Request for Proposals
Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence

The Teagle Foundation will invite selected institutions and organizations to apply for grants that address the question: How can faculty work together to create a more coherent and intentional curriculum whose goals, pathways, and outcomes are clear to students and other constituencies with a stake in the future of higher education?

Grants of varying amounts up to $280,000 over a 24-36 month period will be made for each initiative. The size of the grant will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project. Smaller awards of up to $25,000 will be considered to support planning grants to assist in the development of an emerging project.

Background and Context for this RFP

For the past decade, the Teagle Foundation has focused its grant programs on improving teaching and learning in the liberal arts. Examples of past grant programs include: creating faculty-driven approaches to assessing student learning, developing programs for faculty to discover and use current research on how students learn, incorporating technology into liberal arts education, enhancing civic and moral learning, and preparing graduate students for teaching. The RFP and grant program outlined here shine the spotlight on the curriculum, and specifically on the collective efforts that faculty must make to design a coherent and integrated curriculum.

The call for the undergraduate curriculum to be more intentionally structured and coherent is not new. In 1985, the Association of American Colleges (AAC), now the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), offered a compelling critique of undergraduate education in its report Integrity of the College Curriculum:

As for what passes as a college curriculum, almost anything goes. We have reached a point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its content and purpose…Indeed, the major in most colleges is little more than a gathering of courses taken in one department…(p. 2).

This call for curricular coherence was made at a time when higher education institutions looked forward to a period of continued growth, involving more courses, more choices for students, and increasing numbers of faculty. Perhaps for this reason, the problem was less solved than aggravated. As Robert Zemsky, in his recent book Checklist for Change, points out, little has changed since that report was issued. “Three decades of constantly adding new programs and more choices to the undergraduate curriculum have yielded colleges and universities that are economically unsustainable and educationally dysfunctional” (p. 82).

The combined demands of quality and cost containment give new urgency to tackling the issue of curricular coherence and integration. As institutions seek to sharpen their programs’ goals and expected outcomes, they must do so in the context of limited resources, recognizing that the
additive approach is not only financially unsustainable but may ill serve the goals of a liberal education.

Despite some interesting and productive initiatives on campuses across the country, obstacles to change abound. Aside from the tendency to continually add new courses rather than to rethink and redesign the curriculum, we see a prestige hierarchy between research and teaching that has come to pervade the reward structures of too many institutions; a widespread belief on the part of faculty members that their teaching should, insofar as possible, reflect their own scholarly specialties; and a consumerist view of higher education in which offerings should appeal to as many tastes as possible.

**Goals of this RFP**

We seek to support institutions in pursuing an ambitious approach to curricular change. Many efforts to rethink curriculum result in minor adjustments that, while they may be improvements, do not squarely address the issues of course proliferation or the lack of curricular coherence. This grant program seeks to support campus initiatives that delve deep into the structure of the curriculum and make transparent to students what they can expect to learn and how the curriculum’s architecture delivers this learning. As is always the case for Teagle-supported initiatives, the goal of curricular change is improved student learning.

To facilitate progress towards substantive curricular change, we encourage institutions to identify models of collaborative faculty efforts to redesign the curriculum so that it is more coherent and integrated and its goals and pathways are explicit. For example, the formation of learning communities among faculty across departments, at the same institutions or multiple institutions, may be one such model. These communities could accomplish their work through face-to-face meetings, virtual platforms to share materials, and/or small interest groups who communicate around shared practice and learning. Institutions are expected to create a knowledge base of concepts and strategies related to designing coherent curriculum that can be disseminated nationally. This knowledge base might take the form of publications, conference presentations, websites, or blogs.

**Criteria for Project Proposals**

- **An ambitious approach to curricular change.**
  The outcomes of curricular change efforts will vary by institution and might include any of the following elements: clearer learning outcomes for general education or the major; more intentional interrelationships among courses in a program or major; and greater clarity for students about how the pieces of their educational experience fit together. Curricular planning should take account of those approaches to teaching that have proven most effective in engaging students, commonly referred to as “high impact practices.” Initiatives might address general education or the major.

- **A faculty led and faculty owned initiative.**
  The Teagle Foundation approaches the challenges of improving teaching and learning with the conviction that the faculty must lead the way. Although the support of senior leadership and trustees is essential, it is the faculty’s responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and well delivered, and to continually monitor the impact the curriculum’s content and pedagogy on student learning.

- **Creation of a faculty community across multiple institutions and disciplines.**
Through this RFP, we want to explore how faculty can create solutions by working together. Accustomed to seeing themselves as a community of scholars, faculty members are encouraged by way of these projects to view themselves as a community of teachers who seek a better understanding of how reshaping the curriculum influences student learning.

- **Attention to inter-institutional learning**
  Although the majority of the work on the curriculum will take place at the institutional level, and notably by crossing departmental and disciplinary boundaries, the Foundation believes that efforts by individual colleges will be enriched when they are informed by the experiences of other institutions. Such collaboration can involve either existing or *ad hoc* consortia.

- **Assessment**
  Successful proposals will include clearly articulated goals and appropriate means of assessment. They will seek to evaluate effects of curricular redesign both on student learning and faculty practices, and to use what they learn to inform ongoing improvement. With this grant, as with others, the Teagle Foundation may wish to collaborate with participating institutions in a follow-up study three to five years after the conclusion of the grant period in order to assess the longer-term outcomes of the funded project.

- **Dissemination efforts**
  Active dissemination efforts will be important in order to spread the effects of the knowledge gained by grantees and practices to interested and influential audiences.

**Submission Process**

**Invited proposals will be accepted on a rolling basis following the two-stage process outlined below.**

**Concept paper**

Interested institutions, organizations, or consortia may submit a 1-3 page concept paper after conferring with program staff on whether their proposed project meets the general criteria for this initiative. After review of the concept papers, a limited number of institutions or consortia will then be invited to submit the full proposal, as outlined below.

**Full proposals**

Proposals should include the following components:

- A 5-10 page narrative that outlines the project as specifically as possible and includes a discussion of: background and context for the project, purpose and goals, plans for future sustainability, criteria (both short- and long-term) for judging the project's success, and a dissemination plan.
- 1-2 page work plan and timeline.
- 1-2 page budget, based on July 1-June 30 operating years, and an accompanying budget narrative. Appropriate expenses include stipends for project leader(s), travel and meeting expenses, meals for working dinners or similar occasions, reasonable honoraria or fees for visiting experts or consultants, office and research materials and assistance, and the costs of support staff. The Foundation does not cover indirect costs/overhead. Please
show cost-sharing where possible. Cost-sharing should be for those direct costs borne by the institutions.

- A one-paragraph abstract of the project, suitable for posting on the web.
- The contact information and CV of the person(s) in charge of the project.
- Letters of support from the presidents or provosts of institutions involved in the project.

**All final submissions should be submitted electronically as a single PDF to proposals@teaglefoundation.org.**

**FOUNDATION CONTACTS:** Please feel free to contact Loni Bordoloi (bordoloi@teagle.org) or Desiree Vazquez Barlatt (desireev@teaglefoundation.org) if you have questions about this initiative.