Braiding Funds to Enhance Title IV-A Program Efficiency and Outcomes

This document provides information about ways to maximize funding by employing two techniques — braiding and blending funds. State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) can use these strategies to help maximize the impact of funds and improve student outcomes.

Determining how to use Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) funds is both an art and a science due to the flexibilities of this funding stream. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides some specific examples of programs and activities, but otherwise offers subgrantees the flexibility to use funds in a way that suits the needs of their local contexts. With limited funds and great needs, SEAs, LEAs, and schools can look for creative ways to maximize the impact of funding, avoid duplication, and promote better planning to improve overall outcomes.

Utilizing funds from different funding streams to meet a common purpose or need is one strategy to accomplish that. Such fiscal coordination could be conducted via the blending or braiding of funding streams. This information sheet explains the difference between braiding and blending funds and provides specific considerations for SEA and LEA administrators seeking to enhance their program efficiency and outcome by braiding Title IV-A funds with other Federal, state, and/or local funds. Additionally, it provides two tools for State coordinators (SCs) or LEAs that are considering braiding funds — a 5-step approach to braiding funds and a set of questions to consider when selecting appropriate funding streams.

Braiding Versus Blending Funds

While similar, braiding and blending funds are different, and each type has distinct characteristics. In addition to the definitions below, Table 1 provides detailed information on the key differences between braiding and blending funds.

Braiding funds involves two or more funding streams that are coordinated in a way to support a single initiative or strategy. When braiding funds, each funding stream maintains its award-specific identify, is tracked and reported as a separate funding stream, and does not require statutory authority to implement.

Blending funds also involves two or more funding streams. Unlike braided funds, blended funds are combined into one funding stream, lose their award-specific identity, and require statutory authority to implement.
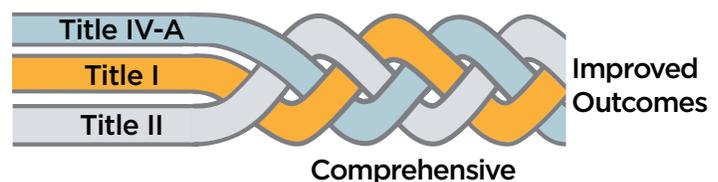
Table 1. Key Features Braiding and Blending Funds

	Braiding	Blending
Definition	Two or more sources of funds are spent for a purpose in such a way that the funds could still be accounted for separately.	Two or more sources of funds are put together for a purpose in such a way that it would be difficult or impossible to tell which source went for whatever funds were spent.
Fund Identity and Tracking	Funds maintain their identity and are tracked as separate funding streams.	Funds lose their identify and are tracked as one funding stream.
Benefit	Braiding allows focus on one common purpose without dramatically changing systems.	Blending allows focus on a common purpose, and provides more flexibility and lower workload on staff and financial reporting systems.
Statutory Authority	None required.	Specific statutory authorization is required (e.g., Title I-A Schoolwide Programs).

Whether blending or braiding funding, fiscal and administrative coordination is needed for SEAs and LEAs to consolidate funds from different programs into one funding stream to meet a common purpose. Such fiscal coordination can be especially helpful for SEAs and LEAs that have limited funding for a particular service. For example, if an LEA receives $10,000 in Title IV-A funds and has identified a need that requires more than the allotted funding, then the LEA could seek to braid other Federal, state, or local funds to meet the funding deficit.

Because braiding funds does not require statutory authorization and has fewer restraints, SEAs and LEAs may be more likely to consider braiding instead of blending funds.

5-Step Approach to Braiding Funds

SEA and LEA administrators can consider the following 5-step approach to determine if braiding funds is appropriate for the intended program purpose.

1. **Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment.** Leverage existing needs sensing efforts by assessing what is known, exploring other potential areas of need, and then summarizing all needs broadly or for a specific issue.

2. **Create a consolidated plan with stakeholders and representatives from each program.** Based on the needs generally or for a specific issue, discuss what supports and services can be provided with program stakeholders such as educators, families and guardians, students, administrators, and nonpublic schools.

3. **Decide which funding programs can help address each aspect of the consolidated plan.** Determine which funding programs address which component of the consolidated plan, acknowledging the kinds and levels of support each funding program provides. See Table 2 for additional questions to ask to ensure that program funding addresses specific aspects of the consolidated plan.

4. **Develop a budget to reflect braided funding.** Organize the budget by type of service or support, allowing details on funding program revenue within each. Be careful to distinguish which services and supports might be wholly supported by a funding program versus require braiding for each component of the consolidated plan.

5. **Monitor performance/improvements and effectiveness of resources.** Consider the indicators of success at the start and a plan to monitor services and supports provided in terms of billing and outcomes over time.

Supporting the Consolidated Plan: Selecting Funding Streams to Braid With Title IV-A

When determining if a funding stream could be braided with Title IV-A, SEAs and LEAs could use the following questions to identify the applicable stream(s) to support the consolidated plan:

Table 2. Questions to ask when braiding funds

Question to Ask	Suggested Practice
Which funding programs have shared outcomes?	Explore a variety of funds from Federal, state, and local sources.
What restrictions does each funding program have?	Consider the unique funding, monitoring, and reporting requirements, including deadlines.
Could braiding funds from those identified programs violate the supplement, not supplant clause?	If braiding includes using state and local funding streams, assess potential for supplanting and consider how to mitigate risks for supplanting (Section 4110 Supplement, Not Supplant).
Could braiding funds from those identified programs violate maintenance of effort requirements?	Ensure that LEAs do not reduce the amount of state and local funds for special education.
Which supports and services based on the consolidated plan will require ongoing versus one-time expenses?	Determine which activities will meet an immediate need that is not anticipated to continue or would build a foundation for providing supports and services in the future. Then consider what will be needed over time.

Example of Programs Blending Title IV-A and Other Funds

Coordination of Federal, state, and local program support with Title IV-A can help maximize the impact of available resources. For example, a school incorporating digital learning within a Title I schoolwide program could use the following funding streams:

- **Title I-A Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies** to purchase devices and digital learning resources.

- **Title II-A Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders** to help teachers improve their teaching using effective blended learning principles.

- **Title III-A Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students** to provide access to supplemental technology specific to English learners.

- **Title IV-A** to facilitate the use of open educational resources.

- **Small, Rural School Achievement Program** and **Rural and Low-Income School Program** to support technology instruction in school.

By braiding other Federal, state, and local funding streams with Title IV-A funds, SEAs and LEAs can leverage existing funds to enhance the program efficiency, improve outcomes, and provide better supports to students.

RESOURCES

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U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. (2017). Dear Colleague Letter.

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