NYSTEM Curriculum RFA
FAU # 0809080957

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
3/19/09 – 4/10/09
Including 2 applicant conferences

MODIFICATIONS TO THE RFA (pages 2 and 17)

Letter of Intent and Pre-application Materials

1. Must applicants attend the Applicant Conference?

   A. No, but if you do plan to attend, please register so that we can notify security that you are coming and ensure that we have enough space to accommodate everyone.

2. Is there a pre-application process?

   A. No. However, a Letter of Intent form (Attachment 4) must be submitted by the due date (April 6, 2009 by 2pm). See Section IV. C. of the RFA.

3. Do we need to include any information in addition to the Letter of Intent form?

   A. Submit only the information requested on the form. No additional information can be considered.

4. On the Letter of Intent form, do we need to include all internal collaborators (faculty at our institution) or is this for primary contacts at our collaborating institutions?

   A. Identify all collaborators for the application, both internal and external to your organization.

5. When will my application number be sent to me?

   A. If the Letter of Intent form was accepted, an application number will be sent to the Principal Investigator on 4/9/09. That number must appear on application Form 1 for the applicant and each subcontractor.

Eligibility

1. We are a not-for-profit museum in New York State and certified as an institution of higher education. We have a graduate school that grants PhD's in comparative biology. We have extensive ties with a number of

other higher education institutions in both education and science departments. Some of our eduational partners offer courses for graduate credit through their school and others require our courses for graduation. Are we eligible to apply for funds under this RFA?

A. Yes. Section II of the RFA requires that the applicant be "a New York State not-for-profit post-secondary educational institution or not-for-profit organization with strong ties to one or more post-secondary educational institutions."

2. I teach at a university outside of New York State. May I apply?

A. No – see Section II of the RFA. However, you may partner with a New York State institution, provided that institution is the applicant.

3. For purposes of this RFA, are Columbia University and Columbia Morningside considered to be separate institutions?

A. Yes.

<u>Scope, Content and Audience</u>

1. Is the focus of this RFA on educating the general public about the benefits of stem cell research?

A. No. The focus is on educating undergraduate students on the many ethical, legal and social issues surrounding stem cell science.

2. We usually create graduate courses for educators. We could gear the course toward undergraduates if necessary but we usually work with graduate education or technology students. Would that be acceptable?

A. Section III.A. of the RFA requires that the applicant "provide an undergraduate course, or modules within a course…."

3. Are on-line courses appropriate? Could we design the course for use on-line with elements that are used for in-person classroom use?

A. The RFA does not stipulate whether the course may be on-line in whole or in part.

4. Does the RFA allow multiple courses in a single application?

A. Section III.A. of the RFA specifically requests "an undergraduate level course or modules within a course…." Multiple courses in one application were not envisioned by the Empire State Stem Cell Board.

Applicants are advised to carefully consider going beyond the intended scope without substantial justification/benefit to NYSTEM and the Empire State Stem Cell Board. An applicant institution may submit only one application in response to this RFA.

5. I've carefully read the Introduction to the RFA but am still curious as to the impetus for the RFA. What was the Board's intention or reasoning?

   A. The Introduction to the RFA specifically acknowledges that "informed undergraduate students, regardless of major, are critical for stimulating discussion…" of important issues related to stem cell science. "This Request for Applications (RFA) is intended not only to promote the development of courses that provide an understanding of the scientific aspects of stem cell science, but also to catalyze courses that integrate multidisciplinary perspectives to achieve understanding that transcends the boundaries of any one field."

6. Is it acceptable to focus the coursework only to non-science majors or to science majors? Is it preferred that the coursework focus on one or both audiences?

   A. Either or both audiences are acceptable, depending on the goals of the curriculum to be developed. Sections I.B. and III.A. of the RFA specifically "encourages curriculum development for science and non-science majors alike."

7. Section I.B. of the RFA refers to providing "balanced perspectives concerning these issues." Does that mean that all sides of the issue must be presented?

   A. Yes. The curriculum must address all sides of the issue.

8. The review criteria (Section V.C.) includes scoring the application based on "the demonstrated ability of the institution and PI to execute recruitment activities to stimulate interest from women and underrepresented minorities." How can this be demonstrated – past experience?

   A. The Board is interested in stimulating the interest of women and underrepresented minorities in these issues and in the biological sciences in general. A demonstration of the successful means by which such inclusion has been stimulated in the past could be one way to address this review criterion.

Choosing the Principal Investigator and Curriculum Development Team

1. Because this is an interdisciplinary curriculum, we have put together a team of curriculum development specialists, biomedical researchers, engineers and philosophers. The review criterion listed in Section V.C. of the RFA specifically deals with the qualifications and skill of the Principal Investigator. We may also have a Co-PI. Will the entire team be judged or just these one or two individuals?

   A. The background and expertise of the PI who will serve as program director and the experience of the PI in undergraduate teaching and curriculum development will be considered. Notably, the application requires a biographical sketch (Form 7) for each member of the team designated as "Key Personnel" on Form 6 such that the strength of the team willl also be a factor in the evaluation of Institutional Support (another criterion listed in RFA Section V.C.).

2. Is there a limit to the number of Principal Investigators (PIs) on the application?

   A. While an application may have many scholars, researchers and/or partners on the curriculum development team, the application forms limit one PI and one Co-PI. The PI is defined on page 11 of the RFA as the "New York State investigator employed by the applicant institution responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing the Work Plan if an award is made." This individual becomes NYSTEM's primary contact for the contract. A Co-PI may be from the applicant institution or a partnering institution. If partnering/subcontracting institutions also wish to designate a PI and/or Co-PI, this is done via the Face Page for Subcontracting Entities.

3. There is no application form provided for overlapping support. Our institution has another award for developing stem cell curricula and the benefits of that program may be applicable to this award. How do we reflect that?

   A. The issue of overlapping support is generally one of financial support; both sponsors of the related activities must not fund the same effort ("double-billing"). If overlap is an issue, the work plan and budget justification should specifically address the manner in which the overlap will be handled.

Institutional Support

1. Is partnering with other institutions considered evidence of institutional support?

   A. Institutional support would be those commitments from partnering institutions that help to develop, sustain and support the development, implementation and continuation of the curriculum developed.

Public Distribution of Curricula

1. Section I.B. states that NYSTEM will post curricula on its website. What does that mean for copyright? How will modifications by others be reported back to NYSTEM and/or the original developers?

   A. The copyright will be retained by the contractor/developer. However, it is the Empire State Stem Cell Board's desire to provide broad access to and applicability of, curricula developed through contract with the Department of Health. As such, NYSTEM will encourage those who access the curricula via its website to engage the developer in discussions regarding possible modifications, etc. for use in their own institutions. NYSTEM will work with the developer and the user to encourage posting of additional modifications over time to enhance its usefulness.

2. What is meant by the review criterion in RFA Section V.C., which states, "the extent to which the expected curriculum and related products will be useful to other institutions"?

   A. See above reference to "… broad access to, and applicability of, curricula developed through contract…." The Board is interested in curricula that can be easily utilized by other institutions without major modifications.

Work Plan, Timeline and Collaboration Strategy and Budgeting

1. What is the format requested for the ten page Work Plan (Form 8)?

   A. The Work Plan needs to fully address the plan to accomplish the identified major goals of the project and be responsive to the General Expectations cited in the RFA (Section III.A.). Specific instructions are provided on page 15 of the RFA. Form 8 is preset with appropriate font sizes and margins. See also Form 9, Time Line and Collaboration Strategy. These two forms will become the content of the Work Plan for the contract, if awarded.

2. Most of our costs will be associated with "buying out staff time" to work on the project. Is that a problem?

   A. No. However, careful and thorough completion of Form 5 and Form 6 will provide sufficient information regarding time and effort and justification of the need for each of the key and support/technical personnel identified in the budget.

3. How is the budget scored?

   A. The reviewers are required to score each criterion listed in Section V.C. of the RFA. They will determine the score for this criterion (weighted at 20% of the overall score of the application) based upon the appropriateness of the budget allocations to the accomplishment of the proposed goals, including an assessment of cost reasonableness and percentage of effort. In addition to the budget score, the reviewers will also consider and provide comments on the appropriateness of budget duration, effort, overlap and areas of possible concern with regard to the Contract Policy Statements and Conditions (Attachment 5, Contract Appendix A-2).

4. Are "no cost extensions," "carry-forwards" and budget modifications allowed and are they treated in the same way as the NIH?

   A. They are allowable under the contract but are treated very differently than an NIH grant. Each must be formally requested and none are guaranteed. A formal contract amendment process, which is both lengthy and time-consuming, is generally necessary. Careful budgeting in the application should reduce the need for contract amendments.

<u>Appendix Material</u>

1. Can we include other related coursework we've developed in the appendix?

   A. Yes. Note that the instructions on page 11 of the RFA specifically state that "Appendices may not be used to circumvent page limitations." Thus, if the material is vital to convey understanding of the application and the proposed work plan, it should be described in the text of the work plan (Form 8) and not in an appendix.

2. What is a vendor responsibility questionnaire?

   A. This is a tool by which the Department and the Office of the State Comptroller assess the risk of entering into contract with an

organization. It can be completed and updated on-line. See Section IV.I. of the RFA for details.

Application Contents

1. Please clarify what is to be submitted by the application due date.
   A. Refer to Section V.A. and Attachment 2 of the RFA. An application package must contain a CD-ROM with the required forms and any appendix material and a complete paper copy. The paper copy should include original signatures on all Face Pages (Form 1). The electronic files to be completed and included on the CD-ROM are:
      - Contractor Forms 1-3 in a single Microsoft Word (.doc) file. This version of Form 1 will not be signed. The contents will be extracted and used in various ways by NYSTEM and the peer review contractor.
      - Contractor Forms 1-3 in a single Portable Document Format (.pdf) file. This .pdf should be created from the electronic Word file. This file will be sent to the peer reviewers.
      - Signed Forms 1 (Face Pages) for the contractor and all subcontractors in a single .pdf. These forms will be scanned into .pdf after original signatures. This fille will be sent to the peer reviewers.
      - Forms 4-9 and all appendix material in a single .pdf not greater than 12MB. This file will be sent to the peer reviewers.

Forms can be downloaded from: http://www.nyhealth.gov/funding .

Awards and Contracting Process

1. Section V.B. references a set of Pass/Fail requirements and refers to Attachment 2. Please clarify how this is done.

   A. When applications are received, they are inspected for the four mandatory elements listed on Attachment 2. If any one or more of those criteria are not met, the application will not pass the preliminary review and will not be forwarded for peer review. The applicant will be notified of this determination.

2. Section V.B. suggests that if we don't get 60 points or more, we have no chance of funding. Is that correct?

   A. Yes. The Funding Committee has decided that it will not consider applications that score 0-59 points.

3. Please explain the Funding Committee vote and notification process. Do they have full latitude or does everything that scores 60 points or better get funded as long as there is funding available?

   A. Following the peer review scoring process, the resulting critiques, recommendations, comments and scores are distributed to the members of the Funding Committee for consideration at an upcoming meeting. During that meeting, as described on page 16 of the RFA, the members will discuss the applications and make recommendations for funding to the Commissioner of Health based on "responsiveness to the mission of the ESSCB, responsiveness to the RFA, programmatic balance, availability of funds and compliance with Public Health Law Article 2, Title 5-A, Section 265." Reasons for deciding not to recommend an application for funding can include many items, including but not limited to, geographic diversity of the applicants and diversity of the subject matter covered by the applicants. If the Committee does not fund an application in order to fund another with a lower score, or stops before the designated funding runs out, it must explain the rationale to the Office of the State Comptroller. The Funding Committee recommendations are voted on during the public portion of the meeting, which can be viewed by webcast live and for approximately 30 days thereafter.

4. How long will it take to get feedback from peer reviewers? When will an official notice of award be sent?

   A. After the Funding Committee meeting recommendations are made, several administrative approvals to enter into a contract are needed before formal communications can be sent from the Extramural Grants Administration office. These approvals generally take six to eight weeks. Upon approval, letters of award or regret will be sent to the Principal Investigator and the grants official from the applicant institution. With that correspondence, the PI will also receive a copy of the reviewer critiques, scores, summary statement and review panel roster. The letter of award is not a guarantee of funding; a contract must first be executed before funding is provided.

5. What can we do to facilitate contract execution?

   A. Upon receipt of the letter of award, PIs should gather "just in time" information including any required IRB (human subjects), IACUC (vertebrate animals), IBC (recombinant DNA) and ESCRO (human pluripotent stem cell) approvals; and Grants Offices should complete/update the Vendor Responsibility Questionnaire and get the Workers' Compensation and Disability Insurance forms (see Section IV.K. of the RFA) ready for submission/return with the signed contract.

Then, when the contract is sent to the institution for signature, it can expeditiously return all necessary documents to the Department of Health with the signed contract.

6. When will we actually receive the funds?

   A. Funds under the contract are reimbursed in accordance with the payment and reporting schedule (Attachment 5, Appendix C to the contract, a sample of which can be found in the RFA). The contract must be executed (signed by all required parties and returned to the applicant institution) in order for allowable expenditures to be reimbursed. Contract execution generally takes six months from the date of the notice of award. The contract start date will be noted on the letter of award; it is expected to be July 1, 2010. Eligible expenses incurred prior to contract execution are made at the applicant's risk. If the contract is not executed, no funds will be reimbursed.

7. Can we count on receipt of the funds in this fiscal/economic environment? Under what circumstances might we not receive them?

   A. Once the contract is executed, eligible expenses will be reimbursed according to the terms of the contract. For purposes of program stability and demonstration of fiscal accountability, it is important that quarterly vouchers and semi-annual progress reports are submitted in a timely fashion. If the contract is terminated in accordance with Section III of the grant contract agreement (Attachment 5), expenses incurred beyond the date of termination will not be reimbursed.

MODIFICATIONS TO PAGE 2 OF THE RFA

1. Section I.C. (Available Funds) – the second paragraph is hereby deleted. Section I.C. now reads as follows:

Institutions may file or participate in only one application in response to this RFA. Approximately $2.5 million is available to support approximately ten awards. The number of awards will be contingent upon the quality of applications submitted. The contract term will be up to two years. Annual direct costs are capped at $150,000. Facilities and Administrative costs are capped at eight percent of the modified total direct costs.

2. Section I.D. (Use of the Funds) – the first and last sentences are hereby revised to correct references internal to the RFA). Section I.D. now reads as follows:

Funds awarded will be used to support the activities outlined in Section III.A. below, General Expectations (see also Section III.E. below, Reporting Obligations). Specifically, funds may be used to pay for a portion of the salary for faculty participation in curriculum development and implementation, administrative support and assistance, and modest expenses related to supplies, materials and course development. Facilities and Administrative costs are allowed, but are limited to a maximum of eight percent of modified total direct costs in any year (see Section V.A., Application Content).

By law, funds must not be used for any activities related to human reproductive cloning.

3. Section V.C. (Review Criteria) – the review criteria formerly labeled as "Qualifications and Skills of the Principal Investigator" has been changed. It now reads as follows:

Qualifications and Skills of the Principal Investigator and Development Team (20%)

- The background and expertise of the PI who will serve as program director.
- Experience of the PI and curriculum development team members in undergraduate teaching, subject matter and curriculum development.