

ND CLIMBS Application 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 US Department of Education to implement programs that aim to increase literacy achievement for students in the state's most at-risk schools between 2024 and 2029.

Schools receiving this grant will implement a model of intensive, continuous improvement efforts at both the system and individual educator levels. Many grant activities are already defined for schools, including implementing the BARR model schoolwide and participation in network improvement groups. Applicants should carefully review all grant assurances to understand the comprehensive nature of principal and educator engagement in carrying out the required activities throughout the grant's life. All documents referred to throughout this guidance are available on the [ND CLIMBS webpage](#).

Application Guidance

LEA Eligibility and Prioritization:

The application window for ND CLIMBS 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 ND CLIMBS 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. ”

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. The application scoring tool can be found [here](#) (link) 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. A Local Needs Assessment template is available online to support the development of a clear and complete narrative.

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 ND CLIMBS programming.

Technical Assistance:

NDDPI will be hosting an application Q&A webinar on Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 1:00 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 emailed to Taylor Olsen (tlolsen@nd.gov).

Grant Assurances

The following section 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, evidence-based literacy education for all students within the school. 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.

Conduct a local needs assessment for the application process

Directions and guidance for the local needs assessment can be found in the template guidance.

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 program, 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.

Contract with Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) for new or continuing services.

BARR plays a pivotal role in aligning each school's systems to support sustainable, systematic change. The three-year, evidence-based program is designed to help schools establish relationship-centered structures that address the needs of all students. Program requirements include identifying a local coordinator to meet regularly and virtually with the assigned BARR coach,

providing annual professional development for staff and making scheduling adjustments to allow time for class and teacher collaboration, focused on relationship building and data-informed decision-making. Additional information about the BARR Center is available on its [website](#).

Administer North Dakota Academic Progression of Learning & Understanding of Students (NDA+) 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 are to be administered in the fall, winter, and spring, with the summative assessment conducted in the spring for applicable grades. While the NAVVY formative assessment is not required, its use is strongly encouraged.

Ensure a 75% or greater completion of educator biannual survey(s)

Beginning in Spring 2026, confidence surveys will be administered via Qualtrics to all educators in participating ND CLIMBS buildings. The survey results will inform the work of the Educator Network and contribute to the evaluation of the program. Schools will receive reports on survey participation, and the State requests that schools actively support efforts to ensure that at least 75% of their educators complete and submit the survey.

Maintain the engagement of administrative instructional leaders (principals) in the network improvement community.

The Literacy Leaders Improvement Network (LLIN) is a required component of the ND CLIMBS grant. The development of the network will occur during Year 1 of grant implementation (2025-2026), with full participation commencing in Year 2 of grant implementation (2026-2027). All school principals are required to engage, and LLIN, in partnership with the State, will establish the criteria for full engagement with the network.

Maintain educator participation in the Networked Improvement Model.

Similar to the LLIN, the State will provide an improvement network for educators at ND CLIMBS schools. A design team, led by Marzano Resources and incorporating educator input, is currently determining the structure of this network. Detailed requirements and expectations will be added to this section once finalized. The networks are scheduled to begin meetings in the 2026–2027 school year.

Local Literacy Plan

The following sections comprise the local literacy plan that each school team will develop. Local literacy plans are designed to keep schools focused on goal setting and improving student outcomes. Each school will submit its own plan, which the school's literacy team will complete. Schools that are part of larger districts should consider input from district-level decision-makers during the development of the plan. A dedicated module in the Educational Hub will support each section of the local literacy plan.

- **Professional Learning Plan – Develop and Implement**

Previously referred to as the Professional Development Plan, this section addresses not only the professional development (PD) and professional learning (PL) activities in which the school will participate but also how the school will determine PD needs, support implementation, and define the roles of all staff members in professional learning.

- **Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC) Plan – Develop and Implement**

Schools must develop and demonstrate the implementation of a GVC plan rooted in a well-rounded education. The plan should focus on Tier 1 instruction and guide decisions regarding high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), scope and sequence, and vertical alignment. Elementary buildings should demonstrate complete alignment with the ND Century Code by the start of SY 2026–2027 for Round 1 awardees and by the beginning of SY 2027–2028 for Round 2 awardees, addressing the elimination of practices and resources contrary to the Science of Reading. A list and explanation of contrary practices can be found [here](#).

- **Assessment and Intervention Pathway Plan – Develop and Implement**

This section focuses on meeting the needs of all students. Teams will determine how various types of data will inform instructional decisions and help select tools and materials for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. The plan should address scheduling (both during the school day and after-school programming), tier transitions, and progress monitoring processes.

- **Family and Community Engagement Plan – Develop and Implement**

Teams will develop and implement strategies to facilitate two-way communication with parents and caregivers, integrate family and community perspectives into decision-making, and foster a welcoming environment for all families.

- **Grade-Level Transition Plan – Develop and Implement**

This plan addresses practices and activities to ensure both incoming and exiting students are prepared for transitions into the LEA and between grades or subjects. It emphasizes vertical alignment between LEA buildings and early learning entities, both academically and behaviorally, and identifies the knowledge and skills students should demonstrate as they progress from one teacher to another and from one grade to another.

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, survey responses, 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 evidence-based activities, including expenses for personnel, consulting contracts, supplies, professional development, travel, and other necessary expenses, as outlined in the program narrative, to meet the program's needs and goals 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 BARR contract amounts and network fees, will be pre-populated on budget lines that cannot be altered. Any additional purchases a school wishes to make with ND CLIMBS funds must undergo an approval process to ensure allowability and to verify that the activity meets the required levels of evidence. 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.

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.

ND CLIMBS is funded through the federal CLSD grant, which aims to expand access to and improve literacy achievement among students. All expenditures should support this purpose by enhancing access to high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction and positively impacting student outcomes. The goals of the ND CLIMBS grant can be found [here](#).

Given the grant's focus on building-level system improvement, investments such as BARR are intended to establish sustainable systems and practices that support both educators and students. Decision-making should also be guided by the local literacy plan developed as part of this grant. The plan's sections provide a framework for determining needs, setting goals, and prioritizing actions that will contribute to improved student literacy achievement.

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 evidence-based literacy instruction and related activities, rather than replacing state, local, or other federal funding that would otherwise support these initiatives.

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

Implications for salaries:

- Existing positions funded with state or local resources cannot be replaced with ND CLIMBS 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:

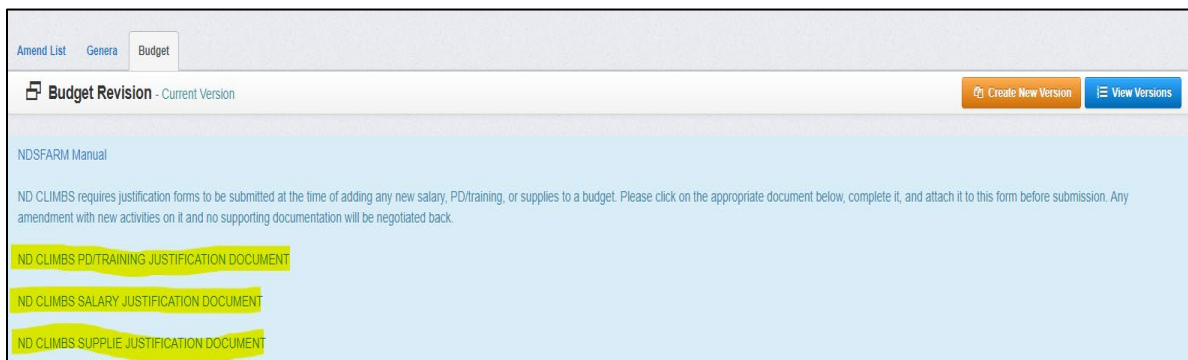
- Professional development or training that was previously funded by state or local resources cannot be shifted to ND CLIMBS grant funds.

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 (excluding BARR conference): 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.