

Archived Information

TIPS FOR PREPARING AN APPLICATION FOR AN EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM GRANT FOR INDIAN TRIBES AND TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS

The following tips are intended help applicant Indian tribes and tribal organizations prepare an application for a grant for the Even Start Family Literacy program. These grants are competitive in nature. The tips simply are ideas for how you might approach designing your proposed project, writing your proposed application, and assessing whether it completely addresses all of the selection criteria in the application package.

Although the Secretary believes that following these tips will help strengthen a tribe or tribal organization's application, following the tips does not ensure an applicant of funding. The Department funds applications based on the procedures in Part 75 of the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) (34 C.F.R. Part 75), and the grant application package. A panel of experts will review and evaluate each eligible application based exclusively upon the selection criteria in the application package. These tips are organized around those selection criteria. Each of the selection criterion has an assigned maximum number of points that is indicated in the application package. The experts who review the applications will assign a number of points for every application for each selection criterion, based upon how well the application addresses that criterion. Applications receiving the highest total average scores typically will be recommended for funding to the Secretary.

Following are some general tips about application writing and project design:

- **EXPLAIN YOUR PROJECT VISION.** Applicants must address all of the selection criteria, but are not required to address those criteria in the order in which they are found in the application package. Strong applications often explain their proposed project by telling a compelling story about their vision of the project. If you decide to present your project in an integrated way, be sure to identify clearly where in the proposal you address each selection criteria to help reviewers easily match your proposal to the selection criteria and assign appropriate scores. You can accomplish this in a number of ways, such as by including a “road map” listing each selection criteria and where in the application that criteria is addressed, or by cross-referencing each selection criterion at different places in the application where you have addressed them. In other words, don't expect the reviewers to read your mind. Rather, explain clearly where and how you have addressed each selection criteria.
- **EXPLAIN WHO, WHY, WHERE, WHEN, AND HOW.** If you tell the story of the proposed project in the active voice, reviewers will know how the project will operate and who will be responsible for providing each of the key activities and tasks. For example, saying “Adult education services will be provided three days per week at the project” does not address the question of how the services will be provided and

who will provide them. A clearer message is: “The local Indian college will provide adult education services three days per week through a staff member who will come to the project.”

- **WORK CLOSELY WITH THOSE WHO WILL BE IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT.** As you design the project, consult with key tribal offices (e.g., the financial office), key staff who will be implementing the project, and key collaborating organizations, to make sure the project is realistic in what it proposes to do and that everyone is on board.
- **USE AN INDEPENDENT READER FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT OF YOUR PROPOSAL.** Ask a person who is familiar with family literacy but who has not been involved in the grant writing process to read your draft application against the selection criteria before submitting the application.

In addition, below are “Tips” that specifically address each selection criterion. These tips closely follow the application and the selection criteria in the application package. However, you should refer to the application for the exact selection criteria and the points that apply to each.

Although we cannot assure you that using either the general or specific tips will positively affect the formal review of your completed application or result in funding, following them should help you identify any critical areas that you may have overlooked or failed to address in preparing your application.

(1) Meeting the purpose of the authorizing statute

_____ Is the proposal clear about how the proposed project will integrate early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program for families in the community who are most in need of Even Start services?

_____ Is the proposal clear about how the proposed project will build on existing high-quality community resources to create a new range of services for families in the community who are most in need of Even Start services?

_____ Is the proposal clear about how it will promote achievement of goals one, three, five, and eight of the National Education Goals (listed on pp. 14 - 15 of the application package)?

_____ Does the proposal explain how the project will assist children and adults from low-income families to achieve to challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Clearly explain in the application how the proposed project will meet the purposes of the Even Start Family Literacy program by explaining:

- how the project will provide each and all of the ten required Even Start program elements (see page 10 of the application package);
- how the project will build on existing high-quality community resources; and
- how the project will identify, recruit, and serve those families in the target community who are the most-in-need of Even Start services based upon a low level of income, a low level of adult literacy or English language proficiency of the eligible parent or parents, and other need-related indicators.

Even if your project design focuses on serving infants and toddlers rather than school-age children, acknowledge your understanding of the State's content standards and student performance standards and explain how the project's activities will help ensure that young children are ready for school. If the proposed project will provide services for school-age children or teen parents, explain how the project will help participants achieve those standards.

(2) *Need for project*

_____ Is the proposal clear about the extent to which it will focus on serving those families in the target community who are the most-in-need of Even Start services, based upon a low level of income, a low level of adult literacy or English language proficiency of the eligible parent or parents, and other need-related indicators?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Explain in your application the extent of need for family literacy services in the community that the project proposes to serve, such as the number of families in the area who are eligible for Even Start services, and how the project will identify which of those families are the most-in-need of Even Start services based upon low-income, low-literacy levels, and other need-related indicators. Generally speaking, not all eligible families are most in need. Clearly indicate how the project will recruit and serve those eligible families that have the greatest needs for family literacy services in your community.

_____ Does the proposal clearly identify specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities (including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses), and explain how the proposed project will address those gaps and weaknesses?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Include in your application such factors as:

- whether comprehensive family literacy services are lacking in the community for eligible families most in need of family literacy services, and specifically how the proposed project would provide those services or integrate existing services;
 - whether the applicant receives or intends to apply for State-administered Even Start funds or funds under the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Family and Child Education (FACE) program or whether there is a FACE program in the community; if so, how and why there is still a need for family literacy services in the community and how the proposed project will address that need; and
 - any other factors that the applicant considers relevant to the extent of need for the project.
- Consider conducting a needs assessment to identify gaps in family literacy services or components of those services in the community.

(3) Significance

_____ Does the proposal explain the importance or magnitude of the results or outcomes that you believe it is likely the proposed project will attain?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Explain what results or outcomes you expect the proposed project to have for the families that the project will serve and why those results are important for those families, such as improvements in school readiness for children, educational or literacy levels for children and parents, and in employment skills or economic self-sufficiency for parents.

(4) Quality of project design

_____ Does your proposal have specific and measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Include measurable goals and objectives in the application. Begin by thinking of the needs that you have identified and described in the application for family literacy services in your community. Then develop goals and objectives that address those needs through providing family literacy services and required Even Start activities.

Investing sufficient thought as you design your proposed project about measurable goals and objectives will make it easier to plan a local evaluation to use in continuously improving the project. Make sure that the goals and objectives that you select are specific enough to be

measurable. For example, a goal of “breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy for low-income families” or “providing services to meet families’ needs” may be valuable overarching goals, but do not represent measurable outcomes that a proposed project might aim to accomplish with families.

Examples of measurable project outcome goals range from simple outcomes, such as regular participation in all core instructional components or obtaining a library card, to larger outcome goals such as making specific gains on a learning assessment between pre- and post-test, obtaining a GED, making gains on observational developmental assessment tools for young children, or observational changes in family environment. Refer to the Federal Even Start Family Literacy Performance Plan: Objectives and Indicators (set forth in the reference materials in the application package) for examples of specific and measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes.

_____ Does the proposal explain how you will coordinate the project with similar or related efforts, and with other appropriate community, State, and Federal resources?

TIPS FOR APPLICANTS: Even Start projects must build on appropriate high-quality community resources and coordinate with other programs, including other programs funded under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Head Start, volunteer literacy programs, and other relevant programs such as child care programs.

Provide concrete examples of how the proposed project will coordinate effectively with these programs, and which staff members will be responsible for that coordination. Consider conducting a resource assessment in the community to determine what high-quality resources are available. Include that information in the application, as well as explaining clearly how the proposed project will build on existing resources that are of high-quality, and that share goals that are similar to that of the proposed project.

(5) Quality of project services

_____ Does the proposal include strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability?

_____ Does the proposal clearly explain the likely impact of the services that the project proposes to provide on the intended recipients of those services?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: An applicant must propose a project that has "high-quality, **intensive** instructional programs" in the three core instructional areas (early childhood education, adult education and parenting education) (section 1205(4) of the ESEA, emphasis added). The Even Start National Evaluation shows that there is a clear relationship between the amount of instructional service offered in all of the core services and the amount received – that is, when participants have more hours to choose from, they take advantage of that available instruction. In addition, the first National Evaluation showed that adults and children with high levels of participation in Even Start’s core services had larger learning gains than those with low levels of participation. It is better to serve fewer families with intensive instructional services than many families with low intensity services.

Explain how many hours of services per week the project will offer in each of the core services (early childhood education, adult education, parenting education, and PACT), how the project will be implemented to allow for the most intensive family participation in all core components (for example, through such methods as attendance policies, incentives, flexible scheduling, or family participation agreements), and how the project will ensure that families participate regularly in all core components.

_____ Does the proposal explain how and why the services to be provided by the proposed project are appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Clearly explain how the proposed project will address the specific needs of the families that will be served and why and how those services and their delivery are appropriate for those needs (for example, if the application has identified a need for the use of culturally appropriate materials for instruction, explain how the project plans to use such materials.)

(6) Quality of project personnel

_____ Does the proposal explain how you will encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability?

_____ Does the proposal explain the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: The National Evaluation shows that Even Start staff who provide instruction are well-educated and experienced – 76% have at least a Bachelor’s degree, over half have at least six years of post-high school education, and over half have at least six years of experience. The law requires all projects to provide staff training, and the National Evaluation shows that most projects routinely provide in-service training to their staff members.

Clearly explain in the application the roles of key staff, including outside personnel such as the independent evaluator, who will carry out each key element of the project, and how the education, training and experience required for each key staff position is connected and well-suited to meeting the project’s goals and objectives. If resumes for key staff are not yet available, include position descriptions for those staff.

(7) Adequacy of resources

_____ Does the proposal explain how the applicant organization or lead applicant organization will provide adequate support for the project, including facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: The Even Start law requires grantees to provide an increasing local project share over the grant period (at least the following amounts: 10% in the first year, 20% in the second year, 30% in the third year, 40% in the fourth year, 50% in the fifth through eighth years, and 65% thereafter.

Include in the application information about the sources and amount of the local project share or match, either funds or in-kind contributions, and evidence that the source of the match is, indeed, committed to making the match available to the project.

The law does not permit indirect costs to be included in the budget, either as a part of the federal funding or for the local project’s share or match, unless a project requests and qualifies for a waiver of that requirement. Acknowledge in the proposal that the applicant Indian tribe or tribal organization governing body understands this limitation and is willing to assume the indirect costs of the Even Start program that it cannot charge toward the matching requirement.

_____ Does the proposal explain how and why the costs are reasonable in relation to the number of persons to be served and to the anticipated results and benefits?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: The National Evaluation shows that the average cost of providing Even Start services per family (from all sources,

including the local project share or match) in 1996-97 was approximately \$5,000. The National Evaluation also shows that more intensive services benefit participants both in terms of increased participation and better educational outcomes. Thus, projects will help participants achieve greater success by providing intensive, high-quality instructional services in all core components for fewer families at one time than by serving a higher number of families with less intensive services for the same cost.

(8) Quality of the management plan

_____ Does the proposal include a management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, and does that management plan include clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks?

TIPS FOR APPLICANTS: Include realistic timelines for start-up activities, such as staff recruitment and training, coordination of services, procurement, and family recruitment, that need to occur before full implementation, and for project evaluation and feedback. Tie the timeline into the goals and objectives of the project, as well as into the annual budget periods. Explain clearly how the proposed project’s goals, management plan, budget, and evaluation are connected.

(9) Quality of project evaluation

_____ Does the proposal explain how the project will be evaluated (in addition to its responsibility to cooperate with the national evaluation), including methods of evaluation that use objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Explain clearly how the local evaluator who will be evaluating the project will use methods that connect to the project’s measureable outcome goals, and the extent to which those evaluation methods will produce quantitative and qualitative data. Consider working with a local evaluator who is familiar with family literacy to design appropriate and measureable outcome goals for the project and the project’s proposed evaluation.

_____ Does the proposal describe how you will use the methods of evaluation to provide you performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes?

TIP FOR APPLICANTS: Work with a local evaluator familiar with family literacy to design an evaluation that will provide on-going

performance feedback to your proposed project to use in improving intended outcomes. Explain in the application how the evaluation will provide on-going feedback and how the project will use that feedback to improve outcomes, such as through periodically scheduled staff meetings with the evaluator to discuss the qualitative and quantitative data about family outcomes and project performance, and periodic staff reassessment of how to achieve measurable project goals.

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