

## Frequently Asked Questions About the 2020 STEM Talent Challenge Program

*Updated 14 September 2020*

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## 1. ELIGIBILITY

### a. Who is eligible to apply for funding?

The following entities are eligible STEM Talent Challenge grant recipients:

1. a State;
2. an Indian tribe;
3. a city or other political subdivision of a State;
4. an entity that—
  - a. is
    - i. a nonprofit organization,
    - ii. an institution of higher education,
    - iii. a public-private partnership,
    - iv. a science or research park,
    - v. a Federal laboratory,
    - vi. an economic development organization or similar entity; **and**
  - b. has an application that is supported by a State or a political subdivision of a State; or
5. a consortium of any of the entities described in subparagraphs (1) through (4).

EDA has promulgated [regulations](#) that provide additional guidance on eligibility.<sup>1</sup>

**For-profit entities** that are able to demonstrate that they are institutions of higher education, parties to public-private partnerships, science or research parks, Federal laboratories, or economic development organizations or similar entities are eligible for funding; however, EDA strongly encourages for-profit entities to read these FAQs and the FY 2020 STEM Talent Challenge Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully, and to contact the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (OIE) at [oiie@eda.gov](mailto:oiie@eda.gov) for information pertaining to this question. Note that EDA is **NOT** authorized to provide grants to individuals under this Program.

### b. Are there other statutes and policy requirements that I need to know and that will impact these awards?

Yes; as indicated in the [NOFO](#), EDA award recipients must comply with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (“Uniform Guidance”) at 2 CFR-part 200<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions (DOC STCs) and Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements.<sup>3</sup> In addition, recipients must comply with applicable requirements of all other Federal laws, executive orders, regulations and policies governing this program. These include but are not limited to laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, religion, or sex.

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<sup>1</sup> 13 CFR §§ 312.3 and 312.6.

<sup>2</sup> The Uniform Guidance may be accessed at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2020-title2-vol1/pdf/CFR-2020-title2-vol1-subtitleA-chap11.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The DOC STCs and Pre-Award Notification Requirements may be accessed at [https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants\\_management/policy/](https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/).

**c. In order to apply as a nonprofit organization must I be legally organized as a 501(c)(3)?**

No; however because EDA has adopted the definition of nonprofit organization as set forth in the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR § 200.70, any entity applying as a nonprofit must provide documentation that the organization is: (1) operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) not organized primarily for profit; and (3) uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operations of the organization.<sup>4</sup>

**d. What is a public-private partnership and what documents should I submit to EDA to demonstrate my eligibility?**

EDA defines a public-private partnership as a relationship formalized by contractual agreement between a public agency and a private-sector entity that reasonably defines the terms of collaboration in the delivery and financing of a public project.<sup>5</sup> EDA will typically review agreements for items such as the purpose and objectives of the partnership, the binding/contractual nature of the relationship, the duties and responsibilities of each party, and the duration of the agreement. The scope of the relationship documented in the agreement may be limited to the proposal set forth in a given partnership's grant application or may encompass a broader program, initiative, or other set of activities or goals. A letter of support from a public entity alone, without additional documentation demonstrating a formal, binding relationship between the parties, will be found insufficient to establish eligibility under this entity category. EDA reserves the right to request additional information from applicants to establish eligibility, as necessary. Applicants that have further questions concerning these documentation requirements should contact OIE. See Question 9(a) of this document or Section G of the [NOFO](#) for contact information.

**e. How should organizations apply under a public-private partnership?**

Organizations that plan to apply as a public-private partnership (PPP) may submit their applications in one of four ways:

1. A private entity that is a party to the PPP applies on behalf of the PPP. The applicant private entity must include in the application the contractual agreement establishing the PPP, which agreement must clearly document the roles and responsibilities of each member of the PPP.
2. A public entity that is a party to the PPP applies on behalf of the PPP. The applicant public entity must include in the application the contractual agreement establishing the PPP, which agreement must clearly document the roles and responsibilities of each member of the PPP.
3. The PPP applies as a single entity if:
  - a. the PPP is an established entity, independent of the parties to the PPP and with its own organizational structure and clearly defined management team; and
  - b. the application includes the contractual agreement establishing the PPP, and clearly documents the roles and responsibilities of each member of the PPP.
4. If the public and private partners are equally involved in the management and/or implementation of the proposed project, then the entities of the PPP should submit as co-applicants. The application should include the contractual agreement establishing the PPP, and clearly document the roles and responsibilities of each member of the PPP.

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<sup>4</sup> 13 CFR § 312.3 (referencing 2 C.F.R. § 200.70).

<sup>5</sup> 13 CFR § 312.3.

See Question 1(d) of this document for additional guidance on establishing a PPP through a formalized contractual agreement.

Note that regardless of the approach taken to submitting an application, each party to the PPP will be considered jointly and severally liable for fulfilling the terms of the award, including post-award reporting and all documentation requirements.

**f. What is an economic development organization (EDO) and what documents should I submit to EDA to demonstrate my eligibility?**

EDA defines an EDO as an organization whose primary purpose is to support the economic development of a community or region.<sup>6</sup> In order to demonstrate eligibility status under this category, EDA will look to the organization's Articles of Incorporation, Charter, Resolutions, Bylaws, and/or other documents that may be relevant to establish the primary purpose of the organization. Applicants are encouraged to submit all relevant documentation to EDA for evaluation. EDA reserves the right to request additional information from applicants to establish eligibility, as necessary. If applicants have further questions concerning these documentation requirements, they should contact OIE. See Question 9(a) of this document or Section G of the [NOFO for contact information](#).

**g. My organization has not yet formed, or we have formed, but the organization is not yet registered in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov) or on Grants.gov. May the organization still apply for a grant under this NOFO?**

In order to be considered for funding, applicants must submit a full application via Grants.gov by **11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on October 14, 2020** (which includes SAM registration as well as Grants.gov registration). As a result, EDA strongly encourages applicants that are in the process of forming or have formed but are not yet registered on Grants.gov, to do so **as soon as possible**. Full application registration requirements include obtaining a unique entity identifier (commonly referred to as the Data University Numbering System or DUNS number) and an active registration in SAM.gov, a process that can take up to **10 business days**.

**h. Are previous Regional Innovation Strategies Program recipients and/or Build to Scale recipients with active projects eligible for the STEM Talent Challenge program?**

Both previous Regional Innovation Strategies Program recipients and current Build to Scale (formerly Regional Innovation Strategies) recipients (i.e., entities operating within the period of performance of an existing Build to Scale award) are eligible applicants under the STEM Talent Challenge.

**i. What distress criteria must be met in order to be eligible to receive EDA funding?**

Unlike most of EDA's other programs authorized under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965<sup>7</sup>, the STEM Talent Program is authorized under Section 28 of the Stevenson-Wydler Technology Innovation Act of 1980<sup>8</sup>. This authorization does not require applicants to meet specific distress criteria to be considered eligible.

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<sup>6</sup> 13 CFR § 312.3.

<sup>7</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 3121, et seq.

<sup>8</sup> 15 U.S.C. § 3722.

- j. **Will any previous grants that EDA awarded my organization affect my organization's competitiveness for the STEM Talent Challenge?**

No, however the Grants Officer may take into consideration past performance on previous awards when making final selections.

- k. **For the purposes of this Program, what is a consortium?**

A consortium is two or more eligible entities jointly applying for an award as co-applicants.

## 2. CO-APPLICANTS

- a. **How do you determine who the co-applicant is and what forms are they required to submit?**

If the other entities in question will be partnered with the lead applicant in the management and/or implementation of the proposed project, then that entity may be considered a co-applicant. For assistance identifying co-applicants, please reach out to OIE. See Question 9(a) of this document or Section G of the [NOFO for contact information](#). Co-applicants are generally required to submit the same forms that the primary applicant must provide. See Appendix A of this document for a comprehensive checklist of the documents required for all co-applicants. All co-applicants must meet the eligibility requirements described above.

- b. **What if my organization plans to engage a third party that is not a co-applicant to perform a portion of the project activities? Is the third party considered a co-applicant?**

If your organization intends to enter into an agreement with a third party to accomplish a portion of a project's activities, whether or not the third party should be a co-applicant will depend on the scope of the third party's involvement. The Uniform Guidance regulation at 2 CFR 200.330 "Subrecipient and contractor determinations" provides guidance on characterizing parties that perform work under an award. An entity that carries out a portion of a Federal award will be considered a subrecipient (see 2 CFR 200.330(a)). An entity that provides goods and services for a non-Federal entity under an award is considered a contractor (see 2 CFR 200.330(b)). All parties performing work under an award must be retained in compliance with the Uniform Guidance.

## 3. APPLICATION MATERIALS AND SUBMISSION PROCESS

- a. **Are applicants limited to submitting one application?**

Yes, applicants are limited to submitting one application. However, an entity may also submit an application as part of a separate and distinct entity or group of entities, such as a public-private partnership or a consortium, although that separate and distinct entity or group of entities may not itself submit more than one application.

- b. **How are applications reviewed?**

Applications will be reviewed based on the process and evaluation criteria outlined in Section E of the [NOFO](#).

- c. **When is the deadline for submission and where do I submit the application?**

Applications should be submitted electronically via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) (Grants.gov) and must be received by **11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on October 14, 2020**. EDA will not accept paper, facsimile or email transmissions of applications for this program except as provided in the [NOFO](#). Applications received after the applicable closing date and time will not be considered for funding.

- d. **Where can I access the most up-to-date State Single Point-of-Contact (SPOC) list related to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs"?**

The most recent list is available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc\\_1\\_16\\_2020.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf). Note that States that are not listed on [the Intergovernmental Review (SPOC List)] page have chosen not to participate in the intergovernmental review process, and therefore do not have a SPOC. If you are located within a State that does not have a SPOC, you may send application materials directly to a Federal awarding agency."<sup>9</sup>

- e. **How many letters of support from State or a political subdivision of a State are necessary if my organization is applying as part of a consortium?**

Generally, only one letter will be necessary so long as the letter demonstrates that the applicant's or co-applicant's application is supported by a State or a political subdivision of a State (e.g., a county or a municipality) that encompasses all or a substantial portion of the region served by the project.

#### 4. FUNDING AND BUDGET

- a. **The NOFO discusses a maximum amount for an EDA grant, but can applicants apply for less than that amount?**

Yes, an applicant can apply for less than the maximum amount stated in the [NOFO](#). EDA encourages applicants to develop compelling applications that efficiently use federal dollars.

- b. **The NOFO discusses an optional amount of \$50,000 dedicated to planning and development activities. Can our application be solely dedicated to planning and development and/or can we allocate more than \$50,000 to planning and development?**

No. No more than \$50,000 may be allocated to planning and development activities. Planning and development activities must be paired with program implementation. Additionally, the maximum Federal Share of each STEM Talent Challenge award is \$300,000, of which no more than \$50,000 may be allocated to planning and development activities if needed. All other funds requested must be dedicated to program implementation. If not conducting planning and development activities, applicants may request the full \$300,000 for program implementation.

- c. **Are award amounts allotted by year or for the entire period of performance?**

The total amount of any Federal award (up to \$300,000 over an 18 to 24-month period of performance) is based on the entire period of performance, not per year with a given period of performance.

- d. **The NOFO indicates that applicants must include a budget narrative, but the required Form SF-424A (Budget Information Non-Construction Programs) seems to cover that information. Are those the same?**

No, the Budget Narrative and Form SF-424A (Budget Information Non-Construction Programs) are separate and distinct required documents. Form SF-424A identifies the totals per budget line item. The budget narrative identifies and justifies how the funds in each budget line item will be used to support the proposed project and links each line item to its relevant commitment letter or funding source.

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<sup>9</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Intergovernmental Review (SPOC List), [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc\\_1\\_16\\_2020.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf)

Budget narrative line items and whole budget totals should mathematically match the total project costs listed in the appropriate totals fields of Form SF-424A and Question 18, Line g (“TOTAL”) of Form SF-424. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the “Application and Submission Information” (Section D) in the [NOFO](#) for further guidance.

**e. What can be considered in-kind contributions?**

In-kind contributions provided by the applicant may be used to meet the required non-Federal share of the total project costs. In-kind contributions consist of non-cash contributions directly related to the proposed project, and typically include items such as space, equipment, or services. The market value of space can be used as an in-kind contribution for the period of performance. All itemized valuations of any proposed in-kind contributions should be included in the Budget Narrative. All in-kind contributions must be eligible project costs and meet applicable Federal cost principles and uniform administrative requirements and will be evaluated by EDA in accordance with these requirements.

**f. Can the STEM Talent Challenge fund construction projects?**

There is no funding available for construction projects under this program, including projects related to the design or renovation of buildings. However, certain structural modifications may be eligible in some circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

**g. How do you determine allowable expenses that can be charged to the award?**

Allowable costs incurred are subject to [2 CFR part 200, Subpart E](#). If applicants have questions concerning whether a particular cost is allowable, they should contact OIE. See Question 7(a) of this document or Section G of the [NOFO](#).

**h. Can this funding be used to directly support program participants, such as through apprentice wages or stipends?**

No. This program cannot pay for apprentice wages, stipends, or other resources directly to the student or worker. The STEM Talent Challenge funds are for planning, program management, and operations only.

**i. Can match funding be used to directly support program participants, such as through wages or stipends?**

No, funding match cannot be used to pay for apprentice wages, stipends, or other resources directly to the student or worker. As with federal funds requested through this challenge, match funds must be used for planning, program management, and operations only.

**j. Is there a limitation on the amount of indirect costs I may claim?**

In general, indirect costs are allowable based on the negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA) approved by your cognizant agency; EDA requires copies of the applicant's or co-applicant's currently approved NICRA, if any, at the time of application. However, indirect cost rate requirements vary by type of applicant entity and whether an entity has had an approved indirect cost rate in the past. If applicants are new to the Federal grant process, or do not have a current NICRA, we encourage them to discuss this process with OIE well before the end of the application window. See Question 9(a) of this document or Section G of the [NOFO for contact information](#).

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<sup>10</sup> See 13 CFR § 312.7(a)(9) and (b)(3).



**k. What is the minimum match required?**

Applicants must provide a minimum of one-to-one (i.e. 50 percent of total project costs) in matching share for all challenges. Applicants must demonstrate that this matching share (cash, in-kind, or a combination of cash and in-kind contributions) is **available**, **unencumbered**, and **committed** to the project. Applicants should also consider the nature and source of the matching share, as funds from Federal sources often cannot be considered as matching funds for other Federal projects. The budget narrative, Form SF-424A, and commitment letters should clearly and consistently document the total project budget and should delineate and substantiate matching share, both cash and in-kind, including appropriate valuations.

**l. What is required for a matching share commitment letter?**

A matching share commitment letter must demonstrate that matching share (whether cash or in-kind) referenced in the Form SF-424, SF-424A, Project and Budget Narratives, and elsewhere in the application will be available, unencumbered, and committed at the time of the award and that is signed by an authorized representative of the organization providing the matching share (e.g., the applicant, co-applicant, or third-party organization). Where an application relies on multiple organizations for matching share, multiple commitment letters—one from each organization providing matching share—are required. Commitment letters do not count towards the Budget Narrative's 4-page limit; these letters can be uploaded as attachments in Grants.gov.

**m. Does EDA allow program income to be considered matching share or an addition to the award?**

Because EDA requires that matching share must be available, unencumbered, and committed at the time of award, EDA does **not allow** for program income to be considered as matching share (i.e., matching share cannot consist of funds that may be collected at a future date).

**n. May unrecovered indirect costs count towards the required matching share?**

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.306(c), unrecovered indirect costs may only be applied toward the matching share with EDA's prior approval, and therefore applicants seeking to apply unrecovered indirect costs to the matching share should seek EDA's guidance early in the application process.

**o. Are matching funds subject to grant usage restrictions?**

Non-Federal matching funds are governed by the same principles and requirements as the Federal/EDA funds.<sup>11</sup>

## **5. AWARD NOTIFICATION**

**a. When and how will applicants be notified of results?**

All applicants should expect to receive grant award notification approximately 60-90 days from the application close date set forth in the [NOFO](#). OIE will notify applicants via email using the email addresses provided for the authorized representative and application point-of-contact on Form SF-424.

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<sup>11</sup> See Subpart E of the Uniform Guidance.

## 6. INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

### a. Will EDA conduct an informational webinar?

EDA posted a recorded webinar on September 9, 2020. A recording of this webinar is available here: <https://www.eda.gov/news/media/2020/09/09/stem-talent-challenge-informational-webinar.htm>.

## 7. CONTACT US

### a. What is the easiest way to contact EDA with questions during the application process?

Please note, to support a fair, national competition, EDA cannot provide strategic advice, or partnership development support during the competition, and must limit support efforts to administrative and technical concerns about the competition and application process.

If you require immediate support, or have unique technical questions, please contact the program office by email at [oje@eda.gov](mailto:oje@eda.gov) or by phone at (202) 482-8001.

**APPENDIX A OPTIONAL CHECKLIST-STYLE GUIDE FOR REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR APPLICATION**

**1. For States, Indian Tribes, Cities, and Other Political Subdivisions of States**

The following checklist table is meant to assist applicants that are States, Indian tribes, cities, and other political subdivisions of States (including consortia of one or more of these types of entities). As set forth in Section D.2 of the NOFO, all documents are required for a complete application.

Note that this list **DOES NOT APPLY** to nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, public-private partnerships, science or research parks, Federal laboratories, or economic development or similar organizations.

Document Checklist for State, Indian Tribe, City, and Other Political State Subdivision Applicants/Co-Applicants				
Document	Title/Description/Reference	Checklist		
Project Narrative	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Application		
Budget Narrative and Staffing Plan	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Application		
Matching Share Commitment Letters	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Source 1	Source 2	etc.
Form SF-424	Application for Federal Assistance	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form SF-424A	Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs	Application		
Form SF-424B	Assurances-Non-Construction Programs	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form CD-511	Certification Regarding Lobbying (if applicable)	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form SF-LLL	Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (if applicable)	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
SPOC/EO 12372 Compliance Documentation	See <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf">https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf</a> (if applicable)	State 1	State 2	etc.
ICR Agreement	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.

**2. For Nonprofit Organizations, Institutions of Higher Education, Public-Private Partnerships, Science or Research Parks, Federal Laboratories, Economic Development or Similar Organizations**

The following checklist table is meant to assist applicants that are nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, public-private partnerships, science or research parks, Federal laboratories, or economic development or similar organizations (as well as consortia that include one or more of these types of entities). As set forth in Section D.2 of the [NOFO](#), all documents are required for a complete application.

Document Checklist for Nonprofit Organization, Institution of Higher Education, Public-Private Partnership, Science or Research Park, Federal Laboratory, Venture Development Organization, and Economic Development or Similar Organization Applicants/Co-Applicants,				
Document	Title/Description/Requirements	Checklist		
Project Narrative	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Application		
Budget Narrative and Staffing Plan	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Application		
Matching Share Commitment Letters	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Source 1	Source 2	etc.
State/Local Government Support	See Section D.2 of the NOFO	Application		
Form SF-424	Application for Federal Assistance	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form SF-424A	Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs	Application		
Form SF-424B	Assurances-Non-Construction Programs	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form CD-511	Certification Regarding Lobbying (if applicable)	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Form SF-LLL	Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (if applicable)	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
SPOC/EO 12372 Compliance Documentation	See <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf">https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/spoc_1_16_2020.pdf</a> (if applicable)	State 1	State 2	etc.
Organizational Documentation	E.g., certificates of good standing, articles of incorporation, bylaws, establishing authorities; see Section D.2	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.
Indirect Cost Rate (ICR) Agreement	See Section D.2	Applicant 1	Applicant 2	etc.