

Innovation Funding Initiative

Investing in bold ideas. Creating lasting impacts.



Orange County Department of Education (OCDE)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

Innovation Funding Initiative: Cohort 1

ISSUED BY:

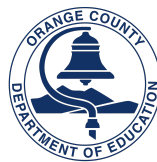
The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE)

ISSUED ON:

December 3, 2025

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT APPLICATIONS:

January 30, 2026



Stefan Bean, Ed.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

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Request for Applications (RFA)
Innovation Funding Initiative: Cohort 1

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 or school district consortia 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
Release of Request for Applications (RFA)	December 3, 2025
Deadline to submit Intent to Apply (optional)	December 19, 2025, 5:00 p.m. (PST)
Webinars for Prospective Applicants: Innovation Funding RFA Overview	December 11, 2025, 10:00 a.m. (PST) December 17, 2025, 2:00 p.m. (PST)
Office Hours for Technical Questions Times to be announced in late December	January 6, 2026 January 12, 2026 January 20, 2026
Deadline to submit questions	January 20, 2026, 5:00 p.m. (PST)
Final responses to questions (Frequently Asked Questions/FAQs) posted on website	January 23, 2026
Deadline to submit applications (Late or partial submissions will not be accepted)	January 30, 2026, 5:00 p.m. (PST)
Anticipated award announcement	February 27, 2026
Period of Performance	July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2029

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: <https://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 districts and public schools serving students in grades TK-12.

B2. Funding Available

OCDE intends to fund up to 6 projects in this first cohort. 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, 2026 and ending June 30, 2029. This maximum applies to both individual district applications and to Consortium applications. Funds will be distributed based on the needs of the innovation project, and may be awarded annually, 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 and literacy, school climate and safety, STEM (includes AI), student enrichment programs, student health and wellness, student supports, youth development and leadership).

B3. Eligible Applicants

Applicants eligible to apply for this opportunity include school districts within Orange County, California serving students in grades TK-12, or a Consortium of Orange County school districts. If districts apply as a Consortium, one district must be identified as the lead district. A Consortium application must include a Letter of Commitment from each participating district. A Consortium application must include two or more Orange County school districts. There is no maximum number of districts that can participate in a Consortium application. Districts may submit more than one application. However, any district will receive no more than one award for the three-year project period. A district can be awarded funding as an individual district, and receive an award as a participating district in a Consortium application, as long as that district is not the Consortium lead.

School sites 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 this current funding opportunity is only available to Orange County districts serving students in grades TK-12, Charter schools may be eligible for future rounds of funding. Districts outside of Orange County, educational entities that do not serve grade TK-12 populations, and other non-LEA entities are not eligible to apply.

Note: While the applicant must be a school district or Consortium of districts, 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 Professional Learning Community

C1. Evaluation and Implementation Support

To support Orange County school districts selected to receive Innovation Funding under this opportunity, awardees will receive ongoing support from an OCDE Evaluator and an Implementation and Sustainability Coach (hereafter: Implementation Coach). This technical assistance and individualized support is designed to help enhance the successful implementation and monitoring of proposed projects, to help ensure that lessons learned from implementation are utilized for continuous improvement, and for scaling and sustaining successful programs. The evaluation process is designed to be collaborative, with the Evaluator and Implementation Coach supporting awardees to refine their data collection tools and metrics, as well as methods for evaluating innovation impacts, monitoring project implementation and progress towards program goals, and identifying innovative practices that can be replicated in other contexts.

OCDE will provide ongoing technical assistance, support, and resources to awardees to implement, evaluate, sustain, and scale successful innovations. OCDE will also provide subject matter experts to guide and support awardees in these processes. Awardees will meet, at a minimum quarterly, with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach for the duration of the project period. The OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach will be available to meet with the project team more often if needed. These technical assistance and coaching sessions will give project teams structured opportunities to reflect on their progress, address challenges, and adjust their strategies with expert guidance.

Additionally, each year of the project, awardees will receive support in completing an Implementation Stages Planning Tool, which will help project teams track growth and

identify areas for improvement. During the first year of project implementation, awardees will collaborate with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach to co-create a comprehensive data collection and evaluation plan, specifying the processes and timelines for gathering data related to the innovation project. In Years 2 and 3 of the project, the district project team will work closely with the Evaluator 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. Innovation Professional Learning Community

OCDE will establish a professional learning network of innovative educators, and host quarterly meetings. During the first year of the funding period, the learning network will consist of Cohort 1 awardees. During the second year, additional educational partners will be invited to join the learning community. The learning community will provide opportunities for innovative educators to connect, share experiences, 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.

C3. Education Innovation Summit

OCDE will plan and host an Education Innovation Summit, to be held after the first full year of Cohort 1 project implementation. Awardees must participate in the Summit, to present on their successes and share lessons learned with the broader Orange County educational community. The in-person Summit will provide opportunities for networking and learning for awardees as well as for other educators in Orange County who are interested in innovative approaches to solving educational challenges in order to improve 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 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 an awardee professional learning community
- Participate at the Orange County Education Innovation Summit
- Comply with local, state, and federal laws and education regulations
- Collaborate and meet regularly with OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach
- Submit progress reports (triannually)
- Submit fiscal expenditure reports (triannually)
- Submit annual evaluation reports and a final evaluation report after the project period ends

The application does not require an authorized signature, but requires acknowledgement that the authorized signatory for the district has approved the application being submitted.

E. Budget Guidelines

A maximum of \$525,000 per awardee will be granted for a three year project period, beginning July 1, 2026 and extending through June 30, 2029. 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, 2029. 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, 2029).

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
- Subcontractors (entities that provide goods or services to the funded project for a fee without being responsible for programmatic results)
- Subawards (for subrecipients, including Consortium or other funded partners, 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

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 December 19, 2025, 5:00 P.M. (PST), with the subject line “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 information on the lead district, districts participating in a consortium (if applicable), lead contact information, a project abstract, and identification of the primary and secondary focus areas of the project.
- An **Applicant Agreement Form**, which includes an acknowledgement that an authorized signer for the district (e.g., Superintendent or designee) has approved the application being submitted, and who 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 Narrative**, with responses to prompts outlined in Section II.C. of this RFA (20 pages maximum)
- A **Budget Narrative**, with detailed description and justification of proposed project budget (No page limit, does not count towards the Project Narrative 20-page limit).

- A **Budget Workbook**, with a 3-year breakout of proposed project costs, by budget category, including a brief description for each proposed category of how funds will be spent (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:
 - 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)
 - A logic model, or other graphic may be provided to help illustrate the applicant's monitoring and evaluation approach. (optional)
 - 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)
 - Citations List. A list of citations is required for data, evidence, or theories cited in the narrative. This list may be single-spaced. (required)
 - Letters of Support from partners. These letters are optional, but encouraged as they may demonstrate greater readiness and feasibility for project implementation. (optional)
 - Letters of Commitment. **These letters do not count towards the Appendix page limit.** Letters of Commitment are required from each Consortium partner and other partners that will be considered funding subrecipients or subawards (this does not include contractors). Letters of Commitment are required at the time of application. If a Consortium is awarded funding, the lead applicant will be required to develop an MOU with all Consortium partners in order for the lead applicant to contract with OCDE. (required, for Consortium application)

- o Description of Consortium Partner Roles. **This Description of Consortium Partner Roles does not count towards the Appendix page limit.** Applicants will provide a brief description of the role each Consortium partner will play in the project, including the Lead District. (3 pages maximum; required, for Consortium application).
- o Other supplemental materials the applicant believes will enhance their 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. Moreover, applicants must adhere to all specified page limits. Responses that exceed page limits will not be reviewed beyond the maximum specified page limit. Therefore your full response may not be considered in scoring if it exceeds the page limit.

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 January 30, 2026, up until 5:00 P.M. (PST).

Timeline is subject to change. For the most current timeline, visit the OCDE Innovation Funding Initiative website at <https://ocde.us/innovationfunding>. If a district plans to submit more than one application, 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: "Innovation Funding Application: [District Name - Brief Project Title]" (e.g., Innovation Funding Application: AlphaUSD - New Math).

¹ If a district is submitting more than one application, applications should be numbered in the naming convention (e.g., AlphaUSD1_ApplicantInfo, AlphaUSD2_ApplicantInfo).

- **Body of email:** Applicants may address the email to: *OCDE 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:	Name Files Using the Following Guidelines:
(1) A single Application PDF containing the following: (a) Applicant information, including the Applicant Information Form, Applicant Agreement Form, and Application Checklist (b) Narrative document, including Project Narrative (no more than 20 pages) and Budget Narrative (d) Appendix, containing supplemental materials such as Letters of Support, a Metrics Table, a logic model, tables or graphics that support the narrative and are labeled and referenced accordingly in the project narrative, a citations list, or other supporting documents. (Appendix is limited to no more than 10 pages total; limit does not include required Letters of Commitment and Description of Consortium Partner Roles for Consortium applications).	District Abbreviation_Application <i>Example:</i> <i>AlphaUSD_Application</i>
(2) A single Excel Budget Workbook (using the required 3-year budget template)	District Abbreviation_Budget <i>Example: 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 want to ZIP the files and attach them as a ZIP file.	

Applicant is solely responsible for ensuring its application arrives to OCDE by the deadline set forth in this RFA, in order to be eligible for OCDE's initial selection 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. Abstract Describing Innovation Project

As part of the Applicant Information Form, applicants must include an abstract, no more than one (1) page, double-spaced, 12-point standard font, with 1" margins, briefly describing the innovation project. Abstracts shall 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, and expected impacts. 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.

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 *Application 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. Responses that exceed the page limits will not be reviewed beyond the maximum specified page limit.

Therefore, the complete response may not be considered in scoring if it exceeds the page limit. It may be helpful to review the scoring rubric to determine the relative weight of each narrative section to help guide the number of pages to allocate to each.

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 innovation project, and at least one of the applicant's student outcomes must be tied to a Differentiated Assistance (DA) student group or indicator, data related to unmet needs or challenges of the student group or DA indicator of interest will help strengthen this section of the application. Data sources must be referenced within 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 *reference any relevant theory or preliminary work* that supports the potential efficacy of the innovative approach(es) proposed. 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.
- 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.
- Project goals must be clearly stated, and 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 associated with 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, the applicant must identify the main activities along with 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 for each goal in order to give the reviewer an idea of the applicant's 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 table for developing their project implementation plan, or modify it to best reflect their project plan.

Sample Implementation Plan

Goal 1: By June 30, 2027, test the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i> with 10 pairs of Geometry and Art teachers in four high schools in the Consortium districts 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 2026	Number of teachers recruited Number of teachers trained
	Pilot the curriculum with teacher pairs	August - December 2026	Fidelity of teaching the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum</i> based on responses provided on the <i>New Math-Art Curriculum Fidelity Tool</i>
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, 2026	Number of focus groups conducted Focus group themes identified, to be used 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, 2026	Revised curriculum with educator lesson plans, templates, and resources
	Implement the curriculum at all high schools in Consortium districts	August 1, 2026 - May 30, 2028	Number and percent of high school Geometry classes in participating districts using the <i>Math-Art Curriculum</i>
Goal 2: By March 1, 2027, recruit 20 older adults to serve as 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 key district and school site personnel or positions who will be involved in the various aspects of project implementation and oversight, collaboration with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach, progress monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The description may include partners' roles and responsibilities in the project, if applicable. This section shall include a description of project team composition and skills or expertise that demonstrate capacity to effectively implement the proposed project. Including key staffing titles, roles and responsibilities, and a brief description of their qualifications will enhance the application. Applicant shall describe the plan for addressing turnover in key 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 intervention 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 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, sites, or other collaborative partners with a key stake in 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.

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 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) indicator or DA student group (see sample Metrics Table on the following page). Applicants may propose short-term and long-term expected outcomes, including changes they expect to see within the first year, and changes they expect to see by the end of the project. Applicants may choose to 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 of the application.

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. 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.

Metrics Table

Use this Metrics Table to broadly outline measures for meaningfully understanding the progress and final outcomes from the proposed project. 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) indicator or 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 is doing (e.g., implementation 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*	Measure	Outcome or Process Measure?	Student Outcome?
Example Rows			
1	# of teachers trained in new curriculum	Process ▾	No ▾
1	% of teachers implementing the new curriculum	Process ▾	No ▾
1	Student Math SBAC Scores (11th grade)	Outcome ▾	Yes ▾
1	Increased student creativity in problem solving	Outcome ▾	Yes ▾
Applicant Rows (Add as many rows as needed, for each goal applicant has set)			
		Choose an ... ▾	Ch... ▾
		Choose an ... ▾	Ch... ▾

*Goal number used in the *Project Design and Quality* section of the application.

C5. Strategies for Scaling and Sustaining 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. The [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool \(PSAT\)](#) and other sustainability resources will be used to help guide the development of the sustainability plan during the project period. It may be a useful guide for applicants to review when proposing their 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 shall include a plan for sharing their experiences and project results with other educational partners, and how they will communicate with and guide other educational partners in replicating the innovation model in their own contexts.

C6. Budget

The project budget must be clearly separated by categories specified in the budget 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 Template: Applicants must submit their budget using the 3-year budget template. Applicants are not required to allocate costs equally across the 3-year project period. Proposed costs and timeline must be feasible, with adequate justification, and align with the proposed implementation plan. Along with costs by project year, applicants must provide, for each budget category for 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 template. Use the Budget Category

headings as shown in the Budget Template, 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 under Salaries, identify what is being purchased in Books and Supplies, and clearly describe contracted services or other expenditures. 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 of this RFA for more information. The Budget Narrative must adhere to formatting specifications (i.e. double-spaced, 12-point standard font, 1" margins). If relevant, the applicant may describe leveraged funding or in-kind staff or support that may be required to implement the project fully, during a portion or the entire duration of the project. There is no page limit for the Budget Narrative.

III. Application Materials

All application templates can be accessed on the [Innovation Funding Initiative 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](#)

[Application Narrative Template](#). This template includes prompts for both the Project Narrative and the Budget Narrative. Carefully reference all sections of this RFA for full information and details on what is expected in each section of the narrative.

- Project Narrative (Sections 1-5 of Application Narrative Template)
 - [Implementation Plan Template](#)
 - [Metrics Table Template](#)
- Budget Narrative (Section 6 of Application Narrative Template)

[Budget Workbook Template](#). This template requires applicants to provide proposed costs for each project year, by cost category (e.g., certificated salaries, classified salaries, benefits, books and supplies, services and other operating expenditures, capital outlay, indirect costs). 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.	No points awarded. However, applicant must meet eligibility requirements.	

Project Need and Alignment	Applicant provides background information and relevant data to justify the need for this project in their school(s). Applicant cites relevant theory and any previous work related to this project, and develops a compelling rationale for the project. 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 project is responsive to and/or has buy-in and support from their school communities. For example, the applicant describes how the voice of families, students, and staff were considered in developing this project.	20 points	10 points
Project Design and Quality	Applicant describes how the project is innovative, and how it aligns to the innovation definition provided in this RFA. The applicant explains how the project is evidence-based and 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.	35 points	18 points

Feasibility of Project	Applicant describes their capacity and readiness to implement the project, identifying key personnel, roles, responsibilities, and relevant expertise, as well as the project team structure and expected contributions from community partners. Applicant explains how school site leadership participated in project planning. Applicant provides a realistic plan for implementation, including strategies for addressing potential staff turnover. Applicant describes staff capacity for collaborating with the OCDE Evaluator and Implementation Coach 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 implementations. Consortium applicants: Letters of Commitment for Consortium partners and a Description of Consortium Partner Roles are provided to demonstrate shared readiness and feasibility.	25 points	13 points
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 identified and at least one student measure is aligned with a Differentiated Assistance (DA) indicator or DA 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.	5 points	2 points

Strategies for Scaling and Sustainability	Applicant addresses initial planning for sustainability of 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 describes the plan to scale the project by sharing their findings and guiding others in replicating and adapting the innovative practice in their own contexts.	5 points	2 points
Budget Template and Narrative	Applicant submits a budget for the project using the required budget template. Costs in the template comply with allowable costs and stated maximums. Applicant provides a justification of the costs with a clear, detailed, reasonable and necessary budget that is aligned to the project's implementation plan. If relevant, the applicant also describes in the narrative budget any leveraged funding or in-kind support that may be needed and available to support the project.	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 to 60 points, so applicants must score higher than the minimum in at least some of the categories to be considered for an award. Additionally, scoring 60 points does not guarantee funding.			

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 and exceeds expectations. •Clear, compelling, and 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

An initial panel will review all applications submitted which met eligibility criteria and included all required application materials. This panel will include reviewers from the OCDE's Grants & Funding team, the OCDE Research, Evaluation, & Data Inquiry team, and an OCDE subject matter expert aligned to the application's content. 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 above. To accomplish this, district and partner names will be redacted from documents provided to the initial review panel. This blind review will assist in creating a fair and unbiased application 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 will not necessarily be made in strict rank order. Additional considerations may include, but are not limited to, representation across district types, and alignment with the strategic priorities of the funder.

Award decisions will be announced in late February 2026. Both awardees and non-selected 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 award process. Upon selection of awardees, OCDE shall provide an agreement for negotiation between OCDE and each awardee.

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 any new information that was not originally contained 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 January 20, 2026, 5 p.m. (PST). Responses to questions will be posted on Monday each week, beginning the week of December 8, 2025, as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the Innovation Funding Initiative website at <https://ocde.us/InnovationFunding/Pages/FAQ.aspx>

Two Webinars will be available to prospective applicants, to assist in understanding the required components of the funding application and the application process. Webinars will be held in December 2025 (see Section B1 for Key Dates). Office hours will also be scheduled in January to answer technical questions districts may have about the application process or requirements. Specific times for office hours will be announced after the Webinars are held. OCDE shall not be bound by, nor responsible for, any statements, guidance, or interpretations provided outside the formal RFA process. Only the information contained in this RFA, any official written addenda, and the responses published through the designated question & answer/FAQ process shall be considered authoritative. All 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, templates, and resources, to access Webinar information, or to sign up for Innovation Funding emails, please visit the OCDE [Innovation Funding Initiative website](#) or use this [Listserv sign-up link](#).