

Fiscal Year 2026 Talent Search (TS) Program Competition

General Questions and Answers

Grants.gov

Q: Why is the ‘Apply Here’ button greyed out when I view the TS competition announcement in Grants.gov?

A: Usually, it has something to do with the account you are using to access Grants.gov. Please be sure that your account profile identifies you as an Organization and not as an Individual. Individuals are not an eligible applicant for this program.

Eligibility

Q: Is a for-profit business eligible to apply as an applicant under the category “a public or private agency or organization”? Or as a subgrantee?

A: Yes.

Dual Enrollment

Q: Are dual enrollment costs allowable?

A: Yes. Grantees should explore talent marketplaces, learning and employment records, and other mechanisms that present apprenticeships, career and technical education, and integration with the workforce system as equally viable and often faster routes to economic mobility as traditional college programs. Grantees are encouraged to develop applications that demonstrate connections with the workforce system, dual enrollment options, and resources dedicated to the data infrastructure necessary for Workforce Pell and other pathways that can minimize debt while accelerating entry into rewarding careers.

However, any payment of tuition costs for dual enrollment must also be aligned with the requirements of 34 CFR 643.30(h), including that a waiver of the tuition costs is unavailable; the tuition is paid with Talent Search grant funds to an institution of higher education on behalf of a participant; and the Talent Search project pays for no more than the equivalent of two courses for a participant each school year.

Budget

Q: What budgets are required, and what do we put where?

1. The SF-524 budget form is not included or required for this competition.
2. The SF-424 cover page should reflect total funding requested for the first year only.

3. The budget selection criteria section of the narrative should include both a detailed line item table budget and a narrative explanation, for the first year only.
4. The SF-424A should also be filled out for the first year only. (Note: any costs that do not have a dedicated line, should be included in “Other.” Also, remember that any participant support costs, equipment over \$10,000, and the portion of each contract or subaward over \$50,000, should not have indirect costs charged against them.)
5. The Budget Narrative attachment is where you will expand on your budget, including details for all five years of the grant. Any details that you were not able to fully articulate on your SF-424A can be explained here.

Priorities

This notice includes one absolute priority, one competitive preference priority, and one invitational priority.

The Invitational Priority

- Should an applicant address (a) and (b)?
A. Yes.

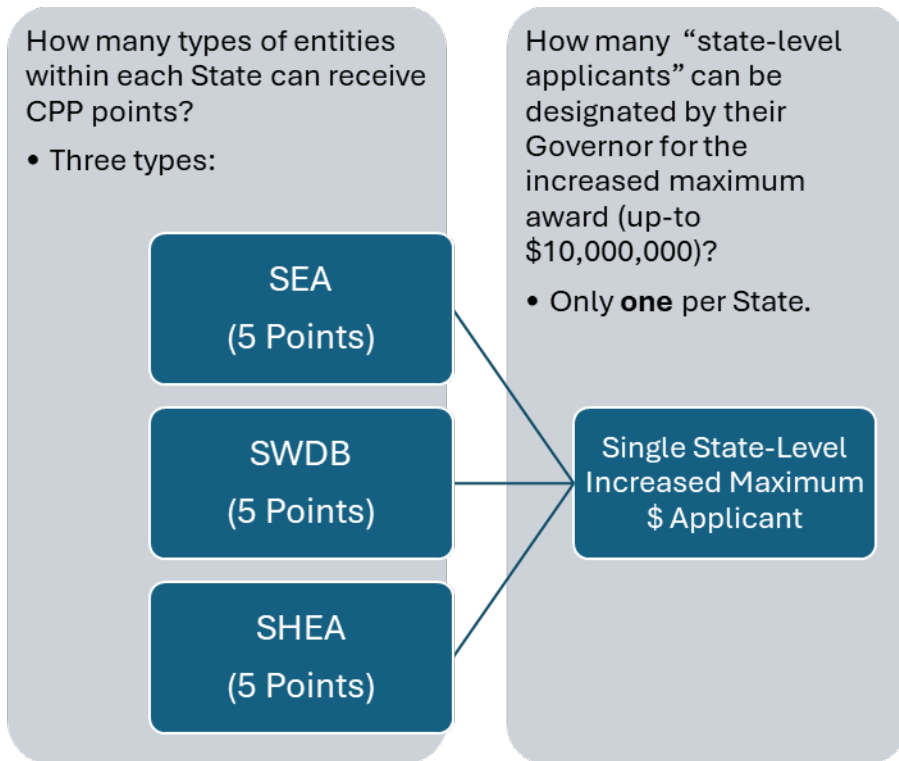
The Competitive Preference Priority (CPP):

- Creates a ‘competitive preference’ in this competition for any State educational agencies (SEA), State workforce development agencies or boards (SWDB), State higher education agencies (SHEA), or Indian Tribes/ Tribal organizations/ Tribal educational agencies.
- The CPP is for 5 or zero points.
- Practically speaking, any of the types of entities listed above will receive 5 points under the CPP, as long as they “clearly identify” that they are applying and meet one of the eligibility criteria for the CPP. We encourage applicants applying under the CPP to indicate as such on the Program Profile sheet and in the abstract.
- Can each SEA, SWDB and SHEA within a State receive CPP points?
 - Yes. One SEA, one SWDB and one SHEA within each State may **each** receive CPP points under their separate applications.
- What if my State has more than one SEA, SWDB or SHEA? For example, if my State has five SHEAs, can each SHEA receive CPP points?
 - No. As noted above, only **one** SEA, **one** SWDB and **one** SHEA within each State may receive CPP points under their separate applications. If there are multiple SEAs, SWDBs, or SHEAs interested in applying under this competition, which could raise a concern as to which SEA, SWDB or SHEA within the State should

receive the CPP points for their application, then a decision should be made amongst that group of eligible entities (i.e., all SHEAs within a State) as to which one will seek CPP points within their State for their application. For example, a State with two or more SHEAs could contact their Governor, and provide a letter of support from their Governor of the Governor's indication of which SHEA should receive the CPP points for their State.

Maximum Award Amount

- The default Maximum annual award for this competition is \$1,000,000.
- There are two circumstances in which an applicant may receive a maximum annual award above \$1,000,000 (up to \$10,000,000):
 - (1) “any Indian tribe receiving points under the competitive priority” may apply for a maximum award above \$1,000,000 but not exceeding \$10,000,000.
 - **Please note:** The annual per-participant cost of a project cannot exceed \$500. Therefore, an applicant must propose to serve a very large number of participants in order to substantiate an increased maximum award amount.
 - (2) One applicant within each State may be designated by their Governor as the “state-level applicant” eligible for an increased maximum award amount, above \$1,000,000 but not exceeding \$10,000,000.
 - Needs to be a SEA, State workforce development agency or board, State higher education agency and designated by a letter from the governor that is included in the submitted application.



Funding Levels

Q: Are current grantees required to stay at the funding level they currently operate under? Can they increase or decrease?

A: Current grantees are not required to stay at their current funding level. They can increase or decrease their funding request, so long as they maintain a per participant cost at or below \$500 per student served annually, with a minimum of 500 students served annually.

Q: Are current Talent Search grants that have per participant costs greater than \$500 required to change their funding request and/or participant number so that they come in at or below \$500?

A: Yes, the application would need to be written in such a way that the per participant cost does not exceed \$500. This can mean requesting fewer dollars or serving more students.

Q: What budget categories are covered by the \$500 per participant maximum? Is it all budget categories, or only student service costs?

A: An applicant’s funding request is to cover every categorical line item of the federal budget—personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, student service items, other, and indirect costs.

Q: Can we scale the funding request to serve more students in later years?

A: No, applicants are required to request the same funding for each year of the grant.

Q: Where should pre-apprenticeship or other student activities be included in the objectives? Are these considered "Postsecondary Enrollment" and "Postsecondary degree attainment?"

A: Enrollment and completion of a Registered Apprenticeship does count as a recognized postsecondary credential, and therefore does count towards the program objectives.

Recognized postsecondary credential means a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree, as defined in section 3(53) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Q: Is it an allowable cost to pay for pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs that lead to credentials?

A: Yes, depending on the exact expenses in question. Direct financial assistance to participants is not allowed, but certain tuition or supplies could be allowable. (See 34 CFR 646.30(h) for additional information on the use of Talent Search funds for payment of tuition).

Prior Experience Points/ Current Grant questions

Q: Do we need to write to or explain our PE points somewhere in our submission?

A: No, all you have to do is include your current grant award number on your Profile form. Department staff will pull the PE results from the grant's past APRs, and those points will be added in the slate development process pre-award.

Q: Do we have to serve the same schools in order to earn PE points? Can we add or change schools?

A: Grants are required to serve a majority of their prior target schools in order to show continuity from one grant to the next, in order to receive PE points. But new schools may be added as well.

Q: Will a Talent Search project that was non-continued be eligible to receive PE points for any years under which it previously demonstrated high quality service delivery, if it submits an application in the 2026 competition?

A: Yes.

Q: Can a current grantee that is operated by a State higher education agency both receive its PE points and be designated by the Governor to write for and receive points under the CPP?

A: Yes. However, please note that a state agency does not need to be designated by the governor to receive CPP points. To receive CPP points, an applicant must clearly identify that it is one of the following entity types: State educational agencies, State workforce development agencies or boards, State higher education agencies, or Indian Tribes/ Tribal organizations/ Tribal educational agencies.

The governor's designation is required only for the one applicant within each State that may be designated by their governor as the "state-level applicant" eligible for an increased maximum award amount, above \$1,000,000 but not exceeding \$10,000,000

Q: If a current grantee, such as at an IHE, becomes partner to a State-level applicant writing to the CPP, can the current grantee's PE points be applied to the State-level application?

A: No, PE points only apply when the same institution is the lead applicant.

Attachments and Formatting

Q: Do we need to include letters of commitment, resumes, logic model, or a bibliography?

A: No

Q: What formatting is required? Can we single-space charts and tables?

A: Double spacing is highly recommended for your narrative, to ensure it is legible to the reviewers. Single spacing of charts and tables is allowable if that is the best way to clearly convey your information. Use a common font of at least size 12.

Personnel

Q: Can a project director be split over more than one similar TRIO grant?

A: Yes. Program regulations allow for splitting time over up to two additional similar projects. A waiver is required to split the director over 4 or more projects.

Other

Q: Can a project partner with a prison education program, or otherwise support incarcerated or justice-involved youth?

A: Talent Search projects need to identify the target middle and high schools that they will serve. That is where their participant recruitment and service efforts should primarily be focused. It is permissible to serve other eligible students in the target area as well, if practical, including eligible students impacted by the justice system.

Q: Where can I learn more about workforce development topics?

A: See “[America’s Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age](#)”.

Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship Programs – Examples

The following are examples of pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs, and may be used as a reference point for applicants in responding to the Absolute Priority.

Q: What are examples of pre-apprenticeships?

A: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Final Rule (20 CFR 681.480) defines a pre-apprenticeship as a program designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program and includes five elements: (a) training and curriculum aligned with employer skill needs; (b) access to educational and career counseling and supportive services; (c) hands-on, meaningful learning activities connected to education and training; (d) opportunities to attain at least one industry-recognized credential; and (e) a partnership with one or more Registered Apprenticeship programs that assists in placing completers into Registered Apprenticeships.

Q: What are examples of a Registered Apprenticeship?

A: Registered Apprenticeships include industry-driven, high-quality career pathways where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce. Individuals can obtain paid work experience; progressive wage increases; classroom instruction; and a portable, nationally recognized credential. There are five key components of a Registered Apprenticeship:

- 1. **Industry Led** – Programs are industry-vetted and approved to ensure alignment with industry standards and that apprentices are trained for highly skilled, high-demand occupations.*
- 2. **Paid Job** – Registered Apprenticeships are jobs! Apprentices earn progressive wages as their skills and productivity increase.*
- 3. **Structured On-the-Job Learning/Mentorship** – Programs provide structured on-the-job training to prepare for a successful career; which includes instruction from an experienced mentor.*
- 4. **Supplemental Education** – Apprentices are provided supplemental classroom education based on employers' unique training needs to ensure quality and success.*
- 5. **Credentials** – Apprentices earn a portable, nationally recognized credential within their industry.*

To learn more, please visit www.apprenticeship.gov