COMMUNITY CONNECTORS
CommunityConnectors.Ohio.gov

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

General

Goal of the grant

Community Connectors is one of the key education reforms signed into law by Gov. John R. Kasich last June (2014), and seeks to bring together parents, community organizations, faith-based organization, businesses and others to support Ohio's schools and to mentor students.

Community Connectors provides $10 million in lottery profits in 3-to-1 matching grants that will help give more Ohio students access to role models who can help motivate and inspire them, as well as help them develop skills that lead to success in school and the workplace.

Community Connector grantees will carry out the five core principles of the program:

1. Setting Goals to be Prepared for the 21st Century Careers
2. Building Character
3. Developing Pathways to Achievement
4. Building a Sense of Resiliency
5. Believing in a Positive Future

Who can apply for a grant?

A nonprofit entity, faith-based organizations, houses of worship, community nonprofits and nonprofit entities associated with a for-profit business are eligible. If the lead applicant is a community nonprofit or nonprofit associated with a for-profit business, a faith-based organization must be included as a partner.

Examples of Collaborations:

- If your organization is a community nonprofit, you will need three additional entities: a school district, a faith-based organization or house of worship, and a business. If the lead applicant is a faith-based organization or house of worship, two additional partners – a business and school district – are required.

- Nonprofit organizations from the faith-based, business and civic communities are eligible to lead a project, and must team up with an eligible public school district and a business and a faith-based organization to establish a mentorship program.

Eligible school districts are those in which at least 40% of the student population is economically disadvantaged or has a graduation rate below 92%. All students from the eligible district, regardless of socioeconomic status, will be eligible to participate in the program. Local partnerships will develop programs that serve students grades 5 – 12 (programs may serve students in one or more grade levels).

Applicant Eligibility & Qualifications

Community Connectors programs will reflect broad and deep collaborations in the community. Lead applicants will be responsible for building those collaborations among faith-based organizations, community nonprofits, the business community and school districts.

Lead applicants must *all of these criteria* to be eligible:

- Be a nonprofit entity. Faith-based organizations, houses of worship, community nonprofits, and nonprofit entities associated with a for-profit business are eligible. If the lead applicant is a community nonprofit or nonprofit associated with a for-profit business, a faith-based organization must be included as a partner.

- The lead entity MUST partner with an eligible school district in which at least 40% of the student population is economically disadvantaged or has a graduation rate below 92%. The partnership must include the school district; however programs can target one school within a district. Nonprofit organizations may partner with multiple school districts provided that one of the districts meets the 40% or higher economically disadvantaged student population or less than 92% graduation rate threshold.

- Collaborate with at least one business or industry partner. (Lead nonprofit organizations affiliated with for-profit companies may partner with those companies.)

What districts, JVSD, STEM and charter schools are considered eligible to take part?
Programs can partner with an eligible school district in which at least 40% of the student population is economically disadvantaged or has a graduation rate below 92%. JVSD, STEM and charter (community) schools, like school districts, are not eligible to be the lead applicant, but can be considered as a partner. JVSD, STEM and charter schools are considered districts unto themselves for the purposes of this grant. You can find the list of eligible charter schools here and a list of JVSD and STEM schools here. JVSD, STEM and charter schools not on this list may also be a partner as long as there is at least one eligible school district, JVSD, STEM or charter school partnering on the grant.

Can you partner with just one school within the district?
The partnership must include the school district: however, programs may choose to target one school within an economically disadvantaged or low-performing school district.

What is the timeframe to apply and when will the grant be awarded?
Deadline for application submission is Friday, March 6, 2015 at 5:00PM.

- Grants are expected to be awarded April 2015.
- Assessment, planning, and training must be complete by September 2015.
- All awardees must be ready to implement selected programs by September 2015.

What funds are available and how will the funds be awarded?
This program has $10 million to award from the lottery profit funds for initiatives that encourage community-led and values-driven mentoring relationships that benefit students and schools, and result in high levels of hopefulness for all involved. The maximum award is $500,000, which will be awarded over three years. In year one the state will match up to $3 for every $1 local cash/in-kind investment, year two the state will match up to $2 for every $1 local cash/in-kind investment, and year three will be a up to $1 state match for each $1 local cash/in-kind investment. The local cash/in-kind contribution does not have to be constant across the three program years; however, the total grant award will not be greater than three times the local contribution.

General

1. Can I submit more than one grant application?
   While nothing prohibits multiple grant applications, organizations should be cognizant of the time and resources necessary for each successful program. Additionally, each application must meet the program's requirements for collaboration for each grant submitted and include all required documentation and paperwork for each submission.

2. Is there a word limit for the project proposal?
   There is no specific word limit, but applications must be in 11-point Arial-type font, single-spaced, and submitted on the application template. There can be no more than 12 pages of text, excluding the attachments.

3. Can the application be worked on over several days and saved?
   Yes. You can download the application. Save it to your computer's desktop, and upload it when it is complete.

4. Are programs that use college students as mentors eligible for the grant?
   As long as the application, at a minimum, has all of the requisite partners, then the type of programming is up to the applicant.

5. Is there a minimum amount of time required for mentoring?
   There is not a minimum amount of mentoring required as long as it meets the needs of the students involved.

6. Can students be mentored virtually?
   All groups applying for grant funds can develop their own innovative and unique mentor programs; however, all programs must include Community Connector's principles of hope building and utilize best practices to ensure program success.

7. What standards/best practices will be used for child safety?
   Mentoring best practices are expected to be utilized in the Community Connectors program and how those practices will be included in the program is required to be described in the application. Background checks are required in accordance with local school policies and applicants should budget for background checks. The school or school district have an obligation under Ohio law depending on the role of the individual working with students, the level of access to students, and its own policies. Boards that have adopted a background check policy for volunteers must do so according to ORC 109.575. Contractors must receive a background check if required per ORC 3319.391.

8. Is the mentoring curriculum provided or is it up to the applicant organization to develop a program that follows the core principles?
   It is up to the organization to adopt or develop a program that addresses the Community Connectors core principles and meets the needs of students served.

9. Is there a required mentor-mentee ratio?
   There is not a required mentor-mentee ratio. Partners are required to make sure that the ratio meets the needs of students being served.

10. Can grant funds be used to hire an external evaluator?
    Yes. Grant funds can be used for external evaluation.

11. Is there any funding available to provide mentoring to students?
    Community Connectors is a 10 million dollar grant program that is funded by the State of Ohio that focuses on connecting at-risk students to mentors in their community. The grant provided 3-to-1 matching grants that will help give more Ohio students access to role models who can help motivate and inspire them, as well as help them develop skills that lead to success in school and the workplace.

12. Can Community Connectors funds be used for already existing projects?
    Community Connector funds can be used for already existing projects as well as a new program. All Community Connectors projects, however, must address the program's five core principles.

13. If a district is high poverty but NOT low performing, is it still an eligible district?
    Yes. A school district is an eligible partner for a grant as long as it meets the threshold for either high poverty or low performance. An eligible school district is not required to be both high poverty and low performing.

14. Can a program have paid mentors?
    Yes. Please keep in mind grant recipients will be those organizations that propose creating sustainable, replicable, and innovative programs that impact the lives of Ohio's children.

15. Will this grant be offered again next year?
    We will not know until the next budget is released if there will be another round of Community Connectors. Please refer to the website for updates and information.

16. Are individual schools that have 40% or higher poverty rates able to apply, even if their district as a whole doesn't meet 40%?
    No. According to the enacting legislation, the partnership included on the application must be with an eligible school district, not a single school.

17. Is the mentoring activity required to take place at a school or can it occur at other locations in the community?
    Community Connectors mentoring activity is not required to take place at a school and may take place at any other facility suitable and safe for the students participating in the program.

18. Can students be mentored by faith-based groups?
    Yes. Please keep in mind that no proselytization is permitted during the mentorship process.

19. Can youth groups mentor students?
    Yes. Applicants wishing to propose a program that utilizes youth groups as peer-to-peer mentors, however, should consider whether the Community Connectors core principles could be shared among peer groups in the same way they might though intergenerational relationships. Successful applications will be able to demonstrate how the Community Connector core principles will be shared between mentors and students.

Application

1. What supporting documents does the lead organization need to apply for the grant?
   Applicants will need an IRS determination letter as proof of nonprofit status to apply. Applicants are required to submit a signed "Nature of Partnership" agreement that demonstrates collaboration, a signed Community Connectors Grant Assurances document, as well as several documents that describe specific program elements. These documents are listed in the "How to Apply" section of the application.
   Applicants are also encouraged to submit letters of support, copies of consent or assent forms, or previous evaluation or research studies. These documents are optional.

Grant Partners

1. How many projects may a school district be a partner?
   A district can partner with as many applicants as their capacity allows.

2. Do we need to have signatures from all of the school districts involved in the grant proposal or only the school districts that meet the eligibility requirements)?
   Signatures are required for all school districts included in the grant proposal.

3. Can a non-public school serve as the district partner on the grant application?
   No. A nonpublic school does not meet the school district eligibility requirement, but is welcomed as an additional partner once the minimum required partners are included.

4. Is the Buckeye United School District eligible?
   Yes, the Buckeye United School District is eligible.

5. Do lead applicants and partners need to have a full audit conducted?
   No. Lead applicants and partners should keep in mind that a state audit is a possibility as the receiver of state funds and are required to utilize standard accounting procedures and principles.

6. Can an applicant partner with more than one faith based or business organization?
   Yes, as long as the applicant meets the basic eligibility requirements.

7. Does the faith-based organization partnering with a school district need to be located within the district boundary?
   There is not a geographic restriction for partners.

8. Can a partner be a school in an eligible school district or do you need to form a partnership with the entire district (e.g., administration)?
   The district must agree to and sign the partnership agreement. However, the proposed program can focus on a single school within the eligible district.

9. Is there a limit to the number of schools that can be served within the eligible district named on the application?
   No. The capacity of the organization will determine the number of schools that can be served.

10. Is a for-profit organization an eligible lead applicant?
    A for-profit organization cannot be the lead applicant.

11. Are non-profit parochial schools eligible to participate? What types of partners besides a business are needed?
    A non-profit parochial school that qualifies as a faith-based organization would need to partner with both a business and an eligible school district to participate in the grant.

12. Can an ESC be the lead applicant?
    ESCs, as government entities, are not eligible to be the lead applicant on the grant and do not qualify as a school district partner. As long as the application reflects the minimum partnerships, additional partners, such as ESCs, are welcomed.

13. Are eSchools eligible for the Community Connectors grant?
    Yes. As charter (community) schools, e-schools are eligible to participate in the grant as a partner as long as they meet the other eligibility criteria. A list of charter schools that meet these criteria is posted on the website.

14. Can a community foundation serve as the fiscal agent?
    A community foundation that is a nonprofit entity can serve as a fiscal agent for a Community Connectors program.

15. Can state-wide organizations submit one application to work with multiple school districts?
    Each application must reflect local partnerships.

16. Can a nonprofit organization be considered the “business” for the purposes of the grant?
    Yes. A non-profit, especially a business centric non-profit, can serve as the business partner in a collaboration. In such an instance, the application must declare that the non-profit is serving as the business partner and should explain how the non-profit is capable of fulfilling that role. A non-profit cannot fulfill two positions in a collaboration at the same time. A non-profit that wants to be considered a business partner must also collaborate with a faith-based organization and an eligible school district in order to be considered for funding.

17. Would religiously affiliated Institutions of Higher Education (IHE's) qualify as a faith-based organization?
    Yes, a religiously affiliated institution of higher education can serve as the faith-based organization in a collaboration. In such an instance, the application must declare that the IHE is serving as the faith-based organization and should explain how the IHE is capable of fulfilling that role. An IHE cannot fulfill two positions in a collaboration at the same time, meaning any IHE that wants to be considered a faith-based organization must also collaborate with a business and eligible school district in order to be considered.

18. Can a community college or other state institution of higher education serve as a lead on the grant proposal?
    Yes. A community college or other state institution of higher education may serve as the lead applicant on a grant proposal. As a nonprofit entity, the IHE would be required to have a faith-based organization and business partner, as well as an eligible school district.

19. Can the partnering school district act as fiscal agent for the grant funds?
    Yes. Generally, the lead applicant should be the fiscal agent, but it is possible for another member of the partnership to utilize its expertise and capacity to manage the program's accounting.

20. Can an applicant contract with a school district, ESC or partner to act as fiscal agent?
    Yes. The grantee could contract with the ESC to act as a fiscal agent. However, Community Connectors intends to encourage partnerships that allow multiple organizations with various assets to collaborate to support mentor programming. Successful programs will capitalize on the capacities of partners willing to share their expertise and resources in support of an effective program.

21. Will you be putting out a list of eligible STEM schools or JVSDs?
    Yes. The list of eligible school partnerships has been updated to include both STEM schools and JVSDs. You can find a copy of the list here.

22. Would a municipal government qualify as a business or nonprofit partner?
    No. As long as the application reflects the minimum partnerships, however, additional partners, such as municipal governments, are welcomed.

23. For the Community Connectors grant, what types of organizations fulfill the "faith-based" requirement?
    Any organization whose mission is based on the belief that every child's life has a purpose, and that instilling values such as hard work, discipline, and personal responsibility are necessary to ensuring that purpose is fulfilled, is eligible to be an application's faith-based partner. While faith or religion may be the basis for this belief, a group does not have to be affiliated with an organized religion or faith tradition to be considered a faith-based partner; secular, non-religious, values driven organizations also qualify. What is most important, and necessary to meet the faith based organization requirement, is a dedication to children that is focused on finding the worth of each child, ensuring the child understands and absorbs that worth, and harnessing the understanding to

achieve a fulfilling life. Both faith-based and values driven organizations that are not religiously affiliated may use the signed Nature of Partnership Agreement to explain how their mission is based on finding and developing a purpose for each child's life.

24. What is the intended primary role(s) of the faith-based organization's participation for the grant?
    There are no restrictions on the manner in which each type of partner may participate in the grant program. Instead, the roles of each partner should be determined by the applicants, based on the ways that each partner brings and builds capacity to the collaboration. Successful applicants will maximize the various assets of each partner for the benefit of young people in the program.

25. Would an organization like Big Brothers Big Sisters qualify as a 'values-based organization'?
    Like business partners and nonprofit civic associations, faith-based organizations, both religiously affiliated and values-driven, are responsible for identifying themselves as that particular type of partner on the application. Faith-based organizations then have an opportunity to describe how they fill this particular role in the nature of partnership agreement.

26. Are organizations in the process of attaining 501c3 status eligible to apply for the grant?
    If a community nonprofit organization has not received taxed exempt status from the IRS, the organization may not be the lead applicant. However, that organization would still be eligible to serve as a partner on an application.

27. Do non-profit agencies have to have an IRN number to be able to apply for the Community Connectors grant?
    No. Organizations will be issued an IRN if awarded a grant to facilitate transfer of funds.

Funding

1. Are there limitations on the use of funds?
   Yes, funds must be spent in accordance with state and federal laws. Specific limitations are outlined in the Community Connectors Grant Assurances document that must be signed by each lead applicant. The program plan and budget will also serve as a limitation because programs must adhere to terms of their grant award. To the extent an applicant proposes to use funds in a manner otherwise prohibited, a grant may still be awarded on the stipulation and agreement of the lead applicant that such usage will not occur. The Department of Education will work to notify any potential applicant prior to the grant award to ensure the program is workable under such restrictions.

2. How do you define in-kind contribution? Are in-kind contributions allowable for the local match?
   Local contributions may take the form of in-kind contributions or cash. In-kind contributions are limited to personnel time. If the personnel are currently funded by another source, the applicant must pay particular attention to all rules associated with that funding source and ensure that they are not supplanting existing funds. Cash contributions may include donated funds from applicant partners including businesses, community nonprofits, other faith-based organizations, and school districts (excluding state funds).

3. How can the funds be used?
   Grant funds must go toward supporting activities and personnel that deliver the Community Connectors mentoring program. The grant does not allow for indirect costs.

4. Is there any general guidance regarding match funds?
   Local cash contributions restrictions are, in large part, dictated by the terms of the funding rather than restrictions of the Community Connectors program. Applicants should review the restrictions of any funding they currently receive to determine whether those funds can be used as a local match for a state grant.

5. What resources can be used for the local contribution to draw down Community Connectors funds?
   Local contributions may take the form of in-kind contributions or cash. In-kind contributions are limited to personnel time. This means, any allowable salary or wages paid to a current employee whose time will be redirected or dedicated to the community connectors programs can be used to draw down state matching funds.

6. What is meant by in-kind investment?
   An in-kind investment consists of goods or services used in support of the project for which no reimbursement is made using grant funds.

7. Can grant funds be used for the salaries of clergy or other faith-based organization personnel who are working on Community Connector programming?
   The grant assurances do not allow public dollars to be spent in support of proselytization. Employees of certain types of faith-based organizations are sometimes required to perform ministry or proselytization as part of their daily responsibilities. The salaries, wages, or benefits of these types of employees cannot be paid using a Community Connectors grant because those funds would be either directly or indirectly spent in support of proselytization.

8. Can volunteer hours be included the in-kind contribution?
   Volunteer hours are normally not sufficient to qualify as an in-kind contribution. However, in a situation where a paid employee is relieved of employment obligations to be given an opportunity to participate in a mentorship program, that employee's time may qualify as an in-kind contribution.

For example, a company is a business partner on a Community Connectors grant. To encourage its employees to act as mentors in the program, the company allows those that sign up and participate in the program to dedicate five hours each week to the program. Employees are not required to take vacation or leave for these five hours each week and continue to receive their normal compensation, even though they are not working for the employer during those hours.

To properly capture this type of in-kind contribution, applicants should be able to show how many mentors they except to participate as well as the total number of hours the mentors will spend mentoring while still being compensated by their employer.

9. We have received a number of questions regarding the local match requirement.
   -Does the lead partner have to have cash on hand for matching funds?
   -The FAQ states that state funds from school districts are excluded from being part of the match. Are those the only funds excluded?

   Local cash contributions restrictions are, in large part, dictated by the terms of the funding rather than restrictions of the Community Connectors program. Applicants should review the restrictions of any funding they currently receive to determine whether those funds can be used as a local match for a state grant.

   Local contributions may take the form of in-kind contributions or cash. In-kind contributions are limited to personnel time. This means, any allowable salary or wages paid to a current employee whose time will be redirected or dedicated to the community connectors programs can be used to draw down state matching funds.

   An in-kind investment consists of goods or services used in support of the project for which no reimbursement is made using grant funds.

10. <u>Does an applicant need to have matching grants in hand at the time of application submission or could the applicant have a plan for matching grants after the awarded?</u>

    A plan for matching funds would work for application submission, however, please keep in mind that if awarded, funds cannot be drawn down until applicant can give proof of matching funds.

Website

1. Where on the Community Connectors website can I find the list of eligible school districts and charter (community) schools?
   The list of eligible school districts and charter (community) schools can be found here.

2. How do I receive an application for Community Connectors?
   Applications are available on the Community Connectors website under the “Apply” tab. You can find the Community Connectors application here.

The Community Connectors Advisory Board consists of diverse members of the faith-based, civic and community and business organizations and will advise the State Superintendent of Instruction on the awarding of grants to the lead organizations and school(s)/or school districts. The Advisory Board will review the grant applications and scoring, and make recommendations to the Superintendent of Public for the grant awards.

How do I get a copy of the application? Visit www.CommunityConnectors.Ohio.gov. All applications must be submitted by 5:00p.m., March 6, 2015.

Thank you for your interest in Ohio's innovative Community Connectors grant program.

For questions, visit: www.CommunityConnectors.ohio.gov and register for the grant webcast.