Exploration Supports: District Strategic Planning

Introduction

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This opportunity provides funding to districts who are seeking to strengthen district systems that are necessary to support sustainable school improvement in one or more identified schools. These district systems may include Talent Management, Instructional Infrastructure, Turnaround Leadership development, and/or Culture and Climate. Grantees will partner with an approved external provider to conduct a systems review, stakeholder engagement activities, and prioritization and improvement planning.

For a list of CDE approved external providers, visit CDE's Advisory List of Providers and review organizations approved under District Strategic Planning.

Eligibility & Prioritization

Eligibility. Districts with at least one school that meet the following criteria are eligible to apply:

- Schools identified for improvement under ESSA as Comprehensive Support (CS), Targeted Support (TS), or Additional Targeted Support (ATS); and/or
- Schools with a state identification School Performance Framework plan type of Priority Improvement, Turnaround, or On Watch

Prioritization. If not all EASI proposals can be funded, proposals that meet grant expectations will be funded in the order of the EASI school-level prioritization list. Schools with the highest number of prioritization points will be funded first. District level support requests will use the average prioritization of all EASI eligible schools. District level supports that serve specific EASI-eligible schools will use the average prioritization of the included EASI eligible schools. Details on how prioritization points are calculated and the points for each EASI eligible school are available on the EASI Resources and Technical Assistance webpage.

Program Considerations & Fit

Program Considerations. This program is designed for districts ready to develop a strategic plan to support sustainable school improvement. This program includes resources to partner with an external provider to engage stakeholders in understanding district data that is leading to student performance gaps, understand strengths and challenges within the district system, and develop a district-level plan to address identified needs. Additionally, this program also includes a CDE-provided professional learning supports to support implementation of the district strategic plan in the final semester of the programming.

Program Fit. This opportunity is a good fit for districts ready to engage in district-level stakeholder engagement and planning. Other EASI services such as Exploration Supports and other Offered Services pair well with this option. Districts interested in applying for District Designed and Led should consider this opportunity first to support the identification of needs and the development of an implementation plan.

Sequence of Program Support

Below is an outline of the phases of activities for awarded districts. This program will support 18 months of strategic planning and early implementation funding for districts.

Phase 1 – District and External Partner Development of District Strategic Plan

February 2027 to December 2027

- ***Launch, Engage***
  - Finalize scope of work with external partner, District and Partner attend initial onboarding meeting with CDE Program Lead to discuss program timeline and requirements
  - Convene a district strategic planning working group/cadre/committee/steering committee in partnership with external partner
  - Facilitate stakeholder engagement from staff, students, families, and community
  - Synthesize stakeholder engagement to draft district strategic plan components
- ***Prepare to Implement***
  - Finalize district strategic plan materials
  - Assign roles and responsibilities for district strategic plan implementation; determine progress monitoring structures for early implementation
  - Share, celebrate, and socialize district strategic plan with community and stakeholders
  - Engage in strategic resource mapping alongside CDE to ensure maximum resource allocation for your strategic priorities
- **At the end of the first phase, districts should have:**
  - A finalized district strategic plan informed by stakeholder input that is representative of the district's community, staff, and students
  - An initial implementation plan with roles and responsibilities for each component of the district strategic plan and a system for progress monitoring the plan in its first semester
  - A multi-year map of strategic funding decisions and milestones, developed in collaboration with external partner and CDE

Phase 2 – CDE Professional Learning to Support Performance Management of District Strategic Plan

January 2028 to September 2028

- ***Early Implementation, Professional Development Support***
  - Attend in-person CDE-provided professional learning sessions around performance management and use of your district strategic plan to drive improvements
  - Attend CDE provided virtual synchronous sessions to support implementation of district performance management structures between in-person sessions
  - Launch implementation of district strategic plan and associated performance management structures
  - Identify early successes and challenges in implementation

    - If eligible, utilize CDE supports to complete District Design and Led EASI Application (Fall 2027)
- **At the end of Phase 2 districts should have:**
    - Rolled out new district performance management practices to support implementation of their district strategic plan
    - Executed their first performance management sessions to launch the 28-20 school year, and receive feedback from CDE personnel (and external partner if applicable)
    - Scheduled performance management sessions throughout the 28-29 school year
    - If eligible, has plans to apply for future EASI funding (through DDL and/or Accountability Pathways) in alignment with multi-year map of strategic funding decisions and milestones
- **At the end of the program (September 2028) districts should have:**
    - A multi-year district strategic plan with associated performance management structures and clear roles and responsibilities for continued implementation
    - Additional EASI funds (or other identified funding) to support continued implementation or expanded implementation of the district strategic plan – and a revised multi-year map of strategic funding decisions and milestones

Available Funds & Duration

Available Funds. Awards range from $80,000 to $150,000 based on the district size, increased costs due to geographic isolation, increased costs due to a high cost of living in the Colorado area, and the number of schools identified for improvement.

Duration. Program support is designed to support LEAs for a period of approximately 18 months (2026-27 to 2027-28).

Allowable Use of Funds

Funds are intended to support the four components of Exploration Supports. Allowable use of funds includes costs associated with:

- Hiring an approved external provider to facilitate data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and/or planning activities outlined above.
- Stakeholder engagement (stipends, translation, materials, childcare, etc.)
- Development of a strategic plan
- Early implementation of the plan activities
- Other expenses to support the process (e.g., stipends, substitutes, materials etc.)

Budget Recommendations. For the application submission, the budget should include each of the components of Exploration Supports- data review, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and early implementation. General placeholders in the budget are acceptable for stakeholder engagement, improvement planning, and early implementation as specific activities will be determined by the outcome of the diagnostic review. The budget line for the cost of the external provider should align with the scope of work. For example, the draft budget for District Strategic Planning may include the following budget lines:

- Year 1 (2026-27)- Cost of approved external provider (insert provider name) to complete district-level diagnostic review for $40,000.
- Year 1 (2026-27)- Placeholder for stakeholder engagement activities as determined by the outcome of the diagnostic review and CDE approval for $10,000.

- Year 1 (2026-27)- Placeholder for improvement planning activities as determined by the outcome of the diagnostic review and CDE approval for $15,000.
- Year 1 (2026-27)- Placeholder for early implementation activities as determined by the outcome of the diagnostic review and CDE approval for $15,000.

Applicants should request funding in the Year 1 (2026-27) budget. If awarded District Strategic Planning, funds are issued in Year 1 (2026-27) and are intended to carryover into Year 2 (2027-28).

Any expenses related to an external provider must be supported by a scope of work (draft version acceptable) that clearly outlines timelines, deliverables, and costs for the district. If the external provider is facilitating multiple components of the support including the diagnostic review, stakeholder engagement, and improvement planning, districts are strongly encouraged limit provider costs to ensure funds are available for early implementation activities. The amount and budget lines must be separated by each of the components of Exploration Supports.

Note: If entering indirect costs, the total request amount may not exceed the maximum allowable amount.

Indirect Costs. Applicants may elect to include indirect costs in the application budget. Indirect cost rates based on the district's restricted indirect cost rate. The total request amount (indirect costs plus other budget lines) may not exceed the maximum allowable amount. There are some exclusions for distorting items that apply, such as the limitation of indirects on the first $50,000 on provider contracted services. Grantees should note that indirect costs are only allowed on federal awards. If the grantee receives a state award, indirect costs must be removed during the post-award revision process. More information regarding indirect cost rates is available on CDE's School Finance webpage at https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/icrc.

Fund Considerations.

- Funds from this opportunity must be used to **supplement and not supplant** any federal, state, and local funds currently being used to provide activities.
- Post-award revisions must be submitted and approved in the online system prior to incurring expenses. Any expenses incurred prior to approval are the responsibility of the LEA. All post-award revisions must be approved by 06/30.
- For federal awards, funds must be obligated by 09/30 and requested by 11/1 of each respective fiscal year.
- For state awards, funds must be obligated by 06/30 of the final year of the grant cycle.
- A school or district may carry funds forward in alignment with funding source restrictions and with CDE approval. At the end of the grant performance period, any non-requested federal funds are reverted and any unspent state funds must be returned to the state.
- CDE may terminate a grant award upon thirty days' notice if it is deemed by CDE that the applicant is not fulfilling the requirements of the funded program as specified in the approved project application, or if the program is generating less than satisfactory results.
- Multi-year or future award year amounts are contingent on allocations of state and federal funds to CDE in each respective fiscal year.

Important Program Dates

Program Dates	Activity

September- December	Meet with the appropriate school and district teams to discuss interest in applying for EASI support and develop an application. If needed, meet with supporting CDE staff. Vet and identify a partner to support your district strategic planning.
December	Application due
January	Award notifications
February/March 2027	Kick-off meeting with CDE Program Lead to answer questions and finalize any placeholder budgets. Begin work with external partner to engage stakeholders and a district diagnostic review, and begin to develop a multi-year district strategic plan.
July/August 2027	External Partner and District meet with CDE to discuss progress toward development of multi-year district strategic plan, determine progress toward December finalization
Sept/October	CDE facilitates Strategic Alignment Process alongside district and external partner to draft multi-year map of strategic funding decisions and milestones
December 2027	Finalize multi-year district strategic plan and share with CDE
January 2028	Attend virtual kick-off of Phase 2 of district strategic planning work with CDE
February- May 2028	Attend two full day professional development sessions led by CDE (dates TBD) Attend one virtual half day professional development session led by CDE (dates TBD)
June- September 2028	Attend two virtual half-day professional development sessions led by CDE (dates TBD) Execute first round of performance management sessions (August/September 2028) in your district

Evaluation and Reporting

Each grantee of the program must, at a minimum, agree to the following evaluation, reporting, and/or progress monitoring components:

- The components and artifacts composing the district strategic plan: Including the key implementation benchmarks, leading indicators, and outcomes developed as part of this grant and the tools and systems used to progress monitor the strategic plan
- Utilize an online Performance Management (PM) tool to track progress toward implementation of their district strategic plan and strategic resource funding map
- Any school or district contact working with an approved external provider funded through the EASI grant may be asked to serve as a reference for provider approvals as part of the CDE School & District Support RFI process in the following year.
- Engage in CDE performance management routines, protocols, and documentation

- Districts will also be asked to participate in network-wide surveys to provide feedback to CDE about the District Strategic Planning services
- Final Expenditure Report (FER) in GAINS each fiscal year by 09/30.
- *Note: All data collected will protect personally identifiable information (PII) protected and is only reported on an aggregate level for purposes of evaluating the EASI support and/or supporting future program improvements.*

Program Assurances

CDE Commitments:

- CDE will work with LEA to align their strategic planning structures to their UIP and minimize duplicative efforts.
- CDE will provide embedded progress monitoring of work flexibly in order to support LEA in meeting Grant Program goals.

LEA and District Leadership Commitments:

- Identify a district point person with decision-making authority who will support the overall direction of the district strategic plan development, ideally the superintendent or other executive level leader.
- Identify a district team (2-3 people) that includes the district point person to attend all CDE professional learning
- Take ownership and hold oneself accountable for the results at the district.
- Identify a district partner and maintain a working relationship with the partner in good faith throughout the period of the grant.
- Ensure the LEA and staff will not discriminate against anyone regarding race, gender, national origin, color, disability, or age.
- LEA will be required to submit Final Expenditure Reports (FER) the end of each fiscal year.
- LEA understands that unobligated funds state funds will be returned to CDE and unobligated federal funds will be rescinded at the conclusion of the grant cycle.
- Funds will be used to supplement and not supplant any federal, state, and local moneys currently being used to provide services and grant dollars will be administered by the appropriate fiscal agent.
- Funded projects will maintain appropriate fiscal and program records and fiscal audits of this program will be conducted by the grantees as a part of their regular audits.
- If any findings of misuse of these funds are discovered, project funds will be returned to CDE.

Related Resources & Information

Colorado Department of Education's EASI Website

www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/easiapplication