

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA No. 84.338]

Notice Inviting Applications and Establishing Requirements for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 1999**AGENCY:** Department of Education.**ACTION:** Notice Inviting Applications and Establishing Requirements for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 1999.**Reading Excellence Program**

Purpose of Program: The Reading Excellence Program provides competitive reading and literacy grants to eligible State educational agencies (SEAs). SEAs, in turn, will award competitive subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to fund local reading improvement programs and tutorial assistance programs.

Background: The Reading Excellence Act (REA), Part C, Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), was enacted as Title VIII of the Labor-HHS-ED Appropriations Act of 1999 by Section 101(f) of Pub. L. 105-277, the Omnibus Appropriations Act of FY 1999. Section 2253 of the REA authorizes a Reading and Literacy Grant Program to SEAs. Grants are to be awarded on a competitive basis to eligible SEAs, which in turn will make competitive subgrants to LEAs for two types of programs: Local Reading Improvement subgrants and Tutorial Assistance subgrants.

The purposes of the program are: (1) To provide children with the readiness skills they need to learn to read once they enter school; (2) to teach every child to read in the child's early childhood years—(a) as soon as the child is ready to read; or (b) as soon as possible once the child enters school, but not later than the third grade; (3) to improve the reading skills of students, and the instructional practices for current teachers (and, as appropriate, other instructional staff) who teach reading, through the use of findings from scientifically based reading research, including findings relating to phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension; (4) to expand the number of high-quality family literacy programs; and (5) to provide early literacy intervention to children who are experiencing reading difficulties in order to reduce the number of children who are incorrectly identified as a child with a disability and inappropriately referred to special education.

Each SEA that receives funds must award subgrants on a competitive basis

to eligible LEAs under two programs: Local Reading Improvement and Tutorial Assistance.

To be eligible for a Local Reading Improvement subgrant, an LEA must: (a) have at least one school that is identified for school improvement under section 1116(c) of ESEA in the geographic area served by the agency; (b) have the largest or second largest number of children who are counted under section 1124(c) of ESEA, in comparison to all other LEAs in the State; or (c) have the highest or second highest school-age child poverty rate, in comparison to all other LEAs in the State.

To be eligible for a Tutorial Assistance subgrant, an LEA must meet one of the three conditions listed for Local Reading Improvement subgrants or have at least one school in the geographic area served by the agency that (i) is located in an area designated as an empowerment zone under part I of sub-chapter U of chapter 1 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; or (ii) is located in an area designated as an enterprise community under the same part.

Eligible Applicants: SEAs of each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are eligible to apply for a grant.

Applications Available: April 5, 1999.

Deadline for Transmittal of Applications: May 7, 1999.

Deadline for Intergovernmental Review: July 6, 1999.

Note: Applications must be submitted on or before May 7, 1999, to be considered for funding. An application for an award may be submitted by electronic mail (email), regular mail, or hand delivery. Applications may not be faxed. The following are accepted for proof of submittal: (1) A legibly dated U.S. Postal Service postmark; (2) a legible mail receipt with the date of mailing stamped by the U.S. Postal Service; (3) a dated shipping label, invoice, or receipt from a commercial carrier; (4) an electronic return receipt (for emailed applications); or (5) any other proof of mailing acceptable to the Secretary.

Special instructions for applications submitted by email: Applications submitted by email should include an electronic return receipt and should be mailed to grantspolicy@ed.gov. Applications submitted by email may be submitted in one of the following formats: (1) Microsoft Word (Version Word 95 or Word 97) or (2) portable document format (PDF). The preferred version is Word 97; however, all versions must have text search capability. The electronic version will be the official file copy. To ensure the

integrity of the program, the Department will return a printed version to the applicant. The returned receipt and copy will be considered proof of receipt. All forms requiring original signatures (ED-424, Application for Federal Education Assistance; SF 424B, Assurances: Non-Construction Programs; ED 80-0013, Certifications Regarding Lobbying, Debarment, Suspension and other Responsibility Matters; and Drug-Free Workplace Requirements; ED 80-0014, Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion—Lower Tier Covered Transactions; and Form LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities) must be mailed to the Department by the deadline date, as set out above under Deadline for Transmittal.

Available Funds: \$241,100,000.

Estimated Range of Awards: \$200,000—\$30,000,000 per award.

Minimum Grant Award for SEAs Receiving a Grant: \$500,000 for SEAs; \$100,000 minimum for territories.

Estimated Average Size of Awards: \$11,500,000.

Estimated Number of Awards: 22.

Note: The Department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

Project Period: Up to 36 months.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR Parts 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) 34 CFR Part 299, General Provisions governing Titles I through XIII of ESEA.

Waiver of Proposed Rulemaking: In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553), it is the practice of the Secretary to offer interested parties the opportunity to comment on proposed regulations. Section 437(d)(1) of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), however, exempts from this requirement rules that apply to the first competition under a new or substantially revised program. The Secretary, in accordance with section 437(d)(1) of GEPA, has decided to forgo public comment on an absolute priority and a requirement in order to ensure the timely award of funds. The Secretary issues an absolute priority elsewhere in this notice and establishes the following requirement: the SEA must submit with its application the proposed LEA subgrant application(s) and a description of the procedures, including review criteria, the SEA will use to award subgrants; the LEA application(s) and description will be reviewed as part of the State application by the peer review panel.

This requirement will apply only to the competition for FY 1999 funds.

Absolute Priority: Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) of EDGAR, the Secretary has the authority to establish an absolute priority for applications under programs administered by the Department. For all funds to be awarded under this competition, the Secretary establishes an absolute priority to applicants that propose projects that exclusively fund, at the subgrant level, activities to improve elementary school reading instruction and related early childhood, professional development, family literacy, and tutorial assistance activities. To qualify for this priority, States could not fund, at the subgrant level, any activities for middle schools or high schools. Under this competition, the Secretary will consider for funding only those applications that meet this absolute priority.

Competitive Priority: Section 2253(c)(2)(C) of the Reading Excellence Act requires that priority shall be given to applications from SEAs whose States have modified, are modifying, or provide an assurance that they will modify within 18 months after receiving an REA grant the SEA's elementary school teacher certification requirements. The modification must increase the training and the methods of teaching reading required for certification as an elementary school teacher to reflect scientifically based reading research. However, nothing in the REA shall be construed to establish a national system of teacher certification.

Under 34 CFR 75.105(b)(2)(iv) and (c)(2), respectively, the Secretary is not required to seek public comment on a specific priority set out in the statute and can implement that priority as a competitive preference. The Secretary will award 10 additional points to applicants that meet the REA competitive priority.

Selection Criteria: Under 34 CFR 75.210, the Secretary has chosen the following selection criteria. The maximum possible score for each criterion is indicated in parentheses with the criterion. The Secretary awards up to 100 points for all criteria. In addition, an applicant may be awarded 10 additional points under the Competitive Priority announced in this notice.

(a) **Significance (10 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(i) The extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services

that address the needs of the target population.

(b) **Quality of project design (30 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. (2) In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) The extent to which the proposed project will be coordinated with similar or related efforts, and with other appropriate community, State, and Federal resources.

(ii) The extent to which the proposed project design reflects up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.

(iii) The extent to which the proposed project is based upon a specific research design, and the quality and appropriateness of that design, including the scientific rigor of the studies involved.

(iv) The extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.

(v) The extent to which the proposed project encourages parental involvement.

(c) **Quality of project services (35 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project. (2) In determining the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project, the Secretary considers the quality and sufficiency of 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. (3) In addition, the Secretary considers the following:

(i) The extent to which the training or professional development services to be provided by the proposed project are of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration to lead to improvements in practice among the recipients of those services.

(ii) The extent to which the technical assistance services to be provided by the proposed project involve the use of efficient strategies, including the use of technology, as appropriate, and the leveraging of non-project resources.

(iii) The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project reflect up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.

(iv) The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project are appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services.

(v) The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project involve the collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing the effectiveness of project services.

(d) **Adequacy of resources (10 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources for the proposed project. (2) In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(i) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the number of persons to be served and to the anticipated results and benefits.

(e) **Quality of the management plan (5 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. (2) In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(i) How the applicant will ensure that a diversity of perspectives are brought to bear in the operation of the proposed project, including those of parents, teachers, the business community, a variety of disciplinary and professional fields, recipients or beneficiaries of services, or others, as appropriate.

(f) **Quality of the project evaluation (10 points).** (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. (2) In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(i) The extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of 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.

(ii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

Intergovernmental Review

The Reading and Excellence Act in this notice is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the Executive order is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program.

For Applications or Information Contact: To request an application or to

obtain further information about the competition, contact Dr. Joseph Conaty, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 5C141, Washington, DC 20202-6200; call (202) 260-8228; or email reading_excellence@ed.gov.

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Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternate format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, or computer diskette) by contacting Katie Mincey, Director, Alternate Format Center, 330 C St. SW, Room 1000, Washington, DC 20202-4560; by calling (202) 260-9895 or 205-8113; or by emailing katie_mincey@ed.gov. Individuals with disabilities also may obtain a copy of the application package in an alternate format by contacting Ms. Mincey. However, the Department is not able to

reproduce in an alternate format the standard forms included in the application package.

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Note: The official version of this document is the document published in the **Federal Register**.

Electronic Submission of Applications: Applications for this grant may be submitted by email, regular mail, or hand delivery. Electronic submission is the preferred method of submission. To ensure application integrity, a printed version of all electronic submissions will be returned to applicants.

Program Authority: Reading Excellence Act, Part C, Title II of ESEA, was enacted as Title VIII of the Labor-HHS-ED Appropriations Act of 1999 by Section 101(f) of Pub. L. 105-277, the Omnibus Appropriations Act of FY 1999.

Dated: March 30, 1999.

Judith Johnson,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.

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