

## School Safety Improvement Program - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Version 4

Updated: March 10, 2023

**New FAQs or updates to a previous FAQ are highlighted in yellow**

School Districts/systems **had the opportunity** to request a vulnerability assessment through completion of the “School Safety Vulnerability Assessment” survey issued by the Iowa Department of Education in the Consolidated Accountability and Support Application (CASA) system. **Although technically a school could still request a vulnerability assessment by the state vendor, there would have to be exigent circumstances being that the cut off for completing the State provided vulnerability assessment was December 31 2022.**

To apply for School Safety Improvement Grant Funds, school districts/systems must indicate and provide their Notice of Interest (NOI) in the School Safety Improvement grant funding opportunity through completion of the “School Safety Improvement Funding NOI” survey issued by the Iowa Department of Education in the CASA system. Once a school district/system has indicated their notice of interest through the CASA survey, further instructions on how to apply for the funding will be provided to the school district’s POC designated within their survey response. NOIs must be received no later than September 1, 2024.

**Q:** What is the School Safety Improvement Program?

**A:** As a response to the increase in mass shootings exacerbated by the pandemic, the State of Iowa has designed the School Safety Improvement Program as a proportional response to the harm experienced. This program addresses the overall pandemic trend of increased mass shootings, and more specifically school shootings. This program allows schools to perform security assessments in concert with local authorities and assist the schools in creating and improving school security plans and also provides funding for schools to invest in minor capital improvements for security enhancements from one or more of the six categories identified as eligible minor capital improvements.

**Q:** Who is eligible to apply for resources through the School Safety Improvement Program?

**A:** All Iowa public and accredited private school districts/systems are eligible to request a vulnerability assessment and/or grant funding to invest in minor capital improvements for security enhancements.

### **SCHOOL SAFETY IMPROVEMENT GRANT FUNDING**

**Q:** **Is there a State third party contractor assisting Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management (IA HSEMD) in managing the grant program?**

**A:** **Yes, AG Witt has been contracted to assist the districts and HSEMD with the School Safety Grant program.**

**Q:** How much grant funding is available to schools under this program?

**A:** Each school district/system is eligible to apply for up to \$50,000 per school building **(on the 2021-2022 BEDS report)** to perform minor capital improvements under this program.

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**Q:** What is considered a “school building” under this program?

**A:** For purposes of this grant, a “school building” is defined as: any public or non-public attendance center containing classrooms used for instructional purposes for pre-school, elementary, middle, or secondary school students. This does NOT include community partner preschools. The definition of a school building under this grant program is based upon how school buildings and attendance centers are defined in Iowa Administrative Code 281-14.3 and 281-17.2 respectively.

**Q:** What is the maximum award that each school district or nonpublic school is eligible to receive?

**A:** The budget for the school safety improvement grant was based on the 2021-2022 building count, as reported by each district/system in the 2021-2022 BEDS (Basic Educational Data Survey). For the purposes of this grant, the maximum amount of funds that a school district or nonpublic school is eligible to receive is based on total school building count multiplied by \$50,000 (e.g., three buildings will generate \$150,000 in grant funds).

**Q:** Can school safety improvement grant funds only be spent on the school buildings included in the 2021-2022 building count?

**A:** No. The building count is used to determine the maximum possible award. However, security improvements on any attendance center as defined in this FAQ could be considered eligible for reimbursement (up to the maximum possible award) if the use of funds addresses a security issue identified in the school's vulnerability assessment. Funds must be used to address security issues identified in the vulnerability assessment, which may include upgrades/modifications to structures that do not meet the definition of "attendance center" but are necessary in order to adequately secure the attendance center.

For example, a school district has one building that serves as the middle school and high school. The district reported this as one building and could receive up to \$50,000 for security improvements. The funds may be used to address security concerns identified in the vulnerability assessment for any portion of the school building. **Conversely, if the middle school and high school are both on the 2021-2022 BEDS report but happen to reside in the same building, they are eligible for two \$50,000 grants.**

Another example includes a nonpublic parochial school serving students kindergarten through grade 8 is attached to facilities that are used for general church activities. The nonpublic school reported this as one building and could receive up to \$50,000 for security improvements. The funds may be used to address security concerns identified in the vulnerability assessment, which may include upgrades/modifications of the facilities used for general church activities if the upgrades/modifications are necessary to secure the school facilities.

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**Q:** Are virtual academies, online learning centers and similar schools that are on the BEDS report eligible for grant funding?

**A:** No. If the virtual academy or online learning center does not have students physically attend the building, it does not meet the definition of an attendance center, so even though it is on the BEDS report, it is not eligible for grant funding.

**Q:** Can a school district utilize the State Master agreements to purchase commodities and/or services for School Safety Vulnerability Mitigation?

**A:** Yes, the state of Iowa Cooperative allows governmental entities and political subdivisions, including schools, in the state to purchase from master agreements created by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) - Central Procurement. Cooperative purchasing is a collaborative effort providing benefits in pricing, product quality, and contract process efficiencies for public purchasing entities throughout Iowa. Here is a link for more information to include vendors,

[https://das.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/procurement/pdf/School%20use%20of%20State%20Master%20Agreements%20-%20090922\\_0.pdf](https://das.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/procurement/pdf/School%20use%20of%20State%20Master%20Agreements%20-%20090922_0.pdf)

**Q:** If the estimated cost for school safety improvements at a school district/system's building is less than \$50,000, can the balance of funds be used for another building within the school district/system where the estimated cost is more than \$50,000? **In this example, consider a building as a school on the 2021-2022 BEDS report.**

**A:** Yes, but the school district/system will only be allowed to transfer the excess funds from one building (Building #1) to another building (Building #2) when all improvements identified in the vulnerability assessment have been addressed at the initial building (Building #1). Transfer of funds between buildings requires prior approval by HSEMD. The total cost of all buildings cannot exceed \$50,000 x # of buildings in the approved scope of work and budget.

**Q:** **If a school on the 2021-2022 BEDS report has more than one building on its campus, can the \$50,000 grant be applied to that (those) building(s) as well?**

**A:** **Yes, but it will need to be clear in the application which building the item applies to and that vulnerability is identified in the assessment report.**

**Q:** What type of expenditures are eligible under this grant?

**A:** The School Safety Improvement Grant allows for investments in minor capital improvements for security enhancements from one or more of the six categories identified as eligible minor capital improvements. The six categories of eligible minor capital improvements are entry control, electronic security and communication systems, barriers, perimeter security, illumination and building envelope.

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**Q:** Is there a guide to reference for what security enhancements are eligible and not eligible under this grant?

**A:** Yes, it is a working document that will be updated as items are added (reviewed weekly).

This is not an all-inclusive list, but it is a good reference. If there are questions, please email the school safety grant team at [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov).

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Alpg25a--](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Alpg25a--EGad_RCcNAN6WsJL2YxIFGtIMNGeJDXGmo/edit?usp=sharing)

[EGad\\_RCcNAN6WsJL2YxIFGtIMNGeJDXGmo/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Alpg25a--EGad_RCcNAN6WsJL2YxIFGtIMNGeJDXGmo/edit?usp=sharing)

**Q:** What is considered a “minor capital improvement” under this grant?

**A:** Treasury has adopted the definition of capital expenditures from the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200.1 for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program. 2 CFR Part 200 requirements must be met for capital improvements for the School Safety Improvement Grant Fund.

**Q:** Do contractors need to comply with the Davis Bacon Act for work performed under the School Safety Improvement Grant?

**A:** Yes, but only if the school district has capital expenditures through the School Safety Improvement Grant that will equal or exceed \$10M.

**Q:** Who is the final authority for approvals and disapprovals for items submitted in the school safety grant application?

**A:** The Director of Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

**Q:** What is needed in order to apply for the School Safety Improvement Grant Funding?

**A:** A copy of a valid vulnerability assessment and a completed application form as provided by the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

**Q:** If my application is approved, are the grant funds provided “up-front?”

**A:** No. If a grant application is approved, the school district/system will be issued an award letter committing to provide reimbursement for the requested and eligible funds. The school district/system will then be reimbursed for eligible costs incurred according to the scope of work and budget submitted and approved as part of the grant application.

**Q:** When is the deadline to apply for grant funds?

**A:** The grant application period will remain open until December 31, 2024. However, all costs associated with an approved application must be incurred (obligated to pay) on or before December 31, 2024. Additionally, all work must be completed and reimbursement submitted to and paid no later than December 31, 2025, or 60 days after the completion of work, whichever comes first.

**Q:** Can a school system submit more than one application?

**A:** No, a vulnerability assessment needs to be completed for all buildings prior to submitting an application. The application must include all buildings for which you are seeking funding within the district/system.

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**Q:** Can security enhancements be made to any building within a school district/system using these funds?

**A:** No. Security enhancements must align with the recommended mitigation measures found in the valid vulnerability assessment for the building in question. Additionally, only those structures that meet the definition of school building under this grant program can have costs associated with approved security enhancements reimbursed. A school building is defined as any public or non-public attendance center containing classrooms used for instructional purposes for pre-school, elementary, middle, or secondary school students. This does NOT include community partner preschools.

**Q:** What if I recently installed or purchased security enhancements that would otherwise be eligible under this grant program? Can I apply and seek reimbursement for costs already incurred?

**A:** No. The period of performance begins at the time of receipt of the approved application and ends on December 31, 2024. Therefore, all costs incurred prior to the approved application and after December 31, 2024, are not eligible uses of these funds.

**Q:** After a school district/system receives the Vulnerability Assessment Report with the mitigating efforts, what are the next steps for applying for a school safety grant?

**A:** First, the School Safety NOI Survey through the Dept of Ed must be completed. The POC identified from the survey will receive a school safety improvement grant application package through email. The POC must follow the instructions on the email attachment "1\_How to Register in EMGrants for SLFRF School Safety Improvements Funding". After the POC is registered, the POC will upload the Vulnerability Assessment Report into EMGrants along with the completed grant application and support documentation. Please email [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov) if assistance is needed.

**Q:** What are the compliance and reporting requirements associated with this grant?

**A:** All sub-recipients of grant funds must comply with the full terms and conditions of the grant and are responsible for understanding all relevant guidance and terms and conditions of the grant award. All sub-recipients of grant funds must comply with Provisions of the Uniform Guidance for Federal Awards ([2 CFR Part 200](#)) and [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Guidance on Recipient Compliance and Reporting Responsibilities](#). All non-federal entities that spend more than \$750,000 in federal awards during the entity's fiscal year, including SLFRF funds, must have a single or program-specific audit conducted for that year compliant with 2 CFR 200 Subpart F. This audit must cover the compliance of the entity with Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the federal award, as well as the fair presentation of the entity's financial statements, pursuant to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200).

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**Q:** What about building fire codes or other safety compliance?

**A:** Sub-recipients of grant funds must ensure that, prior to installation of minor capital improvements and/or other associated security enhancements or modifications to any school buildings, the proposed modifications are reviewed and approved by the State Fire Marshals Officer (SFM) or your local fire inspector in accordance with Iowa Administrative Code 661-300. For more information on this requirement and/or to submit proposed modifications to the SFM, please visit the SFM website at <https://dps.iowa.gov/divisions/state-fire-marshal/building-code>.

**NOTE: Submitted proposed modifications could take up to 90 days or more to be approved by SFM.** Proof that appropriate coordination and necessary approval from the SFM or your local fire inspector prior to installation of minor capital improvements and/or other associated security enhancements or modifications will be required to be eligible for reimbursement under this grant. Documentation providing proof of this compliance will be submitted as part of the reimbursement request. Here is a link to a general, but not all inclusive guide related to when to submit to the things to the State Fire Marshal, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JWMIeyabE8S-Tawy86R7guA9O4coEHGe/edit?usp=share\\_link&oid=108650509385129262960&rtpof=true&d=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JWMIeyabE8S-Tawy86R7guA9O4coEHGe/edit?usp=share_link&oid=108650509385129262960&rtpof=true&d=true)

**Q:** Does the State Fire Marshal approval have to be done before the application is submitted?

**A:** No, that can be completed after the submission.

**Q:** Is the fee charged by the SFM to review and approve a proposed modification an eligible cost that can be reimbursed by these grant funds?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Can a vulnerability assessment service provider also be the party responsible for providing or installing security enhancements under this grant program?

**A:** No. In order to ensure objective contractor performance and eliminate unfair competitive advantage, contractors that develop or draft specifications, requirements, statements of work, or invitations for bids or requests for proposals must be excluded from competing for such procurements. Sub-recipients of these grant funds must strictly adhere to procurement requirements outlined in [2 CFR Part 200](#).

**Q:** Is it possible for the school safety grants funding to be used to cover expenses that stem from other school safety initiatives such as school safety radios or critical response mapping?

**A1:** School radio installation/programming costs – Yes, this cost can be covered by the school safety grant. It does need to be included in the school's application to be eligible for funding consideration. We would like to see where the radios came from (vendor/installer) and the date they were received. These costs do NOT have to be identified in the vulnerability assessment (this is the only exception to that rule). Also the radios can be installed and programmed before the grant is awarded (this is also the only exception to that rule).

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**A2: School radios** – Yes, these costs can be covered by the school safety grant as long as it is identified as a vulnerability in the assessment. If school radios are determined to be needed after the assessment is done, it would be permissible to have the school's local LE provide a letter identifying the risk and mitigating efforts. This would need to be included in the school's application and must meet the eligibility requirements for grant funding.

**A3: Critical Response Mapping (CRM)** – No, these costs cannot be covered.

**Q:** Is there any guidance to prioritization of what security enhancements a school/district should do?

**A:** No, this is entirely a district/school decision as the threats and vulnerabilities are different for each district/school. We encourage schools to work with the law enforcement and emergency management partners to assess the threats (different from vulnerabilities) to the district/school. From there prioritize those threats based on likelihood and impact and then apply the vulnerabilities identified in the vulnerability assessment to that prioritized list that will help mitigate them to what you request funding for.

**Q:** Who can I contact if I have more questions about the grant?

**A:** For additional questions regarding the School Safety Improvement Grant, please email [SchoolSafetyGrant@iowa.gov](mailto:SchoolSafetyGrant@iowa.gov)

### **VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS**

**Note:** All of the vulnerability assessments conducted by the state vendor, Tetra Tech have been completed and sent to the district/school system superintendent or equivalent. If your district/school system did not receive your reports from Tetra Tech, please email [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov).

**Q:** Why haven't I received my vulnerability assessment reports from Tetra Tech yet?

**A:** Tetra Tech has sent out all reports but there are some districts that the spam or junk filter is filtering those emails out.

**Q:** Why was the vulnerability assessment timeline changed to December 31, 2022.

**A:** Governor Reynolds requested this change to allow schools the maximum amount of time to ensure that the purchase of the capital improvements can easily be completed by the end of 2024.

**Q:** If vulnerability assessments are being completed outside of the state's third-party vendor, do these need to be conducted by December 31, 2022?

**A:** No, they only need to be conducted by the time the grant application is submitted.

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**Q:** Do I have to have a vulnerability assessment performed in order to request grant funding for minor capital improvements for security enhancements?

**A:** Yes. A vulnerability assessment must be completed by one of the three options listed below:

1. Assessment by the State of Iowa and/or the State of Iowa contracted 3rd party entity
2. Assessment by Law Enforcement
3. Assessment by Vulnerability Assessment Services Providers

**Q:** Is there a cost to have an assessment performed by the State of Iowa and/or the State of Iowa contracted 3rd party entity?

**A:** No. The State of Iowa and/or the State of Iowa contracted 3rd party entity will conduct vulnerability assessments for all Iowa public and accredited private school districts/systems at no cost to the school.

**Q:** If I choose to have an assessment conducted by law enforcement or my own Vulnerability Assessment Services Provider, will the program pay for any expenses associated with obtaining these services?

**A:** No. Contracting with a vulnerability assessment service provider will not be a reimbursable expense under this School Safety Improvement Program.

**Q:** Can I perform my own self-assessment to meet the vulnerability assessment requirements?

**A:** Yes, A vulnerability assessment completed utilizing a school self-assessment tool or vulnerability assessment service provider other than the State of Iowa and/or the State of Iowa contracted 3rd party entity will be required to have an official letter from local law enforcement validating the vulnerabilities and options for consideration identified from the self-assessment.

**Q:** I had a vulnerability assessment completed in the past. Can I use that assessment to request grant funding?

**A:** Yes, but only vulnerability assessments dated within three years of the date of your grant request application will be accepted. Additionally, vulnerability assessments must include defined vulnerabilities and options for consideration to mitigate vulnerabilities and an official letter from local law enforcement validating the vulnerabilities and options.

**Q:** How do I request a vulnerability assessment from the State of Iowa?

**A:** School districts (public and private) can request a vulnerability assessment through completion of the "School Safety Vulnerability Assessment" survey issued by the Iowa Department of Education in the Consolidated Accountability and Support Application (CASA) system. Note this survey will not be monitored after January 1, 2023, so please email [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov).



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**Q:** Is it possible to change my selection from having the state's third-party vendor complete a vulnerability assessment to having one completed by a local vendor or law enforcement?

**A:** Yes, it is possible to change a selection and complete a vulnerability assessment locally. The respondent will need to go into the original survey in CASA and change the response accordingly. If an assessment with the state's contracted vendor has already been scheduled, the school should contact the vendor and cancel the appointment. It is also the responsibility of the school to ensure all required components of the assessment are completed in order to qualify for the school safety improvement fund grant. Any change after December 1, 2022, may cause the Vulnerability Assessment to have to be conducted January 2023. **Changes after January 1 2023, will be taken on an individual case basis and the request should be emailed to [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov).**

**Q:** Do I need to update my selection in CASA for either the Vulnerability Assessment Survey or the Notice of Interest Survey?

**A:** If your response changes at any time, yes please update the response in CASA. Those two surveys are the database of record and must be accurate.

**Q:** Is there a checklist or template for a school to use when conducting their own self-assessment?

**A:** There are no prescribed materials or checklists for conducting the assessment although Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMD) did develop an optional series of questions that were sent to County Emergency Management Coordinators; the most important aspect is that the assessment specifies vulnerabilities and options to mitigate them and they identify which school has which vulnerability if there are multiple schools in a report. The results of the assessment must be summarized in a report written by the school, the County EMA, local law enforcement (LLE) or another outside source. If LLE did not conduct the assessment, LLE will need to validate in writing that the school has the vulnerabilities cited and that reasonable options for consideration are provided to mitigate the vulnerabilities.

The [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#) (CISA) provides useful resources that may be referenced when developing a vulnerability assessment, including a [school safety assessment tool](#).

**Q:** Who is the State of Iowa 3rd party contracted entity performing vulnerability assessments?

**A:** Tetra Tech is the only approved State of Iowa 3rd party contracted entity authorized to provide vulnerability assessments on behalf of the State of Iowa under this program.

**Q:** When will we receive the Vulnerability Assessment Report(s) from Tetra Tech?

**A:** **All vulnerability assessment conducted by Tetra Tech have been completed and sent to the district/school system superintendent or equivalent. If you have not received your reports, please email [schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov](mailto:schoolsafetygrant@iowa.gov).**

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**Q:** Are the vulnerability assessments being conducted by the state vendor considered protected information?

**A:** Yes, all vulnerability assessments conducted by Tetra Tech are marked with the following: "This information is confidential information, is not subject to public disclosure, and is protected by Iowa Code 22.7 (50)." The vulnerability assessments from Tetra Tech will only be shared with the school superintendent and only those personnel the superintendent authorizes to receive the vulnerability assessments for his/her district.

**Q:** Are vulnerability assessment reports conducted outside of Tetra Tech reviewed by anyone?

**A:** Yes, non-Tetra Tech vulnerability assessment reports are reviewed by a member of Iowa HSEMD staff, this review is only to verify that the vulnerabilities and options for consideration are clearly identified and reasonable. They will also verify that there is a letter from law enforcement validating the findings of the assessment. If there is a question, the HSEMD staff member will work with the school and/or the agency that conducted the assessment.