# Transcript of Comprehensive Centers Program 2026 Grant Competition Pre-Application Application Instructions and Submission Procedures Webinar for Prospective Applicants

**DISCLAIMER: The Application Notice and Instructions (ANI) published on Grants.gov on May 8, 2026, serves as the official announcement for the 2026 Comprehensive Centers Program grant competition.** This presentation does not contain the full text of the ANI for this competition.

BEGIN

## Introduction

### Slide 1

[Speaker: Michelle Daley]

Welcome to the pre-application webinar for prospective applicants for the Comprehensive Centers Program 2026 Grant Competition. This webinar provides an overview of the Application Instructions and Submission Procedures across all 2026 grant competitions for the Comprehensive Centers Program, which includes competitions for Regional Centers, the National Center, Content Centers and the National Comprehensive Center on Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities.

For information on a specific competition webinar for the 2026 Comprehensive Centers Grant Competition, please visit the Comprehensive Centers program website at ED.gov.

### Slide 2

My name is Dr. Michelle Daley.  I serve as a Group Leader for the Comprehensive Centers Program in the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services at the U.S. Department of Education.

### Slide 3

The Department is accepting applications through June 30, 2026, for proposals to establish Comprehensive Centers under separate Application Notices and Instructions through this competition.

The Department may make awards for:

- A National Comprehensive Center
- Regional Comprehensive Centers, and

- Three types of Content Centers:
    - One Emerging Needs Center, focusing on projects or proposals that are designed to strengthen core instruction through creating and supporting principals and other school leaders in implementing strategic staffing models;
    - At least two Field-Initiated Centers, with preference given to applicants submitting proposal to establish Centers focused on evidence-based literacy instruction, or strengthening core instruction through improving mathematics instruction, and
    - One National Center on Improving Literacy for Students with Disabilities.

Each Center type has its own absolute priority, competitive preference priorities, and application requirements.

Because these are distinct priorities, applicants must review the relevant Application Notice and Instructions (ANI) for each Center type they are interested in.

If an applicant intends to compete for more than one Comprehensive Center—whether National, Regional, or Content—they must submit a stand-alone application for each Center they wish to operate.

Applicants can view recorded webinars reviewing the specific requirements for each Center type on the U.S. Department of Education's YouTube Channel.

### Slide 4

This webinar will provide information for prospective applicants for the Comprehensive Centers grant awards.

During the webinar, we will review information related to the application review process, application instructions, submission procedures, and important resources for this grant competition.

Next, we will go over submission procedures and the application review process, and finally we will close with a reminder of the competition resources available to prospective applicants.

### Slide 5

As a result of attending this webinar, applicants should be able to understand application instructions, the process for reviewing and submitting grant applications, including online submission platforms, methods, and required forms for the 2026 Comprehensive Centers grant competition.

### Slide 6

The funding opportunity listing on Grants.gov contains the full Application Notice and Instructions for this competition.

The Application Notice and Instructions serve as the official announcement for this competition.

Applicants should not rely solely on this webinar for information and guidance, should only use this presentation as a resource in conjunction with the official instructions in the ANI.

Before applying for this grant, interested applicants should thoroughly review the ANI, which includes the Application Package, available on Grants.gov. Applicants may also review resources available on the Applicant Information page on the Comprehensive Centers program website on ed.gov.

### Slide 7

Eligibility for this program is established in Section 203 (b) of the Education Technical Assistance Act (ETAA) of 2002.

Applicants eligible for this grant include research organizations, institutions, agencies, institutions of higher education, or partnerships among such entities, or individuals, with the demonstrated ability or capacity to carry out the activities described in the ANI.

A group of eligible entities may also apply as a consortium, in accordance with the requirements in 34 CFR Part 75, Subpart C.

## Application Review Process

### Slide 8

Now, we will discuss the process the Department will use to evaluate applications for the Comprehensive Centers grant competition.

### Slide 9

Applications for this competition are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Daylight Time on June 30, 2026.

Once applications are received, the Department will first conduct an Eligibility Review. The Eligibility Review is a process to carefully screen applications to ensure they meet all the eligibility requirements outlined in the notice. This includes verifying that the applicant is eligible to apply for an award under this program, all required forms are included in the application, and verify that the application clearly addresses the Absolute Priority.

If an application is deemed ineligible, an applicant will be notified, and the application will not be reviewed and scored. All applications that meet eligibility for the program will proceed to Peer Review.

The Peer Review is an objective process where applications are reviewed and scored by a non-federal panel of peers. Panels are comprised of peer reviewers with professional experience and expertise relevant to the Comprehensive Centers program.

Each reviewer takes the time to individually read, evaluate, and score their assigned applications based on the selection criteria listed in the Application Notice and Instructions.

The panel then engages in a comprehensive discussion about the applications and their respective scores and comments.

The reviewer scores and comments are then finalized, and individual scores are averaged to create an overall application score.

Because the applications are scored on each individual selection criterion, not responding to specific criteria could negatively impact the applicant's score.

Based on the Peer Review, the Department prepares a rank order list from the overall application scores, after applying any competitive preference points.

Finally, prior to making final awards, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, in consultation with the Office of General Counsel and other offices, as appropriate, will develop funding recommendations and identify any special terms and conditions that may be needed.

Following the vetting of the highest rated applications, the competition manager will prepare and submit a funding slate to the Secretary for review and approval. The Department intends to create 19 separate funding slates, one for the National Center, one for each Regional Center, and one for each type of Content Center.

If the Department decides to make awards, the Department anticipates funding a single award for the National Center, each Regional Center, the Emerging Needs Center, and NCIL funding slate. The Department anticipates funding at least two awards from the Field-Initiated slate.

If the Department decides to make new awards this fiscal year, award decisions will be announced in September 2026, and funded and unfunded applicants will be notified.

# Application Instructions and Submission Procedures

### Slide 10

Now that we've reviewed how the application will be evaluated, we will spend some time reviewing the application instructions and submission procedures.

### Slide 11

The Application Instructions linked here can be found on Grants.gov. These instructions provide information about the application submission procedures and details for each part of the application package and the required forms that applicants will use to submit information for their application.

### Slide 12

A complete application package consists of several documents the applicant will be required to submit in the application. As a resource, an application checklist is included in the ANI and linked in Grants.gov.

The application checklist helps to ensure that all required forms, attachments, certifications, narratives, and other submission components are completed before submitting your application.

The checklist serves as a quality control resource, helping an applicant verify that all required forms have been completed during the application development process and confirm completion prior to submitting your application to avoid an incomplete submission.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the Application Checklist as you develop your applications, and as a final check prior to submission to verify the completion of all required documentation.

Failure to include required application components may result in the application being deemed incomplete or ineligible for review.

### Slide 13

The Standard Documents section includes the Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) and the ED Supplemental Information for SF 424.

These forms require basic identifying information about the applicant and the application. Applicant must provide all requested information, which includes name, address, e-mail address and UEI.

Applicants are advised to complete the Application for Federal Assistance (Form SF 424) first because Grants.gov will automatically insert the correct Assistance Listing Number and program name automatically wherever needed on other forms.

Applicants should not attach any narratives, supporting files, or application components to the Standard Form (SF 424). Although this form accepts attachments, the Department will only review files attached in accordance with the instructions provided within the application.

The final form in the Standard Document section is the ED Grant Application Form for Project Objectives and Performance Measures Information. This form collects project objectives and quantitative and/or qualitative program and project-specific performance measures at the time of application submission.

The Budget Information section includes the Budget Non-Construction Programs (ED Form 524) form. This part of the application should contain information about the Federal funding you are requesting. It is required for applicants to provide all the budget information requested for each year of the project to be considered for Federal funding.

Specific instructions for completing the budget forms are provided within this application package.

### Slide 14

The next section is the ED Abstract Form. This form should be used to create a brief (no longer than 2 pages) project abstract. The abstract is a summary that provides reviewers with a high-level overview of proposed projects. It is used to understand the purpose, scope, target population, activities, and projected outcomes outlined in the proposal, and will be made public, if the proposal is successful.

The Project Narrative section includes the Application Narrative (Project Narrative Attachment Form), which is the primary component of your application. This section also includes a Table of Contents.

In developing the application, applicants are highly encouraged to write concise and streamlined applications describing their proposal for the project. The Department recommends applicants limit their Application Narrative to the equivalent of no more than 75 pages.

To promote fairness and efficiency, the Department will instruct reviewers to only read and score the first 75 pages of the application narrative. Applications that exceed this page limit will still be reviewed, but reviewers will only score information in the first 75 pages of the narrative.

The Budget Narrative section includes the Budget Narrative Attachment Form for an applicant to provide a detailed explanation and justification of requested Federal funds, providing a justification of how the money requested for each budget item will be spent. Applicants should include sufficient detail to enable reviewers to understand how requested funds will be used, how much will be expended, and the relationship between the requested funds and project activities and outcomes in their Budget Narrative.

### Slide 15

The next sections of the checklist are Other Attachment Forms and Assurances and Certifications.

The Other Attachments form, which applicants will use to provide supplemental information for your application.

The final section is the Assurances and Certifications, which includes Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (Standard Form LLL) and the Grants.gov Lobbying Form.

Be certain to complete all required assurances and certifications in Grants.gov and include all required information in the appropriate place on each form. The assurances and certifications required for this application are the Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF LLL Form) and Grants.Gov Lobbying Form – "Certification Regarding Lobbying".

The ANI and Grants.gov provides complete description of each form. Please refer to the Application Package Instruction for the complete list of all required forms.

### Slide 16

The Project Narrative is the primary component of your application. The narrative should be attached to your application as a single searchable PDF document to the Project Narrative Attachment Form in accordance with the instructions found on Grants.gov.

The project narrative responds to the priorities, application requirements, and selection criteria found in the ANI. It should describe the applicant's proposed approach to establishing and operating the Comprehensive Center, and how it intends to meet the requirements to operate the Center, according to the application requirements.

As a reminder, reviewers can only score what is written and supported in your narrative, budget narrative, and other attachments. Applicants should ensure they have addressed each of the selection criteria that will be used to evaluate their proposal in their narrative.

Consider using a clear and logical organization of your application so that peer reviewers can easily understand your proposed approach and locate key information they will need to evaluate your proposal. Some applicants may choose to organize their narrative by the selection criteria to help reviewers navigate and locate the relevant information to evaluate

each criterion. Regardless of how you organize the narrative, include a Table of Contents that clearly illustrates where and how the important sections of your proposal are organized. The Table of Contents should not exceed one double-spaced page.

As a reminder, the Department encourages applicants to limit this section of the application to the equivalent of no more than 75 pages. While applicants may exceed this limit, ED will instruct peer reviewers to read and score only the first 75 pages of this section of the application.

### Slide 17

All applicants must use the ED Budget Information Non-Construction Programs (ED Form 524) to propose a budget for each year of the project.

The budget should break down expenses into federal budget categories such as Personnel (covers salaries and wages), Fringe Benefits (employer-paid benefits for project personnel such as health insurance, retirement contributions, etc.), Travel (travel expenses necessary to carry out project activities), Equipment (Tangible, non-expendable personal property with a useful life of more than one year and a per unit acquisition cost that of the capitalization level established or $10,000 or more), Supplies (tangible, expendable personal property that are consumable, expendable that are lower-cost items needed for project operations), Contractual Expenses (costs for consultants, subcontractors, or partner organizations who will provide services such as subject-matter expertise, evaluation support, etc., and Other (would include allowable costs not captured in the above categories). Total Direct Costs are the sum of allowable costs tied to project implementation.

Please note in line 10 of the ED 524B Budget form, applicants should indicate the applicant's approved indirect cost rate, per 34 C.F.R. §§ ("sections") 75.560 through 75.564.

If an applicant does not have an approved indirect cost rate agreement with a cognizant Federal agency, the applicant may use the de minimis rate of up to 15%. If two or more applicants for a Comprehensive Center receive the same total scores, the Secretary will select for funding among tied applications, as appropriate, the applicant that has the lower effective indirect cost rate, as indicated on this form in Section A.

For more information, please visit the Department's Office of Finance and Operation's Indirect Cost Division website linked on this slide.

### Slide 18

The Budget Narrative provides an opportunity for the applicant to explain the nature and amount of the proposed expenditures for the project.

Applicants should provide sufficient details to enable reviewers and project staff to understand how requested funds will be used, how much will be expended, and the relationship between the requested funds and project activities and outcomes.

The narrative should include, for each project year, the basis for estimating the costs of personnel salaries, benefits, project staff travel, materials and supplies, consultants and subcontracts, indirect costs and any other projected expenditures.

If you are requesting reimbursement for indirect costs on line 10, please specify in your Budget Narrative the estimated amount of the base to which the indirect cost rate is applied and the total indirect expense. Please indicate which costs are included and which costs are excluded from the base to which the indirect cost rate is applied.

### Slide 19

Congress has appropriated $50 million to the Comprehensive Centers Program for Fiscal Year 2026, approximately $47.5 million of which may be used for new awards.

The Department estimates funding each new award ranging between $750,000 and $6.5M for the first budget period of the project, which is the first 12 months of the up to 60-months, or up to 5 year, project period. Funding for subsequent budget periods is contingent on appropriation levels.

Specific estimates of funding levels, as well as the estimated range of awards for each Center are in each Centers' Application Notice and Instructions. Applicants should not request funding above the estimated maximums in the Application Notice for any project period.

Please note that the Department is not bound by any estimates in the ANI.

### Slide 20

To apply for this competition, applicants must submit the application electronically through Grants.gov and follow the Common Instructions for Applicants to Department of Education Discretionary Grant Programs, which contain requirements and information on how to submit an application.

Workspace is an application system used for federal grants. Applicants must use grants.gov Workspace to apply. In Workspace, a grant team may work simultaneously to access and edit different forms within the application. Forms can be completed online or offline.

In Workspace, you will be able to view your grant application, access forms, attachments, form status, activity and actions among others. For additional support, the Workspace

website offers a variety of resources and videos to help you navigate the application and features.

Several particularly helpful resources include: Get Started on Your Workspace Application, Resources to Help You Set Up Your Workspace, and the Video: How to Create a Workspace. Use the link provided on this slide to access Workspace resources.

Applicants should review the Common Instructions for Applicants to Department of Education Discretionary Grant Programs, published in the Federal Register on December 7, 2022, and available by searching for 87 FR 75045.

### Slide 21

To apply, you must first be registered in two systems: SAM.gov and Grants.gov. If you are already registered, make sure your registration is active and up to date.

The Grants.gov registration involves several steps, including registration on SAM.gov. You may begin working on your application while completing the registration process, but you cannot apply until all registration steps are complete.

For more information on the registration processes, see the ANI for details.

### Slide 22

To submit your application successfully, you must include your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)number on your application.

This number should match the one that is used by you or someone in your organization when registering as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) on Grants.gov.

This UEI number is typically the same number used when your organization registered with the System for Award Management (SAM) (www.sam.gov).

If you do not enter the same UEI number on your application as the UEI you registered with, Grants.gov will reject your application. Please see the related instructions in this application package.

### Slide 23

Here are a few Grants.gov submission resources and submission tips that you may find helpful.

Be sure to review the “Grants.gov Submission Procedures and Tips of Applicants” section in your Application Instructions as well as the Grants.gov “Applicant FAQs”

Also, be sure you have the correct version of Adobe Acrobat downloaded in order to read grants.gov application packages.

Finally, be sure to save your work frequently in workspace so you don't lose any important changes.

### Slide 24

All application documents must be submitted as PDF files. When attaching files, applicants should limit the size of their file names. We recommend your file names be less than 50 characters and not use any special characters.

Once an application is submitted, it cannot be undone, however applicants may resubmit an application until the closing date and time.

Applicants are encouraged to download and save a copy of your submitted application.

### Slide 25

You should receive confirmation on successful submission of your application.

If you encounter error messages, visit Grants.gov, linked to this slide, for steps explaining common error messages that applicants may encounter while completing or submitting an application package.

### Slide 26

A few helpful reminders:

First, all substantive, project-related information must be contained in the Project Narrative Form and Budget Narrative Form sections. These are the forms that Peers will review and score. Be sure to label each file with the appendix name (e.g., Appendix B Resumes) and attach it to the Other Attachments Form.

The Other Attachments Form can support up to 5 attachments. The list of required attachments can be found in the application package.

All documents should be submitted in Portable Document Format (PDF). Grants.gov does not properly process special characters. Therefore, do not use colons and backslashes when naming your files.

### Slide 27

Also, when you submit your application electronically, you must upload any narrative sections and all other attachments to your application as files in Portable Document Format (PDF).

The Department recommends applicants submit all documents as read-only flattened PDFs, meaning any fillable PDF files must be saved and submitted as non-fillable PDF files and not as interactive or fillable PDF files, to better ensure applications are processed in a more timely, accurate, and efficient manner.

If you upload a file type other than PDF or if you submit a password-protected file, the Department will be unable to review that material. Please note that this will likely result in your application not being considered for funding. The Department will not convert material from other formats to PDF.

### Slide 28

Be sure to verify the submission of your application by sign the "Track My Application" feature in grants.gov. Do not rely solely on email to confirm that your application has been received and validated.

You will need to enter your grants.gov tracking number in the field to see the status. The application status should state "validated".

A reminder that the Date/Time received should be earlier than 11:59:59 p.m. on June 30, 2026.

### Slide 29

We recognize that technical problems may occur. If you experience technical problems, you may contact the Grants.gov support desk.

### Slide 30

If your application is not evaluated or not selected for funding, we notify you.

If your application is successful, we notify your U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators and send you a Grant Award Notification, or "GAN"

We may also send you an email containing a link to access an electronic version of your GAN or notify you informally.

We include the regulations outlining the terms and conditions of an award and include these and other specific conditions in the GAN. The GAN also incorporates your approved application as part of your binding commitments under the grant.

If the Department decides to make new awards this fiscal year, award decisions will be announced in September 2026, and funded and unfunded applicants will be notified.

# Resources

**Slide 31**

That concludes our review of the Application Instruction and Submission Procedures for the Comprehensive Centers 2026 grant competitions. We will conclude with a reminder of several key resources to assist applicants in this grant process.

**Slide 32**

Please find links here to the most important websites for competition resources:

The ANI, published on Grants.gov, is the official notice inviting applications for the 2026 grant competition. The ANI includes the requirements, priorities, and other relevant details for this grant competition. The ANI includes information for applicants, including the application submission procedures, application details, and what to do if you're having submission challenges.

The Comprehensive Centers program website has additional information and resources, including links to this webinar.

The Department intends to publish Frequently Asked Questions on the program website to address applicant questions. We will update the FAQ resource periodically as we receive additional questions.

Questions regarding this competition should be submitted via email to OESE.ComprehensiveCenters@ed.gov.

**Slide 33**

Please find additional resources, including specific pre-application webinars for each type of Comprehensive Center, on the Department's program website.

**Slide 34**

For individuals with disabilities, upon request, the Department will provide individuals with the ANI in an accessible format. Requests may be submitted to OESE.ComprehensiveCenters@ed.gov.

**Slide 35**

The deadline for the transmittal of applications in this competition is 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on June 30, 2026.

Applicants should make sure to register on SAM.gov and Grants.gov well prior to submitting their application and should carefully review the ANI.

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Please submit any additional questions about this competition via email to OESE.ComprehensiveCenters@ed.gov.

For more information about the Comprehensive Centers program or this grant competition, visit the Comprehensive Centers website on ed.gov, which is linked in this presentation.

## Thank You

**Slide 37**

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, thank you for participating in today's Pre-Application Webinar for Prospective Applicants for the 2026 Comprehensive Centers Program grant competition.