

## Rural Initiative Center Grant Questions and Answers

**Questions/answers highlighted in blue were added after the  
3/26/2025 webinar.**

### Eligibility Requirements

1. Who received notice of this RFA and why should they consider applying?

A: Notice was sent to all TUPE County Coordinators. The purpose of the RFA is to fund up to two Rural Initiative Centers to extend TUPE services to rural school districts that currently receive no Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding. COEs with experience operating TUPE programs in rural communities should consider applying to expand their reach into rural areas not currently funded to provide TUPE services.

2. Can multiple COEs apply as a consortium?

A: Multiple COEs may apply as a consortium of counties. However, the COE applying for funding must serve as the lead agency. The lead agency assumes fiscal and reporting responsibility for the grant. The roles and responsibilities of the lead agency and other participating agencies must be clearly described in the Application Narrative and delineated in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the lead agency and other participating agencies. If the COE is unable to obtain an MOU by the application deadline, a Letter of Agreement/Support or similar document detailing what each third party will do to support the grant will suffice. However, if the COE is awarded funding, the CDE will require that an MOU with each partner agency be submitted as documentation that a formal agreement has been established between the parties.

3. Can we invite non-county agencies to co-apply with us?

A: While there can only be one lead agency, you may include non-county agencies in your application. Per Page 6 of the RFA, you may include health care providers, community-based health organizations, or other agencies who will provide services to rural school districts or otherwise take part in the operation of the Rural Initiative Center.

4. Can my COE apply as the lead agency but outsource 100% of the work to another organization?

A: The responsibility of administering the grant remains with the lead agency. Therefore, the grant must not be fully outsourced to another organization. The applicant COE is expected to be the expert and lead on the grant. However, they

may work with partner agencies to provide direct services to rural school communities.

5. What makes a strong applicant?

A: The RFA requires that applicants demonstrate their experience operating a high-performing rural TUPE program. The TUPE Office advises applicants to read the RFA in its entirety, including the Scoring Rubric. The Scoring Rubric provides insight into how the CDE will evaluate each application and how each section of the application will be weighted. A strong applicant will be a COE with experience working in rural communities, the ability to work collaboratively with rural school communities and partner agencies, and a clear and thoughtful plan for administering subawards, providing mentoring and information exchange, and project monitoring and evaluation.

6. What is the definition of a "high-performing TUPE program?"

A: In the context of the Rural Initiative Center RFA, a high-performing TUPE program is one that has extensive experience providing TUPE services in rural communities. High-performing TUPE programs also have a demonstrated ability to collaborate and build partnerships.

## General Questions

7. How will rural counties and students benefit from this RFA, considering the major issue facing rural school districts is not money, but capacity?

A: The RFA gives applicants the latitude to propose various solutions to building capacity, such as directly funding school districts to provide TUPE services or identifying others who can provide these services, including health care providers, community-based health organizations, and other agencies or individuals.

8. Given that this grant will end in 3–5 years, how will services be sustained?

A: The Rural Initiative Centers are intended to extend the reach of TUPE services while building rural capacity for TUPE programming. Services will be sustained if LEAs that receive subawards and mentoring through a Rural Initiative Center later join a Tier 1 or Tier 2 consortium or otherwise obtain TUPE funding to continue providing services.

9. What should I do if I have questions about the RFA after the webinar?

A: If you have questions after the webinar, please refer to the RFA, the General Program Guidance, the Project Budget Guidance, the webinar recording, and the Q&As.

10. Can I contact the Capacity Building Project for help on my application?

A: No, please do not contact the Capacity Building Project for assistance with your application.

11. Will the regions that are selected get to review the application of the COE that wants to represent them?

A: The CDE does not plan to route applications for review by other COEs in the region(s) to be served. However, the RFA encourages applicants to demonstrate collaboration with other COEs in the region(s) to be served. Specifically, it asks them to describe their capacity to collaborate with others in the region(s) they propose to serve, how they will work with TUPE County Coordinators and others to inform and advise the Rural Initiative Center and its subaward program, and how they will engage them in mentoring and information sharing to help build rural capacity.

12. Who will be the readers of these grant applications after the CDE screening phase? What qualifies them as "independent"?

A: Applications will be read by at least two Consultants within the CDE. The intention of the reference in the RFA to "two independent readers" is that two Consultants will separately read and score each application before averaging their scores, discussing the application, and involving a third Consultant if they do not reach consensus.

13. Please provide the definition of 'rural' used in this grant. What is the best resource for determining if a district is rural?

A: In general, the CDE follows the rural and urban classifications of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which has a look-up tool at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/>. Sites in the NCES database are identified as either urban or rural according to the following classifications:

Urban Classification	Rural Classification
11—City, Large	31—Town, Fringe
12—City, Midsize	32—Town, Distant
13—City, Small	33—Town, Remote
21—Suburb, Large	41—Rural, Fringe
22—Suburb, Midsize	42—Rural, Distant
23—Suburb, Small	43—Rural, Remote

In this schema, sites classified as "town" or "rural" would be considered rural for purposes of this RFA. However, applicants may use any reasonable method for determining rurality in the region(s) they propose to serve, within the generally understood definition of rurality as being of low population density.

14. Whose input did you receive for this Rural Initiative Grant RFA? Were rural counties contacted for input on this RFA?

A: As part of planning for this RFA, the CDE reviewed recent progress reports of rural grantees and conducted key informant interviews with TUPE Coordinators in 15 mostly rural counties across the state. The TUPE Office also consulted with its statewide evaluation partner, UCSD, which prepared a case study on one rural county's TUPE program.

15. How will the TUPE Office ensure that all rural counties have an opportunity to be served through this RFA?

A: Unfortunately, the funding available for this initiative is insufficient to augment all rural counties in such a way as to significantly increase the number of rural students who receive TUPE services. The TUPE Office determined that awarding two competitive grants to COEs who propose promising plans for increasing rural reach was a more strategic use of the limited funding available. However, the TUPE Office will ensure that learnings from the initiative will be used to inform the development of capacity building resources that will be made available to all.

## Application Narrative

### Section 2: Geographic Region(s) to Be Served

16. How many region(s) and/or counties is my COE expected to serve? Will we have a better chance of being awarded funding if we serve a large number of regions and counties?

A: There are no minimums or maximums with respect to the number of counties to be served. The quality of the application is what is most important. Each application will be evaluated on its own merits, including the soundness of its plan for reaching students in rural districts that currently receive no Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding.

17. Is an applicant expected to have all of its target counties identified in the application or can we include a three-year growth plan?

A: You are not expected to identify all of the counties you may eventually target. We suggest that you identify only the counties that you can reasonably serve at the time a grant is awarded. However, as your capacity grows, additional counties may be added. Therefore, it would be appropriate to include a general three-year growth plan in the application.

18. If a county is mostly urban, but has some rural areas, is it OK to include them in the application?

A: It is acceptable for Rural Initiative Centers to target counties that are mostly urban, but only to the extent that those counties include rural schools that are not currently being served by Tier 1 or Tier 2 programming.

19. My COE is considered urban. Can I apply for this grant?

A: The purpose of this RFA is to fund Rural Initiative Centers to help rural school districts in a defined region or regions, but applicants need not themselves be located in a rural area. They must, however, demonstrate knowledge about the needs and conditions of rural school districts in the region(s) they propose to serve and a capacity to help them provide TUPE services.

20. How can our COE demonstrate knowledge of the region(s) we intend to serve if we are not supposed to describe the specific districts that will receive subawards?

A: Applicants can demonstrate knowledge of the region(s) they intend to serve by describing youth tobacco use rates in the selected region(s), by indicating what rural school districts lack tobacco-free school policies, do not administer the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), or do not participate in a Tier 1 or Tier 2 consortium grant, or by sharing information gleaned from other sources, such as key informants. It is certainly acceptable to cite particular districts in this context. However, the CDE anticipates that grantees will need time in Year 1 to develop, implement, and promote their subaward programs and rural school districts will need time to respond. Therefore, applicants should not commit to issuing subawards to particular districts at this stage.

### **Section 3: Capacity**

21. According to the "Inclusion of Other Agencies" section, the applicant COE may include healthcare providers, CBOs, and other agencies who will provide services to the rural school districts or take part in the Rural Hub. Will the COE need to include all agencies in the region(s) they are choosing to represent?

A: The applicant COE does not need to include all agencies in the region(s) they plan to serve. They should carefully assemble the team they think will be most effective in expanding the reach of TUPE services in districts that currently lack Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding.

### **Section 4: Subawards**

22. Who can a COE subaward to in this grant?

A: Any entity providing services to rural school communities can be a recipient of a subaward. The main objective of the subaward program is for the lead agency

to secure direct services for rural school communities. Services can be provided by COEs, LEAs, or qualified individuals.

23. For a school district that has both rural and non-rural school sites, and the rural ones do not currently have TUPE grants, would this district be eligible for a subaward?

A: In this example, the district would be eligible for a subaward provided they use it only for rural school sites that are currently noted as exempted in TUPE GEMS.

24. Are charter schools eligible for subawards?

A: Charter schools are eligible to receive subawards as long as they are not currently receiving Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding.

25. Will the districts that receive subawards be required to administer CHKS?

A: Administering CHKS is not a condition for receiving a subaward from a Rural Initiative Center.

26. Is there a difference between subawards and subcontracts? What terms or conditions are there for this type of service agreement?

A: Securing services for rural school communities can be done via subawards or subcontracts. The mechanism of how it is done is up to the lead agency's discretion. Follow your local COE's accounting practices to determine the terms and conditions for subawards and/or subcontracts.

27. Is there a funding limit for individual subawards?

A: There is no limit for individual subawards.

28. How much of the grant should be allocated to the subawards?

A: There is no minimum or maximum amount that applicants are expected to allocate for subawards. However, per the RFA, the subawards are the most important and resource intensive part of the Program Plan. Applicants should keep that in mind when developing their application.

29. Does the CDE have a preference for fewer subawards with greater dollar amounts (potentially greater impact) vs. more subawards spread across the state with lesser dollar amounts?

A: The CDE has no expectation regarding the number or size of subawards. However, applications that propose reasonable plans for maximizing the reach of TUPE services in currently unfunded rural districts will be prioritized.

30. What types of activities should be funded with the subawards?

A: Please refer to the Rural Initiative Center Grant General Program Guidance for ideas on activities that can be funded with the subawards.

31. Will the CDE TUPE Office monitor subawardees or will that be done by the lead agency?

A: The monitoring of subawardees is to be done by the lead agency.

32. Given that "Priority will be given to those who demonstrate experience operating a high-performing rural TUPE program," how can such a program be a "rural hub" if they cannot subaward to LEAs that already have Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding?

A: The intention with this RFA is that TUPE personnel with valuable knowledge and expertise gained through working with LEAs in their consortium will reach out to additional LEAs in the Rural Initiative Center's intended service area that do not currently receive Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding, and provide them with subawards and mentoring to help build their capacity to provide TUPE services.

33. Can our organization simultaneously apply for a Tier 1 grant and a Rural Initiative Center grant? If so, and both are awarded, are the school districts participating in the Tier 1 grant ineligible to be a part of the Rural Initiative Center grant?

A: A COE that is simultaneously applying for a Tier 1 or Tier 2 grant, or that currently has a Tier 1 or Tier 2 grant, is eligible to apply for a Rural Initiative Center grant. However, if both are awarded, there can be no duplication of services. I.e., LEAs receiving Tier 1 or Tier 2 funding as part of a consortium cannot also receive subawards from the Rural Initiative Center.

## **Section 5: Mentoring and Information Exchange**

34. Who are grantees expected to mentor?

A: The lead agency should be a high-performing COE with demonstrated experience in rural communities, and is expected to serve as a mentor for those with less experience, such as rural LEAs receiving subawards to provide TUPE services for the first time. The lead agency should become familiar with the expertise of TUPE Coordinators and other TUPE staff in the region(s) they serve to build a network of other mentors who can assist programs with local needs.

35. Why would rural counties need mentorship in a different way than other counties?

A: Many rural counties have high-functioning programs led by experienced TUPE professionals. The intention of the mentorship component of this RFA is to make some of that knowledge and expertise available to those who are newer to

TUPE, such as newly identified champions in districts receiving subawards under this program.

## **Section 6: Project Monitoring and Evaluation**

36. Will the quality improvement/evaluation tool be provided by CDE, or will the COE have to create this tool?

A: Grantees are responsible for developing any tools needed for monitoring and evaluating their programs. However, recognizing that the Rural Initiative Centers represent new programming, the CDE intends to work collaboratively with grantees to ensure the successful implementation and evaluation of their programs.

37. How will a center be assessed for its success?

A: Success will be assessed mainly in terms of the extent to which the centers reach underserved rural communities with TUPE services. However, the CDE is also interested in how the centers impact the communities they serve, which will be assessed through qualitative means such as narrative descriptions of accomplishments, success stories, best practices, lessons learned, and challenges.

## **Section 7: Assurances**

38. Can we include agencies in the application that we are already in communication with but have not yet signed an MOU?

A: We recognize that MOUs can take time to draft and get approved. As an interim solution, you may submit a Letter of Agreement/Support or similar document from each partner agency detailing what will be included in the prospective MOU. If the COE is awarded funding, the TUPE Office will require an MOU from each agency formalizing the agreement between the Lead Agency and any partner agency/agencies.

## **Section 8: Budget**

39. What object code do subawards fall under?

A: Subawards fall under object codes 5100-000 or 5800.

40. Should I fill out all the tabs of each workbook?

A: It is only necessary to complete the Budget Detail tab for each year (i.e., Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3). The Budget Detail tab is the first tab in the workbook. The other tabs do not need to be completed for the application.

41. Are there any resources for completing the Budget template?

A: Please refer to the Project Budget Guidance document posted in the Resources tab of TUPE GEMS.

42. What is meant by "Center?" Can funding be used to pay for a physical center?

A: The Rural Initiative Centers are intended to serve as virtual hubs for TUPE-related activities such as the provision of subawards and mentoring and information exchange services. The CDE expects that Rural Initiative Center personnel will be housed in facilities currently operated by the lead agency for each grant. Grantees may budget for space as needed, within the limits described in the Project Budget Guidance.

43. With the recent TUPE budget cuts, will there will be enough TUPE funds to sustain these projects in 3 years?

A: The Rural Initiative Grants will be supported not with revenue from Propositions 99 and 56, but with funding from the Electronic Cigarette Settlements Fund (i.e., the JUUL Settlement), which were allocated to the CDE for a five-year period, subject to annual State Budget Act approval. The CDE expects that funding will therefore be available for a minimum of three years with a possible two-year extension.