

Questions and Answers Related to Fiscal Year 2016 Vocational-Technical Education Enhancement Grant Application and Administrative Issues

The Vocational-Technical Education Enhancement Grant Planning Guide for FY16 was released on October 17, 2014. A follow-up technical assistance webcast was offered by Department staff on November 18, 2014, in which a prepared slide show was presented, along with the opportunity for registered participants to submit questions which were addressed after the formal presentation. Furthermore, during the webcast the offer was extended for additional questions to be submitted via email to be part of this overall "Q&A document" which seeks to provide thorough clarification to points submitted through both mediums.

Duplicative questions have been combined for the sake of brevity, and in some cases questions have been paraphrased for clarity.

Inquiries and corresponding answers focus on points in five topical areas:

- Questions Pertaining to Application and Improvement Plan Format
- Questions Pertaining to Application and Improvement Plan Process
- Questions Pertaining to the Transition from Approval of Enrollment Dependent Reimbursement to Concentrator-Based Allowable Reimbursement for Items Provided on a 1:1 Basis
- Questions Pertaining to Financial Issues
- Questions Pertaining to Eligibility: Grantees, Courses, Programs, Expenditures

The balance of this document presents the questions and the Department's responses based on the aforementioned categorical division.

Questions Pertaining to Application and Improvement Plan Format

Q: Is the EG FV4 required for the FY 2016 application?

A: As a result of a recent turn of events, yes. The Excel-based EGFV4 will be the format used for applicant submission and state review of the budget, along with any changes as deemed necessary by either the Department or the applicant college or LEA before the final grant award is determined.

Once that final grant award is established, that figure will be placed into ePeGS for use throughout the grant cycle.

Assuming "why" is a natural follow-up question, the answer is simple. The ePeGS system is more aligned with an allocation or fixed grant award than it is for a scenario in which the funding level may fluctuate, as can be the case with a percentage of enhancement grants. When schools submit an enhancement grant application the budget is subject to modification at the state level both before and after any potential imposition of an across-the-board reduction of awards.

Due to the existence of these variables, we have decided to make an amendment to the budgetary component of FY16 enhancement grant applications. Written guidance for use

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of the FY16 EGFV4 will be included in the amended enhancement grant planning guide which will be posted soon.

- Q: Will there be an assurance sign off page like in the past?
A: An actual assurance signatory page has been replaced by Assurance N (see page 9 of the administrative planning guide, in the Request for Grant Award section) which reads, "Electronic, online submission of an application for Vocational-Technical Education Enhancement Grant funding shall be considered as bearing the electronic signature of chief administrator of the school or community college district, and such action indicates full acceptance of all assurances by the applicant."
- Q: Do we submit an improvement plan in addition to answering questions/prompts, or does the improvement plan consist of the answers to the questions/prompts?
A: Applicants will be allowed to submit each of their individual program improvement plans, but that is not required. The program improvement plan should provide each program with the answers to respond to the writing prompts.
- Q: Are application still to include a separate statement of need, planned improvements, and a description of evaluation, or are those covered through the prompted responses?
A: Those issues should be addressed through the responses to the writing prompts. A complete response to the first three of the prompts would likely be impossible to compose without establishing need and intended solution.
- Q: Will the writing prompt questions be those find in Appendix V of the planning guide?
A: Yes.
- Q: For writing prompt "G" of the FY16 Enhancement Grant Program Improvement Plan, it states, "Describe the composition of the program's advisory committee." Do you want us to list the advisory committee members' names (and affiliation) there, send a list separately, or keep a copy on file at the local level?
A: If only one of committee member's name or affiliation is provided, the group being represented is more important. Though not directly part of the question, referenced writing prompt "G" seeks more than a list of membership.
- Q: Can you provide schools with a sample response for each of the writing prompts? Or at least bullet points of guiding statements?
A: The intent of the rubrics included as part of Appendix V is to provide examples of varied depth. Applicants will be given the opportunity to revise responses if deemed non-responsive.
- Q: Can you describe a non responsive application?
A: There are two general ways in which an application might be deemed non responsive. First, would be a failure to submit the application in the proper format as described in the FY16 planning guide. The second would be inadequate address of key elements of a program improvement plan, measurable objectives, increases in career-related skills, and

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a viable advisory committee which both meets program guidelines and is active in the development of the improvement plan are all non-responsive. Failure to provide depth to the writing prompts would result in a call for more information before an application could be considered as meeting a qualifying threshold.

Q: How much of a change is expected in the narrative portion of the application?

A: Most of last year's applications were written in a way that displayed planning, thought, a clear explanation of one or more issues needing to be addressed and a well-defined plan for resolution. Others did little more than express an intent to buy things, and in some cases didn't involve key contributors in the planning process. Aside from the required inclusion of measurable objectives, the fuller applications from FY15 will likely not require a significant expansion.

The revised process seeks to prioritize program enhancement, through improvement(s) or necessary augmentation, over entitlements. It may well be an evolving, dynamic process over grant cycles, but it is a start.

Q: What are the consequences for not meeting the measureable grant-year objectives?

A: No consequence has been discussed. The requirement is not intended for punitive purposes, but is intended to help the state and local educators better gauge growth, impact, and potentially, the need for plan adjustment.

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Q: When did industry-recognized credentials (IRC) become part of the enhancement grant? If that is or becomes a requirement can EG funds be used to help with costs related to accreditation?

A: There is no IRC requirement tied to enhancement grants. The only time it is mentioned in the planning guide is as an example in the rubric to illustrate under the key element of Specific Industry Skills what might help propel a program improvement plan from merely meeting qualifying thresholds for an award to being exceptional.

Q: If a measurable objective is linked to TSA scores, that year's TSA scores will not be available in time to submit for final payment. Will the final payment date be changing?

A: The final date for reimbursement requests remains the last day of March, but the progress report is not due until May 15, 2015. If data is unavailable by the time the report is submitted, an amended report can be submitted once such needed information is at hand.

Q: There is a PDF online (<http://dese.mo.gov/college-career-readiness/career-education/program-management-account-finance/grants>) entitled Anticipated Changes for FY2016- are all of the changes listed in this document in place for the FY 2016 program?

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A: The operative word is *anticipated*. Based on guidance from the advisory committee of local career technical educators formed to help steer modifications to the administration and delivery of the enhancement the anticipated change which would have limited each program at each eligible institution or school to being funded once every three years was eliminated from consideration.

Q: Are multiple programs from the same school able to apply for funds through the same grant application in FY16?

A: Absolutely. The only change for FY16 is that each program will have its own improvement plan that will determine the narrative response to the writing prompts described in Appendix V of the planning guide.

Questions Pertaining to Application and Improvement Plan Process

Q: Clarification of understanding, we are expected to complete the enhancement grant paperwork but the system will not be ready till January with it being due February 6th?

A: The short turnaround is only applicable to the data entry portion of the application process, and even less so with the newly announced use of the Excel-based EGFV4 for initial submission of budgets and state approval of total grant amounts. Planning and resulting development of narrative responses to published writing prompts that will be used by web application under development by the Leader contractor can and should be done now. The web application will be made available once finalized and tested. At that point narrative language from word processing software should be able to be pasted into the application's text boxes.

In fact, much more time has been provided for FY16 application development than schools had for FY15 grants. Release of the FY16 guidelines on October 17, 2014, provides 112 days until the deadline for applications to be submitted. The FY15 application process was nearly half that amount time, 63 days.

Q: Is there a time of day included in the February 6, 2015 deadline (Due by noon, 5pm, midnight)?

A: Provided the application is received with a February 6 timestamp, it has met the deadline.

Q: Exactly what is meant by the planning guide's reference to "negotiation" when discussing a budget.

A: That language has been revised in the amended planning guide. In instances when an applicant wishes to resubmit a budget it remains subject to state approval.

Q: Just to confirm: If a school who doesn't receive a grant reduction needs to lower their grant award due to a budget cut / matching fund deficit, can they do so?

A: Provided that there is good cause for such a request, yes.

Q: Will the FY16 enhancement grant application process be competitive?

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A: Certainly not in the traditional sense. One application will not be measured against another, and applications will not be scored, but in theory an application may be determined to be non-responsive and therefore not eligible for funding. Should that occur the applicant will be given 30 days to take necessary steps to qualify for funding.

Q: Will grants be reduced before or after disallowed items? If I have a large item disallowed, is that item removed before a reduction percentage is applied?

A: Reductions have occurred after all budgets are reviewed and any necessary adjustments have been made, such as removal of a disallowed cost. The removal of a large item from a grant's budget would occur only if it were specifically on the list of disallowed costs, or if it had no direct relationship to instruction in an eligible course.

Reductions only occur because the demand for funds outweighs the amount of available money. The state doesn't know the extent of reductions until all budgets have gone through an initial approval to provide a tally from which cuts can be made to establish financial balance.

Questions Pertaining to the Transition from Approval of Enrollment Dependent Reimbursement to Concentrator-Based Allowable Reimbursement for Items Provided on a 1:1 Basis

Q: Can examples be provided to better illustrate how the formulas determine how many units can be funded when provided to students on a 1:1 basis?

A: Before answering the question, it is worth noting that the planning guide's description of situations where a smaller average number of career cluster concentrators are counted for a particular program/course has been rewritten for the sake of clarity.

That stated, the first point to stress is that the extent of support provided by enhancement grants is shifting from the number of students in a given classroom, or in the classrooms of multiple teachers in the same program area to the average number of concentrators the affected career education program has had over the past three years. Secondly, under no circumstances is reimbursement available for more than 33 units per classroom intended for distribution to students on a 1:1 basis eligible for reimbursement from enhancement grant funds.

Those two points established, each eligible course will be part of a state-approved career education program which either has fewer than 33 concentrators or a number greater than that threshold. If the number is lower, the grantee will be eligible for enhancement grant reimbursement for a number of units equal to the number of concentrators. If the of concentrator count is greater than 33, reimbursement will be available for the number of units equal to the course's enrollment provided that number does not exceed 33.

A key factor for those situations where enhancement grant funds won't be eligible to reimburse the costs of every unit being provided on a 1:1 basis is that no restriction exists

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that prevents the grantee from using multiple funding streams to cover costs. Two funding streams can't be used to pay for the same piece of equipment or non-consumable supply, but can be used in combination to provide support of an overall project.

- Q: Will 1:1 be negotiated for programs that are working to improve the program significantly with the goal of increasing enrollment in a high demand area?
- A: The three-year average of concentrators will be the set measure for programs which have been in place for enough years to have such an average, but that average could change on an annual basis. Negotiated numbers will be established for programs with less than three years, but those negotiations will focus on the number of units the grantee needs for 1:1 provision during the grant year, not for future growth.
- Q: Can we figure what our number is before requesting computers, for example, so we don't request more than the number figures out to be so we don't indeed owe a repayment?
- A: Repayment would only be an issue if the grantee were reimbursed for more units than allowed by formula.
- Q: If you have multiple high schools in your district, will the average number of concentrators be figured from the entire district? Or from the high school into which the equipment was placed?
- A: The number of concentrators for the building where the units are to be located. For the same course in the same program in different high schools, it could be feasible that 10 units would qualify for grant reimbursement in one high school while 14 would be eligible in the other.
- Q: Would it be possible to use a 3 year average for number of qualifying students? It is difficult to know how many students we will have when the grant is due before we even schedule students.
- A: The use of an average number of concentrators provides applicants with a number that is available before planning begins. For those scenarios with fewer than 33, the concentrator average will not inform you how many students may need a unit provided on a 1:1 basis, but it will allow you to plan for how many units will be eligible for grant reimbursement during the grant cycle. For those with a average number of concentrators greater than 33, the number of units eligible for reimbursement will equal that of students up to 33.
- Q: Is the number of concentrators per cluster that will be used to substitute for enrollment dependent the same numbers that are listed in the Concentrator Report for Perkins IV?
- A: Yes, when examining the number of units provided to students on a 1:1 basis and then charged to the grant for reimbursement, the Perkins Cluster report will be used to verify that as an allowable expenditure.
- Q: How does DESE know how many concentrators we have? I have data going back to FY11, but I'm not sure that has been reported anywhere??
- A: The concentrator information is submitted in the Missouri Student Identification System (MOSIS) June Student Core, by each LEA and applicable postsecondary institution.

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- Q: Since the state will not be checking classroom enrollment when reimbursements are approved what safeguard will be in place to ensure honesty?
- A: Oversight of the eligibility of expenditures is simply shifting to a monitoring/audit process opposed to the system which has been in place. If evidence supports ineligible expenditures having been reimbursement repayment of funds is a likely result.
- Q: Enrollment Dependent: Are there other items besides computers that are typically enrollment dependent? If so, can you give examples.
- A: There are a number of things which might be provided to students on a 1:1 basis. Examples that quickly come to mind are oscilloscopes and welders.
- Q: Is the number of concentrators per cluster that will be used to substitute for enrollment dependent the same numbers that are listed in the Concentrator Report for Perkins IV?
- A: Yes
- Q: We are beginning this year to test students as completers in our Business and FACS program, will our grant not be eligible at all?
- A: While there might not be a significant difference in the number of completers and concentrators, the latter is both likely larger and the one which establishes reimbursement limits pertaining to supplying students with equipment or non-consumable supplies. For other expenditure issues neither is a factor. As with the immediately prior answer, if three years of data is not available, this is sorted through negotiation.

Questions Pertaining to Financial Issues

- Q: Can the 80% expenditure requirement be clarified?
- A: If a grantee is awarded \$10,000 in enhancement grant funding, the expectation will exist that no less than 80% (\$8,000) will be expended. Should a grantee fail to expend at an **average of 80%** over two awards, then a penalty will be imposed for that school's next request. An example, using identical \$10,000 awards for two grant periods would carry the expectation that the school averaged \$8,000 for each of the two grants, whether that was actually a minimum of \$8,000 each year, or \$6,500 one year and \$9,500 the other.

Should the grantee expend at an average of 80% over the two grant cycle, they may apply for a third cycle with no concern of a penalty. Should the expenditure rate not meet the 80% average expenditure expectation, a penalty would be accessed through a maximum award based on the lesser of the two following options:

- 80% of the grantee's average expenditure level for the two most recent Vocational Technical Education Enhancement Grant awards; or
- 80% of the allowable costs from the grantee's application.

Using the same example from the first paragraph of two grant cycle awards of \$10,000, and average expenditure of \$8,000 would result in no penalty, while a reduction would

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result in a third \$10,000 request if the an average expenditure from the first two had been \$6,500. Based on the above bullet points, the lesser amount would be 80% of \$6,500, so the third request of \$10,000 would be reduced to \$5,200.

Q: Does the grantee's match count toward the 80% expenditure expectation?

A: No, there is not a direct relationship. However, there is an assurance that local expenditures will equal a certain percentage of the expenditure of state funds, but local expenditure is not directly factored into the 80% equation. The 80% expenditure expectation is an attempt to encourage careful planning and a resulting high percentage of awarded funds to be properly used in support of career technical education.

Q: In regard to fully utilizing the funds requested, does the term *awarded funds* indicate the amount of funds we requested or the amount of funds that was approved for reimbursement?

A: Awarded state funds are those approved for a grant.

Q: Do the consecutive grant periods begin with FY 15 & FY 16?

A: No. FY15 expenditures have no bearing on the 80% expectation. That policy takes effect July 1, 2015 with no consideration for anything which has taken place beforehand.

Q: So there will be no reimbursement payments until the end of the year due to needing proof of improvement or meeting objectives?

A: That is incorrect. The planning guide states that through use of ePeGS, reimbursement requests can be made monthly or quarterly, or at the end of a trimester, or semester, but must be done no later than March 31, 2016.

Q: Will the Final Expenditure Report (FER) be submitted through ePeGS?

A: Yes

Questions Pertaining to Eligibility: Grantees, Courses, Programs, Expenditures

Q: Are Vocational-Technical Education Enhancement Grants available for K-8 districts?

A: Grants are available only for certain courses taught in state-approved career technical education programs. Eligible courses are not taught below the secondary level.

Q: We are in the process of certifying a program. If the program does not receive certification of state approval by Feb 6, 2015, does this mean it will not be eligible for a FY16 enhancement grant?

A: No. You may apply, but we cannot award a grant if your program is not state approved by July 1, 2015.

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Q: Why was the Business Education course Computer Applications removed from the eligibility list for enhancement grant funding?

A: The vast majority of course gain their qualifying eligibility through alignment with an occupation projected as being high demand on a statewide basis and generally requiring less formal education than attainment of a bachelor's degree. In recent years Computer Applications has been erroneously aligned to the high demand occupation, Computer User Support Specialist, which is more of an information technology position.

Using the online O*Net crosswalk, four occupations were found for which a direct relationship could be established for Computer Applications: Computer Operator, Data Entry Keyers, Word Processors and Typists, Computer Programmers, and Software Developers. Of these, the latter two are ineligible due to requiring a bachelor's degree while high demand projections for the former three are classified below the required "A" or "B" levels.

Q: On page 18 when it states that "All occupations selected are expected to have at least 50 job openings annually on a statewide basis over the ten(10) year projection of 2010 through 2020", is that number arrived at by adding the growth and replacement columns, then dividing by 10? Can you please let me know how that is determined?

A: The determination is made as described in the question.

Q: Will all of the PLTW computer science courses be counted as high demand, just as the PLTW Biomedical and PLTW Engineering are? Would we be allowed to plan to include these courses in the enhancement for future years as part of the roll out of our new computer curriculum?

A: For FY16 the answer is yes, but the list of eligible courses is an annual determination.

Q: Is PLTW, CSE part of the high demand list for PLTW Engineering. If that is the only course you are teaching in the PLTW computer science roster of courses, PLTW says it is considered part of the engineering path. Am I allowed to include it in enhancement this year?

A: The FY16 EGFV4 will include a list of all eligible PLTW courses, including the computer science content.

Q: I noticed that Welding is not on the High Demand List for FY16, is that correct?

A: That course did not have a qualifying, aligned high-demand occupation in the statewide projection. However, the planning guide details alternate ways to that a course may possibly qualify for enhancement grant support.

Q: The Enhancement Grant Administrative Planning Guide says that a program may be eligible if it has had at least 10 completers per year who were employed in a related job at a rate of 80% or higher for the previous two years. What documentation will be used to provide to verify this?

A: The information will be verified by reviewing Screen 26 in Core Data.

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- Q: Do we still need to teach at least 3 different courses that are considered high demand in the classroom to be eligible for the grant? If not, what is the minimum number?
- A: That requirement is not included in the FY16 planning guide. However, each state-approved program seeking funds is subject to the requirements of their program area. If an applicant fails to offer enough credits within the program to maintain state approval, that request for funding (or at least the portion for that specific program) is ineligible.
- Q: Does the limit on instructor certification, pg. 12, eliminate instructor training for PLTW from the enhancement grant?
- A: No
- Q: Are workstations still allowable under “Other Allowable Costs?” If so, and the unit price exceeds \$1,000, is it considered “Instructional Equipment” or does it still fall under “Other Allowable Costs?”
- A: Furniture is ineligible for enhancement grant funding in FY16 regardless of name, category or cost.