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STRATEGICALLY SPENDING FEDERAL ENTITLEMENT GRANTS: Making the Connection to District Priorities

Opportunity Brief • Getting Started

by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, Claire Sullivan



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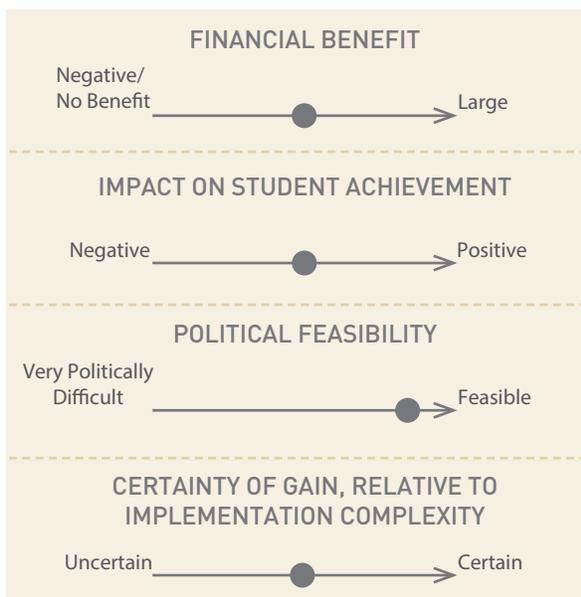
STRATEGICALLY SPENDING FEDERAL ENTITLEMENT GRANTS: Making the Connection to District Priorities



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Ensuring that federal entitlement grants are thoughtfully allocated to support strategic priorities is an often-overlooked opportunity. The typical large district of 50,000 students receives approximately 14% of its revenue from federal funds, representing close to \$1,500 per student. By developing a coordinated budget, shifting decision-making from compliance to negotiation, and fixing misaligned incentives, district leaders can turn federal grant budgets into a much more powerful tool for student achievement and use them to help fund many of the district’s strategic priorities.

Federal rules provide much more flexibility in grant use than is typically recognized.



This opportunity represents a way to shift significant funds with only modest political pushback from the public, since federal funds tend not to be in the public eye. The greatest challenge can be overcoming central office resistance born out of fear of non-compliance; access to a few experts in the field can significantly reduce that fear.

Complex and Confusing

Federal grants include ESEA Title I (for low-income students), IDEA (for students with special needs), School Lunch and Breakfast, Title II (Principal and Teacher Training and Recruitment) and Title III (English Language Learners).

Grant Administration

Federal funds come with “strings attached.” Use of funds is restricted, and there are extensive reporting requirements and audits to ensure compliance with allowable use. Each major grant program is administered through a separate office at the U.S. Department of Education that is charged with managing the grant based on grant-specific requirements in law, regulation, and guidance. The requirements are detailed, and vary from program to program. Administering the grant program at the federal, state, and local levels requires expert knowledge and detailed record-keeping and reporting. Expert knowledge required for one program is not easily transferable to another grant program.

This complexity has led most mid-sized and large districts to hire a grant administrator for each federal grant, replicating the federal structure of having separate offices for each major grant program. Districts typically identify for each program a manager who is not the chief financial officer and who often does not report to the chief financial officer. In many districts, the grants budgets are maintained separately from the operating budget and are often not included in school board or public budget deliberations.

Further complicating federal grant management is the reality that states can add requirements for grant programs based on their own laws, regulations, procedures, and priorities. The only caveat is that state requirements cannot conflict with federal requirements. As a result, district managers cannot rely solely on federal guidance to determine how to comply with grant requirements; they must follow their own state’s requirements as well. For the same reason, district leaders cannot rely exclusively on the recommendations offered here; they will need to take into consideration their specific state context.

The complexity, silo-like management, and relative lack of visibility can lead to federal dollars being used well from a legal standpoint, but not from a strategic standpoint. Many districts have a wide range of grant-specific programs in place that are not as connected to one another, or to district priorities, as they would be if the funding streams were managed centrally by leaders charged with comprehensive district improvement.

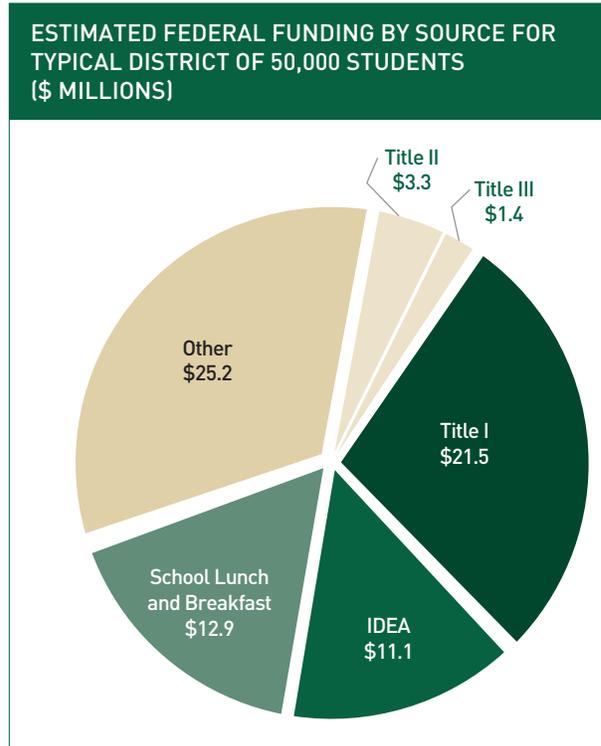
Why Opportunities Are Lost

Three key factors impede the effective use of federal grant dollars:

1- Lack of visibility and scrutiny

District leaders directly accountable for improvement in teaching and learning apply limited scrutiny to existing grant programs and options for alternative use. Limited scrutiny reduces the likelihood of ending ineffective or unaligned programs and redeploying grant resources to support higher priority and more effective practices.

Exhibit 1



Source: The District Management Council

2- Inaccurate and misunderstood information becomes institutionalized

Grant managers make decisions and interpret grant requirements all the time. Yet, experts in the field report that many districts base their decisions on inaccurate information or flawed interpretations received from federal officers, state compliance officials, lawyers, and others. Grant managers may also have misinterpreted this guidance in ways that unnecessarily limit options for grant use. However, once made, these decisions and interpretations tend to become institutionalized. Others in the district are highly unlikely to challenge grant managers because of their respect for the complexity of grants management. Melissa Junge and Sheara Krvaric, lawyers and experts in federal grants, see this play out in their partner districts: “Given the uncertainty about what you can and cannot spend money on, nearly every district we work with tends to be over-cautious. Over time, this restrained approach shifts from being the ‘way things are done’ to ‘the way things have to be done.’” Despite strongly-held beliefs of many grant managers to the contrary, federal rules provide much more flexibility in grant use than is typically recognized.

3- Compliance incentives trump all

Each major grant program is typically run by a separate manager, and as a result, it is difficult for many managers to

Strategically Spending Federal Entitlement Grants

resist “silo thinking.” They lose the capacity to see or value a tight connection between “my grant program” and “the district priorities.” The “silo thinking” is exacerbated by their sense of responsibility to ensure that “their grant program” complies with all federal and state requirements, including “allowable use” of funds, “maintenance of effort,” “supplement, not supplant,” and reporting.

The fear of non-compliance is real: no grant manager wants the district superintendent to receive a letter from the state department of education threatening loss of funds due to some issue of non-compliance! But fear of non-compliance has a cost: since it is easiest to meet compliance requirements with separate and/or unrelated projects, those are the kinds of projects most grant managers are most comfortable proposing and continuing. However, students are best served when all district dollars, including federal dollars, are tightly linked to the district’s key strategies and priorities and are routinely evaluated for effectiveness, not just compliance.

No-Cost & Low-Cost Solutions

Fortunately, district leaders can take a number of specific no-cost or low-cost actions to shift more of their federal dollars towards strategic priorities. In the process, they will be leveraging existing resources more effectively and identifying new dollars to support critical efforts.

1 Create visibility: develop a coordinated budget

Form follows function. Often, how a budget document is designed dramatically shapes how budget decisions are made and communicated. In most districts, district leaders and the public pay little or no attention to the many grant budgets, and focus on the district’s operating budget. A coordinated budget that combines the operating budget and major grant budgets into one unified and comprehensive budget will shine a light on the district’s activities as a whole. Without grant spending displayed alongside operating budget expenditures, grant

spending receives less scrutiny, is not always connected to strategic priorities, and masks the total costs of efforts that are underway. Below is a simplified example of a coordinated budget (Exhibit 2).

In the example, district leaders - looking only at the operating budget – might believe that the district is spending only \$1 million on reading teachers as opposed to \$6 million. In reality, less than 20% of the district’s reading teachers and only 25% of the reading materials are funded through the operating budget.

Not consolidating and coordinating the budget often leads to uncoordinated efforts as well. The chief academic officer may evaluate the effectiveness of the reading program and staff paid for through the operating budget, but not those funded through grants and other sources. In many districts, a reading program purchased with Title I funds will use different materials even though they are to be used with the same children as the district-wide program. The reading programs are so siloed that in many districts, teachers who teach reading, but are funded through Title I, actually introduce themselves as Title I teachers, not reading teachers, and might even attend separate professional development sessions, thus missing key support provided by the district to help improve the instruction of reading. When a student receives different and perhaps conflicting instruction, it can undermine that student’s learning.

District leaders who want to gain an initial sense of how grants are being used and how grant managers view their responsibilities may find it useful to ask each grant manager to complete the questionnaire in Appendix A. The questionnaire poses basic questions about what the grant is paying for, how those expenditures are linked to the district’s strategic objectives, and how its impact is measured.

2 Eliminate inaccurate and misunderstood information

District leaders should not assume that grant managers know the actual requirements of a grant, fully understand the

Exhibit 2

A COORDINATED BUDGET							
Budget Item	Operating Budget	Title I	Title II	IDEA	Private Grant	State Reading Grant	Total
Reading teacher salaries	\$1 million	\$2.9 million	\$0.1 million	\$1.0 million	\$0.5 million	\$0.5 million	\$6.0 million
Reading materials	\$1 million	\$2.0 million	\$0.0 million	\$0.5 million	\$0.25 million	\$0.25 million	\$4.0 million

Source: The District Management Council

flexibility that exists in every grant, or know how to deploy grant funds to address strategic priorities. Asking the grant manager to contact the state-level grant manager to uncover actual requirements and opportunities for flexibility is also not likely to yield the results district leaders need for two reasons: 1) the grant manager will not be eager to report back to district leaders that s/he has been operating on inaccurate or incomplete information; and 2) the state grant manager may not be sufficiently expert or enthusiastic to acknowledge the flexibility of grant funds.

Find your own expert

Unfortunately, it makes the most sense for the district to find its own “expert.” One option is finding a lawyer who specializes in identifying the flexibility available in state and federal grant funding. Another option is to groom a non-traditional candidate to manage Title I or IDEA; for example, a principal known for successfully interpreting district rules to get important work done can be encouraged and supported to bring the same approach to managing these grants. Still another option is to push existing grant managers to adopt “outside-the-box” thinking by giving them the full support of district leadership and explicitly communicating what is desired of them.

One more option is to start the conversation with a state or federal education official whom district leaders have reason to believe may be more inclined to interpret rules in ways that support rather than impede implementation of a well-conceived idea. Experts Junge and Krvaric say that although many state agencies have compliance-oriented cultures, there are some sympathetic and innovative officers who will help districts access flexibility as best they can.

One way to encourage education department officials to say “yes” is not to ask “if” the district can do something with a particular grant, but rather “how” the district can use this grant to meet the desired objective. Even more proactively, the district can assert the district’s interpretation and explain why it makes sense; this approach puts the education official in the position of needing to put together a comprehensive rebuttal based on regulation, rather than a simple and safe “no”. Requesting that the official respond with options for allowable uses is another way to identify flexibility that may not have been apparent before. And, of course, in the event that the official does say “no”, district leaders need not hesitate to negotiate the interpretation of the law with the official or to take the issue to a higher level in the bureaucracy. Because there is considerable variation among reviewers about what constitutes an allowable Title I cost, for example, the opportunity for negotiation seems especially rich in this area.¹

District leaders seeking pre-approval from state (or federal) officials should begin these conversations months in advance of the grant due date to allow time for negotiations and to

minimize the risk of being found out of compliance. Districts that have worked with outside experts or found “can do” talent internally, and have doggedly pursued grant flexibility, have often been rewarded.

3 Shift decision-making authority and accountability to district leadership

The key step to maximizing the effectiveness of federal grant dollars is to align incentives by moving decision-making authority about how grants are used to the senior district leadership level, where leaders are held responsible for achieving district priorities and are in a position to ensure that all efforts are aligned to district priorities. Moving the ultimate decision for grant use out of the hands of the grant manager and up to the leadership level also gives districts the ability to prudently manage risk, rather than avoid it at all costs.

Holding the grant manager and other central office staff partially responsible through the evaluation process for both improving academic results and aligning federal dollars to district priorities is another way to help build a mindset that spending should drive results and continued spending is contingent on past results. In reality, grant managers in most districts are evaluated nearly entirely on compliance: if grant applications are submitted on time, reports are approved by the state, and no unallowable use of funds letters arrive, then the grants manager is deemed successful. District leaders can ask more of them.

Opportunities to Use Federal Funds Differently

All too often, when a superintendent attempts to seek greater flexibility of grant dollars, they hear, “We are already doing everything we can.” Keeping in mind that some rules vary by state, we offer a few examples of flexibility that are often overlooked. Because Title I and IDEA are, by far, the largest sources of grant funds that can support district priorities for improving academic achievement, our focus is on these two programs, with some attention to two other ESEA grant programs, Title II and Title III.

Title I

Gain more flexibility by implementing school-wide programs

Any school with 40% or more students eligible for free or reduced lunch may become a schoolwide Title I program, which means Title I funds can be spent to support initiatives for the entire school. Schools that have been identified as “priority” or “focus” schools in states that have obtained ESEA flexibility waivers can also operate schoolwide programs regardless of poverty level. The alternative is a targeted assistance program where the money can be spent only for direct services for specific students who are struggling academically.

Aligning Title I grant funds to district priorities is made

much simpler in schools that have opted to have schoolwide programs rather than targeted assistance programs. Funds for schoolwide programs can be used for any effort linked to the broad Title I purpose of ensuring at-risk students achieve proficiency on state academic assessments aligned to state academic standards.² The funds can be used for a host of common strategic priorities including schoolwide reading programs and staff, positive behavior and intervention supports (PBIS), Response to Intervention (RTI), support for struggling students, training of staff and leaders in any of these areas, or improved curriculum. Funds for targeted assistance programs, on the other hand, can only be used to pay for direct services for those students specifically identified as eligible.

Through the 2000s, at the urging of federal education officials, many eligible schools moved to schoolwide program status. Yet, despite the fact that most schools in urban districts are now schoolwide Title I programs, most continue to use their Title I funds as if they are a targeted assistance school. For example, a large proportion of Title I funds are used for tutors and teachers who work in separate programs for a targeted group of students. These programs and staff are often different from the staff providing core or tier two instruction in the school. They often use different curriculum and are supervised and managed by different leaders. The services are typically so separate that they are often called “Title I services,” not reading services, for example. Therefore, while it is essential to move to schoolwide program status whenever possible, it is not sufficient: district and school leaders have to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by schoolwide status to end instructional fragmentation by spending Title I dollars on services and staff that are integrated, aligned, and support schoolwide strategies to improve academic achievement.

Track and use grant funds to pay for portions of staff time

Those schools that cannot qualify for schoolwide program status can still take steps to align their grants with district priorities. For example, the grant can be used to pay for a portion of a teacher’s time working on a whole school effort – the time when s/he is working with eligible students. The remainder of the teacher’s salary can be paid with local funds or other grant funds, thereby permitting that teacher to work with all students. Splitting the salary of a single teacher or paraprofessional among different funding sources is one way to reduce the problem of instructional fragmentation. A practical

consideration when integrating grants is to ensure that staff members maintain time sheets that allow their time to be apportioned to the different funding sources.

Misconceptions about Restrictions on Title I Funds

Many districts miss opportunities to use Title I funds for district or school strategic priorities because they believe that grant rules and requirements prevent them from doing so.

The federal “necessary and reasonable use” standard allows more flexible use than most grant managers believe

Many federal grants list allowable uses of funds in a “use of funds” section. That is not the case for Title I because Congress designed it to be a more flexible program. Because the law does not specifically describe a list of permissible funds, districts are sometimes timid about spending Title I funds in

innovative ways. The general goal of Title I is to raise the achievement of low-performing students. Therefore, district leaders looking to increase the effectiveness of Title I dollars can use the “necessary and reasonable” standard to help drive spending decisions instead of past practice. Yet, few Title I grant managers at the local or state level appear to be comfortable with an expansive definition of “necessary and reasonable use”. Their discomfort stems in part from the fact that interpretations of what is permissible vary considerably

among states and from grant manager to grant manager. Faced with conflicting interpretations, it is “safer” to accept a more restrictive definition of acceptable use.

Schoolwide Title I funds do not have to be coordinated with other federal, state and local funds as a requirement for flexible use

Another common misconception is that a schoolwide program must consolidate its Title I funds with other federal state and local funds in order to be able to spend those dollars flexibly. In fact, schools may - but are not required to - use additional funding sources. A schoolwide program can be supported exclusively with Title I funds or by a mix of funding sources. “Consolidating” various funding sources has been encouraged by many state Title I offices in response to federal guidance, and that focus has led many grant managers at the local level to erroneously conclude that it is required.

Whether Title I funds are coordinated with other funds or not, they may be spent on comprehensive activities. For example, as long as the activities are consistent with a school’s needs assessment and schoolwide plan, a school can use Title I funds

The greatest challenge can be overcoming central office resistance born out of fear of non-compliance.

on a wide range of school climate activities: peer tutoring; professional development to help staff address bullying, harassment, and social isolation; preparing low-achieving students to participate in advanced coursework; implementing formative or interim assessments; collecting and analyzing data; inducting new teachers; and, operating a ninth grade learning academy.³

Schoolwide programs are not subject to the same cost-by-cost requirement to meet the “supplement, not supplant” standard

Title I expenditures are governed by the rule known as “supplement, not supplant.” The basic premise of “supplement not supplant” is to ensure that Title I funds are used to add to (supplement) and not replace (supplant) state and local funds. Proving that funds are being used to supplement not supplant has typically required grant managers to demonstrate that each individual cost charged to Title I supports an activity or service that the district or school would not otherwise have carried out with local or state funds. This individual cost-by-cost requirement tends to lead schools and districts to create separate, siloed efforts with Title I dollars to most safely ensure that they are supplementing and not supplanting; if it is new and separate, it must be supplemental. Districts have relied heavily on separate “pull-out” services that remove students from the regular classroom because these separate programs make it easier to demonstrate that Title I funds are being used to provide extra (supplemental) services. The challenge is that these separate Title I-funded activities or positions may also be disconnected from district priorities because they are so separate.

Few grant managers are aware that federal statute establishes a different test for schoolwide Title I programs. For these, grant managers need only establish that each school, in the aggregate, has received all of the state and local funds it would have received in the absence of Title I funds. To meet this “supplemental funds test,” a school district needs to show that its Title I schoolwide schools were not denied access to state and local funds because they received Title I funds. Once the district can establish that its methods for allocating state and local funds is “Title I-neutral,” schools with schoolwide Title I status need not demonstrate that an individual cost is supplemental. Because this substantially different test for supplanting is not widely known, few grant managers have been able to take advantage of the opportunity it affords to use Title I funds in more integrated, aligned ways at the school and district level.

Suppose a district wants to use Title I dollars for a reading program for a schoolwide program. Of course, the district has paid for reading in the past. Does this then constitute “supplanting?” It does not, as long as school spending from all sources is the same, and the Title I dollars are in addition to the

funds that would normally be allocated.

Schools with targeted programs can address the stricter “supplement, not supplant” requirement and still achieve more flexible use of funds by repurposing the grant-funded effort. This strategy typically requires developing a different structure and/or different provider. For example, a school may have used local funds to pay for its library media specialist and then eliminated the position. In the following year, it can use Title I funds to pay for a literacy teacher to bring students to the library media center twice each week to read stories, show films, and supervise writing activities.

Even without a redesign of the grant-funded effort, there is some flexibility to pick up the cost with Title I of previously-eliminated positions. This is called “overcoming the presumption of supplanting.” If the district can prove it would not have supported the cost with state/local funds this year, then it can pick up the cost with Title I (assuming the underlying cost is allowable).

IDEA

IDEA, the federal grant related to special education, offers districts several key opportunities to integrate, coordinate, and align grant activities with district priorities:

- 15% of the IDEA grant can be used for early intervening services for students who do not have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). That means that a variety of behavioral and academic-tiered intervention programs can be funded with IDEA for all struggling students in the district, not just those identified as having disabilities. This flexibility is very useful when combined with the strategy of setting guidelines for special education staff, which can free up considerable funds from the special education budget.
- The remaining 85% of the IDEA grant must support students with disabilities, but in many states (not all), there is latitude in the use of these funds.

This means IDEA funds can be used to partially fund comprehensive endeavors as writing new curricula, preparing teachers for the Common Core State Standards, and providing professional development in content areas. IDEA can pay for the portion related to serving students with disabilities, such as differentiated instruction, using data to drive instruction, or universal design for learning techniques. General education staff can participate in these efforts. IDEA cannot, however, pay for the portion of such work that wasn’t applicable to supporting students with disabilities.

Additionally, professional development or training provided for special educators can be recorded and put on the district website for use by other special educators – and become accessible to regular education teachers, as well.

Finally, in some states, IDEA funds can be used to pay

general education teachers to provide instruction to students with disabilities if those services represent additional time on task for these students. For example, some districts use general education reading, math, or English teachers to provide a double dose of instruction to students with IEPs. Many districts falsely believe that only special education certified staff can be paid with IDEA funds.

Title II

Title II is, in practice, the most flexible of the ESEA Title grants. Designed for principal and teacher development and recruitment, it is often referred to as the “PD grant.” It is common to see districts allocate a fixed portion of the grant to each school to use for school-based professional development (PD). Since the grant dollars are sometimes distributed directly to the schools, the grant’s contribution to advancing district priorities can be limited. Some districts have taken a more aggressive approach to aligning Title II to district priorities by determining how the dollars will be spent from the district office, thus ensuring the professional development is tightly aligned to district strategies. District-level decision-making can also eliminate the tendency to split the dollars (and PD) across dozens of short, ineffective, training sessions.

Other districts have taken full advantage of the grant’s definition of purpose: principal and teacher development and recruitment. They have moved away from mostly funding “sit and git” professional development sessions or paying for educators’ attendance at workshops, both of which seldom actually develop educator expertise. They have used Title II for a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving teaching, including coaching, mentoring, induction programs, implementing new evaluation systems, performance-based pay, or even lawyers to support principals when removing ineffective teachers. (In this last case, the lawyers mentor and support the

principals through the evaluation and documentation process, rather than conduct the actual legal proceedings.)

Title III

Title III is designed to support English language (EL) learners. It is the least flexible of the ESEA Title programs because its use is restricted to direct services for EL students and their teachers. That said, districts have found ways to integrate and coordinate Title III-funded services with other district services. For example, a district uses Title III funds to pay for that portion of its six-week, summer academy for ninth graders that serves newcomers and EL students at risk of failure. The district does not have sufficient Title III funds to run a separate program due to high transportation costs, but by integrating and coordinating programs and funding with its Title I and Refugee grants, the district is able to provide transportation for everyone to various summer programs – EL students, newcomers, and native speakers.

A Tool to Get Started

As demonstrated by the examples of the Title III summer school and Title I shared staffing programs, multiple grants can be used, along with local funds, to pay for a single program to help reduce silos and integrate efforts. Opportunities are plentiful.

To accelerate the process of identifying opportunities for integration, districts can consider using the worksheet in Appendix B to identify their grant sources and potential uses. The completed worksheet – in combination with the coordinated budget recommended earlier - can be used together to strengthen district capacity to more aggressively and effectively coordinate, integrate, and align federal grants with district priorities.

¹ Melissa Junge and Sheara Krvaric, “How the Supplement-not-Supplant Requirement Can Work Against the Policy Goals of Title I: A Case for Using Part I Title I Funds More Effectively and Efficiently,” Center for American Progress and American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, May 2011, 11, <http://www.aei.org/files/2012/03/06/-how-the-supplement-not-supplant-requirement-can-work-against-the-policy-goals-of-title-i_111823556546.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2013).

²Elementary and Secondary Education Act Section 1114, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1114>.

³“Using Title I, Part A ARRA Funds for Grants to Local Educational Agencies to Strengthen Education, Drive Reform, and Improve Results for Students,” Department of Education, 2009, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/guidance/titlei-reform.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2013).

Appendix A

SAMPLE GRANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Grant:

Total Grant: \$ Starting Date: Ending Date:

1. Positions Funded:

Name	Title	Dept/School	Supervisor	FTE	Salary	Fringe	Total

2. Professional Development Funded:

Focus	Frequency	# Participants (Anticipated)	Cost	Cost Per Participant

3. Curriculum Materials (including technology and software):

Item	Intended Users	Cost

Appendix A

GRANT QUESTIONNAIRE

4. Other:

Item	Purpose	Intended Users	Cost

5. In what ways do the major activities supported through this grant advance the district's strategic priorities? (please be specific)

6. How are you measuring the impact of the major grant activities?

7. What have you learned in the past about the impacts of major grant activities?

8. What have you done to adjust grant activities on the basis of information about their impact?

Appendix B

SAMPLE GRANTS INTEGRATION AND COORDINATION WORKSHEET			
		\$ Allocation to District	Potential Link to District Priorities
Title I	Basic		
	1003A		
	1003G		
	Migrant		
Title II	A: Principal & Teacher Training/Recruitment		
	D: Technology		
Title III	Limited English Proficient		
Title IV	B: Safe & Drug Free		
	C: 21 st Century Learning		
Title V	B: Innovative Programs		
Title VI	Rural Education		
Title X	McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth		
Perkins	Vocational & Technical Education		
IDEA	Part B		
	Early Intervention		
	Preschool		
	Professional Development		

GETTING STARTED

STRATEGICALLY SPENDING FEDERAL ENTITLEMENT GRANTS: Making the Connection to District Priorities

Large districts typically receive around 14% of their revenue from federal funds, but grant budgets are often managed separately from the operating budget and are often less aligned to key district strategies for raising achievement. Spending these funds differently can shift significant resources to district priorities.

HERE'S HOW TO GET STARTED:

1 DETAIL CURRENT USES OF GRANT FUNDING

The operating budget is closely scrutinized by district leaders and the public, but grant budgets generally receive little attention. Find out the details of what the various grants are paying for, how those expenditures are linked to the district's strategic objectives, and how impact is being measured. This review will highlight opportunities to align grant activities and grant spending more closely to district priorities.

2 FIND OR GROOM EXPERTS

Fearing non-compliance, grant managers often are unlikely to uncover opportunities for spending grant funds more flexibly. It is essential to engage outside experts or groom forward-thinking grant managers to lead the way.

3 ASK "HOW" NOT "IF" FUNDS CAN BE USED MORE FLEXIBLY

A "can do" attitude and dogged persistence can help districts overcome naysayers and find creative solutions. There is often more room for discussion and negotiation than is assumed.

4 TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF TITLE I SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

Many schools operating under schoolwide program models continue to use funds as if they were targeted assistance schools. Guidance and support from district leadership can help schools take advantage of the flexibility that is already available to them and align grant funding to support comprehensive school improvement strategies.

5 STAY INVOLVED; DON'T JUST DELEGATE AND HOPE

District leaders need to stay involved in examining and deciding how grant dollars are spent. Leaders have a broader view of the organization and are better positioned to ensure that all spending is aligned with district priorities. Setting the tone for grant managers is also important. Evaluating grant managers on more than just compliance can send a clear message that spending should drive results and that continued spending is contingent on past results.

A word to the wise: BEWARE OF MISCONCEPTIONS

Due to the complexity of grant requirements and the consequences of non-compliance, the "way things are done" can seem like the "way things have to be done." It is essential that district leaders make the effort to debunk inaccurate and misunderstood information in order to achieve the benefits of this opportunity.



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

Getting the Most from School District Budgets

This chapter is from *Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets* by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan of The District Management Council. To access this chapter and the rest of the series, please go to www.dmcouncil.org. Topics in this series include:

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3. **Adding Precision to Remediation and Intervention Staffing Levels: Data-Driven Guidelines Improve Schedules, Building Assignments, and Workload**
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5. **Strategically Spending Federal Entitlement Grants: Making the Connection to District Priorities**
6. **Ensuring More Students Read on Grade Level: Cost-Effective Strategies**
7. **Improving the Cost-Effectiveness of Professional Development: Reducing Expenses While Increasing Impact**
8. **Rethinking Purchasing: A Strategic Approach to Increasing the Value of Each Dollar Spent**
9. **Lowering the Cost of Extended Learning Time: Creating Financial Sustainability**
10. **Targeting New Investments: Funding a Better Future Despite Declining Resources**

About the Authors

Nathan Levenson is Senior Managing Director of The District Management Council (DMC). After a career in the private sector and six years as an elected school board member, he served as superintendent in Arlington, Massachusetts. His work at DMC has led him to more than 50 districts, always looking to help them do more with less.

James C. Smith, Senior Director at The District Management Council, has a combination of human capital consulting and classroom teaching experience. James works on projects across several areas including human capital, strategic planning, special education, and stakeholder engagement.

Karla Baehr is Senior Advisor and Consultant at The District Management Council. Her many years of experience as a superintendent in both urban and affluent districts provide a unique perspective. Karla also served as deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Claire Sullivan is a Senior Associate at The District Management Council. Having worked in the classroom prior to joining DMC, Claire now works with a number of districts on mapping resource allocation, with particular focus on data-driven budgeting and improving special education and remediation and intervention staffing.

About the District Management Council

The District Management Council (DMC) partners with public school district leaders to help improve student outcomes, operational efficiency, and resource allocation. DMC was founded in 2004 to address the most pressing and important management challenges facing American educators. The trusted advisor to school district leaders, DMC works with districts on these important issues to achieve measurable results. With the firm belief that leadership and management matter, DMC helps to strengthen and increase the managerial capacity of the people leading school districts to systemically improve the performance of the American public education system. To learn more, visit www.dmcouncil.org.

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