**Bipartisan Safer Communities Act**

Stronger Connections Grant – Rhode Island FAQs

*Please be sure to review the* [*BSCA Stronger Connections RFP*](https://ridegms.blob.core.windows.net/documentlibrary/D955E355-2C7D-4690-BBB2-71E5A30BD73D.docx)*;* [*BSCA Stronger Connections Budget Template*](https://ridegms.blob.core.windows.net/documentlibrary/42B34CDF-C8D4-41C7-80D6-8E06EB828957.xlsx)*;* [*BSCA Stronger Connections May 4, 2023 Info Session Slides*](https://ridegms.blob.core.windows.net/documentlibrary/3E8DE238-AC08-4576-883A-D08C24856EBC.pdf)*; and* [*BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)*](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf) *for additional guidance. These documents can also be found in a dedicated section of the* [*AcceleGrants document library*](https://gms.ride.ri.gov/DocumentLibrary/Default.aspx?t=638188876939741230) *for BSCA Resources.*

**General Questions**

1. **When is the application deadline?**

The application deadline is June 4, 2023 at 4:00 PM EST.

1. **What were the risk factors from SurveyWorks that were used to qualify LEAs for eligibility?**

RIDE used the following student risk factors built into SurveyWorks, which all LEAs collect and have ready access to, and are consistent with our other healthy and safety grants that support the goal of improving conditions through student learning for students in grades 6-12, Year 2020 Risk Factor Data: Worry about Violence at School, Seen a Weapon at School Last 12 Months, Been in Physical Fight Last 12 Months, and Dating Violence Victim Last 12 Months.

1. **Is there a partner requirement? Meaning, the LEA must partner with external organizations/non-profits or is that up to us based on our needs and evidence-based practices?**

No

1. **Would the initiative need to be only for the qualifying school(s) or can it be applied district wide?**

It depends. LEAs should use the data from their needs assessment, along with input from stakeholders, to determine the most effective use of funds for increasing student sense of belonging in order to improve student academic achievement.

1. **Like Title IV-A, are there any percentage requirements for funds that are in play here (e.g., at least 20% of budget for well rounded, at least 20% safe and healthy students and something for effective use of technology)?**

No. These funds are only for activities under section 4108 of ESEA.

1. **Is GEPA just for IDEA-B or inclusive of all funds?  The example is IDEA-B but I was writing mine to include other subgroups and barriers.**

The grant should include all underserved subgroups in a LEA, including those identified under GEPA.

1. **Can I braid these funds with my federal program funds?**

Yes, provided the requests meet the allowable uses of funds, see FAQ question 121 for more information.

1. **Can I use SurveyWorks data as one of our outcome measures?**

Yes.

**Performance Period**

1. **Do we need to write the grant for three years or can it be for less time?**

LEAs may submit proposals that end before June 30, 2026. Requests can be for less than three years and can support smaller interventions.

1. **How should I let you know how I would want the funds broken down (over the three-year period)?**

Put the information on the cover page of the grant. Specifically:

* submit a detailed budget for year one,
* indicate on the cover page the amount of funds the LEA is requesting for each year, and
* use the abstract to provide an overview of the entire grant.

Successful applicants will need to submit detailed activity plans and budgets for subsequent years of the grant.

**Allowable Use of Funds**

1. **What expenses might be allowable under the grant?**

It depends. LEAs initiatives must describe a program of size, scope and quality to improve student academic achievement by increasing students' sense of belonging and include requests that are reasonable and necessary to support these such activities.

LEAs must first ensure that requests are:

* allowable under Section 4108 of Title IV-A in ESEA (and not one of the prohibited behaviors in section 4101(b) or section 8526 in ESEA;
* supplement, and do not supplant, other non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used to pay for authorized activities;
* based on identified student and staff needs for increasing student sense of belonging in order to improve student academic achievement, including, when applicable, private schools;
* are planned with input from stakeholders; and are
* consistent with the Uniform Grant Guidance.

See the US Department of Education’s [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf) for additional guidance.

1. **Based on the needs assessment and data used to determine our approach, can this be something that we already have in place, but want to scale and expand, or does it have to be a new idea, program, position, etc.?**

It depends. LEAs must first ensure that requests are:

* allowable under Section 4108 of Title IV-A in ESEA (and not one of the prohibited behaviors in section 4102(b) or section 8526 in ESEA;
* supplement, and do not supplant, other non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used to pay for authorized activities;
* based on identified student and staff needs for increasing student sense of belonging in order to improve student academic achievement, including, when applicable, private schools;
* are planned with input from stakeholders; and are
* consistent with the Uniform Grant Guidance.

If these factors are met, then LEAs may consider scaling up and/or expanding activities that have evidence of success within the district.

See the US Department of Education’s [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf) for additional guidance, including question B-10.

1. **Is adding an SRO an allowable use of funds?**

Activities must align to one or more of the BSCA strategies and be allowable under Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant, Section [4108 of ESEA](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=20+USC+7118&f=treesort&fq=true&num=7&hl=true&edition=prelim&granuleId=USC-prelim-title20-section7118). Per the US Department of Education, “schools that choose to include or expand the presence of school-based police using Stronger Connections funds should implement high-quality practices in the training and use of SROs in schools, consistent with the [Guiding Principles for SROs](https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P460) published by the U.S. Department of Justice.”

Applicants may also refer to the US Department of Education’s [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf) for additional guidance, including questions B-10 and C-21.

1. **Would an add-on software package to an existing platform be an allowable use of funds (tied to SEL, that the district does not currently have)?**

It could be, provided it is part of an allowable activity for improving student academic achievement. See FAQ question 12 for additional considerations.

1. **Would an equity audit be allowable? Could we use the grant to fund cultural programs?**

It depends. See FAQ question 12 for additional considerations.

1. **Can this grant be used for schools to purchase furniture to create calming centers?**

It depends. See FAQ question 12 for additional considerations.

1. **Can the funds be utilized for security camera expansion projects, vape detectors, and rapid lockdown devices?**

It depends. Construction projects are not an allowable use of funds. See FAQ question 12 for additional considerations.

1. **Would an application like Rave Panic Button be allowable?**

It depends. See FAQ question 12 for additional considerations.

1. **Can funds be used for a program review (e.g. special education)? NEW**

If this is something that the district is required to do, then no. If this is not something the district is required to do, it may be allowable if the district is able to describe how the activity is:

* based on identified student and staff needs for increasing student sense of belonging in order to improve student academic achievement;
* planned with input from stakeholders;
* allowable under Title IV-A Section 4108;
* supplemental, and not something the district is already required to do or have been paid for with nonfederal funds in the previous year;
* reasonable and necessary and allocable; and
* consistent with the Uniform Grant Guidance.

See the US Department of Education’s [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf) question C-9 for additional guidance on how funds may be used to serve students with disabilities.

1. **Can we add access swipes and intercom communications to our new building with these funds? NEW**

No. As stated in the [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf), Question D-2, “ESEA section 8526(1) prohibits using funds under the ESEA “for construction, renovation, or repair of any school facility, except as authorized under [the ESEA],” and there is no specific authorization for construction, renovation, or repair in ESEA Title IV, Part A. Accordingly, Stronger Connections funds may not be used for school construction.”

**Equitable Services to Private Schools**

1. **Must an LEA receiving funds provide for the equitable participation of private school children and educators? NEW**

Yes. Because this funding was provided through Title IV, Part A, each eligible LEA that receives a grant must, after timely and meaningful consultation with appropriate private school officials, provide eligible private school students and educators services and other benefits that are equitable in comparison to services and other benefits provided with Stronger Connections funds to public school students and educators.

For additional guidance on the BSCA equitable services requirements, refer to Section E of the [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023).](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf)

1. **LEAs only need to consult with private schools if they are in our district, right?**

Yes, LEAs only need to consult with private schools located within the district boundaries.

1. **Do private schools create their own plans for use of the funds? Or is it just an option to participate in the LEA plan?**

The LEA plan should be based on the needs of the public and private school students. As these are discretionary funds, LEAs do not need to offer a separate program, but they could, for participating private schools.

LEAs must first consult with private schools to see if they are interested in participating and to collect the needs of students and educators. This can be done through a survey. LEAs then need to take into consideration, as part of the planning process, the needs of private school students and educators when designing their program.

For additional guidance on the BSCA equitable services requirements, refer to Section E of the [BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (2023)](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2023/04/23-0083.BSCA-FAQs.pdf).

1. **After consultation, one private school has determined that it would like to be part of what the district is planning. Would it be permissible to include their staff in our training if the school agrees or do they have to set up their own training?  If they are only interested in a part of the grant for only part of their staff, how would I figure their fair share?  Would it be just the cost of the activity? NEW**

Yes, it would be permissible for the LEA and private schools to participate in a joint initiative. This would help to build community and connections within the community, while saving the LEA time with program administration, as it would not need to plan two separate programs; which would be more cost effective.

One way to determine an equitable share would be to calculate a per person cost for the intervention. Regardless of the method chosen, it should be agreed upon during consultation with the private school(s).

# **Inquiries**

This is a competitive grant. Staff will not be able to address individual questions.

LEAs were given the opportunity to ask questions during the information session on May 4, 2023. A recording of the session is posted on the RIDE website, and in the AcceleGrants Document Library, with the other grant materials.

Questions may be sent to stephanie.enos@ride.ri.gov, and responses will be sent to superintendents in eligible LEAs and posted in the FAQs to ensure that no one has an undue advantage.