

Esports Funding Guide

Esports programs are gaining traction in schools, providing students with STEM/STEAM, career technical education, and social-emotional learning opportunities. However, securing sustainable funding is crucial for long-term success. Here is some information to help guide you as an educator in obtaining funding to build a long-lasting esports program.

Sustainable Funding Strategies

One-Time Use Funds: A Starting Point, Not a Solution

While one-time funds can help launch an esports program, they do not ensure sustainability. Schools should advocate for a dedicated esports budget, whether that is at the local or district level. It is important for program sustainability because even though getting started is an accomplishment, it is only the first step in a long-term investment.

Having a long-term focus of 3-5 years sets your program up for future success. The initial investment in equipment prevents the need for immediate upgrades in subsequent years. But the same way traditional sports teams refresh their equipment, esports needs the same. Things like computers, peripherals, new game titles, and jerseys—all of these will need to be upgraded/replaced when they are being constantly used.

Identify Key Decision Makers

When starting an esports program, it is important to identify the people at your school/facility with whom you will need to have proactive communication. These can differ depending on one's circumstances, but it is certain that you will run into difficulties without coordinating with the proper people. Here are some examples of key stakeholders for K-12 and Higher Education.

K-12

- Principal
- Superintendent
- IT Department

- Facilities Management
- Procurement
- Athletics
- District Level Administration (particularly Curriculum & Instruction and CTE)
- Student Clubs

Higher Education

- Provost
- Dean
- Athletics
- Student Life
- President's Office
- Alumni
- Student Government
- Financial Aid Office
- Office of Advancement

Federal Funding

Formula Grants: Schools meeting specific criteria can access government and philanthropic funding:

- **Title I (\$18.4B):** Supports at-risk students; promotes engagement.
- **Title II (\$2.9B):** Funds curriculum integration and professional development.
- **Title IV-A (\$1.38B):** Provides technology resources for esports programs.
- **Perkins (\$1.4B):** Supports CTE initiatives, including high-powered PCs and broadcasting equipment.
- **IDEA (\$15.4B):** Enhances accessibility for students with disabilities in esports.
- Strong Workforce Development

Future of Federal Funding

With a new administration in office and the future of the Department of Education uncertain, federal funding opportunities have become increasingly unpredictable. This unpredictability is heightened when considering the possible dismantling of the Department of Education. Funding could shift to state control or be eliminated entirely. While the outcomes remain unclear, it's crucial to stay informed about the status of these grants. There have been indications that **key programs will move to new departments**, so schools and esports programs relying on these grants should monitor policy developments closely and consider diversifying their funding strategies to mitigate risk.

It is worth noting that education funds have been withheld without certainty of release. In early July 2025, over \$6 billion in federal education grants were frozen. While these funds were eventually restored on July 25, 2025, some funds still have yet to arrive at their destination. This has caused educators to consider the risks of their budgets not being appropriated when they expect. While this can create some confusion, a solution that educators can lean towards is positioning esports under CTE. The current administration has highlighted CTE as a point of emphasize in their agenda which means if esports can fall under that umbrella, it can still exist within the current education environment.

Positioning Esports Under CTE

Career Technical Education offers esports programs a more stable funding pathway while also strengthening their educational value. Esports naturally align with multiple CTE career pathways, preparing students for future careers in the gaming and digital entertainment industries.

Examples of Career Fields:

- **Information Technology & Computer Science:** Technical support, system administration, cybersecurity, game development, programming
- **Media & Broadcast Production:** Live streaming, video editing, content creation, camera operation, casting
- **Digital Marketing & Business:** Social media management, partnerships & sponsorships, business development
- **Event Management:** Tournament operations, venue management, logistics coordination
- **Graphic Design & Animation:** Adobe Premiere, Unreal Engine 5, Open Broadcast Software, Production equipment operation

Why This Positioning Matters

Educators should be positioning their esports initiatives as more than just a space where students build community. By framing esports as a CTE pathway, programs can access more stable Perkins/CTE funding for infrastructure and equipment, fund physical space buildout including furniture, gaming stations, and broadcast setups and demonstrate clear workforce development outcomes. This positioning also allows schools to reach an untapped demographic of students who may not engage with traditional CTE programs. It starts with the community building, but it can lead the students to so much more.

State/Outside Grants

It is important to look at the different funding resources that are available locally. It is possible that your state offers specific grants for STEM-related or after-school programming. Esports programs align with various grant opportunities. When applying, emphasize how esports supports student development in the following areas:

- **STEM/STEAM:** Esports naturally fosters many of the skills we aim to develop in STEM/STEAM education. Also, there are many skill development alignments for STEM and esports.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Esports appeals to a demographic that may not participate in other school programs. It encourages student participation and can easily integrate curriculum into after-school meetings and practices.
- **Career Technical Education (CTE):** Esports aligns with many grant funds tied to career technical education pathways, such as Computer Science, Business, Hospitality, and Project Management.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Esports provides numerous opportunities for SEL. Whether it's learning how to manage emotions after a loss or how to communicate with teammates, esports provides moments for gamers to grow as communicators.
- **School Departmental Funding:** If categorized under student engagement, IT, or CTE instead of athletics, esports can tap into diverse funding sources across departments. For example, if your broadcasting equipment is connected to a video production course, you may be able to access funding already allocated for that department.

Grant Writing Assistance

For those looking for assistance in grant writing, here are some resources to help secure those federal grants:

- [NASEF](#)
- [STEMfinity](#)
- [Gameplan](#)
- [Video Game & Esports Foundation](#)
- [CDW Grant Engine](#)

Measuring Student Engagement

Make sure to get information on how your esports program is benefiting your students. It is important to express what product the grant is funding and how it benefits students. Recording student engagement data can help justify your desire for additional funding/support from your leadership. Here are some notable points to emphasize and track to ensure accurate messaging:

- Student attendance/retention (recapture of ADA funding)
- Improvement in grades
- School pride and belonging
- Reduction in behavioral issues and suspensions
- Friends that are made in the program
- Percentage of students who only participate in esports
- Data from other esports programs in your district

Local Partnerships

Federal funding is not the only place where schools can obtain funding. Connecting with the local community can be very beneficial in building sustainable funding. Small businesses, nonprofits, and local franchises (Walmart, Kroger, etc.) are often inclined to invest in their local communities. Some even have local funding budgets that they allocate monthly. So do not hesitate to reach out and ask for aid in your esports program, whether it's for money or for gear.

Additionally, local sports commissions and business development councils may offer government-funded support to retain local talent.

Additional Fundraising/Partnership Opportunities

- **Crowdfunding & Community Engagement:** Host in-person events to educate and generate excitement. Also, remember to engage local media for coverage and exposure.
- **Parent-Teacher Associations/Booster Clubs:** Parents are always eager to help their children in whatever ways they can. Talking to local PTAs could help generate grassroots support for your program.
- **Maximize Existing Resources:** Use shared devices from Computer Science and CTE programs for after-school esports. However, there needs to be assurance that the existing devices can run the requested titles.

- **Partner with Local Colleges:** Creating connections with local community and four-year colleges provides collegiate coaching pipelines, mentorship, and community engagement opportunities. Many colleges already have existing spaces for events and tournaments. A partnership can benefit both your program and provide recruitment to the collegiate program.
- **Collaborate with CTSOs:** Many schools participate in [FBLA](#), [Skills USA](#), etc. Partner with these organizations to develop the career skills embedded within esports: video production, broadcasting, game design, game development/coding, marketing, etc.

Below is a quote from individual who has aided many schools with their funding efforts: "Esports funding strategies vary by district and student outcomes and goals. The most successful programs collaborate across multiple departments and build meaningful business and community partnerships that align with their long-term vision and values."

— [Julie Mavrogeorge](#), Esports Consultant who has assisted with esports program development with clients such as [Los Angeles Unified School District](#), [ISL-Qatar](#), [Work ED](#), [STEMfinity](#), and [Intel](#).