District Designed & Led: Major Improvement Strategy

Introduction

The District Designed and Led (DDL) route of the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) application encourages districts to initiate and expand support for schools in need of improvement. This route includes two services including Implementation Support and Major Improvement Strategy (DDL-MIS). Both DDL options are designed to support improvement implementation efforts.

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DDL-MIS service is designed for districts and their schools that have a demonstrated need that can be served through the implementation of one of CDE's Major Improvement Strategy (MIS) Guides[1]. Current guides include:

- Attendance Strategy Guide 2.1
- Community Schools Strategy Guide 2.1
- Coaching Strategy Guide 2.1
- Data Driven Instruction Strategy Guide 2.1
- Family-School-Community Partnerships (FSCP) Strategy Guide 2.1
- High Dosage Tutoring Strategy Guide 2.1
- Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Strategy Guide 2.1
- Ninth Grade Success Strategy Guide 2.1
- Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Strategy Guide 2.1
- Trauma-Informed Education Strategy Guide 2.1

Eligibility & Prioritization

Prerequisites. Districts and their included and eligible schools must demonstrate the need for the selected improvement strategy. The need for the selected improvement strategy may be demonstrated using any of the following:

- External diagnostic review completed in the last two years from time of application
- Internal district diagnostic review completed in the last two years from time of application
- S-CAP review in the last two years from time of application
- Relevant school or district-level data trends for the last three years

[1] Refer to the Current UIP Major Improvement Strategy Guides website (https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/strategyguides) for the most up to date list of approved guides. Archived Strategy Guides are in the process of being updated, as appropriate, and will be added as 2.1 versions when they may be used in for this grant opportunity.

Note: If the application includes multiple schools, the demonstrated need must clearly align with the selected Major Improvement Strategy Guide for each included school.

Eligibility. Schools 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.

Limitations. If prerequisites and eligibility criteria are met, funding decisions may be limited by the following:

- *District capacity*- The EASI Route of District Designed & Led (DDL) depends on the capacity of a district to implement the selected major improvement efforts. If a district has active DDL funded initiatives from prior EASI cohorts or is applying for multiple DDLs, the number of funded DDL awards for a district may be taken into consideration in the final funding decisions.
- *Schools in multiple DDLs-* An individual school may only be included in one DDL application for funding.
- *DDL renewals-* A district or individual school may apply for additional funding to continue an improvement strategy funded through a previous EASI cohort. Up to one continuation is allowed for a given improvement strategy.
- *DDL funding cap-* All DDL (Implementation Support and Major Improvement Strategy combined) awards are subject to a funding cap. A single district with fewer than 20 eligible schools may not exceed the maximum per included school up to $1,000,000 total in EASI Cohort 10 (2026-27 to 2028-29). If a district has more 20 eligible schools, the DDL funding cap is the maximum per school up to $1,200,000 in EASI Cohort 10 (2026-27 to 2028-29).

Program Considerations & Fit

Program Considerations. Successful implementation of DDL-MIS requires district-level support and capacity to ensure adherence to the selected CDE Major Improvement Strategy Guide. Each Major Improvement Strategy Guide includes necessary preconditions and contextual fit sections that should be considered in the selection of an aligned improvement strategy. CDE will also gather information about the interest of grantees in a learning cohort focused on the selected improvement strategy. If the grant funds multiple districts implementing a specific improvement strategy and CDE staff allows, additional professional learning opportunities or CDE-lead support may be provided to grantees.

Program Fit. DDL-MIS is designed to support the implementation of a selected Major Improvement Strategy Guide focused on a given improvement initiative. DDL-MIS is a good fit for districts who can demonstrate the need for the selected improvement strategy and are wanting to implement the strategy as aligned to the guide. The need may be demonstrated through a recent external diagnostic review, internal school review process, recent completion of an EASI support that includes diagnostic components (i.e. Transformation Network, Connect for Success, District Strategic Planning, or Exploration Supports), or recent school data

profile. DDL-MIS may not be a good fit for schools or a district currently receiving support or considering applying for Rigorous Action through Redesign, Foundations for Accelerated Improvement, Connect for Success, Transformation Network, or School Transitions. DDL-MIS is not a good fit for schools or districts wanting to deviate from the selected strategy guide. If a school or district is wanting to pursue an implementation plan that is notably different than the selected strategy guide, then DDL-IS is a better fit.

Sequence of Program Support

The sequence of the work is determined and outlined in the selected Major Improvement Strategy Guide. Guides provide the sequence of implementation, core components, and provide sample implementation activities. Proposals detailing the sequence of the work must align to the selected Major Improvement Strategy Guide but may be adjusted based on the current state and context of the school or district.

Available Funds & Duration

Available Funds. Applicants may request up to the maximum award amount for each school included in the selected Major Improvement Strategy. Award may be:

- Up to $20,000 per school in Year 1 (2026-27)
- Up to $80,000 per school in Year 2 (2027-28)
- Up to $80,000 per school in Year 3 (2028-29)

Note: All District Designed & Led (Implementation Support and Major Improvement Strategy combined) awards may not exceed the district DDL funding cap.

Duration. Program support is designed to support a district-led initiative for a period of 2.5 years (2026-27 to 2028-29).

Allowable Use of Funds

Funds are intended to support the implementation of a selected Major Improvement Strategy Guide and budgets must align tightly to the core components in each guide. Please note that some strategy guides indicate a sequential implementation of core components. Allowability of expenses will be based on the focus core component. Allowable use of funds includes costs associated with:

- Implementation of focus core component(s) of the selected MIS Guide
- Hiring an external provider to support implementation
    - Preferably (although not required) an approved provider on the CDE Advisory List of Providers
- Stipends for teachers and support staff to design, develop, or implement activities in support of the selected improvement strategy
- Substitute pay to create staff time for implementation activities or professional development related to the selected improvement strategy
- Materials and supplies needed for implementation of the selected improvement strategy
- Stakeholder engagement (stipends, translation, childcare, etc.)

Funding requests for full-time equivalent (FTE) positions are generally not approved. Narrow exceptions are allowed if the school or district can clearly demonstrate that the position is intended to build capacity through the development of systems, practices, and structures for the respective improvement strategy. Additionally, FTE requests must be supported by the selected strategy guide and the core component of focus, be considered a supplemental position, and be supported by a clear plan for sustainability for the position after the grant concludes.

Note: Strategy guides pull together research on best practices and implementation and may reference activities that are not allowed by the grant funding source. Please refer to the EASI Budget Guidance document for additional details on unallowable expenses.

Budget Recommendations. For the application submission, a draft budget should clearly demonstrate a clear plan for implementing the selected MIS Guide. Each budget line should specify activities and the connection to core components in the guide. It is acceptable, however, to use a general placeholder in the budget if the activities are sequential and dependent on the outcome of initial activities. District-level implementation of DDL-MIS is acceptable, but any school-specific expenses (i.e. staff stipends, substitute pay, supplies, etc.) may only be for schools eligible for EASI support.

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 eligible school. Scope of work must also clearly align to the selected MIS guide.

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.
December	Application due
January	Award notifications

April-May	Meet with CDE DDL Program Lead and set performance targets and implementation benchmarks for grant
Fall & Spring Year 2 & 3	Participate in two check-ins per year with CDE DDL Program Lead

Evaluation and Reporting

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

- Development of an implementation plan including implementation benchmarks and performance targets
- Progress monitoring check-ins twice per year
- 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.
- 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

LEA Commitments:

- Designate a program contact person or small working team who will be responsible for the implementation of the supported improvement effort
- All grant requirements are met in a timely manner
- Participate in the development, tracking, monitoring, and sharing of implementation benchmarks and performance targets with CDE staff through the duration of the grant
- Participate in two implementation check-ins each year of the grant with designated CDE staff
- 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

Colorado Department of Education's Major Improvement Strategy Guides

https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/strategyguides