

Core Program Statement of Interest Process Overview

Introduction

The Massachusetts School Building Authority's (the "MSBA's") grant program is a non-entitlement, competitive program, and its grants are distributed by the MSBA [Board of Directors](#) based on need and urgency, as expressed by the district and validated by the MSBA. The MSBA completes an exhaustive review of available information regarding all districts that submit a Statement of Interest ("SOI") for the Core Program each year. The goals of this review include:

- To determine those schools that are the most urgent and needy relative to the pool of SOI submittals filed in that year. The MSBA considers many factors when looking at the totality of the SOIs including, but not limited to, the age of the building, the amount of space per student, the current and projected enrollment, the condition of the major systems of the school, the general environment of the building and the appropriateness of the building to the educational mission;
- To collaborate with districts on the potential project that they have identified as the priority school if they are filing more than one SOI for that given year;
- To understand if the MSBA is currently partnering with the district on another project already underway; and
- To understand the range of options each district faces when planning for district-wide educational facilities.

The following information provides an overview of the SOI process from initial opening of the SOI period, which is typically in January until the Board of Directors votes to authorize invitations to the MSBA's grant program at a subsequent winter Board meeting; this timeline may vary as needed. The MSBA reviews these dates annually and may adjust the opening and closing dates as may be needed. Each year, the SOI opening information is published on the MSBA's website in addition to each superintendent receiving email communications in advance, on the day of and throughout the filing period until the closure of the Accelerated Repair Program and the Core Program.

The SOI Filing Period

The MSBA opens its [Statement of Interest System](#) annually for districts to file one or more SOIs for either the [Core Program](#) or the [Accelerated Repair Program](#). The SOI is the tool districts use to identify the deficiencies and/or programmatic issues that exist in their facilities. Districts should submit one SOI per school for each school that they believe requires a project. An SOI should only be filed for a facility where a district has the ability to fund a construction project in the next two years. Over the last several years, the SOI system has opened in early January. SOIs are typically due for the Accelerated Repair Program in early February and for the Core Program in early April; however, this timeline may vary as needed.

The MSBA has received approximately 100 to 125 SOIs for the Core Program annually. The number of invitations that the Board is able to authorize each year varies and is contingent on a number of factors. The MSBA has to operate within its annual statutory budget cap. The number of invitations varies based on the characteristics of the pool of applicants, including the number of elementary, middle or high schools that file, total square footage of the schools, and the reimbursement rates of the districts that are invited to participate in the MSBA's grant program. Thus, applying for an MSBA grant is competitive, and not every SOI submitted can be invited into the grant program.

The Funding Cap

The Commonwealth irrevocably dedicated a 1% statewide sales tax, known as the School Modernization Trust fund ("SMART Fund"), to the MSBA's capital program. The state sales tax collections inform the amount of annual funding the MSBA can commit for projects. The MSBA's legislation limits increases or decreases annually thereafter by the lesser of four and one half percent (4.5%) of the limit for the prior fiscal year or the percentage increase or decrease of the dedicated sales tax revenue amount over the prior fiscal year.

The SOI Due Diligence Process

The SOI process involves the district filing an electronic version of an SOI and accompanying votes with the MSBA by the dates established. MSBA staff is readily available to address concerns, questions, and issues during the filing period. Once the filing period has closed, MSBA staff commences the due diligence process for all SOIs. This is a four phase process, which includes:

1. Review SOI submissions for completeness;
2. Review SOI submissions and accompanying documents for content;
3. Conduct [senior study visits](#), if required; and,
4. Recommend SOIs for invitation into [Eligibility Period](#).

During this process, the MSBA may seek to obtain additional or clarifying information from districts. As the MSBA reviews the entire cohort of SOIs received, it will determine the appropriate level of due diligence that will be required for each SOI and will notify districts of next steps accordingly.

SOI VOTE REQUIREMENTS – NEW FOR FILING AN SOI IN 2022:

All required votes must be taken prior to the SOI submission filing deadline. The documentation for the completed votes is required in order to complete the filing for the SOI submission as noted in detail below.

1. Review SOI submissions for completeness:

Once the SOI system has closed, MSBA staff reviews each submission to check that all of the required materials have been received. The MSBA works with districts throughout the filing period to ensure that the SOI is complete.

For all SOI submissions, the district needs to provide:

- An electronic version of the SOI with the required electronic signatures; there are two separate certifications in each SOI where district officials need to sign;
- An electronic version of the Closed Schools Certification with the required electronic signatures;
- Any supporting materials required to be submitted with the SOI and/or any supplemental materials districts want to submit with the SOI; and,
- **NEW IN 2022: SOI VOTE REQUIREMENTS:**
 - All required vote documentation must be uploaded in the SOI system in order to submit an SOI and in the prescribed format set forth within the MSBA's SOI Application System.
 - **Cities and Towns** must submit the following vote documentation:
 - Vote of the municipal governing body (i.e. City Council/Board of Aldermen/Board of Selectmen/equivalent governing body) authorizing the Superintendent of Schools to submit the SOI.
 - Vote of the School Committee authorizing the Superintendent of Schools to submit the SOI (meeting minutes are NOT required).
 - **Regional School Districts** must submit the following vote documentation:
 - Vote of the Regional School Committee authorizing the Superintendent of Schools to submit the SOI (meeting minutes are NOT required).

If applicable, districts are expected to submit materials and have them post-marked, specific to certain statutory priorities selected by the district:

- If the district selects statutory priority 1, a hard copy of the engineering or other report detailing the nature and severity of the problem and a written professional opinion of how imminent the system failure is likely to manifest itself is required. The district must also submit photographs of the problematic building area or system to the MSBA.
- If the district selects statutory priority 3, the district must submit the full accreditation report(s) and any supporting correspondence between the district and the accrediting entity to the MSBA.

The supplemental materials just mentioned must be post-marked on or before the due date of the Program submission deadline. The district and the MSBA should discuss in advance of the filing date any extenuating circumstances or requests for exceptions to receipt of the hard copy material.

2. Review each SOI submission and accompanying documents for content:

Once an SOI is determined to be complete, MSBA staff review the information and any additional documents submitted by the district. MSBA staff then compile the data necessary to assess which SOIs filed in that calendar year may be categorized as the most urgent and needy. Determining the most urgent and needy SOIs relies on many different data sources. MSBA staff use over 50 data points that include the SOI, the MSBA project management system, the MSBA's enrollment tool, the MSBA's [2016 School Survey](#), and information from the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education \("DESE"\)](#). There are many factors that can impact the assessment of urgency and need in an SOI, such as increasing enrollment, overcrowding, building condition, general environment, and program deficiencies. As such, it is important to assemble as much data as possible so that staff may gain as complete of a picture of the submitted SOI as possible.

Due to the volume of SOIs submitted for the Core Program, the MSBA requests that each district identify a Priority SOI for consideration. This enables the district and the MSBA to focus financial and staff resources on completing a project and ensures that an opportunity for a grant is possible for as many districts as possible. This narrows down the pool of potential projects if districts have submitted multiple schools within the district for consideration.

With its focus on the district identified SOI Priority, MSBA staff then looks at this smaller pool of submitted SOIs to assess urgency and need focusing on:

- The 2016 School Survey rating of building condition;
- The 2016 School Survey rating of general environment;
- The previous or ongoing project activity with the MSBA; and,
- Section 8 of the MSBA's [statute](#).

Consideration of these factors produces a smaller subset of the Priority SOIs that appear to be more urgent and needy than the other SOIs submitted that year. With this assessment, a group of SOIs are identified for further consideration. This further review may or may not require a senior study visit. If the MSBA is familiar with the school facility identified in the SOI or if the SOI has already received a senior study visit within the previous two or three years, a senior study visit may not be needed for that SOI. The MSBA may choose to re-visit a school within this two or three-year window if the SOI contains new information since the last visit.

3. Conduct Senior Study Visits, if required:

If MSBA staff determines that a [senior study visit](#) is needed to complete the due diligence process, MSBA staff, accompanied by its technical consultant, will visit the SOI facility. The MSBA may conduct facility visits either virtually, in-person or a combination of virtual and in-person. The MSBA may request the use of alternative technology to complete the visits such as virtual meetings, drones, district-supplied recordings or other means. Dependent upon the method used, the staff study visit may be conducted in two parts, holding the meeting and the facility tour, at different times and days.

The senior study visit lasts approximately two hours and is an opportunity for the MSBA to further understand the issues identified in the district's SOI. MSBA staff requests that the district have someone familiar with the facilities and systems present, as well as someone who is familiar with the curriculum as it relates to the program offered. The district is requested to provide a copy of the school's floor plans (emergency/evacuation plans are sufficient) ahead of the MSBA's visit.

The senior study visit starts with a meeting to review the SOI, the MSBA process, and to hear district concerns. The discussion is followed by a tour of the main areas of the school, as well as typical general classrooms and specialty spaces.

Dependent upon the number of senior study visits that are required, this phase can take approximately 8 to 10 weeks, with visits typically scheduled from September through November, but this may vary depending upon the opening and closing dates.

4. Recommend SOIs for Invitation into Eligibility Period:

Once the content review and senior study visits have been completed, MSBA staff once again review the factors that can impact the assessment of urgency and need in an SOI (e.g., increasing enrollment, evidence of overcrowding, building condition, general environment and program

deficiencies), to understand the total impact of all of the factors on the overall need expressed in the SOI. As the number of invitations that the MSBA can issue varies each year, and the number of SOIs received each year exceeds the MSBA's annual cap expenditure, MSBA staff compares the SOIs that were selected for further review to each other to determine a degree of urgency and need, ranging from minor to major, for each of the SOIs. MSBA staff then provide their findings to the [Chief Executive Officer](#), [Executive Director/Deputy Chief Executive Officer](#), and the MSBA's [Facilities Assessment Subcommittee](#); these recommendations are then presented to the MSBA [Board of Directors](#).