

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT
OF 1984

South Carolina
Commission on
Higher Education

South
Carolina
Centers of
Excellence

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

**FISCAL YEAR
2025-2026**

***Effective Teacher Training that
Focuses on the Knowledge, Skills, and
Characteristics of the Profile of the
South Carolina Graduate***

Administered by:
S.C. Commission on Higher Education
1122 Lady Street, Suite 400
Columbia, SC 29201

Intent to Submit Form Due:
September 26, 2025

Technical Assistance Workshop
2:00-4:00 pm,
September 30, 2025

Proposal Deadline:
November 5, 2025

For further information, please
contact:

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E-mail: lyin@che.sc.gov

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1984 FY 2025-26

PURPOSE OF THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

The purpose of this competitive grant program is to enable eligible institutions, or groupings of such institutions, to serve as "state-of-the-art" resource centers for South Carolina in a specific area related to the improvement of teacher education. Teacher education encompasses both in-service and pre-service training. These "resource centers" develop and model state-of-the-art teaching practices, conduct research, disseminate information, and provide training for P-12 and higher education personnel in the Center's specific area of expertise. Research has shown that the single greatest factor influencing student achievement is teacher quality. In order for the state to attain its education goals, we must ensure that all students have access to highly qualified teachers and educational programs. Towards this goal, **the focus of the Centers of Excellence Program is to concentrate on assisting rural¹/underperforming² schools and districts.** The Commission on Higher Education (CHE) envisions the Center to be a university-wide effort. Typical activities include:

- developing and modeling state-of-the-art pre-service preparation programs for other institutions of higher education to emulate that focus on increasing the number of teachers appropriately prepared to work effectively with students in underperforming schools and with diverse needs;
- conducting statewide school-based and campus-based faculty development activities related to State content and assessment standards;
- conducting research and evaluation activities related to teacher quality and student achievement;
- serving as a state (and/or regional and national) clearinghouse for information dissemination on center activities; and
- providing demonstration, outreach, and technical assistance programs for low performing schools and districts and institutions of higher education as requested.

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

Any public or private college/university in the State authorized by the State Board of Education to offer one or more-degree programs at graduate or undergraduate levels for the preparation of teachers is eligible to apply. **To assist in the outreach to the State's rural schools and/or underperforming schools,** the Center should engage faculty and students from across the university as appropriate for the specific Center focus.

¹ Definition of Rural, Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster(<https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/>).

² Underperforming refers to a school's rating that is "below average" or "unsatisfactory" based on the [South Carolina School Report Card](#).

Although collaborative proposals involving more than one institution are welcome and encouraged, one institution must be designated as the fiscal agent.

Institutions that currently receive State funding for a Center of Excellence may apply for a second Center with a different focus. However, simultaneous **state funding is limited to a maximum of two Centers for each institution**. Institutions that do not comply with the CHE's programmatic and budgetary reporting requirements are not eligible to submit a proposal for the year following the non-compliance.

Institutions interested in submitting a proposal for FY 2025-26 should submit an "Intent to Submit Proposal" form to the CHE on or before **September 26, 2025**. This Intent to Submit in no way commits the institution to submit a proposal but assists staff in preparation for the review process. **A mandatory virtual Technical Assistance Workshop will be held on September 30, 2025, for all project directors who submit the Intent to Submit form**. Institutions must attend the technical assistance workshop in order to submit a full proposal on or before **November 5, 2025**.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

1. Purpose

A Center must focus on developing and modeling state-of-the-art teacher training programs (in-service and pre-service) at the host institution as well as serve as a catalyst for changing teacher training programs at other institutions of higher education which prepare and support teachers. Centers should enhance the institution's professional development programs as an integral part of its mission and focus services on rural and/or underperforming schools or priority schools. Target schools and districts are those that have a rating of "below average" or "unsatisfactory" and a poverty index of > 75%. The goal of the program is to increase higher education's involvement in working more closely with underperforming schools through professional development, teacher education programs, and other units within the institution. State-of-the-art practices include but are not limited to:

- innovative practices that enable school personnel to improve student achievement;
- collaboration with major education stakeholders, including local school districts and schools, other higher education institutions and Centers of Excellence, professional associations, parent groups, and the private sector;
- field-based teacher education programs, including professional development schools that are aligned with in-service teacher professional development;
- technology-based instructional techniques;
- innovative practices for teaching children with diverse backgrounds and diverse learning styles; and
- assistance to teachers in understanding state content and assessment standards and how to help all students meet or exceed these standards.

The Center's activities must directly support one or more existing educational programs at the institution. There should be clearly defined benefits for both P-12 and higher education in the State and these should be

directly linked to the training of high-quality teachers and raising student academic achievement. The Center should demonstrate how the activities will support the improvement of underperforming school partners and be tied to State content and assessment standards. The Center should address the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.

2. Achievement of Excellence

A proposed Center must demonstrate a substantial likelihood of achieving success with its P-12 partners and developing a reputation for statewide excellence within the three-year State funding period. Annual measurable benchmarks for evaluating progress toward the stated goals must be included in the proposal, as well as a list of targeted specific achievements.

3. Institutional Commitment

A Center must be funded in part by the lead institution to demonstrate its commitment to the proposed Center's goals and objectives and its commitment to working with rural and/or underperforming P-12 schools and districts. The awarded funding will be managed by CHE staff and the Centers shall submit projected and actual expenditure documents to the CHE for funding throughout the project year within the allocated award amount.

The proposal must demonstrate a match of institutional/external support from higher education and/or business partners. Support can be in-kind, release time, financial commitment, change to academic programs, or inclusion of the project in the institution's service-learning program, among others. Matching funds from district partners, if available, are encouraged.

4. Center Director's Commitment

The Center Director (s) must be committed to attending the mandatory director's meeting three times a year (one in Fall, one in February, and one in summer) and supporting the Center of Excellence statewide activities during the award term.

If the Center Director leaves the institution during the award term, the grant can be managed by the co-director. If there is no co-director, the funds can be transferrable within the institution for the remaining fiscal year. The institution must provide supporting documents and justification for the CHE's review and approval. If the grant has not finished its award term, the CHE reserves the right to rescind the remaining funds from the institution.

4. Collaboration with Related Centers, State Department of Education Initiatives, or Major Education Stakeholders

A Center **must** design its programs and activities as follows:

- in collaboration with rural school(s)/district(s) and/or underperforming school(s) and/or district(s) that will be the target of its activities;
- in collaboration with other Centers of Excellence and/or Teacher Recruitment Centers in all appropriate related activities;

- in collaboration with all parties affected by the Center's programs, including other institutions of higher education, other local school districts, professional associations, business and industry, parents, and the private sector; and
- be consistent with ongoing related curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation, or professional development activities at the South Carolina Department of Education, The Educational Accountability Act, the Education Oversight Committee, the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, and other state education initiatives.

FUNDING

During FY2025-26, CHE will sponsor one collaborative Center of Excellence for Elementary Math Education on a three-year term up to \$180,000 a year, pending funding availability.

DESIRED TOPICS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

Proposals must address one of the areas listed in #1 below. All proposals must focus activities on rural school(s) or district(s) and/or an underperforming school(s) or district(s) as defined by the Education Accountability Act's Report Card ratings (<https://ed.sc.gov/data/report-cards/sc-school-report-card/>). The priorities listed below reflect the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) 2020 Vision that "all students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities." To meet this goal, the state must produce effective teachers.

During FY2025-26, guided by the Education Oversight Committee's six goals, to be aligned with the [2025 South Carolina College - and Career-Ready Mathematics Standards](#), which will be fully implemented in 2025-2026 school year, the Commission on Higher Education has specifically requested that proposals focus on elementary math education. The desired center is

- Development of a Collaborative Center of Excellence for Math Education to equip pre-service teachers with fundamental pedagogical skills necessary for integrating higher-order critical thinking skills and mathematical skills in their instruction for Grade 1-5 students. The Center must establish a collaborative partnership between two higher education institutions that have accredited Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Elementary Education and focus on both training preservice teachers and providing math tutoring support to Grade 1-5 students at risk. Priority will be given to the proposal that applies the Concrete-Pictorial-Abstract (CAP) approach. The Request for Proposal can be found in Attachment 6.
2. Priority will be given to proposals in which representatives from the targeted rural schools/districts and underperforming school(s) or district(s) **are involved** in the development of the collaborative effort.
 3. Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate the institution's commitment to develop state-of-the-art programs, evidenced by a commitment to change ongoing academic programs at the institution as a result of the Center's work. Innovative programs should include appropriate faculty and personnel from other departments in addition to Education.

4. Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate a commitment to a program focused on the Center's area of expertise, math education, and aligned with [South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards](#).
5. Priority will be given to partnerships between multiple institutions across all sectors. Additional consideration, which will enhance the proposal's competitiveness for funding, will be given to partnerships involving the private sector, other schools and/or districts, business and industry, and members of the community. **The proposal narrative must describe the collaboration and the previous planning activities between the institution and the major stakeholders.** A discussion of the clearly defined roles of all of the project's partners (P-20) must be included.
6. Priority will be given to proposals which have a clear evaluation and assessment protocol with leading indicators of progress, which would facilitate dissemination and replication of successful strategies, programs, or incentives, and show student improvement. An external evaluator is not necessarily needed for the project.
7. Priority will also be given to proposals that draw upon **the higher education institution's demonstrated faculty strength and experience** as well as the ability to research and modify plans and deliverables based on data in relevant program areas. This experience can be demonstrated through a **brief** description of such evidence as:
 - Quality of faculty as indicated by publications, presentations, P-12 service, consultations, and other experience;
 - Institutional support for the program as indicated by letters of support from chief academic officers, deans, and department heads; budget, faculty time, facilities, and equipment allocations; special programmatic initiatives, etc.;
 - Previous successful collaborative efforts with major education stakeholders in related program areas;
8. Finally, priority will be based on the likelihood that the program, if funded, will have a lasting impact on P-20 education in the State.

EVALUATION

CHE will request program outcome data periodically as needed and might conduct an independent evaluation of selected grant programs during the award term.

IMPORTANT DATES

Intent to Submit Form Due: September 26, 2025
Virtual Technical Assistance Workshop: 2:00 – 4:00pm, September 30, 2025
Full Proposal Deadline: November 5, 2025

PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Specifications: Must use the full-proposal template provided. Must comply with the 6th edition APA citation guidelines.

In addition to other data that the proposing institution deems relevant, proposals must include information organized according to the following sections:

1. **Title Page** (form provided)
2. **Table of Contents**
3. **Abstract** to include (limit one page double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 11 pt. Calibri font):
 - purpose of the project;
 - activities to be implemented;
 - target population to be served;
 - expected outcomes; and
 - school and/or district partners including information about the school rating, poverty index, and/or eligibility for rural schools.
4. **Narrative.** The narrative of the proposal shall not exceed 20 double-spaced pages (1-inch margins, 11 pt. Calibri font) must provide detailed information about the proposed Center and include, at minimum, the following information:
 - a. **The Center's Purpose/Focus:** Describe the Center's focus and how the Center will benefit both the institution and the targeted P-12 school/district as well as impact P-20 education in the state. This section must include evidence of the demonstrated need to be addressed.
 - b. **Literature Review.** Provide the theoretical ground for the proposed work.
 - c. **Goals and Objectives:**

The Education Oversight Committee set six goals for EIA programs: 1) Improving Teacher Quality, 2) Increasing School Readiness and Early Learning Success, 3) Supporting Struggling Students, 4) Emphasizing Learning in Content Areas, 5) Improving Connections across K-12 Education, Career and Post-Secondary, and 6) Measuring and Evaluation Progress of Student Performance.

The center goals and objectives must be aligned with some of EOC goals, if not all of them. Goals, objectives, and effectiveness measures of the proposed Center of Excellence must include some of the following:

- aligning with the South Carolina State Standards;
- forming relationships and collaborating with existing initiatives in the State and, to the extent possible, serving as a central place to coordinate and facilitate the work of such initiatives;
- implementing a plan to improve pre-service preparation and in-service professional development; and
- addressing the identified knowledge, skills, and characteristics in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.
- All Centers' goals must be aligned with all or some of the goals set for Centers of Excellence:

- Goal 1 - Centers of Excellence focuses on teacher effectiveness in low performing schools and districts to enhance teacher practice and student achievement.
 - Goal 2 - Centers of Excellence develop and model state-of-the art pre-service and in-service programs.
 - Goal 3 - Centers of Excellence impact teacher education programs including pre-service students and higher education faculty.
 - Goal 4 - Centers of Excellence provide high quality professional development to teachers in schools, districts, and the state.
 - Goal 5 - Centers of Excellence undertakes research design to determine effective practice and content.
 - Goal 6 - Centers of Excellence disseminate information on model program and activates to P-20 personnel.
 - Goal 7 - Centers of Excellence have clear evaluation and assessment protocol which facilitates dissemination and replication.
- d. **Activities:** Include a detailed description of the activities to be implemented and how these will meet the Center's goals and objectives. Discuss how these activities will meet the needs of teacher education and student achievement. Discuss how the proposed activities to be implemented include sufficient effective approaches to address objectives related to the specific Center focus. In addition, the activities must include well-defined, measurable benchmarks of expected progress at the end of each year of funding from the state and should address the following goals:
- (1) Collaborating with Education Faculty in developing and modeling exemplary teacher training programs that (i) are collaborative, (ii) field-based, (iii) use state-of-the-art technology, and (iv) use proven strategies.
 - (2) Developing an influential constituency for the Center composed of stakeholders who will work with the Center and support the Center over the period of funding;
 - (3) Achieving a position of leadership in the State within three years such that the Center is the primary resource in its area of expertise;
- e. **Research:** Developing a detailed research agenda for the project time that will enable higher education faculty and P-12 personnel statewide to improve classroom effectiveness and student achievement. Specifically, the plan should provide examples of ongoing research questions that will be examined as a function of the Center's activities, how the research will be implemented, and how the research findings will be used to improve academic programs statewide (pre-service and in-service).
- f. **Evaluation Plan:** Cite specific evaluation measures that will be used annually to assess the effectiveness of the Center's activities. The evaluation plan must address program objectives, performance indicators, benchmarks to monitor progress toward goals, and outcome measures to assess the effect of the activities on teacher participants and the impact on P-12 student achievement. The Center does not need to contract an external evaluation to implement the plan.

In addition, the evaluation plan should explain the design for data collection and a clear description of

- types of data to be collected (both quantitative and qualitative should be included) and the objectives to be measured (not just pre- and post- surveys);
- when data will be collected;
- pre- and post-data related to impact on Grade PreK-3 student academic growth
- discuss the methods and procedures to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed project objectives;
- discuss how information from the data will be used to monitor success and, if necessary, make changes in program design;
- provide accountability information about the project's success;
- show impact on P-12 student achievement;
- provide results on outcome data;
- include an assessment of how the activities have contributed to teacher practice,
- include an assessment of the impact of the project on student (P-20) achievement; and
- show the extent to which the project influenced changes in teacher knowledge and instructional practices in the classroom or how the professional development has impacted school climate and/or administrative actions.

- g. **Institutional Strengths:** Cite accomplishments of existing academic, research, or professional development programs to demonstrate a likelihood of the Center achieving success within a reasonable period. Evidence must be provided to justify the Center's suitability to the institutions, in terms of either the institutions' mix of related academic/research/professional development programs or the presence of advantageous institutional or community resources. Present evidence concerning previous institutional collaboration with the P-12 community and other education stakeholders, especially as it relates to low performing schools or addressing student achievement.
- h. **Center Staffing:** State who the Center director(s) will be, summarize his/her qualifications, and stipulate the director's time commitment to Center activities. Also describe other faculty and/or support staff, teachers, and administrators involved in the Center's program and their qualifications, projected time commitment, and responsibilities to the Center. Abbreviated curricula vita (2 pages) for the director and any other key personnel associated with the Center's activities should be attached to the proposal. Provide evidence indicating that the director and/or other Center staff members will be able to promote non-programmatic as well as programmatic aspects of the Center, including developing internal and external constituencies and institutionalizing funding for Center activities. Qualifications, time commitment, and responsibilities must be included for any graduate assistants. The Center director must be a tenured faculty member at the institution. A Center co-director, who is either tenure-track or tenured, is strongly encouraged.

Proposals must disclose participation of family members as it relates to the Ethics Act, the Ethics Commission opinions, and the State Ethics Commission.

- i. **Benefit to the Institution:** Explain why the institution is willing to commit its resources to the Center. For example, what will be the impact of the Center on the institution's academic/research/professional development programs? How will the proposed Center improve

the quality of institutional programs and enhance existing institutional strengths in the Center's area of concentration and related fields? How will the Center impact the institution's community outreach with P-12 schools (university-wide)?

- j. **Institutional Commitment:** Demonstrate institutional and faculty support of the Center for the three years of state funding. Letters from faculty and administrators in program areas related to the Center's focus supporting the proposed Center may be included. Letters of support on letterhead from the P-12, higher education, and business partners must be included in the proposal or submitted electronically to the Commission on Higher Education at lyin@che.sc.gov. Letters submitted electronically must clearly identify the project they support. Provide evidence of institutional support beyond the end of State funding.
 - k. **Discussion of Partnerships.** Discuss the partnership in detail. Describe the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each of the post-secondary institutions, schools, businesses/industries, etc.
 - l. **Benefit to P-12 Districts/Schools:** Describe the expected benefit to the partner districts and/or schools and how the research base will support staff efforts to improve low performing districts and schools. Include a description of who will be served.
 - m. **Discussion of Similar and Related Centers:** Provide a short description of any similar Centers regionally or nationally and explain how the proposed Center will seek to benefit from other similar centers' experiences. A list of South Carolina Centers of Excellence funded through the Education Improvement Act will be available through the CHE.
 - n. **Current Initiatives/Programs:** Provide a short description of any current initiatives and/or programs at the institution(s) that will support the goals and objectives of the proposed Center. Provide data showing results of current initiatives and/or programs.
 - o. **Collaborative Planning:** Provide a detailed description of the collaborative planning efforts that have occurred between the institutions, the partner district(s)/school(s), and any other participating organization or agencies. Provide information on possible collaboration with other Centers of Excellence.
5. **Timeline.** Include a detailed timeline of activities and processes for the proposed Center.
6. **Budget:** Provide a proposed budget and budget justification for the grant awarded year. Budgets will indicate all anticipated expenditures for equipment, materials, salaries and benefits, and other operating expenses. Proposed salary/supplement expenditures should provide sufficient detail to identify and justify the number of professional positions; the amount of time associated with each, and estimated salary/supplement for each position. No institutional overhead is allowed. No Indirect Costs are allowed. A complete justification/explanation of funding amounts must accompany the budget summary.
- No more than 50% of the total budget shall be used for salaries and/or fringes for all personnel.
 - Faculty course buyouts must strictly follow the institution's guidelines and details must be provided in the budget justifications.

- Funds for the Centers of Excellence may be used to pay reasonable salary (including fringe) and Graduate Assistant Differential (GAD)/tuition for graduate assistants.
- Funds can be used to pay pre-service teachers for tutoring Grade 1-5 students.
- Salaries (including fringes) and GAD for graduate assistants shall be no more than 15% of the total budget and must be included in the 50% maximum for salaries and fringe benefits.
- Funds cannot be used to pay both tuition and stipends for participants during the same time period.
- Funds shall be used to supplement, not supplant.
- The grant shall not be used to contract an external evaluator.
- The grant shall not be used for any cost-of-living increase.

Acknowledgement of Support

An acknowledgement of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education must appear in any publication of materials based on or developed under this project as follows:

The activity which is the subject of this document (journal article, report, video, etc.) was produced under a grant from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education under the auspices of the EIA Centers of Excellence Grant Program.

All media announcements, public information, and promotional materials pertaining to these funded activities should acknowledge support of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education under the auspices of the EIA Centers of Excellence Grant Program.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION, METHOD OF SELECTION AND OTHER PROCEDURES

Proposals must be submitted as an electronic copy (Word document for proposal narrative, PDF for complete proposal with signature pages, and Excel for budget), must be signed by the President of the proposing institution, and must be addressed to the Commission on Higher Education: Dr. Lishu Yin (lyin@che.sc.gov). They must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on **November 5, 2025**. The following method of selection and other procedures will be followed:

1. Proposals will be reviewed by representatives from State Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education staffs, a current center director, and at least one representative each from the P-12 and higher education communities.
2. The reviewers will forward recommendations to the CHE.