

# **Promise Neighborhoods Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**



**U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Innovation and Improvement**

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### Purpose of the FAQs

The purpose of these Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are to provide information about the Promise Neighborhoods Program. The FAQs do not impose any requirements beyond those included in the Promise Neighborhoods Program notice inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 2010 (notice) and other applicable laws and regulations. In addition, they do not create or confer any rights for or on any person.

The Department will provide additional or updated program guidance as necessary on its Promise Neighborhoods Web site: [www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html). If you have further questions that are not answered here, please email [promiseneighborhoods@ed.gov](mailto:promiseneighborhoods@ed.gov). We cannot respond to individual questions, but we will post answers to the most frequently asked questions on our Web site.

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## A. Purpose

### A-1. What is the purpose of a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?

A Promise Neighborhoods planning grant is a one-year award that will support activities that lead to the development of a plan to implement a Promise Neighborhood. The plan must include the core program features described in the Promise Neighborhoods Program notice inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 2010 ([the](#) notice).

### A-2. What are the expected outcomes for the planning year, and what types of planning activities are allowable during the planning year?

The primary expected output during the planning year is a feasible plan to implement a continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions that will significantly improve results for children. Accordingly, the Department is requiring that planning grantees undertake the following activities during the planning year--

- (1) Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of children along the cradle-through-college-to-career continuum, which builds on the statement of need prepared to address the selection criteria, and includes collecting data for the academic and family and community support indicators described in the notice, for children in the geographic area proposed to be served;
- (2) Conduct a segmentation analysis (as defined in the notice) of the needs in the neighborhood to better target solutions for the children in that neighborhood;
- (3) Develop a plan to deliver the continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions that addresses the challenges identified through the needs assessment and segmentation analysis;
- (4) Work with public and private agencies, organizations (including philanthropic organizations), and individuals to gather and leverage resources to support the financial sustainability of the plan;
- (5) Identify strategies for building upon and leveraging high-quality academic programs and family and community supports, existing and anticipated Federal investments, including the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA); and existing and anticipated investments in neighborhood revitalization efforts and similar place-based initiatives funded by other Federal agencies such as the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Justice. Efforts funded by other Federal agencies include programs such as HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods, Health Centers, and the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation and Weed and Seed Programs;
- (6) Build community support for and involvement in the development of the plan, which includes establishing outcomes for children in the neighborhood that are communicated and analyzed on an ongoing basis by leaders and members of the community;
- (7) Obtain commitments from partners to work long-term to work long-term to implement the plan and help ensure continued programmatic success of their plan, and develop a strategy to hold partners accountable for meeting performance goals and milestones;

- (8) Plan, build, adapt, or expand a comprehensive, longitudinal data management system, while abiding by Federal, State, and other privacy laws and requirements, for all academic and family and community support indicators, as described in the notice, as well as for additional indicators needed for the Promise Neighborhoods evaluation, such as demographic characteristics;
- (9) Work with a national evaluator for Promise Neighborhoods; and
- (10) Participate in a community of practice, as described in the notice.

The Department will monitor the grantees' progress toward completion of these activities. During the planning year, grantees must be able to demonstrate performance, or show significant progress toward completion of activities (1)-(10), including by responding to the Department's questions and concerns regarding progress.

## B. Eligible Applicants and Partners

### B-1. Who is eligible to apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?

An eligible applicant for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant is an eligible entity (as defined in the notice, and below) that operates a school or partners, in coordination with the school's local educational agency (LEA), with at least one school in the geographic area<sup>1</sup> proposed to be served. In cases where an eligible entity operates a school or partners with a school that does not serve all students in the neighborhood, the applicant must partner with at least one additional school or schools that serves students in the neighborhood. The Department of Education (Department) strongly encourages eligible applicants also to partner with entities such as the LEA; Federal, State and local government leaders; and providers of family and community supports (as defined in the notice).

An eligible entity is an entity that--

- a) Is representative of the geographic area proposed to be served (as defined in the notice);
- b) Is one of the following:
  - i. A nonprofit organization that meets the definition of a nonprofit under 34 CFR 77.1(c), which may include a faith-based nonprofit organization;
  - ii. An institution of higher education as defined by section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended; or
  - iii. A charter school as defined by section 5210(1) of the ESEA; and
- c) Currently provides at least one of the solutions from the applicant's continuum of solutions in the geographic area proposed to be served.

For the purposes of Absolute Priority 3 (Promise Neighborhoods in Tribal Communities), an eligible applicant is an eligible entity that partners with an Indian Tribe, or an Indian Tribe that meets the definition of an eligible entity. An eligible applicant for Absolute Priority 3 must also operate a school or partner, in coordination with the school's LEA, with at least one school in the geographic area proposed to be served.

### B-2. May a consortium of eligible entities apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?

No. Only a single eligible entity may apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant.

### B-3. May private schools receive a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant or receive assistance through a grant?

Yes. ~~Consistent with the definition of eligible entities that are in the notice, Private schools, faith-based nonprofit organizations, including faith-based nonprofit organizations, that manage, operate, or partner with private schools that meet the definition of an eligible entity~~ may apply

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the Department uses the terms "neighborhood" and "geographic area" interchangeably.

for Promise Neighborhoods planning grants. In cases where ~~a faith-based nonprofit organization that manages or operates a private school in the neighborhood applies for a planning grant one of these nonprofit organizations; manages, s or operates, or partners with a private but an eligible-~~ applicant operates a school that ~~the school that~~ does not serve all students in the neighborhood, the applicant must partner with at least one ~~additional-~~ public school or schools that serve students in the neighborhood. Thus, generally an eligible applicant that ~~is a-~~ manages or operates a private school must partner with at least one ~~other-~~ public school in the geographic area proposed to be served. All private schools interested in being part of a Promise Neighborhood, including those that do not meet the definition of an eligible entity, may partner with an eligible entity that is serving as the applicant.

Any private school that receives a federal grant becomes a recipient of federal financial assistance. Therefore, any private schools receiving funding under this program are prohibited from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (except as otherwise permitted under title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972), national origin, or disability and are subject to Federal, state, and local civil rights law.

#### **B-4. Is there a requirement for matching funds?**

Yes, an applicant must demonstrate it has received a commitment from one or more entities in the public or private sector, which may include philanthropic organizations, to provide matching funds, excluding other Federal funds, for the planning process. An applicant must obtain matching funds or in-kind donations for the planning process equal to at least 50 percent of its requested grant award, except that an applicant proposing a project that meets the criterion for Absolute Priority 2 or Absolute Priority 3 must obtain matching funds or in-kind donations equal to at least 25 percent of their requested grant award. In addition, the applicant must specify the source of the cost or contribution and, in the case of a third-party in-kind contribution, a description of how the value was determined for the donated or contributed goods or service. Applicants must demonstrate the match commitment by including letters in their applications explaining the type and quantity of the match commitment, including original signatures from the executives of organizations or agencies providing the match.

The Secretary may consider decreasing the matching requirement in the most exceptional circumstances, on a case-by-case basis. An applicant that anticipates being unable to meet the matching requirement must include in its application a request to the Secretary to reduce the matching requirement, including the amount of the requested reduction and a statement of the basis for the request.

**B-5. May a Promise Neighborhoods planning grants be used to plan to “scale up” existing cradle-through-college-to-career activities beyond the geographic area that an applicant is currently serving?**

Yes. An applicant that has been serving children, and has already achieved significant results with those children, in a target geographic area prior to applying for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant may propose to use planning grant funds to develop a plan to expand services and scale up beyond this initial area to serve children in a new neighborhood. An applicant proposing to plan to “scale up” existing activities in a new neighborhood must partner with at least one organization or entity that provides at least one of the solutions from the applicant’s proposed continuum of solutions in the geographic area proposed to be served.

**B-6. May a newly created eligible entity apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?**

Yes; however, a newly created eligible entity must still meet one of the absolute priorities as well as the other requirements set forth in the notice. Under the absolute priorities, an applicant must provide a description of its organizational capacity to plan and implement a proposed Promise Neighborhood. In the case of a newly created eligible entity, the applicant must describe the prior performance of its management team in developing and managing projects or programs similar to the proposed Promise Neighborhood.

**B-7. May a charter school that is not an LEA under State law apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?**

Yes, a charter school that is not an LEA under State law may apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant so long as the charter school: (a) has legal authority to receive a grant from the Department (e.g., is incorporated as a nonprofit organization that meets the definition of a nonprofit under 34 CFR 77.1(c)); and (b) meets the definition of an eligible entity (as defined in the notice).

**B-8. May an eligible applicant that does not currently have a governing board or advisory board that meets the criteria described in the definition of “representative of the geographic area proposed to be served” create a new advisory board or modify an existing board in order to be eligible to apply for a Promise Neighborhood planning grant?**

An eligible applicant may create a new advisory board or modify an existing board so long as the governing board or advisory board meets the definition of “representative of the geographic area proposed to be served” and is established before the applicant submits its Promise Neighborhood planning grant application.

**B-9. May an eligible applicant that proposes to serve a community with a migrant population apply for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant, given that proposals must focus on a defined geographic area and migrant children and families will likely reside only temporarily in such an area?**

Yes. Promise Neighborhoods planning grants will support activities that lead to a plan to create a continuum of services that supports communities in distress and all children who live within them. The notice does not exclude any group of children in a community or any particular type of distressed community.

**B-10. The notice states that a maximum of one-half of the Promise Neighborhood’s governing or advisory board may be made up of “public officials.” How does the Department define “public official?”**

A public official (as defined in the notice) means elected officials (e.g., council members, aldermen and women, commissioners, State legislators, Congressional representatives, members of the school board), appointed public officials (e.g., members of a planning or zoning commission, or of any other regulatory or advisory boards or commissions), or individuals who are not necessarily public officials, but who have been appointed by a public official to serve on the Promise Neighborhoods governing board or advisory board.

## C. Priorities

### C-1. Are there requirements on the number of students that must be served in a Promise Neighborhood?

No; however, the Department expects that the goal of every proposed Promise Neighborhood will be to ensure that ~~every~~ children in the geographically defined area improves academic and developmental outcomes from the cradle through college to career, thereby improving the likelihood that ~~all~~ children in the neighborhood will have the tools, resources, and supports to succeed academically. An applicant should ensure that its management plan is adequate to support the proposed activities that lead to the development of a plan to implement a Promise Neighborhood.

### C-2. What does it mean to break down agency “silos” as cited in the Purpose of Program section of the notice?

Breaking down agency “silos” means ensuring that multiple public agencies at the Federal, State, or local levels work together to share information, plan jointly, focus on improving outcomes, and ensure that outcomes are shared, communicated, and analyzed on an on-going basis. When agencies break down “silos,” they can more efficiently and effectively provide comprehensive services to address the needs of children and families in distressed communities.

### C-3. What is the Department’s definition of “need” in the context of Promise Neighborhoods?

The notice describes the types of need that communities served by Promise Neighborhood projects are likely to have but does not include a single, specific definition of need. Applicants must describe the geographically defined area to be served and the level of distress in that area based on indicators of need (as defined in the notice) and other relevant indicators.

### C-4. Will an applicant that plans to coordinate its proposed project with other neighborhood revitalization efforts supported by other Federal funds receive preference in the Promise Neighborhoods competition?

Peer reviewers will use the project design selection criterion, to rate applications on the extent to which a proposed project will be coordinated with similar or related efforts, and with other appropriate community, State, and Federal resources. The Department encourages applicants to build upon and leverage existing and anticipated investments in programs funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and existing and anticipated investments in neighborhood revitalization efforts and other initiatives from Federal agencies such as the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Justice; examples of these initiatives include HOPE VI, Choice Neighborhoods, Health Centers,

Children’s Systems of Care, Project Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health (LAUNCH), and Weed and Seed.

**C-5. Must an applicant meet Absolute Priorities 1, 2, and 3 in order to be considered for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant?**

No. An applicant must meet one of the three absolute priorities, as described in the notice. An applicant must indicate in its application whether the applicant is applying under Absolute Priority 1, Absolute Priority 2, or Absolute Priority 3. An applicant that applies under Absolute Priority 2 but is not eligible for funding under Absolute Priority 2, or applies under Absolute Priority 3 but is not eligible for funding under Absolute Priority 3 may be considered for funding under Absolute Priority 1, provided that the applicant meets the requirements under Absolute Priority 1.

**C-6. May an applicant propose to serve neighborhoods in both rural and non-rural communities in a single application?**

Yes. Applicants may propose to serve multiple, non-contiguous geographically defined areas that include both a rural community and a non-rural community. In cases where an applicant proposes to serve a rural and non-rural community through a single grant, the applicant must explain its rationale for including both communities and will be scored under Absolute Priority 1.

**C-7. What does it mean to “scale up” a proposed Promise Neighborhood in a rural community?**

To “scale up” a proposed Promise Neighborhood in a rural community may mean serving additional neighborhoods within a town, serving children in an additional defined geographic area within the county but outside the initial neighborhood, or expanding to neighboring towns or counties.

## D. Target Population and Neighborhood

- D-1. In order for an eligible entity to be considered “representative of the geographic area proposed to be served,” residents of the geographic area must have an active role in the organization’s decision-making. How will the Department determine whether community residents truly play an active role in decision-making?**

In the preliminary memorandum of understanding described in paragraph 5 of Absolute Priority 1, applicants must describe the governance structure of the proposed Promise Neighborhood, including how the eligible entity’s governing board or advisory board is representative of the geographic area proposed to be served, and how residents of the geographic area have an active role in the organization’s decision making. This will provide the Department with information to determine whether community residents play an active role in the organization’s decision-making for the proposed Promise Neighborhood.

- D-2. May solutions supported by a Promise Neighborhoods grant occur outside of school buildings?**

Yes. Although improving and supporting schools is the centerpiece of the Promise Neighborhoods Program, and schools will likely be the home of many solutions along the cradle-through-college-to-career continuum, the Department acknowledges that learning occurs in many settings within a community and may occur outside of school buildings. Applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with entities such as an LEA; Federal, State, and local government leaders; and providers of family and community supports, all of which may deliver solutions in a variety of settings.

- D-3. Has the Department established requirements for the size of the geographic area to be served by a proposed Promise Neighborhood?**

No. There are no requirements regarding the size of the geographic area to be served by a proposed Promise Neighborhood. Furthermore, the geographic area to be served need not be geographically contiguous. The geographic area must be determined by indicators of need (as defined in the notice). Moreover, applicants should ensure that their management plan is adequate to achieve the objectives of the proposed budget on time and within budget.

**D-4. Must the geographically defined area of the proposed Promise Neighborhood align with the attendance zone of the school with which the eligible applicant proposes to partner?**

No. Although there may be programmatic benefits, such as easier data collection, in aligning the geographic boundaries of the proposed geographic area with school attendance zones or other geographically defined boundaries such as census tracts, the Department believes that eligible applicants are best positioned to determine the geographic boundaries of their proposed Promise Neighborhoods.

**D-5. May a geographically defined area include more than one governmental jurisdiction, e.g., two cities?**

Yes. Although there may be programmatic benefits, such as easier data collection, in creating the geographic boundaries of the proposed geographic area within a single governmental jurisdiction, the Department believes that eligible applicants are best positioned to determine the geographic boundaries of their proposed Promise Neighborhoods.

## E. Project Design

### E-1. What is a continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions?

A continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions is defined in the notice as a set of programs, policies, practices, services, systems, and supports, with strong schools at the center, designed to ensure that children in a Promise Neighborhood improve academic and developmental outcomes from cradle through college to career. These solutions must be based on the best available evidence including, where available, strong or moderate evidence (as defined in the notice), be linked and integrated seamlessly (as defined in the notice), and include both academic programs and family and community supports (both as defined in the notice).

### E-2. Must an applicant for a Promise Neighborhood planning grant include in its grant application its proposal to create a plan to implement a full continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions for children in its proposed Promise Neighborhood?

Yes. Planning grant applicants must describe in their application how they will use the one-year planning period to create a plan to implement a full continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions that is designed to ensure that children in the target school or schools described in paragraph 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), or 2(a)(iii) of the notice have access to a complete continuum of solutions. The plan to be developed by the applicant must also ensure, ~~to the extent feasible and~~ appropriate, that children in the neighborhood who do not attend the target school or schools have access to solutions designed to significantly improve educational outcomes and to support their healthy development and well-being. In addition, applicants must explain how they will use their needs assessment and segmentation analysis to determine the children with the highest needs and ensure that they will receive the appropriate services to meet academic and developmental outcomes.

### E-3. Are planning grantees expected to pilot or fully implement cradle-through-college-to-career solutions during the planning year or to produce a plan for implementation of the solutions?

Applicants for Promise Neighborhoods planning grants are likely to be at different points of readiness when they begin the planning process. Because the definition of an eligible entity requires an applicant to currently provide at least one of the solutions from the applicant's proposed continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions, the Department anticipates that some solutions will be implemented during the planning year. Applicants may propose to pilot some solutions during the planning year; however, the primary expected output during the planning year is a feasible plan to implement a complete continuum of solutions for children in the target school or schools described in paragraph 2(a)(i), 2(a)(ii), or 2(a)(iii) of the notice.

**E-4. Does the Department expect that some or all of the solutions in the cradle-through-college-to-career continuum will be provided by partner organizations based in the proposed Promise Neighborhood?**

The Department believes there are many programmatic benefits of providing solutions that are developed and managed by organizations based in the proposed Promise Neighborhood. This is why the Department is requiring that an eligible applicant be a nonprofit organization, institution of higher education, or charter school that is representative of the geographic area proposed to be served; and that currently provides at least one of the solutions from the applicant's continuum of solutions in the geographic area proposed to be served. There is, however, no requirement that all solutions be provided by organizations based in the proposed neighborhood. The primary focus in developing and selecting solutions must be whether the solutions will significantly improve the educational outcomes and support the healthy development and well-being of all children in the Promise Neighborhoods.

**E-5. Will preference be given to applications that combine efforts from multiple neighborhoods from the same city or geographic area?**

No, the Secretary will not give any competitive preference to regional or consolidated applications. However, the Department strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships with LEAs; Federal, State, and local government leaders; and providers of community supports.

**E-6. What is the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (ARRA), and what are examples of ARRA programs with which Promise Neighborhood grantees are encouraged to coordinate?**

The ARRA is the economic stimulus package enacted by Congress in February, 2009. Funds made available under ARRA are used to expand programs such as Early Head Start, Community Development Block Grants, School Improvement Grants, and the National School Lunch Program. Promise Neighborhoods grantees are encouraged to coordinate with these and other federally funded programs. More information about the ARRA is available at <http://www.recovery.gov>.

## **F. Data Collection and Reporting**

### **F-1. What demographic data must an applicant provide in its application?**

Applicants must describe the geographically defined area they propose to serve. This description must include an explanation of the level of distress present in the area based on (1) indicators of need (academic and family and community support) as defined in the notice, and (2) other relevant indicators.

### **F-2. What types of data must Promise Neighborhoods grantees collect during the planning year?**

Grantees will collect data for its needs assessment that includes academic and family and community support program indicators (as defined in the notice) that are prescribed by the Department. Grantees may also develop and use their own family and community support project indicators (both as defined in the notice) that reflect the specific needs in their communities and for which they will develop solutions. Grantees must report data on program and project indicators to the Department. For additional information on these indicators and their use, please refer to Table 1 and Table 2 in the notice. Grantees must also work with the Department and with a national evaluator for Promise Neighborhoods to ensure that data collection and program design are consistent with plans to conduct a rigorous national evaluation of the Promise Neighborhoods program during the implementation phase and of specific solutions and strategies pursued by individual grantees.

### **F-3. What measures should applicants consider to assess the learning and development of three-year-olds?**

The Department expects applicants to propose using developmentally appropriate early learning measures (as defined in the notice) at the beginning of the program or school year to ensure that young children meet developmental milestones for age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning (as defined in the notice).

These measures may be part of a coordinated system of assessments and strategies intended to collect information about the process and context of young children's learning and development in order to make informed instructional and programmatic decisions. Such systems include appropriate screening, diagnostic, formative, and observational measures and make use of relevant descriptive data.

Such instruments may be appropriate for use with three-year-olds if they meet the definition of developmentally appropriate early learning measures for multiple domains of early learning and fit within the context of a comprehensive assessment system.

## **G. Allowable Activities**

### **G-1. May an applicant propose to serve adults in the Promise Neighborhood?**

Yes; however, applicants must explain in their applications how the services for adults directly align with improved academic and family and community support results for children. Examples of such services include, but are not limited to, family literacy programs and other training for community members to support student learning.

### **G-2. Does the definition of “increased learning time” include before- or after-school instructional programs?**

Yes. Extending learning into before- and after-school hours can be difficult to implement effectively, but before- or after-school instructional programs may be included under the definition of “increased learning time.” If an applicant proposes to offer these programs to children in the proposed Promise Neighborhood, we encourage the applicant to plan to closely integrate and coordinate academic work that takes place during regular school hours and academic work that occurs before or after regular school hours

## H. Future Competitions

**H-1. Will grantees that receive Promise Neighborhoods planning grants automatically receive implementation grants or receive any priority in competitions for implementation grants?**

No. Implementation grants will be awarded through grant competitions in subsequent years contingent on the availability of funds. Grantees that receive Promise Neighborhoods planning grants will compete for implementation grants alongside applicants who did not compete for or receive a planning grant. While all eligible entities will be able to apply for implementation grants, communities that have effectively carried out the planning activities described in the planning grant notice, whether independently or with a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant, are likely to be well positioned with the plan, commitments, data, and demonstrated organizational leadership and capacity necessary to develop a quality application for an implementation grant.

**H-2. If an applicant is unsuccessful in its first planning grant competition, may the applicant apply for another planning grant at a later date?**

Yes. In subsequent years and contingent on the availability of funds, the Department intends to conduct further competitions for planning grants for Promise Neighborhoods. So long as an applicant meets the eligibility requirements, the applicant may apply for a planning grant in a subsequent competition.