funds, written approval must be obtained from the TEA Program Manager.

General Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

- Personnel: Includes the BLGP Project Manager and all other employees dedicated to the planning and execution of BLGP. All associated costs are estimated to be 40% of awarded funds.
- Technical Assistance: Includes the contracting and engagement with BLGP Technical Assistance Network vendors, particularly a BLGP Design and Implementation Vendor in the fall of 2020. All associated costs are estimated to be 40% of awarded funds.
- Other approved costs: Includes any other costs necessary to fulfill the Fidelity of Planning requirements of BLGP. All associated costs are estimated to be 20% of awarded funds.

General Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds

In general, refer to the Budgeting Cost Guidance Handbook on the [Administering a Grant](#) page for unallowable costs.

In addition, unallowable activities and use of funds for this grant may include but are not limited to the following:

- Debt service (lease-purchase)
- Audit services
- Field Trips
- Cost of Membership in Any Civic or Community Organization
- Capital Outlay

LOI SCORING AND REVIEW

This section provides information on the scoring and review of LOI applications.

LOI Review and Funding Criteria

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *LOI Review Criteria*.

Scoring Rubric

The BLGP selection team will review all applications based on the following rubric:

Criteria		% of Overall Score
Commitment from Leadership	1. District demonstrates that BLGP initiative fits within district's long-term vision and near-term priorities	50%

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> District has the capacity and commitment to implement high-fidelity blended learning as a focal priority for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond Senior district and school-level champions show commitment to high-fidelity blended learning, familiarity with data-driven practices, and a willingness to innovate. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in other innovative TEA programs (including Texas Home Learning 3.0, Additional Days School Year, etc) will be considered a positive indicator of districts' willingness to innovate. Leadership demonstrates eagerness to embrace BLGP framework and openness to reimagine district systems (incl. instruction, operations, master scheduling, etc) <p><i>Associated Questions/Attachments: Application Part 1 (Question #1 & #3) and Attachment 2</i></p>	
BLGP Project Manager (PM)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated ability to drive student achievement results and has demonstrated ability to lead planning and implementation of program in district PM demonstrates commitment to and passion for blended learning, and has a basic understanding of program requirements PM has the ability to lead and drive buy-in for broader operational change (beyond just instruction) given where he/she sits in the organization <p><i>Relevant Questions/Attachments: Application Part 1 (Question #2) and Attachment 2</i></p>	25%
Economic Indicators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The BLGP prioritizes LEAs with the highest enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students <p><i>Relevant Questions/Attachments: Attachment 1</i></p>	15%
Results	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The BLGP prioritizes feeder patterns with schools that have majority of students approaching grade level, with at least 15% meeting grade level in proposed subject <p><i>Relevant Questions/Attachments: Attachment 1</i></p>	10%

Oral Interviews for Funding

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), *LOI Oral Interviews for Funding*.

Phone Interviews may be conducted as a component of the award process. Please see the **LOI Timeline** for additional information.

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