



North Carolina Department of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Program

2026-2027

Guidance & Planning Document

Program Overview

Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has received funding to establish the Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Program (Program). Under the Program, NCDPI will award, upon approval by the State Board of Education (SBE), grants to allow selected public schools serving students in grades nine through 12 to develop, maintain, or expand a speech and debate team and to allow participation in speech and debate competitions.

Eligible Organizations and Partners

Any public school unit (PSU) that includes a high school (grades 9 through 12) is eligible to apply to the Program to develop, maintain, or expand an educational and competitive speech and debate team in any high school within the PSU. Speech and debate teams receiving funds through the Program must participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.

Funding Availability

Session Law 2026-41, as amended by Session Law 2026-61, provides \$250,000 in nonrecurring funds for the Program during the 2026-2027 school year. Grant applicants will submit a proposed budget that is aligned with all budget requirements listed in the application. Applicants should be mindful of their ability to spend all requested funds within the grant period. The funding available for this Program is for the 2026-2027 school year. **All funding and services must be completed by June 30th, 2027.**

Funding Guidelines

Per Session Law 2026-41, as amended by Session Law 2026-61, NCDPI will determine the amount of each award up to a maximum of \$10,000 per team. Funds may be used for any of the following purposes:

1. Provide stipends for coaches. Each team award may only include two stipends, one lead team coach stipend of up to \$2,500 and one assistant team coach stipend of \$1,500.
2. Make payments associated with participation in a speech and debate league or competition.
3. Travel to and from speech and debate competitions.

Agency Priority

In support of legislative intent, all awards will be distributed to districts in a competitive and equitable manner to maximize the number of teams that receive funding. Preference will be given to applicants that support under-represented areas by prioritizing:

- PSUs serving high economically disadvantaged populations.
- Awarding PSUs in a manner to best support a broad geographical distribution.
- PSUs demonstrating a clear plan to monitor the program's impact on academic achievement and other student outcome measures identified by the PSU.

Student Eligibility

Per Session Law 2026-41, as amended by Session Law 2026-61, if a student is enrolled in a school that does not offer a speech and debate team, the student is eligible to participate on the speech and

debate team of the school located geographically closest to where the student resides that does have a program. Nothing in this section prohibits a school from enforcing guidelines for student participation in extracurricular activities, such as academic performance requirements, nor does it prohibit a school from conducting a selection process for the program, so long as the student is able to participate in the selection process as if the student were enrolled in that school.

Budget Requirements

As part of the application, applicants must submit a proposed budget and budget narrative. The proposed budget must clearly align with program activities, be reasonable and necessary, and provide a cost breakdown by category. Requested funds must be submitted, by category, in the proposed budget section of the application. An applicant awarded Competitive Speech and Debate Grant funds for the 2026-2027 funding period that fails to demonstrate compliance may have its funds terminated. Budgets may include the use of funds for any of the following purposes:

1. Provide stipends for coaches. Each team award may only include two stipends, one lead team coach.
2. Stipend of up to \$2,500 and one assistant team coach stipend of \$1,500.
3. Make payments associated with participation in a speech and debate league or competition.
4. Travel to and from speech and debate competitions.

Criteria and Guidelines

Applications will be available from August 19, 2026, until 5:00 pm EST on September 19, 2026. All applications will be submitted through the Google Form application link provided to PSUs.

Award and Use of Funds

Grant awards will not exceed \$10,000 per participating high school in the PSU. Funds may be used for any of the following purposes:

1. Provide stipends for coaches. Each team award may only include two stipends, one lead team coach.
2. Stipend of up to \$2,500 and one assistant team coach stipend of \$1,500.
3. Make payments associated with participation in a speech and debate league or competition.
4. Travel to and from speech and debate competitions.

Speech and debate teams receiving funds through the Program must participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.

Assurance of Accuracy:

An assurance must be submitted with the application, stating that all information provided within the application is true and accurate. If, during the implementation of any funded project, NCDPI establishes that inaccurate or false information was provided in the application, the grant may be rescinded.

Rejection of Proposals:

NCDPI reserves the right to reject any applications received in response to this Request for

Applications.

Review Process:

NCDPI will use three levels of review to score competitive grant applications, as outlined in SBE policy CNTR-001.

Grant Proposals must be submitted by 5 p.m. on September 19, 2026. Any proposal received after this deadline will not be reviewed or considered for an award under the Program.

Every applicant must meet the eligibility criteria stipulated by applicable laws, regulations, policies, and guidelines established by the funding source. Only eligible applicants are encouraged to respond to the call for applications, and it is crucial for applicants to clearly demonstrate their eligibility in accordance with the guidelines presented in this Request for Proposals. Proposals will be assessed in accordance with the procedures established in SBE policy CNTR-001. [View further information on policy CNTR-001.](#)

All applications will be subject to evaluation based on the applicant's written response addressing the criteria outlined in the rubrics included below.

Below are copies of the rubrics used to review the applications. Although not required, it is highly recommended that PSUs view and utilize the rubric in submitting their applications to ensure alignment with the Program's purpose and understanding of the review process.

Required Research/Evaluation Commitments:

PSUs that are awarded a competitive speech and debate grant will provide a report to NCDPI at the conclusion of the Program that includes, at a minimum:

- A list and descriptions of competitions that students participated in during the life of the grant.
- A list of measurable participant outputs and outcomes and descriptions of how the program impacted these outputs and outcomes. This must include the extent to which students participating in speech and debate teams funded by the Program experienced measurable improvement in academic performance.

Reporting

No later than May 15, 2027, NCDPI shall report the following information to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Fiscal Research Division:

1. The PSUs receiving grants and the amount of the grant.
2. A description of how the grants were used.
3. The PSUs that applied for grants but did not receive one.
4. The extent to which students participating in speech and debate programs funded by the Program experienced measurable improvement in academic performance.
5. Any other information the NCDPI deems relevant to evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the Program.

How To Apply

For the 2026-2027 Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Program, applications must be submitted via the Google Form application link. Applications are to be submitted by PSUs on behalf of those high schools that will be participating. Only one application should be submitted by a PSU.

Applicants may find it helpful to use the information in this document to begin collecting the necessary data and to ensure that all narratives are drafted before entering the information into the Google Form application.

To qualify for the grant, each component of the application must be completed and uploaded to the Google Form application as a PDF. To utilize the template in Google Docs, the application will prompt the applicant to make a copy. This will automatically create a copy of the Google Document in the applicant's Google Drive.

Final submission of the application will be submitted via Google Form.

Only applications submitted through the Google Form application link will be reviewed and evaluated. **Applications must be submitted by 5:00 pm ET on September 19, 2026.** Applications received after 5:00 pm on September 19, 2026 will not be accepted or considered for an award under the Program.

NCDPI 2026-2027 Proposed Tentative Timeline*

August 19, 2026	• Grant Planning and Guidance Document Available • Google Form application link shared with PSU leaders. • Request for Proposals Announcement – Information on the Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Program will be available on the NCDPI Office of Teaching and Learning website.
September 19, 2026	• Applications due September 19, 2026 by 5:00 pm EST. • Screening – A list of applications submitted by the deadline will be downloaded and screened for completeness. • Screened Applications sent to Review Team for Level 1 review.
October 1, 2026	• Grant award recommendation submitted to the SBE for review and approval • Notifications to Approved/Not Approved Applicants
By October 31, 2026	• Awards granted

*NOTE: The proposed timeline is tentative and subject to change based on the number of applications received and any actions taken by the SBE.

Links for Application Materials

[Application](#) (Complete, PDF, and upload to Google Form)

[Google Form](#)

Application Review Process & Rubrics

Level I Evaluation

This rubric below is designed to support the merit-based Level I evaluation required by SBE policy CNTR-001. Pursuant to SBE policy, NCDPI will appoint a review team of at least three impartial persons who are familiar with the subject area. Each review team is assigned a specific number of applications to evaluate. Review team members will individually review all proposals and rate each proposal on its merit within the categories listed in the rubric.

Category	Points	Evidence of Quality
Objectives & Outcomes	15	Measurable objectives, clear timeframes and outcomes; benefits to students and educators.
Narrative & Implementation	20	Coherent team model; realistic implementation steps, personnel, schedule, evidence base, alignment to priorities, and sustainability.
Need & Access	15	Compelling need is supported by student, socioeconomic, demographic, geographic, and/or access data.
Team Participation & Student Access	10	Credible plan for league/association participation and equitable access for eligible students.
Budget Quality	15	Reasonable, allowable, well-justified costs; compliance with statutory limits and chart of accounts.
Community Involvement	10	Meaningful involvement beyond the school system, including families and/or community/business partners.
Evaluation	10	Clear local evaluation methods, academic performance measures, data sources, and

		timeframes.
Dissemination	5	Specific plan to share results and promising practices statewide.

After all proposals are evaluated by individual team members, the entire review team will discuss each proposal as a group and come to a consensus on the final rating. Each proposal shall be included in one of the five quality bands listed below based on the proposal score.

Quality Band	Suggested Score Range	General Descriptor
Excellent	90–100	Exceptional proposal with strong evidence, feasibility, and likely impact.
Strong	80–89	Fully addresses criteria with credible evidence and a feasible plan.
Average	70–79	Generally sound proposal with some gaps or areas needing clarification.
Weak	60–69	Significant gaps in evidence, feasibility, alignment, or readiness.
Unacceptable	Below 60	Does not adequately meet required criteria or contains major deficiencies.

After consensus, each review team shall prepare comments on each proposal to be used in the approval/rejection letters sent to the applicants. The review team Chairperson will present findings to the Office Director.

Level II Evaluation

Applications recommended for funding by the review team will be reviewed by a smaller team of reviewers (which may include the Office Director and review team Chairperson). These reviewers will use the following criteria and will align applications with specific funding priorities.

1. SBE/DPI Priorities. The applicant's attention to agency priorities will be taken into consideration.
2. Geographic Area Needs. Needs will be considered in the various geographical areas of the state. Attention will be given to appropriate statewide distribution of funds.
3. Socioeconomic Needs. The socioeconomic standing of each applicant will be taken into

consideration.

4. Number of Projects and Total Funding Received. All projects and total amounts funded to each applicant during the current year and prior years will be compared with other applicants to ensure reasonable distribution of funds.
5. Applicant's Prior Performance. The applicant's prior and current performance in related areas will be examined to ensure a high probability of success.

Based on the above criteria, the reviewers will rate each proposal using the rating scale below.

Rating	Descriptor	General Standard
4	Excellent	Response is specific, coherent, evidence-based, highly feasible, and demonstrates strong readiness and statewide learning value.
3	Strong	Response addresses the criterion fully with credible evidence and a feasible plan.
2	Average	Response partially addresses the criterion but contains gaps in evidence, clarity, feasibility, or readiness.
1	Weak	Response provides minimal evidence or lacks a credible plan.
0	Unacceptable	Required information is missing or does not address the criterion.

Level III Evaluation

Using evaluation forms from the review teams, a combination of the Office Director, the appropriate Chief, the Deputy Superintendent, and/or Superintendent will jointly determine final selections of proposals to be presented to the SBE for approval.

Competitive Speech and Debate Team Grant Program

2026–2027 Planning Document

Purpose

This document is designed to assist PSUs with planning and submitting applications for the Competitive Speech and Debate Grant Program.

Application Opens	August 19, 2026
Submission Deadline	September 19, 2026; 5pm EST
Award Notification	No later than October 31, 2026
Grant Contact	Dr. Kristi Day; Kristi.Day@dpi.nc.gov
Maximum Award	Up to \$10,000 per team for the 2026–2027 school year

Program Overview

Purpose. The Competitive Speech and Debate Team Grant Program is intended to allow public schools serving students in grades 9–12 to develop, maintain, or expand educational and competitive speech and debate teams and participate in speech and debate competitions.

Eligible applicants. A public school unit (PSU) that includes at least one school serving students in grades 9–12 may apply. Each proposed team must be associated with an eligible public school.

Award amount. NCDPI may award up to \$10,000 per team for the 2026–2027 school year, subject to available funds and final program requirements.

Required participation. Teams receiving funds must participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.

Student access. A student whose school does not offer a speech and debate team may be eligible to participate on the program team at the geographically closest public school to the student’s residence, consistent with statutory requirements and local extracurricular participation guidelines.

Allowable Uses Of Funds

- ☐ Coach stipends: up to \$2,500 for one lead team coach and up to \$1,500 for one assistant team coach; no more than two coach stipends per team award.
- ☐ Payments associated with participation in a speech and debate league or competition.
- ☐ Travel to and from speech and debate competitions.

All expenditures must comply with applicable State requirements and the NCDPI chart of accounts. Costs outside the statutory categories should not be included unless later authorized by law or program guidance.

Section I. Applicant Information

Field	Response
Public School Unit	[Insert Text]
Superintendent / Charter Leader	[Insert Text]
Primary Grant Contact	[Insert Text]
Title	[Insert Text]
Email	[Insert Text]
Phone	[Insert Text]
Total Number of Teams Requested	[Insert Text]
Total Amount Requested	[Insert Text]
Fiscal Contact / CFO	[Insert Text]

School/Team Request Summary

List each school/team included in this application. Complete a separate team budget for each team. A PSU may submit one consolidated application for multiple eligible school teams.

School Name	Grade Span	Existing or New Team	Amount Requested	Primary Coach
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]

Eligibility Certification

- ☐ The applicant is a North Carolina public school unit.
- ☐ Each school/team included in this application serves students in grades 9–12.
- ☐ The applicant understands that a maximum award of \$10,000 may be made per team for the school year.

Section II. Objectives And Intended Outcomes

** If applying for multiple schools, please address each question for each school you are applying for.*

1. State the primary objective(s) of the proposed speech and debate initiative.

Write each objective in measurable terms and include the timeframe for accomplishment.

[Insert Text]

2. What student outcomes do you expect as a result of this grant?

Include specific measures and targets. Outcomes may address participation, communication skills, academic performance, attendance, engagement, or other locally relevant indicators.

[Insert Text]

3. How will the proposed project benefit educators and coaches?

Describe expected improvements in educator capacity, knowledge, instructional connections, or extracurricular leadership.

[Insert Text]

Section III. Narrative Description And Implementation Plan

4. Describe the proposed speech and debate program.

Indicate whether the grant will develop a new team, maintain an existing team, or expand an existing team. Describe the team model, expected events, competition opportunities, meeting structure, and student experience.

[Insert Text]

5. Describe the preliminary steps required for implementation.

Include coach recruitment/designation, training, team recruitment, registrations, purchases/payments, travel planning, competition scheduling, and other major start-up activities.

[Insert Text]

6. Describe the research, evidence, or successful models that informed the proposal.

Summarize the basis for the proposed approach and how it supports educational and competitive speech and debate.

[Insert Text]

7. Explain how the proposal aligns with the PSU/school strategic plan and State priorities.

Identify relevant academic, student engagement, college/career readiness, communication, or other priorities.

[Insert Text]

Implementation Schedule

Activity / Milestone	Description	Responsible Person	Target Date	Evidence of Completion
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]

8. How will the speech and debate team be continued, sustained, or replicated after the grant period?

Address recurring costs, staffing/coaching, local funding, partnerships, and potential expansion to additional schools.

[Insert Text]

Section IV. Team Participation And Student Access

9. Describe how each funded team will participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.

Include anticipated registration, competition participation, and responsible staff.

[Insert Text]

10. How will eligible students learn about and access the team?

Describe recruitment, communication, tryout/selection processes (if any), and how participation requirements will be applied consistently.

[Insert Text]

11. How will the PSU address participation by eligible students whose home school does not offer a speech and debate team?

Describe how the PSU will communicate the opportunity, identify the geographically closest participating school as appropriate, and apply local extracurricular requirements consistently. Note that such students are responsible for transportation to and from the school where the team meets per the legislation.

[Insert Text]

Section V. Proposed Budget And Budget Narrative

Provide a separate budget for each team. Total requested per team may not exceed \$10,000. All locally prepared budgets must conform to the NCDPI chart of accounts and final program guidance.

12. Provide a brief budget narrative explaining how the requested funds will support the team’s objectives and implementation plan.

Explain the necessity and reasonableness of each major cost.

[Insert Text]

Team Budget Form (repeat for each team)

Budget Category	Description / Justification	Amount	Statutory Limit
Lead Coach Stipend	[Insert Text]	\$ [Insert Text]	Up to \$2,500
Assistant Coach Stipend	[Insert Text]	\$ [Insert Text]	Up to \$1,500
League / Competition Fees	[Insert Text]	\$ [Insert Text]	Allowed
Competition Travel	[Insert Text]	\$ [Insert Text]	Allowed
Total Team Request		\$ [Insert Text]	
Maximum		\$10,000	

Section VI. Community Involvement

13. Describe how the project will involve the local community beyond the school system.

Address anticipated participation of parents/families, citizens, businesses, civic organizations, higher education, alumni, judges, volunteers, or other community partners.

[Insert Text]

14. Identify confirmed or anticipated community partners and the role each will play.

Include in-kind support, mentoring, judging, venues, sponsorships, outreach, or other contributions, if applicable.

[Insert Text]

Section VII. Statement Of Need

15. Describe the need for this grant and provide data supporting the need.

Include relevant student participation/access data, current extracurricular opportunities, academic or engagement indicators, socioeconomic data, demographic data, population/geographic factors, and barriers to participation where applicable.

[Insert Text]

Section VIII. Local Evaluation And Reporting

The legislation requires NCDPI to report the extent to which participating students experienced measurable improvement in academic performance.

16. Describe the local evaluation plan for the project.

Identify baseline data, outcome measures, data sources, collection methods, responsible staff, analysis methods, and evaluation timeframes.

[Insert Text]

Outcome Measurement Table

Measure	Baseline	Target	Data Source	Review Date	Responsible Staff
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]

Measure	Baseline	Target	Data Source	Review Date	Responsible Staff
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]
[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]	[Insert Text]

17. How will the PSU evaluate measurable improvement in academic performance among participating students?

Describe the indicators to be used and how student privacy will be protected.

[Insert Text]

18. How will evaluation findings be used to improve the team and inform future decisions?

Describe review cycles, feedback structures, and who will act on findings.

[Insert Text]

Section IX. Required Assurances

- ☐ The applicant certifies that all information in this application is accurate and complete.
- ☐ If awarded, each funded team will participate in the Tarheel Forensic League and the National Speech and Debate Association.
- ☐ Grant funds will be used only for allowable purposes and in accordance with all applicable State requirements and the NCDPI chart of accounts.
- ☐ No team award will include more than two coach stipends, and stipend amounts will not exceed the statutory limits.
- ☐ The PSU will maintain documentation of expenditures and provide fiscal and program information requested by NCDPI.
- ☐ The PSU will provide data and information needed for NCDPI reporting and evaluation, including information necessary to evaluate student academic performance, subject to applicable privacy requirements.

- ☐ The PSU will administer student participation and any team selection process consistent with applicable law, local extracurricular guidelines, and the program's student access requirements.
- ☐ The PSU will participate in technical assistance, and other grant administration activities required by NCDPI.
- ☐ The Superintendent/Charter Leader is aware of and supports this grant application.
- ☐ The Chief Finance Officer is aware of and supports this grant application.