# Tobacco-Use Prevention Education Program Rural Initiative Center Grant

Request for Applications

Fiscal Years 2025–28

Governed by California Health and Safety Code Section 104420

March 12, 2025



**Application Due Date: May 2, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time**

Tobacco-Use Prevention Education Office

Whole Child Division

California Department of Education

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## Questions and Contact Information

The information contained in this Rural Initiative Grant Request for Applications (RFA) and the Rural Initiative Grant RFA Technical Assistance (TA) Webinar should be your primary resource documents for developing an application. Answers to substantive questions from the webinar will be compiled in a Frequently Asked Questions list and posted on the Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE) Grant Electronic Management System (GEMS) web page at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>.

Complete applications should be uploaded and submitted in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/> by the application deadline. Mailed or emailed submissions will not be accepted.

Note: This RFA process is competitive and will be reviewed and scored by readers using a [scoring rubric](#_Appendix_1:_Scoring). The California Department of Education (CDE) strongly encourages interested parties to read the entire Rural Initiative Grant RFA, view the TA webinar, and consider all elements for eligibility, program and narrative requirements, and potential disqualifications prior to submitting a completed application.

## Application Highlights for the Rural Initiative Grants, 2025–28

* Rural Initiative Grants will be funded using JUUL settlement funds allocated to the CDE by the California Department of Justice.
* The CDE anticipates the awarding of up to two grants. The number of grants awarded will depend on the number and quality of applications received, the proposed reach of the applications, and the total amount of funding available.
* The maximum size of each award will be $500,000 per year for three years to cover the direct and indirect costs of operating a Rural Initiative Center with a subaward program for rural school districts.
* The grant award period is from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2028, with the possibility of a two-year extension through June 30, 2030. Grant Award Notifications (AO-400s) will be allocated annually, contingent on continued availability of funds and satisfactory performance.
* Applicants must submit a complete three-year budget. Grantees may revise their budgets annually in coordination with the CDE.
* Only county offices of education (COEs) in California are eligible to apply.
* A full and complete grant application, including required signatures, must be submitted in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/> by **May 2, 2025, no later than 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time**. Late applications will not be accepted.
  + The applicant must download the application narrative and budget templates from TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>
  + The applicant must upload the completed application narrative and budget templates in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>. Upon submission of the application, the documents must be signed in TUPE GEMS through DocuSign.
* Applicants may submit no more than one application.
* Applicants must define the geographic region(s) they plan to serve with their Rural Initiative Center. Priority will be given to those who demonstrate experience operating a high-performing rural TUPE program and the capacity to increase mentorship and information exchange in the region(s) they propose to serve.
* This RFA requires applicants to propose activities to develop, implement, promote, and evaluate a subaward program to increase rural student access to TUPE services. While services for students should be the primary focus of subawards, services for parents/guardians, families, and school staff may also be considered based on local needs.
* In their subaward programs, grantees will identify local champions willing to undertake TUPE work in rural districts currently unfunded by TUPE, provide subawards to support their work, and arrange for technical assistance and mentoring. The CDE expects the amount of the grant budget that is allocated to subawards to increase after Year 1. Because these programs are intended to reach students in underserved rural school communities, districts currently participating in a TUPE Tier 1 or Tier 2 grant are **not** eligible for subawards.
* The TUPE Office will host and record a live TA webinar after the release of the RFA. The webinar will provide guidance on program requirements for the Rural Initiative Grant Application. The webinar recording, as well as a list of questions and answers compiled during the webinar, will be posted on TUPE GEMS approximately five days after the webinar.
* All required application materials and the webinar will be available on the CDE TUPE Rural Initiative Grant RFA web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/ruralinitiativerfa25.asp](http://staging.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/ruralinitiativerfa25.asp).

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### I. Critical Dates

The following chart identifies anticipated critical dates for the application process. These dates may be extended by the CDE at its discretion. Any changes will be posted on the CDE TUPE Rural Initiative Grant RFA web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/ruralinitiativerfa25.asp](http://staging.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r29/ruralinitiativerfa25.asp).

| **Critical Dates** | **Events** |
| --- | --- |
| **March 12, 2025** | RFA and supporting documents are posted on the CDE TUPE Funding web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/‌ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp). |
| **After Release of RFA** | The TUPE Office hosts a live TA webinar for applicants. A recording of the webinar and a list of questions and answers are posted 5 days after the webinar in the Resources tab on TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>. |
| **May 2, 2025** | **Submission deadline for completed applications.**  Applications that are not submitted to TUPE GEMS on this date by **3:00 p.m.** Pacific Time, including required signatures, will be disqualified. |
| **May 7, 2025** | Applicants are notified if they have been disqualified based on CDE screening. Review and scoring of eligible applications begins. |
| **June 2025** | Intent to Award (ITA) funding list is posted on the CDE TUPE Funding web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/‌ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp). Note: The ITA is not the final funding list. Appeals are due to the CDE no later than 10 business days after ITA posting. |
| **July 2025** | Final Funding List is posted on the CDE TUPE Funding web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/‌ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp). |
| **July 1, 2025** | Grant period begins. Grant Award Notifications (GAN, form AO-400) are sent to grantees upon approval by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. |

### II. Introduction

#### A. Background

In 1988, California voters approved Proposition 99, the Tobacco Tax and Health Protection Act, which placed a 25-cent tax on packs of cigarettes. A portion of the tax goes to various state and local agencies to operate a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program. Proposition 99 funded the CDE to establish the TUPE Program to provide students in grades six through twelve with the knowledge and skills needed to avoid tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases.

Proposition 99 also established the Tobacco Education and Research Oversight Committee (TEROC) to advise funded agencies, including the CDE, with respect to program development, implementation, and evaluation. TEROC develops and regularly updates an overarching plan for tobacco prevention and control in California. Objective 4 of the TEROC Plan addresses the need for programs to prevent tobacco use among young people [and to empower them as advocates for tobacco control](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/Pages/YouthObjective.aspx). The TEROC Plan may be found at [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/‌Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/Pages/TEROCPlan2025.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/Pages/TEROCPlan2025.aspx).

In 2016, California voters also approved Proposition 56, the California Healthcare Research and Prevention Tobacco Tax Act. Proposition 56 increased the cigarette tax by $2.00 per pack with similar new taxes on other tobacco products. A portion of the tax goes to support anti-tobacco programming. The law was designed to help prevent youth tobacco use, reduce tobacco-related health care costs, and accelerate the rate of decline in tobacco-related disparities.

Pursuant to Propositions 99 and 56, the CDE has developed important funding opportunities. County Technical Assistance (CTA) grants fund county-level technical assistance and basic TUPE programming. Tier 1 grants fund district-level tobacco-free school policy implementation and administration of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). Tier 2 grants fund more comprehensive TUPE programming, including tobacco-related student services, family and community engagement activities, and staff professional development.

In 2023, following lawsuits alleging that e-cigarette maker JUUL violated state laws by targeting youth through its advertising and promotional campaigns, the California Department of Justice and other entities reached a settlement with JUUL. California received $175.8 million from the settlement, of which $17 million was allocated to the CDE “to support existing youth education and outreach, as well as development of new educational campaigns in tobacco prevention for California student communities.” The CDE has dedicated $5 million of this amount for Rural Initiative Grants to increase the reach of TUPE programming in underserved rural areas of the state.

#### B. Purpose

Early tobacco-use prevention is critical because tobacco use generally starts in youth and can interfere with brain development. Youth tobacco use is associated with poorer academic performance and lower school connectedness. Tobacco use during adolescence disrupts the development of brain circuits that control young people’s ability to pay attention and learn. It also makes young people more susceptible to addiction. It can increase stress and symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and depression, and can lead to a lifetime of negative health outcomes.

Cigarette smoking among young people in California is at a historic low, but other forms of tobacco have taken the place of cigarettes. The tobacco products most commonly used by young people now are vapes—e-cigarettes and other battery-operated devices that generate aerosols rather than smoke. In the 2023 California Youth Tobacco Survey (CYTS), 5.6 percent of high school students reported ever having smoked a cigarette, but more than three times as many, 18.3 percent, had vaped. More than one in five, 21.6 percent, had used any form of tobacco. Current use rates (i.e., rates of use within the past 30 days) were 1.2 percent for cigarettes, 5.9 percent for vapes, and 7.3 percent for any form of tobacco. More than a quarter of them, 27.2 percent, used two or more tobacco products.

The ongoing popularity of tobacco is disturbing but not surprising given the tobacco industry’s strategy of continually recruiting new users to replace those who quit or die. The industry continually develops and markets new products designed to appeal to young people, including fruit- and candy-flavored products that entice youth to initiate tobacco use. The industry uses celebrities popular with youth to endorse their products and places ads in publications popular with young people. They blanket retail locations with pro-tobacco messaging, often in ways that specifically target children. Strong measures are needed to counter these influences and reduce youth tobacco use rates, including school-based tobacco use prevention programming.

Marijuana use among California youth is also a major concern. Like tobacco, marijuana is addictive and can interfere with brain development, leading to difficulties with paying attention, thinking, and problem-solving. It can cause problems with young people’s social lives and has been linked to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Unfortunately, youth use rates in California are even higher for marijuana than for tobacco. In the 2023 CYTS, 23.0 percent of high school students had ever used marijuana, while 10.4 percent were current users and 4.9 percent co-used marijuana and tobacco. Considering twelfth graders only, 28.9 percent had ever used marijuana, 14.0 percent were current users, and 6.4 percent co-used marijuana and tobacco. Co-use is driven in part by vaping devices that can be used with either substance. With tobacco and marijuana becoming increasingly intertwined, it is critical that youth tobacco-use prevention programming also address the rising epidemic of youth marijuana use.

There are clear disparities in tobacco use by rurality in California. According to the 2023 CYTS, 1.1 percent of students in urban schools reported current cigarette use, 5.7 percent used vapes, and 6.9 percent used any form of tobacco, whereas in rural schools, 1.9 percent of students reported current cigarette use, 8.0 percent used vapes, and 9.6 percent used any form of tobacco. For every type of tobacco product, including smokeless tobacco, cigars, little cigars/cigarillos, hookah, heated tobacco products, and nicotine pouches, current use rates were higher for rural students than for urban students. Exacerbating these disparities, rural schools are less likely than urban schools to participate in the TUPE Program and if they do, are less likely to do so at a level that funds comprehensive student services.

The purpose of this RFA is to counter these trends by developing up to two Rural Initiative Centers to increase student access to tobacco-use prevention education services in underserved rural areas. The CDE is soliciting proposals to operate these new centers from county offices of education that can demonstrate extensive experience operating high-performing rural TUPE programs. Having defined the region(s) to be served by their centers and demonstrated their capacity to increase rural student access to TUPE services, successful applicants will work with the CDE to develop, implement, promote, and evaluate new program offerings. These new offerings will include: (1) subawards for local champions willing to undertake TUPE work in rural school districts that currently receive no TUPE funding, and (2) opportunities for mentorship and information exchange for TUPE leads at all levels in the region(s) served by the centers. In these ways the Rural Initiative Centers will help to address tobacco-related disparities experienced by rural youth.

#### C. Applicable Laws and Regulations

The TUPE Office is governed by California *HSC* Section 104420. The Rural Initiative Grants will be supported with funds appropriated to the CDE from the Electronic Cigarette Settlements Fund (i.e., the JUUL Settlement), intended for youth tobacco-use prevention education and outreach. Funds appropriated by the legislature must be expended or encumbered by the CDE within three years.

### III. Grant Information

#### A. Anticipated Number and Size of Awards

The CDE anticipates awarding up to two grants. The number of grants awarded will depend on the number and quality of applications received, the proposed reach of the applications, and the total amount of funding available.

The maximum size of each award will be $500,000 per year for three years to cover the direct and indirect costs of operating a Rural Initiative Center with a subaward program for rural school districts.

#### B. Grant Funding Period

The Rural Initiative Grant Program provides funding for three years, from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2028.

#### C. Opportunity for Future Funding or Renewal

The CDE may augment and/or extend Rural Initiative Grants for an additional two-year period, from July 1, 2028, to June 30, 2030, subject to funding availability and contingent on satisfactory performance. Recognizing that the Rural Initiative Centers represent new programming, the CDE intends to work collaboratively with grantees to ensure the successful implementation of their grants. However, the CDE reserves the right to not augment, extend, or renew grants under this RFA if in the best interest of the statewide tobacco-use prevention effort.

#### D. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements set forth below, and the proposed programs must meet the requirements of this RFA to be considered for funding. Therefore, applicants should review the entire RFA and the TA webinar and consider all eligibility and program requirements prior to submission.

##### 1. Who May Apply

Only county offices of education (COEs) in the State of California are eligible to apply. School districts, individual schools, community agencies, private schools, and charter schools are not eligible to apply.

Although the purpose of this RFA is to fund Rural Initiative Centers to help rural school districts in a defined region or regions, COE applicants need not themselves be located in a rural area. They must, however, demonstrate knowledge about the needs and conditions of rural school districts in the region(s) they propose to serve and a capacity to help them provide TUPE services.

COE applicants who currently have CTA, Tier 1, and/or Tier 2 grants and who receive a new grant under this RFA may retain their existing funding, provided there is no duplication of services or supplantation of funding. (But note that only school districts not currently participating in a TUPE Tier 1 or Tier 2 grant are eligible for subawards under this grant.)

##### 2. Absence of Tobacco Industry Funding or Support

Applicants are ineligible for TUPE funding if, at the time of application, they are in receipt of funding, educational materials, or services from the tobacco, vaping, or marijuana industries, even if for the purpose of implementing tobacco-use prevention, intervention, cessation, or youth development programs. In addition, TUPE grantees are prohibited from accepting such funding, materials, and services for the duration of the grant. Acceptance of such items will result in termination of the grant and the return of all advanced grant funds and may disqualify LEAs from future TUPE funding opportunities.

A signature by the Superintendent or Designee on the DocuSign Signature Pages constitutes an assurance that the COE operating the Rural Initiative Center will not accept funding, materials, or services from the tobacco, vaping, and marijuana industries. A Designee is defined as an LEA official that has been specifically authorized by the governing board to accept and sign as a proxy on financial statements and legally binding documents. This designation must be documented by uploading a copy of a recent resolution or minutes vesting these powers on the Designee with the application materials.

##### 3. Other Eligibility Requirements

The application submitted must: (a) show that the proposed program meets the Rural Initiative Grant TUPE Program Requirements; (b) comply with the Application Submission and Narrative Requirements; (c) meet all other conditions, requirements, and deadlines; and (d) provide signatures as set forth in this RFA.

#### E. Overview of the Application Process

An applicant may not submit more than one complete application.

##### 1. Inclusion of Other Agencies

Applicant COEs may include in their proposals health care providers, community-based health organizations, or other agencies who will provide services to rural school districts or otherwise take part in the operation of the Rural Initiative Center. However, the COE applying for funding must serve as the lead agency. The lead agency assumes fiscal and reporting responsibility for the grant. The roles and responsibilities of the lead agency and other participating agencies must be clearly described in the Application Narrative and delineated in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the lead agency and other participating agencies.

As part of their Year 1 activities, the CDE expects successful grantees to create a subaward program for rural school districts in the region(s) they proposed to serve in their application. The grant application should describe how they will develop, implement, promote, and manage such a program, but should not list intended subawardees, as the selection of subawardees will occur after the grantee develops the subaward program in Year 1. Grantees are expected to begin issuing subawards by the end of Year 1. The amount of each subaward is to be determined by the applicant.

##### 2. Geographic Region(s)/Counties to Be Served

The purpose of this RFA is to fund Rural Initiative Centers that will increase rural students’ access to TUPE services. The CDE intends to fund up to two such centers. Applicants must indicate the specific region(s) that their center will serve, as defined by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). The CCSESA map is available on the California County Superintendents web page at <https://cacountysupts.org/regions/>. The CDE expects applicants to propose serving at least one region on the CCSESA map.

Priority will be given to applications that demonstrate the greatest potential for positive impact on underserved rural students in California, so careful consideration should be given to the selection of the region(s) to be served and the applicant’s ability to have a positive impact in the region(s) selected.

Within their selected region(s), applicants may determine which geographic areas to serve bases on their assessment of the rurality and needs of those areas.

##### 3. Complete Application

A full and complete Rural Initiative Grant application, including required forms and signatures must be uploaded and submitted in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/> **no later than 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time on May 2, 2025**. Applications that are mailed, emailed, or late will not be accepted.

The DocuSign Signature Pages must include the authorized signature of the Superintendent or Designee. An electronic signature is acceptable. In the absence of an authorized signature by the Superintendent, or by the Designee with governing board resolution or minutes, the application will be disqualified.

Note: Submitting an application constitutes consent to a release of information and waiver of the applicant’s right to privacy with regard to information provided in response to this RFA. Ideas and format contained in the application become the property of the CDE.

#### F. Use of Funds

Funding provided through this RFA may only supplement, not supplant, any current TUPE funding. Funding received pursuant to this RFA must be accounted for independently and separately from all other TUPE grant funds.

The use of TUPE funds for any purpose other than student tobacco-use prevention is not authorized. However, the CDE encourages grantees to address marijuana use as it relates to co-use with tobacco and as it relates to the use of vaping devices, which are defined as tobacco products under California law.

Subaward programs to be developed by the Rural Initiative Centers are intended to increase rural student, parent/guardian, family, and/or school staff access to TUPE service. Therefore, subawards may be given only to rural school districts that do not currently have TUPE funding. The amount of each subaward is to be determined by the grantee.

For more information about the use of funds, see the Project Budget Guidelines in the Resources tab of TUPE GEMS, [https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/](https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/" \o "Tobacco-Use Prevention Education Grant Electronic Management System web page).

#### G. Reporting Requirements

Ongoing communication with the CDE is an important part of reporting requirements. Grantees will be required to meet with TUPE Office staff via Teams or Zoom at least once per quarter to provide updates on grant implementation and to discuss challenges and accomplishments. The CDE intends to work collaboratively with grantees to identify barriers confronted by the Rural Initiative Centers and help address them.

Further opportunities for technical assistance and capacity building will be made available by the CDE and/or the Capacity Building Project (CBP) throughout the grant period. Grantees are strongly encouraged to take advantage of them.

Additionally, grantees must complete and submit the following regular reports according to a schedule to be provided by the CDE:

* Two expenditure reports per year for the periods July 1−December 31 and January 1−June 30, and
* One annual progress report per fiscal year, including data on implementation of the Program Plan.

If communication is insufficient, or if required reports are not provided in a timely manner, the CDE may suspend funding to the grantee and, unless the situation is remedied, may terminate funding altogether.

#### H. Application Review Process

The review and scoring process for applications consists of three stages: (1) an initial CDE screening, (2) reader review and scoring, and (3) funding determination.

##### 1. CDE Screening

Applications will be screened by the CDE to ensure that all technical requirements (forms, signatures, etc.), are met. Applications meeting the technical requirements of the RFA will move on to the reader review and scoring process.

##### 2. Reader Review and Scoring

Applications passing the initial screening will be read and scored by two independent readers who will determine the extent to which the applications meet the requirements identified in the Scoring Form and Rubric (Appendix 1). Each element in the rubric will be scored as Outstanding (3 points), Good (2 points), Developing (1 point), or Weak (0 points).

The readers’ scores will be averaged to obtain the application’s final score. If the scores are widely divergent, the readers will have the opportunity to discuss the application and re-score. If the readers are still unable to reach consensus, the application will be assigned to a third reader. The score from the third reader will be paired with the closest score from the original readers and then averaged to obtain the application’s final score. Applications will then be ranked by overall score.

Comments from individual readers will not be provided to applicants, and the professional judgment of readers will not be considered on appeal.

Upon completion of the review and scoring process, the CDE will post an Intent to Award (ITA) funding list on the TUPE Funding web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp>.

#### I. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be scored using a Scoring Form and Rubric (see [Appendix 1](#_Appendix_1:_Scoring)), which is based on a percentage scale and covers the main sections of the application as discussed in this RFA. Applications will generally score well if they provide: (1) accurate and pertinent information in each of the sections, (2) thorough and concise details in the narrative sections, and (3) a precise and well-considered budget. The CDE encourages applicants to review the Scoring Form and Rubric as they develop their applications.

#### J. Payment Procedures

The grant award cycle is for three years; however, GANs (form AO-400) will be issued in annual increments following the submission and approval of a revised budget for each new fiscal year in the grant cycle. The AO-400 must be signed and resubmitted each year of the grant. Carryover from one fiscal year to the next will be allowed with sufficient justification. However, the cash advance for the new year will be held until the grantee expends at least 75 percent of prior year funds. Applicants must retain documentation of their fiscal and program records documenting expenditures and program implementation for audit and state monitoring purposes for five years beyond the date of the final grant payment.

Payments will be issued following the schedule provided in the Project Budget Guidelines. For more information about payments, see the Project Budget Guidelines in the Resources tab of TUPE GEMS, <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>.

#### K. RFA Technical Assistance Webinar

A live TA webinar will be hosted after the release of the RFA. A recording of the webinar and a list of questions and answers compiled during the webinar will be posted on TUPE GEMS approximately five days later. The webinar will provide guidance on program requirements for the Rural Initiative Grant Application and on developing a project monitoring and evaluation plan. The information contained in this RFA, and the TA webinar should be your primary resource documents for developing an application.

### IV. Application Instructions

The Rural Initiative Grant Application Form provides a structured format for applications and includes eight sections: (1) [Applicant Summary](#_1._Applicant_Summary), (2) [Geographic Region(s) to Be Served](#Geographic_Regions), (3) [Capacity](#Capacity), (4) [Subaward Program](#Subaward_Program), (5) [Mentoring and Information Exchange](#Mentoring), (6) [Project Monitoring and Evaluation](#Project_Monitoring), (7) [Assurances](#Assurances), and (8) [Project Budget](#Project_Budget). Requirements for individual sections are described below under [Application Narrative](#Application_Narrative) and [Project Budget](#Project_Budget).

#### A. Format and Content Requirements

For most sections of the application, applicants will download the Rural Initiative Grant templates from TUPE GEMS. The Application Narrative template is in Word and the Budget template is in Excel; each template contains specific instructions on how to complete them. Applicants should read and follow these instructions and enter only the information requested. The Application Narrative should be single-spaced and 12-point Arial font. **The application should be no more than 10 pages.** There is also a video tutorial in TUPE GEMS to help explain this process.

Applicants may not submit attachments other than those required in this RFA. Additional documents provided with the application will not be considered.

Applications that are incomplete or that do not follow the format and content instructions below and in the Rural Initiative Grant Application forms will be disqualified.

#### B. How to Submit Applications

1. The applicant must complete Section 1 in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>
2. The applicant must download the Application Narrative template (Word document) and Budget template (Excel documents) from TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>
3. The applicant must complete each template and then upload them in TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>.

**Please note, the completed Application Narrative template can be uploaded as a Word document or a PDF file. The Budget template should remain as an Excel document.**

1. The required documents must be signed in DocuSign. For additional information, please refer to the [Signature and Submission](#_F._Signature_and) section of this document.

Mailed or emailed applications will not be accepted.

#### C. Submission Deadline

A full and complete Rural Initiative Grant application, including required signatures, must be uploaded to TUPE GEMS at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/> no later than **May 2, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time**.

Late applications will not be accepted.

#### D. General TUPE Guidance

The Rural Initiative Grant Application should be designed as a three-year project that prioritizes the development, implementation, and promotion of program offerings in Year 1, followed by expansion and refinement of these offerings in Years 2–3. Project monitoring and evaluation should begin in Year 1 and continue for the duration of the grant. Grantees should follow a continuous quality improvement process, in which project monitoring and evaluation produce timely findings that are then used to improve the provision of services. Demonstration of solid planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement processes is required in all applications.

##### Program Plan

Applicants must develop a Program Plan, the purpose of which is to guide the development, implementation, and promotion of the program’s offerings. The plan for the Rural Initiative Center addresses two key areas:

* + Subaward program
  + Mentoring and information exchange

The subaward program is the most important and resource-intensive part of the Program Plan. Applicants must describe how they will develop, implement, and promote a subaward program to increase rural student, access to one or more TUPE services. While services for students should be the primary focus of the subawards, services for parents/guardians, families, and school staff may be considered based on local needs.

Mentoring and information exchange are also important, as they help ensure that rural TUPE coordinators and leads at all levels can access valuable input from similarly situated colleagues who have experience operating TUPE programs in rural settings.

These two areas are described further in the Application Narrative section of the RFA.

##### 2. Existing Resources for Rural Schools

Rural Initiative Centers are intended to supplement, not replace, existing resources for rural schools in the statewide TUPE Program. These resources include: (1) TUPE County Coordinators, who provide tobacco-related technical assistance to school districts in their respective counties; (2) Tier 1 and Tier 2 grantees, who ensure that school districts participating in their grants implement tobacco-free school policies, gather data about student tobacco use, and provide student services and other TUPE programming; (3) the TUPE Capacity Building Project, which develops tobacco-related technical assistance, training, and other resources for TUPE projects statewide; (4) other statewide providers, such as the California School-Based Health Alliance, the California Friday Night Live Partnership, and the Stanford Tobacco Prevention Toolkit Team, which help to build capacity in their respective areas; and (5) TUPE Office staff, who retain primary responsibility for advising grantees.

#### E. Application Narrative

The following is an overview of the narrative sections of the application. Specific instructions appear in the Rural Initiative Grant Application forms for each section.

##### 1. Applicant Summary (Section 1)

The purpose of this section of the Application Narrative is to collect basic information about the applicant.

The Applicant Agency is the lead agency applying for TUPE funding, and the agency that will receive funding directly from the CDE, if the application is funded.

The Application Lead is the person driving the development of the application. This person has “ownership” of the application in TUPE GEMS and thus has the authority to invite others to be on the application team. The Application Lead is the only person authorized to verify the application content and submit it to the CDE.

The Superintendent/Designee is either the Superintendent or someone for whom an Authorized Designee Form has been completed and uploaded to TUPE GEMS. The Designee must differ from the Application Lead. The only exception to this is an Assistant Superintendent who is a Superintendent/Designee; s/he may also be Application Lead.

##### 2. Geographic Region(s) to Be Served (Section 2)

This section is to identify and describe the geographic region(s) to be served by the Rural Initiative Center. What is already known about youth tobacco use rates in the selected region(s) based on data sources such as CYTS? What rural school districts are underserved by TUPE programming? More specifically, what districts lack tobacco-free school policies, do not administer CHKS, or do not participate in a Tier 1 or Tier 2 consortium grant? What information about tobacco-related needs do you have from other sources, such as key informants?

Note that applicants do not need to have conducted a comprehensive survey of rural needs in the region(s) to be served when submitting their applications. Instead, they should describe what additional data they will gather to assess those needs, and from what sources, beginning in Year 1.

The 2023 CYTS report can be found on the California Department of Public Health web page at [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/‌Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/ResearchandEvaluation/SurveyInstrumentsTrainingManualsAndProtocols/CYTS2023AnnualReport\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CTCB/CDPH%20Document%20Library/ResearchandEvaluation/SurveyInstrumentsTrainingManualsAndProtocols/CYTS2023AnnualReport_FINAL.pdf).

Information about tobacco-free school policies can be found on the California Department of Education Tobacco-Free School District Certification web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tobaccofreecert.asp>.

Information about CHKS administration can be found on the California Healthy Kids Survey web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/chks.asp>.

Information about participation in Tier 1 and Tier 2 consortia can be found at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/‌ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/tupefunding.asp).

Student enrollment numbers can be found on the DataQuest web site at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

##### 3. Capacity (Section 3)

This section is for you to describe your team’s capacity to operate a Rural Initiative Center.

First, describe your team’s experience providing and overseeing TUPE programming. What evidence do you have of operating a high-performing rural TUPE program? What relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities do your key personnel have in this area? What outside agencies do you propose to include, if any, and what additional capabilities do they bring to the team? What support do you have from senior leadership in your COE?

Second, what experience do you have related to managing a consortium? What experience do you have motivating underserved rural school districts to participate in a consortium grant, implement tobacco-free school policies, administer CHKS, or provide TUPE services?

Third, describe your capacity to collaborate with others in the region(s) you propose to serve. How will you work with TUPE County Coordinators and others to inform and advise the Rural Initiative Center and its subaward program? How will you engage them in mentoring and information sharing to help build rural capacity?

Finally, illustrate the organization of your program with a chart showing the flow of information among members of your team, including outside agencies, if any, and from team members to the program’s intended audience. Please upload this chart as a separate attachment in the Application Narrative section of TUPE GEMS.

##### 4. Subaward Program (Section 4)

This section is for you to describe the first main component of your Program Plan: the subaward program. How will your subaward program be set up and organized to reach its intended audience of underserved rural school districts? Who will provide input on how the program is structured? How will it be developed and implemented? How will the program be promoted so that underserved rural school districts not only hear of the funding opportunity but are motivated to participate? How will you ensure fairness and transparency in the allocation of funding? Besides the subaward, what other support will they receive, and from whom?

With the subawards they receive, what actions will rural school districts be expected to take? Will they implement one or more TUPE student services, such as prevention, intervention, cessation, and youth development? Will they engage parents/guardians, families, or school staff in a TUPE-related activity or meeting? If the Rural Initiative Center engages outside agencies to provide student services in rural school districts, what will those districts be expected to do to coordinate with these outside agencies?

Finally, what will the Rural Initiative Center do to help ensure that the actions school districts undertake with their subawards are sustained over time or that they lead to further progress in the future?

##### 5. Mentoring and Information Exchange (Section 5)

This section is for you to describe the second main component of your Program Plan: mentoring and information exchange. How will you coordinate and collaborate with others, especially other COEs, to create mechanisms for mentoring so that rural TUPE coordinators and leads at all levels can learn from their colleagues who have experience operating TUPE programs in rural settings? How will you organize opportunities for colleagues to meet as a group (virtually or in person) to exchange information about their challenges, successes, and other program learnings?

##### 6. Project Monitoring and Evaluation (Section 6)

This section is for you to describe how you will monitor and evaluate your work. How will you ensure that the Program Plan is implemented as planned and achieves its intended outcomes? What data will be collected, and by whom, to ensure that you have the information you need to evaluate the program? For example, how will you assess the reach of your subaward program with respect to the number of districts participating and the number of students, parents/guardians, families, and/or school staff served, and how will you know if colleagues are benefiting from the mentorship and information exchange opportunities you organize? How will you use data to inform decision making and improve your program offerings over time?

##### 7. Assurances (Section 7)

In this section, applicants must download applicable forms, retain some for reference, and submit others with their application. Instructions for the various forms are provided on TUPE GEMS, where they may be downloaded.

1. **General Assurances and Certifications**

The applicant’s Superintendent or Designee must certify that s/he has read and agrees to the terms as stated in this RFA and all terms in accordance with the California Health and Safety Code and California Education Code.

The Superintendent or Designee’s signature represents acceptance of all conditions as stated in the Application Narrative, the Project Budget, all general and certified program assurances, and forms not requiring a signature; it also represents agreement that the work proposed in the application will be carried out.

A Designee may provide the authorized signature as long as a copy of a recent governing board resolution or minutes, specifically authorizing the Designee to accept and sign as a proxy on financial statements and legally binding documents, is included with the application. In the absence of an authorized signature by the Superintendent, or by the Designee with governing board resolution or minutes, the application will be disqualified.

Grantees must provide General Assurances and Certifications as a condition of receiving CDE funds. See the CDE General Assurances and Certifications web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/‌fg/fo/fm/ff.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/fm/ff.asp) for more information.

1. **Program-Specific Assurances and Certifications**

The applicant agency, on behalf of all agencies identified in the application, must certify that it will:

* 1. Implement a systematic and ongoing process to (a) collect relevant program monitoring data; (b) ensure that the funded program is implemented as planned; and (c) measure the effectiveness of the Program Plan in achieving the intended outcomes.
  2. Implement the program as described in the approved application or receive written permission from the CDE prior to implementing any changes to the approved application.
  3. Expend funds as detailed in the approved application unless specifically approved by the CDE.
  4. Submit all required deliverables by the designated due dates to ensure that the program remains in good standing with the CDE.

1. **Memorandum of Understanding**

Applicants must submit a current MOU between the lead agency and all other agencies participating in the application (except rural LEAs who may receive subawards), dated January 2, 2025, or later. The MOU should clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the lead agency and all other participating agencies, especially with respect to service provision and data collection. The MOU should affirm that all participating agencies agree to the terms of the RFA and agree to implement the services outlined in the application.

The MOUs can be collected separately; however, they should be saved into one document for the purposes of uploading into TUPE GEMS. Electronic signatures are acceptable. Applicants who do not plan to include other agencies in funded roles do not need to submit an MOU.

1. **Inventory Report**

The Inventory Report is a requirement across all grant types. All inventory items costing more than $500 and purchased with any TUPE funds, including current and expired TUPE grants, must be noted on the Inventory Report. If you are purchasing or have purchased inventory, including but not limited to laptops, copiers, desktop computers, etc., complete and upload an Inventory Report using the inventory template provided. Alternatively, you may certify that you do not meet the criteria for completing the Inventory Report.

##### 8. Project Budget (Section 8)

For this section, you will create a three-year project budget organized by object code. Every dollar amount in the budget must be clearly and fully justified and be accompanied by a computation that includes a unit cost per budget item. Budgets must align with the Program Plan described in the Application Narrative. The CDE will review all proposed budget items for clarity, reasonableness, and purpose. Prior to funding, the CDE will screen for unallowable costs. Allowable costs are specified in the Project Budget Guidelines. For more information about the allowable costs, see the Project Budget Guidelines in the Resources tab of TUPE GEMS, <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/>. Because the recipients of subawards will not be known until after the subaward program is set up, do not create line items for individual subawards.

Your project budget should be constructed using the standardized Excel template provided in this section of TUPE GEMS, which should not be altered in any way.

Detailed budget guidance may be found in the Project Budget Guidelines under TUPE GEMS Resources page at <https://tupegems.ucsd.edu/> .

#### F. Signature and Submission

Authorized signatures are required from the Application Lead and the Superintendent or Designee. Note that both signatures must be completed before the application can be submitted in TUPE GEMS. **Applications whose signatures are incomplete as of the deadline will be disqualified.**

If your organization’s practices require additional signatures, such as from a fiscal representative or department head, please complete these separately.

When the application is ready for submission, the Application Lead must click the “Sign and Submit” link on the Application Overview screen in TUPE GEMS. This will direct the applicant to a form requiring input of the names and email addresses for each signee. After this form is submitted, TUPE GEMS will generate a packet of the application for signature via DocuSign. The Application Lead and the Superintendent/Designee will receive email notifications from DocuSign that their signature is requested. Signatures may be completed in parallel; they do not need to be completed in sequence. After the application has been signed by all parties, the Application Lead will receive an email confirmation from DocuSign that the signature packet is complete. At this point, DocuSign will send an alert to TUPE GEMS to submit the application. Please note that applications are submitted at the top of every hour. When the application is fully submitted, the Application Lead will receive an email notification from TUPE GEMS confirming it has been submitted to the TUPE Office.

Signature and submission represent certification that all of the information in the application has been reviewed and approved by the Superintendent or Designee, and that all grant requirements will be met as stated pursuant to California Health and Safety Code Section 104420(n)(2).Grantees must retain copies of signed documents for their records and for audit purposes. Please visit the CDE General Assurances and Certifications web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/fm/ff.asp> for more information.

#### G. Specific Terms and Conditions

Applicants funded through this RFA must have a tobacco-free policy, in accordance with California Health and Safety Code Section 104420(n)(2), which states that all COEs, school districts, and charter schools that receive TUPE funding are required to adopt and enforce a tobacco-free school policy no later than July 1 of each fiscal year. The policy must prohibit the use of products containing tobacco and nicotine, including, but not limited to, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chew, clove cigarettes, and vapes that can deliver nicotine and non-nicotine vaporized solutions, at any time, in COE, charter school, or school district-owned or leased buildings, on school or district property, and in school or district vehicles.

#### H. Appeal Process

Applicants who wish to appeal the CDE’s Intent to Award list must submit a letter of appeal. The letter must be written on the applicant agency’s letterhead and signed by the Superintendent or Designee. An electronic signature is acceptable. A copy of the signed letter must be uploaded to TUPE GEMS no later than 10 business days after ITA posting.

Letters of appeal that are late will not be considered.

Only appeals based on claims that the CDE’s actions violated a state statute or regulation will be considered. Appeals based on the professional judgment of application readers will not be considered.

The letter of appeal must include:

* A clear, concise statement of the action being appealed,
* The state statute and/or regulation which the CDE is alleged to have violated,
* The specific evidence being submitted to support the appeal, and
* The specific remedy sought.

The CDE will make a decision on the appeal within 20 business days of the filing deadline for appeals. The decision will be the final administrative action afforded to the appellant.

### Appendix 1: Scoring Form and Rubric

Applications will be scored in several categories, with each category contributing a proportion of the total score, as summarized in the table below.

| **Rubric Category** | **Weight** |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Region(s) to Be Served (Section 2) | 15% |
| Capacity (Section 3) | 25% |
| Subaward Program (Section 4) | 25% |
| Mentoring and Information Exchange (Section 5) | 15% |
| Project Monitoring and Evaluation (Section 6) | 10% |
| Project Budget (Section 8) | 10% |
| **Total** | 100% |

Each item in the rubric will be rated based on the quality of the applicant’s response in the relevant section of the application. The possible ratings are Outstanding (3 points), Good (2 points), Developing (1 point), and Weak (0 points), defined as follows:

* Outstanding: The applicant’s response is exceptionally clear, specific, and relevant, and presents a compelling argument supporting the proposal.
* Good: The response is sufficiently clear, specific, and relevant, and presents a reasonable argument supporting the proposal.
* Developing: The response is in some respects clear, specific, and relevant, but does not fully support the proposal.
* Weak: The response is insufficient. The information provided is not clear, specific, or relevant, and does support the proposal.

| **Geographic Region(s) to Be Served (Section 2)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the applicant identify and describe the region(s) to be served by their Rural Initiative Center? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| Are available data sources used to describe tobacco-related needs in the region(s) to be served, such as data from CYTS? Does the applicant demonstrate that the area is underserved by TUPE programming, such as by reference to the lack of tobacco-free school certification, non-administration of CHKS, or non-participation in TUPE consortium grants? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

| **Capacity**  **(Section 3)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the applicant demonstrate experience operating a high-performing rural TUPE program? How well do the applicant’s skills, knowledge, and abilities prepare them to operate a Rural Initiative Center? Are the capabilities of any outside agencies included in the proposal clearly described? What support does the applicant have from senior leadership in their COE? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| How well does the applicant demonstrate experience managing a consortium and motivating underserved rural school districts to participate? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| How well does the applicant demonstrate the capacity to collaborate with others in the region(s) to be served? Do they propose a reasonable plan for working with others to inform and advise the center and its subaward program? Do they demonstrate an ability to engage others in mentoring and information sharing to help build rural capacity? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| How well does the applicant describe a plan to set up and organize the Rural Initiative Center to reach its intended audience? Does the flow chart demonstrate an effective organizational structure, including outside agencies, if any? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

| **Subaward Program (Section 4)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the applicant describe their subaward program, including how it will be set up and organized, who will provide input on it, how it will be developed, implemented, and promoted, how they will ensure fairness and transparency in the allocation of funding, and what additional support subawardees will receive? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| How well does the applicant describe the activities subawardees will be expected to undertake with the funding they receive? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| How well does the applicant describe a plan to ensure that the actions school districts undertake with their subawards are sustained over time or that they lead to further progress in the future? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

| **Mentoring and Information Exchange (Section 5)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the applicant articulate a plan to foster mentoring and information exchange? Does their plan involve collaborating with other COEs to create mechanisms for mentoring so that rural TUPE personnel at all levels can learn from their colleagues? Do they sufficiently describe plans to organize opportunities for colleagues to exchange information about challenges, successes, and other program learnings? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

| **Project Monitoring and Evaluation (Section 6)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the applicant articulate a plan to ensure that their Program Plan is implemented as planned and achieves its intended outcomes? How well do they describe what data will be collected, and by whom, to ensure that they have the information they need to evaluate the program? How well do they describe a process to use data to inform decision making and improve their program offerings over time? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |

| **Project Budget (Section 8)** | **Outstanding** | **Good** | **Developing** | **Weak** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How well does the budget align with the Program Plan? Is it reasonable with respect to the allocation of funding across different areas (e.g., personnel, contractors, subawards)? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| Is the budget clear, reasonable, and free of unallowable costs? | **3** | **2** | **1** | **0** |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |