

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Technology Innovation Challenge Grants

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures.

SUMMARY: The Secretary establishes final selection criteria, procedures for evaluating and selecting applications, and procedures for submission of applications under the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program. The Secretary will use these selection criteria, selection procedures and application procedures in fiscal year 1997 (FY 1997) and in subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to make informed funding decisions on applications for technology projects having great promise for improving elementary and secondary education.

EFFECTIVE DATE: These selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures take effect on June 11, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Room 606D, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20208-5544. Telephone: (202) 208-3882. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program is authorized in Title III, section 3136, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6846).

Under this program the Secretary makes grants to consortia. Each consortium must include at least one local educational agency (LEA) with a high percentage or number of children living below the poverty line and may include other LEAs, private schools, State educational agencies, institutions of higher education, businesses, academic content experts, software designers, museums, libraries, or other appropriate entities. The Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program provides support to consortia that are developing, adapting, or expanding existing and new applications of technology to improve schools through activities that include continuous professional development for teachers and the development of high quality academic content that helps all children learn to challenging standards.

The Secretary published a notice of proposed selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures for the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program in the **Federal Register** on February 26, 1997 (62 FR 8687). Written public comments were due to the Secretary by March 28, 1997. Written comments were received from four parties. The Secretary has reviewed these comments and has determined that no modifications in the proposed selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures are warranted, except for editorial and technical revisions. An analysis of the comments and the Secretary's responses are contained in the Appendix to this notice.

Selection Criteria

The Secretary establishes selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures for the FY 1997 competition and subsequent competitions. The program statute (20 U.S.C. 6846(c)) requires the Secretary to give priority in awarding grants to consortia that demonstrate certain factors in their applications. The Secretary has addressed this mandate by incorporating these priority factors into the selection criteria.

The Secretary establishes the following unweighted selection criteria to evaluate applications:

(a) *Significance.* The Secretary reviews each proposed project for its significance by determining the extent to which the project—

(1) Offers a clear vision for the use of technology to help all students learn to challenging standards;

(2) Will achieve far-reaching impact through results, products, or benefits that are easily exportable to other settings and communities;

(3) Will directly benefit students by integrating acquired technologies into the curriculum to improve teaching and student achievement;

(4) Will ensure continuous professional development for teachers, administrators, and other individuals to further the use of technology in the classroom, library, or learning settings in the community;

(5) Is designed to serve areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or other areas with the greatest need for educational technology; and

(6) Is designed to create new learning communities among teachers, students, parents, and others, which contribute to State or local education goals for school improvement, and expand markets for high-quality educational technology or content.

(b) *Feasibility.* The Secretary reviews each proposed project for its feasibility by determining the extent to which—

(1) The project will ensure successful, effective, and efficient uses of technologies for educational reform that will be sustainable beyond the period of the grant;

(2) The members of the consortium or other appropriate entities will contribute substantial financial and other resources to achieve the goals of the project; and

(3) The applicant is capable of carrying out the project, as evidenced by the extent to which the project will meet the problems identified; the quality of the project design, including objectives, approaches, evaluation plan, and dissemination plan; the adequacy of resources, including money, personnel, facilities, equipment, and supplies; the qualifications of key personnel who would conduct the project; and the applicant's prior experience relevant to the objectives of the project.

Evaluation and Selection of Applications

Evaluation

The Secretary evaluates applications using unweighted selection criteria. The Secretary believes that the use of unweighted criteria is most appropriate because they will allow the reviewers maximum flexibility to apply their professional judgments in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in individual applications.

The Secretary also believes that due to the highly technical nature of the applications, it will be necessary to obtain clarification and additional information from applicants during the selection process. For the purposes of the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program, the Secretary may request highly rated applicants to submit additional information in response to specific questions raised during the application selection process for the FY 1997 competition and subsequent competitions. In accordance with 34 CFR 75.231, the Secretary also may request an applicant to submit additional information after the application has been selected for funding.

Selection Procedures

In applying the selection criteria, the Secretary will use a three-tier peer review process for the FY 1997 competition and subsequent competitions.

At each tier of the review process, panels of experts will read the applications under consideration to determine which applications are most

deserving of further consideration in light of the selection criteria. The Department will, to the extent feasible, use reviewers that represent three areas of expertise: (1) K-12 school-based educators who use new technologies for classroom instruction or curriculum development; (2) K-12 school-based administrators who have management responsibility for school-wide, system-wide, or state-wide technology applications; and (3) educational technology experts drawn from higher education, consulting firms, or technology-related firms.

At each tier of the review process, each reviewer assigns a qualitative rating for Significance and a qualitative rating for Feasibility to each application he or she reviews. The qualitative ratings used by individual reviewers are as follows: "A" for high quality; "B" for satisfactory quality; and "C" for unsatisfactory quality. The reviewers also assign an overall rating of "A", "B", or "C" for each application they review.

In Tier I of the review process, reviewers are recruited to serve on panels that meet in several regional sites around the country. Tier I of the review process has two stages. In Stage 1 of Tier I, the applications received by the published application deadline are assigned to teams of readers at the regional sites. The applications are read and rated by all of the individual readers on the team, who then meet to compare their individual ratings of each application they have read. Through this process, the reviewers identify applications that have been unanimously awarded high ratings. At the end of Stage 1 of Tier I, each team at a review site forwards its most highly rated applications for further consideration. In Stage 2 of Tier I, the applications forwarded for further consideration at that site are then read and individually rated by reviewers who served as team leaders in Stage 1 of Tier I. These team leaders use the same qualitative ratings of "A", "B", and "C" for Significance, Feasibility and the overall rating for each forwarded application they read. At the end of Stage 2 of Tier I, the team leaders meet to compare the ratings of all the applications they have read or considered at both stages of Tier I, taking into account all of the readings and ratings of all of the reviewers for each application at that site. Those applications that have been unanimously awarded high ratings by the team leaders at the end of Stage 2 of Tier I are forwarded for further consideration at Tier II of the review process.

In Tier II of the review process, team leaders from all of the regional sites are brought together to serve as reviewers at a single site. These reviewers read the applications forwarded for further consideration from Tier I. Taking into account the quality of all of the applications they have read, the reviewers assign a qualitative rating for Significance, a qualitative rating for Feasibility, and an overall rating of "A", "B", or "C" for each application they review.

Tier II of the review process has two stages. In Stage 1 of Tier II, the reviewers meet in teams to compare their individual ratings of each application they have read. Through this process the reviewers identify applications that have been unanimously awarded high ratings. At the end of Stage 1 of Tier II, each team forwards its most highly rated applications for further consideration. The applications forwarded for further consideration are then read and individually rated "A", "B", or "C" by the persons who served as team leaders in Stage 1 of Tier II. At the end of Stage 2 of Tier II, the team leaders meet to compare the ratings of all the applications they have read or considered at both stages of Tier II, taking into account all of the readings and ratings of all of the reviewers for each application. Those applications that have been unanimously awarded high ratings at the end of Stage 2 of Tier II are then forwarded for further consideration at Tier III of the review process. At the end of Tier II, the reviewers will also identify inconsistencies, points in need of clarification, and other concerns, if any, pertaining to each application being forwarded. Each applicant whose application is forwarded for further consideration at the end of Tier II will have an opportunity to respond in writing to these clarification questions and concerns.

At Tier III, readers are assembled to serve as reviewers at a single site. These reviewers have served as team leaders during both of the previous tiers of the review, and each of the original Tier I review sites is represented by one team leader at Tier III. There is only one stage of review at Tier III. The reviewers read the applications that are still under consideration and, after reading the responses to the clarification questions, they assign ratings for Significance and Feasibility, and an overall rating of "A", "B", or "C" for each application, taking into account the quality of all of the applications they have read. The reviewers compare their individual ratings of each application they have

read, and through this process the reviewers identify applications that have been unanimously awarded high ratings. Those applications that have unanimously high ratings are recommended for funding. The reviewers also provide individual recommendations on an appropriate budget level for each application recommended for funding. The Secretary awards grants only to those applications the reviewers have recommended for funding at the end of Tier III. No other applications are considered for funding. In the final selection of applications for funding, the Secretary may also consider the extent to which each application demonstrates an effective response to the learning technology needs of areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or the greatest need for educational technology. In preparation for a grant award, the Secretary also may request an applicant to submit additional information after the application has been selected for funding.

Application Deadline

The Secretary, in order to ensure timely receipt and processing of applications, establishes the following application deadline for the FY 1997 competition and subsequent competitions.

Procedures for Submission of Applications

Applications, in order to be considered for funding under this program, must be received on or before the deadline date announced in the application notice published in the **Federal Register**. (For the FY 1997 competition, applications must be received on or before May 30, 1997, as announced in the **Federal Register** on March 28, 1997 (62 FR 15052)). The Secretary does not consider an application for funding if it is not received by the deadline date unless the applicant can show, in accordance with 34 CFR 75.102 (d) and (e), proof that the application was (1) sent by registered or certified mail not later than five days before the deadline date; or (2) sent by commercial carrier not later than two days before the deadline date. An applicant must show proof of mailing in accordance with 34 CFR 75.102 (d) and (e). Applications delivered by hand must be received by 4:00 p.m. (Washington, D.C. time) on the deadline date. For the purposes of this competition the Secretary will not apply 34 CFR 75.102(b), which requires an application to be mailed, rather than received, by the deadline date.

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number assigned to the collection of information in this notice of selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures is 1810-0569.

Intergovernmental Review

This program is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the Executive Order is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the Order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program.

Note: This notice does *not* solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition was published in the **Federal Register** on March 28, 1997 (62 FR 15052).

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.303A, Technology Innovation Challenge Grants)

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 6846.

Dated: May 6, 1997.

Ramon C. Cortines,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

Appendix

Analysis of Comments and Changes

Summarized below are comments that referred to the proposed selection criteria, selection procedures, and application procedures.

Geographic Equity

Comments: Two commenters noted that over the last two years, the distribution of awards under the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program appeared to have been skewed in favor of a few geographic regions of the United States. The two commenters advocated that provisions ensuring some measure of equitable geographic distribution of awards be added to the selection criteria.

Discussion: The statute authorizing the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program does not address the issue of geographic distribution of awards. The Secretary understands the importance of participation by all areas of the country in this program and is engaged in intensive dissemination activities to heighten public awareness about the funding that is available. However, the Secretary believes that the three-tier review process that will be used to make selection decisions based on the priority factors outlined in the statute will result in the highest quality awards and that these awards must be based on "merit," irrespective of geographic considerations.

Changes: None.

Serving Disadvantaged Students

Comment: One commenter suggested that the Secretary consider stronger, quantitative measures to ensure that the legislative intent of serving disadvantaged students with the greatest need for educational technology be fulfilled. The commenter suggested that additional points be added to applications emanating from LEAs serving primarily disadvantaged populations and that a sliding scale of extra points be put in place to strengthen the applications coming from jurisdictions with high percentages of disadvantaged students.

Discussion: The statute authorizing the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program specifies that a consortia, in order to be eligible for support under this program, must include at least one local educational agency with a high percentage or number of children living below the poverty line. Further, the selection criteria for this program incorporate the statutory priority by specifying that each proposed project be reviewed for its significance by determining the extent to which the project "is designed to serve areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or other areas with the greatest need for educational technology * * *." Applicants will have to address this selection criterion by demonstrating that the projects they propose will in fact serve areas with a high number or percentage of disadvantaged students or other areas with the greatest need. The Secretary does not believe that further elaboration of the selection criteria, by adding a sliding scale of extra points, is needed to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged students will be addressed.

Changes: None.

Funding New Applicants

Comment: One commenter advocated that those institutions that have not applied under past competitions or been successful

in these competitions, be given the same opportunity to receive grants as those who have been successful in previous competitions. The commenter was concerned that funding appears to go to institutions that have been previously funded and that seldom are there successful new applicants.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the widest possible pool of applicants must be able to compete for support under the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program. Therefore, the program encourages applications from all eligible sources and engages in an intensive dissemination program to ensure broad participation. To date the program has supported two competitions, one in fiscal year 1995 and one in fiscal year 1996, that have resulted in 43 grants. None of these current grantees holds more than one award under this program. There are some grantees that are also members of consortia in partnership with other grantees, but there are no current grantees that have won grants in both competitions that have been held to date.

Changes: None.

Allowing a State Educational Agency to Assist Consortia

Comment: One commenter suggested that for the next Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program competition State educational agencies be allowed to assist consortia in putting together meaningful grant applications to support improving elementary and secondary education.

Discussion: The statute authorizing the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program currently does allow State educational agencies to participate in consortia seeking funding under the program. The statute is clear that the application for funding must be submitted by a local educational agency, but a single local educational agency is not eligible to apply unless it is part of a consortium that may include other local educational agencies, State educational agencies, institutions of higher education, businesses, academic content experts, software designers, museums, libraries or other appropriate organizations. The Secretary agrees that State educational agencies can be important members of these consortia, can fulfill a critical role in assisting the consortia to develop a meaningful grant application, can provide leadership to bring together appropriate partners to build the consortia, and should use every opportunity to do so.

Changes: None.

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