

TEAGLE WORKING GROUPS ON “BIG QUESTIONS”

The Teagle Foundation has committed up to \$1 million for grants to encourage student engagement with and enriched understanding of a wide range of questions of meaning and value. The grants, each up to \$100,000, will support multi-institutional Working Groups with projects leading to fresh approaches to many of these questions.

BACKGROUND

This RFP with its “Big Questions” phraseology is the result of extended inquiries into the connection between students’ interest in issues of value and meaning and their engagement with liberal education. We do not have a strict definition of “Big Questions” but they include surely such questions as “*Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I going to do with my life? What are my values? Is there such a thing as evil? What does it mean to be human? How can I understand suffering and death? What obligations do I have to other people? What does it mean to be a citizen in a democracy? What makes work, or a life, meaningful and satisfying?*” These questions, we believe, can be approached in both secular and religious terms, through the curriculum and in “the other hundred hours”, through the wide ranging study of texts and problems central to every discipline. The important thing, in our view, is not to run away from them, but to address them in ways that work in specific settings.

The Foundation’s website, www.teaglefoundation.org, contains reports on two recent discussions that we call “Listenings: one on “Religious Work,” the other on “Big Questions.” These inquiries point to the possibility that more extensive and intellectually robust ways of approaching a wide range of such questions may have powerful invigorating effects on student learning in the liberal arts. Such questions, we believe, may be formulated in either religious or secular terms; indeed, the interplay between these two formulations may prove especially productive. We urge potential applicants to look closely at the Foundation’s website as they prepare their proposals.

We invite proposals that explore imaginative ways to invigorate the study of these “Big Questions” in American colleges and universities.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Goals:

1. To determine whether engagement with such “Big Questions” (either in the curriculum or outside it) can strengthen liberal education.
2. To determine what is needed to achieve such engagement and then develop a plan for testing / acting on that knowledge.
3. To develop strong links among the institutions working on these projects.
4. To produce reports that will help faculty and administrators on a variety of campuses when they try to find better ways to address these questions.

Eligibility: In addition to private colleges and universities, consortia, regional and national associations, theological schools and seminaries, associations, research centers, and other similar organizations in higher education are eligible to apply, provided they can demonstrate a strong commitment to the liberal arts as well as liberal education, have high academic standards, and are financially stable. Proposals for projects restricted to a single college or university campus will

not be accepted but ad hoc collaborations among accredited, private colleges and universities may be funded through a grant to a lead institution. Examples of similar collaborations in Working Groups already funded by the Foundation are listed on the Foundation's website: <http://www.teaglefoundation.org/grantmaking/grantees/forums.aspx> . Note that we will not fund proposals on topics these groups are already exploring.

Since only one proposal will be accepted from each institution, a letter of endorsement from the president or senior academic officer should be included in the final application.

Means: We expect that proposals will use a variety of approaches, both within the curriculum and outside it. A research component is appropriate, indeed an empirical dimension to the work is important, but a successful project will result in practical ways of increasing student engagement and learning in the liberal arts.

Hypothetical Examples: The Foundation is prepared to consider a wide range of proposals in this program. The following list of hypothetical examples points to the range of possible activities rather than to specific projects we have in mind:

- A department or program in a research university or seminary works collaboratively with several liberal arts colleges to develop faculty and student linkages and exchanges around one or more "Big Question" topics.
- A liberal arts college invites several similar institutions to join in developing a joint January term program that involves both service learning and academic work on the topic of democratic leadership and civic responsibility.
- A group of graduate deans jointly appoint a task force to determine how the specialized research of the Ph.D. might more productively be linked to teaching around certain "Big Question" themes.
- A Dean of Religious Life or a Chaplain working with colleagues from the faculty and the Student Life staff invites a similar group from other institutions to test a fresh approach to some of these questions.
- A research organization convenes a summer institute to explore how America's increasing religious pluralism relates to traditional scholarly and pedagogical approaches to racial and ethnic identity.

Evaluation: The Foundation will work closely with grant recipients to develop good ways of assessing the effectiveness of programs developed under this grant. We expect, however, that recipients will define at the outset a baseline that can be used to measure results at a later stage.

White Papers: In addition to the usual financial and narrative reports at the end of the grant, each Working Group is expected to produce a White Paper that will be of use to other individuals and institutions committed to the strengthening of liberal education. The Teagle Foundation, after reviewing the paper, will work closely with recipients to disseminate the results of their work through web sites, and perhaps through conferences or publications.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Preliminary approach: An e-mail of not more than 250 words should be sent before February 15 to proposals@teaglefoundation.org. The preliminary e-mail should

- state the “Big Questions” to be engaged;
- list the institutions that may be collaborating on the project;
- provide a brief description of research methods and institutional activities;
- comment on the significance of the anticipated results.

If this brief sketch of the project is of interest, the Foundation will invite a more detailed proposal.

Final Proposal: An original plus three copies of final proposals should be sent to the address given at the end of this RFP. Proposals must include:

- A 3-4 page narrative defining the topic to be studied, explaining its relevance to the applying institutions, and importance to liberal education. The proposal should make clear how the Working Group will add to the knowledge base for strengthening liberal education, and describe the basic methods and work plan for the group.

The proposal should indicate what metric will best be used to determine the effectiveness of the project. (By “metric” we do not mean an elaborate evaluation but one or more straightforward indicators, preferably quantitative, that point to the success of the project.)

Projects should not exceed 24 months in length. In addition to plans for on-campus activities, the project must result in a publishable White Paper, due no later than September 1, 2008.

- A one-paragraph abstract of the project, suitable for posting on the web.
- The contact information and c.v. of the person in charge of the project.
- List of working group members with title and affiliation for each.
- A letter of endorsement from the President or senior academic officer of all institutions participating in the project.
- A brief budget as described below.

Budget: The maximum grant is \$100,000 payable over two years. The grant will normally be paid in two installments: an initial payment at the time the grant is awarded, and a final payment of \$10,000 on receipt of satisfactory interim narrative and financial reports.

A one or two page budget based on July 1 – June 30 operating years should suffice.

The grant may be used for all direct, but no indirect, costs of the program. Appropriate expenses include travel expenses, office and research materials and assistance, meals for working dinners or similar occasions, reasonable honoraria or fees for visiting experts or consultants etc. A modest charge may be included for release time of the person or persons in charge of the project and support staff. Institutional cost sharing should be shown whenever possible.

REPORTS / DELIVERABLES

- Interim narrative and budget reports.
- A final financial report following the format of the budget described above.
- A final narrative report describing how the Working Group functioned and what has been learned about collaboration and institutional organization from it.
- A White Paper. Publishable texts must be submitted to the Foundation by September 1, 2008. The Foundation will hold the copyright to these texts and intends to make them widely available over its website and perhaps through publication in book or journal form. Permission will regularly be granted to authors, however, to publish the text in any additional place they choose on whatever terms they negotiate with other publishers.
- White Papers should be accompanied by a statement about what the institution plans to do to disseminate the White Paper and suggestions to the Teagle Foundation about its dissemination efforts. (We will want addresses of 50 – 100 individuals and institutions outside the sponsoring college whose attention to the report seems especially vital.)

TIMELINE

February 15, 2006:	Last date for preliminary e-mail contact.
April 1, 2006:	Final proposals due.
Late May 2006:	Teagle Board action; Award letters to successful applicants.
September 1, 2008:	Final date for submission of publishable texts of White Papers and final reports.

WHERE TO SEND PROPOSALS

The original proposal plus three copies should be sent to:

The Teagle Foundation
10 Rockefeller Plaza, Room 920
New York, NY 10020-1903