California Community Colleges

RISING SCHOLARS NETWORK PROGRAM 2025-28 REQUEST FOR APPLICATION (RFA) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Abstract

This is a series of questions and responses related to the 2025-28 Rising Scholars Network Request for Applications that has been received from potential applicants within the California Community Colleges.

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Rising Scholars Network Program 2025-28 Request for Application (RFA) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Question: 1 - Will the overall student population play any role in the performance score? Because rural campuses may have a smaller overall student population, it could potentially result in a smaller number of students being served in SG04 & SG15 codes by Rising Scholars schools. Based on what was discussed at our last meeting, I was of the impression that the number of students served will be a factor in determining the overall grant award, but not necessarily the point distribution of the application. 1

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If not, will the Chancellor Office’s provide their data methodology (or data element dictionary) so that colleges can run their own analyses? 5

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Question: 28 - What documentation or evidence is required to demonstrate that promotional and marketing materials purchased align with the goals of the Rising Scholars Program? 10

Question: 29 - Are there specific limitations on spending that we should be aware of when planning events or purchasing materials? 10

Question: 30 - How do we ensure compliance with both the Chancellor's Office and district policies when using funds for promotional, student, or program-related needs? 11

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Question: 32 - Are there restrictions on reallocating funds between different program priorities, such as shifting from marketing to direct student support if necessary? 11

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Question 35 - Can you provide guidance on how to respond to the Activities and Outcomes Section of the Nova application 13

Question: 1 - Will the overall student population play any role in the performance score? Because rural campuses may have a smaller overall student population, it could potentially result in a smaller number of students being served in SG04 & SG15 codes by Rising Scholars schools. Based on what was discussed at our last meeting, I was of the impression that the number of students served will be a factor in determining the overall grant award, but not necessarily the point distribution of the application.

Response to question #1:

The overall student population will not be a factor in the performance score. Only the weighted performance index algorithm will factor in those students identified as SG04 and/or SG15. The students determine this number served and coded by the program. The number of students served will be a partial factor in determining the grant award. The funding formula will be calculated with a minimum base of $100,000 (56% of the formula), plus application score (34% of the formula), plus FTES size based on SG04 and/or SG15 (10% of the formula).

Question: 2 - Will the SG04 & SG15 students be sorted by age groups during the MIS Data pull at the Chancellor's Office? The juvenile SG codes were not initially available at the time the Juvenile Justice program was launched, which may have resulted in initial students could potentially be recorded in SG04 or SG15 students

Response to question #2:

No, the SG04 and SG15 data will not be sorted by age group. A few 1.0 and 2.0 grants served juvenile justice students before the Juvenile Justice targeted RFA, and yes, they would have been coded by SG04 and/or SG15 during the period prior to the development and implementation of SG24, which is designed for Juvenile Justice students. Consequently, the performance of these students will be a factor in the ranking of this round of applications should the college determine they want to compete for this grant.

Question: 3 - I have a question regarding the RFA scoring. If 50% of the scoring is allocated to SG4 and SG15, does that mean it is divided equally as 25% for SG4 and 25% for SG15?

Response to question #3:

The two data elements, SG04 and SG15, were not disaggregated and treated separately. The total population for both data elements was subjected to a weighted performance index of multiple variables based on different factors. These variables were subjected to a principal component analysis, accounting for as much variation in the data as possible by identifying potential factors and the variables influencing them most. The weighted categories and subcomponents are listed below: Weighted Performance Factors for Special Population Data Elements SG04 and SG15. Based on the collected data, a calculation was performed to determine an index score assigned a point value of up to a possible total of 50 points.

Weighted Performance Factors for Special Population Data Elements SG04 and SG15*

Category	*Subcomponents*
Units	- *Average Units in a Year* - *Progression in Units Across terms* - *Degree applicable units' ratio*
Degrees and Awards	- *Degrees by student type* - *Percentage change in degrees awarded over time* - *Ratio of students in program to degrees earned, by SG04 and/or SG15 status*
Persistence and Performance	- *Persistence rate from Fall to Spring across multiple years*
Access and Enrollment	- *Total students served* - *Access to courses by students* - *Type of course instruction/offerings*
Course Availability	- *Unique courses offered* - *Growth in courses over time*

**This information can also be found in Section A: Performance-Based Evaluation Metrics in the RFA.*

Question: 4 - If we need to correct data in MIS, do we have an opportunity to do that before final scoring?

Response to question #4:

Yes, the deadline for correcting Chancellor Office management Information System (COMIS) data for purposes of this Request for Application (RFA) is January 17, 2025.

Question: 5 - Are all performance factors treated equally? Are they all worth the same potential point value?

Response to question #5:

No, they are not treated equally. They have weighted values which are entered into a calculation to generate an index score.

Weighted Performance Values for Special Population Data Elements SG04 and SG15

Category	*Weighted Value of the Total Performance Score*
Units	*30%*
Degrees and Awards	*20%*
Persistence and Performance	*20%*
Access and Enrollment	*20%*
Course Availability	*10%*

Question: 6 - For course availability and SG15 students, how are "unique courses offered" and "growth in courses overtime" defined, particularly for post-incarcerated students. For example, SG15 students have access to all courses offered at LTCC, though they are not uniquely offered to SG15 students. Would any course taken by an SG15 student be counted toward these totals?

Response to question #6:

For "unique courses offered" it is simply the college level unique course identifier used to indicate which course is which, in the Course Data Element Dictionary it is CB00, Course-Control-Number which uniquely

identifies a course. The second phrase "growth in courses overtime" is defined as the growth of those unique courses during the specified period of the grant which is 2022-23 and or 2023-24. Yes, any course taken by an SG15 student during this period is counted toward these totals.

Question: 7 - Does the outcome of scoring impact the amount of funding awarded? Or is the score used only to determine whether colleges are funded?

Response to question #7:

Yes, the funding formula is partially influenced by the outcome of application scoring. Funding will be calculated as follows: a minimum base of $100,000 (56% of the formula), plus the application score (34% of the formula), plus FTES size based on SG04 and/or SG15 (10% of the formula). Consequently, the application score is used in both: to determine who gets funded and in part, how much they are funded.

Question: 8 - We have two questions on the Rising Scholars RFA.

Our first question is, in the Required Applicant Information Section, we must choose one category from the following:

Programs that serve students in prison and/or jail

Programs that serve students on campus

Programs that serve students on campus and in prison and/or jail.

Our program serves formerly incarcerated students on campus, as well as serving students with in-person and online instruction in our juvenile detention center. Does the CCCCO include juvenile detention facilities in its description of "prison and/or jail"? I'm assuming we should elect option #3 (Programs that serve students on campus and in prison and/or jail) but wanted to confirm since juvenile justice centers are technically detention centers and not an adult prison/jail. Can you please confirm or correct our assumption?

Our second question is, we have also been using the codes SG24 and SG29 but per the RFA these codes will not be counted in the Performance-Based Evaluation Metrics. Is that correct?

Responses to question #8

This grant provides funding specifically for adult programs and the populations identified in the RFA. Juvenile Justice students are not covered under this RFA, as there is a separate grant designated for Juvenile Justice programs. If your program does not operate within a prison or jail, you should select "programs that serve students on campus."

Additionally, please continue using SG24 and SG29 as they align with your program's focus. If you are also serving formerly incarcerated students on campus, ensure that these students are reported using the SG15 data element.

Question: 9 - The RFA, section B1, calls for: How will your program support the goals of the Economic and Workforce Development (EWD) and Strong Workforce Program (SWP) initiatives, which aim to equip students with in-demand skills, reskill and upskill to close skills gaps, and build a strong workforce? Specifically, how will your program enhance student success in Career Technical Education pathways, align workforce data and outcomes with the needs of incarcerated students, and increase enrollment in programs that lead to high-demand, high-wage jobs, resulting in employment or improved earnings?

This seems in direct contract for colleges teaching in CDCR facilities which are mandated by SB1391 supplement, but not duplicate or supplant, any adult education course opportunities offered at that facility by the Office of Correctional Education of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

How would a college be able to meet the grant criteria if they cannot do anything OCE or PIA is already doing – which is CTE programming?

Response to Question #9

Colleges serving in CDCR facilities can meet the grant criteria outlined in the RFA while adhering to the restrictions of SB 1391 by focusing on program offerings that complement, rather than duplicate or supplant, the CTE programming provided by the Office of Correctional Education (OCE) or Prison Industry Authority (PIA).

To achieve this, colleges can emphasize:

1. **Non-CTE Offerings**: Develop and deliver programs that enhance workforce readiness without overlapping existing CTE programs. Examples include:
    a. Career counseling and guidance tailored to justice-impacted students.
    b. Soft skills training in areas such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
    c. Digital literacy and technology skills to prepare students for modern workplaces.
2. **Transferable Skills Development**: Offer general education and foundational skills courses that support both workforce and academic pathways.

By aligning these efforts with the goals of the Economic and Workforce Development (EWD) and Strong Workforce Program (SWP) initiatives, colleges can effectively support the transition of students to high-demand, high-wage jobs. This approach fosters workforce development while ensuring compliance with SB 1391's mandate.

Question: 10 - Do colleges that were already awarded the last cycle need to reapply?

Response to Question #10

Yes, colleges interested in receiving funding for the next cycle will need to reapply for the new RSN grant. Please note that this is a competitive grant process, and we are able to fund only 65 colleges.

Question: 11 - In the Requests for Applications (RFA) document section titled Section A: Performance Based Evaluation Metrics it indicates "the Chancellor's Office will automatically pull data to evaluate applicants based on specific performance questions" (RFA, p. 8). My question is: Will the Chancellor's Office provide the performance metrics data to colleges to help in their writing of the application?

If not, will the Chancellor Office's provide their data methodology (or data element dictionary) so that colleges can run their own analyses?

Response to Question #11

No, the Chancellor's Office will not provide the performance metrics data to colleges to help in their writing of the application.

Response to Question #11a.

Yes, the data methodology is described below. Colleges can use this methodology to calculate their performance score. However, because it is a competitive process that is based on the college's rank among all applicants your individual score will not provide a ranking, only a score. In addition, the performance score is only worth up to 50% of the total score. Your responses to the qualitative questions provide up to 50% of the total score and determine the college's overall rank when compared to other applicants.

Weighted Performance Index Scoring Model & Method

There are three categories of scoring that the 2025 to 2028 Rising Scholars Network grant application cycle will use when considering applications. One category of scoring is referred to as the Past Performance category: this utilizes data from the applicant college/district sourced from COMIS (Chancellor's Office Management Information System) to observe the performance of formerly and currently incarcerated students over the past 2 years as an indicator of how the applying college has served this target group of students in the past.

The Past Performance component of the application is worth 50% of the overall application package. Within this category, there are 5 subcategories: Units, Performance, Awards, Access, Availability. Colleges receive a score in each of these subcategories based on their outcome data for currently and formerly incarcerated students in COMIS. The outcome data are obtained as follows:

Subcategory	*Outcome Data Used*
Units	*Avg Units Per Term:* *Average units taken by currently or formerly incarcerated students that are transferable, degree-applicable or non-credit categories of A, C, I, J* *Calculation:* *Average of units in a term for enrollments where CB04 in ('T', 'D') OR CBO4 = 'N' and CB22 IN ('A', 'C', 'I', 'J'). For enrollments that are noncredit, we utilize a 17 attendance hours equivalence to 1 credit.* *Transferable Units Ratio: Average rate of completed units that are transferable.* *Calculation:* *Units where CB04 = 'T' in specified terms / Total units taken in specified terms.*
Performance	*Success Rates: The rate of course enrollments that result in a successful course grade.*

Subcategory	*Outcome Data Used*
	Successful grades considered: A, B, C, P, IA, IB, IC, IPP *Calculation: Course Enrollments with a "Successful" Grade in Time Period/Total Enrollments in Time Period* *Persistence Rates: The rate of students who persist from Fall term to the Spring term.* *Calculation: Count of students who were enrolled in Fall term that also enrolled at the same college in the subsequent Spring term/Count of students who were enrolled in Fall term at the selected college*
Awards	*Award Counts: The count of awards (Bachelors, Associates, Certificates, Noncredit Awards & HS Diplomas) at a college in the given academic year.* *Award Types Considered in SP02: Associates (A, S), Bachelors (Y, Z), Certificates (M, B, N, L, T, F), Noncredit Awards (G, H, I, J, K, P, Q, R), HS Diploma (U).* *Change in Award Rates: The change in rates of formerly and currently incarcerated students who earned an award in the selected year (snapshot).* *Calculation: (Year 2 snapshot count of students who earned an award in that year/Year 2 snapshot count of unique students enrolled that year) - (Year 1 snapshot count of students who earned an award in that year/Year 1 snapshot count of unique students enrolled that year)*
Access	*Enrollment by Term: Number of unique students enrolled in a given term, both currently and formerly incarcerated students.* *Calculation: Enrollments in a specific term of currently and formerly incarcerated students where headcount status (STD07) is 'A','B','C','E','F','G', or 'H'* *Change in Enrollment: Percentage change from one academic year to the next for the currently and formerly incarcerated student populations.* *Calculation: (Year 2 unique currently and formerly incarcerated students in above headcount statuses/Year 1 unique currently and formerly incarcerated students in above headcount statuses) - 1*
Availability	*Number of unique transferable or degree-applicable courses being taken by currently and formerly incarcerated students in a given term.* *Calculation: Count of distinct Course Control Numbers (CB00) that have an enrollment of at least one formerly or currently incarcerated student during the time period.*

Depending on the applicant college's prior RSN grant status, the terms of interest are either from the 2023/23 and 2023/24 academic years (for RSN 1.0 recipients) or the 2023/24 academic year (for RSN 2.0 recipients). For quarter schools, units are converted to the annual equivalent unit on a semester scale.

Outcome metrics for all colleges are then normalized so that they are comparable across metrics. The standardized metrics are then weighted according to the RFA categories to create composite scores for each specific subcomponent. The final score is then summed and rescaled onto the final point score of between 5 and 50 points.

The Performance-Based Evaluation Metrics score is combined with the Questions by Category and Workplan scores to create the final application score. All applicants scores are then sorted, and the top 65 applicants move on to the funding phase.

Question: 12 - I was hoping to follow up with you regarding our questions during the Bidder's Conference. We are North Orange Continuing Education, and I believe we are the only standalone non-credit institution with the Rising Scholars 2.0 grant. (We also have the Juvenile Justice Grant as a District with Cypress College and Fullerton College.)

Our questions are regarding the units and degree completion sections as we do not offer units but do have students completing their high school diplomas and certificate course through our CTE programs.

Units: What does that mean for NOCE as we don't offer unit courses?

Degrees Awarded: Do High School Diploma (HSD) and Career Development and College Preparation (CDCP) certificates count?

Response to Question #12

Units: Please see the response to question 11 under the sections labeled "units" and "awards", where the following statement is made, "For enrollments that are noncredit, we utilize a 17 attendance hours equivalence to 1 credit.
Degrees awarded: Yes, HSD and CDCP certificates count and are captured and calculated.

Question: 13 - I hope this message finds you well. I am reaching out with a question regarding the funding for the new Rising Scholars RFA. I was unable to find specific information on the funding amount, and I would appreciate clarification on the following:

What is the maximum funding we can apply for?

Does the funding amount need to remain consistent throughout the three-year period?

Responses to Question #13

There is no maximum amount, however as you noted we provided a range of funding that may occur based on the algorithm employed in the funding model. Regardless of the amount requested the funding level will be determined by this formula. If you are selected for a grant and offered an amount you will need to either reject the grant or adjust your budget to the amount offered.

Yes, the funding amount needs to remain consistent throughout the term of the grant. There is no variability in the amount of the grant over the funding period.

Question: 14 - I hope this email finds you well. I'm writing with a quick question regarding the Rising Scholars RFA. If Los Rios opts for a single district application involving all four colleges, are we eligible for a minimum of $100,000 per college per year for three years? Or does this limit the budget to $100,000 per year for all four colleges combined?

Responses to Question #14

No, it does not provide $100,000 per college if a multi-college district applies. It is only $100,000 per application. The award would be for all the colleges in the district's application.

Question: 15 - We have a question regarding the Work Plan Activities and Outcomes section. It requests that we identify the Regional Priority sector the activity will address. Since we plan to support both CTE and general education students, should we leave this blank or select 'Other' if the activity primarily supports general education students?

Response to Question #15

This section is not factored into the scoring of the activity section, however if you do want to complete it and are answering this section, select from the dropdown menu provided.

Question: 16 - The RFA states that "funded grants may range from $158,118 to $304,255 per year for three years." Is this amount per college or per application? With four colleges, are we eligible for up to $1,200,000 per year? If a single application limits the grant funding to $304k per year, we will plan to submit four separate applications. Thank you in advance for your guidance.

Response to Question #16

This amount is per application per year for three years. You are not eligible for up to $1,200,000 per year with a single district application for a four college multi-college district. If you want to achieve this level of funding, then each college must submit an application and compete on a college-by-college basis.

Question: 17 - Are we allowed to use Rising Scholars Program funds for promotional items such as pens, notebooks, or other materials with the program logo?

Response to Question #17

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

Question: 18 - Can we allocate funds to provide branded shirts or other apparel for students and staff participating in the program?

Response to Question #18

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Question: 21 - Are educational supplies for students (e.g., books, backpacks, technology like laptops or calculators) an allowable expense under this grant?

Response to Question #21

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

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Can the funds be used for services or items that need to be procured outside the district, such as third-party vendors for printing, promotional materials, or event planning?

Response to Question #23

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

Question: 24 - What steps can be taken to ensure that funds are not overly restricted within the district, avoiding limitations on necessary program expenditures?

Response to Question #24

The Chancellor's Office will always direct you to your local district guidelines for expenditures, as we cannot override local guidelines.

Question: 25 - Can we send funds directly to the district office or an external fiscal agent to streamline approval processes and ensure flexibility in spending?

Response to Question #25

Yes, you should be able to send funds directly to the district office; however, please verify this with your district. If you wish to send funds to an external fiscal agent, you will need approval from the Chancellor's Office to add the fiscal agent as a subcontractor to your grant. Additionally, I would need to understand how the use of a fiscal agent aligns with the student outcomes outlined in Education Code 78071(c).

Question: 26 - Can program funds be used to support professional development opportunities for staff working with the Rising Scholars Program, such as training or conferences?

Response to Question #26

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

Question :27 - Are we allowed to host Rising Scholars-focused events or outreach programs (e.g., community open houses, alumni networking events) using these funds?

Response to Question #27

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Question: 28 - What documentation or evidence is required to demonstrate that promotional and marketing materials purchased align with the goals of the Rising Scholars Program?

Response to Question #28

T*he Chancellor's Office evaluates program outcomes for Rising Scholars students using data submitted through the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS). Grantees are required to submit all relevant data within 30 days after the end of each academic term. Key data elements used to assess program success and student outcomes include SG04, SG15, SG24, and SG29.*

This data enables the Chancellor's Office to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, identify areas for improvement, and ensure continued support for justice-impacted students. Promotional and marketing materials should align with these program goals and demonstrate their contribution to positive student outcomes through the data collected.

Question: 29 - Are there specific limitations on spending that we should be aware of when planning events or purchasing materials?

Response to Question #29

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

Question: 30 - How do we ensure compliance with both the Chancellor's Office and district policies when using funds for promotional, student, or program-related needs?

Response to Question #30

You can ensure compliance by only authorizing expenditures align with Education Code 78071(c) and align with your district spending guidelines

Question: 31 - Can funds be used for collaborative efforts with other campus programs, such as joint marketing initiatives or shared resources (e.g., co-branded materials with EOPS, DSPS, or the Career Center)?

Response to Question #31

The Chancellor's Office does not provide a specific list of spending guidelines for grants or programs. All expenditures must align with the program's outcomes, local district policies, and CA Education Code 78071 (C). Funds should support positive student outcomes such as graduation, transfer, course completion, reducing units for college/career goals, and closing equity gaps.

Question: 32 - Are there restrictions on reallocating funds between different program priorities, such as shifting from marketing to direct student support if necessary?

Response to Question #32

You may update your budget as needed to address the needs of your program. Adjustments to budget category amounts of up to 10% can be made without prior approval from the Chancellor's Office (CO). However, any changes exceeding 10%, as well as the addition or deletion of budget categories, require prior written approval from the Project Monitor.

Question: 33 - Are there restrictions on reallocating funds between different program priorities, such as shifting from marketing to direct student support if necessary?

Response to Question #33

You may update your budget as needed to address the needs of your program. Adjustments to budget category amounts of up to 10% can be made without prior approval from the Chancellor's Office (CO). However, any changes exceeding 10%, as well as the addition or deletion of budget categories, require prior written approval from the Project Monitor.

Question: 34

Can you provide guidance on how to respond to the Objectives Section of the Nova application

Response to Question #34

Workplan: Objectives Guidance

Objective Name

Place the name of the objective in this space.

Objective Type

Choose from the dropdown menu one of the following types of objectives:

- *Develop new program to address acute market need*
- *Develop new program to address ongoing market need*
- *Improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)*
- *Improve career readiness and job placement*
- *Increase enrollment of existing plans*
- *Increase quality of existing programs*

Description of Objective

Relate the objective to one of the dropdown labels above. Description of the objective must be quantifiable and measurable. Objectives in a proposal workplan serve as specific, measurable goals that outline what the project aims to achieve. They provide a clear direction for the project, helping to focus efforts and resources. Objectives should be defined in a way that allows for assessment of progress and success.

Typically, they are framed using the SMART criteria—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This ensures that each objective is clearly articulated and attainable within a set timeframe.

How will this Objective address the Regional Strategy plan (Optional)

This section is not factored into the scoring of the objective section, however if you do want to complete it, contact you Economic Development Program or Strong Workforce Program administrator for a copy of the Regional Strategy plan for the region your college or district is in. If you are answering this section, describe how your objective supports this plan.

Description of Alignment with Sector Strategy/Regional Priority (Optional)

This section is not factored into the scoring of the objective section, however if you do want to complete it, contact you Economic Development Program or Strong Workforce Program administrator for a copy of the Regional Strategy plan for the region your college or district is in. If you are answering this section, show how the plan will inform a potential sector strategy/regional priority and the relationship of the objective to it.

Question 35 - Can you provide guidance on how to respond to the Activities and Outcomes Section of the Nova application

Response to Question #35

Workplan: Activities & Outcomes Guidance

Activity Title - Describe the who, what, and when of your Workplan.

Activity Name

Place the name of the activity in this space.

Brief Description of Activity and Significance of Activity to Outcome

Identify and describe key deliverables and how this activity contributes to a successful project outcome in the current grant period.

Proposed Completion Date

List the proposed completion date for this activity.

Select Student Success Metrics that Apply to this Activity (Optional)

This section is not factored into the scoring of the activity section, however if you do want to complete it and are answering this section, select from the dropdown menu provided.

Responsible person(s)

List the responsible person(s) in this space.

Note: Responsible persons are selected from agency contacts.

Regional Priority Sector (Optional)

This section is not factored into the scoring of the activity section, however if you do want to complete it and are answering this section, select from the dropdown menu provided.

Dependencies

Contributions of others required for a successful project outcome.