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Integrating Expanded Learning Opportunities into Personalized Learning Plans and Flexible Pathways to Graduation

GRANT APPLICATION

The Vermont Agency of Education (VTAOE) invites SUs/SDs in partnership with expanded learning providers and/or informal educators to apply for this competitive grant opportunity for the purpose of preparing students for post-secondary success through sharing common language and practice that can support the translation of student learning between and across different contexts. SUs/SDs will steer the work and act as the fiscal agent for the project.

Partnerships include stakeholders who support the shift to personalized learning in a proficiency-based system. A maximum amount of \$150,000 will be available for dispersal under this grant competition. Individuals can submit proposals indicating expenditures of between \$5,000 to \$50,000 amounts. Proposals of up to \$150,000 will be considered.

Application Due Date: March 31, 2017

Anticipated Grant Duration: December 31, 2017

Number of Awards: Multiple awards are anticipated

For additional information, contact:

Jess DeCarolis, Division Director
Personalization and Flexible Pathways Division
jess.decarolis@vermont.gov or 802-479-1265

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Introduction and Background

Vermont's "Flexible Pathways Initiative" (Act 77 of 2013) and Education Quality Standards (EQS) established the expectation that students will have access to "flexible pathways to graduation." "Pathways" have been defined as "any combination of high-quality academic and experiential components leading to secondary school completion and post-secondary readiness [...] that allow the student to apply his or her knowledge and skills to tasks that are of interest to that student." The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has interpreted this to include learning experiences available through what are generally referred to as "expanded learning providers" or "informal educators." These entities have a rich history of providing valuable educational programs for students, and can range from 21C Community Learning Centers to museums and non-profit education organizations.

As SUs/districts make the shift to personalized learning in a proficiency-based system, expectations for students to take ownership over their own learning and collect evidence of that learning will increase. As their sense of agency increases, students will look to integrate learning that takes place in informal spaces – and outside of school – into their Personalized Learning Plans as evidence of proficiency. This is a momentous shift and schools cannot make this change alone. In order to support this shift in practice and expectation, it will be important for both formal and informal educators to share a common language and practice that can support the translation of student learning between and across different contexts. It will require school and informal educators to align their educational offerings around important content and skills, identify common learning targets, and devise ways to track student progress toward proficiency. (Note: In informal learning spaces proficiencies are often considered micro-credentials or badges.)

The AOE would like to support this effort by providing funding to allow SUs/SDs and schools to work with Expanded Learning Providers to create exemplars of external learning opportunities that can be incorporated into student PLPs and count toward graduation requirements. This effort would include 1) creating shared learning targets and performance scales; 2) redesigning or modifying both internal and external learning opportunities (in schools or through ELPs) to incorporate these shared learning targets; and 3) creating a process by which a student's external learning experience can be endorsed by their school of record.

Vermont Agency of Education Priorities

This grant will support project(s) that:

- build networking opportunities for SUs/SDs, expanded learning providers and AOE staff
- provide detailed plans and timelines for professional learning opportunities that connect expanded learning providers and schools in a collaborative design process
- detail specific processes and artifacts that will be produced as a result of this collaboration
- explain how the results of these collaborative efforts could solve a problem(s) for the field, for example:
 - What are the current challenges schools face when students want to incorporate learning/activities outside of the school into their PLPs?

- What have been successes in integrating demonstrations of proficiencies in informal spaces into formal spaces? How can we successfully integrate demonstrations of proficiency that happen during an expanded learning opportunity into formal spaces, such as portfolios, PLPs, report cards, etc.?
- How are expanded learning opportunities involved in the personalization process? What mechanisms are in place by which students, parents and educators can collectively identify high-quality expanded learning opportunities that address proficiencies?
- How might collaboration between expanded learning providers and schools solve a problem or need within specific regions of the state?
- explain how these artifacts will be shared with and serve the field
- include a plan for how this work will continue, support and expand personalized learning

III. Project Award and Timeline

Grants will expire on December 31, 2017 provided that program objectives are met and all reporting and monitoring requirements are successfully fulfilled. Grantees are expected to provide a plan, timeline, and budget request for two grant activity periods. Grant activity periods will end June 30, 2017 and December 31, 2017. Projects proposing to conclude by June 30, 2017 do not need to submit a plan, timeline and budget for the second activity period. Any projects with budgetary and activity provisions between July 1, 2017 and December 31, 2017 will need to provide a separate plan, timeline, and budget for this activity period.

Timeline

Notification of Request for Proposals - March 6, 2017

Application Due Date - March 31, 2017 (Received at VT AOE by 4:00 PM)

Award Announcements – April 14, 2017

IV. Project Requirements

- A. **Consortium/Steering Committee:** Identify a Steering Committee (SC) that will guide the work of this project. SC members should represent the schools and expanded learning providers involved in this project. Identify a committee lead who will be minimally responsible for arranging meetings, setting agendas, communicating with the AOE and moving the work forward. This position could be supported with grant funds.
- B. **Organizational Structure:** Provide clear plans for how the collaboration will be structured in order to meet the grant expectations. A school district or supervisory union that will serve as the fiscal agent must be identified.
- C. **Communication System:** Discuss intended strategies for communication with and among the school(s), expanded learning providers, AOE staff, and the field.

- D. **Plan, Timeline, and Benchmarks of Success:** Provide a clear, achievable plan and timeline for the work, as well as specific indicators of project success at key points of the timeline. This plan and timeline must be developed for two time periods: April 14, 2017- June 30, 2017 and July 1, 2017- December 31, 2017.
- E. **Budget and Budget Justification:** Include a cost effective budget and justification for line items that reflect the goals and priorities of this project. This budget and budget justification must be developed for two time periods: April 14, 2017- June 30, 2017 and July 1, 2017- December 31, 2017.

V. Application Requirements

The narrative sections (excluding appendices, abstract, budget and budget justification) of the application must be double-spaced and the font must not be smaller than 12-point and shall not exceed 10 pages. Application must contain the following sections:

- A. **Steering Committee & Fiscal Agent:** Include Appendix A, Steering Committee Lead, Appendix B, Steering Committee Members, and Appendix C, Fiscal Agent.
- B. **Abstract:** Provide a one-page summary that briefly describes the project visions, goals, activities, and deliverables that will be addressed and expected benefits of the work. The abstract may be single-spaced
- C. **Grant Narrative:** The narrative shall describe in detail how the project will meet the Vermont Agency of Education Priorities (Section II) as well as the Project Requirements (Section IV). The project narrative shall also include a project timeline and must clearly demonstrate that the submitting team has the capability of managing the project, organizing the work, and meeting deadlines. Finally, a plan for sustaining this work at the end of the funding period should be included.
- D. **Budget and Justification:** Include a project budget (Appendix D) and justification for anticipated funding. The budget justification must clearly be tied to the scope and requirements of the project, and activities and associated costs should be identified for the time periods indicated in Section IV Part E. Be as specific as possible. The justification will describe the basis for determining the amounts shown on the project budget page.

VI. Application Submission and Review

- A. **Submission:** Applicants must submit an original as well as an electronic copy to Jess DeCarolis via email (jess.decarolis@vermont.gov) at the Vermont Agency of Education. To be considered for funding, original signed applications must be received at the Vermont Agency of Education by 4:00PM on March 31, 2017.

Application should be mailed or delivered to:
Jess DeCarolis, Director
Personalization and Flexible Pathways
Vermont Agency of Education
219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641

B. Review Process:

A review panel will evaluate the eligible applications in light of the required application components.

Criteria

Steering Committee Make-up	15 Points
Organizational Structure	20 Points
Communication System	15 Points
Plan & Timeline	40 Points
Budget	10 Points

The Agency reserves the right to award in part, to reject any and all applications in whole or in part, and to waive technical defects, irregularities or omissions if, in its judgement, the best interest of students would be served. After receiving the application, the Agency reserves the right not to award a grant, to negotiate specific grant amounts and to select certain grantees regardless of points awarded as part of the process to meet federal requirements or State Board of Education priorities.

Applicants may be asked to clarify or rewrite certain aspects of their applications. Finalists may be asked to participate in an interview before funds are awarded. Applicants will be contacted if such information or actions are necessary.

VII. Award Administration

- A. Notification of the Award:** The SU/SD designee will be notified of the status of their application within two weeks of the application deadline.
- B. Reporting Requirements:** The Steering Committee and/or SU/SD designee will provide bi-monthly updates on progress to a designated staff person at the Agency of Education.

Appendix A

Steering Committee Lead

Institution or Organization: _____

Chairperson: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Appendix B

Steering Committee Member

Institution or Organization: _____

Steering Committee Member: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Primary Role: _____

Appendix C

Fiscal Agent

Institute or Organization: _____

Contact: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-Mail: _____

Amount of Funds Requested: \$ _____

Appendix D

Project Budget

	2017
A. Direct Cost Requested for Partner	
1. Salaries & Wages (Professional and clerical)	_____
2. Employees Benefits	_____
3. Travel	_____
4. Materials and Supplies	_____
5. Consultants and Contracts	_____
6. Equipment (Purchase)	_____
B. Other (Equipment rental, printing, etc.)	_____
C. Total	_____

This form is a required element of the grant application. Justification for each of the categories shall be included in the budget narrative portion of the application.

Appendix E

Key Element Scoring Guide

Name of Project: _____ Date: _____

Reviewer: _____

Criteria	Total Points	Poor	Average	Excellent
A. Steering Committee Make-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has a lead been identified?</i> • <i>Will the steering committee have the skills, knowledge and capacity to carry out the grant priorities?</i> • <i>Are a variety of educators, employers, and/or community providers represented on the steering committee?</i> 	15	0 - 5	6 – 10	11 - 15

Comments: _____

Points Awarded (Maximum 15):

Criteria	Total Points	Poor	Average	Excellent
B. Organization Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Has a structure that will support the grant priorities been developed?</i> • <i>Has a fiscal agent been identified?</i> • <i>Are specific details concerning meeting frequency, group accountability, record-keeping, etc. adequately discussed?</i> 	20	0 - 6	7 – 14	15 - 20

Comments: _____

Points Awarded (Maximum 20):

Criteria	Total Points	Poor	Average	Excellent
C. Communication System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are strategies for communicating among known and potential stakeholders identified?</i> • <i>Are strategies for communicating with the AOE, educators, and the field identified?</i> • <i>Is success feasible?</i> 	15	0 - 5	6 – 10	11 - 15

Comments: _____

Points Awarded (Maximum 15):

Criteria	Total Points	Poor	Average	Excellent
D. Plan & Timeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the plan seem achievable?</i> • <i>Is the timeline reasonable?</i> • <i>Are deliverables specified within the timeline?</i> • <i>Are pitfalls or obstacles identified? Are plans to adequately address them included?</i> 	40	0 – 13	14 – 26	27 - 40

Comments: _____

Points Awarded (Maximum 40):

Criteria	Total Points	Poor	Average	Excellent
A. Budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the budget effectively address project goals?</i> • <i>Is justification for major expenditures (especially salaries) reasonable?</i> 	10	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 - 10

Comments: _____

Points Awarded (Maximum 10):

Total Score (Maximum is 100): _____