@Scale Project Initiative II - FAQs

Basic Information

1. Q. Would you give a simplified example of what you are looking for in this RFP?
   A. The @Scale program seeks to replicate or take further to scale existing projects that address specific goals of the STEM Plan and have a demonstrated history of success and evidence of student outcomes. The projects can be direct replications of prior implementations or could be an innovation in the context of prior projects.

2. Q. Can a proposal focus on just one STEM major such as math or computer science?
   A. Yes, a project focusing on a specific STEM major would be appropriate.

3. Q. Where can we locate the @Scale RFP?
   A. Same link as above.

4. Q. Where can we locate the State STEM Plan: A Foundation for the Future: Massachusetts’ Plan for Excellence in STEM Education – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics?
   A. http://www.mass.edu/forinstitutions/prek16/pipeline.asp

5. Q. Our project proposal is a collaboration of members who have not worked together before. Can our proposal be comprised of the best components from our individual projects?
   A. Yes, however submitted projects should reflect a strong foundation in education research, demonstrate a history of successful outcomes for targeted populations of students, workers and/or educators, be cost effective, and incorporate design characteristics, infrastructure and reinforcement systems that support scale-up or replication.

6. Q. Can new programs respond to the RFP or only existing programs with strong supporting data apply?
   A. While the primary goal of the @Scale Project Initiative is to replicate or scale a suite of established projects, proven successful by verifiable data and vigorous program analysis, we also encourage investigation and development of new strategies reflecting student feedback about barriers, challenges and opportunities that may not have been previously addressed in research.

7. Q. The RFP shows two different submission (proposal due) dates – one on Oct. 25th and one on Oct. 26th. Which one is correct?
   A. Proposals are due on Thursday, Oct. 25th by 4 pm. The other date was listed in error.

8. Q. Given the final report is due on December 31, 2013, are you looking for a fully operational project at that point?
   A. We expect projects to be in full implementation mode by the conclusion of the grant period even though the grant period of one-year may be too soon to realize or measure
actual student outcomes. Understanding the reality of this short grant period, applicants may want to consider approaching this RFP as a multi-year project and define what activities and outcomes can be expected in the different stages of implementation and anticipate the possibility, although not a commitment of funding beyond year one of the project.

9. Q. What is the meaning of “history of success”? What are the criteria or is it different for different types of schools? For example, a vocational school that pilots a biotech project for a few years but not long enough to measure success.
   A. We seek evidence of prior success. Projects that have less evidence or can only demonstrate intermediate and not outcome success will be at a disadvantage to projects that have a history of outcome success.

10. Q. In your planned release of subsequent RFP’s, is there one with a focus on K-12?
    A. Yes. In fact, the next phase, scheduled for late-fall, will call for proposals focused on the goals of Student Academic Achievement and Educator Effectiveness through science inquiry and applied mathematics projects at middle and high school. The fourth and final planned phase will call for proposals targeting the goals of Student Interest and Educator Effectiveness at Elementary and Pre-K as well as after school programs.

11. Q. Is there an age restriction for student programs focused on workforce development?
    A. There is not an age restriction per se, however, in the RFP we have prioritized projects that address current or near-term workforce gaps through direct training and education of workers/students. The priority order is: (1) incumbent workers that seek to upgrade or develop their knowledge and skill in response to workplace advancements (technology, business practice, certification requirements...), (2) displaced workers who seek to enhance their transferable knowledge and skills and/or add new knowledge and skills to meet job demands in their current or in a new industry sector, (3) traditional students that are seeking specific industry skills and credentials that will lead to initial employment opportunities.

12. Q. Is scaling a project within the same institution permissible or must scaling of a project be across the board (statewide)?
    A. Scale up could be within an institution (vertical) or to another institution (horizontal) to scale more quickly or broadly over time.

13. Q. What is the connection between this STEM RFP and other community college work on retraining, etc.?
    A. We work closely with related workforce development initiatives including the recent Department of Labor Grant to Community Colleges. However, this RFP is directly related to the state STEM initiative and the goals of the STEM plan.

14. Q. Regarding STEM, are there regions of the state for which STEM is in greater demand, is the RFP directed to any specific regions of the state?
    A. The economy differs in different areas of the state. You are encouraged to engage and work with the regional STEM Networks to understand demand in an area. The projects
15. Q. Based on past experience, how many proposals do you expect to receive?
   A. We have received 28 indications of intent to submit. The final number may vary but we anticipate anywhere from 25-30.

Qualifying Proposals

16. Q. Would a private university’s project quality if it offers experience to high school students leading to students later entering a public or private college in a STEM field with evidence of completion?
   A. Yes. Ideally, there is some collaboration between public and private sector. This could also include community colleges and private 4 year colleges. On the workforce goal, an example would be private colleges working with vocational schools and the community college system. In the case of a high school project, evidence that that project leads to increased entry, retention and graduation from post-secondary STEM majors would be necessary.

17. Q. Are there any criteria regarding the size of the projects - e.g., number of students served or cost per participant rate?
   A. No. There are no specific criteria for the number of students/workers served and the unit cost although the cost effectiveness of the project in terms of the populations served will be a consideration for selection.

18. Q. Would there be consideration for a strong pilot program for later funding to continue?
   A. The @Scale Project Initiative represents a new engagement with the funding community and it is a work in progress. It is our intent to create a portfolio of successful projects and to work to understand student outcomes. We encourage applicants to think in terms of multi-year projects.

19. Q. Can a non-profit and a school or school district (K12) apply?
   A. Yes, strong partnerships of all kinds are encouraged as long as the partnership proposal directly addresses at least one of the two stated goals of the STEM Plan - an increase in STEM certificate and college degree attainment under Goal 4 or a reduction in the STEM workforce gap under Goal 6.

20. Q. Which grade levels does this RFP target? Must students already be in post-secondary education or can students be entering institutions of higher education or still be in high school?
   A. The two goals of this RFP are aimed primarily at post-secondary students. The closer the relationship of students to becoming graduates or entering the workforce, the stronger the proposal. That said, we acknowledge there is merit in showing high school graduates how preparation leads to higher graduation rates, for example in underrepresented student populations. While strengthening the K-12 graduate
preparation to impact post-secondary graduation rate is useful, the goal is about completion of STEM majors. Stronger proposals will have longitudinal data to show how they are causing higher post-secondary graduation rates.

21. Q. Would a proposal recruiting from high school students for a summer program qualify for submission?  
   A. Assuming the link is to improve graduation rates from post-secondary schools, a program that engages K-12 students leading to a better graduation rate could qualify, but evidence would be needed. This RFP is designed to see what could be done at the post-secondary level to result in higher graduation rates.

22. Q. Would a program for students coming out of adult education leading to enrollment at a community college be appropriate? An evaluation is being done. The aim is to scale up the program and there are plans for similar program next fall on life sciences–bio-manufacturing. Since graduation numbers are still small, would this be enough of a track record to fit Goal 4 or would it be better for Goal 6? Is the timing of the second program too late?  
   A. Your focus is on adults and community college completion, so that fits with what we are trying to address. We are looking for a strong collaboration with industry and workforce organizations to have confidence in the demand for the workers. If this is more of a college access project, it would score less well. If it has some college credit and is about completion, then that is better. Our focus in Goal 6 is on those students closest to the workforce (with skills) and how to get them into the workforce.

23. Q. Do programs focused on moving high school students into college STEM majors qualify for this RFP?  
   A. One of the things we need to address to increase graduation rates is what to do within the program itself to retain students through completion and connect them with jobs. Your proposal may be better related to a Department of Labor (DOL) grant to community colleges. You may also wish to look at other resources.

24. Q. Regarding the DOL community college grant that addresses barriers to getting manufacturing jobs, could we build contextualized learning modules to help students gain successful learning?  
   A. We need to see evidence of completion of degrees where early foundation work leads to higher retention and graduation. In addition to the DOL grants, there are other initiatives that exist around the state that are STEM complementary and may even be overlapping. Some work may be better channeled toward these other resources.
Goals of the RFP

25. Q. In aligning projects with labor market demand, how do we treat this aspect with rapid changes in the market?
   A. Projects should address the current market need and demonstrate that the project is in response to labor market demand. Projects that are responsive to changing workforce trends will be reviewed more favorably.

26. Q. Should projects responding to improving STEM post-secondary graduation rates target those majors most in demand?
   A. Programs that focus on moving more students towards degree completion for ‘in-demand’ industry sectors are certainly valued but not required since this is a broader goal, not directly tied to industry sectors.

27. Q. Do proposals need to address both Goals 4 and 6 or can it address just one?
   A. Proposals must address at least one goal but may address both.

28. Q. What is the percent target for Goal 6? (Goal 4 is given a target increase in number of STEM graduates by 2016).
   A. There are no explicit targets for improvement in workforce development. Partnerships become important here. Proposals that respond to the workforce goal should identify specific demands that the project will address.

29. Q. Under qualifying projects, the RFP states that proposals must address one or more goals of the STEM Plan. Does this mean in addition to goal 4 and 6?
   A. No. However, a proposal that addresses one of the other state STEM goals will be rated more favorably.

Funding

30. Q. Can the funding match include “in-kind” donations?
   A. Yes.

31. Q. Can all of the funding match be “in-kind”?
   A. The intent is to leverage public sector dollars with funding from private and other public (non-state) donors. We view in-kind donations as an additional source of financial support to aid in a project’s success in reaching the funding ratio of 1:3 and the mix depends on the needs of the project.

32. Q. What do you mean by “private/other” funds in the RFP language on grant match funds?
   A. The source of matching funds can come from businesses, foundations, and individuals but also from federal (non-state) agencies such as NSF or NIH.
33. **Q.** What can the funding support? For example, how can stipends be utilized?  
   A. There are no explicit restrictions. We are focused on outcomes.

34. **Q.** What expenses are allowable under this grant?  
   A. We list allowable expense categories on the budget template, Form 1, which accompanies the RFP. Note that indirect costs are limited to a maximum of 10% of the total @Scale funds.

35. **Q.** Are fringe benefits allowed?  
   A. Usual and necessary expenses will be considered in light of what is a reasonable and efficient use of the funds. Any indirect costs must be limited to no more than 10% of the grant.

36. **Q.** What is the timeline for the release of grant awards?  
   A. The release of grant awards will be determined by success in securing the required funding match under this timeline:  
      1) Projects that have secured private sector matching funds at the targeted ratio of $1:$3 will receive their initial disbursement of STEM Pipeline Funds within three weeks of award notification.  
      2) Projects that have not secured private sector matching funds at the targeted ratio of $1:$3 will have until February 1, 2013 to do so.  
      3) Projects that do not secure private sector matching funds at the targeted ratio of $1:$3 by February 1, 2013 will be deferred for possible future funding consideration.

37. **Q.** Can we use existing funds toward the 1:3 match or must they be newly secured funds?  
   A. Existing funds committed to your project are allowable as long as those funds are applied to an incremental scale-up project.

38. **Q.** Is it correct that a proposal can be submitted without the full funding match?  
   A. Yes. Some proposals may be ready with a match or be ready with partners but the commitments are in process. We are allowing until February 1, 2013 for the full match to be in place. Selection is based on the merit of the proposal with the criteria that a full or partial match be available. Funding will not released until the target match is achieved.

39. **Q.** Can @Scale grants be used for student awards or scholarships?  
   A. The intent of the @Scale program is to impact the greatest number of students, quickly. We do not prohibit the use of funds for scholarships. However, that use of funds may limit the impact to fewer students which in turn may make the proposal less competitive.

40. **Q.** Are the @Scale funds strictly for educational institutions or are other organizations such as workforce investment boards (REB) eligible to apply for these funds?  
   A. The RFP allows for @Scale funds to be disbursed to any entity (including WIB’s & REB’s) that qualifies for the funding and that the funds are not restricted to educational institutions.
41. Q. What is the allowable project timeframe under this RFP?
A. 1 year – from end of calendar year 2012 to end of calendar year 2013.

42. Q. What if our project qualifies in every way but we can’t secure the full private funding match?
A. Not being able to fulfill the required funding match shouldn’t deter any partnership from submitting a proposal. We allowed an additional two months, from November 23, 2012 until February 1, 2013, to secure the required match. We will work with selected projects to secure additional funding during this planning period.
B. We expect to fund 4-8 implementation projects that address improvements in STEM Post-Secondary Graduation Rates and Workforce Development projects. Out of that total, we expect to fund at least two projects that address each of these two goals (four projects in total) and may fund as many as eight projects in total.

43. Q. What is the total award amount?
A. Between $50,000 and $150,000.

44. Q. Does the match need to be consummate with the funding request?
A. Yes. All projects must secure $3 dollars in private funds for every $1 in STEM Pipeline Fund money (State funds).

Evaluation

45. Q. What kind of evaluation is acceptable? Can projects rely on a self-designed evaluation program or must projects use 3rd party evaluators?
A. There are no specific evaluation criteria other than the evaluation data is measurable and verifiable and provides a strong evidence of success. An independent 3rd party evaluation is preferable. If a proposal is the combination of more than one project, then the proposal should include supporting evaluation data on each of the components.

46. Q. In the case of vocational schools or workforce projects, results are reported to agencies funding the projects and the evaluation of the results is determined by the funder – would information from a funder’s evaluation qualify?
A. Yes, we are looking for evidence of success regardless of the evaluation source. Independent, 3rd party evaluations are preferred but not mandatory.

47. Q. Regarding best practices for STEM (as found in the literature), do you prefer the replication of national models to Massachusetts sites or a successful local project on one campus replicated at additional sites?
A. No preference. Either type of project is acceptable.

48. Q. If a project was done as a beta release and is now moving to a scaled version but without 3rd party evaluation, would it qualify?
A. Projects should have clear plans for data collection and evaluation. However, projects with the strongest evidence of success will be judged more positively than projects that are collecting and planning to evaluate data.

49. Q. In post-secondary education, if we are looking for a change in graduation rates, the evidence after 1 year won’t be there. How precise do we need to be around the issue of causality?
   A. A particular strategy may produce better outcomes and demonstrate how to scale for greater impact. Evidence matters, but we recognize that we are in an imperfect world and on a continuum, so proposals will be compared to competing ideas. Retention year by year is an aspect of graduation rates.

50. Q. For evaluating and reporting, are we limited to 5% of the grant?
   A. Yes. We did not require anything explicit for evaluating prior projects, but some level of ongoing evaluation is needed to help us understand the level of success. Independent 3rd party evaluation is always preferable to self-evaluation but the goal is validating success and outcomes. We are developing a core set of evaluation questions for all @Scale projects so there will be a common instrument to use across all projects.

51. Q. Does this RFP seek measurable outcomes?
   A. Yes. The outcomes sought include:
   1) Achieving a measurable increase in employment of STEM qualified workers.
   2) Achieving a measurable increase in STEM certifications and degrees awarded.

52. Q. Will a scoring rubric be used in selecting the projects?
   A. Yes. The scoring rubric is being developed from the RFP.

53. Q. How can we submit other questions?
   A. Subsequent questions may be sent to the address in the RFP: STEMProjectforScale@bhe.mass.edu. All questions and their answers will be added to the posted FAQ found on the DHE STEM Pipeline webpage at: http://www.mass.edu/forinstitutions/prek16/pipeline.asp.

54. Q. Would a proposal that only seeks to expand its footprint within the same institution (e.g. higher ed) but with a focus on a different audience (e.g. high needs students) qualify under this RFP?
   A. Yes although the degree of scale-up proposed could be a competitive disadvantage if other programs are affecting more students. You might consider proposing a two-phased approach with the first phase the local scale-up with the second phase an opportunity for replication to other institutions in future years.