



GradNation Acceleration Grant Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the GradNation campaign?

The [GradNation campaign](#) mobilizes Americans to increase the nation's high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and put millions more young people in the path to adult success. America's Promise Alliance leads the campaign with its partners – the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. The campaign provides those working to increase high school graduation rates with data, best practices, and opportunities to connect and learn from one another.

2. What is the GradNation Acceleration Grant?

Based on the committed action of practitioners, we have learned a lot about how states and communities are successfully supporting students to high school graduation. In addition, we have collectively deepened our understanding of the barriers young people face in reaching graduation. The [GradNation Acceleration Grant](#) is led by America's Promise Alliance and generously funded by AT&T.

The grant opportunity seeks to support existing state- and community-level efforts to accelerate progress to a 90 percent graduation rate.

3. Specific states and communities in those states are eligible for the GradNation Acceleration Grant. What are the states?

Ten priority states are eligible for the GradNation Acceleration Grant: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

4. How were the priority states identified?

America's Promise, along with its co-conveners, conducted data analysis to identify 10 states where graduating more students would have a measurable impact on the national graduation rate and on national equity gaps. Nationally, 251,625 more young people would have to graduate to reach a 90 percent graduation rate. As noted in the [2017 Building a Grad Nation report](#), improvements in the national graduation rate require improvement among five groups of students: low-income students, Black and Hispanic/ Latino students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, and those served by low-graduation rate high schools.

The 10 priority states were identified based on a two-step process, first using quantitative data and then qualitative factors. Using raw graduation rate data, we applied a point system that accounted for five indicators: the estimated number of non-graduates, number of disconnected youth, graduation rate gap from the national average, graduation rate change from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2013-2014 school year, and sub-group gaps for Hispanic, Black, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities. Once the point system was applied, we identified 20 states with the highest scores. From the 20 states that emerged from the quantitative analysis, we applied qualitative factors to identify 10 states that had the greatest need based on the data *and* the conditions to accelerate progress. Qualitative factors at this stage included local conditions for timely action, such as policy or leadership conditions, and existing partnerships or coalition work to improve graduation rates.

5. What can the GradNation campaign offer to organizations that are not in a priority state?

The GradNation Acceleration Grant is an effort within the broader GradNation campaign. America’s Promise is committed to continuing to elevate best practices, provide virtual learning opportunities, and tell the story of what is working to get to a 90 percent graduation rate. Visit the [GradNation website](#) for more information on each Action Platform area, for upcoming webinars aligned to the GradNation Action Platform and to [join the GradNation community](#).

6. What is the application process? How will the finalists be notified?

The application process will be conducted as follows –

Application Submission

Applicants should submit their application for funding through the online application portal by midnight on Wednesday, November 8, 2017.

Review Period

America’s Promise Alliance, AT&T, and partner organizations will review applications through December 2017. Please see the [GradNation Acceleration Grant Review Rubric](#) for a sense of the criteria being used to evaluate each application.

Application Notification

Applicants will be notified of a funding decision in January 2018 via an e-mail to the lead organization. AT&T and America’s Promise reserve the right to ask clarifying questions or request additional from finalists.

7. What are the components of a strong application?

The strongest applications will describe a state-or community-level effort that demonstrates 1) an understanding of school-level and community-level graduation rates and related data, 2) a collaborative relationship with high school(s) and/or a district, and 3) a commitment to meet the needs of students most at-risk of not graduating (low-income students, Black and Hispanic/Latino students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, and those served by low-graduation rate high schools). The proposal should describe how the organization is in a position to accelerate its impact on young people in one or more areas of the GradNation Action Platform.

8. What activities are America’s Promise and AT&T interested in funding under the Acceleration Grant?

America’s Promise will fund applicants with proposals that demonstrate an understanding of student needs, have the conditions to accelerate progress, and articulate the desired impact. The range of possible activities is quite broad given the types of activities and strategies that may be used to improve graduation rates. However, the scope of the proposal must be within the content area of one or more GradNation Action Platform items.

America’s Promise acknowledges that limited funding over two years will not, alone, improve graduation rates. As such, proposal review and final awards will be considered in the context of a two-year implementation timeline and the available funding. Applicants are encouraged to braid or blend these funds with existing funds to support young people to graduation. For example, a community non-profit may already be engaged in a dropout prevention strategy but has an opportunity to add a component related to higher schoolers’ social-emotional needs. As another example, a state-level proposal may include a mix of re-grants to select districts and a state-level research effort focused on efforts to locate and re-engage students who leave high school in ninth grade.

9. Does this grant have to be used to create a new project?

No. This grant does not have to be used to create a new project. Rather, it is intended to support existing or promising projects. Note that the purpose of the Acceleration Grant application section titled “Ability to Accelerate” is geared towards determining whether an applicant can point to existing efforts or work to improve graduation rates and is able to accelerate efforts under the grant.

10. How will each application be reviewed?

America’s Promise Alliance, with partner organizations with expertise in the GradNation Action Platform areas, will evaluate proposals using the review criteria included in this application package. Panels of three individuals will evaluate each proposal, score each proposal, and come together to determine which proposals should be funded in each category (two state-level and three community-level grants). Applicants are encouraged

to download and review the GradNation Acceleration [Grant Review Rubric](#) to get a sense of the criteria by which proposals will be reviewed.

11. How will the funds be dispersed?

The grant period will be from January 2018 through January 2020. For state grantees, awards are up to \$125,000 total; funds will be dispersed in four equal parts, two times in each of the two years. Similarly, community grantee awards are up to \$100,000; funds will be dispersed in four equal parts, two times in each of the two years. The first half of the grant will be dispersed upon receiving the the executed signed agreement and the second half upon submission of grant progress report. Applicants are encouraged to download and review the GradNation Acceleration Grant [Budget and Budget Narrative Template](#) as they develop their proposals.

12. If my organization doesn't meet the requirements, but know organizations that does, can we share the funding opportunity?

Yes. We encourage you to share this funding opportunity with other organizations. Please note that applying organizations must meet the definition of "state level organization" or "community level organization" as described in the Funding Background document.

13. Who do I contact for more information?

Please visit the GradNation website for more information about the [GradNation Action Platform](#) and the [GradNation Acceleration Grant](#). If you have any questions, please contact gradnation90@americaspromise.org.

The following questions have been added based on inquiries received after the September 13, 2017 release of the GradNation Acceleration Grant.

14. Is there a particular graduation rate America's Promise is considering?

The GradNation Acceleration Grant is intended for any state or community that is tackling a four-year graduation rate challenge. Since state and local conditions and areas for action differ greatly, there is no specific graduation rate figure required to be considered for this funding opportunity (e.g., 70 percent). Section 1 of the application provides each applicant an opportunity to describe the graduation rate challenge that is being tackled in the proposal. It is in this section that applicants should describe the data that is unique to their communities and youth and how that data informs a particular strategy that supports those students to graduation. In addition, note that proposals should be geared towards graduating more youth in one of the five groups in order to improve the national graduation rate: low-income students, black and Hispanic/latino students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students in low-graduation rate high schools. See the [2017 Building A GradNation](#) report for detailed data.

For example, a community's data may indicate that the graduation rate among students with disabilities is 70 percent, a full 15 points below the district average of 85 percent. Upon closer examination this community has learned that students with disabilities often leave the school system after tenth grade. The Acceleration Grant proposal might be centered on identifying these students in tenth grade and linking them with a local non-profit that provides individualized services for these youth to persist through to graduation.

15. Will proposals be considered if they focus on subgroups of students not listed in the [2017 Building A GradNation](#) report?

An applicant may consider student groups other than the groups listed in question 7, above, if the state- or community-level data indicate a need to support those students towards high school graduation and postsecondary pathways. For example, Native American students, students in juvenile justice programs, and homeless students are not explicitly named above but district-level data may indicate a need to address their non-academic needs. An applicant should not be deterred from applying solely because the student group they will serve does not fit in one of the above-mentioned groups.

16. Will proposals focused on middle school students be considered?

The GradNation Acceleration Grant is geared towards high school age youth in grades 9 to 12. America's Promise is particularly interested in expanding and elevating practices that are working for these students. However, data and practice in a given location may indicate that a strategy with, for example, eighth and ninth graders, improves persistence through to high school graduation. Such a proposal would be considered.

17. What are the project dates for the GradNation Acceleration Grant and are they connected to the dates in the Budget and Budget Narrative Template?

Grantees will be named in January 2018. Following a period of time to finalize the Scope of Work and budget, the first award will be made; precise dates for the project period will be determined during this time. America's Promise appreciates that this does not align perfectly with the academic calendar. However, it allows for a brief planning period prior to the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. In implementation, funding will likely go through the majority of the 2019-2020 school year.

The Budget and Budget Template spreadsheet is provided as an initial template and does not represent the final dates for each quarter of funding. The headings refer to four budget periods because funds will be disbursed four times. The headings are for initial planning and may adjust based on when the first disbursement is actually made.

18. In responding to application questions, should applicants answer each question under a separate sub-heading or together in a single narrative?

America's Promise does not have a preference as to how the application questions are answered. Reviewers will use the [Acceleration Grant Review Criteria](#) to evaluate responses to the application prompts.

19. For state applicants, must the outcomes and milestones be specific to the partnering school district?

State applicants should include a description of expected outcomes and milestones based on what the state expects to achieve in its work with districts. During the course of implementation a state applicant may establish outcomes and milestones for each partner districts. Section 3, Impact, of the application includes a narrative question about the processes and data to inform implementation. State applicants are encouraged to use this narrative to describe how they will ensure that the objectives and milestones of the proposal will be met within partner districts.

20. If a non-profit applicant has service locations in more than one priority state, is it possible to submit more than one application?

A non-profit applicant with locations in more than one of the priority states may submit separate applications for each state or community proposal. Please note the definitions of “eligible state applicant” and “eligible community applicant” to determine whether each separate application is a state or community application.

21. Are proposals involving alternative schools eligible to apply?

Yes, proposals that include alternative schools are eligible to apply.

22. Are letters of support permitted?

Letters of support are permitted but not required. Please send letters of support to gradnation90@americaspromise.org with the Lead Organization in the subject line.

23. If a state organization applying for a GradNation Acceleration Grant intends to select partner districts after it is awarded funds, does the state applicant need to name the partner district(s) in this application?

America’s Promise recognizes that not all state applicants will be able to name district partner(s) at the time of the initial application. For example, a state applicant may have criteria in mind for identifying partner districts, but will not apply that criteria to districts unless awarded funds. Applicants are encouraged to describe that criteria in their proposal to provide reviewers with information about how district partners will eventually be selected. In the “Applicant Information” section related to district partners, please state where in the application information is provided about how district partners are selected (e.g., “See Programs and Activities to Improve Graduation Rate response”). Applicants should also consider including the timing for partner district identification in the Scope of Work submission.