

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA No.: 84.359A (Pre-Application) and 84.359B (Full Application)]

Early Reading First Program; Notice Inviting Local Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2003

SUMMARY: The Secretary invites applications for new grant awards for FY 2003 for the Early Reading First Program. These grants are authorized by subpart 2, part B, title I, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act, Public Law 107-110. The Secretary also announces final eligibility, procedures, requirements, priorities, and selection criteria for this competition.

Purpose of Program

The purpose of the Early Reading First Program is to create preschool centers of excellence by improving the instruction and classroom environment of early childhood programs that are located in urban or rural high-poverty communities and that serve primarily children from low-income families. These programs will provide preschool-age children, including children with disabilities and children with limited English proficiency, with high-quality environments and early reading curricula and activities, based on scientifically based research, to support the age-appropriate development of: oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge. These activities (with tactile and communication accommodations for children with disabilities, as appropriate), in combination with professional development based on scientific research and with screening assessments, will form a seamlessly integrated instructional program that will further children's development of language, cognitive, and early reading skills and prevent them from encountering reading difficulties when they enter school.

Applications Available: March 17, 2003.

Deadline for Transmittal of Applications: Pre-Application: April 11, 2003. Full Application (for invited applicants only): June 27, 2003 (which is approximately 6 weeks after the date applicants will be invited to submit Full Applications).

Deadline for Intergovernmental

Review: August 26, 2003.

Estimated Available Funds: \$75,000,000.

Estimated Range of Awards: \$300,000–\$1,500,000 per year;

\$900,000–\$4,500,000 for a 3-year period.

Estimated Number of Awards: 17–250.

Note: The Department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

Project Period: Up to three years.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Early Reading First Program is part of the President's early childhood initiative, "Good Start, Grow Smart." As part of that initiative, these grants will strengthen early learning environments and instruction for young children. They also will help ensure that preschool programs are more closely coordinated with State educational goals, so that there is continuity with formal school instruction and so that what children are doing before they enter school is aligned with what is expected of them once they are in school.

Early Reading First grants will use research-based strategies to generate information about effective practices in providing younger children with the essential language, literacy, and cognitive experiences that will best prepare them for later school success. The Department plans to disseminate information about Early Reading First projects that prove to be effective.

Specifically, Early Reading First projects provide the following activities, with accommodations as needed for children with disabilities: High-quality oral language and print-rich environments; professional development for staff based on scientifically based reading research knowledge of language, cognitive, and early reading development that will assist in developing preschool-age children's oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge; activities and instructional materials based on scientifically based reading research for use in developing language, cognitive, and early reading skills; acquisition, training, and implementation of screening reading assessments; and integration of the instructional materials, activities, tools, and measures into the applicant's overall programs.

Eligible Applicants

(1) One or more LEAs identified as being eligible on the list of "Eligible LEAs" that will be posted on the Department's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/earlyreading/index.html> by the date that applications are available; (2) one or more public or private organizations or agencies

(including faith-based organizations) located in a community served by one of those LEAs, which organization or agency is acting on behalf of one or more programs (which may include themselves) that serve young children, such as a Head Start program, a child care program, an Even Start program; or (3) one or more of the eligible LEAs, applying in collaboration with one or more of the eligible organizations or agencies. In addition to obtaining the list of "Eligible LEAs" from the Department's web site, the public may obtain that list on or after the date that applications are available by contacting the individual identified under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT.**

Applicability of Regulations

The following provisions of the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) contained in Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) apply to these Early Reading First Program grants: 34 CFR parts 74, 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85, 86, 97, 98, and 99.

FY 2003 Eligibility

Background

The Early Reading First statute ties grant applicant eligibility to basic LEA eligibility for Reading First State Grants subgrants. Specifically, to meet the basic eligibility criteria under the Reading First State Grants Program (and, thus, the Early Reading First Program), each eligible LEA must:

- Be among the LEAs in the State with the highest numbers or percentages of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most currently available data (and a State may use the lowest grade for which it has those data, such as grade 4, up through grade 5); and also qualify under one of the following categories as an LEA that:
 - Has jurisdiction over a geographic area that includes an area designated as an empowerment zone (EZ) or an enterprise community (EC).
 - Has jurisdiction over a significant number or percentage of schools that are identified for school improvement under section 1116(b) of title I of the ESEA (or the predecessor statutory authority).
 - Has the highest numbers or percentages of children in the State who are counted under section 1124(c) of title I of the ESEA (the number of children counted for Title I Basic Grants to LEAs).

At the time of the FY 2002 Early Reading First grant competition, no State had yet obtained approval of its