PLUS PROGRAM · SAMPLE GRANT · COALITION PARTNERSHIP

SAMPLE DRUG-FREE COMMUNITIES GRANT

RIO ALTO COMMUNITY PREVENTION COALITION

SAMPLE APPLICATION FOR A FICTIONAL SCHOOL. FOR ILLUSTRATION ONLY.

ABOUT THIS SAMPLE

This sample is written for a fictional coalition, the Rio Alto Community Prevention Coalition, and its fictional school district partner, Rio Alto Unified School District. Every local figure in it is invented. The PLUS Program and Direction facts are accurate. Writer's notes appear in quoted boxes after each major section.

The Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program is a federal grant run by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in partnership with the CDC. It funds community coalitions that work to prevent youth substance use. The applicant is a coalition. A school district can serve as the coalition's fiscal agent or as its school sector partner. The coalition has members from 12 required community sectors, and the school sector and the youth sector are two of them. Awards are up to $125,000 per year for five years. The coalition must match every federal dollar with non-federal cash or in-kind resources. In September 2026, ONDCP announced FY 2026 awards to 101 new and competing continuation coalitions sharing about $12.6 million, with more than 500 coalitions now funded nationwide. The FY 2026 NEW (Year 1) notice (CDC-RFA-CE-26-0061) closed April 14, 2026. A FY 2027 NEW (Year 1) notice (CDC-RFA-CE-27-0058) is forecast on Grants.gov with an estimated posting date of January 26, 2027 and an estimated close date of March 31, 2027. Forecast dates change, so writers must confirm them on Grants.gov. Coalition members must have worked together on youth substance use for at least six months before applying.

PLUS fits DFC because DFC asks coalitions to reduce risk factors and build protective factors with local data. PLUS gives the coalition a working mechanism inside the schools. Each month the PLUS Team gathers data on its campus, identifies the issues, plans the response, and carries it out with the student body. That puts students in the coalition's youth sector with real data in hand.

This sample shows only the parts of a DFC application where the school district partner and PLUS appear. A full DFC application covers more, including the coalition's history, all 12 sectors, and substances beyond those addressed here.

Writer's note. DFC is a coalition grant. The coalition writes and submits it. The district's job is to be a strong school sector partner with a written commitment, a clear role in the action plan, and a documented in-kind match. If your district is not yet part of a DFC coalition, start by finding the coalition that serves your community. Many coalitions are already funded and can add PLUS to their action plan at their next continuation or competing application.

PROJECT ABSTRACT (EXCERPT)

The Rio Alto Community Prevention Coalition requests $123,602 in Year 1 of a five-year DFC award to reduce youth use of tobacco (including nicotine vaping) and marijuana in Rio Alto, California. The coalition has met monthly since 2023 and has members from all 12 required sectors. Rio Alto Unified School District is the school sector partner. The district runs the PLUS Program at Rio Alto High School and will open a second PLUS site at Quail Run Middle School. PLUS is an evidence-based school climate program that uses youth participatory action research. Each month the PLUS Team surveys a new sample of the student body with Direction, runs a student-facilitated Forum, and plans schoolwide activities in response to what students report. The coalition will use PLUS to carry three of the seven strategies for community-level change into the schools. The district will contribute a 0.2 FTE PLUS Advisor at each site as in-kind match. The coalition will measure progress with the DFC core measures every two years and with local school data each month.

1. BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

BACKGROUND

Rio Alto is a city of about 48,000 residents in California's Central Valley. Rio Alto Unified serves about 9,200 students in grades TK to 12. About 71 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The coalition's 2025 community assessment named nicotine vaping and marijuana as the top two youth substance concerns. Parents, school staff, and youth sector members raised both in every listening session.

The table below shows the local data that shaped the coalition's choice of substances. All figures are invented for this sample.

MEASURE	GRADE	RESULT	SOURCE AND YEAR
Past 30-day nicotine vaping	11	15 percent	District administration of the California Healthy Kids Survey, 2025 to 2026
Past 30-day marijuana use	11	10 percent	Same

MEASURE	GRADE	RESULT	SOURCE AND YEAR
Students who say vaping is "very wrong" for someone their age	9	48 percent	Same
Vaping-related suspensions	9 to 12	112 incidents	District discipline data, 2025 to 2026
Students who report vaping on campus in the last 30 days	9 to 12	12 percent	Direction, Rio Alto High School, averaged across Cycles 1 to 6, 2026 to 2027
Students bullied on campus in the last 30 days	9 to 12	9 percent (norm 6 percent)	Direction, Rio Alto High School, 2026 to 2027

Rio Alto High School opened its PLUS class in fall 2025 with district funds. In its first year the PLUS Team found that vaping in restrooms was a top four critical issue in five of nine Forums. Students linked vaping to stress, to exclusion from friend groups, and to older students supplying devices. The Direction bullying result above is above the 6 percent norm for grades 9 to 12, so the school received a warning indicator. The coalition sees isolation and exclusion as risk factors that sit next to youth vaping. PLUS works on both.

> **Writer's note.** DFC asks for a data-based rationale for each substance in the action plan. Use your coalition's own survey data and name the source and year. If your district already runs PLUS, add a short account of what the PLUS Team found. Reviewers respond to data that came from students themselves. Do not use Direction results as a substitute for the DFC core measures.

COMMUNITIES SERVED

The coalition serves the city of Rio Alto and the attendance area of Rio Alto Unified. PLUS will operate at two schools in Year 1 and Year 2.

SCHOOL	GRADES	ENROLLMENT	PLUS STATUS
Rio Alto High School	9 to 12	2,150	PLUS class since fall 2025
Quail Run Middle School	6 to 8	1,020	Planning in Year 1; PLUS class opens fall 2028

Quail Run is the main feeder school for Rio Alto High School. The coalition chose it so that prevention starts before students reach the grade where vaping rises.

APPROACH

The coalition follows the Strategic Prevention Framework recommended in the DFC notice. Its five steps are assessment, capacity, planning, implementation, and evaluation. PLUS runs a similar loop on each campus every month. That match lets the school data feed the coalition's own planning.

The PLUS Program. PLUS (Peer Leaders Uniting Students) is an evidence-based school climate program used in California schools for about 25 years. It uses youth participatory action research. Students gather and analyze data about their own school and lead the response alongside adults. School climate is the pattern of experiences that students, staff, and families have on campus. PLUS looks at risk factors such as bullying, exclusion, harassment, fights, and vaping. It also builds protective factors such as connection, belonging, and caring relationships.

At each site the PLUS Team is a class of 25 to 30 students in a dedicated class section. The Advisor selects the students to reflect the student body. The team is not elected and has no officers. An adult PLUS staff team guides the work at each site. It includes an administrator, a counselor or PBIS lead, and the Advisor.

The 30-day cycle. PLUS runs nine times a year. An August pre-cycle teaches students the process, and Cycle 1 begins in September.

1. **Protective factors.** The PLUS Team leads youth development activities during the school day that build connection and belonging.
2. **Data integration.** Direction surveys a new representative sample of less than 10 percent of the campus with the same questions each cycle. It measures the student body, not individual students. A student-facilitated Forum then gathers qualitative data from 40 to 50 high school students, or 25 to 30 middle school students. A new group attends each month. Students identify the issues, how those issues affect students, and what can be done. The Forum names the top four critical issues.
3. **Action planning.** Students review both kinds of data and plan the activities the campus needs. A cycle report goes to the principal, counselors, PBIS and MTSS teams, and the district office.
4. **Engagement.** Students carry out the activities with the campus. They share the data with the school community and measure again the next cycle.

How PLUS carries the coalition's strategies. DFC coalitions plan with the seven strategies for community-level change. PLUS carries three of them inside the schools. The coalition carries the others in the wider community.

DFC STRATEGY	WHAT PLUS DOES IN THE SCHOOLS	COALITION ROLE
1. Provide information	The PLUS Team shares each cycle's vaping and climate data with the campus through posters, announcements, and family Forums	Coalition media partner extends the same messages to parents and the city
2. Build skills	Forum participants examine how students treat each other on campus and what students can do about pressure and exclusion	Coalition provides parent education sessions with a health care partner
3. Provide support	PLUS activities build connection and belonging during the school day. The PLUS Team promotes the wellness center with QR code self-referral campaigns and reduces stigma about asking for help	County behavioral health sector member supports the wellness center connection

DFC STRATEGY	WHAT PLUS DOES IN THE SCHOOLS	COALITION ROLE
4 to 7. Access, consequences, physical design, policy	PLUS cycle reports give the coalition current school data to inform these strategies	Coalition leads community and policy work with city, law enforcement, and business sectors

The PLUS Team does not counsel or mediate. Forums focus on how students interact on campus. When students need support, the PLUS Team points them to the wellness center and the adults who run it.

A Kern High School District PLUS Team ran a vaping poster campaign as a full cycle, from survey to Forum to data to campaign. Objective 2 in the work plan follows that model.

Vertical alignment. Information moves up from the PLUS class to the site administrator, the MTSS and PBIS teams, the district office, and the school board. Decisions come back down. The coalition adds one more step. The district's school sector representative brings each month's cycle summary to the coalition meeting. Coalition decisions then return to the school sites through the same path.

> **Writer's note.** This is where reviewers decide whether the school partnership is real. Show the path that data takes from a Forum to the coalition table and back. Map PLUS to the Seven Strategies honestly. PLUS carries information, skills, and support inside schools. Leave policy and enforcement strategies to the coalition sectors that own them.

WORK PLAN

The DFC action plan is a 12-month plan with SMART objectives for at least two substances. The excerpt below shows the objectives where the district and PLUS are responsible parties. Year 1 is expected to begin September 30, 2027. Confirm your own budget period dates in the notice.

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMEFRAME	RISK OR PROTECTIVE FACTOR
1. By May 2028, Rio Alto High School will complete Cycles 2 to 9, each with Direction data and a Forum	Cycle report to principal, PBIS and MTSS teams, district office, and coalition each month	PLUS Advisor, PLUS staff team, PLUS Team	October 2027 to May 2028	Perception of peer disapproval; school connection
2. By May 2028, the PLUS Team will run at least two schoolwide vaping prevention campaigns built from cycle data	Campaign planned in the action planning step and measured the next cycle	PLUS Team, Advisor, coalition media partner	October 2027 to May 2028	Perception of risk (tobacco)

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMEFRAME	RISK OR PROTECTIVE FACTOR
3. By April 2028, older PLUS students will deliver a vaping talk to every grade 6 class at Quail Run Middle School	Feeder school vaping talk from the Direction activity resource database	PLUS Team, Quail Run counselor	February to April 2028	Perception of risk (tobacco); early initiation
4. By June 2028, Quail Run will complete PLUS planning	2-Day PLUS Program Development Training for the staff team; spring master schedule and team selection; June Advisor Institute	Quail Run principal, district school sector representative	November 2027 to June 2028	Capacity
5. By May 2028, the PLUS Team will host two evening family Forums	Family Forums with interpretation; data on youth vaping and marijuana shared with parents	PLUS Team, Advisor, coalition parent sector	November 2027 and March 2028	Perception of parental disapproval
6. By May 2028, wellness center self-referrals at Rio Alto High School will rise 20 percent over the 2026 to 2027 count	QR code self-referral campaigns; classroom visits with wellness staff	PLUS Team, wellness center staff	October 2027 to May 2028	Access to support

Five-year goals. By Year 5, the coalition expects to lower past 30-day nicotine vaping and marijuana use in grades 9 and 11. It also expects to raise perception of risk and peer disapproval on the DFC core measures. Quail Run will run full PLUS cycles from Year 2.

> **Writer's note.** Write objectives the coalition can actually report in the DFC and CARA & Me system. Tie each school objective to a core measure or a named risk or protective factor. Keep the PLUS calendar real. A new site needs the winter 2-Day training, a spring master schedule, and team selection before its class can open in August.

2. EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

The coalition's evaluation plan has two layers. The first layer is the required DFC data. The second is local school data that helps the coalition adjust its strategies during the year.

Required DFC core measures. DFC coalitions collect four core measures every two years. They are past 30-day use, perception of risk, perception of parental disapproval, and perception of peer disapproval. They cover alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and prescription drug misuse. The survey must cover at least

three grades between 6 and 12. The notice recommends at least one middle school grade and one high school grade. Surveys are submitted for review and approval in the DFC and CARA & Me system.

The coalition's evaluator will decide how the core measures are collected. One option is the district's existing administration of the California Healthy Kids Survey. Another is a separate coalition youth survey. The evaluator will confirm which survey meets the core measure item requirements before submission.

Local school data from PLUS and Direction. Direction gives the coalition data every month from each PLUS site. It asks the same questions each cycle of a new representative sample of less than 10 percent of the campus. It includes vaping questions and an Attendance and Engagement category. A question asked across schools to more than 250 students sets a norm. A school above the norm gets a warning indicator. Direction is anonymous and COPPA compliant. It collects no personal information from students.

Direction is not presented here as a source of DFC core measures. Direction can help the schools gather local data between core measure years. The coalition's evaluator will review Direction's vaping items and confirm whether any of them meet DFC core measure requirements. Until the evaluator confirms that, the coalition will report Direction results only as local data.

MEASURE	TOOL	HOW OFTEN	WHO REVIEWS
DFC core measures, grades 7, 9, and 11	Survey approved in the DFC and CARA & Me system	Every two years	Coalition evaluator; coalition data workgroup
Vaping on campus and school climate items	Direction	Every 30-day cycle	PLUS Team; PLUS staff team; school sector representative
Top four critical issues	Forum summary in the cycle report	Every 30-day cycle	PLUS staff team; MTSS and PBIS teams; coalition
Vaping-related suspensions	District discipline data	Each semester	District school sector representative
Wellness center self-referrals	Wellness center log, counts only	Each semester	Wellness center staff
Strategy activities and reach	Coalition activity log	Monthly	Project coordinator

Reporting. The coalition submits its Annual Progress Report in the DFC and CARA & Me system each August. It submits its Annual Performance Report in GrantSolutions each March. Data collection and evaluation costs may not exceed 10 percent of the federal award. The Year 1 evaluator contract is $10,000, which is within the limit of $12,360.

> **Writer's note.** Be careful here. DFC core measures come from specific required survey items. Do not claim that Direction meets them. Say that Direction gives schools local monthly data, and that your evaluator will confirm whether any Direction items meet the requirements. Ask your evaluator and your CDC project officer whether any part of the PLUS subscription counts toward the 10 percent data and evaluation limit.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The fiscal agent is Rio Alto Family Resource Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. It employs the project coordinator and manages the grant. The coalition's executive committee approves the action plan and budget. Rio Alto Unified signs a memorandum of understanding with the coalition each year. The MOU names the district's school sector representative, the two PLUS sites, the district's in-kind match, and how cycle summaries are shared. Only aggregate data is shared. No student names or records leave the district.

COMMUNITY COALITION

The table shows the sector members whose work connects to the schools. All names of organizations are invented.

SECTOR	MEMBER	ROLE CONNECTED TO PLUS
School	Director of Student Services, Rio Alto Unified	Brings cycle summaries to the coalition; oversees both PLUS sites
Youth	Two Rio Alto High School PLUS Team students, ages 16 and 17	Share Forum findings and youth perspectives at coalition meetings
Parent	Parent leader from the district English Learner Advisory Committee	Co-plans evening family Forums
Youth-serving organization	Rio Alto Youth Center	Extends PLUS campaign messages to after-school programs
Healthcare	Valley Community Clinic	Leads parent education sessions
State, local, or tribal agency	County behavioral health prevention specialist	Supports the wellness center connection
Media	Rio Alto Community Radio	Donates airtime for campaign messages

Each member represents only one sector. Paid coalition staff do not serve as sector representatives. The PLUS Advisors attend coalition meetings as guests when the agenda includes school data.

Writer's note. DFC requires a school sector representative with influence over school policies and procedures. Name someone at the district level who can carry decisions back to the sites. Youth members must be 18 or younger, and the application lists their ages. Do not name students.

YEAR 1 BUDGET

FEDERAL REQUEST

CATEGORY	LINE ITEM	AMOUNT
Salaries and wages	Project coordinator, 0.75 FTE at $68,000	$51,000
Fringe benefits	30 percent of salary	$15,300
Travel	Travel to the National Coalition Institute Training Program and other trainings, as allowed in the notice	$6,500
Supplies	Printing and materials for PLUS Team campaigns and family Forums	$5,195
Contractual	PLUS Program renewal, Rio Alto High School (three-year agreement)	$1,495
Contractual	PLUS Program first year, Quail Run Middle School	$3,495
Contractual	PLUS Advisor Institute registration, Quail Run Advisor	$1,495
Contractual	Local evaluator	$10,000
Contractual	Community information campaign with media partner	$10,000
Other	Coalition and family Forum meeting costs, including interpretation	$3,000
Total direct costs		**$107,480**
Indirect costs	15 percent de minimis rate on modified total direct costs	$16,122
Total federal request		**$123,602**

NON-FEDERAL MATCH

SOURCE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Rio Alto Unified (general fund)	PLUS Advisor, Rio Alto High School, 0.2 FTE (illustrative $120,000 salary and benefits)	$24,000
Rio Alto Unified (general fund)	Quail Run Advisor collaboration time, 0.1 FTE for spring 2028 planning	$6,000

SOURCE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Rio Alto Unified (general fund)	Quail Run Advisor Institute lodging (3 nights at $250) and travel ($250)	$1,000
Rio Alto Unified (general fund)	Quail Run PLUS staff team time at the 2-Day training	$4,800
Rio Alto Unified (general fund)	Rio Alto High School PLUS staff team time for cycle reviews	$6,000
Rio Alto Family Resource Center	Office space and accounting	$14,400
Coalition members	Volunteer time at meetings and workgroups (480 hours at an illustrative $33 per hour)	$15,840
County behavioral health	Prevention specialist time	$9,500
City of Rio Alto	Meeting space	$4,800
Rio Alto Community Radio	Donated airtime	$12,000
Local business sector	Donated printing	$3,500
Valley Community Clinic	Staff time for parent education	$6,000
Faith-based partner	Hall and volunteer time for family Forums	$4,200
Rio Alto Police Department	Youth services officer time at coalition meetings	$5,600
Rio Alto Youth Center	Staff time for campaign outreach	$6,400
Total match		**$124,040**

The match of $124,040 exceeds the federal request of $123,602, so it meets the 100 percent match requirement for Year 1.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

Project coordinator ($51,000) and fringe ($15,300). The coordinator runs the coalition, keeps the action plan on schedule, and manages reporting. The coordinator also schedules the monthly cycle summary on the coalition agenda.

Travel ($6,500). This covers the trainings the DFC notice requires for new coalitions. Youth members travel with an adult chaperone.

Supplies ($5,195). This covers printing for the PLUS Team's vaping campaigns (Objective 2), the feeder school talks (Objective 3), and family Forum handouts (Objective 5).

PLUS Program renewal, Rio Alto High School ($1,495). This is the per-year price under a three-year agreement. It includes the online subscription with unlimited Direction and the activity resource database, one conference registration, and one 2-Day training registration for a new staff member. It supports Objectives 1, 2, and 6.

PLUS Program first year, Quail Run ($3,495). This includes the 2-Day PLUS Program Development Training for a staff team of up to four (a fifth attends free), the subscription, the PLUS curriculum, and one conference registration. It supports Objective 4. From Year 2 the site renews at $1,495 per year under a three-year agreement.

PLUS Advisor Institute registration ($1,495). The Institute is held each June in Temecula. It prepares the Advisor to teach the PLUS class and lead its activities. The 2-Day training prepares the staff team to run the program schoolwide. The Institute provides lunches and refreshments. The district pays lodging and travel as match.

Local evaluator ($10,000). The evaluator manages the core measure survey, reviews Direction items against core measure requirements, and prepares data for the Annual Progress Report.

Community information campaign ($10,000). The media partner extends PLUS Team messages to parents and the wider community (Strategy 1).

Meeting costs ($3,000). This covers interpretation and materials for coalition meetings and family Forums. Food is charged only as an incentive at community-wide events such as family Forums, within the DFC limit of $3 per person. No food is charged for coalition meetings.

Indirect costs ($16,122). The fiscal agent uses the 15 percent de minimis rate. No equipment or other excluded costs appear in the direct costs.

District match ($41,800). The 0.2 FTE Advisor covers the dedicated PLUS class section plus 0.1 FTE for collaboration. That collaboration time lets the Advisor serve on the site's PBIS team, MTSS team, and school safety committee. The Advisor brings each cycle's data to those teams and carries decisions back to the class. In Year 1 the Quail Run Advisor uses the collaboration share for planning. From Year 2, both sites carry a full 0.2 FTE Advisor, a district match of $48,000 per year. All district match comes from the general fund, not federal funds.

> **Writer's note.** DFC funds cannot pass through to other organizations, and stipends, equipment, and research are not allowed. The coalition buys PLUS directly as a contractual cost. Confirm with your CDC grants contact how to classify it. Federal funds, including federal funds passed through the state, cannot count as match, so name a non-federal source for the Advisor. Check every line against the current notice.

SUSTAINABILITY

The coalition submits a sustainability plan in Year 3. PLUS costs drop after the first year, which makes the school work easier to sustain. Each site renews at $1,495 per year under a three-year agreement. Rio Alto

Unified has committed to keep both PLUS class sections and the 0.2 FTE Advisor roles in its master schedule and budget. The district will include the PLUS cycle data in its LCAP engagement process. More than 80 percent of PLUS schools renew each year. The PLUS Team will also stay part of the coalition's youth sector after DFC funding ends.

> **Writer's note.** Show that the district already pays for the parts that matter most. The class section and the Advisor's collaboration time are what keep PLUS connected to MTSS, PBIS, and the coalition after the grant.

EVIDENCE BASE

PLUS meets ESSA Tier 2 (moderate evidence). University research teams at UC Berkeley, the University of Oregon, and the University of Florida continue to study PLUS. A five-year University of Oregon study of student voice in California high schools, funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, is underway.

1. "Youth Participatory Action Research in the High School Curriculum: Education Outcomes for Student Participants in a District-Wide Initiative." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness.* A quasi-experimental study with propensity score matching compared 153 PLUS participants in six high schools in one California district with similar peers. Participation significantly improved attendance. PDF
2. Abraczinskas, M., Kornbluh, M., Golden, A. R., Glende, J., Velez, V., Vines, E., and Ozer, E. J. (2022). "Preventing Bullying and Improving School Climate Through Integrating Youth Participatory Action Research Into School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports." *Journal of Prevention and Health Promotion,* 3(2). PDF
3. Cohen, A. K., Ozer, E. J., Abraczinskas, M., Voight, A., Kirshner, B., and Devinney, M. (2019). "Opportunities for Youth Participatory Action Research to Inform School District Decisions." *Evidence and Policy.* PDF
4. Gauna, R. (2017). "The Peer Leaders Uniting Students (PLUS) Program: The Impact on School Climate, Student Engagement, and Student Mentoring." Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University Irvine. PDF

For PLUS pricing and planning, contact pce@pcesolutions.org or 866.403.9484, or visit plusprogram.org.

SOURCES

- ONDCP announces FY 2026 Drug-Free Communities and CARA Local Drug Crisis grant awards (The White House, September 2026)
- DFC Support Program NEW (Year 1), CDC-RFA-CE-26-0061, Simpler.Grants.gov
- CDC-RFA-CE-26-0061 notice of funding opportunity (PDF)
- DFC Support Program NEW (Year 1), CDC-RFA-CE-27-0058 forecast, Simpler.Grants.gov
- DFC Support Program Competing Continuation (Year 6), CDC-RFA-CE-26-0208, Simpler.Grants.gov

- Drug-Free Communities Notice of Funding Opportunity: Questions and Answers (CDC)
- Drug-Free Communities at a glance (CDC)
- DFC Overview 2026 (CDC, PDF)
- FY 2026 Strategic Prevention Framework Partnerships for Success notice (SAMHSA, PDF), for the five SPF steps