

Innovation Funding Initiative

Investing in bold ideas. Creating lasting impacts.



Orange County Department of Education (OCDE)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

Innovation Funding Initiative: **Cohort 2**

ISSUED BY:

The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE)

ISSUED ON:

October 7, 2026

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT APPLICATIONS:

December 4, 2026 (5:00 pm)



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Request for Applications (RFA)
Innovation Funding Initiative: [Cohort 2](#)

I. Overview of the Program and Funding Opportunity

A. Purpose and Goals of OCDE Innovation Funding Opportunity

The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) invites Orange County school districts serving students in grades TK-12 (Applicant) to submit applications in response to this Request for Applications (RFA) to explore and expand innovative practices that elevate student engagement and achievement. This funding opportunity is part of OCDE's Innovation Funding Initiative, emerging from the [OCDE 5-3-1 Strategic Plan](#). By empowering schools and districts with resources to develop and implement pioneering projects, OCDE aims to address the challenges faced by Orange County schools and students. Successful projects will transform educational environments or practices, and have high potential to be replicated on a larger scale. Through the initiative, OCDE also aims to build a collaborative network of innovative educators dedicated to shaping a forward-thinking future in education.

What is Innovation?

For the purpose of this funding opportunity, **innovation** refers to the implementation of a new strategy or novel application of strategies designed to address an unmet need in an educational context. Innovative practices improve efficiency or outcomes—especially equitable outcomes for underserved student groups—and demonstrate progress toward specific, measurable goals. Proposed innovations must be grounded in theory or evidence, responsive to the needs of the population of interest, and capable of producing sustainable, scalable, and replicable change. Some examples of innovative approaches may include adopting a strategy from another context and applying it to an educational setting, reconsidering or reinventing traditional educational policies and practices, thoughtful integration of technology with supporting practices, and creative strategies for elevating student learning, engagement, or success.

B. Overview of the Funding Opportunity

B1. Timeline and Key Dates

Activity	Date (all times shown are PST)
Request for Applications (RFA) Released	October 7, 2026
Prospective Applicant Webinars: Innovation Funding RFA Overview	October 13, 2026, 10:00 a.m. October 21, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Deadline to submit Intent to Apply (optional)	October 30, 2026, 5:00 p.m.
Office Hours for Technical Questions	November 4, 2026, 2:00 p.m. November 13, 2026, 10:00 a.m. November 19, 2026, 10:00 a.m.
Deadline to submit questions	November 23, 2026, 5:00 p.m.
Final responses to questions (Frequently Asked Questions/FAQs) posted on OCDE website	November 24, 2026
Deadline to submit applications (Late or partial submissions will not be accepted)	December 4, 2026, 5:00 p.m.
Anticipated award announcement	Early February 2027
Period of Performance	July 1, 2027 - June 30, 2030

Dates in the table are subject to change. Additionally, OCDE may modify the RFA by issuing an addendum, which will be posted on the OCDE Innovation Funding website: ocde.us/InnovationFunding. Applicants shall be responsible for ensuring their application reflects any and all RFA addenda issued by OCDE. OCDE recommends that applicants check the website frequently for updates.

Submitting an Intent to Apply is not a requirement of this funding program. However, prospective applicants who submit an Intent to Apply form will receive direct updates. Applications will be accepted from applicants who do not submit an intent to apply.

Webinars are open to representatives of Orange County school districts and public schools serving students in grades TK-12.

B2. Funding Available

OCDE intends to fund six (6) projects in this second cohort. Districts that were funded in Cohort 1 are not eligible to apply in this second round. Awards will be made for a period of three (3) years, with a maximum of \$525,000 per award for the project period beginning July 1, 2027 and ending June 30, 2030. Funds will be distributed based on the needs of the innovation project, or according to a schedule agreed upon by OCDE and the awardee. OCDE intends to fund a variety of projects across districts of different types (e.g., unified school districts, high school districts, elementary school districts) and projects with different focus areas (e.g., Career and Technical Education (CTE); early learning; expanded learning; learning, language, and literacy; school climate and/or safety; STEM/artificial intelligence (AI); STEM/science, other technology, engineering, or math; student health and wellness; student supports; youth leadership).

B3. Eligible Applicants

Applicants eligible to apply for this opportunity include school districts within Orange County, California serving students in grades TK-12. Districts may submit up to two applications in this round. However, any district will receive no more than one award for the three-year project period.

Districts funded in Cohort 1 are not eligible to apply in this second round. This includes Anaheim Union High School District, Fountain Valley School District, Fullerton School District, Huntington Beach Union High School District, Orange Unified School District, and Saddleback Valley Unified School District. Other organizations/entities *not eligible to apply* include: Charter schools, private schools, districts outside of Orange County, colleges or universities, nonprofit or community-based organizations, and other non-LEA entities. Public school sites in Orange County are not eligible to apply on their own. If an Orange County school has an innovative idea they would like to submit, their district must apply on their behalf. While the applicant must be a school district, implementation at one or more school sites is highly encouraged. Schools that will serve as implementation sites must be involved in developing the funding application.

C. Support for Awardees and Learning Opportunities

C1. Implementation Support and Learning

To support Orange County school districts selected to receive Innovation Funding under this opportunity, awardees will receive ongoing technical assistance, support, and resources from an OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coaches to implement, evaluate, sustain, and scale successful innovations. OCDE will also provide subject matter experts (Content Coaches) to guide and support awardees in these processes. This individualized support is designed to enhance implementation, progress monitoring, and evaluation of proposed projects, and to help ensure that lessons learned from implementation are utilized for continuous improvement, scaling and sustaining successful programs. The process is designed to be collaborative between the Evaluator, Coaches, and awardee districts with a focus on refining data collection tools, metrics, and methods for measuring project impacts, monitoring project implementation and progress towards program goals, and identifying innovative practices that can be replicated in other contexts.

Awardees will meet as a full group with the Evaluator, Coaches, and their cohort peers, at a minimum of twice per year (biannually) for the duration of the three-year project period. The biannual day-long meetings will be structured as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) with dedicated time for individualized coaching. In the first project year, the sessions will be held on August 3, 2027 and January 27, 2028. If selected to receive an award, implementation teams (i.e. primary and secondary project leads, staff who are key to implementing the project, and leaders with authority to make decisions about project implementation and evaluation) are expected to attend each of these sessions. First year sessions will include individualized support to create a comprehensive data collection and evaluation plan, specifying the processes, tools, and timelines for conducting a rigorous evaluation of the innovation project. The learning community will provide opportunities for innovative educators to connect, share experiences and lessons learned, collaborate on best practices, and identify strategies for sustaining and scaling innovative projects. The learning community may also serve

as an incubator of new ideas for educational innovation in Orange County. Additional PLC and technical assistance opportunities will be made available throughout the project period. The district project team will also work closely with the Evaluator throughout the three-year project period to ensure data related to the project is collected on time and with fidelity to measure project impacts. Awardees will be provided with structured templates for progress reporting, as well as guidance and support on required annual evaluation reporting.

C2. Education Innovation Summit

OCDE will host an Education Innovation Summit, annually in the spring. Participation is required for awardees so that all Innovation Funding recipients may fully benefit from shared learning, collaboration, and implementation enhancement across the county. The in-person Summit will offer awardees and other Orange County educators opportunities to network, learn, and explore innovative approaches to improving student outcomes.

D. Application Components and Applicant Agreements

D1. Application Components

The application requires submission of the following components, which are outlined in further detail in Section II:

- Application Checklist
- Applicant Information Form
- Applicant Agreement Form
- Project Abstract
- Project Narrative
- Budget Narrative
- Budget Workbook
- Appendix

A Table of Contents is not required, but strongly encouraged. All page limits and requirements must be followed in order to qualify for review.

D2. Applicant Agreements

As part of the application process, applicants must complete the Agreement form, acknowledging their agreement to the following conditions if chosen as an awardee under the OCDE Innovation Funding Initiative:

- Attend awardee orientation at the beginning of the project period;
- Participate in biannual day-long coaching and learning sessions throughout the three-year project period, with project leads and key implementation staff attending each session;
- Participate in the Orange County Education Innovation Summit (spring, annually);
- Comply with local, state, and federal laws and education regulations;
- Collaborate with an OCDE Evaluator to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan, and make data available as needed to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the project;
- Submit progress reports (quarterly);
- Submit fiscal expenditure reports (quarterly);
- Submit annual evaluation reports and a final evaluation report after the project period ends; and
- Share all products or processes developed as part of the innovation project with the broader educational community (e.g., presenting at network meetings, conferences, Innovation Summit, disseminating through LEA communication).

More detailed descriptions of these items are shown in the Applicant Agreement Form. While the application does not require an authorized signature, it does require acknowledgement that the authorized signatory for the district has approved the application being submitted. In the Agreement Form that is submitted with the application, the applicant must also check the box indicating that their district Superintendent is aware of the project in the manner it is proposed in the application. Finally, the applicant must check a box indicating that no OCDE staff were involved in the design of the proposed project and/or in the development of the application. *OCDE involvement in these activities may disqualify the application from consideration for funding.*

E. Budget Guidelines

A maximum of \$525,000 per awardee will be granted for a three-year project period, beginning July 1, 2027 and extending through June 30, 2030. Proposed budgets that exceed the maximum limit may be disqualified from consideration. Proposed budgets may be lower than \$525,000 for the three-year period. A period shorter than three years will be allowed, if the proposed project period is sufficient to adequately implement and evaluate the success of the innovation *and* a plan is provided for how the awardee will sustain and scale the innovation during the remaining project period through June 30, 2030. In this case, the applicant must provide a description of other funding sources or resources that will be used to sustain or scale the project during the time period after Innovation Funds are spent and through the end of the award period (June 30, 2030).

E1. Allowable Costs

Allowable costs are shown below. There may be additional allowable costs. Costs must be reasonable and necessary for the successful implementation of the proposed project.

- Curriculum development and instructional materials
- Strategies that result in new approaches to address a need
- Professional development needed to implement innovative strategies
- Salaries, benefits, and stipends for personnel (e.g., for release time)
- Technology, equipment, or materials
- Software purchase and maintenance
- Transportation costs (including bus passes)
- Indirect costs allowed at district's state approved rate ([2026-27 Indirect Cost Rates are available on the CDE website](#))
- Subcontractors (entities that provide goods or services to the funded project for a fee without being responsible for programmatic results)
 - Subawards (for subrecipients that will carry out part of the funded program and help achieve its objectives)

E2. Costs Not Allowed Without Prior Approval from OCDE

- Capital expenditures - new construction
- Facilities costs (renovation/rental/lease)
- Food or beverages
- Out of state travel/conference

If any “Costs Not Allowed Without Prior Approval from OCDE” are included in the proposed project budget, the applicant must clearly justify in the Budget Narrative why each cost is necessary and reasonable to achieve the project’s objectives. These expenses are subject to separate review and written approval by OCDE after the award is made and prior to incurring the costs. Upon award, the agreement with OCDE will require that public funds be used in compliance with applicable laws and regulations related to subcontracting and purchases of technology, equipment, materials, supplies, software services, and other items.

E3. Unallowable Costs

- Costs that are not necessary, reasonable, and clearly aligned with the approved project scope or objectives
- Entertainment or social events
- Alcohol
- Lobbying, political activities, or fundraising expenses
- Gifts, awards, or souvenirs
- Costs that supplant existing state, local, or other funds (i.e., innovation funds may not replace funds that would otherwise be available for the same purpose)
- Travel outside of the U.S.

If an applicant is uncertain whether a cost would be allowable, it is recommended that they submit a question prior to the closing of the question and answer period.

E4. Leveraged or In-Kind Funding

This program does not require matching, leveraged, or in-kind contributions. However, if applicants intend to leverage additional funding or provide in-kind resources to support the project, that information must be provided in the Budget Narrative. The description

must specify the source and timing of these contributions (for example, whether they will be used during specific project years or after the funding ends to sustain or expand project activities).

II. The Application

OCDE staff are not permitted to assist in the design of the innovation project or in the development of the application. This poses a conflict of interest, and may result in an application being disqualified from funding consideration.

A. Application Process

A1. Intent to Apply

Submitting an intent to apply is not a requirement of this funding program. The optional intent to apply form may be emailed to grantsandfunding@ocde.us, by October 30, 2026, 5:00 P.M. (PST), with a subject line “Cohort 2 Innovation Funding Intent to Apply.”

A2. Submission Requirements

- An **Application Checklist** to ensure all required components of the application are completed and included in the application. All items on the Checklist must be checked prior to submission, which shows acknowledgement from the applicant that all required information is included in the application being submitted.
- An **Applicant Information Form**, with project title and total funding requested, information on the district, contact information, identification of the focus area(s) of the project and student grade levels to be served.
- An **Applicant Agreement Form**, which includes an acknowledgement that an authorized representative for the district (e.g., Superintendent or designee) was informed of the project as proposed in the application, has approved the application being submitted, and agrees to comply with all terms and conditions related to the Innovation Funding opportunity if chosen as an awardee. Other agreements are outlined in the previous section of this RFA, and on the Applicant Agreement Form.

- A **Project Abstract** briefly describes the innovation project, as outlined in Section II.B. of this RFA (1 page maximum)
- A **Project Narrative**, with responses to prompts outlined in Section II.C. of this RFA (20 pages maximum, pages numbered)
- A **Budget Narrative**, with detailed descriptions and justification of proposed project budget, including description of expenses by budget category (No page limit, does not count towards the Project Narrative 20-page limit, pages numbered).
- A **Budget Workbook**, with a three-year breakout of proposed project costs, by budget category, including a brief description for each proposed category of how funds will be spent. Applicant must use its district's [state-negotiated indirect cost rate](#). It is strongly recommended that project teams work with their fiscal department to develop their proposed budget, to ensure costs are assigned in the correct budget categories and that indirect costs are calculated on applicable expenses only. (requires use of Excel template provided)
- A single **Appendix** must be included with the application (10 pages maximum), which may include supplemental materials such as:
 - o Citations List. A list of citations is required for data, evidence, or theories cited in the narrative. This list may be single-spaced. (required)
 - o Metrics Table. This table is required, and is designed to organize the applicant's proposed process and outcomes measures to be used for evaluation and progress monitoring. The applicant may embed the metrics table in the project narrative or include it as part of the Appendix. (required)
 - o A logic model, or other graphic may be provided to help illustrate the applicant's monitoring and evaluation approach. (optional)
 - o Tables or graphics that support narrative text may also be included, to support the narrative by visually organizing complex information or illustrating examples. Tables must not contain large portions of descriptive text which is best suited for the project narrative. Scoring of narrative application sections will be based on the project narrative itself. Reviewers may reference supplemental information only to enhance understanding of the narrative. (optional)

- o Letters of Support from partners. These letters are optional, but encouraged if they help demonstrate project readiness or feasibility. (optional)
- o Other supplemental materials the applicant believes will enhance the application.

All written sections of the application must adhere to the following formatting requirements, unless otherwise specified: double-spaced, 12-point standard font, one inch (1”) margins, pages numbered in Project Narrative and Budget Narrative sections. Applicants must adhere to all specified page limits. Responses that exceed page limits will not be reviewed beyond the maximum specified page limit. Applicant’s full response may not be considered in scoring if it exceeds the page limit. **Applications that do not adhere to the formatting requirements may lose up to 2 points from their total score.** Applicants may include the project title in a header or footer, but please avoid including district or school identifying information in headers or footers.

A3. Submission Process and Deadline

OCDE will begin accepting applications upon the date of issuance of this RFA, and will continue to accept applications until December 4, 2026, up until 5:00 P.M. (PST). The timeline is subject to change. For updates, visit the [OCDE Innovation Funding website](#). If a district plans to submit two applications (a maximum of two applications is allowed per district), each application must be submitted in a separate email.¹ To be considered for review, all applications must be received by the deadline. Applicants must follow the instructions in this section for submitting the funding application via email to grantsandfunding@ocde.us. Hard copy submissions will not be accepted.

Please include the following information in your submission.

- **Email subject line** must read: “Cohort 2 Innovation Funding Application: [District Name - Brief Project Title]” (e.g., Cohort 2 Innovation Funding Application: AlphaUSD - New Math).

¹ If a district is submitting two applications, applications must be numbered (e.g., AlphaUSD-1_Application, AlphaUSD-2_Application).

- **Body of email:** Applicants may address the email to: *Cohort 2 Innovation Funding Review Committee*; and may include any information in the body of the email the applicant prefers. This content will not be considered in the evaluation process.
- **Attachments:** Submission of the application must be attached to the email, following the guidance in the table below. The table outlines which files are needed for inclusion in the application submission, with naming conventions.

Attach the following files to the email in this order:	Name Files Using the Following Guidelines¹:
(1) A single Application file (in searchable PDF format*), containing the following sections and in the following order: (a) Applicant information, including the Applicant Information Form, Applicant Agreement Form, and Application Checklist (b) Abstract (no more than 1 page) (c) Narrative document, including Project Narrative (no more than 20 pages, pages numbered) and Budget Narrative (no maximum, pages numbered) (d) Appendix, containing supplemental materials such as a citations list, a Metrics Table, a logic model, tables or graphics that support the narrative and are labeled and referenced accordingly in the project narrative, Letters of Support, or other supporting documents (no more than 10 pages total).	District Abbreviation_Application <i>Example:</i> <i>AlphaUSD_Application</i>
(2) A single Excel Budget Workbook (using the required three-year budget template)	District Abbreviation_Budget <i>Example:</i> <i>AlphaUSD_Budget</i>
The total size of the email with attachments may not exceed 30 MB. Please be sure that the email attachments, in total, are 30 MB or less. If file sizes collectively exceed this limit, applicant may need to ZIP the files and attach them as a ZIP file.	
*Searchable PDF: The best way to create a searchable PDF of your final application is to use the “save as PDF” or “print to PDF” feature from Word or Google Docs. The best way to compile all of your application components (i.e. forms, narrative, appendix) into one single PDF document is to use the full version of Adobe. <i>Please try to avoid scanning the document. Doing so renders it unsearchable.</i>	

The applicant is solely responsible for ensuring that its application arrives to OCDE by the deadline set forth in this RFA, in order to be eligible for OCDE's initial screening process. OCDE shall not be responsible for any technical issues with email delivery. Applicants must complete all required prompts and questions in the application documents, and submit all required documents no later than the specified submission deadline. All components of the application must be complete in order to be considered for funding review. All applications should be verified by the applicant before submission. Adjustments may not be permitted after submission. OCDE will not be held responsible for any applicant errors or omissions in the preparation of their application. Any costs incurred by the applicant in the preparation of the application shall be the sole responsibility of the Applicant. After the application is received by OCDE, an email will be sent to the applicant to confirm receipt.

B. Project Abstract Describing Innovation Project

Applicants must include a project abstract, limited to one (1) double-spaced page, in 12-point standard font, with 1" margins. Abstracts shall be on their own page. The abstract shall briefly describe the innovation project, and include the title of the project, need or challenge it addresses, main goals of the project and strategies to be implemented, what makes the project innovative, whether it is a new innovation for the district or an expansion of an existing innovation, and expected impacts of the project. If space allows, applicants may include any other relevant information that will communicate what the proposed project entails and/or who the partners are that will be involved in the project. The abstract is required, but will not be scored.

C. Description of Project Narrative Sections

This section provides a description of what is expected in each section of the project narrative. To be competitive, applications must be responsive to the narrative prompts (see *Narrative Template*, linked in Section III. Application Materials). Applicants must adhere to the 20-page limit on the narrative section of the application, using double-spaced, 12-point standard font, with 1" margins and numbered pages. Responses that exceed the page limits will not be reviewed beyond the maximum

specified page limit. The complete response may not be considered in scoring if it exceeds the page limit. It is highly recommended that applicants review the scoring rubric to determine the relative weight of each narrative section to help guide the number of pages to allocate to each section.

Applicants should avoid overusing their district name, district acronym, and school names throughout the narrative. Because applications will be redacted to ensure a blind review process, minimizing use of specific names and identifiers will assist in this process. Instead, it is recommended that the applicant mention the district name once and then use the generic term “district” thereafter. It is also recommended that applicants avoid including district identifiers in headers and footers.

C1. Project Need and Alignment

In this section of the application, the applicant will *identify the need or challenge* faced by schools, staff, or students that the innovation project will address, with evidence cited to substantiate the challenge or need, and how the innovation will address the unmet need, challenge, or barrier to student success. The *target population(s)* will be identified in this section. Because this project requires applicants to identify at least one student outcome they hope to impact with their project, and at least one of the applicant’s student outcomes must be tied to a Differentiated Assistance (DA) eligibility indicator or DA student group, data related to unmet needs or challenges of the student group or indicator of interest will help strengthen this section of the application. Data sources must be referenced in the text, using applicant’s preferred method, and a citations list must be included in the Appendix, for any evidence or references cited in the narrative.

This section will also *introduce the innovation* and how it will contribute to improving educational environments, reducing gaps, and/or improving student outcomes.

Applicants shall *describe what they are already doing to address the challenge or need*, and how the proposed innovation will elevate, replace, or complement those efforts.

Applicants shall *reference any relevant theory or preliminary work* that supports the potential efficacy of the innovative approach(es) proposed. Applicants will further

describe how the innovation is *aligned with relevant standards*. Applicants will identify if the proposed project is a *new innovation or an expansion of an existing innovation*. If it builds on an existing innovation, an explanation shall be provided describing how the proposed project expands on that existing approach. Applicants shall also outline *how the proposed innovation and anticipated outcomes align* with district, school, and/or County priorities. The alignment may focus on how the innovation or expected outcomes align with district or school plans (e.g., LCAPs, SPSAs), with the district's DA priorities, or with other district initiatives and priorities. Finally, the applicant must address *how the proposed project aligns with [OCDE's 5-3-1 Strategic Plan](#)*.

C2. Project Design and Quality

This section shall include an organized and detailed description of the project, framed by the project's main goals and objectives, and accompanied by a detailed implementation plan.

- The project design and proposed activities should be clearly explained and aligned with the implementation plan.
- Applicants shall include a detailed description of proposed strategies or activities to be implemented, and what makes the approach innovative.
- The proposed innovation shall be aligned with the definition of innovation outlined in Section I of this RFA, and the applicant should make clear how it is aligned.
- The Project Design and Quality section of the narrative shall include a description of the site or sites of implementation and the target population(s) participating in or affected by the innovation. This shall include a description of grade levels and any student populations that will be prioritized for the project, and the approximate number of students who will be served by the project.
- Applicants will describe how the innovation is grounded in evidence or theory. This may include presenting a Theory of Change and/or evidence that supports the potential efficacy of the proposed innovation to impact expected outcomes.
- A description shall be provided explaining how educators or other staff will be selected to participate in the project. if applicable.

- Project goals must be clearly stated and as specific as possible, identifying (1) target date, (2) a measurable action, (3) the population or setting involved, if applicable; and (4) the intended impact. For example: “By June 30, 2028, test the New Math-Art Curriculum with 10 pairs of Geometry and Art teachers in four high schools in the participating districts, in order to improve student creative problem-solving and math performance; e.g., Implement a district-wide mentoring program pairing 50 ninth-graders at risk for chronic absence with community volunteers in order to improve student attendance and graduation rates.”
- At least one goal must include a student outcome. The proposed project shall show high potential for meaningful impact, either broadly across student groups or deeply within targeted student groups.

An organized implementation plan outlining main objectives, activities, timelines, and progress indicators for each goal shall be provided. *Goals* state the outcomes the applicant hopes to achieve through their project. *Objectives* specify measurable results that mark progress towards the goals. *Activities* describe the actions or tasks the applicant will engage in to achieve each objective.

- For each goal, the applicant must identify main objectives.
- For each objective, applicants must identify the main activities, targeted completion dates, and progress or success indicators (i.e. how the applicant will measure implementation progress or completion).
- The applicant may include as many objectives and activities as needed to give reviewers an idea of the plan for implementation, timing, and measuring progress.
- The implementation plan shall cover the entire project period, and is designed to ensure timely implementation of the project each year. The implementation plan shall be used to help monitor implementation progress.
- The sample implementation plan in this section provides examples of how goals, objectives, timelines, and progress indicators may be framed. Applicants may use this template for developing their project implementation plan, or modify it to best reflect their project plan.

Sample Implementation Plan

Goal 1: By June 30, 2028, test the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i> with 10 pairs of Geometry and Art teachers in four high schools in order to improve student creative problem-solving and math performance.			
Objective	Activities	Timeline	Progress Indicators
Test the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i>	Recruit and train 10 Geometry and 10 Art teachers to pilot the curriculum	July - August 2027	Number of teachers recruited Number of teachers trained
	Pilot the curriculum with teacher pairs	August - December 2027	Fidelity of teaching the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i> based on responses provided on the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i> Fidelity Tool
Evaluate the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i>	Conduct student and teacher focus groups to get input on their experiences with the curriculum	By February 28, 2027	Number of focus groups conducted Focus group themes identified (to determine feasibility of adopting the curriculum, and adjustments needed to the curriculum)
Implement the Revised <i>Math-Art Curriculum</i>	Revise the curriculum based on feedback	By June 30, 2027	Revised curriculum with educator lesson plans, templates, and resources
	Implement curriculum at all high schools in participating districts	August 1, 2027 - May 30, 2029	Number and percent of high school Geometry classes in participating districts using the <i>Math-Art Curriculum</i>
Goal 2: By March 1, 2028, recruit 20 inter-generational mentors to teach students how to solve real-world Geometry problems.			
Objective	Activities	Timeline	Progress Indicators

C3. Feasibility of Project

This section of the narrative will focus on applicant capacity and readiness to implement the proposed project. Applicants shall describe the project team composition and expertise that demonstrates capacity to effectively implement the proposed project, and the team's capacity for collaborating with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach to monitor implementation, collect and analyze data, and complete evaluation

and reporting tasks. Indicate whether new staff will need to be hired or vacant roles filled in order to implement the project. Including key staffing titles, roles and responsibilities, and a brief description of staff qualifications will enhance the application. The description may include partners' roles and responsibilities in the project, if applicable. Applicant shall describe the plan for addressing turnover in key project staff during the project period to ensure continuity and high quality project implementation. This section may also include support to be provided by business or community partners in implementing the project.

Applicants shall provide a detailed description of how school site leadership was involved in the development of the proposed innovation project and funding application. This shall include whether the school site leadership involved in this process represent the sites where implementation will occur, and if not, whether leadership at sites of implementation are committed to the activities proposed if the application is awarded.

Provide evidence of district and site-level readiness and feasibility to implement the project. This may include demonstrating key leadership and implementation site support for the project. Evidence may be provided in descriptive form, or as Letters of Support from leadership, site administrators, educators, and/or other collaborative partners that will support project implementation and success. Include a description of anticipated barriers or challenges to project implementation and/or collaboration with OCDE, and solutions or safeguards that will be put in place to overcome or circumvent those anticipated challenges. Factors to consider addressing in the application include, but are not limited to: level of current site administrator and staff support for the project, site and district ability to integrate processes into existing structures and initiatives, existing resources such as materials, staffing, training structures, and partnerships; district hiring processes; competing priorities or limited staff resources. It is especially important to acknowledge factors that may impede implementation or the timely start-up of the project, and a thoughtful plan for addressing those challenges. Moreover, if renovation, construction, or equipment purchases are needed for the project, the applicant describes processes for ensuring timely acquisition of materials, and strategies for

securing timely approvals and permits. **If staff positions necessary for project implementation need to be filled or hired, applicants may want to include a planning period during the first year to allow for time required to fill positions.**

Applicants must use the National Implementation Research Network's [Hexagon Tool](#) to determine their readiness to implement the program being proposed in the application. Rating scores (numerical, 1 to 5) for each of the following indicators from the Hexagon Tool must be provided: (1) Capacity to Implement, (2) Fit with Current Initiatives, and (3) Supports. Review the Hexagon Tool document for guidance on scoring each Indicator. Applicants must also identify which of those indicators represents the district's area of greatest implementation readiness and the indicator reflecting the area where the district needs to do the most work to prepare for project implementation. A completed version of the "Readiness/Feasibility for Project Implementation" table shown in this section must be included in the Feasibility section of the district's application. Providing a brief summary of the district's plan to progress towards greater readiness between award notification and the start of project implementation would strengthen this section.

Readiness/Feasibility for Project Implementation (based On Hexagon Tool)		
<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Describe Factors Contributing to Readiness Rating</i>
Implementation Site Indicator: Capacity to Implement		
Implementation Site Indicator: Fit with Current Initiatives		
Program Indicator: Supports		
Describe the actions needed to optimize readiness and develop staff capacity:		

C4. Evaluation Planning

In this section, applicants will provide a high level overview of their proposed strategies for project implementation monitoring and for evaluating project success. They will identify how they will measure success (i.e. how applicant will know if their project resulted in an improvement). Applicants will describe the types of measures they plan to use for monitoring implementation progress (process measures) and for evaluating the impacts of their proposed innovation (outcome measures). Ensure that proposed measures are aligned with the goals and objectives presented in the Project Design and Quality section of the application. Expected impacts may include student, staff, school, and/or district outcomes. Applicants must identify **at least one student outcome** they aim to impact and measure as part of their project evaluation. Applicants may propose more than one student outcome, but at least one student outcome must be tied to a Differentiated Assistance (DA) eligibility indicator or DA student group (see sample Metrics Table in this RFA section). Applicants may propose short- and long-term expected outcomes, including changes expected within the first year, and changes anticipated by the end of the project. Applicants may include a logic model in the Appendix to organize their resources and inputs, proposed activities, outputs or deliverables, and expected outcomes, although this is not a requirement.

Applicants are required to complete a Metrics Table, using the template provided. By specifying these metrics and measures, the applicant *is not* limiting itself to the options identified during application. Awardees will consult with an OCDE Evaluator to identify robust measures and metrics and revise the proposed measures as necessary. Completing the table, and explaining why the identified measures are meaningful in understanding the project's progress and final outcomes, will help the application reviewers to understand the project and its goals more deeply. Each goal previously included in the Implementation Plan should also be included *verbatim* within the Metrics Table. The Metrics Table may be included in the Appendix or in the body of the narrative. It will count towards the page limit of the document in which it is included.

Sample Metrics Table

Use this Metrics Table to broadly outline measures for meaningfully understanding the progress and final outcomes from the proposed project within each goal identified in the Implementation Plan. The project **must include at least one student outcome**. More than one student outcome is allowed, but at least one must be tied to a Differentiated Assistance (DA) eligibility indicator or DA student group.

DA Indicators	DA Student Groups	
• ELA • Math • English Learner Progress • Chronic Absenteeism • Graduation Rate • Suspension Rate • College and Career Readiness	• English Learners • Long-Term English Learners • Foster Youth • Homeless Youth • Students with Disabilities • Socioeconomically Disadvantaged • Asian • American Indian/Alaska Native	• Black/African American • Filipino • Hispanic/Latino • Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander • White • Two or More Races

For each measure, specify whether the measure is an outcome measure or a process measure. A process measure tracks what applicant is doing (e.g., activities, services provided), whereas an outcome measure tracks what changes as a result of those processes or activities (i.e. the impact or effects). See examples provided below.

Goal 1: By June 30, 2028, test the *New Math-Art Curriculum* with 10 pairs of Geometry and Art teachers in four high schools in the participating districts in order to improve student creative problem-solving and math performance.

Measure	Outcome or Process Measure?	Student Outcome?
Example Rows		
# of teachers trained in new curriculum	Process ▾	No ▾
% of teachers implementing the new curriculum	Process ▾	No ▾
Student Math SBAC Scores (11th grade)	Outcome ▾	Yes ▾
Increased student creativity in problem solving	Outcome ▾	Yes ▾
Applicant Rows (Add as many rows as needed, for each goal applicant has set)		
Goal [#]*:		
	Choose an ... ▾	Choo... ▾
	Choose an ... ▾	Choo... ▾

*Match the goal numbers and goal wording exactly as they are stated in the Implementation Plan/*Project Design and Quality* section of your application.

C5. Strategies for Sustaining and Scaling the Innovation

Applicants will identify initial plans for sustaining the project, such as plans for potential ongoing partnerships, funding, or resources that may help sustain the innovation and its impacts after the project ends. Sustaining strategies may also include mindset shifts or systems change they anticipate will occur as a result of the innovation, which can help sustain the impacts of the project after it ends. Applicant's response will be strengthened by providing specific examples of what the district will do to sustain the innovation and its impacts. Applicants may want to consult the [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool \(PSAT\)](#) and other sustainability resources to help guide their proposed sustainability approach.

Applicants shall also describe their initial plan for scaling the project, during the project period or after the project period ends. This description may include how they will scale the innovation within their own district during or after the project period. Applicants shall also include specific strategies for how they will share their experiences and project results with other educational partners, and how they will communicate with and guide other educational partners in adapting or adopting the innovation model in their own contexts.

C6. Budget

The project budget must be clearly separated by categories specified in the budget workbook template, allocated across project years to reflect the proposed project implementation timeline, and aligned with project activities for each year. Costs and timeline must be reasonable, clear, and detailed, with justification provided in the Budget Narrative.

Budget Workbook Template: Applicants must submit their budget using the three-year budget template. Applicants are not required to allocate costs equally across the three-year project period. Proposed costs and timeline must be feasible, with adequate justification and aligned with the proposed implementation plan. Along with costs by

project year, applicants must provide, for each budget category in which funding is proposed, a brief summary explaining how the funds will be used.

Budget Narrative: Applicants must provide justification for the proposed project expenses included in the application and budget workbook template. A good way to organize this section is to use the Budget Category headings shown in the Budget Workbook Template (i.e. 1000 certificated salaries, 2000 classified salaries, 3000 benefits, 4000 books and supplies, 5000 services and other operating expenditures, 6000 capital outlay, 7000 indirect costs) and include sufficient detail to demonstrate each cost is reasonable and necessary for the proposed project. While brief, explanations must be specific and itemized—for example, list individual positions included in the salary and benefits sections, identify what is being purchased in the books and supplies section, and clearly describe contracted services or other expenditures. Including dollar amounts when describing the costs will strengthen the Budget Narrative. The level of detail should allow reviewers to understand exactly how the requested funds will be used and how they support the project’s goals and activities.

Applicants must ensure expenses and justifications align with the project narrative, so that reviewers can clearly track expenses to components of the project and implementation plan. For proposals in which a significant portion of the budget is dedicated to non-staff costs (e.g., technology, equipment, materials, transportation, or subcontracts), applicants must clearly justify why this allocation is necessary and describe the specific strategies, activities, and additional resources that will ensure these investments support successful project implementation. Reference the Budget Guidelines (section I.E.) of this RFA for more information. The Budget Narrative must adhere to formatting specifications (i.e. double-spaced, 12-point standard font, 1” margins, numbered pages). If leveraged funding or in-kind staff or support will be required to fully implement the project during a portion or the entire duration of the project, the applicant must describe that leveraged funding or in-kind staff or support. If no in-kind support or leveraged funding will be needed or used, the applicant must state that the Innovation Funding will cover all costs of the project, and no in-kind or

leveraged funding will be needed or used. There is no page limit for the Budget Narrative.

III. Application Materials

All application templates can be accessed on the [OCDE Innovation Funding website](#). They are also linked below. Please note, there is no template for the Appendix.

[Intent to Apply Form](#)

Applicant Information Forms:

- [Application Checklist](#)
- [Applicant Information Form](#)
- [Applicant Agreement Form](#)

[Narrative Template](#). This template includes prompts for the Project Abstract (section 1 of template), Project Narrative (sections 2-6 of template), and Budget Narrative (section 7 of template). In addition to using the template, carefully reference all sections of this RFA for full information and details on what is expected in each section of the narrative. The Implementation Plan template below is provided for applicant use and may be reformatted, as needed. The Metrics Table template may not be reformatted.

- [Implementation Plan Template](#)
- [Metrics Table Template](#)

[Budget Workbook Template](#). This template requires applicants to provide proposed costs for each project year, by cost category (i.e. 1000 certificated salaries, 2000 classified salaries, 3000 benefits, 4000 books and supplies, 5000 services and other operating expenditures, 6000 capital outlay, 7000 indirect costs). Applicants must use their own district's [state-negotiated indirect cost rate](#). *It is strongly recommended that project teams work with their fiscal department to develop their proposed budget, to ensure costs are assigned to the correct budget categories and indirect costs are calculated on applicable expenses only.* Carefully reference the sections of this RFA that provide guidance on completing the workbook.

IV. Review and Selection Process

A. Application Scoring

Applications will be scored based on the categories and descriptions in the following table. Applicant must earn a minimum of 60 points overall and at least the minimum points required in each category shown in the table to be considered for a funding award.

Scoring Category	Description	Total Points Available	Minimum Points Needed
Eligibility requirements	Applicant meets all eligibility requirements, submits all required application documents by the deadline, and agrees to all requirements included in the Applicant Agreement Form.	Applicant must meet eligibility requirements. No points awarded.	
Project Need and Alignment	Applicant provides background information and relevant data to justify the need for this project in their school(s). A description is included of what the district is already doing to address the need and how the innovation will elevate, replace or complement those efforts. Applicant cites relevant theory or preliminary work that supports the potential efficacy of the innovative approach(es) proposed. A compelling rationale for the project is provided. Applicant describes how the project aligns with current school, district, and countywide goals. For instance, the application references the project's alignment to SPSAs, LCAP, or other state, local, district, or school plans and clearly states how the project aligns with OCDE 5-3-1 Strategic Plan. Applicant describes how the innovation is aligned with relevant standards. Applicant describes how the project is responsive to and/or has support from their school communities (e.g., description of how the voice of families, students, and staff were considered in developing the project).	20 points	10 points
Project Design and	Applicant describes how the project is innovative, and how it aligns to the innovation definition	35 points	18 points

Quality	provided in this RFA. The applicant explains how the project is evidence-based and/or grounded in theory, with clearly stated measurable objectives (including at least one student outcome). The design is well-explained, with logically-connected steps clearly connecting proposed activities with anticipated outcomes. Project shows potential for meaningful impact, broadly across student populations or deeply within a specific student group. Overall, the project reflects high quality, intentional planning reflected in the implementation plan and timeline.		
Feasibility of Project	Applicant describes capacity and readiness to implement the project, including completed <i>Readiness/Feasibility for Project Implementation</i> table; identifies key personnel, responsibilities, roles, expertise, and project team structure; identifies contributions from community partners. Applicant addresses factors impacting implementation such as site and district readiness (e.g., current site administrator and staff support for the project, site and district ability to integrate proposed processes into existing structures and initiatives, existing resources relevant to the project, such as materials, staff, training structures). Applicant explains the role(s) of school site leadership in project and application development. Applicant identifies potential challenges that may impede timely start-up or implementation of the project, such as staff turnover in key project leadership and/or implementation staff, delays in hiring processes, competing priorities, and limited staff resources. Applicant describes how challenges will be addressed. If renovation, construction, or equipment purchases are needed for the project, applicant describes processes for ensuring timely acquisition of materials, strategies for securing timely approvals, permits, etc.	25 points	13 points

Feasibility of Project (continued)	Applicant describes staff capacity to attend learning community and planning sessions and Innovation Summit, and for collaborating with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coaches to monitor implementation, collect and analyze data, and complete evaluation and reporting tasks. While optional, Letters of Support may further strengthen evidence of readiness and capacity for successful project implementation.		
Evaluation Planning	Applicant describes a clear and coherent plan for monitoring progress and measuring project success. Applicant explains how success will be defined and measured – specifically, how the project will demonstrate impact on the identified need, challenge, or barrier to student success. Applicant identifies both implementation (process) and impact (outcome) measures that are directly aligned to goals/objectives. At least one student outcome is proposed that aligns with a Differentiated Assistance eligibility indicator or student group. School, staff, and district outcomes may also be identified. Applicant includes a completed Metrics Table with an explanation for why the included metrics are meaningful in measuring the project's success and impact. Goals in the Metrics Table are identical to the goals proposed in the Implementation Plan.	5 points	2 points
Strategies for Scaling and Sustainability	Applicant addresses initial planning for sustaining the project, such as integrating the project into school or district plans, securing ongoing funding, exploring potential partnerships, and fostering mindset or culture shifts that promote long-term continuation of the innovative practice or their impacts. Applicant provides specific examples. Applicant describes their plan to scale the project within their district during or after the project period. Applicant also provides a plan, with examples, for sharing lessons learned and promising innovative strategies with educational partners to enhance adoption/adaptation of practices in other districts.	5 points	2 points

Budget Workbook Template and Narrative	Applicant submits a budget for the project using the required budget template. Costs comply with allowable costs and stated maximums. Applicant provides a justification of the costs by category with a clear, detailed, reasonable and necessary budget that is aligned to the proposed activities and implementation plan. If relevant, the applicant also describes any leveraged funding or in-kind support in the narrative budget that may be needed to support project implementation.	10 points	3 points
Applicant must score a minimum of 60 points to be considered for an award. Receiving the minimum number of points in each category does not total 60 points, so applicants must score higher than the minimum in at least some categories to be considered for an award. Additionally, scoring 60 points does not guarantee funding.			

Applications failing to adhere to required formatting guidelines may lose up to 2 points from their total application score. Please carefully check the formatting guidelines outlined in Section II.A2 and throughout this document.

For each scoring category, points will be allocated based on the thoroughness and quality of information provided, using the following rubric as a guide.

Exemplary (maximum points awarded)	Strong Response (75-99% of points awarded)	Adequate Response (50-74% of points awarded)	Limited Response (1-49% of points awarded)	Minimal/Not Addressed (no points awarded)
•Fully addresses the prompts, exceeds expectations. •Clear, compelling, well-documented response. •Strongly aligned with program goals and demonstrates high potential for success/impact. •No significant weaknesses identified.	•Meets requirements at a high level of quality. •Well-developed and mostly well-supported with evidence. •Minor gaps or weaknesses, but overall strong alignment and feasibility.	•Meets minimum requirements. •Provides some relevant information, though it may be general, incomplete, or uneven in quality. •Shows potential, but additional detail or evidence would be better.	•Meets some but not all requirements. •Information is vague, underdeveloped or inconsistently presented. •Important elements are missing or only partially described.	•Does not sufficiently address the prompt. •Information is vague, missing, or not relevant. •Lacks the detail needed to assess quality or feasibility.

B. Review Process and Funding Decisions

A panel will review and score all submitted applications which met eligibility criteria, included all required application materials, and were submitted by the deadline. Each application will be reviewed by a member of the OCDE Grants & Funding team, an OCDE subject matter expert aligned to the application's content area, and an OCDE subject matter expert from another content area. Through a "blind review" process, panelists will score applications without knowledge of the name of the applicant district or its partners, using the scoring criteria and rubric outlined in this RFA. To accomplish this, district and partner names will be redacted from documents prior to distribution to the review panel. This blind review promotes a fair and unbiased scoring process.

After the initial review, a select number of applications that meet the minimum requirements and are most strongly aligned with the mission of the Innovation Funding Initiative will move forward to the selection round. The selection round is intended to ensure a balanced mix of project types and districts. OCDE reserves the right to exercise discretion in final award determinations. While numeric scores and review panel recommendations will inform the decision-making process, awards may not be made in strict rank order. Additional considerations may include, but are not limited to, representation across district types, and alignment with OCDE's strategic priorities.

Award decisions will be announced in early February 2027. All applicants will be notified directly, and results will be posted on the [OCDE Innovation Funding website](#). An official notice of award letter will be sent to selected applicants, outlining next steps in the process. OCDE shall then provide an agreement to awardees for negotiation.

C. Appeals Process

Applicants may appeal the award decision, within 10 days after the applicant's primary contact is notified of the results via email. Without exception, appeals must be submitted in writing to grantsandfunding@ocde.us, with the subject line "Innovation Funding Award Appeal." The following are requirements for an appeal.

An appeal:

- must be limited to the grounds that OCDE failed to correctly apply the standards for reviewing the application as specified in the RFA;
- must fully and completely address the issue(s) in dispute with RFA citations, describe the basis for the appeal position, and the remedy sought;
- must include a signature from an authorized signatory on the appeal letter;
- may not supply new information that was not in the original application.

The OCDE will not consider incomplete or late appeals. Appellants will be notified of the results of their appeal within 14 days of the appeal deadline. That decision shall be the final administrative action afforded the appeal.

V. Questions and Communication

Questions may be submitted in writing to grantsandfunding@ocde.us. All questions must be submitted by November 23, 2026, 5 p.m. (PST). Responses to questions will be posted on Mondays, beginning in late October, as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the [OCDE Innovation Funding website](#).

Two webinars will be available to assist prospective applicants in understanding the required components of the application and submission process. Webinars will be held in October 2026 (see Section B1 for Key Dates). Office hours will be held in November to answer technical questions about the application process or requirements. OCDE shall not be bound by, nor responsible for, any statements, guidance, or interpretations provided outside the formal RFA process. Only information contained in this RFA, any official written addenda, and responses published through the designated question & answer process shall be considered authoritative. Inquiries must be submitted through the designated question process; informal communications shall not be construed as providing an advantage, endorsement, or clarification of requirements. For the latest announcements and resources, Webinar information, or to sign up for Innovation Funding emails, visit the [OCDE Innovation Funding website](#) or sign up for the [Listserv](#).