# **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act - Stronger Connections Grant**

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

1. **What is the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act-Stronger Connections Grant?**

Through federal legislation in June 2022, Congress authorized $1 billion in formula funding under Title IV, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) to support state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools in providing students with safer and healthier learning environments. Under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act-Stronger Connections Grant (BSCA-SCG), the California Department of Education (CDE) will competitively award subgrants to high-need LEAs to fund activities allowable under section 4108 of the ESEA.

1. **How is the BSCA-SCG different from the Title IV Part A formula funding?**

Congress provided funding in the BSCA for the Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA, but established some requirements unique from the typical Title IV, Part A program. Under the Stronger Connections grant program, the CDE must competitively award subgrants to high-need LEAs, as defined by the CDE, and funds may be used for activities authorized under section 4108 of the ESEA. Funds allocated under this program must be administered and tracked separately from the LEA’s regular Title IV, Part A formula allocation.

1. **Has the U.S. Department of Education released FAQs or non-regulatory guidance?**

Yes. The U.S. Department of Education released guidance in November 2022, and updated that guidance in April 2023. The CDE highly recommends applicants familiarize themselves with the Federal FAQs/non-regulatory guidance as well as the CDE’s Request for Application (RFA).

Link to Federal FAQs: <https://oese.ed.gov/bipartisan-safer-communities-act/>

Link to CDE’s RFA: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/rfastrongcomm.asp>

1. **Who is eligible to apply for the BSCA-SCG?**

Applicant agencies are limited to LEAs within the State of California that serve students in pre-K–12, inclusive. A Local Educational Agency (LEA) is defined as a school district, charter school, or a county office of education (COE) in its role as a provider of direct student services in COE-operated schools.

All applicants and all consortium members must have a CDE-assigned County/District/School (CDS) identification code and must be classified as an active LEA by the CDE. An active LEA is in operation and providing instructional services. A consortium is a group of LEAs that choose to submit a single application. Each LEA member of the consortium must meet the definition of high-need.

**Individual schools are not eligible to apply.** Only the LEA/consortium may apply on behalf of an individual school or schools within the LEA’s/consortium’s jurisdiction.

Community Based Organizations/agencies, colleges or universities, municipalities, private schools, and state special schools are **not eligible** to apply for a Stronger Connections Grant (SCG).

1. **Is a single charter school eligible to apply?**

If the charter school is its own LEA and meets the definition of “high-need LEA,” the charter school is eligible to apply.

1. **What criteria is the CDE using to determine whether an LEA is a “High-Need LEA”?**

To be eligible, an LEA/consortia will need to meet the following definition of “high-need LEA” adopted by the State Board of Education on July 13, 2023:

Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) with a concentration of 80% or above of students from low-income families, English learners, and students in foster care, plus one or more of the following characteristics:

* A chronic absenteeism rate higher than the state average – 30%
* An exclusionary discipline (in and out of school suspension) rate higher than the state average – 3.2%
* A school stability rate lower than the state average – 89.8%
* A dropout rate higher than the state average – 7.8%
1. **If an LEA meets the definition of “high-need LEA,” do all selected schools also need to meet the definition as well?**

No, the State Board of Education determined that the LEA must meet the definition of “high- need LEA” as opposed to individual schools. An eligible LEA determines which schools to include in their application. LEAs should describe how their selected schools align with local and community needs.

1. **If an LEA does not meet the definition of “high-need LEA,” but includes school sites with high percentages of unduplicated pupil count, chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, drop out rates, and lower than state average stability rates, may that LEA apply for the SCG for those schools?**

No, the LEA must meet the definition of “high-need LEA” as stated in question #6 to be eligible to apply.

1. **Do LEAs need to serve all grades, pre-K -12, inclusive, to be eligible to apply for this grant?**

No, LEAs that serve various grade groupings such as pre-K – 6, 6 – 9, 9 – 12, or other combinations normally referred to as elementary, middle, junior-high, or senior-high, are eligible to apply.

1. **Can multiple LEAs apply as a consortium?**

Yes, multiple LEAs may form a consortium and submit a single application. LEAs are encouraged to form a consortium when the resulting program efficiencies facilitate program success for each consortium member. If multiple LEAs choose to apply as a consortium, for the consortium to be considered eligible, each consortium member must meet the definition of “high-need LEA” as stated in question #6. Consortium applicants must designate a single LEA, charter school, or COE as the lead agency on the Application Cover Sheet. The lead agency must be a grant eligible LEA and a member of the applying consortium. The role of the consortium lead must be clearly described in the application narrative and delineated in a Letter of Agreement (LOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the consortium lead and each LEA consortium member.

1. **What are the allowable activities under the SCG?**

For a use of funds to be permitted, the grantee or subrecipient must determine if that activity is allowable under Stronger Connections – i.e., (1) authorized under section 4108 of the ESEA; (2) reasonable and necessary for the performance of the grant; (3) allocable to the grant; (4) supplements, and does not supplant, other non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used to pay for authorized activities; (5) not one of the prohibited activities in ESEA section 4001(b) or section 8526; and (6) consistent with any other applicable Uniform Guidance provisions (see 2 CFR 200 et seq., in particular 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E). For an LEA, use of funds must also be consistent with the design of the SEA’s Stronger Connections grant program and the LEA’s approved subgrant application.

Allowable activities must complement and enhance the actions and services identified to meet the LEA’s goals as provided in their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). The following list of potential activities would be eligible for funding and should be considered in alignment with the prioritized initiatives described in the CDE’s Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Stronger Connections Grant Program RFA. This is not an exhaustive list and program designs should address identified needs for the LEA/Consortium and the communities it serves.

* + Promoting community and family involvement in schools.
	+ Providing school-based mental health services and counseling.
	+ Promoting supportive school climates to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and promoting supportive school discipline.
	+ Establishing or improving dropout prevention programs and/or programs that use culturally fluent engagement strategies to promote positive connection to the school community.
	+ Supporting re-entry programs and transition services for justice-involved youth or youth whose immediate family members have been incarcerated.
	+ Implementing programs that support a healthy, active lifestyle (nutrition and physical education).
	+ Implementing systems, programs, and practices to prevent bullying, cyber bullying and harassment.
	+ Developing relationship building skills to help improve safety and through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse.
	+ Establishing community partnerships.
	+ Contracting with direct service providers.
	+ Purchasing equipment such as surveillance cameras, 2-way communications systems, metal detectors, and other physical or infrastructure-related security equipment, so long as the equipment and the use of the equipment complies with applicable state and federal laws and regulations.
	+ Direct costs associated with programmatic interventions, such as training and release time, project materials and supplies, and services required by project staff, service providers, parents, and students.
	+ Reasonable and necessary travel costs for staff training and on-site technical assistance. Travel costs related to the project shall be reimbursed at rates not greater than those established in bargaining unit agreements to which the LEA is subject.
1. **Can applicants contract with direct service providers or other third-party companies?**

Yes, and the duties of each paid, contracted provider must be clearly described in the budget narrative.

1. **Are LEAs receiving grant funds required to consult with private schools regarding equitable services?**

Yes. Because this funding was provided through Title IV, Part A, each SEA reserving funds for State-level activities under the Stronger Connections program and each eligible LEA receiving a Stronger Connections subgrant must, after timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials, provide eligible private school students and educators services and other benefits that are equitable in comparison to services and other benefits provided with Stronger Connections funds to public school students and educators (ESEA section 8501(a)(1), (3)(A)). After timely and meaningful consultation, an LEA makes the final decisions with respect to the services it will provide to eligible private school students and educators (34 C.F.R. § 299.7(b)(3)).

1. **Where do we submit the BSCA-SCG application and by what date?**

Please email your complete application to BSCA-SCG@cde.ca.gov. Eligible applications must be received by September 12, 2023, 11:59 p.m. Pacific Standard Time.

1. **What should a SCG application include to be considered complete?**

All submitted applications must include the following:

File 1:

* + Application Cover Sheet (Attachment 1)
	+ School Site Participant Identification Form (Attachment 2)
	+ Project Abstract (1 page maximum for LEA/Consortium).
	+ Application Narrative: 15-page (maximum for LEA) or 20-page (maximum for LEA consortium applications)
	+ Letters of Agreement (LOA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the applicant’s partners (if applicable)

File 2:

* + Project Budget (Attachment 3) The Project Budget must be in Excel format and must be uploaded with the application. A PDF, Word, or other formatted document will not be accepted.

Also, please refer to section C. Application Technical Requirements (page 20 in the RFA) for additional details regarding technical requirements. There is not a separate form for a checklist.

1. **Regarding the signature page, are e-signatures okay or do we need to collect physical signatures?**

Digital or electronic signatures are acceptable.

1. **What are the reporting requirements for the SCG?**

As a requirement of funding, all grantees must agree to submit Annual Reports (AR), Annual Expenditure Reports (AER), and an End of Program Report (EOP). The ARs and AERs are due no later than August 31 each year, starting in the year 2024, to ensure that an LEA/consortium will be able to include information from their approved LCAP(s) in the report.

Failure to submit the required reports by the due dates may jeopardize an LEA’s/consortium’s continued funding and may result in termination of the grant, with the CDE withholding any undistributed funds and billing the LEA/consortium for any funds already received.

Grantees may be asked to participate as a case study to be included in CDE’s efforts in sharing best practices to non-grantees.

1. **Are there Non-Allowable Expenditures?**

Yes. Grant funds are intended to complement and enhance existing programs and must not be used to supplant other local or state funds now being used for existing staff or activities. An LEA/consortium that receives an SCG award may not transfer funds out of that award to another authorized program. While certain provisions of ESEA allow LEAs to transfer funds allotted under certain ESEA formula grant programs, BSCA-SCG was enacted solely for the purpose of supporting the safety and health of students. Accordingly, the law requires LEAs to use funds to support those activities allowed under Section 4108 of SEA. In short, funds cannot be transferred to any other program account.

Specifically, funds may not be used:

* To purchase a firearm or to train LEA staff in the use of a firearm.
* For construction, renovation, or repair of any school facilities.
* Expenditures for land, buildings, or other intangible capital assets, including items acquired through leases with option to purchase and capitalized equipment costs in excess of $5,000.
* Telephone systems, fax machines, and telephones, including cell phones and landlines.
* Purchase of vehicles.
* Travel outside the United States or to banned states, as specified by California state travel rules. California state law restricts the use of state general funds to pay for travel costs to states that have laws that discriminate based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
* Childcare—possible exceptions are allowed, with evidence that the provision of childcare is necessary to implement a programmatic intervention strategy or training event conducted beyond normal school hours or off site for students, staff, or parents.
* Clothing.
* Food—possible exceptions are allowed, with evidence that the provision of food is necessary to implement a programmatic intervention strategy or training event conducted beyond normal school hours or off site for students, staff, or parents.
* Preparation, delivery, and travel costs associated with the application.
1. **Do SCG funds need to supplement, not supplant, state and local funding?**

Yes. The requirements of Title IV, Part A also apply to these funds, including but not limited to, the supplement, not supplant, requirement (ESEA section 4110) and the maintenance of effort requirement (ESEA section 8521). The supplement, not supplant requirement means, in general, that LEAs may not use SCG funds for the cost of activities if the cost of those activities would have otherwise been paid with state or local funds in the absence of SCG Grant funds.

1. **Is there a match/cost sharing requirement?**

No. In the SCG there is no requirement to match funds. LEAs are encouraged to combine resources and look for ways to supplement or enhance existing programs.

1. **Does CDE anticipate any more rounds of funding?**

At this time, the CDE is unaware of any US Department of Education plans to extend this initial grant.

1. **Will there be any corrections (errata) to the published RFA?**

Yes, an errata will be posted on the RFA website linked below: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/rfastrongcomm.asp>

**If you have questions regarding the Stronger Connections Grant, please contact:**

BSCA-SCG@cde.ca.gov.

California Department of Education

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