

Charter School Program Planning and Implementation Grants

Background

The Charter School Program (CSP) is authorized by Title V, Part B, Subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and is administered at the federal level by the U.S. Department of Education. The CSP provides support for planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools. The intent of the program is to increase the number of high quality charter schools and to give students more educational opportunities, resulting in higher student achievement.

General Federal Guidelines

The CSP is federally funded and must adhere to all applicable federal laws and regulations. General guidance regarding allowable expenses for federal grant funds may be found in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87, located at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars>. Funds available under the CSP are intended to be used to supplement, not supplant, State and local funds (ESEA Section 5205(b)(3)(C)). Further federal regulations expressly prohibit the acquisition of facilities and construction (34 Code of Federal Regulations 76.533). Information on federal and state requirements for projects administered by the Florida Department of Education is outlined in the document, Project Application and Amendment Procedures for Federal and State Programs (Green Book).

Grant Program Periods

CSP grant funds may be used for post-award planning and program design activities and for initial implementation of a charter school. Planning and implementation grants may be awarded for a period of up to 36 months, with no more than 18 months used for planning and program design, and no more than two years used for initial implementation of the charter school. Planning activities generally occur before the school opens and implementation activities usually occur just prior to opening and in the first two years of the actual operation of a school.

Use of Grant Funds

Federal statute, ESEA, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 5204(f)(3), defines allowable activities for planning and program design as:

- Refinement of the desired educational results and of the methods for measuring progress toward achieving those results;
- Professional development of teachers and other staff who will work in the charter school.

Federal statute, ESEA, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 5204(f)(3), defines allowable activities for implementation as:

- Informing the community about the school;
- Acquiring necessary equipment and educational materials and supplies;

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- Acquiring or developing curriculum materials; and
- Other initial operating costs that cannot be met from State or local sources.

These broad federal guidelines are intended to give maximum flexibility to design a budget specific to the needs of each charter school. The general rule of thumb for use of project funds is that they be used for items that will directly impact students such as school equipment, textbooks, computers, library and media materials, professional development of teachers, and policy and governing board training. Project funds are not intended to be used for ongoing operational expenses.

Questions and Answers

1. What are purchased services?

Purchased services are payments for professional services rendered by personnel who are not on the payroll of the charter school board, and other services which the charter school governing board may purchase. While a product may or may not result from the transaction, the primary reason for the purchase is to acquire a specialized service needed by the school.

One category of purchased services is professional/technical services, which are services that must be performed by persons with specialized skills and knowledge acquired through intensive academic preparation. Included in this category are the services of auditors, attorneys, consultants, and accountants. For contracting guidelines, see the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), 34 CFR 75.700-75.70 and Chapter 287, Florida Statutes.

2. What expenses have a three month limit as determined by USDOE?

Grant funds for renting/leasing of facilities may be used for a maximum of a three-month period prior to the opening of school. After this initial period, the costs of renting a facility are considered ongoing expenses.

Employment of staff (salaries) is limited to a three-month period prior to the opening of school for a principal and/or head teacher to assist the school with its planning and design. New teachers hired prior to the opening of school may be a part of the three month allowable expenditure. Under special conditions, a charter school may be allowed to pay salaries for personnel such as a special education teacher if Exceptional Student Education (ESE) enrollment is higher than reasonably anticipated. In order to pay any salaries over and above the three-month limit specified above, the school would need to submit to the DOE for prior written approval, a program and budget amendment to the approved project application. The school must demonstrate why the needed services were not reasonably anticipated and budgeted through normal operating funds.

3. What are some allowable facilities-related uses of grant funding?

Renovation of facilities is limited to expenditures for installation of a fire alarm, sprinkler system, and such minor renovations required for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Education Act (ADA). This would include expenditures such as the installation of an entry-way ramp or bathroom stall bars.

Minor remodeling of facilities is an allowable expenditure. Minor remodeling means minor alterations to a previously completed building and includes the extension of utility lines, such as water and electricity, from points beyond the confines of the space in which the minor remodeling is undertaken but within the confines of the previously completed building. Minor remodeling does **not** include building construction, major renovation or acquisition of a facility, structural alterations to buildings, or building maintenance or repairs. Classroom painting, classroom lighting and the installation of security cameras are allowable when necessary for the health and safety of students and staff.

4. **What are some uses of grant funding that are not allowable?**
Installing elevators for ADA purposes, removing asbestos, installing fire retardant ceiling panels and carpet, school marquees, or the purchase or lease of vehicles are unallowable expenses. In addition, recurring operational expenses such as teacher or administrator salaries, facility leasing, and utilities are not allowable expenses.
5. **May grant funds be used for networking of computers?**
Yes, schools may use grant funds for networking of computers including wire installation and upgrading of technological areas as long as these upgrades do not include major remodeling or structural alterations.
6. **May grant funds be used to support pre-kindergarten grades?**
No, Charter School Program grant funds or items purchased with these funds cannot support pre-school grades. The Charter School Program is authorized under the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) and supports K-12 programs only. If the charter school serves students in pre-kindergarten grades, project funds cannot be used in a way that benefits those programs in planning, program design, or implementation.
7. **What are some specific examples of allowable activities for planning and program design?**
 - Development of the educational program – goals and objectives, assessment tools
 - Payment of consultants to help develop curriculum, assessment, policies, or business plan
 - Costs associated with professional development and orientation of teachers and other staff who will work in the charter school
 - Training for governing board
 - Professional services – legal and business
 - Personnel salaries for a three-month period prior to opening
 - Payment of fees associated with forming a non-profit organization
 - Conference attendance
8. **What are some specific examples of allowable activities for implementation?**
 - Purchase of necessary classroom furniture, computers, software, and audio visual equipment
 - Purchase of curriculum materials and educational equipment
 - Development of recruitment materials and public outreach programs
 - Professional development of teachers and other staff
 - Development of program and school evaluation strategies and materials
 - Newspaper, TV, or radio advertisements for marketing
 - Payment of consultants performing work directly related to the program and operation of the charter school such as staff or curriculum development.
 - Refinement of educational goals and measurable objectives
 - Ongoing board and leadership training

Additional Information

Information on the Charter School Program (CSP) can be found at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg62.html>

Detailed information on Conflict of Interest Guidelines, Charter Schools Program, Title V, Part B *Non-Regulatory Guidance* can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/quid/cspguidance03.doc>

The U.S. Department of Education General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) is located at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/fund/reg/edgarReg/edgar.html>

The Florida Department of Education, Project Application and Amendment Procedures for Federal and State Programs, (Green Book), can be found at: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/comptroller/gbook.htm>

The Florida Department of Education, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, website can be found at: <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org>

For questions and information on charter schools, contact Karen Hines-Henry at 850-245-0502 or karen.hines@fldoe.org