

## Draft Q-and-A from Striving Readers Technical Assistance Webinars

The following questions were asked during WebEx sessions held in March and April, 2011. The sessions were held by the U.S. Department of Education to provide pre-application technical assistance for Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy discretionary grants (CFDA No. 84.371C).

**1. Q: Does the maximum budget size cover a 12-month budget period or does it cover the duration of the grant?**

A: The categorical award limits (in the table below, from the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA)) are annual funding limits. An applicant should develop a budget that is appropriate for the plan it outlines in its application, with a budget for *up to* five years that proposes annual requests of *up to* the maximum budget allowed *per year*. ED will not consider an State Educational Agency's (SEA's) application if its annual request exceeds the maximum in its budget range, as follows:

Category	Maximum budget allowed per year	States
1	up to \$70 million	California, Texas
2	up to \$50 million	Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico
3	up to \$30 million	Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington
4	up to \$15 million	Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Utah
5	up to \$8 million	Alaska, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming

For more information please refer to the NIA available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-03-10/pdf/2011-5545.pdf>

**2. Q: How was each State's maximum budget amount determined?**

A: The limits were determined by ranking every State according to its share of the national population of children in poverty ages 5 through 17 based on data from "Table 1: 2009 Poverty and Median Income Estimates – States" released by the Small Area Estimates Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau in December, 2010.

- 3. Q: I want to be clear on the maximum budget allowed. If I am a Category 3 State, and my maximum budget allowance is \$30M, then I can apply for \$30M/year, for 5 years, for a total of \$150M? Or do I apply for \$6M a year for max of \$30M?**

A: As a Category 3 State, your maximum budget allowance is \$30 million annually. Thus, your SEA can apply for \$30 million per year over the course of the project period (up to 5 years). In other words, your State may request a maximum total of \$150 million.

- 4. Q: Do supplement not supplant requirements apply to this program?**

A: No. SRCL is not subject to “supplement not supplant” requirements.

- 5. Q: Is SRCL a restricted indirect-cost rate program?**

A: No. Applicants may use their unrestricted rate in calculating indirect costs.

- 6. Q: Do we have to propose the maximum budget? Do we have to propose a five-year project period?**

A: No, applicants do not have to propose the maximum budget or budget period.

- 7. Q: Funding of each year of the project is based on availability of funds each year, correct?**

A: Yes.

- 8. Q: Is ED certain that the \$178 million in FY 2010 funds will be available and that grants will be distributed from these funds this year — that these funds will not become part of the current budget cuts?**

A: Yes, the FY Consolidated Appropriations Act provided \$200 million for the SRCL program and these funds were not rescinded in the recently approved FY 2011 Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act. The Department plans to award SRCL grants this summer from FY 2010 funds.

- 9. Q. Will funding be awarded for a one-year grant, or will multi-year awards be made?**

A: The Department expects to make 3-18 multi-year awards with initial funding for the first year out of the available funds from the FY 2010 appropriation for the Striving Readers program. However, the Department has the discretion to make fewer awards, but provide funding for additional years at the time the grant awards are made under appropriate circumstances (e.g. if the Department does not receive a sufficient number of high-quality applications.) The President’s FY 2012 Budget includes continuation funding for these awards under the proposed Effective Teaching and Learning: Literacy program. However, the availability of funding for FY 2012 and future years is dependent on Congressional action.

- 10. Q: What is the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) grant’s projected project period? Will grants be funded for 3 years, 4 years, or 5 years?**

A: Grants awarded under this competition may be for a project period of **up to** five years. An applicant may propose a five-year budget that includes annual requests up to

the relevant categorical award limit (for more information on the budget limits see question #2 above and FAQ #8 in the application package, found at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/2011.371c.doc>).

As stated in the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA), ED plans to make continuation awards for years two through five of the project period (depending on the availability of funds). In years two and three ED plans to make continuations consistent with 75.253 of the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), 34 CFR 75.253, which will include an analysis of whether the grantee has made substantial progress toward meeting the objectives of its approved application. However, in years four and five, ED will consider certain additional factors in determining continuation funding (in order to ensure that continuation funds will be used only for high-quality and effective projects). These factors are:

- (1) Whether funds are available;
- (2) Whether the grantee meets the requirements in section 75.253 of EDGAR; and
- (3) Whether the grantee is achieving the intended outcomes of the grant and shows improvement against baseline measures on the following indicators:
  - (a) Demonstration of progress in the implementation of a comprehensive State literacy plan.
  - (b) Demonstration of increased alignment of Federal and State funds and programs to support a coherent approach to effective literacy instruction.
  - (c) Demonstration that it has provided high-quality technical assistance to subgrantees and implemented a rigorous monitoring process to ensure that SRCL subgrant funds are used to support effective literacy instruction.
  - (d) Demonstration that it collects, analyzes, and uses high-quality and timely data, especially on program participant outcomes, to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes in early learning programs and in schools.
  - (e) Demonstration of improvement on the program performance measures as set out in Performance Measures, part 5 of section VI of the NIA, to the extent such data is available.  
(For additional information please refer to question #9, above.)

**11. Q: Do subgrants have to be awarded for the whole project period? Or can we have multiple “Cohorts” of subgrantees?**

A: An SEA may award subgrants for shorter time periods and have multiple cohorts if this is what would be most effective given your State context. Keep in mind that peer reviewers will evaluate applicants’ subgrant plans under selection criterion (B). Please note that States must follow State law and procedures when awarding and administering subgrants (EDGAR, 34 CFR 80.37).

**12. Q: What kind of budget should we prepare when we do not know anything except the ceiling amount for our State?**

A: Each SEA applying for funds under this competition should develop a budget that is appropriate for the plan it outlines in its application. Keep in mind that peer reviewers will evaluate applicants' proposed budget under selection criterion (D) "Adequacy of State Resources," specifically (D)(i): "[t]he extent to which the costs described in the SEA's budget are reasonable in relation to the number of objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project."

**13. Q: Is the total number of points available, if all five points are awarded for the competitive priority, 100 or 105?**

A: The selection criteria are worth 100 points total, plus an applicant may earn up to five points for meeting the competitive preference priority, which equals 105 maximum points.

**14. Q: With regard to the statutory subgrant allocations, is it up to States to define how the 40% is distributed at the secondary level? How are elementary and secondary defined?**

A: The FY 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which authorizes the SRCL discretionary grant program, specifies that "the State educational agency shall ensure that at least 15 percent of the subgranted funds are used children from birth through age 5, 40 percent are used to serve students in kindergarten through grade 5, and 40 percent are used to serve students in middle and high school including an equitable distribution of funds between middle and high schools." Beyond these requirements, it is up to the States to propose and explain in their applications how they will allocate subgrant funds. Additionally, these statutory allocation requirements are not per subgrant, but are set for the total subgrant allocation awarded to the State. For more information please see FAQ #6 in the Application Package (available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/2011.371c.doc>). Elementary is defined in the statute as students in kindergarten through grade five. We interpret this to mean that middle and high school refers to grades six through twelve.

**15. Q: Does the 15% of funds targeted for birth to age 5 have to be an equitable distribution for each age?**

A: The SEA is responsible for ensuring that the total amount of SRCL subgrant funds is allocated according to the statutorily mandated funding distribution. In responding to selection criteria (D)(ii) in the Notice Inviting Applications, the SEA should clearly explain how it will design its subgrant competition to ensure compliance with the required funding distribution.

The SRCL authorizing statute does not require an equitable distribution within the birth to five age band. However, applicants must comply with Additional Requirement (d) which requires States to "ensure that SRCL subgrant funds are used to implement a comprehensive and coherent literacy program that serves students from birth through

grade 12, or at any period in the birth through grade 12 continuum as determined by a needs assessment.”

**16. Q: How is a Local Education Agency (LEA) defined in the context of this grant?**

A: Section 9101 (26)(A) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which governs this program, defines Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) as:

IN GENERAL- The term local educational agency' means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or of or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools.

Basically, this means that every State has a definition of an LEA for the purposes of Federal education grants. Most commonly this is a school district, an entity which operates local public primary and secondary schools. Some States also consider charter schools and educational cooperatives/multi districts under the definition of an LEA. States should use their existing legal definition of LEA for the purposes of this grant application.

**17. Q: We are not an SEA, but our agency oversees many early childhood efforts. Can the SEA write us into the grant application as a partner that will work with the SEA to oversee the subgrant competition for the birth to age 5 component?**

A: States have flexibility in how they set up their plan for administering this program. EDGAR (34 CFR 75.701) provides that "a grantee shall directly administer or supervise the administration of the project." The SEA can partner with another agency in administering a portion of the program, but the SEA is ultimately the grantee responsible for supervising the project.

**18. Q: Once an SEA is notified of an award, what is the expected timeline for awarding subgrantees?**

A: ED does not have an expected timeline for States to make subgrant awards. States will have to propose a timeline that supports the goals of the project they design. Consistent with EDGAR Section 80.37 (34 CFR 80.37), States should follow their own State law and procedures when awarding subgrants. Be thoughtful and realistic about the timeline proposed, since grantees will be held to the activities proposed in the application. It is also a good idea to clearly explain the timeline and reasoning to peer reviewers.

**19. Q: May a subgrantee of an SEA take more than 5% for Administrative costs?**

A: SRCL's authorizing statute does not establish any limits on administrative costs for subgrantees. Limits on administrative costs for subgrantees may be set by the State.

**20. Q: Since only 5% of funds are set aside for SEA administration of this program, may States require in their subgrant application that participating districts purchase with subgrant funds reliable and valid assessments determined by the State?**

A: Yes. If a State decides that such a purchase is reasonable and necessary for accomplishing the overall goals of the program, including the State's ability to evaluate progress in improving literacy achievement for children from birth through grade 12, then the State may require its subgrantees to purchase reliable and valid assessments to measure the Government Performance and Results Act performance standards as well as any other performance measures set by the State.

**21. Q: Are independent evaluators required? Who is eligible?**

A: Criterion (A)(iv)(1) asks applicants to respond to "...whether the evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator (whose role in the project is limited solely to conducting the evaluation)." It does not require the use of an independent evaluator. However, reviewers will assign points based on this criterion. The Department does not have a definition of eligibility for independent evaluators, beyond the language used in the selection criterion.

**22. Q: If the State chooses to use an external evaluator (see selection criterion (A)(iv)), will those funds need to come from the 5% for State activities?**

A: Yes. If a State conducts an evaluation using an external evaluator, the cost would need to come from the funds reserved for State leadership activities, which include "technical assistance and training, data collection, reporting, and administration."

**23. Q: Selection criterion (B)(iii) asks the SEA to explain, in crafting its subgrant competition, "the extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education [that propose to serve high-poverty schools or a high-poverty population, based on a definition of poverty and process for applying the priority provided by the State] whose applications are supported by the strongest available evidence." Strongest available evidence of what — need and/or best practices?**

A: The determination of what "strongest available evidence" would encompass should be decided by the State when designing their subgrant competition. Applicants may wish to refer to the definition of "evidenced-based" in the NIA and included in the application package on page 14.

**24. Q: Does Selection criterion (A)(iv) apply only to the subgrantees in the project or will we need to report for the whole State?**

A: Selection criterion (A)(iv) asks the SEA to describe how it "will evaluate the State's progress in improving achievement in literacy for children and youth from birth through grade 12, including disadvantaged students,..." It refers to the progress of children and youth who would be served under this grant.

**25. Q: In the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance indicators, Alternative Measures section, numbers 2-4, (found on page 49 of the Application Package), it is not clear why a State would choose to use the alternative measures rather than choosing to report using the outlined GPRA measures. Please provide an example and/or reason why a State would use the alternative measures.**

A: Some States have approved growth models from the U.S. Department of Education for use regarding assessments given under 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA, and those States would be in a position to use these approved growth measures when evaluating the project's overall effectiveness annually. For States that have a Department-approved Growth Model, it is the State's decision whether to use either the GPRA or Alternative GPRA Measures when reporting annually to the U.S. Department of Education.

**26. Q: Is it the assumption that the 4-year-old oral language assessment will be the same across the school districts? Will ED compare the results of 4-year-old oral language assessment across subgrants, or will the SEA do that?**

A: The SEA will need to report on GPRA measures, which will entail collection of subgrant data. The SEA will need to determine the specific assessment and data collection procedures that it will use to accurately report on GPRA measures.

**27. Q: Do you want State comprehensive literacy plans to be attached or referred to in the grant application?**

The program office has asked States **NOT** to attach their comprehensive State literacy plan as part of the appendices when submitting their SRCL applications. The application narrative should provide a description of how relevant criteria are aligned with the State's literacy plan.

**28. Q: Our State submitted a draft State Literacy Plan to the U.S. Department of Education already. Will reviewers consider that as part of the application?**

A: No. Please note that applications will be scored by independent peer reviewers (not ED staff); and they will not review anything other than the contents of the application submitted. To ensure a fair competition, reviewers cannot check outside sources, such as a web link, referenced in the application. They will only have the application narrative and attachments. Please see question #27.

**29. Q: Are we allowed to change our State Literacy Plan in the process of writing this discretionary grant application?**

A: Yes. Anything previously submitted to the Department as a Literacy Plan will not be considered in the competition. Reviewers will consider only the information provided in your application. SEAs are welcome to revise previously submitted State Literacy Plans. Please see question #27 and 28, above.

**30. Q: If the application includes a chart/logic model for the management plan can it be appended or does it need to be part of the 50-page narrative?**

Appendices should **not** be used as a way to avoid page limits. Any document included as an appendix should be specifically requested in the Application Package or should provide crucial evidence supporting the narrative. Applicants should reference appendices in the narrative. Remember the more complicated an application is, the more difficult it will be for reviewers to score.

**31. Q: Does the length of the application narrative include anything submitted as part of "Part 6: Other Attachment Form"?**

"Part 6: Other Attachments Form" can include individual resumes for project directors and key personnel, an indirect cost rate agreement, and other relevant supporting documentation. These items are not included in the 50-page narrative limit. Please see question #30. For additional information on the content and form of the application, please refer to page 59 in the application package (available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/2011.371c.doc>).

**32. Q: How important is it to send intent to apply?**

The intent to apply is neither binding nor required. It just provides ED a general count for planning purposes.

**33. Q: Is registration through grants.gov and registration with Central Contractor Registry the same thing?**

No, they are two different things. Please see the "Organization Registration Checklist" and other materials on the Grants.gov "Get Registered" webpage ([http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get\\_registered.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp)) for more information.

**34. Q: There is a "save and submit" button in the PDF itself. Is that all we need to do to submit, or upload it to Grants.Gov too? Have you seen the save and submit button on the PDF? Will there be TA provided for the PDF package?**

In the SRCL application package, beginning on page twenty, is a "[Grants.gov submission Procedures and Tips for Applicants](#)" document. Please read and follow all Grants.gov directions as outlined in this document. If you have any questions on how to submit applications using Grants.gov please call customer support at 1-800-518-4726 or <http://www.grants.gov/contactus/.jsp>, or use the customer support available on the Web site: [http://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant\\_help.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant_help.jsp).

**35. Q: How can I obtain a copy of these PowerPoint slides?**

You can request a copy be sent to you immediately by sending an e-mail to [Striving.Reader.Comprehensive.Literacy@ed.gov](mailto:Striving.Reader.Comprehensive.Literacy@ed.gov). We intend to post a copy of the WebEx to the SRCL webpages on ed.gov (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/index.html>).