Frequently Asked Questions About the 2023 STEM Talent Challenge Program
Updated April 11, 2023

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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 a native organization; or
5. a consortium of any of the entities described in subparagraphs (1) through (4).

For-profit entities that are able to demonstrate that they are accredited 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 2023 STEM Talent Challenge Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) carefully, and to contact the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (OIE) at oie@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[1], 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.[2] 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.

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

No. Any entity applying as a nonprofit must provide documentation that demonstrates its status as a nonprofit organization, including articles of incorporation, certificates of good standing, bylaws, and, if applicable, proof of tax-exempt status.

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[1] The Uniform Guidance may be accessed at https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200?toc=1

[2] The DOC STCs and Pre-Award Notification Requirements may be accessed at https://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/grants_management/policy/.

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. 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 7(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.

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. 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 7(a) of this document or Section G of the NOFO for contact information.

g. We are a new organization and/or first-time applicant for EDA grant programs. What requirements are necessary before I start, complete, and submit an application on sfgrants.eda.gov (EDGE)?

Economic Development Grants Experience (EDGE) requires registered organizations to designate an Authorized Representative to submit the application on sfgrants.eda.gov. This person will be listed on the application as the primary respondent to inquiries from EDA program staff. Applying organizations are responsible for maintaining the credentials necessary to designate an Authorized Representative.

Active SAM registration is required at the time of application and throughout the period of performance because non-federal entities are required to have a unique entity identifier (UEI) that is used to apply for, receive, and report on federal awards. The technical requirements and systems associated with generating these credentials require confirmation at each step and can be lengthy—especially for organizations without a (UEI)—and require interaction with multiple organizations outside of EDA. EDA recommends beginning registration as soon as possible to allow sufficient time for each step in the process.

h. Is an Alaska Native Village or Regional Corporation and eligible recipient under the STEM Talent Challenge.

Yes, Alaska Native Villages or Regional Corporations (as defined in or established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) are eligible for awards under the STEM Talent Challenge.

i. What is a *Federal laboratory* and what documents should I submit to EDA to demonstrate eligibility?

To begin, many Federal laboratories are eligible to apply under the STEM Talent Challenge as a nonprofit organization or an institution of higher education. EDA strongly encourages such entities to apply under the STEM Talent Challenge using those entity types.

To demonstrate eligibility as a Federal laboratory, an entity must include with its STEM Talent Challenge application demonstration that substantiates that the entity is a Federal laboratory. This may include the entity's articles of incorporation, bylaws, certificate of good standing, and authorizing statute and/or contract to operate a Federal laboratory.

EDA retains the discretion to determine whether an entity is eligible as a Federal laboratory for purposes of the STEM Talent Challenge. In making this determination, EDA will review the documentation listed above. EDA often looks to the definition of "laboratory" at 15 U.S.C. § 3710a(d)(2), but EDA has not officially adopted that language as the definition of "Federal laboratory" for the STEM Talent Challenge. Instead, EDA makes a case-by-case determination as to whether an entity is eligible as a Federal laboratory under the STEM Talent Challenge.

Like all STEM Talent Challenge applicants, an entity that wishes to apply as a Federal laboratory should verify, prior to applying, that the entity is authorized to receive federal grants and is also authorized to perform the scope of work of a STEM Talent Challenge grant. The method to verify this will vary by entity, but often includes reviewing the entity's articles of incorporation and, if applicable, government contract to operate a Federal laboratory.

Lastly, a Federal laboratory should pay special attention to the general rule that federal funds may not be used as matching share under the STEM Talent Challenge, discussed in Section D.2.iii.c. of the NOFO. While there are some exceptions (including federal grants made available under a federal statute that authorizes use of funds as match for other federal grant programs), funds appropriated by Congress to operate a Federal laboratory will generally not be allowable as matching share. This includes in-kind matching share funded with federal monies. A Federal laboratory wishing to use federal funds as matching share must include with its STEM Talent Challenge application documentation that verifies the funds may be used as matching share under a federal grant; however, EDA retains discretion in determining whether any such funds may be used as matching share under a STEM Talent Challenge award.

j. 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 EDGE. May the organization still apply for a grant under this NOFO?

In order to be considered for funding, applicants must submit a complete application by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 12, 2023 (which includes demonstrating SAM registration and applicant eligibility and which requires EDGE registration). EDA strongly encourages applicants who are in the process of forming or have formed but are not yet registered on EDGE to do so as soon as possible. Full application registration requirements include obtaining a unique entity identifier and an active registration in SAM.gov, a process that can take weeks. For further details, see Section D.9 of the NOFO.

k. 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.

l. Are previous or current STEM Talent Challenge recipients eligible to apply for this challenge?

Yes, previous or current STEM Talent Challenge recipients are eligible to apply for this funding. However, if an organization is currently implementing a prior-year EDA STEM Talent Challenge award and submitting an application to the 2023 STEM Talent Challenge under this NOFO, EDA will not consider that application for award unless all activities under the existing award, *including but not limited to final reporting requirements*, are completed and submitted to EDA prior to the start date of the new award - November 1, 2023.

If your organization has an active STEM Talent Challenge award when you are submitting your application, you will need to submit documentation showing that the scope of work of the current project will have been completed before the start date of the new award, if awarded.

m. 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[3], the STEM Talent Program is authorized under Section 30 of the Stevenson-Wydler Technology Innovation Act of 1980.[4] This authorization does not require applicants to meet specific distress criteria to be considered eligible.

n. 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.

o. 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.

p. What is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), and do I need one to apply?

As of April 4th, 2022, the federal government stopped requiring entities to have a DUNS number to apply for funding. This number has been replaced by the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Additional guidance on the implications of this transition is provided here: https://sam.gov/content/duns-uei.

q. If a university system has branch campuses, each with their own Unique Entity Identifier, can campuses submit unique applications, or would they all be considered submissions from the same entity - the university?

Applicants must have their own UEI to be considered a distinct applicant. As long as an individual UEI is provided for each application, applications can be submitted for different branch campuses.

r. According to the list of eligible applicants, my project must be supported by a State, a political subdivision of a State, or a native organization. What is a political subdivision of a State? How should I demonstrate the support of a State or a political subdivision of a State?

A political subdivision of a state is a unit of government created by and under the authority of a state, such as a county or city. To demonstrate the support of a State or a political subdivision of a State, an applicant may include a letter from executive branch officials (e.g. State governors, State cabinet members, mayors, or other municipal executives) and State and local legislators (e.g. State legislators, city councilpersons). Note that applicants that are a State, Indian tribe, city or other political subdivision of a State, or an institution of higher education that is 100% publicly controlled, need not demonstrate the support of a State or a political subdivision of a State.

2. CO-APPLICANTS, CONTRACTORS, AND SUBRECIPIENTS

a. Are co-applicants allowed? Must we designate a lead applicant for our application?

Co-applicants ARE allowed. However, in the event of an award, one of the recipients will need to serve as the fiscal agent for the grant and distribute funds to the co-recipient(s). It is not possible for more than one recipient to draw down award funds. It is not necessary to designate a lead applicant at the time of application.

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[3] 42 U.S.C. § 3121, et seq.

[4] 15 U.S.C. § 3723.

b. 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 7(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 B of the NOFO for a comprehensive checklist of the documents required for all co-applicants. All co-applicants must meet the eligibility requirements described above.

c. What differentiates a contractor from a co-applicant?

Co-applicants jointly manage and implement the scope of work of an award. In contrast, contractors provide goods and services for the applicant's or co-applicants' use in performing the scope of work of an award. For more information on determining whether a third-party is a contractor, see 2 CFR § 200.331 ("Subrecipient and contractor determinations").

Contracts must be procured in accordance with the procurement standards at 2 CFR §§ 200.317-327 of the Uniform Guidance (discussed above in question 1(b)).

d. What differentiates a subrecipient from a co-applicant?

Co-applicants jointly manage and implement the scope of work of an award. In contrast, subrecipients carry out a portion of project activities on behalf of the applicant or co-applicant(s). For more information on determining whether a third-party is a subrecipient, see 2 CFR § 200.331 ("Subrecipient and contractor determinations").

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.1 of the NOFO.

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

Applications should be submitted electronically via sfgrants.eda.gov (EDGE) and must be received by **11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on June 12, 2023.** 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/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.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."[5]

e. How many letters of support from a State, a political subdivision of a State, or a native organization 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,a political subdivision of a State (e.g., a county or a municipality), or a native organization that encompasses all or a substantial portion of the region served by the project.

f. The NOFO states that a pre-application needs assessment must be completed to determine employer skills needs in the regional economy. What is the purpose of this assessment, and how should it be conducted?

Projects should implement or scale STEM competency-based work-and-learn education and training models that are directly connected with the needs of employers in a regional economy. These needs should be evaluated, through a formal or informal needs assessment, meant to determine the types of skills needed by the drivers of regional innovation, including innovative businesses that employ STEM talent. Projects should be responsive to these assessed needs and should clearly indicate how workers will be prepared for employment.

An example of a formal needs analysis could include reviewing the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). An example of an informal needs analysis could include a verbal survey conducted of the region's employers.

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

The total amount of any federal award (up to $500,000 over a 24-month period of performance) is based on the entire period of performance, not per year with a given period of performance.

c. 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.
Budget narrative line items and whole budget totals should mathematically match the total project costs

[5] Office of Management and Budget, Intergovernmental Review (SPOC List), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf

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.

d. 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.

e. Can contractors who would be receiving funding from the award provide matching funds?

A provider of matching share, including an entity providing cash or in-kind contributions, may not serve as a contractor under an award for which it provides matching share. Thus, an entity providing matching share may not be paid with award funds to provide goods or services to the award recipient. In contrast, a provider of matching share may serve as a subrecipient under an award for which it provides matching share, if it is an eligible entity under this NOFO.

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.

The purchase of equipment and certain equipment installation may be eligible, but only to the extent that such costs support another eligible activity. Note, however, that as provided in Section C of the NOFO, construction costs, including the installation of equipment that disturbs the ground or modifies a structure, are not allowable costs under the STEM Talent Challenge.

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 and matching funding provided for this challenge be used to directly support program participants, such as through apprentice wages or stipends?

Yes. This program can pay for apprentice wages, stipends, and other resources directly to the student or worker. The STEM Talent Program is authorized under Section 30 of the Stevenson-Wydler Technology Innovation Act of 1980.[6] This statute does not prohibit the use of funds for this purpose.

i. 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

[6] 15 U.S.C. § 3723.

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 7(a) of this document or Section G of the NOFO for contact information.

j. 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.

k. 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 must be 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.

l. 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).

m. 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.

n. 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.[7]

o. Is there a benefit to "over-matching?" Will my application score higher if I include more than the minimum required match?

While over-matching is allowed for applicants to the STEM Talent Challenge, providing more match than is required will not cause an application to score more favorably in merit review.

[7] *See* Subpart E of the Uniform Guidance.

5. AWARD NOTIFICATION

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

All applicants should expect to receive grant award notification approximately 90-120 days from the application close data 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.

6. INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

a. Will EDA conduct an informational webinar?

EDA has posted a recorded webinar to the STEM website: https://www.eda.gov/funding/programs/stem-challenge.

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 oie@eda.gov or by phone at (202) 482-8001.