

Funding Announcement Title: Service Access and Equity Grant

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Close Date: November 17, 2025

Announcement Narrative:

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## Service Access and Equity Grant

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### Increasing Service Access for Californians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

#### **Grant Guidelines for Applicants**

Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27

#### **Our Vision**

Our vision is for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience respect for their choices, cultures, language preferences, beliefs, values, goals, and needs, from a person-centered service system made up of a network of community agencies that provide high quality, outcome-based and equitable supports and services.

#### **Background**

California's Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act guarantees services and supports for all persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ensuring equity across age, race, ethnicity, language, and economic status. The state's 21 regional centers (RCs) currently serve approximately 480,000 individuals representing many ethnicities and over 50 languages, reflecting California's rich diversity.

[Chapter 3, Statutes of 2016](#), codified Welfare and Institutions Code Section 4519.5 that established the Service Access and Equity (SAE) Grant Program (formerly known as the Disparity Funds Program) which awards \$11 million annually to RCs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to implement strategies to reduce disparities and increase

equity in RC services. The SAE Grant Program strengthens and sustains community-based strategies that promote equitable access to services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. SAE funding is intended to reinforce approaches that are culturally and linguistically responsive to the diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations served across the State.

Since its inception in 2016, the SAE Grant Program has funded over 500 grant projects that have resulted in developmental screenings for over 3,400 children from underrepresented backgrounds. Through the grant programs, community-based organizations have delivered over 2,400 educational workshops for approximately 45,000 family attendees, increasing their empowerment and advocacy strategies, education, and community networks.

Despite some improvements, data available to the Department of Developmental Services (Department) and RCs reveal persistent disparities in service access based on race, ethnicity, and language. Clients who come from communities of color experience delays in eligibility determination and less timely access to service. The SAE Grant Program aims to complement other strategies implemented by the Department and RCs to identify these barriers and develop community-driven solutions to advance equity and access to services.

### **Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27 Project Types**

Applicants are required to select one of the two project types that best describes their activities from the list below:

- 1. Education and Training:** Increase self-advocacy/family knowledge about topics relating to service access, the regional center system, leadership development, business development, advocacy, independent facilitation, service planning tools, and developmental disabilities. Provide training and support to regional centers and service provider staff to increase cultural and linguistic responsiveness to their catchment area population(s). Training materials are subject to Department review and approval.
- 2. Community Connection:** Engage trained peer partners, including community leaders, family members, and self-advocates, to deliver culturally responsive, individualized service connection support that facilitates equitable access to regional center services, community resources, and transition planning. These projects require comprehensive peer partner training, structured supervision, detailed budget management, and ongoing quality assurance monitoring throughout the grant period.

Proposals must demonstrate the capacity to carry out proposed activities, address a local community or statewide barrier identified through data, incorporate community partner feedback and/or RC plans and recommendations to measurably promote equity and reduce disparities. Grantees within both project types must document service outcomes, participant demographics, and partnership effectiveness in quarterly performance reports that demonstrate both individual family outcomes and broader community capacity-building impacts. Proposals where RCs and CBOs demonstrate collaborative approaches to addressing and mitigating systemic needs and barriers will be given additional consideration.

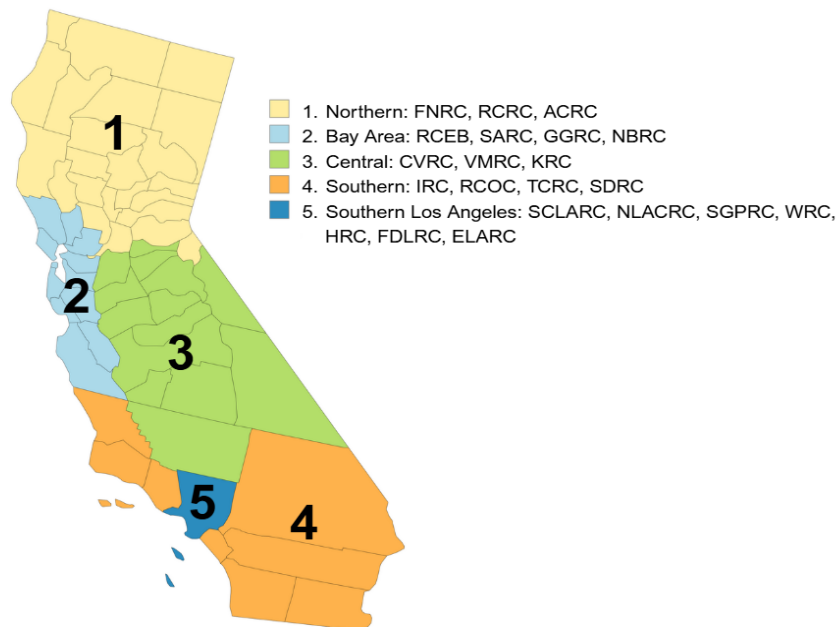
### **Fiscal Years 2025-26 and 2026-27 Grant Priorities**

The Department invites proposals that align with one or more of the established grant priorities, including:

1. **Statewide Information and Training Initiative:** Up to two grantees may be awarded to develop and implement a statewide information and training initiative designed to empower individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families. The initiative will provide regular, virtual informational and training sessions covering a wide range of topics, including—but not limited to—understanding and accessing regional center services, connecting with family resource centers, accessing generic services, planning for transitions across the lifespan, and preparing for the needs of aging caregivers. The initiative must prioritize relationships with all 21 regional centers and emphasize engagement with underrepresented communities and partners. Training materials are subject to Department review and approval.
2. **Increasing Pathways into the System:** Provide education, training, and coaching to primary referral sources and service providers such as hospital and medical clinicians, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), faith-based organizations, and more. Build and maintain relationships with underrepresented communities and bridge the gap between providers, partners, and families to provide the services all clients need to thrive.
3. **Building Caregiver Networks and Supports:** Develop partnerships with RCs to establish or enhance community support groups intended to empower and educate while promoting the importance of family engagement. Community support groups should address the needs within the catchment area and may include families navigating the immigration system, youth engaged in the foster care system, communities experiencing cultural and/or linguistic barriers to service access, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, Deaf/Hard of Hearing population, and senior parents/caregivers.

4. **Service Connection Support for Families:** Implement a culturally responsive peer partnership framework that connects families and self-advocates to essential services and resources. Peer partners shall utilize their lived experience and community expertise to provide individualized support that honors cultural values, language preferences, and family dynamics. Services include facilitating access to regional center programs and services, community-based resources, and transition planning while fostering peer-to-peer networks that strengthen family advocacy capacity and promote community self-determination.
  - a. **Early Start:** Connecting underrepresented families from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic communities to Early Start services to reduce disparities in eligibility determination, service authorization, and timely access to early intervention supports.
5. **Innovative strategies** not listed above to address local needs identified by the regional centers that demonstrate evidence-based success in reducing barriers to service access.

#### Identified Needs by Region



Region	Identified Needs
1. Northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness and capacity to navigate housing and transportation resources for rural communities.</li> <li>• Culturally and linguistically diverse and appropriate services for Spanish-speaking, Hmong, and Tribal communities.</li> </ul>

2. Bay Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma-informed, culturally appropriate supports and services for Black/African American and immigrant communities.</li> <li>• Linguistically appropriate and/or interpretation services for Spanish-, Cantonese-, Tagalog-, and ASL-speaking communities.</li> <li>• Increase awareness and capacity to navigate housing and transportation resources for rural communities.</li> </ul>
3. Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness and capacity to navigate housing, mental health and transportation resources for rural and remote communities.</li> <li>• Bilingual and culturally competent service providers for Latinx, Asian, and Deaf+ communities.</li> <li>• Strengthen regional center and community-based organization alignment and collaboration.</li> </ul>
4. Southern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma-informed, culturally appropriate supports and services for immigrant communities.</li> <li>• Enhanced digital/online services, supports, and materials in multiple languages.</li> <li>• Increase awareness and capacity to navigate housing and transportation resources for rural and remote communities.</li> </ul>
5. Southern Los Angeles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistically appropriate resources and/or interpretation services to facilitate access to specialized care.</li> <li>• Increase awareness and capacity to navigate housing and transportation resources.</li> <li>• Innovative solutions to advance community inclusion and strengthen advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals.</li> </ul>

### Language Access

All applicants must comply with California's language access requirements and accessibility standards in their proposal. Grantees are required to provide meaningful access to services for individuals and ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This includes, but is not limited to, providing qualified interpreters, translated materials in threshold languages, and accessible formats for individuals with disabilities. Grantees must demonstrate how their proposed activities will ensure equitable participation and service delivery for all individuals. Budget proposals should include adequate funding for interpretation services, translation of materials, and accessibility accommodations as necessary to meet these requirements.

For more information on accessibility standards, please visit [here](#).

### Available Funding and Project Term

The SAE grant cycle for FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27 has \$22 million (\$11 million each FY) in funding, to be used across all SAE priority areas, subject to an appropriation by the Legislature. Beginning with FY 2025-26, grant guidelines will be released on a biennial

basis to align with a 24-month project implementation period (Project Term), ensuring sustained program development and community impact. This two-year funding model supports comprehensive project planning, relationship building with community partners, and meaningful evaluation of outcomes while reducing administrative burden on both grantees and the funding agency. Future grant cycles will also follow this biennial release schedule, with the next invitation for request for SAE funding or “Call for Bidders” to be for FY 2027-28 and FY 2028-29. For more information on previously awarded grants, please visit the Department’s webpage [here](#).

### **Request for Proposal Timeline**

The Department is seeking proposals from organizations with lived and/or professional experience within the developmental services system. To be considered for funding, applicants must apply online at [GrantVantage - Department Application Process](#). All proposals are due by 5:00 p.m. PST on November 17, 2025.

#### **Timeline:**

- September 29, 2025: Release of 2025-27 Service Access and Equity Grant Guidelines at 9:00 a.m. PST
- October 6, 2025: Bidder’s Conference for interested applicants.
- November 17, 2025: Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. PST
- December 2025: Proposal evaluation and selection process completed.
- January 2026: Notification of grant awards will be made to all applicants and will be posted to the Department’s website.
- February 1, 2026: Projects are anticipated to begin on February 1, 2026. Actual start dates are dependent upon the date the grant agreement is signed.

### **Online Application**

For the FYs 2025-26 and 2026-27 SAE Grant application process, applicants will submit proposals using the Department’s online grant management system at: [GrantVantage - Department Application Process](#).

- Applicants are required to watch the Department Applicant video to complete the application process [here](#).
- FAQs for the FYs 2025-26 and 2026-27 grant cycle will be available on the Department’s website [here](#) and will be updated based on questions received.
- Applicants will be required to follow a series of steps to submit their application:
  1. Create an Applicant Profile
  2. Complete Applicant Report Template
  3. Complete an Activities Template
  4. Complete a Budget Template
  5. Obtain a letter of support from the regional center(s)/community-based organization(s) you plan to partner with on your project.
- For technical support, email GrantVantage: [applicantssupport@grantvantage.com](mailto:applicantssupport@grantvantage.com).
- For grant application questions, email DDS: [SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov](mailto:SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov).

- RCs are strongly encouraged to partner with CBOs for all proposals submitted and include a letter of support from the CBO.
- CBOs are required to submit their application concurrently to the Department and to each RC located in the catchment area the CBO is intending to serve. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include a letter of support from the RC(s) they intend to collaborate with. At the end of the application process in the GrantVantage system, RCs/CBOs must do the following:
  1. Download a PDF file of the completed grant application that includes three reports: (1) Application Report (2) Objective Report; and (3) Budget Report; **and**
  2. Submit all three downloaded reports for the application to the RC(s) the project will serve. The RC contact list is available [here](#) and as Attachment F.

### General Information

- Organizations that plan to work together are strongly encouraged to submit one application rather than separate applications from multiple organizations.
- University of California and California State University organizations applying for grant funding must complete a Model Agreement concurrent with the application proposal. The Model Agreement template can be found at the Department of General Services' webpage [here](#). Please note that the Department will require changes to the terms listed in the University Terms and Conditions.

### Grantee Code of Conduct

The Department is committed to supporting services and programs with integrity that foster collaboration and professionalism. Grantees are expected to conduct project activities in a professional and respectful manner. The full Grantee Code of Conduct can be found [here](#) and as attachment G.

### Grant Activities

Grant proposals should clearly outline the project design and expected benefit or impact of the project activities to the participants. Logic models explaining the theory of change for project activities and their impact on the outcomes of interest are highly encouraged. More information on how to develop a logic model can be found [here](#). All proposed activities shall have embedded cultural and linguistically responsive practices. All grant activities that are planned to occur in-person need to have a safety plan for grantee staff and participants to comply with all state and local health guidelines.

### Standardized Measures

All projects must use the Department's standardized set of measures which are located [here](#) at Attachment B. Grantees will not be permitted to include their own measures for project reporting. The use of standardized measures is essential to ensure consistency



across projects and enable accurate assessment of program outcomes. These measures may be updated as needed during the grant year.

### Grant Measures

All grantees are required to report quantitative and qualitative data to show progress and outcomes of project activities.

- Quantitative data can be measured, such as the number of participants in Community Connector program, pre/post surveys that are scored with numbers, and comparison of POS expenditures before and after participation in a project.
- Qualitative data is a description, such as what participants say they learned in an orientation. Qualitative data is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations and uncover trends in thoughts and opinions. Qualitative data may be collected using open-ended written or verbal questions in surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Findings from qualitative data are typically summarized in writing.

### Grant Budget

Proposed budgets need to be directly tied to proposed grant activities and reflect reasonable costs. Grant budgets may not be used for activities that the organization is otherwise funded to conduct. Administrative costs are limited to 15 percent of the grant total. A list of allowable and unallowable expenses is located [here](#).

### Quarterly Progress Reports

Grantees must submit a report every quarter on their standardized measures, activities, expenditures, and other achievements for the duration of the project. Reports are due to the Department on the last day of the month after each quarter ends (April 30, July 31, October 31, January 31).

Partnership, collaboration, and inclusion are core principles of the SAE Grant Program. Once approved, a copy of the grantee's quarterly report must be sent to the regional center(s) serving the area(s) where services are provided. Regional centers and community-based organizations providing services in the same catchment area(s) are required to meet at least twice a year to discuss the progress of activities in those areas. For questions, please contact [SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov](mailto:SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov).

### Final Reports

All grantees are required to compile their data and complete a final report within 45 days after the end of the project. Final reports will be posted to the Department's website pursuant to [Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 4519.5](#).



## Proposal Review Process

### Applicant Eligibility

Organizations and subcontractors must be in good standing with the California Secretary of State, California Franchise Tax Board, and/or California Department of Tax and Fee Administration to be considered for review. Tribal governments, tribally authorized programs, and Native-led nonprofit organizations are also eligible to apply.

The Department will use the following links to verify organizational standing:

- [Secretary of State](#)
- [Top 500 Tax Sales delinquent](#)
- [Top 500 Past Due Balances](#)

### Reapplications

Reapplications are proposals that will continue a previously awarded project without significant changes to the focused population, geographic area, activities, or objectives; or will expand a previously awarded project into other target populations, geographic areas, activities, or objectives. Returning grantees with active grants are required to provide a summary of their SAE grant project outcomes (or current status if still in progress) for FYs 2022-23, 2023-24, and/or 2024-25. If funds were not fully expended, they should explain the challenges and describe strategies they would use to ensure full use of funds if re-awarded.

### Reapplication Evaluation

Each reapplication question will be rated as follows:

- **Exceptional** - Exceeds the minimum requirements and describes progress made, what has been accomplished, how the activities impacted the community, description of activities and transition plan.
- **Adequate** - Satisfies the minimum requirements and generally describes progress made, how previous year funding has impacted community, description of activities and transition plan.
- **Inadequate** - Does not satisfy the minimum progress or impact requirements or activities to be completed and transition plan.

If the reapplication receives more than two inadequate ratings, the reapplication will not be considered for further funding.

### All Applications

All applications that pass the eligibility review and reapplication review will advance to a panel review. A review panel will evaluate and score each application. The scores from all reviewers will be averaged into a final score for each application. Grant applications scoring 70 points and above out of 100 total possible points are eligible for funding and

may be awarded. The Department may consider applications scoring less than 70 points only for catchment areas where an insufficient number of proposals have been received.

Application Scoring Criteria	Point Value
<p><b>Project Summary and Organizational Experience:</b></p> <p>Provide a clear and concise project summary that includes a defined population of focus, catchment area, and project design. Specifically describe what your project will accomplish and how it will benefit the community served. In your answer, include what experience your organization has working with the focused identified population.</p> <p>Logic models explaining the theory of change for project activities and their impact on the outcomes of interest are highly encouraged. More information on how to develop a logic model can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	15
<p><b>Data and Community Input:</b></p> <p>Explain why you have selected your priority population(s). You may use RC POS data in <a href="#">Attachment D</a>. You may include other data such as Census, California Department of Education (CDE) data, and/or The National Core Indicators (NCI) survey data as supporting evidence of the disparities or inequities experienced by your priority population(s). Include how your organization used input from the community, focused population(s), and RC to design the proposal and track its outcomes.</p>	20
<p><b>Collaboration:</b></p> <p>How does your organization collaborate with your local RC(s), or how does your RC work with your local CBO(s)? Describe your collaborative relationship.</p>	10
<p><b>Improve Equity and Service Access:</b></p> <p>Please describe how your project will measurably improve equity, access, and/or reduce barriers to services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.</p> <p>In your answer, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include specific details on how your project will implement strategies and prioritize your efforts to reduce disparities in the regional center system.</li> <li>• Identify how your project will increase service access for individuals with I/DD and their families from underserved and marginalized communities.</li> </ul>	20

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain how your project will measure its effectiveness in improving equity in the developmental services system in your RC catchment area(s).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Plan to Promote Equity and Reduce Disparities:</b></p> <p>For <b>all</b> applicants, explain how your project plans to promote equity and reduce disparities for the priority population(s) intended to be served?</p>	20
<p><b>Cultural and Linguistic Competence:</b></p> <p>Describe your understanding of equity, as well as cultural and linguistic competence. In your response, consider the lived experiences of your priority population(s). Explain how you will integrate these principles into your project activities, including where and how they will be applied.</p>	10
<p><b>Budget Template Review:</b></p> <p>I have completed the Budget Template (see Budget Template tab above). The project budget is consistent with the stated project objective and activities.</p> <p>In your Budget Template, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budget Template example is located at <a href="#">Attachment C</a>.</li> <li>Include line items in your budget as indicated in <a href="#">Attachment C</a>.</li> <li>Budget Details and Restrictions are available <a href="#">Budget Details and Restrictions</a>.</li> </ul>	5
<b>TOTAL POSSIBLE SCORE</b>	<b>100</b>

### Funding Review

All applications achieving a passing score will be reviewed by the Department and assessed for funding within the funding available. Reviewers will evaluate the proposals by intended target population, catchment area, and project type. The Department will prioritize funding projects that align with the identified focus areas, focus populations, the additional needs of each catchment area, and letters of support. If necessary, applicants will be asked to clarify or adjust proposed objective, activities, measures and/or data collection methods.

### Funding Review Scale:

- Meets - Satisfies the minimum requirements.
- Does Not Meet - Does not satisfy the minimum requirements.

Additional Considerations	1 = Meets 0 = Does Not Meet
The project's target population does not duplicate current efforts in the same catchment area; and/or the catchment area is presently not being served.	
The project has established connections with its proposed target population(s) and/or community.	

### Notice of Decision and Grantee Responsibilities

By January 2, 2026, the Department will notify all applicants of the final decision via email. If the applicant is awarded funding, a notice will contain a formal cover letter and a grant agreement will be sent to the grantee. After final awards are made, approved project proposals will be posted on the Department's website [here](#). All grant agreements will be signed with DocuSign.

For additional details on eligibility, reporting, payment, and grantee code of conduct, see [Guideline Appendices](#). For more information on the DDS Access & Equity Division, see [Service Access & Equity : CA Department of Developmental Services](#). For any questions about the FY 2025-27 SAE Grant Guidelines, contact [SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov](mailto:SAEgrantprogram@dds.ca.gov).