

SPOTLIGHT ON:**INDIANA****TITLE IV-A IMPLEMENTATION****TITLE IV, PART A STATE USE OF FUNDS:****Using State Set-Aside Funds to Offer Competitive Innovation Grants**

The Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) State coordinator (SC), Lacey Bohlen, from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), implemented a statewide competitive grant program, entitled Innovation Grants, using IDOE's state set-aside funds. Local education agencies (LEAs) can submit applications to this program to receive funding in addition to their regular Title IV-A allocation. The SC had noticed that when LEAs submitted a Title IV-A application for their Title IV-A regular allocation, they were submitting similar ideas year after year, and she wanted to help LEAs realize the power and flexibility of Title IV-A funds by promoting "dreaming and scheming." The Innovation Grants encouraged creative uses of Title IV-A monies and provided an opportunity for LEAs to experiment with creative programs and activities without impacting their regular Title IV-A allocation. Specifically, Lacey wanted to leverage the robust social emotional education presence that already existed in Indiana; therefore, the grants emphasized social emotional well-being through well-rounded educational opportunities at the LEA level.

Additionally, the application prioritized LEAs who proposed programming that could impact students from rural areas and those who are traditionally underrepresented including migrant, foster, and LGBTQ students.

Using IDOE's existing Federal grant applications as a model, Lacey developed a detailed competitive grant application for LEAs, with guiding questions that consistently emphasized the program's goal of creatively using Title IV-A funds. IDOE timed the release of the Innovation Grant application to occur before the next Title IV-A application cycle, which ensured its team's capacity to review applications quickly and efficiently. IDOE spread the word about the grant competition through various channels, including a weekly superintendent's newsletter, the Title IV-A newsletter, monthly fiscal balance reminders, and social media.

In total, IDOE allocated \$1 million for the Innovation Grants program and gave awards to 30 districts from hundreds of applicants. The Innovation Grants



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funded various projects, including wellness programs and activities, songwriting and film programs, arts programs, and partnerships with community organizations. IDOE has seen additional impacts of the Innovation Grants program. For example, more LEAs are starting to transfer funds into Title IV-A rather than transferring them to another eligible Title program. LEAs are also seeing firsthand the impact that innovative Title IV-A programming can have on student outcomes and are beginning to propose more innovative programming in their regular yearly Title IV-A applications.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION TAKEAWAYS

IDOE offered Innovation Grants to encourage LEAs to think creatively about their Title IV-A funds and experiment with unique programs and activities that support social emotional well-being through well-rounded education. The following are three lessons learned from the SC who led this work.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Communicate grant updates concisely and consistently.

IDOE stresses the importance of regular and concise communication with LEAs. The SC used phone calls and emails to provide regular Innovation Grant updates, including essential information such as deadlines and grant requirements; however, these communications were also used to highlight success stories from funded projects. This allowed IDOE to spread the word about the grant program, as well as innovative funding ideas, beyond the LEAs that were awarded Innovation Grants. To make sure the updates were well received by the LEAs, Lacey noted, “The field is busy, so it is critical to provide a steady, supportive, calm voice nudging them along without being overly wordy.”

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Provide proactive training and technical assistance for potential grant applicants.

The IDOE SC credited some of the success of the grant program to proactive training and technical assistance support. For example, IDOE provided application rubrics, examples of innovative ways to use funding, and relevant resource links embedded in the application. This approach helped LEAs know the application expectations upfront, and it also provided inspiration for creative ideas to include in the application. Seeing examples opened a world of possibilities for LEAs to consider and prompted new creative ideas.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE

Leverage expertise within your organization.

The IDOE SC benefited from working closely with persons within her department and with other State education agency-level departments to develop and implement the Innovation Grants. For example, the SC consulted with the Title IV, Part B SC (another Federal grant program) to develop the grant application. Additionally, Lacey sought input from a variety of departments, including the social emotional learning team, to gain a better understanding of the availability and viability of relevant activities and programs, which allowed her to provide a more robust set of examples for LEAs to consider. By looping other departments into the Innovation Grants process, she was able to leverage the knowledge and expertise from other organizations to enhance the application process and grantee experience.

Learn more about Title IV-A in Indiana and the Innovation Grants on IDOE’s [Website](#).

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