



**Public Schools of North Carolina**  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

# **NCDPI DLI GRANTS**

## **Request for Proposals: Instructional Innovation Grant**

NCSBE shall issue a Request for Proposals (RFP)	April 2, 2026
DLI Informational Grant Webinar Series Begins	April 13, 2026
DLI Grant Submissions Close	June 18, 2026
Selections announced by the NCSBE	August 6, 2026
Program Implementation	August 2026 - June 2027

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## A. Authorizing Legislation

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), on behalf of the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE), issues this Request for Proposals (RFP) for Digital Learning Initiative Grants. In Session Law, 2016-94 (House Bill 1030), Section 8.23 (see <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2015/Bills/House/HTML/H1030v8.html>), the State Board of Education is charged with collaborating with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University to continue the progress in implementing the Digital Learning Plan in North Carolina public schools.

**SECTION 8.23.** The State Board of Education shall collaborate with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University to continue the progress in implementing the Digital Learning Plan in North Carolina public schools by doing at least the following:

- (1) Coordinate the implementation of professional learning programs that support teachers and school administrators in transitioning to digital-age learning.
- (2) Manage statewide cooperative purchasing of content, including statewide shared resources for teachers to use for lesson planning and formative student assessments.
- (3) Develop infrastructure maintenance and support protocols.
- (4) Modify and update State policies to provide the support and flexibility necessary for local digital learning innovation.
- (5) Develop and maintain a continuous improvement process.
- (6) Create assessments for technological and pedagogic skills and identify best practices from those assessments.

## B. Purpose of the Program

As education continues to evolve across North Carolina, the Digital Learning Initiative Grants will provide targeted support to Public School Units (PSUs) through two pathways designed to strengthen digital teaching and learning. These competitive grants will assist PSUs in addressing emerging instructional challenges, leveraging innovative technologies, and expanding educator capacity. The goal is to identify and elevate models of instructional innovation that demonstrate digital leadership, support educator professional growth, and student outcomes aligned to high-quality digital learning practices.

**Applications may only be submitted by North Carolina Public School Units (PSUs)**, including traditional public school districts, charter schools, lab schools, and regional schools that have completed their 2024-2025 Digital Learning Media Inventory as well as their PSU's Digital Learning Progress Rubric. **Businesses and non-public school unit entities are not eligible to apply.** The grant period for each pathway will begin in Fall 2026 and conclude in Spring 2027.

**Instructional Innovation Grant: Available Pathways for the 2026-2027 School Year:**

- **Professional Learning: Pathway 1** supports high-quality professional learning aligned with the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan and the ISTE-aligned Digital Learning Competencies, prioritizing the development of educator capacity to transform digital teaching and learning in ways that measurably improve student learning experiences and outcomes. Funded initiatives must clearly define the professional learning model and its instructional alignment, demonstrating how educator mastery of the Digital Learning Competencies will produce meaningful shifts in classroom practice and strengthen student agency, engagement, ownership of learning, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and authentic application of knowledge. Professional learning must extend beyond isolated workshops.
- **Innovative Technologies: Pathway 2** supports the purposeful integration of innovative instructional technologies aligned with the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan and the ISTE-aligned Digital Learning Competencies, prioritizing instructional innovation that measurably enhances student learning experiences and outcomes. Funded initiatives must clearly define the innovation and its instructional alignment, demonstrating how selected tools or models deepen student learning and strengthen learner agency, engagement, ownership of learning, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and authentic application of knowledge. All technology implementations must include a structured professional learning plan and a clearly defined sustainability strategy. Hardware and software purchases are allowable only when embedded within an approved instructional innovation initiative. Infrastructure-only proposals are not eligible.

**C. Award Information and Submission Guidelines**

<b>Estimated Number of Awards:</b>	The State Board of Education will award, based on the quality of the applications and the number of applications received, up to 10 grants.
<b>Estimated Size of Awards:</b>	Funds will be awarded based on the pool of approved applications and the recurring funds available. Traditional public school districts may receive grants of up to \$50,000. Charter, laboratory, and Regional Schools may receive up to \$20,000 for a one-year grant period.
<b>Project Period:</b>	The grant period for each pathway will begin in Fall 2026 and conclude in Spring 2027.

## **D. Allowable Use of Grant Funds**

### **Allowable Use of Funds**

Funds awarded to Public School Units (PSUs) must be used solely to support the objectives and intended outcomes of the approved grant proposal. Allowable expenditures include the following:

#### **Professional Learning and Capacity Building**

- Contracted professional development services
- Offsite professional development aligned to grant objectives
- Professional development-related expenses
- Reimbursement for stipends
- Substitute Teachers

#### **Instructional Technology and Innovation**

- Hardware and software purchases are allowable only when embedded within an approved instructional innovation initiative. Infrastructure-only proposals are not eligible.
- Purchases of emerging technologies that align with instructional innovation and strategic planning priorities

#### **Operational and Implementation Costs**

- State subsistence rates and allowances
- Transportation costs
- Sustenance (not to exceed 10% of the total award)
- Furniture that is necessary to support the approved initiative
- Printing and duplicating costs (not to exceed 5% of the total award)

Within the budget section, all applicants must provide a detailed budget narrative that clearly describes all cost estimates and explains how each expenditure directly supports the program deliverables and stakeholders. Grant funds may not be used to supplant existing funding sources or to refresh, replace, or upgrade existing devices outside of the approved instructional innovation scope.

## **E. Required Grant Deliverables and Expectations**

### **Program Deliverables**

1. **Statewide Presentation Requirement**  
Funded PSUs are required to present project progress, implementation insights, and measurable outcomes at NCDPI's NCEdConnect Conference and DLI Grants Collaborative Showcase.
2. **Resource Sharing and Dissemination**  
Funded PSUs must share project resources, tools, and documented best practices through DPI-designated dissemination channels during and upon completion of the grant period as directed by NCDPI.

### **Fiscal Compliance Requirements**

3. **Adherence to Approved Budget**  
Grant funds must be expended in accordance with the approved budget submitted and awarded as part of the grant application.
4. **Prior Approval for Budget Modifications**  
Any proposed modification to the approved budget must be submitted in writing and receive prior written approval from the DLI Grant Manager before implementation or expenditure. Failure to obtain prior written approval may result in the disallowance of costs or the forfeiture of funds.

### **Project Scope Integrity**

5. **Consistency of Approved Goals and Objectives**  
The approved project goal and associated objectives must remain consistent with the awarded proposal. Substantive changes to the project scope, goals, or intended outcomes require prior written approval from the DLI Grant Manager before implementation.

## F. Submission Process and Requirements

### Submission Process

All required application materials must be submitted electronically through the designated [Google Form](#). We recommend that applicants first create a forced copy of the [application template](#) and complete all components within that template. Signature pages may be uploaded separately in scanned or PDF format as part of the Google Form submission.

If a link does not open from your PDF viewer, copy and paste the URL into your browser.  
Application Template (forced copy): [go.ncdpi.gov/DLICopyRFP2627](https://go.ncdpi.gov/DLICopyRFP2627)  
Submission Form (submit here): [go.ncdpi.gov/DLISubmission](https://go.ncdpi.gov/DLISubmission)

**Deadline:** Applications must be submitted by 5:00 PM Eastern Time on June 18, 2026

**Submission limit:** One application per Public School Unit (PSU).

Applications are considered submitted when the confirmation message appears after clicking Submit.

Incomplete or late submissions will not be considered.

### Formatting Requirements

Applicants must use the provided application template without altering section headings and must adhere to all stated page limits for each section. Clear headings corresponding to each required component must be maintained throughout the application. Narrative responses should be concise and directly aligned to the prompts provided. Supplementary materials may be included only within the permitted appendix page limit.

### Required Components:

The complete application must include the following:

1. Preliminary Materials and Contact Information:
  - a. Cover Page
  - b. Table of Contents
2. Objectives and Intended Outcomes: Up to two pages
3. Timeline and Activities: Up to two pages
4. Program Narrative: Up to five pages
5. Proposed Budget: Up to one page
6. Page of Assurances
  - a. May be uploaded and scanned separately
  - b. Does not count toward total page limit
7. Additional Appendices: Up to five pages, Optional

## G. Digital Learning Initiative Grants Rubric

Criteria	0: Not Evident	1: Developing	2: Acceptable	3: Exemplary
<b>Project Goal, Need, and Intended Impact</b>	Goal, need, and impact are missing, unclear, or not measurable.	Goal and need are present but broad; limited data rationale; impact is vague.	Goal is clear and measurable; need is data-informed; intended educator and/or student impact is reasonably defined.	The goal is highly specific and measurable; the need is strongly data-informed, with clear analysis; and the impact is compelling and clearly tied to educator practice and student outcomes.
<b>Standards Alignment and Innovative Instructional Approach</b> (NC Digital Learning Plan + ISTE-aligned)	No meaningful standards alignment; not instructional innovation or reads primarily as a refresh or device purchases.	Mentions alignment and innovation, but connections are superficial or inconsistent.	Clear alignment to NC Digital Learning Plan and ISTE-aligned competencies; innovation is instructionally grounded.	Alignment is explicit and drives project design; innovation is high-leverage and advances student agency, engagement, and deeper learning aligned to the selected pathway.
<b>Plan Quality and Feasibility</b> (Activities, timeline coherence, roles, key components)	Activities/timeline missing or not feasible; sequencing is unclear.	Basic plan exists but lacks specificity, milestones, roles, or realistic sequencing.	Plan is feasible and coherent; timeline includes major milestones and aligns to objectives and PSU needs.	Implementation-ready plan with clear sequencing, milestones, responsibilities, and inclusion of key components (professional learning and/or innovation integration, rollout, and any publication/sharing steps).
<b>Program Narrative Quality and Coherence</b> (background, readiness, clarity of project description)	Narrative missing or unclear; insufficient detail to understand the project.	Narrative present but fragmented; limited readiness evidence or unclear description of the project.	Narrative clearly explains project background and readiness; proposal is understandable and cohesive.	Narrative is compelling and well-organized; it demonstrates readiness, clear rationale, and a coherent story that strengthens the full application.
<b>Evaluation</b> and Continuous Improvement	No evaluation plan or measurable indicators.	Evaluation mentioned, but metrics, data sources, or an analysis plan are weak.	Measurable outcomes and a workable evaluation plan for monitoring impact.	Strong evaluation system with clear student impact metrics, educator practice indicators, data analysis and reporting plan, and an explicit improvement cycle.
<b>Stakeholder</b> Engagement and Dissemination	No credible plan for stakeholder involvement or dissemination beyond the PSU.	Limited engagement; the dissemination plan lacks clarity, reach, or realism.	Stakeholders meaningfully included; dissemination plan is clear and feasible.	Robust engagement with multiple feedback methods; dissemination is comprehensive and positions the work to benefit other PSUs.
<b>Budget</b> Quality, Allowable Use, and Compliance Readiness	Budget missing or noncompliant; weak/absent rationale; not aligned to allowable uses.	Partially aligned but unclear rationale or questionable items; limited compliance readiness.	Aligns to proposal and allowable uses; clear rationale; shows readiness to manage funds appropriately.	Tightly aligned and clearly justified; demonstrates compliance readiness, including prior written approval for budget changes and for substantive changes to goals/objectives.
<b>Application Completeness and Submission Compliance</b>	Missing required components or major submission violations.	Mostly complete with minor compliance issues.	Complete and compliant submission.	Exceptionally clear, well-organized, fully compliant submission that is easy to review.
<b>Dissemination and Required Deliverables</b>	No plan for DPI-directed dissemination is included.	A sharing plan is mentioned, but the required deliverables are missing or unclear.	Plan includes the required statewide presentation and DPI-directed dissemination with basic timelines and artifacts.	Plan clearly integrates required deliverables with a realistic timeline, defined roles, and strong evidence of resource sharing and measurable outcomes.

## H. DLI Grant Support

Each week, a webinar will be offered to support PSUs with their grant applications. The first 30 minutes will be dedicated to providing information about the Digital Learning Initiative Grant or best practices in grant writing. The remaining 30 minutes will be open to PSUs to ask questions. Webinars will be recorded and available for review on the [DLI Grants website](#). Please email [Lindsey.Sipe@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:Lindsey.Sipe@dpi.nc.gov) for face-to-face support requests or 1:1 virtual meetings.

Grant Overview and Support Sessions	
Date and Time	Topic & Webinar Link
<b>April 13, 2026</b> 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.	<a href="#">Overview of the Digital Learning Initiative Instructional Innovation Grant</a>
<b>April 23, 2026</b> 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.	<a href="#">Grant Guru: Learn the art of grant storytelling while building a clear, funder-ready proposal.</a> This session covers structuring your narrative with purpose, communicating project goals clearly, and creating a transparent, well-justified budget aligned with deliverables and funding requirements.
<b>April 29, 2026</b> 3 p.m. - 4 p.m.	<a href="#">Overview of the Digital Learning Initiative Instructional Innovation Grant</a>
<b>May 5, 2026</b> 12 p.m. - 1 p.m.	<a href="#">Grant Guru: Learn the art of grant storytelling while building a clear, funder-ready proposal.</a> This session covers structuring your narrative with purpose, communicating project goals clearly, and creating a transparent, well-justified budget aligned with deliverables and funding requirements.
<b>May 12, 2026</b> 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.	<a href="#">Overview of the Digital Learning Initiative Instructional Innovation Grant</a>
<b>April/May Office Hours</b> April 17 - May 29, 2026 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.	<a href="#">Lunch with Lindsey: April and May Office Hours (Every Friday)</a> Bring your lunch and join me to ask questions, talk through your grant, and connect with others. You can also listen in, share ideas, and learn from what others are doing.
<b>June Office Hours</b> June 4 - June 25, 2026 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.	<a href="#">Lunch with Lindsey: June Office Hours (Every Thursday)</a> Bring your lunch and join me to ask questions, talk through your grant, and connect with others. You can also listen in, share ideas, and learn from what others are doing.

## I. Clause for Originality

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP must be original works of the applicant and free from plagiarism. Proposals should not rely on AI-generated content unless explicitly disclosed. If AI tools are utilized during the development of the proposal, applicants must clearly identify the tools used, describe their specific contributions, and ensure that the final submission adheres to the goals and ethical standards outlined in this RFP.

### AI Transparency Requirements

Applicants who use AI tools in the preparation of their proposals must include the following information:

1. **Disclosure of AI Tools Used:**
  - Detail the AI tools used during proposal preparation, including their purpose and contributions (e.g., ChatGPT, Perplexity, DALL-E).
  - Provide a brief explanation of how these tools were employed (e.g., drafting initial text, generating ideas, refining grammar).
2. **Description of AI Contribution:**
  - Detail the sections or components of the proposal that were influenced by AI tools.
  - Include a justification for using AI and how it enhanced the quality or efficiency of the proposal.
  - Link with original GenAI artifacts to document your work and how it evolved from partnering with AI
3. **Exemplar of AI Documentation:** This exemplar is provided as a professional guide and does not need to be followed verbatim. It serves as a flexible framework for documenting the use of AI tools in brainstorming and project development.

### Penalties for Non-Compliance

Proposals that fail to disclose AI use, do not meet originality standards, or cannot provide evidence of compliance with ethical AI practices may be disqualified from consideration.