PLUS PROGRAM · ALIGNMENT GUIDE · ELEVATE YOUTH CALIFORNIA

PLUS ALIGNMENT GUIDE

ELEVATE YOUTH CALIFORNIA

SIDE-BY-SIDE LANGUAGE FOR GRANT WRITERS. ADAPT EVERY BRACKET TO YOUR SCHOOL.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Elevate Youth California (EYC) is a state grant funded by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) through Proposition 64 cannabis tax revenue. The Center at Sierra Health Foundation administers the grants on behalf of DHCS and is the contact for applications and technical assistance. The Cohort 8 request for applications gave added emphasis to organizations serving transitional age youth and boys and young men of color. It funds youth substance use prevention through policy, systems and environmental change. It invests in leadership development and civic engagement for youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth ages 12 to 26 in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. Only a 501(c)(3) community-based or Tribal organization with established, trusted community relationships may apply. A school district cannot apply and takes part as the nonprofit's partner. As of October 31, 2026, the most recent round, Cohort 8 Standard Track, is closed. It offered about $44 million with awards of up to $1,000,000, and applications were due September 21, 2026. Awards are expected in December 2026 for a performance period of January 1, 2027 to December 31, 2029. No match is required. DHCS has not announced the next cohort.

This guide follows the program's own terms in order: its priorities, its funded strategies, its required components and its success indicators, followed by eligibility and partnership. Each table shows what EYC asks for, where PLUS fits, and sample language the nonprofit can adapt. The sample language uses brackets for the details only your organization and district partner can supply. Replace every bracket with your own data, programs and relationships, and rewrite the language in the nonprofit's voice.

> **Writer's note.** Use the rows that fit. In EYC the nonprofit leads, and the district partner runs PLUS. A strong application shows the PLUS Team finding patterns on campus and the nonprofit carrying those findings into community policy, systems and environmental change. It does not claim that PLUS covers the whole project.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Youth leadership development that empowers youth as community leaders	Students in the PLUS class gather and analyze data about their own school and lead the response alongside adults. This is youth participatory action research. The Advisor selects the PLUS Team to reflect the student body, with no elections or officers.	*"Through PLUS, students at [schools] will research conditions on their own campus each month and lead the response. The PLUS Team is selected to reflect the student body, so leadership reaches students who are not usually chosen for it."*
Civic engagement	The PLUS curriculum aligns with the California State Seal of Civic Engagement. Information moves up from the PLUS class to site leaders, the district office and the school board. Hemet Unified PLUS students presented to the Hemet City Council in 2014 and 2015 in support of a tobacco ban in city parks, which passed in March 2015.	*"PLUS Team members will present their findings to [the school board and city council]. [Organization] will prepare them through its civic academy, building on a PLUS curriculum aligned with the State Seal of Civic Engagement."*
Youth of color and 2S/LGBTQIA+ youth in communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs	Direction results can be viewed by student group, so the partners can see whether some students experience exclusion or isolation more than others. Forums give a new group of students a voice each month.	*"Direction results will be reviewed by student group each cycle so [Organization] and [District] can see which students report the most isolation and exposure to substances, and center the project on them."*
Ages 12 to 26	PLUS serves middle and high school students. Students in grade 6 may be younger than 12. The nonprofit reaches young adults ages 18 to 26, such as PLUS alumni.	*"PLUS reaches students ages [12 to 18] at [schools]. [Organization] extends the work to young adults ages 18 to 26, including PLUS alumni who serve as youth organizers."*
Social justice youth development in all programming	Forums ask students what is happening, how it affects students and what can be done. Students act on their own data. The nonprofit builds the connection to community systems and history.	*"PLUS gives social justice youth development a structure inside the schools. Students study their own campus and act together. [Organization] connects that work to the history of drug enforcement in [community] and to the systems that shape it."*

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Evidence-based, promising or community-driven practices	PLUS meets ESSA Tier 2 (moderate evidence) and is studied by university research teams at UC Berkeley, the University of Oregon and the University of Florida. It has been used in California schools for about 25 years.	*"The school strand uses PLUS, which meets ESSA Tier 2 and has been used in California schools for about 25 years. [Cite the studies on the PLUS Research page.]"*

FUNDED STRATEGIES

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Strategies that reduce risk factors, such as trauma and disconnection from school or community	PLUS addresses disconnection from school. Direction and Forums measure exclusion, isolation, harassment and vaping every cycle. PLUS does not address trauma through counseling or treatment, so name the partner who does.	*"PLUS addresses disconnection from school at [schools] by measuring isolation and exclusion every month and responding with activities students plan from that data. [Health partner] provides trauma-informed services."*
Strategies that enhance protective factors, such as cultural identity, adult and peer mentorship, and community and civic engagement	Youth development activities during the school day build connection and belonging. PLUS Team members work closely with the Advisor and the PLUS staff team. Students carry out activities with the whole campus.	*"Each month the PLUS Team will lead youth development activities that build connection and belonging. Students will work alongside [the Advisor and Organization staff] as they plan and lead the response to their own data."*
Policy, systems and environmental change	This is where the nonprofit leads. The PLUS Team finds the patterns on campus. The nonprofit helps youth turn a finding that reaches past the school, such as smoke and vaping where students gather, into a campaign.	*"When PLUS data points to a community condition, [Organization] will support youth in a [policy, systems or environmental] campaign. Youth will choose the final targets from their own data after the first year."*

REQUIRED COMPONENTS

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Annual listening sessions with youth and young adults on prevention impact and project improvement	PLUS Team members can attend a session, and PLUS Forum themes can shape the questions. The nonprofit holds the sessions and includes youth who are not in PLUS.	*"[Organization] will hold [three] listening sessions each spring, including one for PLUS Team members from both schools. Summaries will go to the PLUS staff teams and shape the next year's work plan."*
An approved work plan with monitoring and evaluation of youth engagement, prevention activities, policy, systems and environmental change, and participant outcomes, using quantitative and qualitative methods	PLUS produces both kinds of data every month: Direction results and Forum findings. Direction also hosts the University of Oregon Youth Empowerment Questionnaire and Youth-Adult Partnership Questionnaire.	*"Each PLUS site will produce monthly quantitative data from Direction and qualitative data from a student Forum. The Youth Empowerment and Youth-Adult Partnership Questionnaires, hosted in Direction, will measure youth engagement each fall and spring."*
External evaluation of EYC's effectiveness	Direction is anonymous and COPPA compliant and collects no personal information from students. Partners can share aggregate results.	*"[Organization] will cooperate with the external EYC evaluation and share aggregate PLUS data as requested. No student names or records leave the district."*
Technical assistance, at least two one-day regional convenings, and biannual progress and financial reports	These belong to the nonprofit. The PLUS Advisor and PLUS Team members can contribute data to progress reports.	*"[Organization] will take part in technical assistance, attend at least two regional convenings and submit biannual reports that include PLUS cycle results."*

SUCCESS INDICATORS

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Progress toward programmatic and policy, systems and environmental change goals	Cycle reports document each school's activities. A systems change can start inside the district, such as adding PLUS cycle data to the board's regular updates.	*"By [date], PLUS cycle data will appear in [District]'s quarterly board update, and youth will present the [campaign] to the [city council] at least [twice]."*

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Increased knowledge of substance use disorder and its prevention	PLUS substance use cycles and student-designed campaigns share facts supplied by health partners. Students do not give medical guidance.	*"PLUS Team and civic academy youth will complete a knowledge check before and after the substance use cycles, with a target gain of [percent]."*
Reduced stigma around substance use services	The PLUS Team serves as a liaison to the wellness center and runs QR code self-referral campaigns. PLUS students do not counsel peers.	*"Wellness center self-referrals at [schools] will rise from [baseline] to [target] as the PLUS Team runs stigma reduction campaigns each semester."*
Community-level policy, systems and environmental changes related to substance use or its root causes	The nonprofit leads community campaigns. PLUS data supplies the evidence from students.	*"Youth will use PLUS Forum and Direction results as evidence in a campaign for [ordinance or policy], led by [Organization]."*

ELIGIBILITY AND PARTNERSHIP

EYC ASKS FOR	WHERE PLUS FITS	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
A 501(c)(3) community-based or Tribal organization with established, trusted community relationships, located in and serving California	The nonprofit applies. The district signs a memorandum of understanding naming the PLUS sites, the Advisor commitment and how aggregate data is shared.	*"[Organization] has worked with [District] since [year] on [programs]. A signed MOU names the PLUS sites, the district's Advisor commitment and data sharing terms."*

BUDGET LANGUAGE

LINE	SAMPLE BUDGET JUSTIFICATION
PLUS Advisor, 0.1 to 0.2 FTE (usually district contribution)	"[District] funds a [0.2] FTE PLUS Advisor at each site. The time covers the PLUS class section and collaboration with the PBIS, MTSS and school climate teams, plus a monthly meeting with [Organization]'s coordinator." A 0.1 FTE covers the class section and can get the job done. PLUS recommends 0.2 FTE because the added 0.1 lets the Advisor serve on those teams and bring each cycle's data to them.

LINE	SAMPLE BUDGET JUSTIFICATION
PLUS Program, first year ($3,495 per site)	"Funds the 2-Day PLUS Program Development Training for a staff team of up to four, the online subscription to Direction and the activity resource database, the PLUS curriculum and one conference registration."
PLUS Program, each year after ($1,495 per site with a three-year agreement)	"Continues the subscription, the annual conference registration and one 2-Day training registration for a new staff member each year."
PLUS Advisor Institute ($1,495 registration plus lodging and travel)	"Prepares the PLUS Advisor to teach the PLUS class and lead its activities through the year. The Institute is held each June in Temecula."

Writer's note. Confirm eligibility in the current request for applications, since the grants.ca.gov listing also names county behavioral health organizations in its purpose statement. EYC requires no match, but showing the district's Advisor contribution tells reviewers the district intends to keep PLUS. Check the Request for Applications for allowable costs, the indirect cost limit, rules on youth pay and incentives, and whether EYC funds may pay for training of district staff. If they may not, move PLUS training to the district's side of the budget. Check federal tax rules on lobbying by 501(c)(3) organizations before you budget for advocacy.

Writer's note. The full sample application for a fictional nonprofit, the Ladero Youth Power Collective, and its district partner, San Ladero Unified, on the Funding PLUS page shows these pieces assembled into one application. Prices are from plusprogram.org/costs. Confirm them before you finalize the budget.

SOURCES

- Elevate Youth California: Cohort 8 Standard Track (grants.ca.gov)
- Elevate Youth California: Cohort 8 Standard Track, full listing (grants.ca.gov)
- PLUS Program Costs