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State Superintendent of Schools

To: Members of the State Board of Education

From: Mohammed Choudhury, State Superintendent of Schools

Date: August 22, 2023

Subject: MSDE's Grantmaking Evolution: Insights, Challenges, and the Path Forward

Purpose

To 1) inform the State Board of Education about the significant enhancements and updates that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has made in its grant management processes; and 2) to present a detailed account of how MSDE is aligning its grant programs to the strategic plan and moving towards an outcome-based and customer support mindset, in contrast to the prior compliance-focused approach.

Background/Historical Perspective

Historically, MSDE's approach to grant management was largely compliance-driven, with various challenges including a lack of streamlined processes, and inconsistencies in Request for Proposals (RFPs) and application requirements. Recently, MSDE has undertaken comprehensive efforts to innovate and improve this approach. These efforts are aimed at raising program quality expectations, aligning grant programs with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the State Board and MSDE's Strategic Plan, and employing modern tools to streamline the application and management experience for grantees.

Executive Summary

The presentation provides a comprehensive overview of MSDE's grant administration, detailing both the structure and recent reforms. It highlights the types and accountability of various grants, the evolution of MSDE's approach from decentralized and compliance-focused to a more centralized and outcome-oriented model, and the ongoing efforts towards continuous improvement, streamlining, and modernization in grant application and management processes. MSDE staff will guide the State Board through a comprehensive review of the Department's grant administration and recent reforms, organized into five chapters:

- Grants by the Numbers
- What's in a Grant?
- Grants Administration at MSDE
- Grant Process Evolution July 2021 through Now – Change and Change Management
- Continuous Improvement – Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Grantmaking, Grant Monitoring, Grant Support, and Grant Administration

Action

No action is required; this information is for discussion only.

Attachments

MSDE_StateBoard_ GrantmakingEvolution _8-22.23.pdf

Presentation Highlights

- Grants by the Numbers

- What's in a Grant?

- Grants Administration at MSDE

- Grant Process Evolution July 2021 through Now – Change and Change Management

- Continuous Improvement – Ongoing Initiatives to Improve Grantmaking, Grant Monitoring, Grant Support, and Grant Administration

- Questions

Grants by the Numbers

Grants by the Numbers will present a detailed breakdown of the various grants administered by MSDE, reflecting the diverse range of funding sources and the significant amount managed at MSDE.

MSDE Grant Summary (1 of 2)

- **During fiscal year (FY) 2023, MSDE managed more than 138 grant programs, providing funds to 1,825 awardees amounting to more than $1 billion.**

- These amounts exclude the FY 23 child care stabilization grants, another grant program that alone reflected 5,700 awardees and $50 million.

- These amounts also exclude the FY 23 child care provider and employee bonus program, which has so far awarded more than $11 million to more than 3,000 eligible child care providers and employees.

MSDE Grant Program Snapshot	
Number of Grant Programs	138
Number of Awardees	1,825 (7,525 including child care providers)
Amount Awarded/Managed*	$1,006,615,545

Total dollars exclude Blueprint State aid and one-time child care grant funding in FY 23, which account for more than $7 billion in additional, unrestricted Blueprint formula pass-through grants and child care grants.

MSDE Grant Summary (2 of 2)

- Most of MSDE grant programs, in quantity (not dollar value) are federal programs (70 federally funded grant programs, including Division of Rehabilitation Services federal Vocational Rehabilitation funding).

- Most grant programs are associated with three MSDE Offices and Divisions:

  - The Division of Early Childhood

  - The Division of Early Intervention/Special Education Services

  - The Office of Teaching and Learning, Instructional Programs and Services

MSDE Grant Program Distribution	
Federal Grant Programs	70
Formula Grant Programs (Federal and State)	30
Grants Programs Released in FY 24 So Far	44

Grant Timing (1 of 2)

- **Adoption of Blueprint Triggers Change:** The Blueprint for Maryland's Future mandated rapid, systemic changes in MSDE operations, distinct from historical practices.

- **Revised Grant Application Timelines:** To align with the Blueprint's framework, MSDE adjusted grant application timelines and fund release schedules for optimal and consistent implementation across the state.

- **Streamlined and Transparent Grant Process:** MSDE introduced a one-stop website for grant applications and centralized management, aimed at simplifying the experience for grantees, standardizing application expectations, and ensuring transparent communication regarding these changes.

For example, MSDE is completing its transition to a single, consolidate federal Title application process in 2023-2024.

Grant	FY 21 Release Date	FY 22 Release Date	FY 23 Release Date	FY 24 Release Date
Title I, Part A	10/20/20	12/1/21	7/1/22	9/15/23
Title I, Part C Migrant	3/30/21	3/30/22	1/19/23	9/15/23
Title I, Part D Sub-Part 1 Neglected and Delinquent	2/9/21	7/19/21	1/20/23	9/15/23
Title I, Part D Sub-Part 2 Neglected and Delinquent	12/10/20	3/30/22	1/20/23	9/15/23
Title II, Part A Supporting Effective Instructional Every Student Succeeds Act	6/30/21	9/22/21	9/16/22	9/15/23
Title III, Part A English Language Acquisition: State Formula Grant	7/20/2020	7/1/21	7/22/22	9/15/23
Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program	1/7/21	12/7/21	7/1/22	9/15/23
Title V, Part B Rural and Low-Income Schools	8/5/2020	8/4/21	1/11/23	9/15/23

Grant Timing (2 of 2)

- Comparing grants for fiscal year (FY) 2024 (this year) to grants for FY 2021 (where release date data are available), **MSDE is, on average, 31.86 days ahead on release/timing**.

- Comparing grants for FY 2024 (this year) to grants for FY 2022, MSDE is, on average, 34.75 days ahead on release/timing.

- Of the 6 grant programs that were late this spring, all released within 30 days of the prior time, with the exception of Judy Hoyer program grant, which was 36 days late.

  - The others were 15 days, 15, days, 21 days, 4 days, and 7 days behind FY 22 release dates.

What's in a Grant?

This chapter distinguishes between grants and procurement, categorizes grant types, and underscores statutory definitions, discretion, competition, and accountability. It clarifies Federal vs. State formulas, mandated versus discretionary awards, and restricted versus unrestricted funding.

Grants v. Procurement/Contracts (1 of 3)

- **Grant/Subgrant:** A grant is a "legal instrument of financial assistance between a State grant-making entity and a non-State entity that is: used to enter into a relationship the principal purpose of which is to transfer anything of value from the grant-making entity to the grant recipient to carry out a public purpose authorized by law and not to acquire property or services for the direct benefit or use of the grant-making entity." See Md. Code Ann., State Fin. & Proc. § 2-210.

- **Procurement Contract:** A procurement is an "expenditure by a State agency for the acquisition, rental, purchase, or lease of supplies, services, maintenance, construction, construction-related services, architectural services, engineering services, and the lease of real property." See COMAR 21.01.03.02.

Grants v. Procurement/Contracts (2 of 3)

- **Full and Open Competition Requirement:** MSDE will issue grants and procurements under a competitive process unless MSDE approves sole source justification or regulations allow for direct solicitation without competition. This includes agreements with other governmental agencies. All MSDE grants will be posted at the MSDE Grants website portal. MSDE posts procurement solicitations estimated over $50,000 on EMMA.

- **Sole Source Award:** A Division may award a grant without competition in the following scenarios:

  - Grantee specifically designated by funder in writing;

  - Item is available only from a Single Source;

  - The public exigency or emergency for the requirement will not permit a delay resulting from publicizing a competitive solicitation; or

  - After solicitation of several sources, competition is considered inadequate.

  - Sole source justifications for procurement contracts are regulated by COMAR 21 05 05

Grants v. Procurement/Contracts (3 of 3)

As part of the grants cycle, MSDE programs and/or the Office of Grants Administration and Compliance complete a Grants/Procurement checklist to verify MSDE's use of the correct vehicle (contract or grant).

Types of Grants (1 of 3)

MSDE is responsible for managing several different types of grants – federal Title/federal formula grants, State formula grants, and other competitive and non-competitive State program grants.

- **Federal Title and Federal Formula Grants:** Financial resources allocated to states or local entities based on predetermined criteria set out in federal legislation. The grants ensure that federal funds address national priorities and are distributed according to authorizing statute. The distribution methodology is usually rooted in legislation and aims to provide resources where they are most needed.

  - **Example:** Title I funds, distributed to school districts with a high percentage of low-income students, ensuring that children who face more challenges get additional resources.

- As they are derived from federal statutes, the conditions and allocation methods are fixed at the national level and have less state flexibility.

Types of Grants (2 of 3)

MSDE is responsible for managing several different types of grants – federal Title/federal formula grants, State formula grants, and other competitive and non-competitive State program grants.

- **State Formula Grants:** Monetary assistance given by state governments to local entities based on specific formulas reflecting the needs and demographics of those entities. The programs allow states to ensure that specific needs within the state are met, particularly when there's a desire to equalize opportunities or resources among different regions or populations.

  - **Example:** Maryland provides Special Education Blueprint State aid funds to school districts based on the number of students with special needs in each LEA.

- These grants help level the playing field and ensure that all areas of the State, regardless of their individual wealth or resources, receive essential funding.

Types of Grants (3 of 3)

MSDE is responsible for managing several different types of grants – federal Title/federal formula grants, State formula grants, and other competitive and non-competitive State program grants.

- **State Program (Non-formula) Grants:** Targeted funds for specific state initiatives, projects, or programs, not determined by a set formula. These programs encourage new initiatives, pilot programs, or responses to immediate state-level challenges or opportunities and allow for a more tailored approach to funding, focusing on specific outcomes or goals.

  - **Example:** Maryland Leads.

- This grant type offers flexibility and allows states to allocate resources to new, innovative, or pressing needs as they arise.

Competitive Grants v. Non-Competitive Grants

In managing educational funding for the state, the Maryland State Department of Education differentiates between competitive and non-competitive grant programs. This distinction, detailed below, illuminates the characteristics and implications of each type for the State's educational endeavors.

- **Competitive Grants:** Grants that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) awards based on a competitive process or specific criteria. Funding is not guaranteed and depends on MSDE's review of the proposal's merit, alignment with strategic priorities, and available funds. Flexibility allows MSDE to address emerging educational needs, invest in promising practices, and encourage innovation.

- **Non-Competitive/Direct Grants:** Grants distributed by MSDE based on pre-determined formulas or requirements and priorities set in legislation or policy - no competitive application process. Funding is automatically determined by set criteria such as student enrollment, demographic data, specific mandated awardees in State law, or specific programmatic needs in the authorizing appropriation.

Restricted v. Unrestricted Grants (1 of 2)

Grantee understanding of the type of grant they have received is essential to ensure compliance and effective financial management.

- **Restricted Grants:** Grants that mandate detailed oversight and necessitate prior approval for each spending action. Payments are made retroactively after each invoice or expenditure has been reviewed and approved.
  - These programs:
    - Require consistent monitoring and administrative oversight.
    - Ensure alignment with grant purpose and objectives.
    - May impact the cash flow for grant recipients.

Restricted v. Unrestricted Grants (2 of 2)

Grantee understanding of the type of grant they have received is essential to ensure compliance and effective financial management.

- **Unrestricted Grants:** Grants that allow for automatic distribution without meticulous expenditure reviews. Funds are disseminated in predetermined amounts and on a set schedule, independent of reported spending.

- These programs:

    - Provide greater flexibility for recipients in spending.

    - Reduce administrative oversight in terms of invoice approval.

    - Are beneficial for predictable budgeting and financial planning.

- Blueprint State aid is administered, by law, in six, bi-monthly payments and is an unrestricted grant. However, MSDE has implemented reporting and accountability rules per 5-406 of the Md. Education Article to ensure MSDE maintains proper oversight and monitoring of Blueprint funds.

Grants Administration at MSDE

In July 2021, MSDE faced challenges in grants administration, marked by noncompetitive awards, inconsistent monitoring, and decentralized operations. The establishment of the Office of Grants Administration and Compliance in Spring 2022 marked a significant leap towards elevating grant processes, ensuring transparency, quality, and alignment with Maryland's educational vision.

A Snapshot of Grants Administration in July 2021: The Road Ahead

Setting the Scene

As July 2021 dawned, the new Superintendent was confronted with a Grants Administration system fraught with inconsistencies, questionable practices, and oversight gaps. These challenges were deeply rooted, with significant implications for Maryland's educational landscape.

Significance of Grants

Grants play a pivotal role in educational development, funding pivotal programs, and initiatives. The administration of these funds determines the efficacy of every dollar spent and, by extension, the educational outcomes for countless students.

Mandate for Change

The initial assessment was clear: MSDE's grant administration needed a comprehensive overhaul. And with the OLA's recent findings echoing this sentiment, change wasn't just desired—it was imperative.

Awarding Concerns

Noncompetitive Awards: Creating High-Risk Grant Investment Scenarios

- **Bypassing Competition:** A noticeable volume of grants were directly awarded, circumventing competitive mechanisms. This not only raised questions about transparency but also about whether the best candidates were being chosen for funding.

- **Ambiguous Decision-making:** The new administration identified instances where grantmaking was designed based on existing grantee relationships and/or external pressures rather than outcome-driven program intent. Such actions, intentional or not, risked eroding public trust, raising ethical concerns and potentially compromising the quality of funded programs.

- **Financial Implications:** Beyond these concerns, such practices could lead to sub-optimal allocation of resources. Without competitive checks and rigorous rubrics/evaluation, there is no guarantee that the most deserving or impactful projects were receiving the necessary funding.

Monitoring Challenges

From Checking Boxes to Ensuring Impact

- **The Compliance Trap:** Historically, MSDE's grant monitoring (when monitoring occurred, which did not always occur) was heavily compliance-oriented. While ensuring rules were followed, this approach overlooked assessing the real-world impact of funded projects, potentially allowing inefficient programs to persist.

- **Disparity in Evaluation:** Different divisions, different standards. This mosaic of monitoring methods made it nearly impossible to cross-compare projects or ensure that evaluations were fair and uniform.

- **Lost Opportunities:** Without effective monitoring, MSDE lost crucial opportunities for feedback, learning, and iterative improvement. This not only affected current grant programs but hindered the evolution of future initiatives.

Decentralized Systems

A House Divided: The Pitfalls of Fragmented Administration

- **Silos in Operation:** Individual Divisions in MSDE, with their unique processes for grant administration, functioned as isolated silos. This made inter-Divisional collaboration challenging and hindered a unified strategy for state education.

- **Accountability Challenges:** This decentralization muddied the waters of responsibility. With no clear ownership, inefficiencies or missteps became harder to rectify, and a culture of collective responsibility was elusive.

- **Operational Inefficiencies:** Differing tools, timelines, and expectations meant resources were often duplicated, and efforts reduplicated. This not only consumed more administrative resources but also made overarching strategy alignment nearly impossible.

Office of Legislative Audit (OLA) Findings

A Wake-up Call: Legislative Findings from 2020-2021 Underscore Urgent Reforms

- **The Importance of Site Visits:** OLA's emphasis on the lack of site visits was telling. These visits offer firsthand insights, qualitative assessments, and a ground-level view of grant implementation—elements that desk-based monitoring simply cannot provide.

- **A Lax Attitude:** The audit pulled no punches, highlighting areas where MSDE's oversight was superficial, risking both financial waste and compromised program outcomes. In several instances, grants with significant monetary values were inadequately monitored.

- **Invoice Irregularities:** A closer look at invoices and their supporting documents revealed lapses in due diligence. In certain cases, large sums were approved without thorough checks, raising alarms about potential misallocations or even misuse of funds.

The Office of Grants Administration and Compliance

The creation of MSDE's new Office of Grants Administration and Compliance (OGAC) in spring 2022 ushered in an era of enhanced quality, rigor, monitoring, support, and accountability for MSDE-administered grant programs.

- **Centralized Oversight:** Positioned in the Division of Financial Planning, Operations, and Strategy, OGAC offers a unified approach to managing grants and fiscal programs across MSDE.

- **Online Access:** Stakeholders can now conveniently locate and access all MSDE grant programs online providing never-before transparency and ease of access.

- **Alignment with Strategic Initiatives:** Ensures fiscal goals and objectives align with MSDE's multi-year strategic plan and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

- **Collaboration with Content Experts:** Works alongside experts in MSDE divisions to ensure grant award processes are streamlined, accessible, and equitable.

The Office of Grants Administration and Compliance

- **Documentation & Approval:** Reviews all grant-related materials developed by MSDE Divisions, ensuring thoroughness and accuracy before any submissions.

- **Communication:** Maintains consistent communication lines with grant staff, project directors, and finance departments, ensuring seamless integration throughout the grant cycle.

- **Grant Archive:** Supports and ensures consistent program monitoring of all grant programs, creating a comprehensive, centralized, and easily accessible archive of all MSDE grants.

- **Compliance & Reporting:** Guarantees alignment with all reporting timelines, monitoring policies, and efficiently manages grant close-outs.

- **Professional Development & Training:** Offers monthly grant-related PD for MSDE staff and ongoing technical support, training, and orientations for awardees and sub-recipients.

- **New Funding Opportunities:** Assists MSDE Divisions in securing new funding through federal notices or foundation/non-profit initiatives. Coordinates the submission of federal applications via SAM.gov.

Grant Process Evolution July 2021 through Now – Change and Change Management

MSDE embarked on a transformative journey to enhance its grantmaking and improve outcomes. This involved elevating program quality expectations, transitioning from a compliance mindset to one that emphasizes outcomes and customer support, and strategically aligning grant programs with the Blueprint and the subsequent Strategic Plan.

Change and Change Management

Internal Changes (part 1 of 2)

- **Raising Program Quality Expectations:** In our effort to maximize the impact of state investments, we recognized the need to elevate the standards in our grantmaking. This called for challenging traditional frameworks and pushing past the "we've always done it this way" mindset. By setting and demanding higher program quality expectations, we are ensuring more effective and efficient use of resources, ultimately aiming for superior outcomes from every dollar invested.

- **Shifting MSDE from Compliance Mindset to Outcome-Based and Customer Support Mindset:** Historically, our approach was compliance-centric, focusing primarily on ensuring processes were followed. But for truly transformative results, we have shifted to an outcome-based and customer support mindset. This transition, though challenging, has meant pivoting from ticking boxes to prioritizing the end results of our grants and the satisfaction and needs of our grantees. Our vision now is to ensure every grant creates tangible, lasting positive change while offering our partners robust support.

Change and Change Management

Internal Changes (part 2 of 2)

- **Aligning Grant Programs to the Blueprint and, now, the Strategic Plan:** Our commitment to forward-thinking investment and impact is evident in our endeavors to align grant programs with the Blueprint and the MSBOE and MSDE's Strategic Plan. This alignment ensures that our grant-making efforts are not only consistent but also synergized with our broader organizational goals. By having our grant programs reflect the milestones set in the Blueprint and Strategic Plan, we are effectively setting a coherent direction for State investments, emphasizing strategic planning, and fostering a culture of continual growth and improvement.

# Providing clear guidance on program expectations.
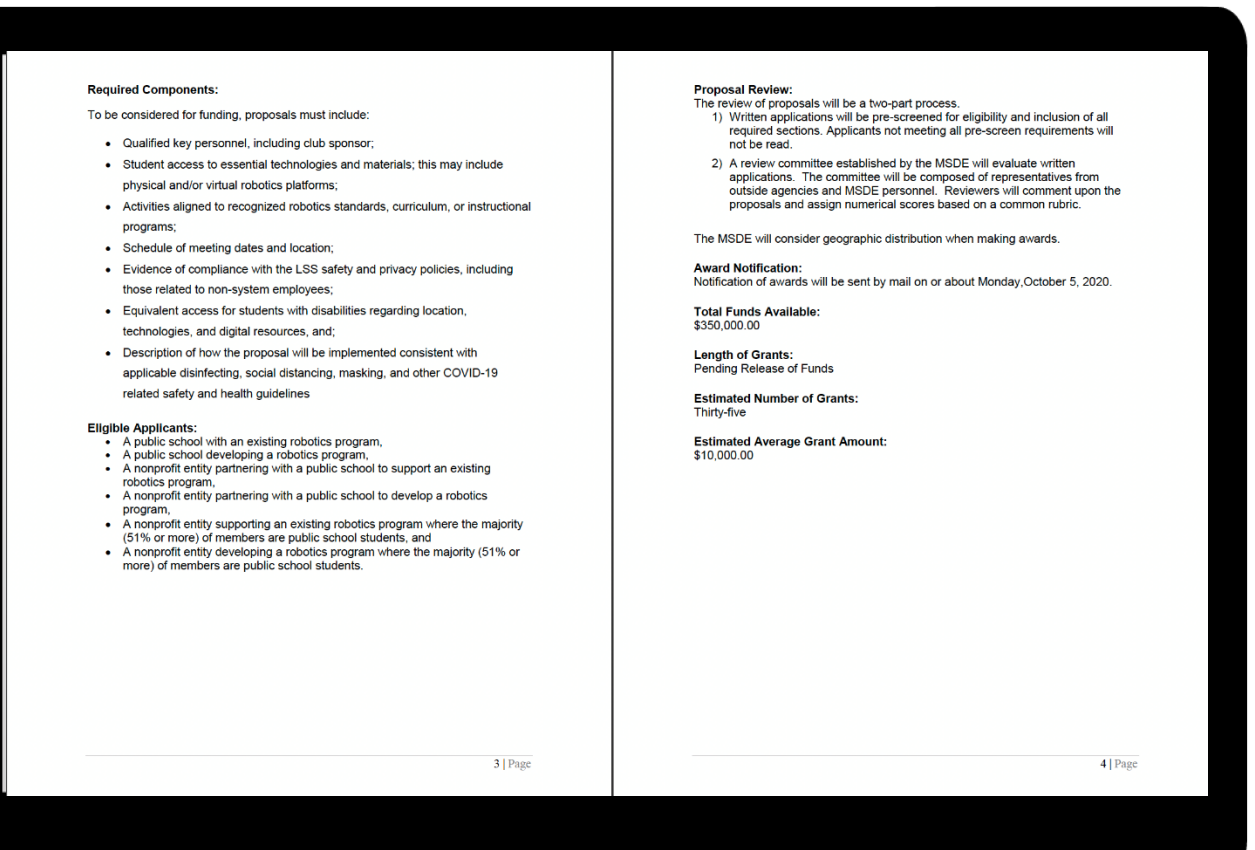
The former grant program request for proposal, while emphasizing the necessary components a program should include to qualify for funding, left little room for imaginative program design. **Applicants did not have clear guidance on or leadership toward the types of programs that might be best suited for success**.

The primary focus was on ticking the prescribed boxes, with innovation and creativity often taking a backseat.

Providing clear guidance on program expectations.
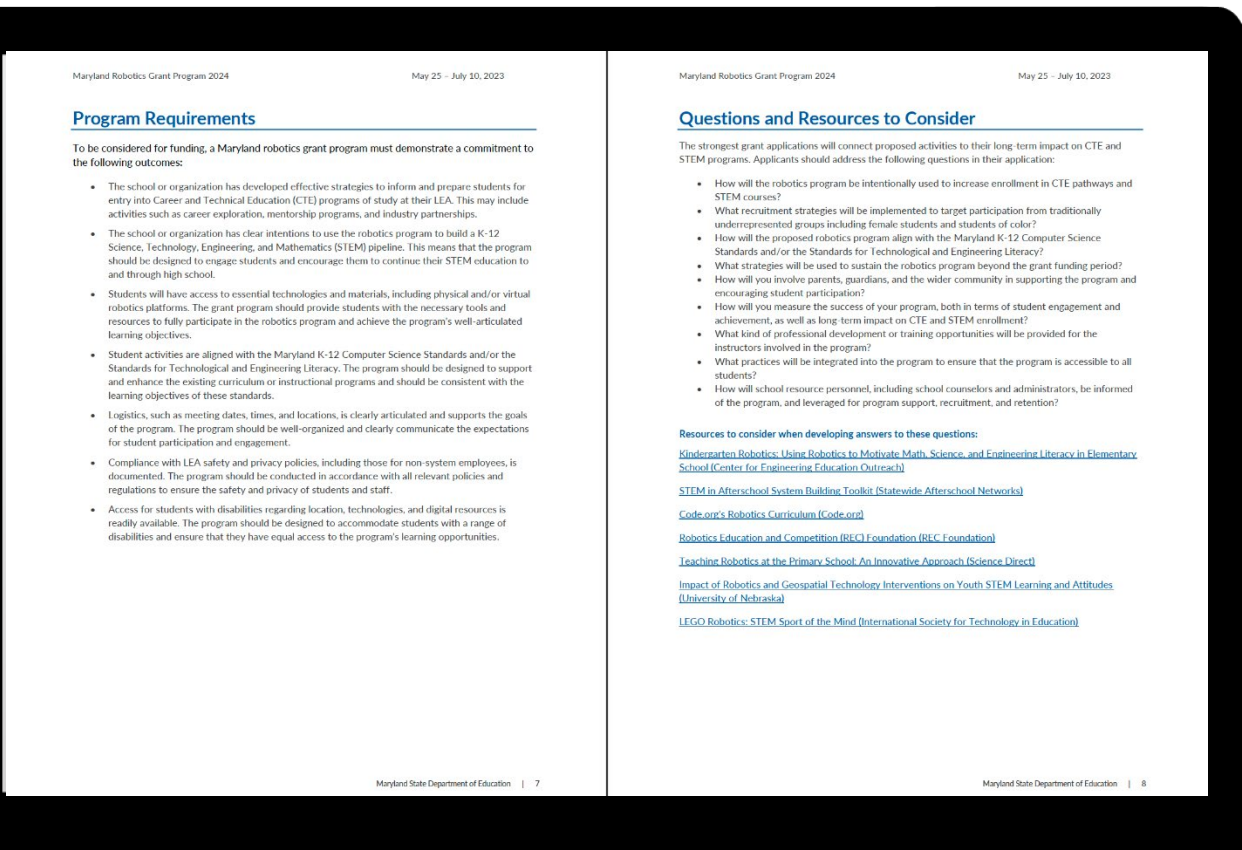
Today's grant information guides mark a significant departure from this traditional approach. These guides are now crafted to **inspire innovation** while ensuring alignment with MSDE's overarching objectives. By **drawing clear parallels, seeding imagination, and even offering preliminary drafts, MSDE has made its vision transparent**.

This revamped approach clearly communicates what is envisioned for successful programs, fostering a more collaborative and supportive application process. As a result**, applicants are better positioned to design programs that not only meet grant criteria but are also intrinsically aligned with the Department's larger goals for educational excellence**.

Leveraging Application Requirements to Drive Outcomes

Previously, MSDE's grant application requirements focused mainly on logistical prerequisites without clear guidance on expected outcomes. This often left applicants navigating **ambiguous directives, with an emphasis on strict compliance rather than on meaningful, tangible results**.

The resulting programs, though aligned with application specifications, could be misaligned with MSDE's overarching vision and lack a way to gauge and measure program and investment success.

Leveraging Application Requirements to Drive Outcomes

The revamped MSDE grant application process champions clarity and measurable outcomes. Detailed goal expectations, illustrated with concrete program examples, guide applicants towards success. Applications now **provide prospective grantees with detailed information about expected goals and the metrics that will gauge success**.

Instead of ambiguous directives, MSDE paints a clearer picture of its aspirations by providing multiple examples of program goals indicative of success. **This data-driven approach ensures not just compliance but the realization of impactful results that resonate with MSDE's objectives**.
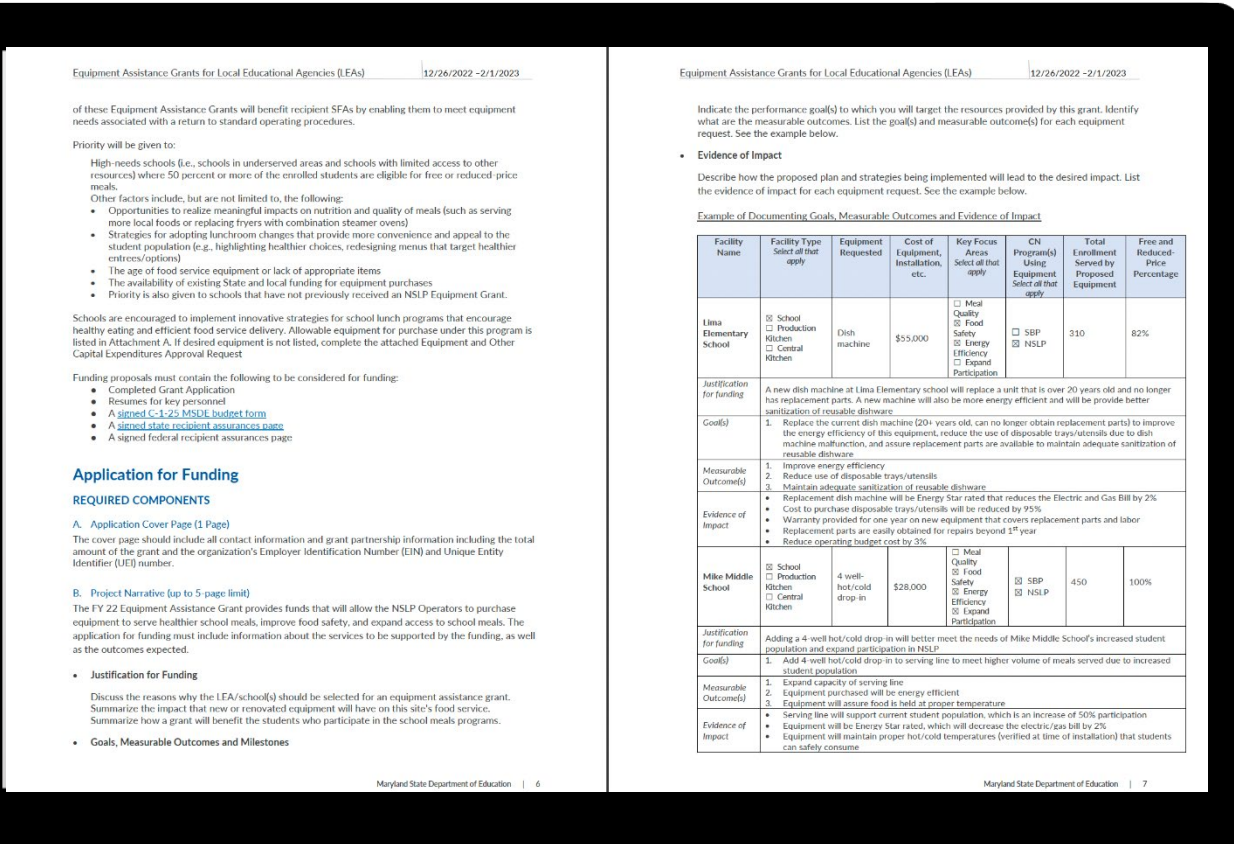
Consistent, Clear Review Rubrics and Criteria

In the past, MSDE employed a variety of assessment rubrics for grant determinations of differing quality, content, type, and expectation. Also, MSDE rarely released a scoring rubric with a grant RFP, which meant that applicants were unaware of program quality and design expectations.

With **varied criteria and a lack of uniformity**, it was challenging to ensure a fair and transparent evaluation process for all applicants.
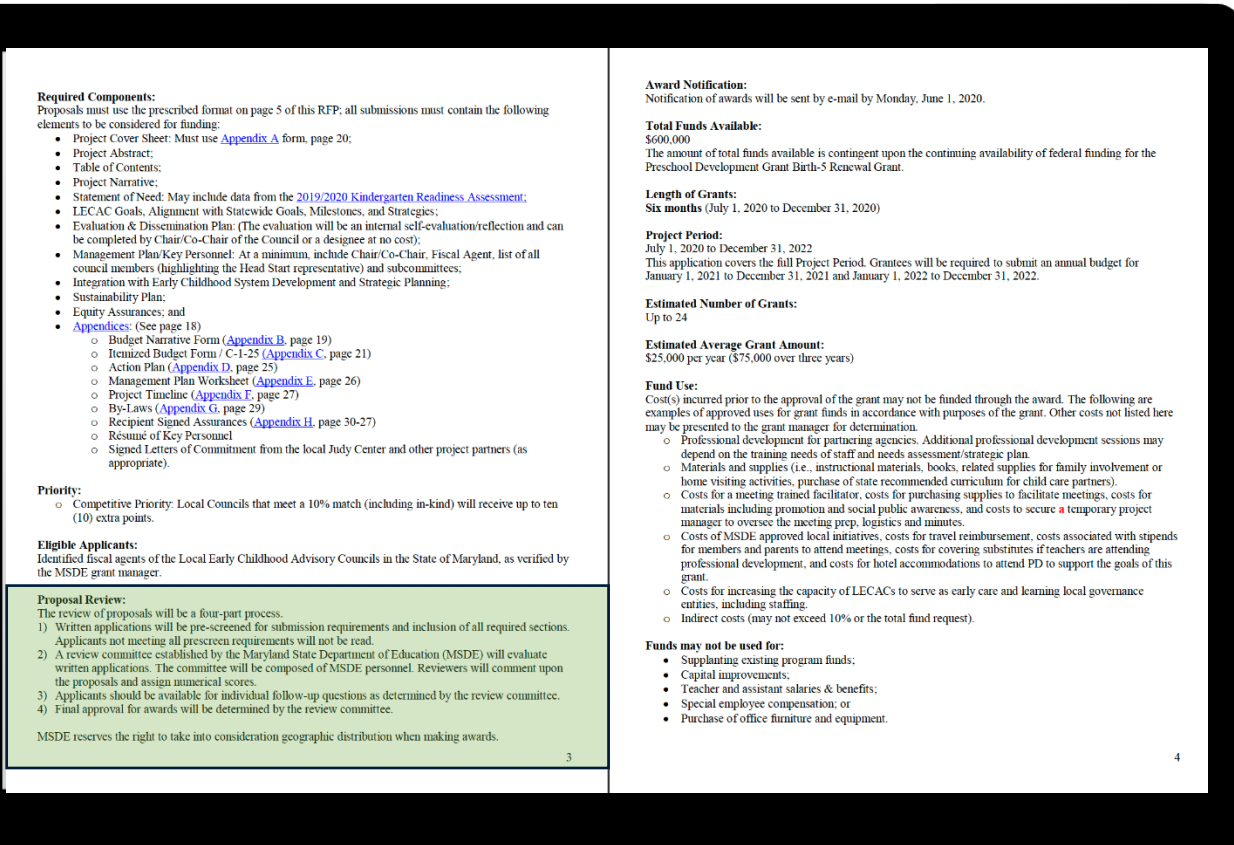
Consistent, Clear Review Rubrics and Criteria

MSDE has now implemented standardized and rigorous rubrics, ensuring that all grant applications are assessed using consistent, objective criteria, and releasing rubrics in each grant information guide.

This not only **elevates the evaluation process and rigor of evaluation criteria** but also **provides clear direction for applicants, promoting transparency and fairness in determining successful grant recipients**.
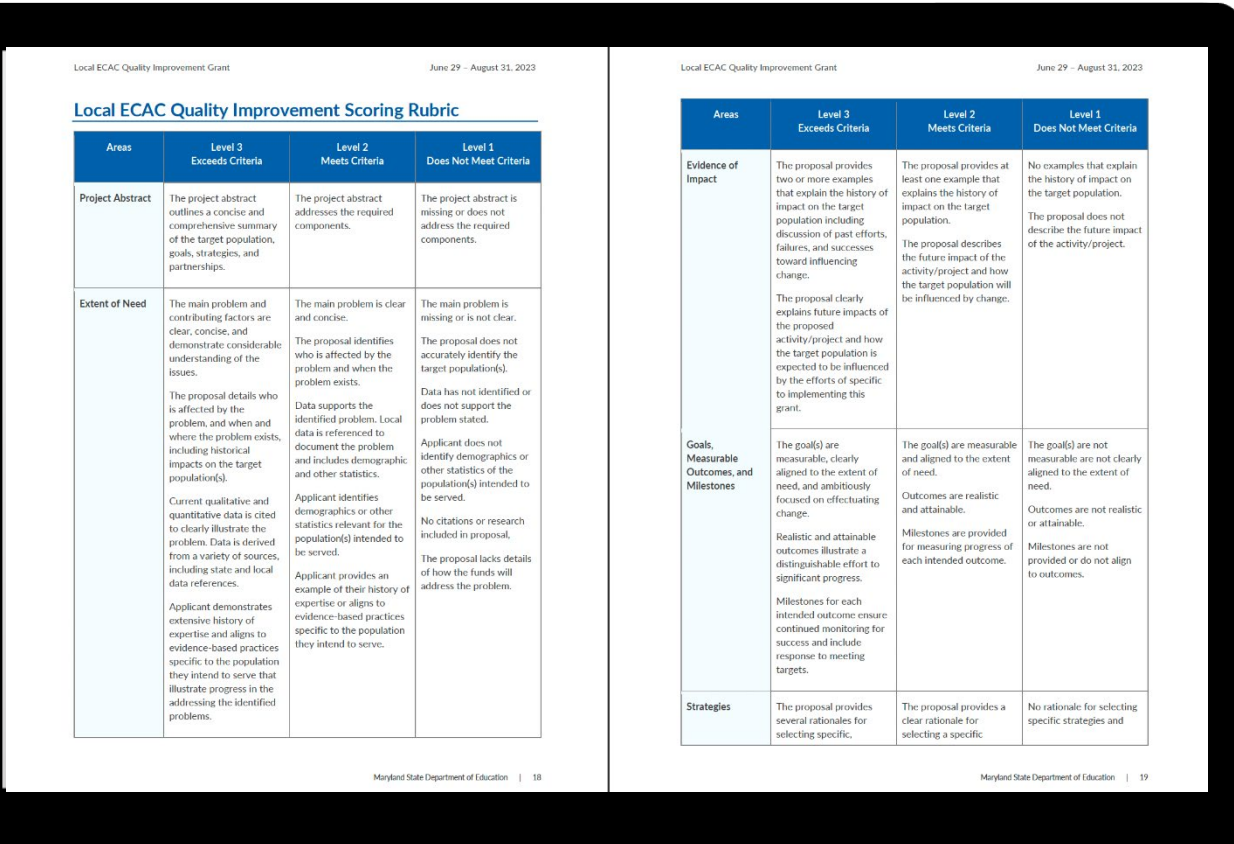
Change and Change Management

External Changes (part 1 of 2)

- **Open Competition:** To ensure fairness, transparency, and the pursuit of excellence, MSDE has championed an open competition framework for our grants wherever possible and appropriate. This approach allows a wide array of entities to compete, fostering innovation, and ensuring that State investments are directed towards the most impactful and promising initiatives. By diversifying and expanding our grantee pool, MSDE is inviting fresh perspectives and solutions that meet the evolving needs of our education ecosystem.

- **Grant Monitoring:** MSDE has committed to ensuring that our grants not only provide financial resources but also guidance throughout the grant tenure. MSDE instituted mandatory site visits for all programs and rigorous reviews of invoice submissions. These measures ensure compliance with relevant federal and state laws and regulations. But beyond compliance, our checks throughout the grant process are designed to offer more hands-on support, allowing grantees the flexibility to adjust, modify, and course-correct during the grant performance period. This proactive approach eliminates the pitfalls of waiting until a final report to address challenges, ensuring timely interventions and more successful grant outcomes.

Change and Change Management

External Changes (part 2 of 2)

- **Increased Accountability:** In an era driven by data and results, we've bolstered our emphasis on measurable outcomes in our grant determination process. Our focus is not just on allocating funds but on the broader impacts of those funds. Grantees are now required to consistently submit measures of success and provide real-time data. This allows MSDE to gauge the ongoing effectiveness of grant programs, ensuring they are achieving desired results and making necessary adjustments when they're not. It's about creating a transparent, iterative relationship where progress is continually assessed and celebrated.

- **Customer Service and Support:** Our commitment to grantees extends beyond funds – it's about building a collaborative partnership. To this end, we've implemented mandatory Technical Assistance (TA) sessions at the outset of every grant, ensuring grantees have a clear understanding of expectations and processes. Furthermore, our dedicated staff now makes themselves available for one-on-one meetings upon applicant requests. This offers grantees personalized guidance and underscores our dedication to their success, fostering a culture of mutual respect and collaboration.

Change and Change Management

Navigating the transformative shifts in grant management, both internally and externally, has required deliberate change management, met at times with resistance but always driven by our commitment to showcasing success and sustaining investment.

- **Internal Change Management:** Spearheaded by the newly established Office of Grants Administration and Compliance, our internal change management initiatives have been crucial. This office has been instrumental in challenging long-standing practices, elevating standards, and championing a forward-thinking approach to grant-making. Its establishment signifies MSDE's dedication to procedural excellence and a robust framework that not only allocates funds but also ensures they achieve maximum impact.

- **External Change Management:** Communication and technical assistance have been the linchpins of our external change management strategy. Recognizing that change, especially when introducing heightened accountability, can be daunting for many grantees, our emphasis has been on open, transparent communication. By providing consistent technical assistance, we're demystifying the grant process, offering much-needed support, and reframing this shift not as a threat but as an opportunity. It's our way of ensuring grantees view these changes as tools to underscore their successes and further the collective mission of educational advancement.

Change and Change Management

Implementing significant changes in grant administration has encountered some resistance along the way, but MSDE remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring accountability, supporting grantees, and optimizing the impact of State investments.

- **Competitive vs Direct Grants:** Frequent requests for non-competitive, direct awards countered by MSDE's commitment to fair, competitive processes that uphold state investments.

- **Detailed Invoice Reviews:** Questions about the necessity of detailed review of invoices and accountability, while MSDE prioritizes thorough oversight to ensure proper use of funds.

- **Subgrantee Accountability:** Challenges with payments to MSDE subrecipients arising from local audits and whistleblower complaints, yet MSDE remains steadfast in enforcing accountability while nurturing positive relations with grantees to minimize fraud, waste, and abuse.

- **State Audit Interactions:** Specific grants, such as those highlighted in the OLA audit report, spotlight the tension between strict compliance and grantee autonomy, illustrating MSDE's balance of adhering to audit findings while advocating for programmatic success.

Change and Change Management

Expanding the tent of grant awardees presents new challenges and areas of growth for MSDE and new opportunities for external individuals and entities to engage in and support key State initiatives.

Challenges Faced: With the inclusion of newer, and often smaller entities, MSDE has observed grantees:

- Submitting incorrect invoices, leading to administrative delays and miscommunication.

- Needing advance payments instead of the traditional retroactive payments post-invoice approval.

- Struggling with processes such as acquiring a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) or understanding payment timelines, indicating a potential knowledge gap in grant management.

- Smaller entities, in particular, often require more intensive support due to limited resources or less experience in handling grants.

Change and Change Management

By recognizing and addressing these challenges head-on, MSDE reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that every grant, regardless of the awardee's size or experience, is set up for success. We view these challenges not as setbacks, but as growth points, allowing us to refine our approach and better serve our expanding community of grantees.

MSDE's Proactive Response: In the face of these challenges, MSDE has not been passive. Our actions include:

- Offering frequent meetings, sometimes as often as weekly or bi-weekly, especially for newer grantees, to provide support, clarify doubts, and streamline processes.

- Developing a comprehensive "Grant Toolkit" specifically tailored for first-time grant awardees, ensuring they have the resources and knowledge to navigate the grant process efficiently.

Continuous Improvement

At MSDE, the journey towards effective grants administration does not stop with the establishment of foundational structures and processes. We remain committed to continuous improvement, fine-tuning our applications, and optimizing our management systems to meet the evolving needs of our stakeholders.

New Local ESSA Consolidated Application and Process (1 of 2)

- **Unified Application Process:** One single Grant Information Guide, one application template, and one deadline for multiple Title funds:

  - Title I (Parts A, C, D Sub-Parts 1 & 2), Title II Part A, Title III Part A (both English Language Acquisition & Immigrant), Title IV Part A, and Title V Part B.

  - Result: A significant reduction by 300-400 pages, easing the burden on local education agencies (LEAs).

- **Streamlined Timing:** The new Grant Information Guide and application will be released by September 15th.

  - A consistent performance period for planned activities in LEA entitlement applications will span 15 months (e.g., for 2023-2024: July 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024).

  - LEAs can also request an extension for the utilization of unspent funds with each year's application to extend to a 27-month performance period.

New Local ESSA Consolidated Application and Process (2 of 2)

- **Improved Grant Award Notices:** Conditional NOGAs will be released earlier (in August and September), offering LEAs earlier access to resources while they finalize applications.

- **Looking Forward:** For 2024-2025, the application will be released in May 2024, allowing LEAs more time for strategic planning and implementation.

- **Master Plan Submissions:** LEAs no longer need to submit a consolidated master plan due to the repeal under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

- **Change Management:** MSDE recognizes the novelty of this process for everyone involved.

  - Extensive scheduled and on-demand technical assistance will be provided.

  - The agency is open to feedback and will make adjustments based on LEA input.

  - The overarching goal: Reduced LEA effort, enhanced cross-team collaboration, strategic resource planning, and the optimized use of funds to support student outcomes for targeted and eligible groups.

New E-Grants Systems

The current grant application process, while thorough, has room for enhanced efficiency. By testing with the BOOST program, we're aiming to reduce paperwork, increase transparency, and minimize errors.

- **Boosted by BOOST Testing:** The BOOST program serves as the ideal candidate for testing due to its unique requirements and its significant scope/scale. The insights gathered here will inform the broader implementation across other grant programs.

- Benefits Envisioned with the New E-grants Platform:

  - **Unified Dashboard:** A centralized dashboard will offer an overview of all grant applications, their stages, required evaluations, and clearances—ensuring no application goes unnoticed.

  - **Instant Communication:** Prompt feedback cycles, elucidated directions, and rapid issue resolutions will become the norm, thanks to the platform's built-in communication features.

  - **Data-led Insights:** Harnessing the analytics capabilities of the new system, MSDE can derive actionable insights, ensuring that funds reach where they are most impactful.

Perkins Late Liquidation Request

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) funds CTE programs with the goal to enhance the academic, career, and technical skills of students in secondary and postsecondary CTE programs.

- **Inherited Issues:** In January 2023, the MSDE Consolidated Annual Report for Carl D. Perkins-funded Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs showed an unobligated State Leadership fund balance of $844,163.19, of which $652,626.19 is in Funds for General State Leadership Activities, $191,421.50 in Funds for Individuals in State Institutions, and $115.50 in Funds for Special Population Recruitment.

- **Lapsed Funding Nationally:** Maryland, along with multiple states, saw lapsed federal Perkins funds. Notably, California and Puerto Rico had lapses amounting to $13,000,000 and $10,000,000 respectively.

- **Addressing the Lapse:** MSDE identified grant allocation discrepancies and approached USDE for a late liquidation request. Pending final confirmation, MSDE plans to draw down the full balance of $844,163.19.

Prekindergarten Expansion Grant – Piloting Short Form Applications

Where and when able, MSDE is streamlining its award processes to recognize the time tax and level of effort required by applicants like, for example, by offering a modified short form application for proven programs, ensuring timely renewals and acknowledging the track record of success in compliance with established criteria.

- To expedite the award process and ensure grantees can move without interruption into the 2023 – 2024 school year, for the 2023-2024 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, MSDE reviewed applications on a rolling basis beginning April 25, 2023.

- Applicants seeking renewal or expansion to an existing approved program were allowed to submit a modified short form application if the applicant's site(s) has(had) a track record of success. A track record of success means an applicant had maintained a lead teacher who meets the grant requirements; and met and/or maintained a minimum Maryland EXCELS Level 4 or above, in compliance with fiscal guidelines.

1. Grants by the Numbers
2. What's in a Grant
3. Grant Administration at MSDE
4. Grant Process Evolution July 2021 through Now
5. Continuous Improvement
6. Questions

Questions

Addendum: One-Time Programs

MSDE has leveraged one-time COVID-19 discretionary funding to create innovative and sustainable programs. This section offers a glimpse at those programs and their primary goals and initiatives.

Maryland Leads

Maryland Leads is a new grant initiative designed to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in utilizing federal funds to overcome the learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerate student learning to narrow opportunity and achievement gaps, and provide more targeted support for historically underserved students and their communities.

- Grow Your Own Staff
- Staff Support & Retention
- The Science of Reading
- High-Quality School Day Tutoring

- Reimagining the Use of Time
- Innovative School Models
- Transforming Neighborhoods through Excellent Community Schools

- Each strategy contains focus areas and best practices from the field.

- LEAs will have the opportunity to work with best-in-class partners to execute approved plans.

Distribute $165M+ ESSER State Set-Aside funds to LEAs through a non-competitive but highly-selective grant process.

Maryland Leads Program Investments, Awarded Funds by High Leverage Strategy Area

MSDE awarded **$170,500,000** to LEAs and generated an additional **$25,000,000** in local matching support for Maryland Leads approved programs and activities.

- Grow Your Own
- Staff Support and Retention
- Science of Reading
- High-Quality School Day Tutoring
- Reimagining the Use of Time
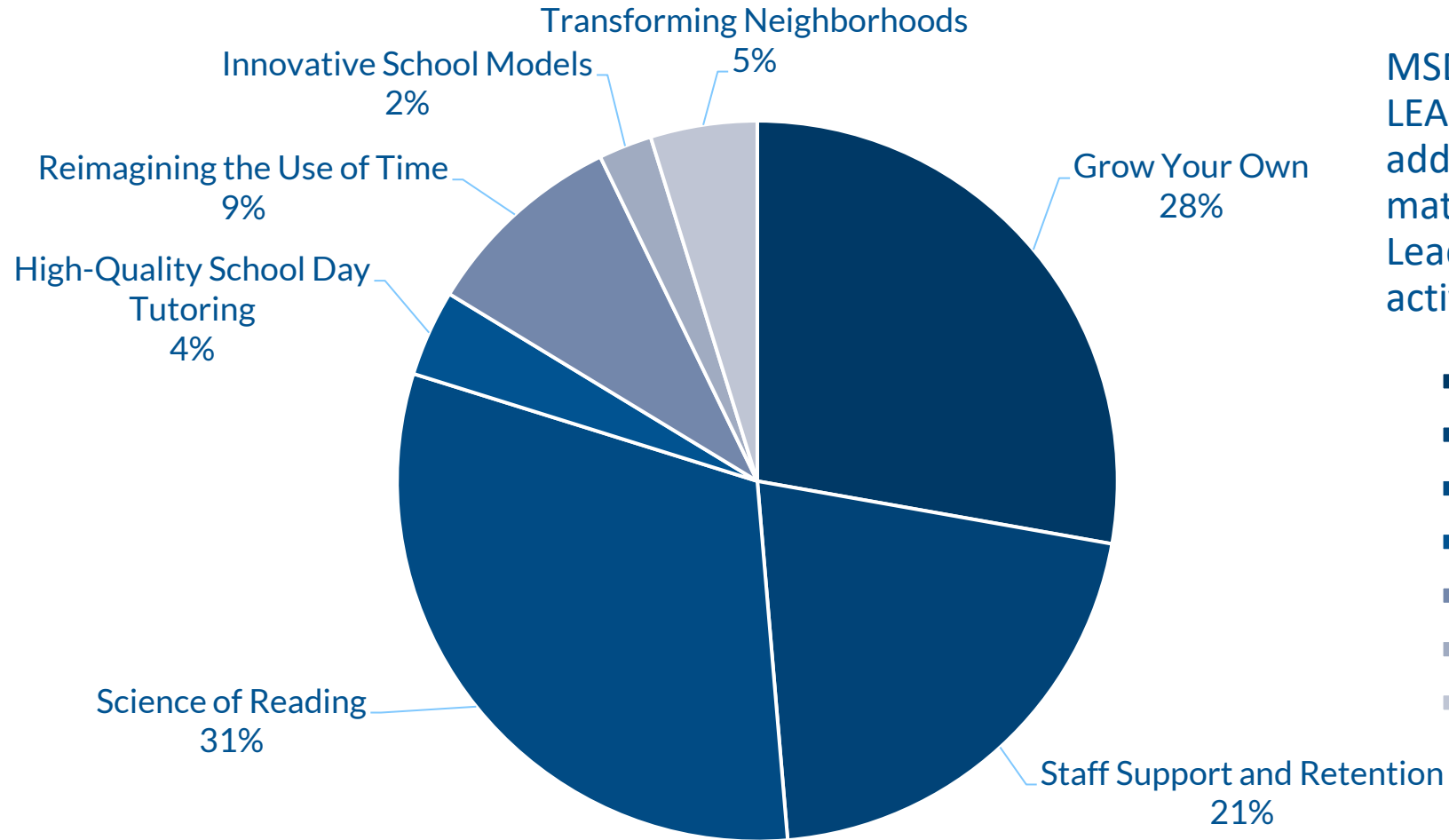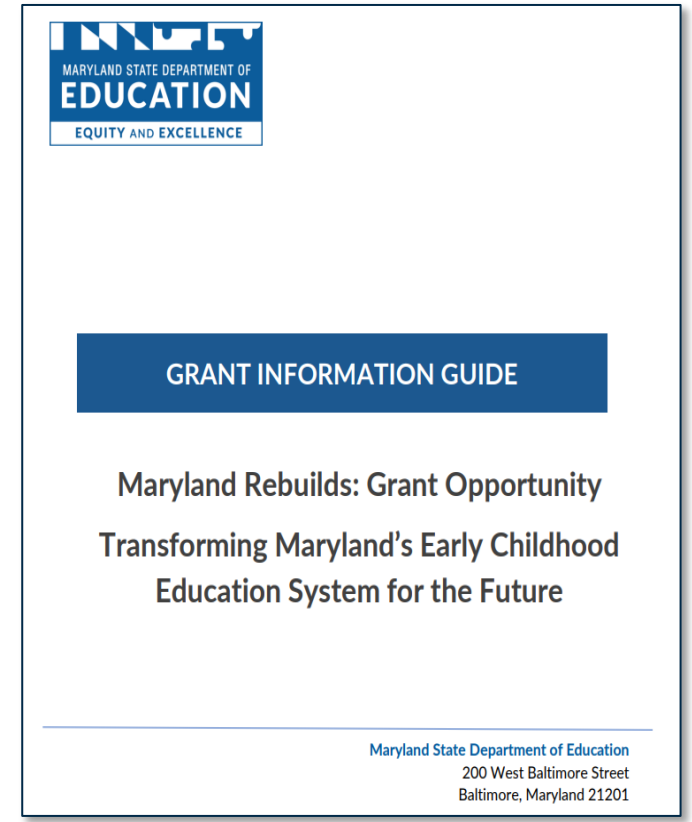- Innovative School Models
- Transforming Neighborhoods

Maryland Rebuilds

Maryland Rebuilds Grant Opportunity is designed to **support the state's childcare system** in utilizing federal funds to stabilize, strengthen, and sustain the childcare system and mitigate the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, **MSDE awarded more than $23 million in funding** to non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, local education agencies, private childcare providers, and public prekindergarten programs to help support the state's childcare community.

- Expanding Access to Quality Child Care.

- Early Learning Models of Excellence.

- Expanding Mental Health Supports and Services.

- Growing a Highly-Effective Child Care Workforce.

- Boosting Family Child Care.

- Advancing a Coordinated Prekindergarten Enrollment System.

GRANT INFORMATION GUIDE

Maryland Rebuilds: Grant Opportunity

Transforming Maryland's Early Childhood Education System for the Future

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Maryland Works

- Serve as the catalyst for scaling registered apprenticeship programs across the state via **$12 million in one-time State set-aside funds** so that by 2030-2031, at least 45% of high-school graduates will have completed a registered apprenticeship program and received an industry-recognized credential as intended by the Blueprint for Maryland's Future
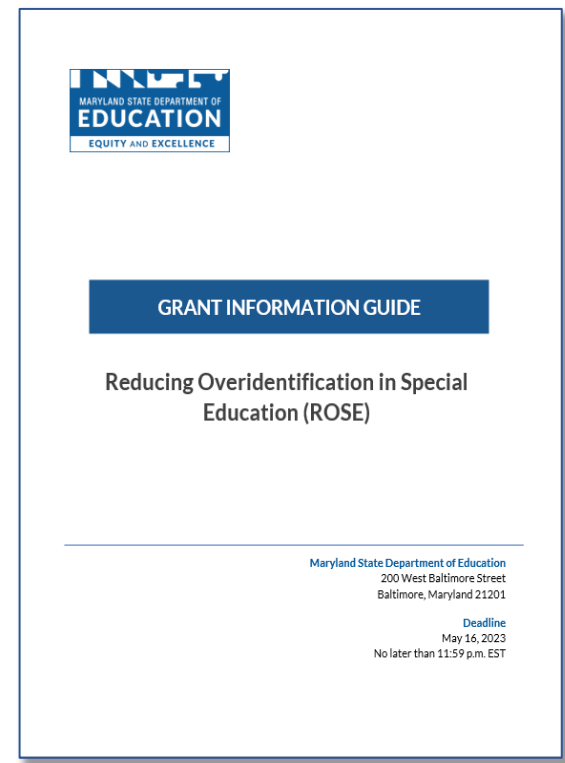
- Ensure **at least 10% of an LEA's graduating seniors in 2024-2025 participate in a registered youth apprenticeship** that leads to an industry-recognized credential for every LEA included in the Maryland Works grant

- Build the **infrastructure to launch and sustain strong registered apprenticeship programs that are industry-aligned and meet the workforce needs** in Maryland for years to come.

GRANT INFORMATION GUIDE

Maryland Works:
Developing and Implementing Systems
to Accelerate Youth Apprenticeships

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
Deadline
April 4, 2023
No later than 11:59 p.m. EST
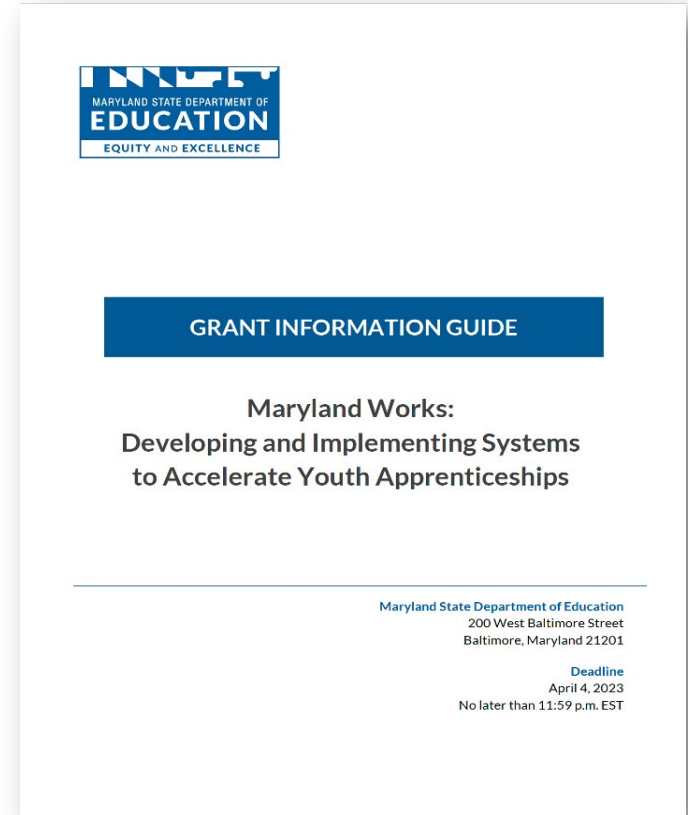
Leverage ESSER funds to develop Pre-K-12 pipelines for the most needed professions

The Reducing Overidentification in Special Education Grant Program

- The $3 million ROSE program is designed to seed resources for up to three local education agencies (LEAs) to mitigate the effects of pandemic learning loss on persistently underperforming students who **risk being misidentified for special education services due to their race, sex, gender, home language, and/or income status**.

- The program also connects to and **supports Blueprint implementation efforts associated with special education policies, processes, and practices.**

- Awards Announced August 2023

GRANT INFORMATION GUIDE

Reducing Overidentification in Special Education (ROSE)

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Deadline
May 16, 2023
No later than 11:59 p.m. EST

The Maryland Tutoring Corps

- **Improve math proficiency for Maryland's secondary students, narrow and close the achievement gap, and mitigate the learning loss** resulting from the pandemic.

- Promote equity in math education by prioritizing middle school students in grades 6-8, Algebra students of any grade level, and historically underserved students such as African American students, economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with special needs.

- Establish a long-term infrastructure that can **recruit, train, and deploy a robust team of qualified tutors** that will provide high-quality, school day tutoring to students who are not proficient in math.

GRANT INFORMATION GUIDE

Maryland Tutoring Corps:
Scaling High-Quality,
School Day Tutoring Statewide

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Deadline
August 15, 2023
No later than 11:59 p.m. EST