Questions and Answers from the Technical Assistance Workshop for Prospective GSEM Applicants

This document contains the questions that were received during the Technical Assistance Workshop for Prospective Applicants for the Grants to States for School Emergency Management (GSEM) Program, which was held at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 12, 2014.

Any additional questions pertaining to this grant competition should be directed to Amy Banks, Competition Manager, U.S. Department of Education (ED), by email (SEA.SEM@ed.gov) or by phone (202-453-6777). Please note that we anticipate receiving a large volume of inquiries and recommend contacting us via email with any questions. We will do our best to respond to inquiries within 24-48 hours. Please do not wait until the closing date to contact us with questions, as we may not be able to respond prior to competition closing time.

Background

1. **Q: Are there Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) examples available that can be used as a template?**

    A: *Rather than provide template Emergency Operations Plans, ED provides a recommended process for developing EOPs, as detailed in the* Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (Guide). *A result of years of emergency planning work by the Federal government and the first joint product of DHS, DOJ, ED and HHS on this critical topic, the recommendations set forth in the* Guide *can be customized to each type of community, incorporate lessons learned from recent incidents, and respond to the needs and concerns voiced by stakeholders. Schools can use the recommended process to create new plans as well as to revise and update existing plans and align their emergency planning practices with those at the national, State, and local levels.*

    The planning process involves working collaboratively with a team to determine the EOP goals and objectives. To do so, it is recommended that schools call on district staff and community partners during the planning process for all aspects of plan development, assessment, review, implementation, and maintenance. The planning process is flexible and should be adapted based on the unique characteristics of the school, district, and situation. The EOP must represent the needs of the school community and families, the broader community, and first responders. More information on the planning process and the Federal guidance can be found at http://rems.ed.gov.

2. **Q: What are the specific NIMS courses required? And do all school personnel need to take them?**

   A: *Since all schools are integral components of every community and its government, ED and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommend that all schools support implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and its Incident Command System (ICS). As part of the GSEM grant program, State education agencies (SEAs) are to work with their local education agencies (LEAs) to support the implementation of NIMS.*

   NIMS uses a core set of concepts, principles, procedures, processes, standards, and terminology that may all be integrated with school emergency management practices at the school building, district and State level. The collective use of NIMS across all local incident response agencies, including K-12 schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs), and disciplines creates a common operating picture, promoting mutual goals and responsibilities, and ultimately, more efficient and effective response services. Furthermore, in the event of a large-scale incident crossing multiple jurisdictions and disciplines, NIMS unites all response teams across all of the participating jurisdictions and facilitates effective and appropriate assistance from outlying communities when needed based on the size and complexity of the incident.

   In order to fulfill NIMS requirements, SEAs, LEAs, and schools should determine what personnel need to receive ICS and NIMS training based on their role(s) in the overall emergency management program. In accordance with the FEMA and ED guidance, certain "key personnel" are required to complete the following six courses: 1) IS-100 An Introduction to the Incident Command System[1], 2) IS-200 ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents, 3) IS-700 NIMS, An Introduction, 4) IS-800.B National Response Framework, An Introduction, 5) ICS-300 Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents, and 6) ICS-400 Advanced Incident Command. In addition, ED recommends that Executive Leaders also consider taking G-402 Incident Command System Overview for Executive/Senior Officials.

Applicant Eligibility

1. **Q: If the SEA isn't directly responsible for school emergency preparedness, can the SEA collaborate with another State agency that is solely responsible for school emergency preparedness? Will such a collaboration comply with the Absolute Priority?**

   A: *Yes. SEAs may or may not be the entity within the State that provides school emergency preparedness assistance to their LEAs. Language in the eligibility section explains it is allowable for the SEA to contract or partner with another State-level agency. This does comply with the Absolute Priority.*

2. **Q: What amount of SEA time is required to demonstrate capacity?**

   A: This will vary per State and must be determined by individual SEAs.

3. **Q: Can local school districts and/or independent school districts (ISDs) apply for the GSEM Grant? / Q: For example, are ISDs allowed to apply for this grant in collaboration with our local school districts? / Q: Can a single school site that is part of a unified school district apply, or does the unified school district need to apply to be considered for a grant? / Q: May a State Emergency Management Agency apply as the lead and collaborate with the SEA rather than the other way around?**

   A: *Eligible applicants include SEAs (defined by section 9101(41) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the agency primarily responsible for the State supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools) in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.*

   Only SEAs (as defined) are eligible applicants. However, as stated in the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) for this grant program, eligible applicants may collaborate informally or contract with other agencies to provide services to LEAs, including agencies such as a State school safety center, the State Emergency Management Agency, or the State Homeland Security Department.

4. **Q: Can we subgrant dollars to districts? / Q: Can we subgrant to districts and non-public schools?**

   A: *Applicants are required to provide for the equitable participation of nonpublic school students, their teachers, and other educational personnel in nonpublic schools located in the State served by the grant. In order to ensure that grant program activities address the needs of nonpublic schools, the applicant must engage in timely and meaningful consultation with nonpublic school officials during the design and development of the program. This consultation must take place before any decision is made that affects the opportunities of eligible nonpublic school students, teachers, and other educational personnel to participate.*

   In order to ensure equitable participation of nonpublic school students, teachers, and other educational personnel, an applicant must consult with private school officials on school emergency management issues such as: threats and hazards unique to nonpublic schools in the State, training needs, and existing EOPS and school emergency management resources already available to the nonpublic schools.

5. **Q: Will SEAs or their other State partners be able to contract with private subject matter experts to complete quality EOPs and conduct training?**

   A: The SEA must determine who they consider to be appropriate partners and include this information in their application for review.

Application

1. **Q: Where can the complete GSEM application package be found?**

   A: *The complete application package is available on grants.gov, the REMS TA Center Website, and the GSEM program page on ED.gov.*

   The application information is available at:
   http://www.grants.gov/view-opportunity.html?oppId=255868

   The REMS TA Center Website's Grantee Corner is available at:
   http://rems.ed.gov/granteecorner.aspx

   The ED.gov GSEM Program Page on ED.gov is available at:
   http://www2.ed.gov/programs/schlemergmgt-sea/index.html

2. **Q: What is the possibility of the due date being extended?**

   A: *Waivers for individual applications failing to meet the deadline will not be granted, regardless of the circumstances. Under very extraordinary circumstances, ED may change the closing date for a grant competition. When this occurs, ED announces such a change in a notice published in the Federal Register.*

   If you are prevented from electronically submitting your application on the application deadline date because of technical problems with the Grants.gov system, we will grant you an extension until 4:30:00 p.m., Washington, DC time, the following business day to enable you to transmit your application electronically or by hand delivery. You also may mail your application by following the mailing instructions described in the NIA.

3. **Q: Is it possible to adjust the start date to January 2015 through June 2016. If so, how is this done?**

   A: *Should you receive a grant, the start date will depend on when funds can be awarded and obligated. September 30, 2014 is the suggested start date; however, the applicant's proposed start date may be slightly modified by mutual agreement by ED and the grantee.*

4. **Q: Is there a suggested point of contact?**

   A: *SEAs must provide an established point of contact (e.g., person or office) for school emergency management issues and submit that information to ED no later than the project start date. This program requirement can be found on page 5 in the NIA.*

   The program point of contact is the competition manager, Amy Banks. Amy may be reached at SEA.SEM@ed.gov or (202) 453-6777.

5. **Q: Is there a limit on the number of attachments that can be uploaded?**

   A:
   - *You must attach any narrative sections of your application as files in a .pdf (Portable Document) format. If you upload a file type other than a .pdf, or submit a password-protected file, we will not review that material.*

   - *Grants.gov cannot process an application that includes two or more files that have the same name within a grant submission.*

   - *When attaching files, applicants should limit the size of their file names. Lengthy file names could result in difficulties with opening and processing your application. We recommend your file names be less than 50 characters. The amount of time it can take to upload an application will vary depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the application and the speed of your Internet connection. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the submission process through Grants.gov.*

   - *Your electronic application must comply with any page-limit requirements described in this application package.*

   - *If you are experiencing problems submitting your application through Grants.gov, please contact the Grants.gov Support Desk, toll free, at 1-800-518-4726. You must obtain a Grants.gov Support Desk Case Number and must keep a record of it.*

6. **Q: Will you clarify that the single point of contact for school emergency management within the State may be different from the State Single Point of Contact for grant reviews?**

   A: This is likely not the same person. Information about the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) process and a list of names by State can be found at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

7. **Q: There is printing in the signature blocks, where do you want the original signatures?**

   A: *ED standard forms that require signatures have a designated space for original signatures, free of printing. If you are experiencing difficulty with forms, please contact the competition manager, Amy Banks, as soon as possible.*

Budget

1. **Q: What information, exactly, do you need for indirect costs?**

   A: *An indirect cost is an expense that you incur that is necessary for implementing the grant, but may be difficult to identify directly with your grant. For example, indirect costs may include money spent for heat, light, rent, telephone, security, accounting, and Internet use.*

   This program uses an unrestricted indirect cost rate. Your organization may already have a negotiated, unrestricted indirect cost rate with a Federal government agency. If your organization has not negotiated this rate in the past, please contact ED's Indirect Cost Group at Indirectcostgroup@ed.gov.

   If an applicant has a current indirect cost rate, the applicant should submit a copy of its current indirect cost rate agreement, including its current rate. If an applicant does not have a current indirect cost rate agreement, applicants should submit a provisional indirect cost rate. Applicants may choose not to submit indirect cost rate information at the time of application; however, in order to charge indirect costs to the grant, this applicant will need to submit an indirect cost rate agreement. The applicant should include any proposed indirect costs in its proposed budget and budget narrative.

2. **Q: Can there be reimbursement to LEAs under the grant for mileage, stipends, and/or paying for substitutes? We would like to ensure that LEAs can afford to have people away from their daily tasks.**

   A: *Yes, this is allowable.*

3. **Q: What is reasonable in case of personnel costs?**

   A: *This will vary per State and must be determined by the SEA in light of other anticipated costs to support grant implementation.*

4. **Q: Where in the budget do personnel costs go for other State agencies that are partners of the SEA? For example, the partner agency is the State Emergency Management Agency and they are providing direct support for technical and training assistance.**

    A: *These personnel costs would go under the Personnel category in the budget.*

5. **Q: Should the grant pool be limited or fail to absorb all the allocated funds, will the overage be spread among the other funded projects?**

    A: A maximum award chart per State is included in the application package on page 8 and in the NIA.