

# STRAIGHT FUND

## **Fiscal and Programmatic Monitoring Training Manual**



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## **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Ohio's new \$250 million Straight A Fund is a competitive grant program to provide Ohio's schools the opportunity to implement new and creative learning options for their students. Grants have been awarded to eligible applicants implementing innovative ideas and programs to better meet the unique learning needs of all of Ohio's boys and girls by directing more money to Ohio's classrooms.

The grants must be used for projects that aim to achieve significant advancement in one or more of the following goals:

- Student achievement;
- Spending reduction in the five-year fiscal forecast; or
- Utilization of a greater share of resources in the classroom.

A critical component of the Straight A Project is the requirement for an initial fiscal review of the budget, the five-year financial impact and the corresponding budget narrative. Successful applicants passed an initial screening by three separate fiscal sustainability scorers to ensure that the proposal includes an explanation of how the project would be self-sustaining. If the project will result in increased, ongoing spending, the applicant was required to show how the spending will be offset by verifiable, credible and permanent spending reductions to sustain the general fund budget and not add costs as a result of the project. When the project funding is exhausted, the program must be able to sustain itself for five years.

Monitoring of the project will assist the Ohio Department of Education in ensuring that projects adhere to funding requirements, particularly in terms of fiscal sustainability and fidelity in program implementation. The funded program must demonstrate substantial impact and lasting value. Programmatic monitors will observe whether the grant is meeting specific project benchmarks, implementing its evaluation plan and assessing whether or not it is replicable for other districts.

Monitoring of the project will assist the department by providing additional data for technical assistance, dissemination and evaluation.

## **YEAR ONE MONITORING GOALS**

The focus for year one will be on reviewing finalized plans, including long- and short-term goals of the project, process benchmarks and indicators to be achieved during the first year evaluation plans. The review of site evaluation plans will take a broad view and focus on such elements as the identification of a lead investigator with responsibility, clarity about what is to be measured and the extent to which measures have been identified. This is not to duplicate or take the place of the technical assistance role, but rather to ensure that sites are properly prepared for assistance. Sites should be able to identify short-term or process indicators by which they will report on implementation progress, particularly during the first year.

For program review, sites will be asked to provide information about their planning and implementation teams and their inter-relationships (if different), regularly scheduled meetings



and the means of documenting these meetings. Monitoring will also ascertain plans for communication with the following stakeholder groups: teachers, other staff (which could include office staff, transportation or maintenance staff, student support staff, etc., depending on the specific project and the ways in which it is likely to impact each of these groups), parents, students, governing authority and the community at large. The focus should be on two-way communication. There should be evidence of stakeholder opportunities to provide input and to ask questions throughout the project.

Fiscal monitoring for the first year will include a review of all expenses for alignment with the proposed budget as well as the goals and programmatic benchmarks for the project. Project funding provides support for the first year of the project only, with any subsequent year expenses being met through verifiable, credible and permanent cost spending reductions. Hence, monitoring will also ask for evidence that projects maintain the plan to continue project implementation and evaluation during subsequent years.

The plan of year one monitoring should be on providing adequate groundwork for ongoing documentation of implementation and outcomes. The monitoring visit should also serve to listen to district concerns and provide assistance or forward concerns on to state staff for further assistance.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE MONITORING VISIT**

Initial contacts will be made with districts to request the district 'team' have monthly meetings with a review and update of their grant time line. They are then requested to 'take a snapshot' of that timeline as well as any important project notes and keep it in a 'folder' for future analysis and information gathering for the replication process. A form will be provided through an Ohio Department of Education SharePoint site for tracking planning and implementation time lines.

The area coordinator and fiscal consultant will notify the district two weeks before a site visit occurs and send a list of documents the district will need to provide upon arrival at the district based on the a review of the documents listed below.

The area coordinators will be required to review the entire grant application ahead of time for the district they are reviewing and **create** a list of questions based on how the district answered the grant application questions using the considerations detailed in following sections. All information will be placed in a monitoring report that will be in a basic format so that all grants are reported consistently. Any inconsistencies during the review will be reported back to the Straight A grant personnel to address.

The most recent five-year forecast on file with the Ohio Department of Education will be placed in the district's SharePoint file as a reference tool for both fiscal monitors and grantees to use.

## **DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW**

District staff will be asked to provide the following documents for review during the visit.

### *Program Documents*

1. Schedules, agendas, notes or other documentation for meetings of planning and implementation groups.



2. Curriculum documents with corresponding instructional tools/materials/equipment to be purchased.
3. Updated timeline for implementation and current status.
4. Communications plan and documents (news releases, survey instruments, websites or other interactive media, staff memos and newsletter as well as communications with parents and community and whether these communications have been translated to other languages).
5. Professional development schedule and syllabi where applicable.
6. Site-specific evaluation plan with contact information for lead investigator with examples of surveys to be used or any ongoing data collection methods to be used (formative testing, etc.).
7. Evaluation tools for student/staff progress and outcomes.

#### *Fiscal Documents*

1. All contracts with vendors, educational service centers, higher educational institutions. Status of completion.
2. If consortium, all contracts with other school districts, as well as budget grid for each district tied to the total.
3. Employment contracts for staff employed through the grant, as well as supplemental contracts for stipends paid to staff for assisting in specific grant projects.
4. Budget grid and narrative, as well as any revisions.
5. Report of expenditures (BUDLED) and any purchase order from that report whose total expense exceeds \$10,000.
6. Invoices from and payments to contractors.
7. Invoices from consortium districts to lead district.
8. Plan for professional development including time lines. (Note: any professional development not completed by June 30 must be completed before next school year begins.
9. List of inventory of equipment purchased—how it is being tracked for insurance/fixed asset purposes.
10. List of any equipment or major purchases outlined in the budget grid, but not purchased as of this time. Need estimated completion dates.
11. If administrative costs are incorporated, documentation on dates and duties.

#### **PERSONS TO BE CONTACTED DURING VISIT**

1. Project lead (principal, superintendent or other based on specific project).
2. Lead treasurer as well as fiscal representative from consortia members as needed.
3. Consortia representative(s) as appropriate.
4. Front-line staff representative(s), those who will be most directly involved with implementation, variable by project.
5. Representatives from impacted stakeholder groups (parents, students, non-teaching staff, business or other community representatives).

#### **FORMAT FOR VISIT**

Site visits will be conducted by the local area coordinator and fiscal consultant. (The School Finance Area Coordinators Directory can be found on the Ohio Department of Education's



website under Finance Data and Information.) Sites will be contacted a minimum of two weeks in advance and provided with a list of requested documents.

The visit will begin by meeting with the project lead and/or implementation committee for a broad presentation of the project to include what the project hopes to accomplish, how they mean to accomplish it and who are the key players specific to implementation. Requested documents should be provided for review. Documents will be reviewed for evidence in response to programmatic and fiscal considerations detailed below. Following document review, the team should be available to meet with each of the listed groups or individuals in order to probe more deeply into specifics, including any “holes” in the documentation (things which may be in process but are simply not covered by any of the documentation). Reviewer should be aware that not all areas listed above will apply equally to every project.

Following the site visit, the reviewer will provide a short summary of findings to the Ohio Department of Education and to the site based on the specified areas indicating if sites are on-track, encountering barriers and/or in need of assistance in each area, and what leads the reviewer to this conclusion. Reviewers may also suggest that some areas have not yet been addressed or need further attention.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FISCAL REVIEW**

Costs allocated to a cost objective are maintained in order to implement and carry out the initial objectives and responsibilities of the grant.

- A. Review grant goals and objectives.
- B. Review budget narrative from grant and its application into the budget grid.
- C. Review the time lines with identified goals/expenses/action steps to ensure they match what was included for the performance objective.
- D. Review how the grant goals apply to the budget narrative/grant.
- E. Review if changes to budget narrative/budget grid—note changes and obtain documentation as to why changes were made and how it affects the grant objectives.
- F. Review specific reimbursements to the district to maintain that the expense was within the grant period and allowable under the grant.
- G. Review reimbursements to districts in a consortium that invoices they submitted had documentation attached within the grant dates and specific to their cost share/objective of the grant.
- H. When review expenses, ensure they do not violate the school district’s policies and guidelines.
- I. If noted in the grant that this grant would be used in conjunction with another federal grant, review how the federal grant is implemented and working in conjunction with this grant.

Each of the following areas should be examined.

1. Staff employment
  - a. If employing staff with grant funds, review employment contract and job descriptions. If supplanted staff, note.
  - b. Review time sheets or other employee time documentation to ensure work on grant objective. Look at payroll report (ACCRPT) to review payroll dates charged to grant.
2. Professional development



- a. Review contracts if contractor for staff development program.
  - b. Review sign-in sheets for all professional development in-service time.
  - c. Review payroll for stipends paid in conjunction with sign-in sheets at in-service.
  - d. Review time lines for ongoing professional development that might occur after grant expiration.
  - e. Review professional meeting reimbursement forms to ensure proper payment for registration, travel and meeting expenses were within the district policies for reimbursement.
3. Contract services
    - a. Review any contract services.
    - b. If contract is with college partner, review for sustaining costs—college credits, post-secondary charges, dual enrollment charges.
  4. Administrative costs
    - a. Administrative costs are to be kept to a minimum and can only be charged if originally budgeted. There should be clear and concise documentation as to what and when these charges occur. Federal indirect cost proposals do not apply in this grant.
  5. Supply/materials purchases
    - a. Review purchase order and invoice for dates, costs in conjunction with grant implementation and budget grid.
    - b. Review to ensure that contracts were issued/received for software programs, maintenance agreements for equipment or facilities.
    - c. Review specific student project purchases to ensure they were received in the classroom.
  6. Equipment purchases
    - a. Review purchase order and invoice for dates, costs in conjunction with grant implementation and budget grid.
    - b. Review to ensure equipment was purchased in line with the district's fixed asset policy.
    - c. In a consortium, review district contracts to see if partner districts will receive and keep equipment purchased and then record it according to that district's fixed asset policy.

All reports will be filed with the Straight A Fund office and posted in the projects SharePoint file. Any items of concern reviewed with that office.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW**

While much of the following will be variable and site specific, reviewers should review the following issues:

1. Ongoing planning process and how it leads to implementation
  - a. Who was/is involved in planning?
  - b. How has planning transitioned to implementation? Is there any addition of new stakeholders to existing group? Who will be charged with implementation and how have they been prepared?
2. Specifics of implementation that the project expects to accomplish during the first year
  - a. Will there be physical changes to the facility?
  - b. Has equipment or new materials been added to the curriculum?



- c. Is there professional development in anticipation of instructional improvements?
- d. Will there be changes to staffing?
- e. Has the project established a time line with reasonable benchmarks or process indicators to track implementation?
- 3. Impacted groups during the first year of implementation
  - a. How have they been involved in the planning process?
  - b. How will changes be explained to the outlying impacted groups?
  - c. Will impacted groups receive professional development/training?
  - d. What feedback opportunities are provided to them?
- 4. Curricular changes expected as a result of this project
  - a. Will teachers be involved in the planning of curricular changes?
  - b. How are they aligned with Ohio's new standards?
  - c. What grade levels and content areas will be impacted and will that affect realignment of grade levels and or subject content?
  - d. Is there a professional development plan for teachers directly and indirectly affected by the realignment of curriculum?
  - e. Is professional development ongoing, well-supported and integrated into the school year? (Look for such things as professional learning communities, classroom coaching and/or observation, involvement of principal or other curricular advisor, feedback opportunities.)
  - f. What kind of support is being provided as change is implemented? (Look for ongoing professional development, coaching, sustained planning and evaluation time.)
  - g. How will changes be monitored during year one and following years?
- 5. Changes in instructional practice
  - a. What grades and content area will be impacted?
  - b. How have these teachers been involved in instructional planning and implementation?
  - c. What kind of support is being provided as change is implemented (professional development, coaching, sustained planning and evaluation time)?
  - d. How will changes be monitored during year one and following years?
- 6. Communication planning
  - a. Is there a communication plan that includes consideration of the following stakeholder groups: parents, students, district staff, governing authority, community at large?
  - b. What evidence is there that input and feedback has been/will be actively sought from any of the above groups throughout the planning and implementation phases of the project?
  - c. How will the project act on feedback garnered from stakeholders?
  - d. What evidence is there of specific outreach to frequently overlooked or difficult to reach stakeholders (non-English speakers, non-teaching staff and staff at another location, students in risk categories or at another location, parents, etc.).
  - e. Is there evidence of data gathering for eventual sharing of this innovation to a broader community in order to ensure replication of successful efforts?
- 7. Evaluation planning
  - a. Has the project identified an internal or external evaluator?
  - b. Has the project identified specific outcomes expected at key points throughout the project (across five years)?



- c. Has the project identified reasonable measures (reasonable measures being those likely to be carried out without placing an undue burden on project implementers, and those making good use of measures already in place for collection of data) for measuring these outcomes?
- d. Do the measures appear to be well-matched to the expected outcomes (have appropriate sensitivity to measure change within the timeframe, measure the outcomes directly or with an appropriate logic if proxy measures are used)?

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

1. Has there been any anticipated/unanticipated organizational change to the internal organizational structure of the school building(s)/district as a result of the implementation of this project? If so, how has it changed?
2. Has there been any change to the workflow of the school building(s)/district as a result of the implementation of this project? If so, how has it changed?

## **MONITORING FEEDBACK AND REPORTING**

Each project will be charged with maintaining an interim reporting document on a form that will be available through a SharePoint site. Reviewers will complete their Mid-Year Review Form. Reviewers will note at the end of their form any assistance that is specifically requested or needed to be provided to the project by the department. This SharePoint site will be readily accessed by districts, members of the Ohio Department of Education Straight A Fund team, department of education area coordinators and fiscal consultants.

