

FY2011 TALENT SEARCH (TS) GRANT COMPETITION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

RESOURCES

1. Where are the new Talent Search regulations located?

The amendments to the Talent Search (TS) regulations were published in the Federal Register on October 26, 2010 and can be found at: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-24324.pdf>. This publication amends the regulations of eight federal education programs (including all of the Federal TRIO Programs) and includes a preamble, which gives insight into the discussions between the public and the Department of Education that helped formulate the final amendments for these programs. The part of the preamble discussion that pertains specifically to TS begins on page 65723. The amendments to the TS regulations are on pages 65774-65780. An easy-to-read unofficial compilation of the TS regulations and amendments is available on the TRIO Web site at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/tsregscompilation.pdf>

However, please note that if there are any discrepancies between this compilation and the Federal Register, the latter takes precedence.

2. Where can the 2011 application package be found?

The FY 2011 application package must be downloaded from grants.gov. To do so, follow these steps:

1. Start at the Grants.gov home page: <http://www.grants.gov/>.
2. Go to the "Apply for Grants" page: http://www07.grants.gov/applicants/apply_for_grants.jsp.
3. Click on "Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package": https://apply07.grants.gov/apply/forms_apps_idx.html.
4. Enter the CFDA number for this program (**84.044**) and click "Download Package." Note that alpha suffixes to the CFDA number cannot be included in the search criteria. If there is more than one program sharing same numeric CFDA an applicant will be able to select specific programs under that number using the program title after the numeric CFDA search.
5. Click "Download" to access the application package and instructions.

3. Where can the application selection criteria be found?

The amendments to the regulations that were published in the Federal Register only contain the parts of the selection criteria that have been amended. Applicants can find the complete selection criteria on pages 9-11 of the unofficial compiled regulations located on the TRIO web site at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/tsregscompilation.pdf>. Additional suggestions regarding how to address the selection criteria are on pages 70-73 of the application package, which may be downloaded from Grants.gov.

4. What types of technical assistance is available in using the online application software?

There is a range of resources, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions and troubleshooting tips, on the Grants.gov Help page: <http://grants.gov/help/help.jsp>. An applicant may also contact Grants.gov by phone or use live chat via this page: <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/ContactUs.aspx>.

5. Where is the list of individuals that have been debarred from doing business with the Federal government?

Applicants should use the Excluded Parties List System, <https://www.epls.gov/>, to determine if an individual is debarred from doing business with the Federal Government.

6. Where is there guidance on persistently lowest-achieving schools to help applicants address Invitational Priority 1?

As stated in the application package, Invitational Priority 1 reads: “The Secretary encourages applicants to propose projects that provide services to students enrolled in schools that are not currently being served by a Talent Search project, especially *schools that the State has identified* as the persistently lowest-achieving schools” [emphasis added]. Therefore, applicants wishing to address this priority should refer to their respective state and/or district standards as to schools that have been identified as “persistently lowest-achieving”.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: FORMATTING

7. Is an identifying header at the top of the page (within the 1 inch margin) allowable?

It is allowable and should include the applicant’s name and the page number.

8. What are the rules regarding single and double spacing? Font style and size?

Refer to the specific information on pages 28-29 of the TS application package regarding formatting requirements. Double-space all text in the project narrative, except titles, headings, footnotes, quotations, references, captions, and all text in charts, tables, figures and graphs. Applicants may only use one of the following fonts: Times New Roman, Courier, Courier New, or Arial, only. Applications submitted in any other font (including Times Roman and Arial Narrow) will not be accepted. Applicants must use a size 12 or larger font, only.

9. What citation format should be used in writing the grant?

Any generally acceptable citation format is allowable, as long as it clearly conveys the source of the information, as well as the date. But the applicant should keep in mind that space is limited, so parenthetical citations may be more efficient than footnotes.

10. Is it allowable to put data in a table or a chart to make it easier to read? What constitutes a chart or a table?

The use of tables and/or charts is allowable in an application. Charts and tables contain abbreviated information and may be used for material that does not fit well into the narrative section of the application, such as lists, data, or deadlines.

11. Will the Table of Contents have a separate attachment field in Grants.gov, or will it be a part of the narrative upload?

There is no separate attachment field for the Table of Contents. It should be included in the Narrative, but will not count against the 65 page limit.

12. How can an applicant convert a Word file to PDF without special software?

The Grants.gov website lists several PDF conversion websites and programs that applicants may seek out if they need assistance creating a PDF file. Go to: http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS

13. May an applicant submit multiple applications? If so, how many target areas can an applicant serve?

An applicant may submit more than one application for a TS grant as long as each application identifies a different target area or target schools. The Department does not have a limit on the number of target areas an applicant proposes to serve.

14. If an applicant has an existing TS project and wishes to submit multiple applications in the new competition, would each application be eligible to receive Prior Experience (PE) points?

No. A currently funded applicant is only eligible to receive PE points for the one application that proposes to serve substantially the same target schools as served under its expiring TS project. In cases in which an applicant proposes to serve the same schools but with two or more different grants (“splitting” the current project into multiple projects), the applicant is eligible to receive PE points for only one application. The applicant must indicate on the TS Project Profile section of the application which one new application should be awarded PE points.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: AWARD AMOUNT

15. Will the Department accept a TS application that reflects a higher cost per participant than \$460?

No. Applications that propose a cost per participant greater than \$460 will be rejected.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: PARTICIPANT NUMBERS

16. May currently funded applicant write to serve fewer participants in its new application for this competition? If yes, what are the conditions?

An applicant currently operating a TS project may propose to serve fewer participants than the project is currently serving, as long as the funding conditions as detailed in the [Federal Register](#) “Notice Inviting Applications” are met. For the 2011 TS competition, this means proposing a participant number not fewer than 500 and a per participant cost that does not exceed \$460. As long as both of these conditions are met, it is allowable to lower the participant number for the new competition. However, we encourage

applicants who are serving more than 500 participants in a current TS project to continue to do so. For further information on the formula for cost per participant, please refer to the information on “Maximum Award” in the Federal Register “Notice Inviting Applications” (pages 24-26 of the TS application).

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: ATTACHMENTS

17. Where should an applicant upload the GEPA Statement?

The GEPA Statement should be uploaded as a .pdf attachment to the “ED GEPA427 Form,” which is located in the Grant Application Package under the box labeled “Mandatory Documents.” However, if the GEPA Statement is uploaded into the “Other Attachment Form” in Grants.gov, it will be accepted and will not be counted as part of the 65-page limit.

18. Should the entire Talent Search Program Profile, found on pages 55-62 of the application package, be attached to the “Other Attachment Form” in Grants.gov?

No. Only pages 55 and 56 should be completed, saved to your computer and attached to the “Other Attachments Form” as a .pdf document. Do not modify or amend the contents of pages 55 and 56 in any way.

DEFINITION: RIGOROUS PROGRAM OF STUDY

19. What is the definition of a *rigorous program of study*? How can an applicant identify the courses that are part of a rigorous secondary school program of study?

According to the amended TS regulations in §643.7, a Rigorous Secondary School Program of Study means a program of study that meets one of the six criteria listed in the definition below:

“(1) Established by a state educational agency (SEA) or local educational agency (LEA) and recognized as a rigorous secondary school program of study by the Secretary through the process described in 34 CFR 691.16(a) through 691.16(c) for the ACG Program; or

(2) An advanced or honors secondary school program established by States and in existence for the 2004-2005 school year or later school years; or

(3) Any secondary school program in which a student successfully completes at a minimum the following courses:

(i) Four years of English.

(ii) Three years of mathematics, including algebra I and a higher-level class such as algebra II, geometry, or data analysis and statistics.

(iii) Three years of science, including one year each of at least two of the following courses: biology, chemistry, and physics.

(iv) Three years of social studies.

(v) One year of a language other than English; or

(4) A secondary school program identified by a State-level partnership that is recognized by the State Scholars Initiative of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Boulder, Colorado; or

(5) Any secondary school program for a student who completes at least two courses from an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program sponsored by the International Baccalaureate Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, and receives a score of a “4” or higher on the examinations for at least two of those courses; or

(6) Any secondary school program for a student who completes at least two Advanced Placement courses and receives a score of “3” or higher on the College Board’s Advanced Placement Program Exams for at least two of those courses.”

DEFINITION: REGULAR SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA

20. Is an alternative school diploma or a GED considered a regular secondary school diploma?

The program regulations in §643.7 define *regular secondary school diploma* as “a level attained by individuals who meet or exceed the coursework and performance standards for high school completion established by the individual’s State.” Alternative awards, including a GED or a certificate of attendance, are not considered *regular secondary school diplomas* under this definition, an interpretation that is consistent with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations in §200.19(b)(1)(iv). The term *regular secondary school diploma* does, however, include a “higher diploma” awarded to students who complete requirements above and beyond what is required for a regular diploma. A diploma awarded by an alternative school would be acceptable, as long as it falls under the definition for a *regular secondary school diploma* and is not, in fact, an alternative award.

REQUIRED SERVICES

21. §643.4 (a)(5) of the TS regulations states that projects are required to offer “Guidance on and assistance in-- (i) Secondary school reentry; (ii) Alternative education programs for secondary school dropouts that lead to the receipt of a regular secondary school diploma; (iii) Entry into general educational development (GED) programs; or (iv) Entry into postsecondary education.” Must a TS project offer all four components of this required service as listed in the regulations or can a project just pick one or two of the services to offer participants?

A TS project is required to provide all four components of the “guidance and assistance” service. Therefore, an applicant should address all four components of this required service under the Plan of Operation section of the application. The plan for providing the required services delineated in §643.4(a) should be based on the project’s assessment of each participant’s need for services.

SELECTION CRITERIA: NEED

22. What are some of the sources of statistical data an applicant may use to show need for a TS project in the proposed target area?

Statistical data can come from a variety of sources, such as the Census Bureau, reports and studies conducted by the applicant’s state, county, city, and school district; and information gathered by the research office at the applicant’s organization or institution. Explore as many options as are available. An applicant should use whatever statistical data that provides the best evidence for need of a TS project and use the most recent versions of that data.

23. What if the proposed target school or target area does not collect the data needed to respond to a selection criterion or the data available does not fully reveal the need?

An applicant must provide sufficient data for the peer reviewers to assess the extent to which an applicant's designated target area and target schools need the services of a TS project. If an applicant cannot provide a particular measure for an applicant's target areas or target schools, an applicant may, if appropriate, use other data sources and describe how these data relate to the criteria and demonstrate a need for a TS project. Simply stating that the information is unavailable is an insufficient justification for failing to address a need criterion.

24. Under need criterion #6 (§643/21(a)(6)), “Other indicators of need for a TS project,” must an applicant address each of the indicators? Further, in addressing the “presence of unaddressed academic and socio-economic problems,” must an applicant include information on foster care youth and homeless children and youth, or are these just examples?

An applicant is required to address each of the three indicators (*low academic achievement and test scores, a high ratio of students to school counselors in the target schools, and the presence of unaddressed academic or socio-economic problems of eligible individuals, including foster care youth and homeless children and youth*). For the third indicator (*unaddressed academic or socio-economic problems of eligible individuals*), an applicant should explain the types of unaddressed issues that are hindering the educational success of TS eligible students in the area where a TS project is proposed and provide supporting data. Data specifically about foster care youth and homeless children is not required unless it is a prevalent issue in the area where the TS project is proposed.

25. May an applicant provide average persistence data for all target schools, or must the applicant give specific data for each target school?

No. An applicant should not average the persistence rates for the target schools. The selection criteria states: “*Low rates of high school persistence among individuals in the target schools as evidenced by the annual student persistence rates in the proposed target schools for the most recent year for which data are available.*” Therefore, data specific to each target school must be stated in the application.

SELECTION CRITERIA: OBJECTIVES

26. If a rigorous program of study is the same as the State's high school graduation requirements, how can the objective be made ambitious if all students are required by the State to graduate from a rigorous program of study?

The standardized objective for *Secondary School Graduation (regular secondary school diploma)* requires an applicant to state what percent “*of seniors served during the project year will graduate during the project year with a regular secondary school diploma within the standard number of years.*” The standardized objective for *Secondary School Graduation (rigorous secondary school program of study)* requires an applicant to state what percent “*of seniors served during the project year will complete a rigorous secondary school program of study and will graduate during the project year with a regular secondary school diploma within the standard number of years.*”

While a state or district may require all students to complete a curriculum that meets the regulatory definition of a *rigorous secondary school program of study*, as defined in the program regulations in §643.7, in order to attain a *regular secondary school diploma*, it is unlikely that every student will successfully complete such a program and graduate with such a diploma. (For more guidance on the definition of a regular secondary school diploma, see the list of definitions in the application package, pages 57-58).

Therefore, while the proposed targets for the *Secondary School Graduation (regular secondary school diploma)* and *Secondary School Graduation (rigorous secondary school program of study)* objectives may be the same for an applicant in a state or district (since all participants who attain a *regular secondary school diploma* may also meet the curricular requirements of a *rigorous secondary school program of study*), both of these targets will likely fall under 100 percent. The denominator for both objectives is all seniors served during the project year, and it is doubtful that all seniors will persist and graduate within the standard number of years under rigorous curriculum requirements. An applicant should justify the proposed targets for these objectives and provide readers with ample context from which to assess their ambitiousness and attainability.

SELECTION CRITERIA: PLAN OF OPERATION

27. With regard to collaboration with other programs, is it permissible for TS students to also be served by a GEAR UP or other federal or non-federal programs?

A project is encouraged to find ways to collaborate with other projects serving similar participants. The collaborating projects may serve the same students as long as the students meet the criteria for both programs, and the projects collaborate to minimize the duplication of services. In addition, to the extent practicable, the TS projects must maintain a record of the services the TS participant receives from another Federal TRIO program or another federally funded program that serves populations similar to that of the TS program. (Please see section 643.11 of the program regulations, “What assurances must an applicant submit?” and section 643.32, “What other requirements must a grantee meet?” for more information on coordination and recordkeeping requirements.)

28. When must an applicant request a waiver of the requirement for a full-time director?

According to the regulations at §643.32(d), each TS project is required to employ a full-time director unless the director will also be administering one or two additional projects for disadvantaged students operated by the sponsoring agency or organization, or if the Department allows the project to waive the full-time requirement. This exception only applies when an applicant proposes to employ a project director who will administer three or fewer projects for disadvantaged students (including the proposed project); in this case, does not need to submit a waiver request in the application package does not need to be submitted. However, a project director administering more than three projects needs to request a waiver.

Keep in mind, however, that each application for a TS grant will be evaluated and scored by a team of three non-federal peer reviewers who will evaluate the adequacy of the time commitments of project staff. If an applicant is proposing a director that will spend less than 100 percent of his or her time administering the TS project, the applicant should explain in the application why that arrangement is being proposed and how such an arrangement will allow the Talent Search project to fulfill its objectives.

29. If an applicant is proposing to employ a project director who will administer more than three projects for disadvantaged students, including the proposed project, when and how should the applicant submit that request?

If an applicant is required to submit a request for a waiver of a full-time project director, that request should be included in the Plan of Operation section of the project narrative under criterion (5), “*The plan, including timelines, personnel, and other resources, to ensure the proper and efficient administration of the project, including the project’s organizational structure; the time commitment of key project staff; and financial, personnel, and records management.*” Please see the discussion above regarding an applicant’s

responsibility to justify its proposed personnel structure, regardless of its submission of a request for a waiver.

30. Are grantees required to track all of its participants through postsecondary education? Where can an applicant find further guidance related to the tracking component?

No, grantees will not be required to track *all* of its participants through postsecondary education. Grantees are required to track the success of their participants in graduating from postsecondary education for a randomly selected sample of participants. See pages 58-61 of the application package for more information on how to conduct random sampling. Furthermore, please note that the random sample of participants is chosen from a sub-set of participants, i.e., those who enrolled in an institution of higher education by the fall term immediately following high school graduation or by the next academic term (e.g. spring term) as a result of acceptance but deferred enrollment.

SELECTION CRITERIA: APPLICANT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

31. What are examples of resources secured through commitments from community partners?

Commitments may be cash or in-kind, such as donation of space, staff time, volunteer, speakers, public services announcements, free advertising, transportation, printing, snacks. An applicant only needs to summarize the commitments in the application. An applicant should not include in the application the actual letters received as these will count against the page limit, but must keep the letters on file. Letters of support or endorsement are not commitments and do not need to be addressed under this criterion. Please see §643.21(d) of the program regulations, as amended, for further guidance on the applicant and community support selection criteria.

SELECTION CRITERIA: QUALITY OF KEY PERSONNEL

32. The TS regulations regarding Quality of Personnel in §643.21(e), states, "In evaluating the qualifications of a person, the Secretary considers his or her experience and training in fields related to the objectives of the project." Should an applicant include the education and experience of the persons employed or to be employed in the positions?

An application should include experience and training required for the position, not the background of a specific person. These criteria need to be included in the application so that the peer reviewers can be assured that the project is sufficiently prepared to select staff with the experience and education necessary to carry out the plan of operation and meet the project's objectives. For example, an applicant may explain that when seeking to fill a position, the sponsoring organization will require the candidates to have a specific type of degree in a certain field(s), and a minimum number of year of work-related experience (such as managing a project similar to Talent Search).

BUDGET AND ALLOWABLE COSTS

33. Should the budget reflect the portion of funds the institution will provide, such as the institutional share of salaries and benefits?

The budget should reflect all funds committed to the project, both federal and non-federal. Although the TS program does not require the applicant to match federal funds, if the applicant institution or organization proposes to pay, for example, a portion of a staff member's salary, the budget should include this commitment and if a grant is awarded, the institution or organization must provide those funds to the project.

34. Can grant funds be used to pay an outside evaluator to provide the evaluation of a project?

It is allowable to pay an outside evaluator to provide an assessment of an applicant's operation. However, it is not a requirement. If an applicant feels that an external evaluation is warranted, the applicant should consider cost-effective methods of evaluation, such as using someone within the host institution who has relevant expertise, but is not employed by a TRIO project.

35. Can grant funds be used to pay for cultural activities?

The Department believes that field trips and campus visits, which are allowable costs, may have cultural benefits for participants and encourages grantees to incorporate cultural events into these types of trips. While the Department understands the value of cultural events, , cultural events should be limited as not to divert scarce resources away from direct services that assist with college access. For that reason, cultural activities are not specifically listed as an allowable cost under the amended program regulations.

36. Can grant funds be used to pay for T-shirts?

No. T-shirts are an unallowable cost for a Talent Search project.

37. Can grant funds be used to pay for textbooks for dual credit courses?

If a course is part of a rigorous secondary school program of study, as defined in the program regulations in §643.7, and also meets the requirements for the payment of tuition in §643.30(h), the project may purchase textbooks or pay related fees (e.g. lab fees) for the participant. Not all dual credit courses meet the definition of a rigorous secondary school program of study. Only courses that otherwise meet one of the criteria in the definition of a rigorous secondary school program of study would qualify as such under the TS program. Please see page 65726 of the preamble to the amendments to the TS regulations for a further discussion on this topic.