

Office of Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell



Request for Proposals (RFP)

Phone Free Schools Support Grant

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Response Due Date: June 5, 2026

Project Start Date: September 1, 2026

Project End Date: August 31, 2028

Phone Free Schools Support Grant
Grantor: Office of Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell
Address: One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108
Email: AGOgrants@mass.gov
Phone: (617) 963-2150

Grant Program Description

The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office (AGO) is pleased to announce the Phone Free Schools Support Grant to support the implementation of "Bell-to-Bell"¹ cell phone policies in Massachusetts schools. This grant opportunity is designed to provide schools with the resources necessary to create phone-free school environments during both instructional and unstructured times during the school day. This grant builds on the AGO's [*Cell Phones and Social Media in Schools: A Toolkit for School Leaders and Communities*](#) ("AGO's Toolkit") and seeks to fund proposals that create safer, more engaged learning environments free from the distractions of cell phones and other personal electronic devices. The AGO will prioritize proposals that are:

- Grounded in the strategies and frameworks outlined in the AGO's Toolkit;
- Focused on the implementation of phone free schools/bell-to-bell cell phone policies;
- Developed in collaboration with students, educators, and families with specific emphasis on community norms;
- Responsive to the needs of all students, including those with disabilities or other accessibility needs;
- Designed to avoid the use of punitive or exclusionary disciplinary practices;
- Scalable, sustainable, and clearly measurable outcomes; and
- Incorporate community education on the proposed policy implemented.

The grant will be funded with up to \$500,000 from the AGO.

Grant funds may be used to support reasonable and necessary expenses associated with the implementation and evaluation of a "Bell-to-Bell" cell phone policy, including but not limited to:

- Materials or licenses for policy implementation (e.g., lockable phone storage; phone apps that restrict access to apps and the internet while allowing for calls and emergency access);
- Professional development and training costs for school staff or administrators;
- Community engagement and education activities, including hosting listening sessions, printing/disseminating educational materials, and conducting outreach;
- Data collection and evaluation tools to assess changes in school climate, student engagement, and phone use patterns; and

¹ A "Bell-to-Bell" cell phone policy restricts cell phone usage from the start of the school day until the end of the school day.

- Translation and accessibility support to ensure inclusive participation and communication.

Grant funds can be used for implementation of new or enhanced programming. A grant award cannot be used to supplant other funding sources or sustain existing program expenses such as a phone storage contract renewal.

Background

Smartphone and social media use are nearly universal amongst teens in America. Today, almost all teenagers have their own smartphone, and up to 95% of teenagers ages 13-17 report using social media, with over one-third reporting that they use it “almost constantly.”²

In May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an [Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#), advising the public that, despite some benefits for some youth, the current body of evidence demonstrates that social media use poses a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.³ Schools have not been shielded from these effects. Teachers and school leaders across the country report grappling with the pervasive distractions caused by cell phones and social media use, with 72% of high school teachers citing cell phone use as a major problem in classrooms.⁴

School leaders in Massachusetts have reported significant impacts of cell phones and social media on students and the school environment, including distractions from learning, shortened student attention span, increased anxiety among students, negative peer interactions, and increases in cyberbullying, harassment, and hate incidents. Students use social media to plan and promote physical violence, with students recording fights on their phones then posting the videos on social media for “likes.”⁵ Although some schools have implemented “off-and-away” policies which prohibit the use of cell phones during class, students can (and often do) continue to access their devices, leading to distractions and strained student-staff relationships.

In contrast, schools across the nation with phone-free bell-to-bell policies report that students interact with each other more, are more engaged, and experience fewer disciplinary issues.⁶ The same is true at the local level: Massachusetts superintendents have reported that

² Michelle Faverio & Olivia Sidoti, Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024, Pew Research Center (Dec. 12, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/12/12/teens-social-media-and-technology-2024/>

³ U.S Surgeon General, Social Media and Youth Mental Health, The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory, 2023 (2023), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>

⁴ Jenn Hatfield, 72% of U.S. high school teachers say cellphone distraction is a major problem in the classroom, Pew Rsch. Ctr. (June 12, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/12/72-percent-of-us-high-school-teachers-say-cellphone-distraction-is-a-major-problem-in-the-classroom/>

⁵ Natasha Singer, Revere High School brawl highlights the growing role of cellphones in school fights, Boston Globe (Dec. 15, 2024), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/12/15/metro/revere-high-school-fight-cellphones-student-education/>; Natasha Singer, An Epidemic of Vicious School Brawls, Fueled by Student Cellphones, N.Y. Times (Dec. 15, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/15/technology/school-fight-videos-student-phones.html>

⁶ Lauraine Langreo, 6 Ways Schools Are Managing Students’ Cellphone Use, EducationWeek (Apr. 25, 2024), <https://www.edweek.org/technology/6-ways-schools-are-managing-students-cellphone-use/2024/04>

implementing phone locking pouches and other bell-to-bell policies have led to marked improvements, including increased student attention, improved peer relationships, and reductions in cyberbullying.

The Attorney General recognizes that addressing the impact of cell phone and social media use on youth in the Commonwealth requires the widespread adoption of intentional and research-based restrictions, guidelines, and education aimed at changing the norms of youth technology use. This includes collaboratively developing and implementing schoolwide policies responsive to the needs of all students that limit students' use of personal electronic devices during the entire school day yet refrain from increasing punitive or exclusionary discipline practices. Furthermore, the long-term success of these policies requires schools to be able to obtain materials necessary for policy implementation, offer related training and community engagement activities to all members of the school community, and evaluate via data collection the impact of such policies.

Although we recognize that cell phone and social media use impacts students' education and mental health in communities across the Commonwealth, schools currently often lack the resources to implement or expand policies addressing personal electronic device use in the learning environment. This RFP is intended to provide Massachusetts schools with the resources to create and access the tools needed to effectively implement bell-to-bell phone restrictions that can address the harmful effects of personal electronic device use on their school communities.

Eligibility

Public and charter school districts and educational collaboratives. District-level applicants may designate one or more schools in which grant-funded programming may operate.

Non-profit organizations that are public charities (generally speaking, public charities have 501(c)(3) status) must be in full compliance with the statutory requirements set forth in G.L. ch. 12, secs. 8E and 8F, and G.L. ch. 68, sec. 19, including initial registration and filing of annual financial reports with the AGO's Non-Profit Organizations/Public Charities Division. Public charities must also comply with obligations and reporting requirements set by the Internal Revenue Service. As of September 2023, the Non-Profit Organizations/Public Charities Division requires all charitable registrations and annual filings to be made through the Charity Portal. Please find more information [here](#).

Funding, Duration, and Anticipated Timeline

This RFP is subject to and contingent upon the availability of funds. Eligible applicants may request funding based on the total number of students enrolled in the school or schools that will receive grant-funded programming:

- Up to 300 students: up to \$10,000
- 301-650 students: up to \$20,000
- 651-950 students: up to \$30,000

- 951 students or more: up to \$50,000

Applicants may propose indirect rates (administrative rates) of 15% or less. Applicant budgets may or may not be funded in their entirety, or at all. All funding decisions will be at the sole discretion of the AGO. Applicants shall not supplant currently funded activities with grant funds.

Grant funds will be awarded with an anticipated start date of September 1, 2026. The maximum grant period will be 24 months. The AGO will not allow program extensions except for good cause shown. The AGO may deny program extension requests at its sole discretion. Unexpended funds must be returned to the AGO within 45 days of contract expiration. At its sole discretion, the AGO will require funds spent on ineligible costs to be repaid to the AGO or re-budgeted to an appropriate expense category.

Cash Flow and Disbursement of Grant Funds

Grant disbursement(s) will be sent to grantees by Electronic Funds Transfer, provided that all necessary contract and periodic reporting documents are received by the established deadlines. A disbursement schedule will be determined by the AGO after the selection of grantees.

Submission Instructions

- Grant applications with accompanying proposals must be delivered electronically through the [AGO's Online Grants Portal](#) by 5:00 P.M. on June 5, 2026.
- Interested applicants may access grant information and application details at the [AGO's Current Grant Opportunities website](#).
- Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed.
- Applications will not be accepted in any other format.
- New applicants will be asked to create a free online account. Any applicant that has applied for any AGO grant using the [AGO's Online Grants Portal](#) may log into its existing account. All applicants should confirm their contact information is current on their applicant profiles.
- Once applicants have started an application, the application may be saved and returned to later.
- Confirmation of Receipt: Applicants typically receive an email confirmation within 48 business hours. If a confirmation is not received, please email the AGO Grants Team at AGOgrants@mass.gov.
- If an applicant experiences issues with the [AGO's Online Grants Portal](#), they should email AGOgrants@mass.gov or call (617) 963-2150 for assistance. The AGO encourages applicants to upload documents in advance of the deadline to avoid last minute submission issues.

Evaluation of Grant Proposals

Program proposals and application components will be evaluated on criteria that include the following:

- Applicant's implementation of the strategies and guidance outlined in the [AGO's Toolkit](#);

- Submission of a cell phone policy which aligns with the [AGO's Toolkit](#) Model Bell-to-Bell Cell Phone Policy (Appendix A, pgs 31-32). The following will be accepted: Finalized policies *or* policies in draft form accompanied by a concrete plan to (1) seek feedback and buy-in on the policy from stakeholders (including students, teachers, staff, and parents); (2) finalize the policy; and (3) begin implementation of the policy within the grant period.
- Applicant's experience with and commitment to addressing school climate and student well-being;
- Inclusion of student, educator, and community input into cell phone policy implementation and the development of community norms regarding cell phone and social media use (pgs 15-18 in the [AGO's Toolkit](#));
- Applicant's plan to support educator readiness and staff capacity to implement the policy, including through training, professional development, or schoolwide practice shifts;
- Scope and impact of the applicant's proposed programming, including but not limited to the number of students or schools engaged, staff trained, or policy and practice changes supported;
- Incorporation of community education regarding cell phone policies and social media impacts;
- Applicant's strategy for sustaining policy changes beyond the grant period;
- The geographic location served by the applicant;
- Applicant's approach to outcomes measurement and ability to measure the impact of grant-supported programming, such as tracking anticipated changes in behavior, engagement, or academic performance related to cell phone use;
- Applicant's operational capacity to deliver proposed programming.

At its sole discretion, the AGO may issue applicants Conditions and Recommendations Letters which set conditions (terms that must be met in order for the proposal to be funded) and recommendations (terms that should be met in order to improve the proposal). An applicant receiving a Conditions and Recommendations Letter must respond in writing to conditions and recommendations within a time frame determined by the AGO. Conditions and Recommendations Letters will be distributed, and responses reviewed, prior to the finalization of awards. Receipt of a Conditions and Recommendations Letter does not indicate or guarantee that an applicant's grant proposal will be funded.

Questions

Questions regarding this RFP may be submitted to AGOgrants@mass.gov, only until 5:00 P.M. on May 29, 2026. When submitting your question(s), please include "Phone Free Schools Support Grant" in the email subject line. Questions received and answers provided regarding this RFP will be posted on the [AGO's Online Grants Portal](#).

Reasonable Accommodation

Applicants who need assistance may seek reasonable accommodation, including receipt of the RFP in an alternative format, by writing to AGOgrants@mass.gov no later than 5:00 P.M. on May 29, 2026.

Expectations and Requirements for Grantees

- Award is contingent upon the applicant satisfactorily completing all necessary documents (see below) by the deadlines established by the AGO.
- Any changes to a grant program or budget at any time during the grant period must be requested in writing by the grantee and must be approved, in advance, by the AGO.
- All funds must be used in a manner consistent with the applicant's grant application and accompanying proposal, which shall both become part of the Scope of Services Agreement.
- Grantees must evaluate their grant-funded program to assess changes in school climate, student engagement, and phone use patterns;
- Grantees must complete two semiannual reports per year of their contract terms in a format to be provided by the AGO.
- Grantees are required to send at least one representative to an annual meeting hosted by the AGO during the project period to discuss program progress and phone free school policies.
- At its sole discretion, the AGO may require grantees to provide programmatic documentation or financial records related to their grant awards.
- Grant awards may not be transferred (e.g., as the result of a change in fiscal sponsor) without prior approval from the AGO. Decisions made on award transfer are at the sole discretion of the AGO.

Required Commonwealth Contract Documents

The following documents will be required upon any notification of a grant award at a deadline established by the AGO and *should not be submitted with the grant application*:

- Standard Contract Form
- Scope and Services Agreement
- Contractor Authorized Signatory Listing
- Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification (W-9)
- Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Form⁷

No grant funds will be disbursed unless the necessary documents are submitted by the deadlines established by the AGO.

⁷ It is the responsibility of the applicant/award recipient to ensure that an electronic transfer of funds may be received by the award recipient. No paper checks will be issued.

Public records

All submitted responses and information are subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law, M.G.L. c. 66, § 10, and M.G.L. c. 4, § 7, cl. 26. Applicants should not submit any personal, medical, or other sensitive information.

Equal Opportunity Statement

The consideration of all proposals and subsequent selection of the successful applicant shall be made without regard to race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, political affiliation, veteran status or national origin. The Office of the Attorney General encourages applicants from all backgrounds to submit applications.

Updates to this RFP

Any changes/corrections to any part to this RFP will be posted on <https://www.mass.gov/grant-opportunities>. It is the applicant's responsibility to check this web page frequently for any updates.