

**Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)
Summary of Public Comments on
Proposed GEAR UP Match Waiver Request Form
Following 60 Day Review Period**

On April 2, 2021, the Department of Education (Department) published a Notice of Proposed Emergency Information Collection Request (Notice) in the Federal Register inviting comments by June 1, 2021, on the proposed match waiver request form for the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) program. Three respondents submitted approximately 3 individual comments. The commenters expressed some concerns about the statutory matching requirement. The Department reviewed each of these concerns and where necessary, made changes to the form and/or instructions. A summary and analysis of the comments as well as information on changes to the proposed GEAR UP Matching Waiver Request form in response to these comments follows. Suggestions for minor changes (generally those of a technical nature) are not discussed below, but in response to those suggestions, some clarifications and technical alterations have been made in the revised form.

GEAR UP Match Waiver Request

Matching Contributions

Comments: One commenter expressed concern that COVID-19 has played havoc with local education agencies (LEAs) nationwide and organizations which normally would be very amenable to provide a match for a GEAR UP award. It would be prudent for this competition to waive the cost share requirement. Or have a waiver that severely reduces the match requirement but that does not place undue burden on the applicant in meeting the requirements to receive the waiver.

Discussion: The Department is required to follow program statutory requirements and regulations with regards to conducting a program competition. Matching is a required component that is established by law for GEAR UP State applicants (Section 404C(b)(1) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA) (20 U.S.C. 1070a-23(b)(1))). However, for GEAR UP Partnership applicants, there are waivers allotted for the application process (§694.7-9). Thus, the Department must follow the statutory and regulatory requirements of the program with regards to conducting the GEAR UP competition process. Therefore, the Department believes that program regulations already allow applicants the ability to apply for waiver of the cost share during competition process.

Action Taken by ED: No change.

Comments: One commenter expressed a concern that challenges of this past year have put an extreme burden on its partnering educational, volunteer and business agencies. Donations from local businesses have fallen considerably and we are challenged by covering the required match for our GEAR UP program as all partners are struggling to stay afloat in this COVID-19 environment. It would be extremely helpful to be offered a wider eligibility for the match waiver along with a decrease in the match requirement, until the local economy has a chance to recover from the challenges COVID-19 has presented.

Discussion: The Department agrees that this past year has put an extreme burden on the entire nation as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The Department has instituted a number of flexibilities for projects to help relieve the burden set forth by COVID-19. The Department established a webpage dedicated to listing and highlighting the flexibilities and resources available to schools and projects: [https://connected.ed.gov/SitePages/Coronavirus%20\(COVID-19\)%20Resources.aspx](https://connected.ed.gov/SitePages/Coronavirus%20(COVID-19)%20Resources.aspx). As a result of guidance provided by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) early into the pandemic and the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Department was able to relax some statutory and regulatory program requirements due to COVID-19.

Action Taken by ED: No change.

Comments: One commenter stated that given the financial restraints and challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, an updated waiver allowing increased leniency on the match requirement would be appreciated. Both P-12 institutions and higher education institutions have suffered unexpected consequences due to the global pandemic, so leniency on the match would help ensure that GEAR UP projects could reach students in need. These students may also be experiencing challenges related to COVID-19, making support for a college and career pathway even more critical to their future success.

Discussion: The Department is aware of the financial restraints and challenges faced by projects as a result of COVID-19. The purpose of the GEAR UP Match Waiver form is to provide some leniency on the matching by allowing GEAR UP grantees to take advantage of the program match requirement flexibilities provided by section 3518(b) of the CARES Act.

Action Taken by ED: No change.

End