Funding Technology in Education

Discover the Ins and Outs of Receiving Grant Money

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Executive Summary

MODERN school districts are frequently tasked with doing more with less. Every budget dollar counts as your faculty and staff strive to prepare your students for the future. A large part of that preparation includes ensuring they have access to technology. The right technology is critical to the success of today's educational initiatives, such as personalized learning, increased engagement, improving student outcomes, and enhancing communication and collaboration. But many districts are challenged to secure the funding they need for technology to support these initiatives.

General Educational Funding

One key way to secure funding for your district's technology needs is through grants, from federal agencies, state agencies, or foundations. The largest source for educational funding is federal agencies. The federal government provides about $500 billion a year in grants, and that money comes from 26 federal grant-making agencies. These agencies cover everything from rural, housing, and research projects to higher education and workforce development. State agencies also administer some federal funding, so title funds, for example, are actually a state grant.

Whether the money starts at the federal level or whether it's actually initiated at the state level, you will have to apply to a state agency to receive those funds. States can control the timing of grants by matching grant requirements with priorities those grants can support. For example, the 21st Century Community Centers grant comes down from the federal government with a large list of different things it can fund, but your state will ultimately decide how those grant dollars can be spent. The state requirements might remain broad, but they can also get very specific as to what the 21st Century Community Centers grant money is used for in your district.

Private and corporate foundations also contribute to grant funding—about $50 billion per year. Foundations are useful for filling in the gaps left by the very prescriptive requirements of federal and state grants. Foundations can be more flexible and can provide a local match if a state or federal grant requires one. Most foundation funding goes through school district local educational foundations.

The two most common types of educational grants are formula grants, which include title funds, and competitive grants, which include things like the 21st Century Community Centers grant or innovative approaches to literacy programs. Formula funding is, not surprisingly, based on a formula. It may be based on student population or student demographics. Whatever the formula is based on, you will be able to calculate how much funding your district will receive. As long as you submit an application, you are more or less guaranteed to receive the money.

Competitive grants, on the other hand, are not guaranteed. Your district will have to apply, meet certain criteria, and wait to see whether or not you'll receive the funding. Generally, your application will be scored by the funding agency, and funding decisions are made based on that score.

Funding for Magnet and Charter Schools

For magnet and charter schools, there are several options out there—but finding the right ones to fund your initiative takes time and research. If you're looking at funding programs for charter and magnet schools within your district, the first step is to know how the Department of Education defines those terms. According to the Magnet Schools Assistance program (MSAP), a magnet school is a "public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." By contrast, a public charter school is "a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state or jurisdiction."

Tip: Safety First

Don't forget—grants are also available for funds for technology to improve school safety. These funds are usually available through partnership with local or county law enforcement and would apply to technology specifically to help law enforcement respond to emergencies at your schools.

There's also growing grant funding for college prep and career readiness programs, so be sure to take advantage of that.

The Department of Education has identified several competitive priorities when it comes to applying for MSAP grants:

- **Need for Assistance—**What is the cost of fully implementing the program and how do those costs affect your existing/future budgets?

- **New or Revised Magnet School Projects—**Does your program build on an existing program that has shown success? Have you done your research and outlined an approach that will work for your students?

- **Selection of Students—**Is school enrollment based on geographic location, a lottery, or entrance exam?

- **Socioeconomic Diversity—**Does your program propose to increase integration of students from all backgrounds?

The MSAP will award up to 30 grants per year, which could translate into significant funding for your initiatives.

If you need funding for a charter school, the Charter School Program (CSP) offers a portfolio of grants that provide financial assistance. Like the MSAP, they have several priorities when awarding grants:

- **Serving Low-Income Students—**Do at least 60% of the students currently enrolled come from low-income families?

- **School Turnaround—**Are you transforming a school with poor academic performance into a charter school using methods that have demonstrated success for you in the past?

- **Novice Applicants—**Have you ever received a grant or sub-grant under the Charter School Program, or a discretionary grant from the Federal government in the past five years? If not, you are more likely to receive funding.

Building your program proposals with these competitive priorities in mind can put your school at an advantage for grant funding. But more importantly, you'll need to demonstrate academic achievement and show how you'll improve outcomes for students—and that is where integrating technology can really help drive innovation.

Funding for Students with Disabilities

From small, rural districts to the largest city schools, technology has revolutionized education for students with disabilities. Educators often face major obstacles to engage students with disabilities, and research has shown that most of these students can and do benefit from technology in the classroom.

Fortunately, there are multiple dedicated federal and state grant programs available to support the special education technology needs of school districts. One key example is the Ed Tech Media and Materials Program, under which is the Stepping Up Technology Implementation grant. Funding from this program can cover the use of assistive technology devices and assistive technology services in order to better serve and engage students with disabilities by facilitating student-teacher access to various content and resources and improving the quality of instruction through personalized learning or utilizing data to improve instruction in real time.

There is research to suggest, however, that even though technology can improve learning outcomes, implementation of that technology can remain a significant challenge. Providing teachers with technology does not always ensure that it will be used—or used most effectively. The Ed Tech program looks to facilitate the use of innovative technology tools to promote engagement and enhance the learning experience for students with disabilities.

Under the Stepping Up Technology program, educators work to identify, develop, and disseminate resources that promote the effective implementation of evidence-based instructional and assisted technology tools in early childhood education, all the way up through K–12. This program has already funded numerous technology tools, such as Web-based learning and assessment materials, instructional software, and assistive technology devices. Eligibility for this program is relatively open. Local educational agencies, colleges and universities, public agencies, non-profit organizations, trial organizations, and for-profit entities are all able to apply.

A Trusted Partner

For districts that aren't familiar with these programs or comfortable with grant seeking in general, however, these programs can seem elusive. Connection® Public Sector Solutions is experienced in providing technology to meet all the various technology needs of school districts across the country. Our team of experts can help point you in the right direction to get more information on applying for funding, as well as help you build a successful plan for implementing technology in your classrooms.

As a leading National Technology Solutions Provider, we've been trusted for more than 35 years to connect people with technology that enhances growth, elevates productivity, and empowers innovation. Connection stands ready to deliver, install, and maintain technology nationwide by leveraging our internal professional services expertise and top-tier vendor partnerships.

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