**2025 ONLINE BEST APPLICATION TRAINING transcript**

**I. Welcome and Introduction**

**SLIDE 1**

Welcome to the BEST Grant Application self paced training.

**SLIDE 2 Goals of this Training**

In this training, our goal is to provide a brief overview of the BEST grant program, the process of applying for a BEST grant, preparation and supporting documentation, a walk through of the BEST Grant Application, a summary of recent changes, as well as tips for a successful application

This is a self-paced training, which divides information into brief segments or modules, so that you can choose to tailor your experience to your needs or revisit a specific section later. Those familiar with the BEST Grant Program from past experience might jump ahead to relevant sections, and first time applicants may want to move through each of the modules in order.

**SLIDE 3 What is BEST**

The BEST program was established in 2008 through legislation, C.R.S. 22-43.7-101 thru 116

The BEST legislation addresses health and safety issues by providing competitive grant funds for the construction of new schools as well as general construction and renovation of existing school facilities, systems, and structures.

The main sources of revenue to the Capital Construction Assistance Fund are The Colorado State Land Trust, Marijuana Excise Taxes, Lottery Spillover Funds, and Interest Earnings on the assistance fund itself

Spending authority for cash-funded grants is appropriated by the legislature each fiscal year, and additional lease/purchase grant funding is subject to debt service limits and projected interest rates.

The amount of funding varies year to year. The current legislative session will determine the funding appropriation limits for the upcoming grant cycle, so precise dollar amounts are not known at the time of this training.

**SLIDE 4 Who can Apply**

The BEST Grant is available to school districts, charter schools and institute charter schools, BOCES, and the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind.

Per statute, the order of priorities are:

1) Health, Safety, and Technology

2) Overcrowding

3) Career and Technical Education

4) Replacement of prohibited American Indian Mascots

5) all others

All applicants are required to provide matching money to their project.

When considering applying for a grant, keep in mind BEST grants are very competitive, having yet to award a project beyond the first tier of Health, Safety, Security, and Technology. Therefore, it is strongly recommended when determining the scope of any proposed grant, that applicants choose projects highly correlated to that first statutory priority.

**SLIDE 5 Who can Apply? Ownership & Notification of Intent**

Applicants must own or have the right to own the improved property through a lease agreement, and must have been in existence for 3 years prior to application.

Charter school facilities, for example, are often owned by a third party or building corporation. In that event, further documentation may be requested to confirm ownership requirements are met.

The deadline to submit a notification of intent to apply for a BEST grant for the upcoming grant cycle is November 30th

**II. BEST Website**

**BEST WEBSITE MODULE**

**Video Walkthrough:** Overview of the BEST website navigation

Video transcript:

The website for the CDE Capital Construction Unit, which administers the BEST Grant, can be found at [www.cde.state.co.us/capitalconstruction](http://www.cde.state.co.us/capitalconstruction)

[landing page]

The landing page for the Capital Construction Unit offers general information about the programs we administer, including the BEST Program, Facility Insight statewide assessment program, the Charter School Capital Construction program, and BEST emergency grants, as well as information on the Capital Construction Assistance Board, and the various rules associated with our program. The landing page features important announcements, a link to register for our email listserv, which is our resource to publish RFQs on behalf of schools, as well as general program announcements.

The menu to the right will take you to the other primary pages of the Capital Construction Website

Assistance Board will take you to a page introducing you to the 9 member BEST Capital Construction Assistance Board, as well as BEST rules and resolutions affecting the program

BEST Grant Program is the main page for the BEST Grant

Capital Construction Programs provides a summary of other programs administered by the Capital Construction Unit

Charter Schools is the page for the Charter School Capital Construction program

Facility Insight is the statewide facility assessment program conducted by CDE

Financial information provides annual reporting and financial information on programs administered by the unit

Forms provides awarded grants with the forms needed to request funds, close out grants, and forms required for Lease/Purchase project administration

Greening Colorado Schools is a page intended to share information on sustainability in schools

Resources is a page providing chronological resources through the BEST grant process

Contact Us provides you with the names and contact details of Capital Construction staff who can assist you in your area. Within the Contact Us page is a territory map to describe the geographic areas covered by each Regional Program Manager, as well as the areas covered by the Facility Insight team. If unsure, please feel free to email the main BEST inbox at BESTSchools@cde.state.co.us

*[Facility Insight]*

Facility Insight is the name of the statewide facility assessment conducted by CDE of all public school facilities in the state of Colorado.

The Facility Insight portal provides an overview map of the state, and allows viewers to view districtwide conditions, as well as down to individual school facilities, to view assessment findings. The color coding reflects the Facility Condition Index of the district or individual school, on a scale of 0-1. A Facility Condition Index is a measure of the total of all calculated ‘requirements’ or deficiencies, divided by the replacement cost of the selected building. A higher FCI represents a building with a higher amount of building system deficiencies relative to the value of the building, and is an important metric for consideration of building replacements.

Facility insight is a high level tool that provides a snapshot of building conditions, and is not meant to replace the in-depth diligence of master planning by consultants with specific expertise in building evaluation and planning. Nevertheless, it is a useful tool the BEST program employs as part of the evaluation of grant applications, particularly in the determination of whether the cost to repair warrants consideration of building replacement, so we appreciate cooperation with applicants in ensuring it’s accuracy to the greatest extent possible.

A Facility Insight assessment will be scheduled for all grantees if not already completed. If you have not had a Facility Insight assessment completed for the facility in question, or significant changes have occurred since the last Facility Insight assessment was completed, please be sure to contact your Regional Program Manager as soon as possible, so we can schedule an assessment or update.

*[BEST Grant Program]*

The BEST Program page is the primary hub for information regarding the BEST grant application, process, and program information.

Under BEST Resources, Apply for a BEST grant provides a link to the application when open, as well as the grant timeline, the Detailed Project Budget spreadsheet required as part of grant submission, match percentages, which are generally available at the end of December, samples of the grant application and agreements, samples of the waiver applications - final copies of which will require you to contact your Regional Program Manager to populate certain data, a sample of the Evaluation Tool used by the CCAB to score the grants, as well as links to charter school eligibility information, the Construction Guidelines to which BEST grants are expected to conform, and instructions for uploading the supporting documents to CDE’s file sharing provider, Syncplicity.

*[BEST Process and Resources]*

Clicking the BEST Process and Resources link will take you to a page intended to provide you with information chronologically through the application process and beyond. This page can be reached from the main BEST page, on the right side menu, or from the Apply for a BEST Grant page under “application preparation”

This page contains answers to Frequently Asked Questions, contact information for BEST staff, information on eligibility, and links to planning expectations for BEST Grants. Many of the documents touched on in this overview will be discussed in more detail in the Grant Application modules.

The Grant Submittal Requirements link will detail the expected minimum diligence expected of any BEST grant, and should be referred to as a reference in preparing for an application in the months leading up to the application opening.

The public school facilities master plan guidelines outline the BEST program’s expectations for the content of a districtwide master plan, which is strongly recommended for any applicant, particularly in cases where new schools or major renovations are under consideration.

Procurement guidance outlines the BEST recommended procurement process. BEST encourages open competitive selection for consultants and contractors on BEST funded projects. The application will allow an opportunity to confirm agreement with BEST’s procurement policy, or alternatively for applicants to describe any deviation from this standard, permitted that it complies with the procurement policies of the applicant’s organization.

Additional resources on this page provide information for awarded grants regarding project execution and monitoring, as well as additional project requirements that may apply depending on the scope of the proposed grant project.

For example:

* BEST Furniture Fixtures and Equipment guidelines outline eligible versus ineligible expenses for new schools and major renovations where furnishing the school would be considered within the scope and budget of the grant.
* Safety/Security questionnaire provides a series of diligence questions specific to grants for safety and security improvements, including a recommendation for a security self assessment or professional audit.
* The BEST Capital Renewal Policy applies to new schools and major renovations, and describes the commitment required of applicants to set aside funds for future replacement of building systems at the end of life
* The High Performance Certification Program is also a statutory requirement of specific state-funded projects, which will be addressed in the grant application module

[END]

PREPARING TO SUBMIT a BEST Grant Application

***FY2025-26 BEST Grant Timeline***

[TIMELINE SLIDE]

The BEST Grant Timeline for the 2025-26 fiscal year began in July of 2024 with the preparation of applicants working with consultants, in-house staff, and BEST staff in evaluating and prioritizing facility needs, scheduling facility insight assessments, and the initiation of larger planning efforts such as master planning and engineering reports

We require a notice of intent to apply in order to ensure that BEST has an opportunity to reach out and work with all applicants prior to grant submission, in an effort to improve the overall quality of all grant applications. This notification deadline was December 15th for all schools. [deleted sentence]

During the application window of January 8-February 10th, the online grant application in GAINS will be open and available for applicants to create and complete online applications. The application window allows for an extended staff review period, and provides an opportunity for revisions to grant applications where necessary after staff review. This, again, is in an effort to improve the quality of all applications, and ensure the CCAB has the most accurate representation of the grant request, and to allow applicants the ability to make adjustments if necessary in response to staff feedback.

The period from February 10th through April 17th is the staff review period, which includes an initial review and revisions to previously submitted applications. The CCAB will receive access to application summary materials before their April 17th board meeting for an approximately 1 month review period in which they may ask additional followup questions through BEST staff.

May 13-15 are the dates of the planned CCAB grant review meeting, at which the CCAB will review and finalize their scoring of each application. Applicants will have an opportunity for a brief 2 minute presentation, and the CCAB may ask follow up questions of applicants. By the end of the 3 day meeting, the intent is for the CCAB to produce a prioritized list of recommended projects for submission to the State Board of Education. The State Board must meet no later than June 20 to approve the list, then the Capital Development Committee must meet by July 15th to approve any grants recommended for Lease-Purchase funding. Lease-Purchase funding may be offered when the BEST program has available revenue within limits set by the legislature to dedicate to COP financing, and if funds are available, is at the CCAB and State Treasurer’s discretion.

Around July 1 or shortly thereafter, the cash funded grant recipients will receive contracts, and if the CCAB were to choose to utilize any lease/purchase financing available, grants funded with lease purchase financing would close and those grants would be funded by approximately December of 2025. Grantees must have funds secured prior to signing their grant agreement, and cash grant agreements should be executed no later than November 30th, with the exception of backup projects.

**GRANT APPLICATION COMPONENTS slide**

[grant app components slide, audio narration]

A BEST Application consists of a combination of several components.

First, and most importantly, is the online grant application form, or CC-03. This is the online grant application form you will complete and submit to summarize the grant application requested.

Several documents will accompany that online grant application, including potentially a waiver letter if requested, a detailed project budget required of all applications, specific submittals based on project scope to demonstrate diligence and planning around the proposed project, and photos of the existing conditions and solutions for a visual explanation to the Capital Construction Assistance Board, or CCAB, of the proposed project.

The online grant application and waiver letters will be combined with Facility Insight data on each affected facility, financial data collected in the process of calculating the match percentage, and any revisions to the application completed after staff review, and merged into a Summary Book of applications for the CCAB to review. Copies of prior year summary books can be found on the “Previous BEST Grant Cycles” page of the BEST website, and we recommend reading through prior successful applications.

The detailed project budget and the submittals based on project scope are supporting backup documents provided for review by BEST staff in evaluating and summarizing the parameters of the application. Staff reviews these documents to confirm support and justification for the grant scope proposed. These documents are not provided directly to the CCAB, but are summarized in the form of staff comments in the evaluation tool provided to the CCAB for scoring. It is important to note that any information contained within the supporting documents that applicants wish to share with the CCAB must be stated in the online application, as they do not review these documents, staff briefly summarizes their contents only in relation to the evaluation tool.

Photos will be reviewed by staff, made available for the CCAB during their review, and displayed in a powerpoint at the May grant review and scoring meetings, in order to provide context and visual descriptions of conditions and the proposed project.

**Scoring Rubric**

**Video walkthrough**

Video Transcript:

A sample of the Scoring Rubric is provided on the BEST website under the BEST Application page. The actual scoring rubric the Capital Construction Assistance Board, or CCAB, uses has been converted to an online format, but the content is described here. It is important to consider the scoring rubric when writing an application, to ensure that the information provided in the application allows staff and the CCAB to score each item as accurately as possible for the intended project. Scoring of BEST Grant Applications is now a combination of BEST staff and CCAB scores.

CCAB Scoring is an individual consideration for each board member and may involve some subjective evaluation, however we provide guidelines around a 0-5 scale. Staff scored items are on a 1-3 scale, based on relatively objective criteria, and with discussion between staff to ensure consistency. Staff scores make up a maximum 10.5 points, which is a result of dividing a 21 point scale by two in order to limit the overall impact of staff scoring, while CCAB scores add up to a maximum of 42 points, for a total maximum score of 52.5.

The first item scored by the CCAB is the statutory priority of the proposed project. The BEST statute outlined here describes the project types the CCAB is required to prioritize, in order. Priority 1 projects are those that address safety hazards or health concerns at existing public school facilities, including concerns relating to public school facility security, and projects that are designed to incorporate technology into the educational environment. Technology for purposes of BEST may include equipment for student instruction.

The vast majority of all BEST applications fall into the first priority, so it is strongly recommended that any competitive BEST grant be highly correlated to health, safety, and security, with application narratives reinforcing that connection. While technology is listed as part of this first priority, technology that relates to building health/safety/security is generally considered more urgent and necessary relatively speaking, and will fare better than technology solely for student learning.

The other priorities, in descending order, are applications to relieve overcrowding, projects to provide career and technical education, projects to replace American Indian mascots, and all other capital projects.

These priorities are an important filter in the evaluation process. If a majority of board members prioritize a project at other than a priority 1, it will fall to the bottom of the prioritized list, where it is very unlikely to receive funding due to the highly competitive nature of BEST grants.

Staff will recommend a priority based on review of the application, then the CCAB will make the final determination.

Demonstrated Need is a staff scored item, based on a review of the Facility Assessment or assessments provided by the applicant. A score of 3 represents alignment of the overall project with these assessments (in terms of big picture decisions like replacement versus minor or major renovations or continued investment into building systems replacements), and a score of 1 represents a misalignment of assessment to proposed project outcomes.

Facility Condition Index, or FCI, is a figure provided in the Facility Insight assessment, and is generated by dividing the total cost of all identified building system deficiencies by the replacement cost of the facility. This figure is used in part by the CCAB and staff to evaluate whether the facility is likely in need of full replacement, has significant needs but requires reinvestment, or if the facility is relatively new and in minimal need of reinvestment. A very high FCI would logically correlate with a building replacement project, a moderately high FCI might lend itself to a partial replacement or major renovation, and a low to mid-range FCI would usually correlate with renovation projects of varying degrees, such as a roof or HVAC replacement project, with some exceptions in unusual cases, such as historic significance or severe educational adequacy issues with an existing facility. The requirements noted in the statewide assessment refer to specific building systems found to be deficient through the assessment process.

Planning score reflects whether master planning has occurred at the district. The BEST program has always recommended regular facilities master planning as a key component of facilities planning, to inform decisions about long term visions for facilities, and align construction projects to those long term goals. With that in mind, applicants with current master plans will receive a score of 3, with all other projects receiving a score of 2 or 1 depending on the planning efforts made relative to the relevance to project scope.

Deficiencies is a staff score around how well the stated deficiencies are supported by the facility assessment and/or additional investigations provided by the applicant.

Solution is a staff scored item regarding the due diligence and supporting documentation provided by the applicant to support the solution.

Project Cost is a staff evaluation of the apparent clarity and thoroughness of the budget and backup documentation

Project Size is a staff evaluation of the square footage of the project after review of the supporting documentation

Procurement is a staff evaluation of the proposed or already completed procurement process for the project, relative to it’s alignment with the CDE required procurement policy and dollar thresholds.

The following CCAB scored sections contain scoring items on a 0-5 scale. Staff may provide general comments regarding grant review, if necessary, however the CCAB largely scores these items based on a direct reading of the grant application as submitted by the applicant.

The CCAB reviews historic contributions to capital needs as a component of evaluating the applicant’s general commitment to facility maintenance and improvement

The CCAB deficiencies score allows the CCAB to evaluate how compelling the deficiencies are, and score regarding the need for capital assistance to address the issues. Always support your claims in your grant application narrative with examples of due diligence to provide a degree of confidence you have sought out expertise in evaluating existing conditions, such as engineering investigations, master plans, or other assessments undertaken of building systems, and summarize those findings in the application.

The CCAB Solution Addresses Deficiencies score, and the Appropriate Solution score allows the CCAB to evaluate whether the solution effectively and efficiently resolves the deficiencies. It is important to note that there are often many ways to address a problem. Our program has limited resources, and the CCAB is interested in whether the solution is feasible, practical, well considered, and a good use of limited state funding. This should be reflected in a grant application narrative demonstrating that the applicant considered multiple options, and selected the proposed option based on sound reasoning.

Time Sensitivity refers to how urgent this project is, and could relate to imminent failure of building systems, current safety issues, financial availability, or other time-sensitive components noted in the grant application.

Future commitment refers to the applicant’s commitment to maintain and renew the proposed project going forward

Efficient use of funds relates to the project cost and whether the cost is considered to be an effective and efficient use of state resources. Important to note, while Statutory Limit waivers may cap the amount the BEST program may require a district to put forward as a match on a large project, the larger the project, the greater the request of state resources. A lack of consideration of the overall project cost and overall project cost effectiveness in evaluating solutions will likely be reflected in a low score for efficient use of funds, as well as multiple other scored areas.

Given the limited funding BEST has available relative to the enormous statewide need, Partnership efforts scores the efforts the applicant has taken to leverage other available resources to enhance their financial contribution to the project or provide cost efficiencies. Some examples could be work paid for and completed in advance, work completed through other funding sources such as grants or donations and therefore not requested in the grant, or used to increase the applicants match above what it might otherwise have been, work provided by a local jurisdiction and not included in the scope of the grant, or potentially other grants and funding sources previously utilized that reduced the necessary scope of this project.

For applications submitted for supplemental assistance to complete a previously awarded BEST grant, an additional 2 bonus points are available for the CCAB to assign. This additional 2 points is not automatic, if the CCAB member does not find the circumstances compelling or finds issue with the application, a board member may choose to refrain from awarding the additional 2 points. This is meant only to assist those projects already funded by BEST that may encounter compelling unforeseen challenges requiring additional funds to complete the original intended project. Adding new scope to an existing project is not considered a supplemental grant request.

**RECENT CHANGES**

[Recent changes Slide, audio narration]

This is a summary of recent changes to the BEST Application for those who may have completed applications in the past.

**Scoring Rubric:** After evaluating with the CCAB and internally as part of regular process improvement efforts, staff and the CCAB determined that a revision to the scoring strategy would be beneficial to the clarity and consistency of the program. So this year we have introduced a revised two-part scoring rubric to identify relatively objective items for staff scoring based on application data and backup documents provided, while keeping the majority of the project scores within the realm of the CCAB, particularly for criteria that may necessitate more subjective evaluations, or are a reflection of direct readings of the grant application narratives.

We believe this updated process with help streamline staff review of grants, provide more consistent information to the CCAB for their important work of evaluating and prioritizing grant applications.

**Executive Summary:** The General Background information question was removed this year, and replaced with an Executive Summary. Our hope is that your team can work to concisely summarize what the problem and solution are for this grant. The intent is that these executive summaries would be able to explain this grant project to the general public and will serve as a broad overview for anyone reading the application. Be sure to restate any critical items in more detail in later sections.

**GAINS:** The biggest change last year, which may be new for many applicants again this year, was the transition of the application into CDE’s new GAINS grant management system. For those of you who have had grants in the past, this system will not only be for completing grant applications for all CDE grants, but also will be a single portal to handle the fund request process and tracking of those grants when awarded.

GAINS has it’s own office within CDE and trainings available, and CDE is committed to the successful implementation of this software.

GAINS will have similar functionality as the previous online application websites if you had submitted an application for a BEST grant previously, however it will allow the uploading of supporting documents directly within the application, and budgets will be established in the application itself in order to be tracked through an eventual awarded project. The login process is different, with new user roles.

LEA BEST Director (LEA stands for Local Education Authority) is the internal staff member of the applying school district, charter, or BOCES who is going to be responsible for the grant application.

LEA BEST Update is internal staff *or outside consultants* who have been requested to assist in the preparation of the application, but cannot create or submit the application

LEA Data View (view-only access) is someone who can view but not edit applications.

New roles for the GAINS system include the LEA Fiscal Representative and LEA Authorized Representative, who will need to access and approve the applications in lieu of manual signatures previously required with BEST grants. These two individuals will be critical to have engaged at the submittal deadline to ensure the grant is fully submitted to BEST.

**Procurement:** Last year dollar thresholds were introduced to the CDE required procurement process, these are intended to add clarity and align with state procurement thresholds regarding the types of services and degree of open advertisement & competition required. Remember, school districts are local government entities, and particularly when proposing to partner with the state to complete a construction project, have a duty to procure qualified service providers and appropriately manage public funds. Competitive procurement is a best practice of public entities, and all architects, contractors, design builders, and other professional service providers are familiar with the need for public entities to competitively procure services for professional services and construction.

**Tips for a Successful Application**

[tips for a successful application slide with narration] (move up)

Transcript:

These are a few of many tips for a successful application. First and possibly most importantly, work with your Regional Program Manager early and often, as this short list only scratches the surface, and every project is unique. We are here to discuss your projects and provide advice and feedback from the earliest stages through award and completion. With a competitive program, historically only around the top half of BEST applications are able to be awarded and funded. We will do our best to provide helpful information to guide you toward a grant project that is a good fit for our program and your needs, in order to give you the best opportunity for success.

Due diligence is key in planning a successful project, and is expected in BEST grant applications. Outside expertise will likely be necessary, so have a plan for who will do what to complete the application, and communicate with your partners to develop an internal schedule to meet the deadline. Diligence includes carefully evaluating existing conditions, exploring multiple options, and researching the feasibility of the project, so that you can make informed decisions and demonstrate to the BEST board and your constituents and stakeholders that that has taken place. Once you arrive at a preferred solution, be sure to explain why that proposed option makes the most fiscal and logical sense for both the state and the applicant, given the options. Consider your grant request from the perspective of a contractor bidding for a project, or a developer approaching a bank for a loan to construct a project. You want to demonstrate to the Capital Construction Assistance Board that you have done all the proper diligence, considered your options, engaged outside expertise, and have spent the time and effort to ensure your project is as well planned and prepared for success as possible. Good diligence makes successful projects, but good diligence also does take time.

Be succinct but informative in defining the deficiencies, the solution (scope of work), and the urgency. Always tie these back to health and safety, because health, safety, and security are the driving priorities of the BEST program. When writing the solution narrative, be sure to address each deficiency with it’s corresponding solution, and be clear about the scope of work proposed in your grant submission, particularly when other work is planned through funding sources outside of the grant. Be thorough in budgeting your project, consider all costs, and include appropriate contingencies. Review the Evaluation Tool against your application, and self-score before submitting. Recruit a third party with minimal knowledge of your project to read your application and provide feedback. Also, we recommend Copy/pasting from Word for spellcheck, because the online application form does not check for spelling or grammar.

**Submittal Requirements Based on Project Scope**

**Video walkthrough**

Video Script:

The Submittal Documents Based on Project Scope are our recommended appropriate supporting documentation to illustrate diligence for a given project type. This list is not exhaustive, but identifies the types of diligence documentation expected for a well planned project of the types listed. This includes diligence taken to determine the issues at hand, as well as steps taken to plan an appropriate and feasible project to solve those issues. Diligence is an important component of project success, and while projects are not expected to be fully designed, the expectation when applying for a BEST grant is that the project has been planned, vetted, and budgeted to a reasonable standard of feasibility. Two new questions in the application will allow for the summary of diligence taken, and we encourage applicants to draw from the work they have done in compiling and completing these steps. It is important to note, the Capital Construction Assistance Board does not receive all of the supporting documents. Instead they will receive staff comments indicating the thoroughness of the supplied supporting documents, as well as the summary in the application provided by the applicant. So important findings should be called out and highlighted by applicants in the appropriate section of the application.

New school, major renovation, and/or addition projects likely have the most exhaustive list of supporting documentation, including a facilities master plan, engineering reports or assessments supporting major deficiencies, drawings or diagrams of the proposed project, a detailed project schedule, a program plan with space requirements, and a detailed professional cost estimate. For smaller single system or limited renovations, we request a minimum of 2 quotes or contractor’s opinions of probable cost, for purposes of cost validation, as wells as system audits or engineering reports applicable to the project type. Roof projects in particular will be reviewed in light of BEST’s Roof Specific policies, linked here on this page. For mechanical projects we recommend IAQ reports where applicable to document the IAQ issues if they are an impetus for the application. Security and Safety projects will require completion of a safety/security questionnaire linked here, the purpose of which is to document that diligence has been completed in evaluating all the security conditions of the affected campus, and to ensure that the project proposed is part of a more comprehensive security plan, beyond just purchasing equipment. Diagrams are also helpful in security projects to identify areas of concern and where devices or improvements might be made as part of the proposed project.

Technology projects, similarly, should demonstrate a relationship to a larger more comprehensive technology plan, and when CTE projects are brought forward, a demonstration of comprehensive planning will be expected.

Supplemental Grants are for previously awarded grant projects who encounter highly unusual and unanticipated issues in the course of executing the grant project that can’t be addressed through diligent management, and may need to request additional grant funds in order to complete the project as originally intended. Supplemental grant applications are scored on the same rubric as all other grants, and subject to competition, so there is no guarantee of award or special consideration. A supplemental grant may be due to a variety of unforeseen issues, but in order to review the merits of such a request, specific items are requested here. Supplemental grant applications must complete a full grant application, and it is recommended to briefly restate the deficiencies and solution proposed in the original application, with the addition of specific new information regarding the unforeseen issue encountered, diligence taken to resolve prior to requesting additional funds, and a proposed solution. Supporting documents should include sufficient detail as identified here to support the increase. In the urgency section of the grant application, I also would strongly encourage applicants to identify what the solution will be if not funded.

With any proposed project type, several other types of supporting documents listed might be appropriate at the discretion of the applicant. Those might include things like professional cost estimates from third part cost estimators, plans & specifications for projects a little further along the design process, self-performed facility assessments, non-compliance letters from AHJs relating to the deficiencies presented, or letters of support addressed to the CCAB from local leadership or other stakeholders in the project.

Once you have read through and taken note of the documentation you intend to bring forward, you may hit “Agree” at the bottom of the page, and either move on to the next screen, or return to the menu.

**Notices and Disclosures**

**Video walkthrough – Project Expense Reimbursement Disclosure, Lease Purchase Project Notice, Competitive Selection Process, HPCP, Capital Renewal, Provisions for Charter Schools, Required signatures**

Video transcript:

There are several pages at the beginning of the application that I will call ‘notice and disclosure’ sections. These sections describe important requirements and considerations of the BEST grant, and that we want to make sure all applicants have understood prior to applying. At the bottom of each disclosure page, you will need to click the “I agree” button, in order for the system to recognize your application as complete enough to submit a final application.

**The Project Expense Reimbursement Disclosure** is notice that the BEST grant and the Department of Education are not responsible for expenses incurred prior to the execution of a grant agreement. This disclosure and associated reimbursement policy has recently changed to align with the State Controller’s updated policies. No work completed or expenses incurred prior to the effective date of an executed grant agreement are eligible for reimbursement. That date is typically in early July for cash grants, and for lease/purchase projects, this would be the December sublease date. However, in an attempt to accommodate the urgent nature of many BEST grant projects, a Conditional Award Letter will be issued to allow an earlier start date if the applicant intends to proceed with or without a grant. This could allow reimbursement starting as early as the date of the executed conditional award letter, contingent on the grant being awarded.

Again, the grantee is responsible for any risks and costs associated with proceeding without a grant agreement. If a conditional award letter is executed, the effective date of that conditional award letter will become the earliest allowable date of reimbursement for eligible project expenses. We are targeting March 1st to issue these vouchers to all grantees, with the exception of supplemental grant applicants who already have an awarded grant in place. If you anticipate starting work on the project prior to July, and in particular if you enter a Start Date in Section III of the application prior to July, staff may be in touch to confirm. It is important to note that regardless of start dates provided in the grant application, in no case will expenses incurred for services performed prior to the execution date of either a Grant Agreement or Conditional Award Letter be eligible for reimbursement.

Our recommendation is to plan summer projects for the following summer whenever possible, rather than the same summer as the BEST application, to ensure full project coverage for expenses.

**The Lease/Purchase Project Notice Disclosure** is a notice that the BEST program and CCAB, in an effort to make the most of available funds for BEST grants each year, may choose to award projects using Lease/Purchase funding. In the event that lease/purchase projects include matching funds to come from an upcoming bond election, or bonds not yet sold at the time of CCAB recommendation, the bonds will be required to be structured as matching money bonds to be sold by the state, and will be required to use a 20-year level debt service structure. Additional restrictions might apply to lease/purchase funded projects, so we also request applicants for major renovation or new construction projects to make your regional program manager aware of any legal or title restrictions, or unusual financing obligations or ownership issues that might complicate such a financing arrangement.

We are going to save the Waiver Application Guidelines for it’s own segment and move on to the **Competitive Selection Process**. CDE strives for a fair, transparent, competitive selection process for vendors hired by grantees to complete BEST funded projects. The process outlined is our recommended process of procuring design teams, owner’s representatives, construction managers, and other vendors you might select for a project including third party commissioning agents, surveyors, environmental consultants, etc. Without reading each line verbatim, we recommend contacting your Regional Program Manager for assistance with templates or guidance, issuing a Request for Qualifications or RFQ, advertising the RFQ widely and scoring qualifications fairly with a small committee of stakeholders using defined criteria for selectin, preferably including an interview stage, making a selection based on those qualifications, which in some cases may include a final fee score if stated in the RFQ, and doing a careful review and negotiation of the contract with your legal counsel to ensure compliance with the requirements of a BEST grant. If the applicant intends to deviate from that recommended process in any substantial way, please describe your proposed selection process, and confirm that it complies with your district or charter’s written procurement policies. If no alternative procurement process is proposed, the grantee is committing to follow the procurement process outlined above.

**The High Performance Certification Program,** or HPCP, is a statutorily mandated program for state funded construction projects to target one of a few sustainability certifications. Not all projects are required to comply with HPCP. Specifically, projects required to comply with HPCP must be at least 25% funded by the state (meaning your match is below 75%), considered a substantial renovation, which is defined as projects exceeding 25% of the value of the building, must contain 5,000 square feet or more, and must include an HVAC system. The three certification targets that projects may target are LEED Gold, Green Globes Three Globes, or CHPS Verified Leader. Additional consideration is given to projects of a historical nature, those who cannot recoup the increased cost from decreased operational costs within 15 years, and cases where the increased costs incurred exceed 5% of the total cost of the project. HPCP projects will be required to have a qualified sustainability consultant on board, so be sure to include that cost in your project budget.

**The Capital Renewal Requirement**, similar to the High Performance Certification Requirement, only applies to new construction or major renovation projects, with the same threshold rule of thumb of more than 25% of the building’s value. Any new construction or major renovation project is required to provide a demonstration of the ability and willingness to maintain the project over time that includes, at a minimum, the establishment of a capital renewal budget and a commitment to make annual contributions to a capital reserve. At a minimum, we require that you commit to establishing a capital renewal fund and contributing 1.5% of per pupil base funding annually for purposes of maintaining that fund, based on the October count of the facility impacted by the BEST grant, starting the fiscal year following completion of construction. A link to the board’s current policy on capital renewal is provided or can be found on the Assistance Board section of our website. Capital Renewal funds are for the replacement of building systems at the end of their expected life.

Per BEST Rules, the signatures listed on the **Required Signatures page** are required to be included on the application. With a fully electronic application this year, we have not yet developed a system for electronic signature, so the signature page will need to be signed pen-to-paper, scanned, and uploaded to the same Syncplicity folder as the rest of your supporting documents. If you’d prefer to upload the entire application, you are welcome to, however all we need in terms of signatures is the completed and signed signature page. Be sure to allow some time to circulate for signatures before the grant deadline. For Charter schools, we do require a signature from the charter authorizer, to serve as confirmation that the authorizer has been notified that the charter has submitted an application.

**On the topic of Charter Schools**, this last section outlines provisions specifically for charter school attention. Charter schools apply directly, but must notify their authorizer of their application. The authorizer may submit a letter to the board stating its position on the application, but is not required. When a charter is awarded a cash grant, financial assistance is provided to the authorizer, who then must distribute those payments to the charter school without retaining any portion. Cash grant contracts also go through the authorizer, though we provide authorizers with sample contracts to pass through to the charter school. Charter ownership is subject to review by CDE’s legal counsel to confirm eligibility as a public school facility owned by a public school or leased with an option to own by the school. Some further clarifications particularly as it relates to ownership by third party building corporations is provided here.

Additional Notices include a discussion about the requirement for BEST to request a determination of historical significance for any facility over 50 years old requesting state grant assistance. The process for identifying historically significant facilities and next steps if considered significant are laid out here, if you already know you have a historically significant facility, be sure to discuss with your regional program manager.

Ineligible expenses is a notification that there will be some expenses that cannot be reimbursed by the grant due to limitations in statutory authority, fiscal rules, BEST policy, and other reasons. The inclusion of ineligible expenses in grant narratives or supporting documents does not override these restrictions, so please be aware that particularly in the area of expenses before award, after completion, and expenses that aren’t capital in nature or are not identified in the grant application, there may be conflicts between what the applicant may need and what is eligible for reimbursement. The FAQ, FF&E guidelines, and Grantee Guide provide more detail around this topic.

**Waiver Application Guidelines**

**Video walkthrough**

Video transcript:

If the actual match you are proposing to provide is less than the CDE Minimum Match percentage for your district, charter, or BOCES, a waiver letter will be required. There are typically two types of waiver letters – a Waiver Letter for Districts, BOCES, and School for the Deaf and Blind, and a Waiver Letter for Charter Applicants. School Districts may also qualify for what we call a Statutory Limit waiver. The BEST statute limits match amounts for School Districts to a maximum of their limit on bonded indebtedness. The Statutory Limit is an automatic match reduction, in that it is not voted on by the Capital Construction Assistance Board, however we do need to document that reduction. A Statutory Limit Waiver form will be needed to document the precise figures identifying that limit and applying it to the district’s match. If you are working with bond counsel or underwriters for your upcoming bond, we recommend working with them to verify your limits on bonded indebtedness.

Waiver Applications for school districts and charters will be reviewed and voted on by the Capital Construction Assistance Board, and may or may not be approved. In the event a waiver is denied but a grant application is shortlisted for recommendation for award, the match percentage will default back to the minimum CDE match percentage, or the Statutory Limit waiver if provided, whichever is lower. We have provided sample waiver applications on our website, however please be aware that waiver applications for individual applicants are customized with applicant-specific financial data used to calculate your match percentage. So please contact your regional program manager if you plan to submit a waiver application, and we will provide you with a waiver application populated with match data. You will see why this is important as we look through a sample school district waiver application. We strongly recommend proposing your best possible matching contribution in the waiver application, as there is no negotiation of waivers, they are either approved or denied. Specific measurable data demonstrating unique financial circumstances is significantly more compelling than general statements.

Looking at a sample waiver application, instructions are provided at the top, then we get into the questions to be answered. Questions 1, 2, and 3 should all have compelling responses, as these are the reasons the CCAB may use, per statute, to consider a request for a reduction in match. Failing to answer these questions may reduce your chances of being granted a waiver. Question 2a includes a table describing all the factors that are used to determine your match. This form, with a completed table will be provided by your Regional Program Manager on request, a sample is available on our website. This question allows an opportunity to specifically address why a particular match factor does not reflect your actual financial circumstances. For instance, Per Pupil Assessed value may be high, but there could be unique circumstances in a given district that prevent that high PPAV from being accessible, such as repeated bond failures, or unique tax situations. Similar explanations with a direct relationship to the match factor at hand can be identified down the list. Some examples have been provided on the instructions page, and only those match factors that are in need of further clarification or explanation need be discussed in your response to 2a. Based on all the factors identified, the applicant should identify a best possible proposed match for evaluation by the CCAB. The Charter School waiver application is nearly identical, however the factors used for charter school matches differ from school districts, so the table under question 2 differs.

When your waiver application is complete, you will submit to Syncplicity.

**BEST FY2024-25 GAINS Walkthrough and Training**

Live webinar from FY25 with subtitles available within video link

**Detailed Project Budget GAINS**

**Video walkthrough of excel sheet – start on Detailed Project Budget webpage**

Video transcript:

Each grant application must include a detailed project budget, a template for which is found on our website on the BEST application webpage, under Application Preparation. The application provides a copy of the template for download. This is a standard budget excel sheet CDE provides with line items for every common expense in construction projects. The first tab includes a cover sheet with basic information about the project being budgeted, that information carries through to the second tab.

Be sure to input the affected area of the project at the upper right, so that costs/sf can be calculated accurately.

This detailed project budget should be supported by cost estimates or quotes from multiple sources to validate that your project is feasible for the amounts stated. This detailed project budget will serve as the basis for your grant request amount, and will provide the source of the total project cost you will be entering into the grant application in GAINS.

Every cell highlighted in green can be filled in by the applicant, though the vast majority of applicants should not expect to complete every line. The line items are meant to be fairly comprehensive as a reminder of all the potential costs typically seen on a construction project, but if you have unusual expenses in your application, there are a few blanks within each section. With very rare exceptions, every project should have a combination of soft costs and hard costs. Soft costs are costs for things that aren’t typically included in a construction cost or hard cost by a contractor, like design and consulting fees, Owner’s Representative fees, sustainability certifications, third party commissioning, city and planning fees, utility and development costs, surveys, 3rd party inspections, environmental abatement and mitigation work, legal fees, moving costs, low voltage, furniture, fixtures, equipment, and some technology.

Hard costs are those costs usually identified in a contractor’s bid or estimate, and include the contractor’s general requirements, mobilization, project management, and all the material & labor to complete the work. This section also provides for a breakout of overhead & profit, insurance & bonding, as well as space for the contingencies we recommend including in budgets –

escalation, which is the cost of inflation from the time of estimate to the time of bid,

construction contingency, which covers inaccuracies in the estimate due to the early stage of conception of the project, as well as some unknowns in the existing conditions,

and owner’s contingency, which is the owner’s ‘relief valve’ to control the project budget as the project progresses, and accounts for minor owner changes to the project scope as the project is better defined during design and construction, as well as owner unforeseens such as unusual soils conditions or additional abatement, etc.

These contingencies allow for successful projects to be completed despite funding being allocated at a relatively early stage.

The grant application Project Costs and Budget section should align with your Detailed project budget in terms of the total project cost, as well as the contingencies identified.

Please keep in mind, the Submittals Based on Project scope may request additional cost estimates or quotes from contractors to serve as cost verification. These should be in addition to the Detailed Project Budget, and should serve to inform your overall project budget. It is very rare that a construction quote should ever represent the full budget for a project. Be sure to review the items in this detailed budget to identify costs to your project beyond what you might receive from a contractor, because contractors often assume the Owner will be responsible for design fees, permitting, unforeseen issues, management, surveys, etc. By spending the time to complete a full budget for your project, you ensure that you have identified the correct actual costs needed to complete a project successfully.

Once you have completed the Detailed Project Budget excel sheet, double check that the total costs and cost/sf look correct at the bottom of the page.

Once you are done with the detailed project budget, upload it into GAINS where prompted on the uploads page.

Use your detailed project budget to determine the Project Cost. This is the figure you will enter in Section III, item C (Project Cost) of the grant application in GAINS. That calculated amount, based on your match, for Item E of Section III in the grant application, or “Requested BEST Grant Amount”, is the figure you will be entering into your budget in GAINS. I suggest writing down the Requested BEST Grant Amount to confirm the amount you will be requesting from BEST, and to make entering that same amount into the GAINS Budget simpler. I’ll walk you through that part of the grant application now.

Once in GAINS, and within your grant application project, navigate to the Budget section. Once in the Budget section, you should see a line for Object Code 5170 – BEST Construction. Click the Modify link to the left of that line.

Then click Add Budget Detail on the upper left, select the Function Code BGA- BEST Grant Amount if not already selected, and enter the BEST Grant Amount (which if you recall is the state’s portion) into the Cost field, leaving the default quantity of 1, and click ‘create’, then you should see the figures reflected in the budget.

After you have completed the budget section of GAINS, the ‘messages’ column may begin to show errors for uncompleted items in the grant application. These messages are hidden until the budget section has an entry, and can help you confirm you are ready to submit once you have gotten through the remainder of the grant application.