



# Request for Proposals

## Revised Spring 2021

The Teagle Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) are jointly sponsoring a grant program to revitalize the role of the humanities in general education. Grant awards (CFDA # 45.162) up to \$25,000 over 6-12 months for planning and up to \$350,000 over 24 months for implementation will be made to institutions participating in this initiative. The size of the grant award will be based on the scope of the project. Under the Teagle-NEH partnership, awards for planning and implementation will be made in Academic Year (AY) 2020-2021, AY 2021-2022, and AY 2022-2023 for work to be carried out between now and AY 2024-2025.

### **Rationale**

The humanities are essential for the health of American civic life. Yet on many campuses of higher education, the humanities have been languishing, with declining numbers of students choosing to major in the humanities, declining enrollments by non-majors in many humanities courses, and widespread demoralization of humanities faculty.

The future vitality of the humanities will depend largely on what happens in general education, the prescribed portion of a student's work that falls outside their chosen major. General education is the place in the undergraduate curriculum where students, who now overwhelmingly pursue pre-professional areas of study, should engage with challenging and inspiring works of literature, art, and philosophy—works that raise the sort of questions they are otherwise unlikely to encounter in their undergraduate career, and at a moment in their lives when they are open to confronting humanistic questions as part of their education.

General education should give students an opportunity to broaden their understanding of the world and themselves, while strengthening the skills to read closely, write clearly, speak with confidence, and contend with differing viewpoints and perspectives—all capacities cultivated by the humanities that are crucial for the

“participatory readiness”<sup>1</sup> of citizen-leaders of our democracy.

At many institutions, the impersonal and incoherent character of general education, typically structured around distribution requirements, minimizes opportunities for genuine engagement with deep and difficult questions raised by the humanities: about the role of government; the power of words and symbols; the burden of our history for people of color, the responsibility of individuals for the welfare of others; the problem of ambiguity even in the realm of science—to name just a few.

Worse, such an approach to general education encourages a “check the box” attitude that undermines the value proposition of staying in college, particularly for low-income and first-generation students who face pressure to enter the workforce prematurely. A serious effort to make general education more coherent and attentive to student concerns is needed to reduce attrition, which often occurs after the first year of college when students have typically encountered a “grab bag” of disconnected introductory coursework. The humanities are essential for redesigning general education so that students of all backgrounds may see the salience of their coursework for the issues and questions they care about and how domains of knowledge are interconnected—as are the problems they will be tackling in the real world—all while building skills in communication and critical analysis that are prized in the workplace and beyond.

The Teagle-NEH initiative is inspired by a successful program model developed at Purdue University, which within three years, has attracted a remarkably large number of undergraduate students. It has helped students in pre-professional majors strengthen critical thinking and communication skills, reversed the decline in credit hours at Purdue’s College of Liberal Arts, and raised morale and teaching opportunities for humanities faculty.

Students who embark on the Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts (CILA) certificate program take a two-semester “Transformative Texts” sequence in their first year under the mentorship of tenure-track faculty. At least half the reading assignments in all sections of this sequence are drawn from a faculty-created and continually revised list of roughly 200 major works—with a resulting degree of commonality that helps create a sense of belonging and intellectual community for students while also allowing faculty the freedom to design syllabi aligned with their own interests.

Students subsequently take thematically organized clusters of courses that complement the technical course load typically required of STEM and other pre-

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2013). The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation. [https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/hss\\_report.pdf](https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/hss_report.pdf)

professional majors, who dominate undergraduate enrollments at many institutions. Most CILA courses satisfy existing general education distribution requirements and represent no detour from the path to timely graduation, a particular concern for students in highly prescribed degree programs. The program model is also flexible enough to meet the practical challenge of serving a significant share of the undergraduate student body.

Two curricular components of the Cornerstone program model are especially notable. First, gateway courses aimed at incoming students that are anchored in transformative texts help build intellectual community among students as well as faculty through a common learning and teaching experience. Studying such texts—whether ancient or modern—that have transformed the world and that continue to have the power to transform individual lives under the mentorship of faculty gives students a strong start to their time in college. Gateway courses anchored in such texts help counter the centripetal forces that can make the college experience feel desultory and disconnected. Such courses create a framework that allows students to make better-informed curricular decisions as they proceed through college, and provide a repository of skills and perspectives on which they draw throughout their formal education and beyond.

Second, thematically organized clusters of courses that bring humanistic inquiry to problems in business, health, engineering, and other technical fields help students appreciate that technical problems cannot be addressed exclusively through technical solutions. Such clusters also provide a purposeful and coherent path rather than a menu of unrelated options for completing the general education requirements. Engagement with the humanities inspires students to reflect on their values, instills a love of learning, and enriches their lives.

## **Goals**

The Teagle-NEH initiative aims to reinvigorate the role of the humanities in general education, and in doing so, expose a broad array of students to the power of the humanities; help students of all backgrounds build a sense of belonging and community; strengthen the coherence and cohesiveness of general education; and increase teaching opportunities for humanities faculty.

This initiative is dedicated to the proposition that transformative texts—regardless of authorship, geography, or the era that produced them—perform a democratizing function in giving students the analytical tools and historical awareness to interrogate themselves as well as the culture and society by which we are all partially formed. Such texts give students access to a wide range of lived experiences and form the basis for creating a common intellectual experience that fosters a sense of community.

Balancing commonality with faculty choice in syllabi needs to be thoughtfully

negotiated within each institution as it strives for both. Faculty recognize the value of shared texts across sections, but they also expect some degree of freedom in designing their own syllabi and time to build a workable consensus with one another on which texts work best and are essential to teach.

Providing thematically organized pathways that link the humanities to students' professional aspirations helps make general education more compelling and coherent. Such pathways help students see the salience of humanistic thinking from the outset of their undergraduate careers, combats the perception that the humanities are irrelevant for their future work, and, not least, encourages them to complete their coursework and stay on the path to graduation.

Revitalizing the place of the humanities in general education can also help to secure the future of the humanities professoriate. It has become clear that humanities departments, which at many institutions are shrinking relative to their counterparts in other fields, must find new ways to ensure that the humanities remain a vital aspect of undergraduate education. Teacher-scholars in humanistic fields will need to reallocate their time to engage non-majors in introductory General Education while also pursuing their more specialized teaching and research. Ensuring that general education programs are anchored in the humanities provides faculty with the opportunity to reclaim their vocation as teachers and to teach the kinds of works that attracted them to academia in the first place. Committing to General Education should not be regarded as a drain on humanities departments but as a way to renew their vitality and ensure their future.

### **Eligibility**

This funding opportunity is available to regionally accredited private not-for-profit and public institutions of higher education. The Teagle-NEH initiative welcomes the participation of a diverse array of institutions—community colleges, liberal arts colleges, regional comprehensive institutions, and research universities.

### **Award Types**

Implementation grants of varying amounts, up to \$350,000 over 24 months, will be made to each funded project participating in this initiative. The size of the implementation grant award will be based on the scope of the project and whether it includes support for fellowships for doctoral students, post-doctoral scholars, and/or visiting faculty. Planning grants up to \$25,000 over 6-12 months are strongly encouraged to lay the groundwork for successful curricular reform and faculty professional development.

## **Criteria for Project Proposals**

Institutions will be selected based on the design and scale of their proposed programs. Selection criteria for both planning and implementation requests are described in further detail below:

- **A faculty-led and faculty-owned initiative**

The success of the Cornerstone initiative depends on the level of commitment of a broad array of faculty coordinating their efforts across departments. Although the support of senior leadership is essential, it is the faculty's responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and well delivered, and to monitor the impact of curriculum and pedagogy on student learning. Accustomed to seeing themselves as a community of scholars, faculty members are encouraged by way of this initiative to view themselves also as a community of teachers who seek to stimulate, challenge, and inspire students of all backgrounds through humanistic inquiry. Funded projects are expected to involve significant participation from tenure-track humanities and other liberal arts faculty. This initiative is committed to diversity in the faculty who teach in the funded program and to diversity in the texts they teach.

- **A common intellectual experience anchored in transformative texts**

Participating institutions are expected to embed transformative texts in gateway courses to engage incoming undergraduate students with enduring human questions and to cultivate their written and oral communication skills. Such courses should build intellectual community among students of all backgrounds through a shared academic experience.

- **Coherent pathways through general education**

Participating institutions are expected to create coherent pathways through general education that link the humanities to students' professional aspirations and provide social, cultural, and ethical context for their thinking about the fields they will enter after college.

- **Student reach, particularly for STEM and other pre-professional majors**

Projects funded under this initiative should be designed to benefit a significant share of the undergraduate student body. The curricular components of the Cornerstone program model may be adapted and delivered in a variety of curricular formats: a certificate program that fulfills general education requirements; integrating core texts into existing courses that meet distribution requirements; mandatory first-year seminars or student success courses for incoming students coupled with intensive advising to develop tailored pathways through general education; or most ambitiously, using transformative texts and questions as a unifying mechanism to develop a coherent general education program for all students. All of these curricular formats have the potential to

reach a significant proportion of the undergraduate student body.

- **Sustainability**

Major curricular redesign requires alignment with institutional priorities and strategic plans, attention to academic governance procedures, and reallocation of institutional resources. The factors that contribute to longer-term sustainability may vary campus to campus, but they are as important as the actual implementation of curricular redesign. For example, proposed curricula needs to be designed in such a way that it will meet internal standards for academic review and can be delivered by the prevailing configuration of tenure-track faculty. Grants under the Teagle-NEH partnership are made in the expectation that once the formal grant period ends, should the piloted programs be successful, the costs associated with supporting those efforts will be absorbed by the participating institutions.

- **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. There may be 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**

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. Project leaders and participants will be expected to join periodic grantee convenings and faculty professional development institutes sponsored under the Teagle-NEH partnership to share lessons learned with their peers and to support each other in the challenging work of curricular redesign that brings the humanities from the periphery to the center of general education. These convenings are conceived not as burdensome obligations but as opportunities for intellectual and professional renewal.

### **Use of Grant Funds**

Grant funds may only be used for allowable costs incurred in accordance with the 2 CFR 200 Subpart E Cost Principles. Planning grants may be used to cover such expenses as compensation for faculty members on the planning team and travel to annual faculty professional development institutes sponsored by the Teagle-NEH initiative and other similar professional development opportunities. Planning grants provide support for faculty at participating institutions to achieve the following:

- lay the curricular groundwork for their proposed program;
- ensure the proposed program meets the necessary approvals by the appropriate governance committees;
- engage the leadership and faculty of professional schools, where appropriate, so the program is accepted as part of their majors' degree plans;
- reach consensus on which transformative texts to use in common;
- establish a clear strategy for faculty professional development and scale-up of sections;
- whenever possible, pilot courses featuring transformative texts.

**Implementation grants provide support for institutions to enact concrete plans for comprehensive and sustainable curriculum development or redesign efforts. They may be used as follows:**

- To provide one-time stipends for faculty time committed to developing their readiness to teach in core-text based courses; course releases to design and implement general education pathways; and other similar expenses likely to arise in a major curricular reform effort.
- To defray the cost of outreach to academic advisors who help guide students in their course enrollment, particularly at large institutions where academic advising is usually carried out by professional staff instead of faculty.
- To support the work of recruiting students, addressing library resources, and similar expenses.

**Support for fellowships for pre- or post-doctoral scholars or visiting faculty will be made available on a limited basis to a select group of institutions that are prepared to contribute significant cost-sharing and are committed to funding the fellowships for at least one year in the post-grant period. Such fellowships are intended to help prepare future faculty, early career teacher-scholars, and faculty in tenured ranks to learn how to design and teach humanities programs that are relevant for non-majors. Though the fellowships may include modest allowances to support scholarly work, they should focus primarily on teaching.**

**Institutions are entitled to recover indirect costs under the Teagle-NEH grant program. The appropriate federally negotiated indirect cost rate will be identified in consultation with NEH staff.**

### **Submission Process**

**Requests for grant support will be considered following the two-stage application process described below. First, we ask that prospective grantees share brief 3-5 page concept papers, whether they are interested in planning or implementation**

support, via [proposals@teagle.org](mailto:proposals@teagle.org). After review of the concept papers, a limited number of applicants will then be invited to submit full proposals. All concept papers should list two co-PIs who are tenured or tenure-track faculty and include a provisional list of faculty members who are interested in teaching with transformative texts. (Institutions that do not have traditional tenure should name faculty who have renewable multi-year appointments.) The concept paper should provide a sketch of the project, with an eye towards meeting the criteria discussed above for faculty-led curricular reform and longer-term sustainability. Interested applicants may wish to refer to this [toolkit](#) that distills lessons learned in standing up a Cornerstone program. For additional details, please see [this list of frequently asked questions](#).

### **Timeline**

Concept papers for planning and implementation awards must be submitted by **December 1, 2021** at [proposals@teagle.org](mailto:proposals@teagle.org). The next round of planning and implementation awards under the Teagle-NEH partnership will be made by May 2022. Work supported by the grant may begin as early as spring 2022.

### **Contact Information**

Please contact Loni Bordoloi Pazich, program director for institutional initiatives at the Teagle Foundation, at [bordoloi@teagle.org](mailto:bordoloi@teagle.org) with questions about *Cornerstone: Learning for Living*.