

**Guidelines for Engaging in Work:  
Grants & Research Operations Office**



**Hillsborough County**

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**PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Preparing Students for Life**

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## Overview of the Grants & Research Operations Office (GRO)

The Grants & Research Operations Office (GRO) is housed in the Academic Support & Federal Programs division of Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS). The mission of GRO is to support the Board's Strategic Plan and priorities by maximizing resources available to HCPS in order to improve educational opportunities; this, in turn, will improve student learning.

The major functions of GRO include the following:

- Researching, locating, and disseminating grant funding opportunities from local, state, federal, and private sources to schools and the district;
- Convening stakeholders to examine each funding opportunity to assess its alignment to the Strategic Plan and whether or not to pursue the opportunity;
- Coordinating inter-departmental and/or inter-agency grant proposal development;
- Developing high quality, research-based grant submissions and submitting grant proposals to funding agencies on behalf of the district;
- Providing differentiated technical assistance over the life of competitive and select entitlement grant projects;
- Assisting with planning for the successful closeout of competitive grant projects;
- Working collaboratively with a variety of external partners, such as the University of South Florida, Tampa Housing Authority, City of Tampa, etc., to develop mutually beneficial projects that may or may not result in funding for the district;
- Assisting with technical writing for initiatives that support district priorities, such as all letters of support signed by the Superintendent and other applications that may or may not result in funding but contribute to the promotion of a positive district image;
- Monitoring federal and state legislation, appropriations, and regulatory actions that affect grant programs;
- Working closely with the Special Revenue and Office of Strategy Management departments to coordinate submission of requested program and fiscal reports by grantors; and
- Providing professional development, technical assistance, proposal review, and writing assistance to school-level grant writers.

GRO provides a continuum of services from pre-award through post-award of a grant. Please utilize the guidelines contained within this document in order to engage GRO in grant-related work.

# Engaging in Work with GRO

## District-Level Grants

This section pertains to large-scale grants which entail one or more of the following elements:

- Grants that involve more than one school site and/or at least one district division;
- Grants for which the district must serve as the applicant/fiscal agent; or
- Grants for which an external partner will serve as the applicant/fiscal agent.

## Pre-Award Processes

### 1. Locating a Viable Funding Opportunity

There are several ways you can find a viable grant opportunity. First, GRO continuously searches for new and potential grant competitions. If the district is eligible for a particular grant opportunity, GRO contacts key stakeholders to review the grant purpose and requirements; the stakeholders ensure that the opportunity aligns with the Board's Strategic Plan and make a decision about whether or not to pursue the funding.

Another way to find funding is for district personnel to utilize the resources at their disposal to locate potential funding opportunities. For example, national and state professional organizations often make grant funding available to its members. Once you become aware of a funding opportunity, you should immediately contact GRO to engage the office in grant development.

An additional way to find funding is through an existing or new partner. A local, state, or national partner may approach a contact in the district to discuss a potential funding opportunity. If you are approached by an external partner to discuss a funding opportunity, you should immediately contact GRO to engage the office in grant development.

Regardless of the avenue utilized to find a funding opportunity, all grants must be aligned with the Board's 5-year Strategic Plan and its priorities. HCPS will not pursue funding that does not assist the district in reaching its goals and objectives.

### 2. Preparing a Competitive Grant Proposal

Should the district choose to pursue a funding opportunity, GRO will assist in establishing a grant development team. The grant development team will be comprised of personnel from divisions/departments that may be involved in the implementation of a proposed project. GRO will schedule one or more grant development meetings and facilitate the development of a competitive grant application.

Members of the development team may also include those who manage other funding sources in the district; this will ensure alignment and leveraging of resources. HCPS will utilize an allocation strategy called "braiding" of funds in order to realize its Strategic Priority of Financial Stewardship. Braiding involves the use of various existing or new funding streams in order to support an initiative in as integrated a manner as possible. The funding streams are used for a common purpose to leverage resources in an effective, efficient way and assists HCPS in sustaining effective initiatives over time.

All members of the grant implementation team are expected to actively participate in all discussions and decision-making related to the proposed project. It is imperative that members bring research-based ideas to the table to inform the design of the project. This may entail providing GRO with that research in order to assist in narrative development.

If a grant development team member is charged with providing costs related to the proposed project, he/she should prepare that information according to district guidelines and processes, such as contacting district-approved vendors to acquire appropriate quotes. Members are expected to provide a detailed breakdown of all proposed costs to GRO in order to inform the development of a reasonable budget that will be used to carry out the proposed work.

Following each grant development meeting, GRO will send an email disseminating the agreed upon "Next Steps" to gather further information necessary for the narrative and budget development. GRO will set interim, internal deadlines for the grant development team to meet in order to propel grant development forward and meet the funding agency deadline. It is imperative that team members meet these deadlines or the ability of GRO to produce a competitive application is negatively impacted.

### **3. Proposing Grant Personnel**

Typically, during the grant development process HCPS will identify a potential Project Director who will manage the proposed project should it be selected for funding. This is, in nearly all cases, a current district employee who has the related content area expertise to carry out the proposed project successfully and who can effectively manage a budget and reporting requirements.

Project Directors who wish to assign additional district personnel to assist in grant implementation must approach their Division Chief during the grant development process to discuss the feasibility of doing so. Should the Division Chief and Project Director wish to propose a new position be added to the grant budget, a concrete plan to sustain that position beyond grant funding must be provided to the Director of GRO.

If a new position is being requested, the Director of GRO will make that request on behalf of the Project Director and Division Chief to the Deputy Superintendent who oversees the area in which the grant will be managed. The Deputy Superintendent will review all requests and determine whether or not each request will be approved.

In the case of a grant in which an external partner is serving as the applicant and fiscal agent, HCPS will usually identify a current HCPS employee to serve as the point of contact for grant implementation. The point of contact is usually an employee who possesses the related content area expertise to assist in carrying out the proposed project.

### **4. Submitting the Grant Proposal**

GRO will be responsible for the grant submission. Most agencies require the submission of a grant application through an online system with which GRO will be familiar. Should a hard copy submission be required, GRO will prepare the necessary documents, obtain the required signatures, and submit on behalf of the district.

## **Post-Award Processes**

Once a grant has been awarded, GRO moves into the role of technical service provider to the Project Director and grant implementation team.

### **1. Boot Camp for Project Launch**

GRO, working with Special Revenue and the Office of Strategy Management (OSM), will design and execute a Boot Camp for all new grant implementation teams. Participants typically include representatives from GRO, Special Revenue, Procurement, and OSM. The Project Director, the accountant/bookkeeper assigned to the project, division representatives, if necessary, and the external evaluator are expected to participate. The Boot Camp is designed to acclimate grant implementation teams to the approved project, budget, funding agency rules and regulations, and grant requirements, such as required reporting. GRO will assist in the initial development of an action plan to establish a clear way of work, and facilitate discussion regarding the necessary systems and processes that should be put in place to ensure successful project implementation and avoid potential financial consequences.

### **2. Technical Service Provision**

Following the project launch, GRO will assign a Point of Contact from the office to streamline communication and the provision of technical assistance. Based on the experience level of the members of the implementation team, GRO may schedule an ongoing cadence of meetings in order to provide consistent, differentiated technical assistance such as providing expertise in the development and submission of programmatic and/or budget amendments. The technical assistance provided will be driven by emerging needs of the grant implementation team over the life of the project.

### **3. Evaluation of the Project**

If a funding agency requires that the grantee contract with an external evaluator, GRO will notify OSM of the need to identify an appropriate evaluator from the HCPS pool. OSM maintains a pool of qualified evaluators and an evaluator with the appropriate qualifications and experience will be identified by OSM through established district processes to serve on the project. Once the grant is awarded, OSM is responsible for contracting with a qualified evaluator to provide the services required to meet the funding agency's reporting deliverables. OSM will serve as liaison between the district and the evaluator to ensure all deliverable timelines are met and the evaluator receives payment for services rendered.

### **4. Memorandums of Agreement for Project Implementation & Partnership Agreements**

Depending on the scope of work that a partner or the district has committed to provide, a formal agreement may be necessary. Please use the guidelines accessed through the link provided below to determine whether a formal agreement is required and what type of agreement should be developed and presented to the School Board of Hillsborough County, FL. for their consideration.

Memorandums of Agreement and Partnership Agreement Guidelines can be found at: <http://bit.ly/HCPS-Partnerships>. Alternately, from the IDEAS/FirstClass desktop, open the District icon, then open the Business News icon to access the Business News Sharepoint.

*(Note: Accessing this information will require HCPS credentials [Lawson # and your District password]).*

## School-Level Grants

This section pertains to grants for which personnel at a single school wish to apply.

School-based personnel are expected to utilize the following checklist in their pursuit of supplementary funding through grants or donations.

### **School Grant or Donation Procedures Checklist**

- \_\_\_ 1. Identify a specific need for a program, school, or classroom that aligns with the district's priorities and the school's School Improvement Plan.
- \_\_\_ 2. Identify a grant or donation source to meet the specified need.
- \_\_\_ 3. Secure Principal approval to seek funding each time an opportunity is identified.
- \_\_\_ 4. Notify Grants & Research Operations (GRO) office of your intent to apply for funding by submitting a Grant Application Notification form via IDEAS at least two weeks prior to the grant deadline. Go to District – District Forms – Grant Application Notification. This Grant Application Notification form must be completed for each opportunity that is pursued.
- \_\_\_ 5. Once the Grant Application Notification is received, GRO will assign a Grant Coordinator as a Point of Contact. The Point of Contact will reach out to determine next steps in the grant development process.
  - a. In the following circumstances, the GRO Point of Contact will provide a higher level of technical assistance:
    - i. Grant awards that exceed \$10,000 in available funding;
    - ii. Grant competitions that specify only 1 submission per school district;
    - iii. Grants for which the district must serve as the applicant/fiscal agent rather than the school; and/or
    - iv. Grants for which an external partner will serve as the applicant/fiscal agent.
- \_\_\_ 6. School personnel will write and complete grant or donation application.
  - a. Should the proposal include the purchase of equipment or materials, school personnel will adhere to the district procedures for such purchases that are detailed later in this document.
  - b. The GRO Point of Contact may review the grant submission should school personnel wish to be provided feedback to strengthen the application.
  - c. GRO will provide technical assistance, if necessary, such as facilitating discussions with district level personnel (e.g., Instructional Leadership Directors, Area Superintendents, Content Supervisors, etc.).
  - d. Some grants require a letter of support from an authorized official. Unless specified by funding agency, the only person who is authorized to sign a letter of support for a grant application is the Superintendent. If a letter of support is needed, submit a draft of the letter of support to GRO two weeks prior to the grant deadline. A sample letter of support can be found at <http://bit.ly/LOS-Internal>.
- \_\_\_ 7. Inform GRO, via email, of receipt of the grant or donation award notification.
  - a. Upon award, GRO will assist the school in determining next steps, including:
    - i. how to submit a grant agreement, if necessary;

1. Only the Chair of the School Board of Hillsborough County, FL is authorized to sign grant agreements for funded projects of **\$10,000 or more**. The Superintendent is the authorized signer for grant agreements that do not exceed this threshold. If the funder requires a grant agreement, GRO will provide guidance to the Principal on how to navigate this process.
    - ii. where the budget will be set up, either in the district Budget office, Special Revenue, or at the school site;
    - iii. reporting requirements, including regulations surrounding informed consent and the release of student information;
- \_\_\_ 8. The grant/donation recipient is responsible for reviewing all reporting required by the funding agency and submitting the requested information by the established deadline(s).
- \_\_\_ 9. Submit a copy of the grant/donation recipient and all documentation to GRO; as well as a thank you note to private or foundation funders.
- \_\_\_ 10. Retain all project-related records per the district's record retention guidelines found in District Forms, Record Destruction & Retention. Email [alfredo.colon@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:alfredo.colon@sdhc.k12.fl.us) with additional questions.

### **Single Applicant Competitions**

Some funding agency guidelines stipulate that an institution can only submit one application in a given funding cycle. This includes institutions with several departments, divisions, or schools, such as our school district. If this stipulation applies to a grant for which you are applying, multiple requests from district schools within HCPS will be rejected by the funding agency.

For competitions which allow one submission per institution, the district reserves the right to submit a district-level application. In this instance, GRO will publish a notice informing principals of the district's intent to apply in the Principal's Weekly Newsletter; school-based applications will not be permitted.

Should the district not pursue district-level funding for a grant competition that only allows one submission per institution, individual schools/teachers may apply. In this case, the following steps must be followed. These procedures are in addition to the existing grant notification requirements outlined in this document. The minimum lead time for this process is 2 weeks prior to the grant deadline.

- 1) Upon submission of the Grant Notification Alert form, a GRO staff member will reach out to alert you to the fact that the competition only allows one submission per institution.
- 2) The teacher applicant will submit their grant proposal, along with all supporting documentation, if any, to GRO.
- 3) GRO will convene a committee to review the proposals according to a rubric that addresses the grant requirements and district expectations.
- 4) No later than one week prior to the grant deadline, GRO will notify all teachers of the committee's decision on the application that has been approved for submission to the funding agency.

Contact the Grants & Research Operations Office with questions: [Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us)

## HCPS Procedures for Grant-funded Materials and Equipment

If a request includes materials or equipment, the procedures outlined in this document must also be followed. These guidelines are designed to ensure that materials and equipment obtained in this manner can be appropriately supported and maintained through existing district resources.

### How Grant-funded Items Should Be Used

- a) Materials or equipment received through the grant process must be used in accordance with the request and purpose stated in the application. The intent of the project must be followed and the use of the item(s) must adhere to the intended educational use.
- b) Example: Should a grant fund the purchase of mini white boards or iPads for math lessons at a specific school, then those materials must stay within the math program or department at that school. They would not be able to be used in art class or taken to a different school, even if the teacher who asked for the funding moves to a different school.
- c) Important Note: If the equipment has a value of \$500 or more (\$200 or more for computers, iPads, laptops and tablets), the following steps must be taken: 1) An SB120 Fixed Asset Acquisition Form must be submitted and 2) an asset decal will be issued to be placed on the equipment.

### Guidelines for School Crowdfunding Account

Many funding opportunities that appear to be grants actually fall under the definition of “crowdfunding.” Crowdfunding involves funding a project by raising donations of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet. There are a number of platforms available to school personnel that are based in crowdfunding.

While crowdfunding opportunities can provide a mechanism for raising money for equipment, supplies and/or materials to supplement instruction or extracurricular activities, they also can result in unintended circumstances that could negatively impact school personnel. For instance, GoFundMe requires the recipient of funds to set up an account in his/her name. The funds are then sent directly to the recipient. Funds raised in this manner should be considered taxable income. Most teachers would not want to be subject to such consequences.

Prior to engaging in crowdsourcing, follow all District procedures including administrator approval. Should a school class/club pursue this fundraising option, complete the Agreement for School Activity process and follow all procedures governing internal accounts. These guidelines are intended to provide protection for teachers who wish to utilize crowdsourcing as a mechanism to raise funds for classroom use or use by extracurricular activities, as well as protection for their administrators and the district.

School personnel are encouraged to try to find traditional grant opportunities for which to apply prior to turning to crowdfunding as an avenue for raising funds. If a crowdfunding platform is

chosen for use, be advised that school personnel are expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

- a) Crowdfunding platforms must be vetted and approved through the District Review Committee. See the addendum to this document for the process to submit a platform for approval.
  - i) The following platforms are currently approved: DonorsChoose; Adopt a Classroom; Snap! Raise; and Hillsborough Education Foundation's Find It & Fund It!.
- b) The representative(s) of companies must meet all vendor requirements including Jessica Lunsford Act (JLA) as well as being cleared through the volunteer screening procedures (including Level 2 screening).
- c) The principal or designee must give his/her approval of any crowdfunding program prior to the communication being released to supporters.
- d) Parent consent and other student safeguards must ensure that personally identifiable student information is not collected nor accessed, as defined under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- e) Crowdfunding opportunities must provide the majority of the funding raised to the school, rather than applying the majority of funds raised toward the platform's processing fees.
- f) Each group (team or club) will be limited to only one crowdfunding opportunity (which raises cash rather than provides items/supplies) per school year which requires the *Agreement for School Activity* approval. The maximum time period to participate per group will be two weeks for requesting support and two weeks allowed for collection of funds.
- g) No crowdfunding accounts may be established in an individual teacher/staff member's name. Crowdfunding accounts must be set up under a school's name and address or a school's parent support organization's name with the school's address.
- h) Any materials received or purchased with crowdfunding sources must be included in the school's inventory if the items are on the list of bid items. Any materials purchased through school or district accounts must be from approved vendors and items selected through the bid process if applicable.
- i) All non-consumable materials and equipment purchased through grants and/or crowdfunding platforms are the property of The School Board of Hillsborough County, Florida and should be handled according to these guidelines.

*Note: School-based platforms that deliver assets or materials directly to the school site, such as DonorsChoose, Adopt a Classroom, and Find It & Fund It!, are exempt from the Agreement for School Activity. However, all other guidelines apply.*

## **Who Owns the Items/Equipment Received through a Grant or Donation?**

*\*If a teacher leaves the school where the project originated, the principal of that school must give consent for that teacher to take funded materials to use in his/her new classroom and the required paperwork (SB126) must be completed in order to transfer the equipment.*

- a) For any grant-funded or donated item, the ownership is in the name of The School Board of Hillsborough County, FL and district inventory policies apply. Equipment must be identified as “district” property.
- b) Items are not the property of the teacher.
  - i) Example: If Mr. Smith should transfer schools, the item should transfer with him as long as it is within Hillsborough County Public Schools and the principal agrees to transfer it. However, if Mr. Smith stops teaching the subject, changes positions, or leaves the District, the laptop remains at the school and with that particular subject area or department.

## Special Instructions for Requesting Technology Equipment in a Project

- a) District standards apply for computers and laptops. If submitting a project for funding for technology equipment, it is recommended that technology be ordered through Lawson. If this is not possible, it is advisable to order equipment similar to what is used in the District for support and compatibility (i.e., HP computers/laptops/printers, iPad tablets, Nook readers, etc.). *Note: Non-standard equipment may not be supported by the district’s technology infrastructure, and may not be able to run district applications.*
- b) The district image, installation, and/or etching are **included** in the desktop/workstation/laptop/tablet bundles purchased through Lawson. The following must be on the **same requisition** as the desktop/workstation/laptop/tablet being ordered: Lawson item # 2927218 @ \$75.00 for **each** device ordered, and use **644** object code for this item. Monitors are purchased separately and installation is also included in printers.
- c) Be advised that any computer or laptop that is not ordered through Lawson will need to be upgraded to work within the District network. Teachers submitting projects that include Windows computers or laptops should verify with their principal that funds will be available to support this upgrade prior to submitting the project request.
- d) Any applications (e.g., “apps”) purchased by the school for use on the equipment, are owned by the school. Contact the Procurement Department (813-272-4374) for information about purchasing apps.

## Special Instructions for Devices Not Acquired through Lawson:

If you receive devices through a mechanism other than the Lawson system, they will require district upgrades and imaging in order to work on the district’s network. This includes Windows laptops or tablets, Macbooks, iPads, Chromebooks, and Windows desktop computers. Follow the directions below when these items are acquired from sources other than Lawson.

- a) Follow guidelines provided in HCPS Procurement Services department’s Computer Ordering Information brochure, found at <http://bit.ly/HCPSProcurement>. Alternately, from the IDEAS/FirstClass desktop, open the District icon, then open the Business News icon to access the Business News Sharepoint to access this link. (Note: Accessing this information will require HCPS credentials [Lawson # and your District password])

## External Partnership Projects

This section should be utilized by an external organization who wishes to partner with HCPS in a grant-funded project.

The following checklist is intended to guide external district partners interested in collaborating with HCPS in applying for grant funding.

### **External Partnership Project Checklist**

- \_\_\_ 1. Identify a specified need for a program that aligns with the partner's and district's priorities.
- \_\_\_ 2. Identify a grant to meet the specified need.
- \_\_\_ 3. Notify Grants and Research Operations (GRO) via email ([Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us)) or phone (813-272-4880).
- \_\_\_ 4. GRO will assist in identifying and notifying all relevant district stakeholders who are required to approve participation (e.g., school principal, Instructional Leadership Directors, Area Superintendents, Content Supervisors, etc.).
- \_\_\_ 5. Partner will schedule meetings to provide district stakeholders with an opportunity to give input on a viable project design. GRO will provide boilerplate language, and the HCPS Office of Strategy Management will provide access to relevant data that may be used to strengthen the proposal.
- \_\_\_ 6. Partner will submit a draft letter of support to GRO a minimum of two weeks prior to the grant deadline. The only person who is authorized to sign a letter of support for a grant application is the Superintendent. A sample letter of support can be found at <http://bit.ly/LOS-External>.
- \_\_\_ 7. Inform GRO, via email, of receipt of the grant award notification.
- \_\_\_ 8. Contact GRO for assistance if a contract, grant agreement, or MOU is required. GRO will provide support to the HCPS Point of Contact for the project with adhering to district guidelines, to include submission for review and approval to the District's attorney. *Note: The School Board approval process requires an average of 6-8 weeks after the agreement language is agreed upon by both parties.*

Contact the Grants & Research Operations Office with questions: [Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us)

## Letter of Support (LOS) Requests

This section provides guidance to external partners who wish to receive a letter of support from HCPS for a partnership project or in support of an initiative that aligns with the district's Vision and Mission.

Only the Superintendent of HCPS is authorized to sign a LOS on behalf of the district. In order for the Superintendent to consider a LOS request, send a full draft of the LOS you wish for the Superintendent to consider to GRO at [Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:Lisa.Placko@sdhc.k12.fl.us).

The request should be made a minimum of two weeks prior to the deadline to submit the letter to the funding agency. Not providing the appropriate time to meet the request may result in the district not being able to consider the request.

Once a LOS request is received, GRO will work with the appropriate personnel to vet the proposed project to ensure that the district is able to support its implementation. Should the district decide to support the project, the LOS will be provided. If the district is unable to support the project, the Director of GRO will communicate this to the external partner and articulate the reasons that contributed to the decision.

## Addendum: Vetting of Crowdfunding Platforms through District Review Committee

HCPS has established a District Review Committee (DRC) for reviewing proposals submitted by individuals and/or organizations wishing to interact with the school district. Beginning in 2018, HCPS found it necessary to additionally vet new crowdfunding platforms to ensure that the majority of funds raised will directly benefit our schools and students. Teachers wishing to fundraise with a new crowdfunding platform that is not already approved by the district must submit their proposal to the District Review Committee prior to launching the crowdfunding campaign. All procedures outlined in the Grants & Research Operations *Way of Work* document must be followed.

District Review Committee information can be found at <http://bit.ly/HCPS-DRC>. On the left side of the page, click on Documents & Forms. From the Documents & Forms page, choose the proposal which best fits your intent (fee based, fundraiser or general), complete the requested information, and submit\* (save and finish).

\*Please Note: Due to network servers, a timer will initiate when a proposal is being implemented. You may wish to copy and paste the questions into a word document prior to submitting answers into the proposal form. This will allow time to answer and spell-check at leisure, and then copy and paste answers to the online proposal form.

- Our system does not allow for attachments. Once your information is submitted, you will receive an auto-reply email with instructions for submitting attachments, if required.
- Should your proposal be an online submission only, you will be placed on the next DRC agenda.
- Proposals are reviewed monthly by the DRC.
- The deadline for consideration on the next agenda is the first Friday of the month. The DRC meets on the following Thursday (second Thursday of the month).
- Applicants do not appear before the DRC.
- Applicants will be notified as to the status of their proposal via certified letter within 7-10 business days after the DRC meeting.

The information on our website will answer many questions; however, should you need further assistance, please contact 813-272-4767.