

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Streamlining Success in Nursing Programs in Texas

**This FAQ document will be updated to reflect additional questions as they are asked. Please check back or email [txhealthcare@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:txhealthcare@aspeninstitute.org) to ensure your questions are addressed.**

### **Q: What does this initiative intend to do?**

The initiative focuses on two objectives, both of which must be addressed in applicants' proposals:

- 1) Enabling nursing students working in healthcare environments to earn credit toward their clinical requirements through work.
- 2) Identifying policies and practices that are restricting nursing students' ability to complete academic and clinical requirements while also holding a job (in healthcare or otherwise). This may include shifting didactic learning online, creating more flexible clinical placement schedules, development regional clinical placement and faculty recruitment systems, and other approaches.

### **Q: Who is eligible to apply for the Streamlining Success in Nursing Programs in Texas grant?**

Organizations eligible to apply include **public and private non-profit institutions of higher education in Texas**. Institutions that are based outside of Texas but serve Texas students may also apply, but the proposed work must occur in the state and impact local students. In geographies where work is best coordinated outside of postsecondary institutions, particularly rural communities, **workforce boards** may apply as the lead.

Training organizations and non-profit community-based organizations that support nursing students and for-profit businesses and organizations are **not eligible to serve as the lead organization**, though may be involved and supported through funded projects.

### **Q: My organization is a community-based nonprofit that serves healthcare students. Is my organization eligible to apply?**

No, your organization is not eligible to apply as the lead organization for this initiative. However, your organization is welcome to partner with a lead organization – a postsecondary institution or workforce board – to advance the goals of the initiative.

### **Q: What kind of activities will be supported through the learning community?**

Organizations selected to advance will participate in a variety of learning activities, including:

- **Annual convenings** hosted in Texas designed to share learning across sites and strengthen the network of people working to advance these strategies. Selected applicants should include funds for in-state travel and accommodations for up to four people to participate in three two-day convenings over the course of the project term in their grant budgets.
- **Quarterly network calls** designed to support relationship building between organizations, to gain current-state insights about projects, and to get ahead of issues that may affect success. Each network call will be 90 minutes and will be held virtually.
- **Evaluation activities**, designed to solicit and understand lessons learned, impacts created, and scalable solutions. [Higher Ed Insight](#) will support evaluation directly and will integrate all data collection into regular reporting requirements. Selected applicants do not need to support additional evaluation work in their grant budgets, though they may request funds to support data collection and/or reporting.
- **Technical Assistance** to support project goals, particularly in enabling learning gained through work to apply toward clinical requirements.

**Q: What is the funding opportunity associated with this initiative?**

While the initiative is primarily a learning community of practice, participants can apply for up to \$300,000 in funding over the three-year program.

**Q: How many applicants will be selected to move forward with the initiative?**

We anticipate selecting 8-10 organizations to move forward.

**Q: Is there a geographic focus for the Streamlining Success in Nursing Training Programs in Texas?**

Yes, programs must serve students in Texas.

**Q: If our organization has an active grant from Trellis Foundation (or TG), are we still eligible to apply?**

Yes.

**Q: Can funding be renewed?**

No, funding is for the three-year duration of the learning community and is not renewable.

**Q: What is the application page limit?**

22 pages, single spaced, including the original application question prompts.

**Q: When will applicants be notified of funding decisions?**

All applicants will be notified by June 30<sup>th</sup>, regardless of their status moving forward in the initiative.

**Q: Will organizations that are not selected for funding be contacted?**

Yes, all applicants will receive an email regarding their application status.

**Q: What is the funding range for this initiative?**

There is no minimum funding amount. The maximum funding is \$300,000 over three years.

**Q: Will feedback be provided on unsuccessful applications?**

Applicants may request written feedback. Due to operational constraints, response times may vary.

**Q: Are there any funding restrictions?**

Yes, overhead costs are limited to 10% of requested funds, and funds may not support any lobbying or political activity. Grant funds may not be used to support individual or institutional scholarships or stipends.

**Q: How can grant funds be used?**

We recognize that \$300,000 over three years will never address the systemic funding limitations in many nursing programs' budgets, but it is our hope that these resources along with the learning community activities and technical support this opportunity provides will enable participants to accomplish their goals. The grant funds provided are **flexible**, within some boundaries note above. Applicants can elect to allocate them in whatever way they believe best suits the initiative's goals. Grant funds are allocated across four primary areas:

- Personnel, including existing or new salaried, hourly, or contract staff
- Programs, including project operations, required materials, subcontracts/partnership support, travel, and other program-related expenses
- Other direct costs, including technology, communications, publications, etc.
- Overhead, which is capped at 10% of the grant amount.

**Q: Does this initiative apply to pre-licensure students?**

Yes, this initiative primarily focuses on students who have not yet obtained their initial licensure to practice as healthcare professionals in nursing. However, the initiative also recognizes the importance of career advancement within the nursing profession. Therefore, individuals in pipeline programs, such as those transitioning from LPN to RN, are eligible to participate. The initiative supports both economic and career mobility within the nursing workforce.

**Q: Can grant funds be used to cover personnel costs at employer partners?**

Grant funding can be used to cover personnel costs at employer partners, within certain boundaries. While there are limitations on overhead rates, the specific allocation of funds is not strictly prescribed, recognizing the diverse needs of different regions and partnerships. It is recommended that applicants carefully consider the nature of their partnerships and

how grant funding can support the development and sustainability of these collaborations. A key consideration is ensuring the sustainability of the work beyond the grant period.

**Q: Does the grant specify a required number of hours for the clinical portion of programs?**

No, the grant does not specify a required number of clinical hours. Institutions are encouraged to design their programs and projects in a way that best meets their specific needs and compliance requirements. Technical assistance will be provided to support applicants in areas such as developing agreements between employers and post-secondary partners. The initiative aims to offer tailored support to address specific needs and questions that may not be covered in the program overview.

**Q: Are daycare expenses an allowable expense?**

Direct student stipends or scholarships, including those for daycare expenses, are not allowable expenses under this grant. However, the initiative recognizes the significant barrier that daycare expenses pose to student completion and is open to exploring systemic solutions. This could include partnerships with daycare providers to utilize existing resources or create subsidized options.

**Q: Under the criteria, “Opportunity for Learning and Scaling,” are external references or evidence-based practices required to support the information and ideas included in the proposal?**

While the initiative acknowledges the value of evidence-based practices, it does not explicitly require external references or evidence-based practices in proposals. The initiative recognizes the expertise of nursing professionals in their respective environments and defers to their judgment regarding effective practices. However, applicants are encouraged to include relevant research or evidence to support novel ideas or approaches. The emphasis is on developing a project that applicants are confident in executing, with the understanding that further clarification or supporting evidence may be requested during the review process.

**Q: Can the funding be used to incentivize employers with cost sharing associated with paying nursing students?**

The use of funding to incentivize employers with cost-sharing arrangements for paying nursing students will be considered on a case-by-case basis. While the initiative acknowledges the financial constraints faced by some healthcare organizations, it aims to avoid scenarios where grant funds are simply passed through to students as stipends. Instead, funding may be used to support activities that enhance employer partnerships, such as facilitating the use of tuition benefit programs or increasing employer capacity to support students. Applicants are encouraged to provide detailed information about any proposed cost-sharing arrangements and how they will be sustained beyond the grant period.

**Q: When a partnership is established with a non-profit organization (NPO), can a letter of support serve as sufficient evidence of support in the application?**

A letter of support from a non-profit partner is acceptable as evidence of support in the application. The application should include a clear description of the partners, their past accomplishments, and the nature of the partnership. It is crucial that the application accurately reflects the extent of partner involvement and commitment. Finalist interviews will be used to further assess the strength and potential of these partnerships.

**Q: Can you share more about what this initiative looks like on a day-to-day basis? If selected, what are the initial action items?**

While the specific day-to-day activities will vary depending on the project, the initiative will include quarterly 90-minute virtual calls to foster collaboration and networking among participants. There will also be an annual in-person convening in Texas to facilitate in-person discussions and relationship building. Day-to-day activities may involve working with employer partners to establish agreements for students to receive credit for their work toward clinicals or conducting surveys to optimize clinical placement capacity. The initiative aims to minimize administrative burden and maximize support, learning, and problem-solving.

**Q: Could you share more detail regarding the grant team interviews and how you envision the structure? How do you recommend teams prepare?**

Grant team interviews are designed to facilitate a more personal interaction and provide an opportunity for clarification and discussion. These interviews will allow the review team to get to know the applicants, ask questions, and understand the dynamics of their partnerships. Applicants will be given ample notice of their interview and guidance on how to prepare. This preparation may include a summary of key discussion points and any specific questions that arose during the application review.

**Q: How many grants are expected to be awarded?**

The initiative anticipates awarding 8 to 10 grants, though this number may range from 7 to 12 depending on the number and quality of applications received. The goal is to ensure that the awarded grants have sufficient resources to achieve their objectives. While the grant funding is intended to be a valuable support, it is not the sole objective of the initiative. The initiative aims to foster a strong network of grantees and partners working collaboratively to achieve the project's objectives.

**Q: Can you describe the geo-regions you've identified in Texas?**

The geo-regions used in the application are based on those defined by a Texas economic development organization. These regions include major metropolitan areas like the Metroplex and Austin, as well as regions like West Central and the Gulf Coast. Applicants are asked to identify their region and provide their address to ensure geographic diversity among awardees.

The initiative seeks to include a range of communities, including rural, urban, and border communities, to maximize learning and impact.

**Q: Should individual colleges plan to partner with other academic institutions in their region?**

While partnerships with other academic institutions are welcome, they are not mandatory for every application. The appropriateness of such partnerships depends on the specific context and goals of the project. For example, collaborations between 2-year and 4-year institutions may be beneficial to facilitate degree transferability, and collaborations between institutions in rural areas may address specific regional needs. The initiative values geographic diversity but does not aim to fund multiple projects within the same community.

**Q: Can you provide additional examples of technical assistance that applicants could request beyond help with drafting agreements with employer partners?**

The initiative encourages applicants to request technical assistance in areas that would be most beneficial to their projects. In addition to support with employer partnership agreements, examples include assistance with implementing competency-based education approaches, learning from exemplary programs that have consolidated clinical placement slots, and guidance on effectively transitioning didactic learning online. The initiative aims to provide targeted technical assistance that addresses common needs and facilitates project progress.

**Q: If we have an existing partnership with a local hospital where students are paid for their clinical hours in return for a job commitment after graduation, are we excluded from eligibility?**

Having an existing partnership with a local hospital where students are paid for clinical hours in exchange for a job commitment does not necessarily exclude an applicant from eligibility. The initiative is interested in understanding the specifics of such arrangements, including how students are selected and whether the arrangement benefits a broad range of students or only a select few. It is also important to assess the replicability and sustainability of the model. The initiative seeks to identify systemic solutions that support working students and address workforce needs both now and in the future.

**Q: What is the average amount for grant funds?**

Applicants are asked to develop budgets and proposals for no more than \$300,000. While this figure is provided as a guideline, it does not guarantee that every awarded grant will receive this amount. The average grant amount is anticipated to be around \$300,000.

**Q: Are there examples of partnerships in other states that could potentially be replicated?**

Texas has unique policy conditions that make direct replication of partnerships from other states less relevant. Specifically, Texas does not restrict students from being paid during their

clinical and allows students to earn credit toward their clinicals through work-based learning. These policies create a distinct context for developing effective partnerships. The initiative encourages applicants to consider the specific landscape in Texas when designing their projects.

**Q: Can you provide more specifics around eligible lead organizations?**

Eligibility for the grant requires that the lead organization be a post-secondary institution (private non-profit or public) or a workforce board. While other organizations, such as hospital foundations, play a vital role in supporting this work, the focus is on post-secondary institutions and workforce boards to ensure effective implementation. In certain situations, such as coordinating across a large rural area or a complex metropolitan area, a workforce board may be the most appropriate lead organization. Hospital foundations and similar organizations are encouraged to participate as partners, providing programming, funding, and coordination support. The initiative aims to foster a collaborative learning community with diverse participants working together to address shared challenges

**Q: Who should I contact for additional questions?**

A: Please email [txhealthcare@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:txhealthcare@aspeninstitute.org) with additional questions.