Answers to questions asked about the FY17 Performance Incentive Fund RFP

The Performance Incentive Fund (PIF) RFP was released on December 7, 2016. All questions received and answered since the release of the RFP are posted below. We will continue to post questions about the RFP, along with our responses, during this solicitation period so please check back here often.

Eligibility
Q: Can an institution of higher education apply for both a consortium and individual PIF grant?
A: Yes, institutions of higher education (IHE’s) can submit one grant for each grant category. However, no IHE can be a lead or partner on more than two grants.

Q: Would a consortium of one higher education organization, one hospital group and three elementary/secondary schools meet your definition of a consortium, or do responses require participation from a second public higher education partner?
A: Yes, the partners you describe would meet the definition of a consortium and you are also correct that a second institution of higher education is not required.

Q: Can the consortium grant focused on Early College Programming consist of just one campus and one high school or do we need to involve more than one higher education institution?
A: Institutions of higher education (IHE) can submit consortium grants alone or in partnership with other IHE's but the submissions must include one or more of the other identified partners: K-12 schools, non-profits, workforce investment boards, etc. Please note that we will attach positive value to those proposals that represent more than one IHE.

Q: Can applicants propose two different projects with two different budgets within one proposal for PIF funds?
A: How institutions respond to this opportunity is at their own discretion. The limitation that must be adhered to is the rule that no institution can apply to, or be a partner to, more than two grants.

Q: Can we continue to partner with public school systems with which we have a current relationship? We would like to expand our current programming to increase participation in the early college programs and in competency-based pathways for early education.
A: Yes, you can submit a proposal that extends and expands existing initiatives with current partner schools.
Planning Grants

Q: Looking at the timetable for implementation of the grants (February through August), it is unlikely any of us can design and implement programs in at least some of the identified categories. Will a focus on design and timetable for implementation be sufficient for an application to be competitive?
A: Yes, planning grants (which is what you are really referencing) are encouraged and will be judged competitively.

Q: Can partners currently engaged in instituting the 100 Males to College program submit a proposal focused on using grant funds to fully implement (launch) this important initiative for helping males of color access, persist and graduate from post-secondary programs?
A: Yes, you may use grant funds as planning grants to fully implement programs in the nascent stage. Of course, proposals with clear objectives and with strong projected outcomes will be more favorably reviewed.

Q: Will there be a technical assistance phone-in session to answer this and other questions colleges might have?
A: No, but we will continue to respond to questions as we receive them.

Q: May PIF funds be used for student internship stipends if the internship is part of the program we are designing?
A: Yes, as long as this approach makes sense within the context of the proposal.

Proposal Requirements – Page Count

Q: The RFP indicates that the entire proposal may not be more than 8 pages, including letters of support from each partner. Page v indicates that the proposal must be double-spaced (although single-spaced for cover, implementation plan, and budget narrative). Page 2, part II, however, indicates that the project narrative should not exceed 6 single-spaced pages. Could you please clarify the spacing and length requirements?
A: Sorry for the confusion. Other applicants noticed the same discrepancies in the RFP. The narrative can be up to eight pages, single spaced, using 12 point font. In addition to the narrative, responses should include the cover-page, the abstract and letters of support. The entire proposal should not exceed 12 pages.

Q: Do the letters of support count towards the eight-page limit for the proposal narrative?
A: No, the narrative can be eight pages long and the entire proposal can be up to 12 pages.

Proposal Requirements - Submission

Q: Does the DHE need to receive the hard copy of the proposal by the 13th or is the proposal timely if postmarked by the 13th?
A: The DHE must receive either the hardcopy or electronic proposal by January 13, 2017. Hardcopies received after the submission due date, with timely electronic submissions, must be postmarked by or before January 13, 2017.

Q: Where this RFP was issued during the holiday season presenting the challenge of securing potential partners because they might be on holiday break, such as schools, would the DHE consider extending the proposal submission deadline?
A: While we appreciate the unique challenges of responding to a RFP during the holiday season, we unfortunately, cannot extend the deadline at this point. We are already very late in getting this RFP out and we need to stay on the established schedule.

Budget

Q: I received a copy of the RFP for the PIF Funds. Are the PIF funds still available or were they part of the 9c Cuts?
A: The PIF allocation has not been subject to 9C cuts.

Q: Can we use the money for student retention initiatives?
A: Yes, you can use the money for student retention initiatives that fall within the categories established in the RFP.

Q: Are we allowed to charge the grant for food for the students during a summer program and for tuition, fees and books for college courses?
A: Yes.

Q: The budget indicates that fringe benefits should not exceed 1.59% payroll tax as determined by the Massachusetts State Comptroller. The current payroll tax rate is 1.66%. Which should I use?
A: Please use the current rate payroll tax rate of 1.66%. We will be mindful of the need to update this figure in future RFP’s.

Q: I hear that there is PIF money for either STEM Starter extensions or new (?) STEM initiatives planned for a separate RFP. If that is the case, can institutions apply for the STEM Starter funds in addition to the one or two other applications under the existing "general" PIF RFP?
A: Yes. Applying for a PIF grant does not exclude institutions from applying for other state STEM related grant opportunities or any other grants.

Q: Are we allowed to charge faculty pay to the grant? This expense would be faculty stipends for courses in addition to the normal load or offered in the summer.
A: Yes, the can charge faculty pay to this grant.