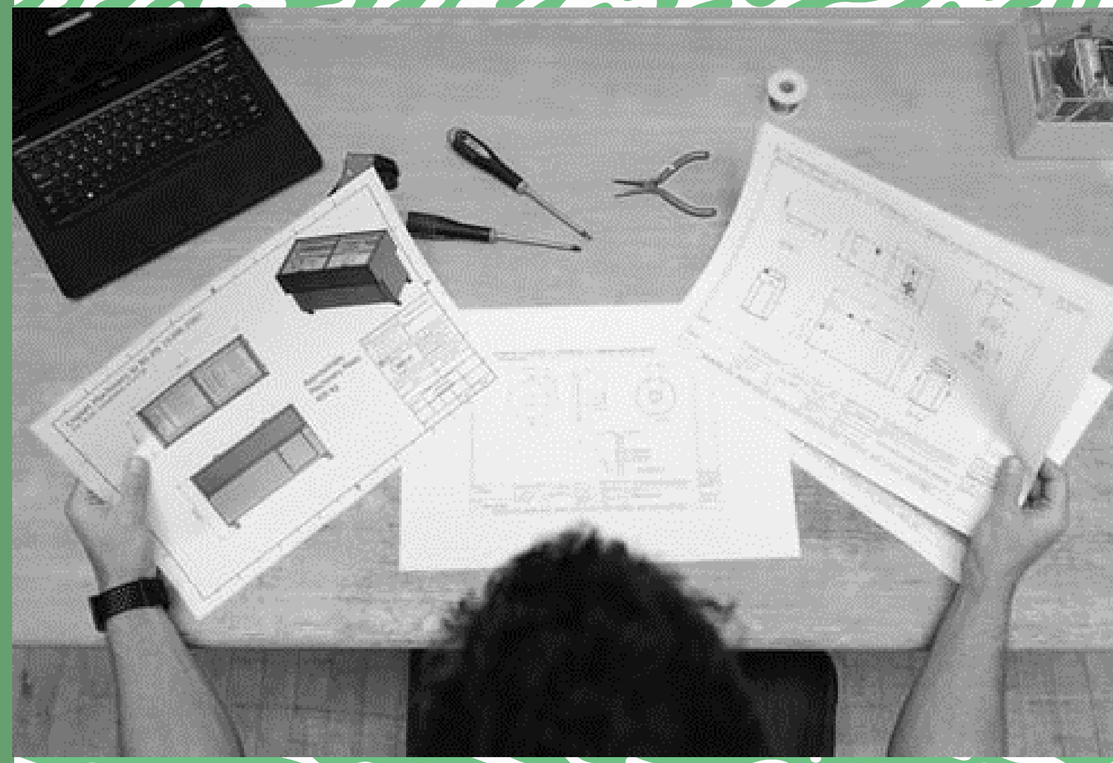
STEM TALENT CHALLENGE

2021 Competition Debrief Webinar

March 15, 2021



TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- Competition by the Numbers
- Technical Review
- Merit Review Trends
- Next Steps

COMPETITION BY THE NUMBERS

Where did we land on applications totals?

The Numbers

Applications Received

77 applications received in total

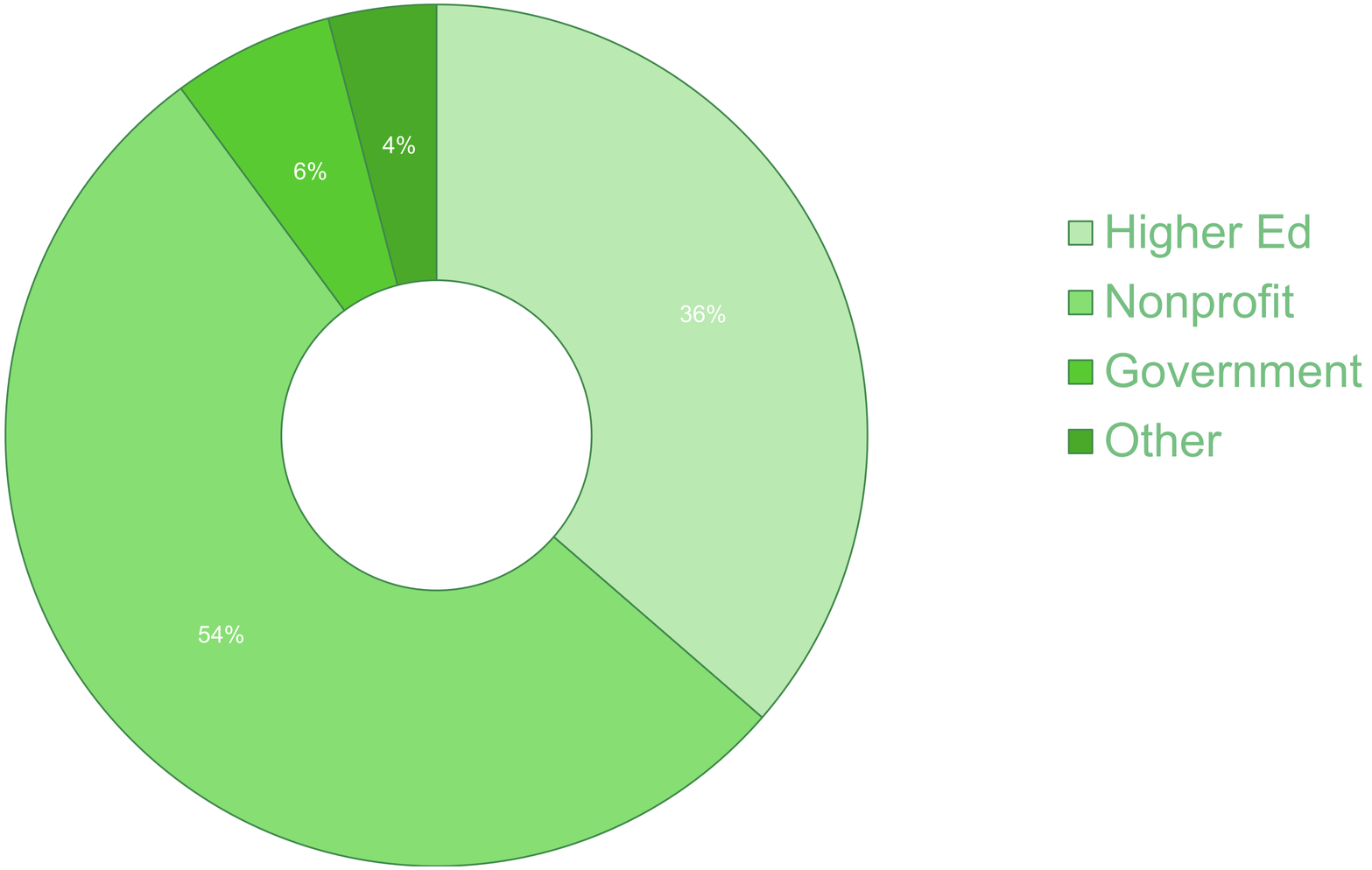
Applications received from 35 states

8 applications selected for funding

$1.96M Obligated

The Numbers

Applications Received by Entity Type



The Numbers

Application Acceptance rates

~10%

Overall acceptance rate

Total amount requested

$23.7M

>11X

Appropriated amount

This year’s challenge was still very competitive!

Technical Review

Don’t get knocked out by a technical mistake!

Technical Review

Most Common Technical Issues

- **Missing match or commitment letter**
- Lack of government support letter

You can ask technical questions during the application period if in doubt

Applications that get knocked out in technical review do not get scored in merit review

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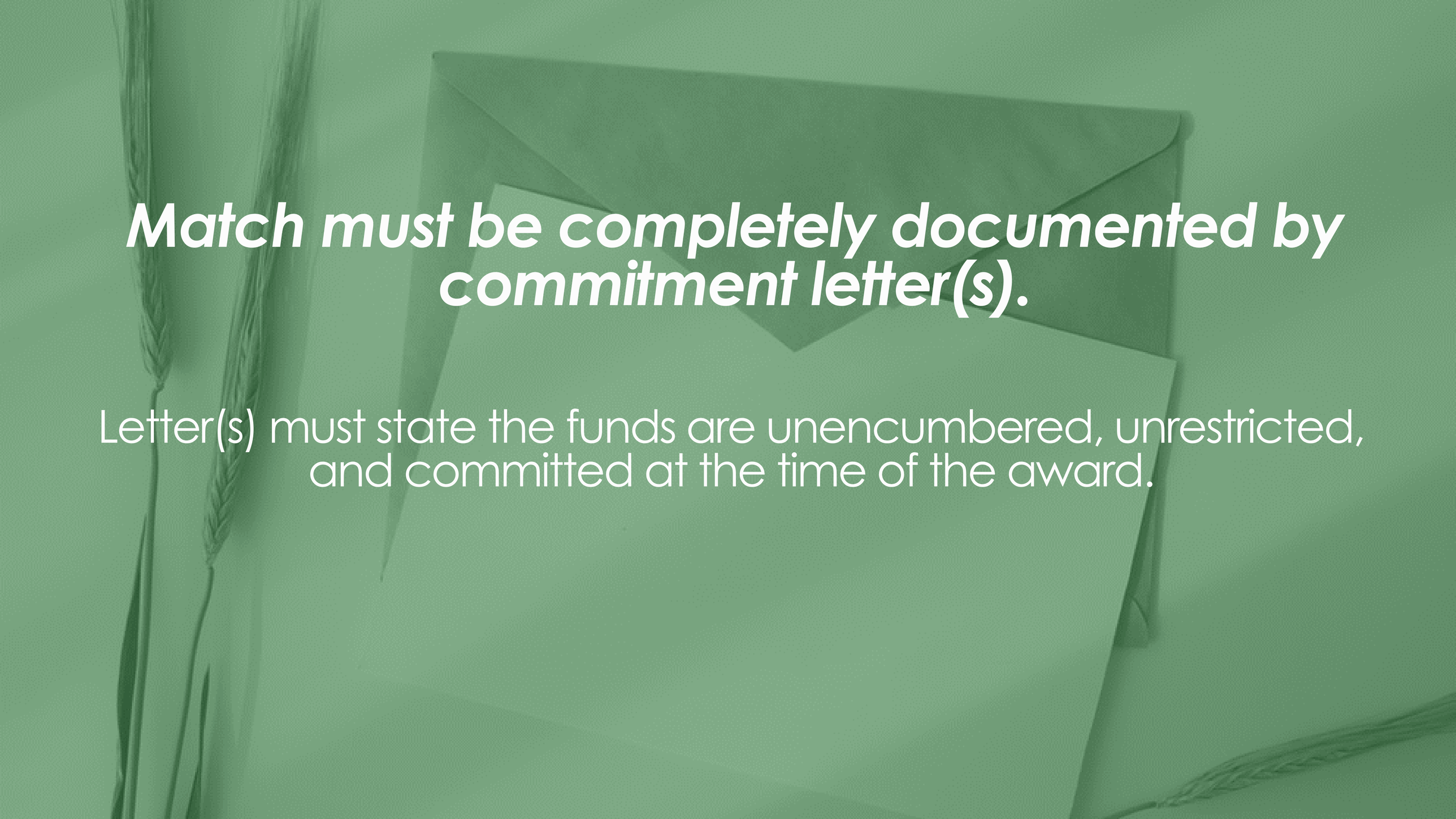
Technical Review

Matching Funds Missing

1:1 match means that applicants must bring at least as much as they are requesting

Match amounts should be easily traceable and consistent throughout budget documents

Funding must be available at the time of app – can't be something that will be based on future earnings or agreements



Match must be completely documented by commitment letter(s).

Letter(s) must state the funds are unencumbered, unrestricted, and committed at the time of the award.

Technical Review

Government Support Missing or Incomplete

- All non-public entities (including private institutions of higher education) require a letter of government support
- Should come from a geographic area or department that will be served by the project

NOFO Language

Applicant must submit one or more resolutions or letters that demonstrate that the application is supported by one or more States, political subdivisions of States (e.g., counties, municipalities), or native organizations that encompass all or a substantial portion of the region served by this project.

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Program Alignment

Are you aligned with the mission of the STEM Talent Challenge

Program Alignment

Mission of the STEM Talent Challenge

- This program seeks to drive regional innovation by building STEM-capable talent
- Projects must complement region's innovation economy and should be tied to transformative sectors/industries of the future

A strong application highlights a training program that is closely aligned with the region's innovation economy

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Merit Review Trends

A look at the scoring criteria and common trends we saw related to each one

Merit Review Trends

Strength of Regional Partnerships and Assets

Stronger Applications

- ✓ Had established connections with industry partners who expressed commitments to hire and supported WBL Opportunities
- ✓ Had partners from a variety of institutions (government, industry, CBO, etc.)

Weaker Applications

- X Planned to develop relationships following grant award
- X Failed to include industry partners or hiring commitments
- X Failed to identify a distinct industry or industry cluster

Merit Review Trends

Strength of Regional Partnerships and Assets

- ✓ Demonstrated how partner commitments were tied to the successful execution of program components
- X Described the roles partners would play in vague terms

- ✓ Ensured lead alone was not responsible for all project components, heavy involvement from partners
- X Lacked a cohesive approach to involving identified stakeholders in project

- ✓ Showed clear and practical roles for regional partners and evidence of commitment to involvement
- X Did not provide evidence of commitment from partners to fulfill their proposed roles

Merit Review Trends

Alignment with STEM Talent Challenge Program Goals

✓ Described specific STEM skills that trainings would build and connected these to an industry need

✓ Demonstrated that the selected industry or industries were well-positioned to grow

✓ Provided evidence that proposed projects would lead to high-paying jobs

✓ Considered both immediate and future talent pipelines

Reviewers looked for projects that were likely to build STEM-capable talent that aligned with a regional industry need

X Proposed general STEM training not tied to a specific industry

X Did not link the building of STEM talent to a regional need

X Did not describe both short- and long-term goals

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Merit Review Trends

Promotes Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Stronger Applications

- ✓ Included partners operating in DEI space
- ✓ Included specific goals for underserved and minority participation and nested DEI into proposed outcomes
- ✓ Offered a specific and nuanced DEI plan specifically tied to region

Weaker Applications

- X Relied on diverse regional demographics to show DEI but failed to demonstrate a plan to target underserved populations and mitigate disparities
- X Did not demonstrate support from DEI organizations

Merit Review Trends

Measurable Goals and Impacts

- ✓ Provided a clear timeline for goals and outputs
- X Did not specify qualitative or quantitative goals or didn't include when they would be achieved

- ✓ Clearly demonstrated alignment between goals and fulfilling industry need
- X Didn't show the impact projects would have on the STEM labor market

- ✓ Included ambitious but attainable stretch goals related to high-quality job placements for program participants
- X Proposed filling low-quality or non-STEM related jobs as part of project impact

Merit Review Trends

Project Sustainability and Adaptability

✓ Identified multiple specific sources of funding

✓ Had a multi-year track record of implementing the proposed or similar projects

✓ Had access to emergency funding sources if necessary to sustain the project

✓ Identified multiple, practical courses of action that would address future funding

✓ Demonstrated scalability and flexibility to expand impact and opportunities

X Did not propose financially innovative ways to sustain projects

X Did not include diverse sources of future funding

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Merit Review Trends

Budget and Staffing Plan

Stronger Applications

- ✓ Provided a clear staffing plan specifying names of leading individuals, time commitments, and their track records
- ✓ Discussed costs in the project narrative as well as providing specific figures and projections in the budget narrative
- ✓ Had subject matter expertise in the programs proposed

Weaker Applications

- X Did not identify the core leadership team or name the project coordinator
- X Dedicated an outsized share of program funds to a few personnel
- X Dedicated matching funds to unrelated projects
- X Did not have adequate (or any) staffing time assigned to the project

Merit Review Trends

Overall Trends

- Projects without a clear industry identified did not score as well as those connected to a specific industry
- Projects that clearly identified goals for job placement outcomes within the project period scored better than those that had delayed job placement impacts
- Projects that focused on sustainability but not adaptability, did not score as well, as it was unclear that they could be adapted for future funding

Applications that were organized and aligned with the merit review criteria scored best overall

Future Funding Opportunities

Future Funding activities at OIE

Build to Scale

OIE's Flagship program; The Build to Scale Program builds regional economies through scalable startups.

Application period will be open in the coming month(s)

STEM TALENT CHALLENGE

We do plan to run the FY 2022 STEM Talent Challenge, pending budget approval

Subscribe to the EDA newsletter for updates to the application window

To subscribe, sign up at: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USEDA/subscriber/new

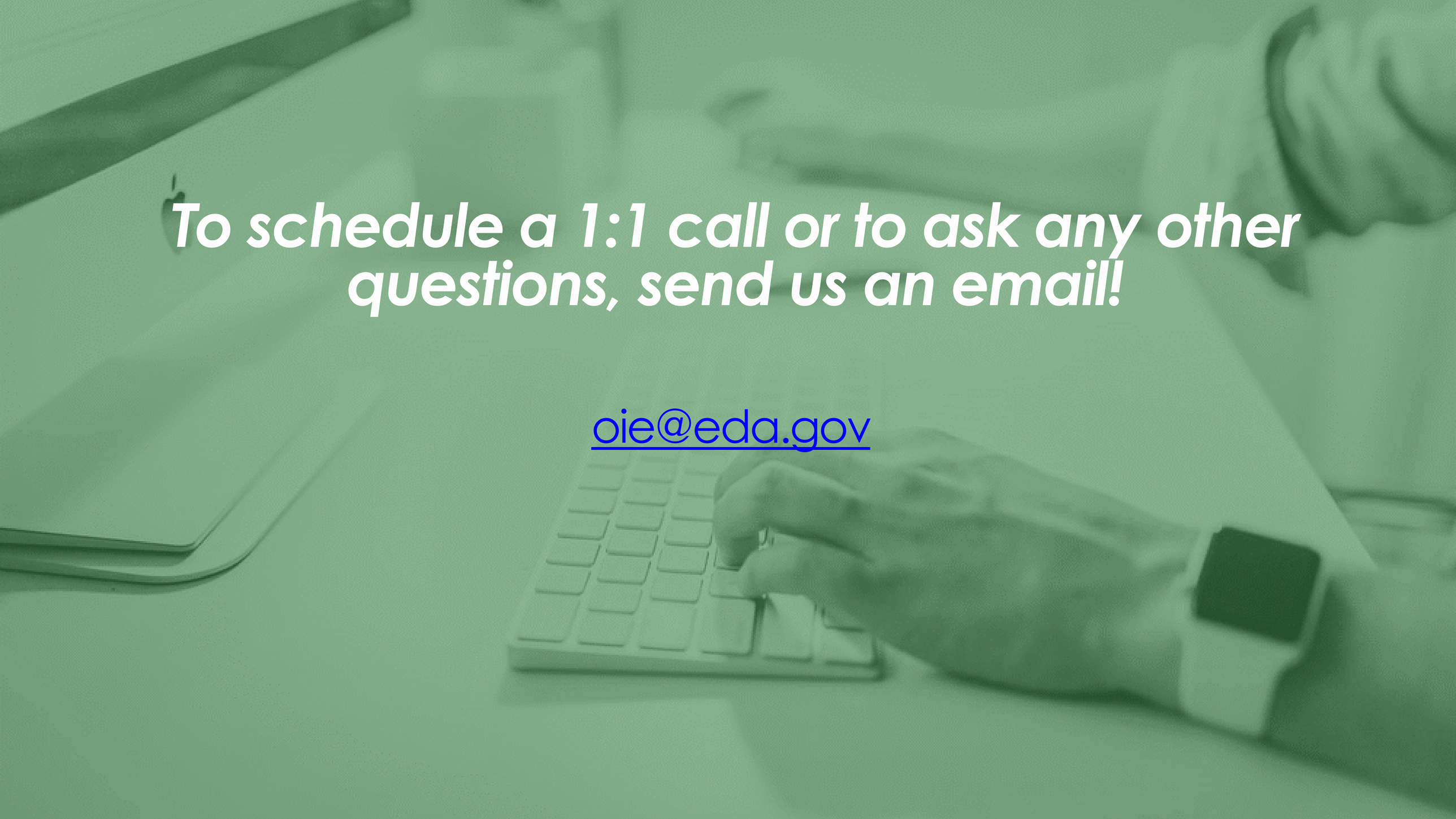
Continuing the Conversation?

How to request one-on-one feedback on your application

Scheduling a 1:1 Call

Steps to complete before requesting a call

- Watch this webinar
- Re-read your STEM Talent Challenge application in its entirety, including budget documents
- Identify areas of strength and weakness to identify on the call
- Make sure to include members of leadership on the call



To schedule a 1:1 call or to ask any other questions, send us an email!

oie@eda.gov