

ND CLIMBS Legendary Learners Funding Opportunity 2 Guidance

Background & Summary

The North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy Improvement through Measured Building Systems (ND CLIMBS) grant is funded by the federal Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) program. North Dakota received \$44.5 million from the federal department to implement programs that aim to increase literacy achievement for students in the state's most at-risk schools between 2024 and 2029. Legendary Learners is the birth through age 5 portion of this grant.

Elementary schools receiving this grant will implement community-driven initiatives designed to foster collaboration, engage families, and enhance school readiness. Guided by evidence-based literacy practices, each participating school will designate a Legendary Learners Coordinator to lead this work, cultivating a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Application Guidance

LEA Eligibility and Prioritization:

The application window for the Legendary Learners Funding Opportunity 2 is open from December 10, 2025, to January 21, 2026. Eligible local educational agencies (LEAs) are invited to submit one or more applications for schools that wish to participate in Legendary Learners programming.

Eligible entities are described in ESEA Section [2221\(b\)\(2\)](#) as: “an entity that consists of one or more local educational agencies that serve a high percentage of high-need schools.”

High-need schools are described in ESEA Section [2221\(b\)\(3\)](#) as “an elementary school or middle school in which not less than 50 percent of the enrolled students are children from low-income families; or a high school in which not less than 40 percent of the enrolled students are children from low-income families. ”

A list of [eligible entities](#) can be found on the NDDPI webpage.

Priority will be given to LEAs that apply for schools identified under the Fostering Improved Results for School Transformation (NDFIRST), Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI), and Targeted School Improvement (TSI) programs.

[Eligible entities](#) interested in applying for ND CLIMBS funds must complete the application form.

The application scoring tool can be found [here](#) and should be reviewed in its entirety before completing the application. Section I of the rubric outlines the predetermined scores for each entity. Section II of the rubric outlines the portions of the application that will be reviewed and scored by a selected reviewer.

The Local Needs Assessment accounts for 55 of the 100 total points available. It serves as a detailed reflection of your school's literacy landscape. The final narrative should be no more than 20 pages in length.

The Leadership Commitment and Authority Letter of Application is worth 15 points and must be completed by the principal of the school on behalf of which the LEA is applying. This letter is imperative in establishing the commitment level of school leadership in implementing the Legendary Learners programming.

Technical Assistance:

The NDDPI will be hosting an application Q&A webinar on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. CT. This webinar will walk through the application pieces and answer questions that arise from the field. All questions that are asked will be documented and shared on the ND CLIMBS webpage.

Questions that arise outside of the webinar should be asked in writing. Questions can be emailed to Taylor Olsen (tlolsen@nd.gov).

Grant Assurances

This section of the guidance document provides a detailed explanation of each assurance associated with the grant award. Please read through each carefully.

Prioritize at-risk children.

Grant activities should focus on providing the highest quality literacy education for all children from birth to age five within the community. Particular attention should be given to students with learning disabilities, English learners, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ensuring that these at-risk populations receive the necessary resources and support to achieve academic success.

Supplement, not supplant funding.

All expenditures made using grant funds must comply with the Supplement, Not Supplant requirements. Additional guidance and details regarding these requirements can be found in the spending guidance section of this document.

Conduct a local needs assessment for the application process

A template for the local needs assessment is available [here](#). Please also refer to the [scoring rubric](#) for more information.

Cooperate and comply with state and national literacy evaluations, including responding appropriately to performance feedback and engaging in a continuous improvement process.

As part of the evaluation of the ND CLIMBS & Legendary Learners programs, MC² has been contracted to collect data and develop annual evaluation reports. Participating schools' data will be shared with the contractor, who may contact schools directly to request additional information as needed. Schools are expected to comply with all reasonable requests from the contractor. Any concerns should be directed to Taylor Olsen.

The business manager will engage in grant process training and updates.

A course for the Educational Hub is currently in development. Additional information will be provided in this section as it becomes available.

Administer North Dakota Academic Progression of Learning & Understanding of Students (ND A+) interim assessments.

The NDA+ suite of assessments is available at no cost to all schools in North Dakota. Data collected through NDA+ will be used to inform program evaluation and contribute to state reporting on the project. NDA+ interim assessments will be administered in the fall for all incoming kindergartners.

Maintain Legendary Learner Coordinator participation in the State cohort.

The State will provide a virtual improvement network for Legendary Learner Coordinators at Legendary Learner schools. This network, led by Sterling Literacy, will include regular meetings and learning opportunities. This network is intended to expand to statewide access by SY 2027-2028.

Develop and demonstrate implementation of a school readiness transition plan.

Legendary Learners schools will be expected to create a community plan for School Readiness Transition. This plan should be developed by a team comprising school personnel, family members, and community members, led by the Legendary Learners Coordinator. This project will be informed by work done at DHHS and learning from the State cohort.

Submit annual review and reapplication documentation.

Annually, schools will be required to complete a status report reapplication in WebGrants. The report will be available during March and April and must be submitted to secure funding for the following year. Schools will provide information on compliance topics, including time and effort record-keeping and engagement with the grant activities, as well as updates on implementation and progress.

As part of the annual review, NDDPI staff will evaluate WebGrants submissions and attendance records. Schools demonstrating potential non-compliance will undergo a more in-depth monitoring review and may be required to submit additional reporting in the subsequent year.

Allocate reasonable funds for personnel, consulting contracts, supplies, professional development, travel, and other necessary expenses, as outlined in the program narrative, to meet the needs and goals of the program and ensure compliance with all grant requirements.

When funds are initially issued to subgrantees, certain items will already be allocated in the budget. Required activities, such as network fees, will be pre-populated on budget lines that cannot be altered. Any additional purchases a school wishes to make with Legendary Learners funds must undergo an approval process. Contract amendments submitted through WebGrants serve as this approval mechanism. Schools must submit a contract amendment **before** purchasing any items with grant funds. Expenditures made without approval may become the financial responsibility of the LEA if the activity is not approved. Subgrantees are also required to submit justification documents as part of the budgeting process. Further guidance on these documents can be found in the budgeting section of this document.

Ensure or work toward aligning the K-3 reading curriculum with the requirements of the North Dakota Century Code, including the removal of contrary practices.

Participating schools will need to demonstrate a K-3 reading curriculum that is wholly aligned to the ND Century Code. This may be achieved through receiving a three-year approval for the Reading Curriculum and Professional Development report, which is submitted annually in STARS by all ND K-3 principals. If a school is in a non-reporting year, grantees may be asked to submit alternative evidence to support their claims. Round 1 applicants must show alignment by SY 2026-2027, and round 2 applicants by SY 2027-2028. Contrary practices are outlined in [this document](#).

Spending Guidance and WebGrants

Allowability

Before making any purchases with ND CLIMBS funds, schools should consider whether the expenditure would constitute supplanting and whether it represents a justifiable use of grant resources. The sections on **Supplement vs. Supplant** and **Justification** below provide further guidance on these considerations.

Legendary Learners is funded through the federal Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant, which aims to expand access to and improve literacy achievement. All expenditures should support this purpose by enhancing access to high-quality literacy instruction and positively impacting student outcomes. The goals of the Legendary Learners grant can be found [here](#) (link).

Supplement vs. Supplant

Note: This guidance applies specifically to the ND CLIMBS grant.

Key Terms

- **Supplement** – “in addition to” **Supplant** – “to take the place of”

Implications for ND CLIMBS Funding

All expenditures must **supplement** existing programs and resources rather than **supplant** them. Grant funds should be used to enhance or expand literacy instruction and related activities, rather than replacing state, local, or other federal funding that would otherwise support these initiatives.

- Legendary Learners funds cannot be used in place of local funds for a state-mandated activity.
- Legendary Learners funds cannot be used in place of local funds for an activity that is already established.
- Legendary Learners funds should be used to enhance and expand the activities already occurring at your building to meet the specific goals of the Legendary Learners grant.

Implications for salaries:

- Existing positions funded with state or local resources cannot be replaced with Legendary Learners grant funds.
- New positions created with grant funds must include a job description that clearly demonstrates how the role supports grant activities.
- Current employees cannot simply receive a new job title and have their salaries shifted to grant funds if they continue performing the same responsibilities as before.

Implications for Professional Development & Training:

- Professional development or training that was previously funded by state or local resources cannot be shifted to Legendary Learners grant funds.

Implications for Supplies, Materials, Subscriptions, and Licenses:

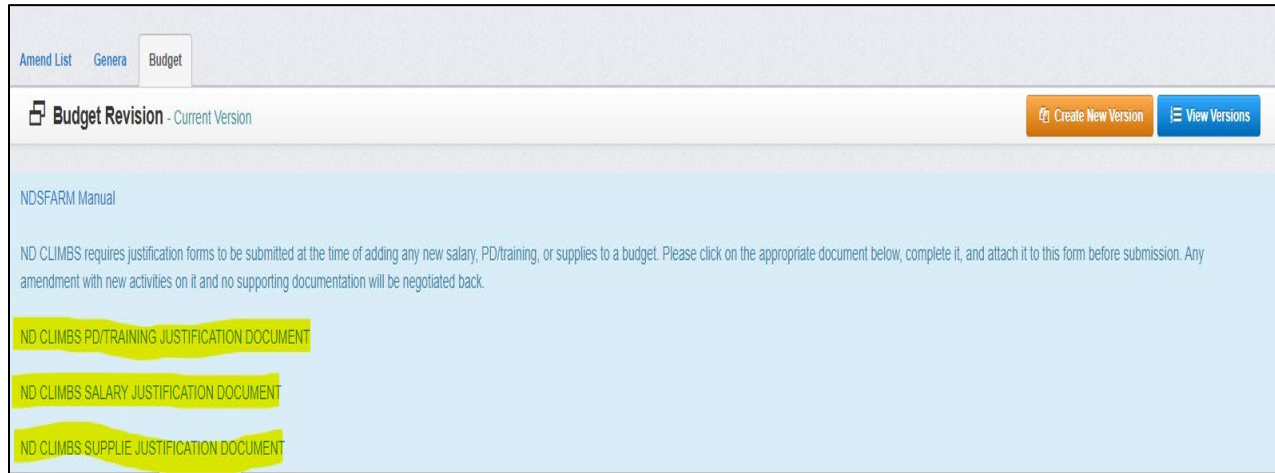
- Items required by state law must be funded with local resources. Examples include:
 - K–3 reading interventions, curriculum, and supplemental reading materials
 - Assessment systems, including interim assessments and dyslexia screeners

Justification

All expenditures for salaries, professional development, and supplies & materials must undergo the justification process before being added to the budget. Justification documents are available within WebGrants and can be accessed directly from the contract amendment form while it is in editing status.

These justification forms must be attached to the contract amendment at the time of submission for any new activities. Activities that have already been approved do not require a justification document, except in the following cases:

- **Salaries:** Justification should be submitted annually as part of time and effort compliance.
- **Out-of-State Professional Development:** A justification form is required each time out-of-state PD is requested, even if the event was attended previously. If additional staff are added to attend, a separate form must be submitted to justify their participation.



The screenshot displays a web interface for 'Budget Revision - Current Version'. At the top, there are tabs for 'Amend List', 'General', and 'Budget'. Below the tabs, the title 'Budget Revision - Current Version' is shown, followed by two buttons: 'Create New Version' and 'View Versions'. The main content area has a light blue background and contains the text 'NDSFARM Manual'. Below this, a paragraph states: 'ND CLIMBS requires justification forms to be submitted at the time of adding any new salary, PD/training, or supplies to a budget. Please click on the appropriate document below, complete it, and attach it to this form before submission. Any amendment with new activities on it and no supporting documentation will be negotiated back.' At the bottom of the page, three yellow buttons are visible, each with a document icon and the text: 'ND CLIMBS PD/TRAINING JUSTIFICATION DOCUMENT', 'ND CLIMBS SALARY JUSTIFICATION DOCUMENT', and 'ND CLIMBS SUPPLIE JUSTIFICATION DOCUMENT'.