

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING A DISTRICT AWARD PROGRAM

Step 1: Decide to apply for the District Award for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.) grant

- This is not a trivial step. As this guide will demonstrate, a well-designed award program requires a considerable amount of effort and time from multiple stakeholders.

Step 2: Identify district-level planning committee members

- Select various stakeholders impacted by the award program. Principals and teachers must be on the committee—these are the staff members who will sustain the initiative during implementation. Also consider including stakeholders such as central office staff, superintendents, and school board members.

Step 3: Determine your district award program and goals

- The award program should be taken as an opportunity for school improvement.
- Examine your district's data for areas of need (or a desire to improve). Areas of improvement could include instructional strategies, specific subject areas, overall student achievement, specific subpopulation achievement, teacher collaboration, use of technology, teacher retention, etc.
- Make sure the goals of the district award program align with other district goals and that district and campus leaders can clearly articulate and explain them.
- Consider both instructional and non-instructional goals for the program.

Step 4: Decide to implement your award program district-wide or within select campuses

- Determine how many teachers you can meaningfully award given the funding level of the grant.
- Keeping your funding levels in mind, determine if your district goals are best served with a district-wide program or a more targeted, campus-specific program.

Teacher Advancement Program (TAP): A Special Case.

Instead of designing your own program, you may choose to implement TAP, a nationally-recognized comprehensive model that combines performance awards with a career ladder program and a highly structured model for teacher collaboration and evaluation. D.A.T.E funds can be used to implement TAP. More information about TAP can be found on the Technical Assistance website at: www.tapsystem.org

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Step 5: Decide who you would like to include in your award program

- Almost any full-time staff member can be in the program, but remember funds are limited.
- You must decide who to award, this can include: classroom teachers (both core and noncore), paraprofessionals, principals, assistant principals, and other staff.
- Not only do you have to decide who to award, but determine whether awards should be based on group performance, individual performance, or a combination of both.
- In order to be effective, awards must be large enough to be meaningful and differentiated enough to help reach the targeted district goals.
- Remember the different criteria and guidelines for using Part I and Part II funds.
- Make sure that awards are aligned with district goals.

Step 6: Decide how you will evaluate the performance of your program participants

- Consider the appropriate performance measures to reach your district goals. These may include: student achievement, district-designed assessments, evaluations, evidence of collaboration, and/or completion of professional development, among others.
- Ensure that all of your performance measures are fair, credible, and will accurately reflect the performance of teachers in both tested and non-tested areas.
- In order to be effective, performance awards need to be rigorous, but realistic and attainable.
- Make your performance or behavioral targets as specific as possible so that everyone being rewarded will understand their objectives.
- If using student achievement, decide upon the method of measurement such as level-performance, value-added, or gain scores.
- Consider other sources of information besides student achievement that can assess educator performance over time. Program awards need not include other measures, but it is important that your committee has mulled over multiple measures to ensure that the chosen targets will meet district goals.
- For more information on potential performance measures, visit the Technical Assistance website: <http://www.txeducatorawards.org>.

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Step 7: Assess your current data and data systems

- All decisions on goals, targets, and performance measures should be based on data. This means that your data must be sufficient to meet the needs of your program.
- The data system also needs to be strong enough to measure what you want to measure, especially if attempting calculations like value-added.
- Teachers and staff should also have access to data to track progress toward meeting program goals.
- The data system also needs to be robust enough to grow and evolve with your district.
- D.A.T.E. funds can be used to purchase or enhance data systems. If you find your present system inadequate to meet your needs, consider building your district's data capacity with your D.A.T.E. funds.

Step 8: Decide whether or not to include other components into your award program

- Part II funds can be used to include recruitment and retention incentives, professional development, teacher and staff collaboration, teacher supports (mentor teachers, master teachers, and instructional coaches), and data system upgrades.
- Consider the value of these other components and how they can support program participants in meeting program goals. Remember the ultimate goal is school improvement; the more support you provide the greater the likelihood of success!

Step 9: Engage stakeholders to provide input into your district award program

- Obtain feedback from various stakeholders impacted by the program.
- Develop a communication plan so that all stakeholders understand the award program, recognize its objectives, and have an opportunity to provide feedback.
- Open and ongoing communication can help foster buy-in for the program.

Step 10: Develop a program sustainability plan

- Grant funds may not last forever. Calculate the total cost of your program over the next few years and begin to identify sustainable sources of revenue to fund the program.
- Design a plan for both funding and programmatic sustainability.

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Step 11: Obtain votes of approval to finalize the plan

Step 12: Complete your grant application

- Strongly consider sending your application for review to Technical Assistance before submitting to TEA. The technical assistance staff can identify potential areas of improvement in the program as well as grant-specific issues that will greatly ease the approval process.

Step 13: Submit your grant application to the Texas Education Agency

Step 14: Upon approval, begin program implementation

For additional information, please contact the Technical Assistance Center at
(512) 579-5050 or txeducatorawards@utsystem.edu.