



**Request for Proposals
Pathways to the Liberal Arts
Revised Fall 2019**

The Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative supports access to and success in liberal arts education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who might not ordinarily attempt a rigorous liberal arts program. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from \$100,000-\$400,000 over a 24-36 month period, will be made to each funded project participating in this initiative. The size of the grant will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project. We expect this grant program will remain open for approximately three to five years.

Rationale

Students who historically have been excluded from higher education—including low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color—now constitute the “new majority” of undergraduates. Many of these students contend with difficult family circumstances, economic challenges, and fragile self-confidence during their college years, and many institutions that serve them struggle to keep them engaged and on the path to the associate or baccalaureate degree. While there have been significant advances in academic advising, data analytics, and the use of technology to improve the experience of at-risk students and their likelihood of graduation, interventions in the curriculum itself have been relatively sparse.

Students are often stymied by confusing and fragmented college curricula that interfere with graduating on time, if at all. Worse, a “cafeteria” approach to curriculum, in which courses may have little apparent connection to each other, and requirements may seem arbitrary, can undermine the purposes of a college education: to help students cultivate the knowledge, skills and capacity for leading considered lives, to enable and encourage them to participate effectively in our democracy, and to pursue fulfillment in their professional and personal lives. These lifelong benefits of a liberal arts education are increasingly seen as luxuries, out of reach for all except the privileged few.

Research shows that “new majority” students benefit immensely from taking rigorous, engaging, and coherent coursework, with requirements for graduation clearly mapped out semester to semester. Intentional curriculum design can make a college education more intellectually cohesive for students while strengthening retention and graduation, reducing institutional costs, and sharpening the college culture of teaching and learning. Such curricular “pathways” also enable two- and four-year institutions to differentiate themselves with distinctive academic programming in a crowded marketplace.

Goals

The Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative supports institutions in implementing significant curricular reforms that deepen student learning in the liberal arts and keep them on the path to the degree. The initiative is focused on advancing the three streams of work described below. Institutions are encouraged to choose one of the three areas of emphasis.

- I. ***Strengthening access to the liberal arts in the transition from high school to college.*** From the Teagle Foundation's long running College-Community Connections program, we have learned that high school students from underserved backgrounds benefit from the opportunity to take college-level coursework led by college faculty, which gives them firsthand exposure to the expectations of the college classroom and helps to cultivate their understanding that liberal arts education can be exciting and enlarging.

The Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative supports four-year institutions in developing rigorous preparatory programs aimed at underserved high school students in their local community. We are especially interested in creative approaches to introducing high school students to classic texts—including, but certainly not limited to, literature, history, philosophy, and political science—that they are otherwise unlikely to encounter in order to sharpen their critical reading and writing skills, broaden their perspective, and help them see what they are capable of achieving through sustained engagement with challenging and inspiring works. The preparatory programs may vary in duration, and while we encourage a residential component, we recognize that not all institutions are in a position to offer residency on campus.

- II. ***Strengthening transfer access to the liberal arts from two- to four-year colleges.*** Community colleges now enroll almost half of all undergraduates nationally, most of whom aspire to transfer to four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. Policymakers have understandably focused on making provisions for transfer between two- and four-year institutions in the public sector. However, strengthening transfer pathways between public two-year colleges and private four-year liberal arts colleges remains an overlooked mechanism for enhancing access to the baccalaureate.

The Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative supports academic partnerships between public two-year and private four-year colleges to facilitate transfer and completion of the baccalaureate in the liberal arts. Curricular bridge-building between public two-year colleges and private four-year colleges provides transfer students with more options to complete their education in a timely fashion. Small independent colleges in particular are especially well-suited to serve transfer students by providing personal attention to help them reach their goals. At the same time, community college students bring important benefits to private colleges in the form of diversity of background and lived experience, enhancing the educational environment for all students.

- III. ***Strengthening the rigor and quality of liberal arts pathways at two- and four-year colleges.*** Many institutions are reconsidering how to attract students to the liberal arts and how to help those in the liberal arts have a richer educational experience. One challenge

common to both two- and four-year college settings is proliferating course offerings that overwhelm and confuse students and make a college education seem like a box-checking exercise rather than a cohesive and comprehensive intellectual endeavor.

The Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative supports clearly defined, structured, and efficient curricular pathways in the liberal arts at two- and four-year institutions. We encourage faculty to think through not just their responsibility for individual courses but how to help students see the connections among multiple courses as they move through their programs of study. We prioritize curricular redesign efforts that will reach a significant proportion, if not all, of the undergraduate student body. Some examples are offered below:

- Creating common intellectual experiences where students take a series of linked courses to strengthen foundational skills, engage with enduring questions and major writers and thinkers, and build a sense of belonging to an intellectual community. Such common intellectual experiences may be built into lower division coursework or in upper division coursework for the major.
- Embedding academically enriching activities such as undergraduate research and project-based learning in the curriculum, with the appropriate preparatory coursework, so students are positioned to complete high-quality capstone projects and share their work with their peers at research colloquia and similar gatherings.
- For institutions where a significant proportion of the student body needs developmental education, reforming non-credit remedial course sequences—which often prevent students from taking credit-bearing coursework in the liberal arts—so they are shortened, and in some cases, eliminated.

Criteria for Project Proposals

The Teagle Foundation welcomes the participation of a diverse array of institutions—community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive and research universities—in the Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from \$100,000-\$400,000 over a 24-36 month period, will be made to each funded project participating in this initiative. Requests from both single institutions and multiple institutions partnering together will be considered. The size of the grant will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project. Planning grants in the range of \$25,000 over 6-12 months will also be considered, particularly for projects that involve multiple campus partners.

Institutions are encouraged to target one of the three streams of the Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative: (1) strengthening access to the liberal arts in the transition from high school to college; (2) strengthening transfer access to the liberal arts from public two-year to private four-year colleges; and (3) strengthening the rigor, coherence, and quality of liberal arts pathways at two- and four-year institutions.

Regardless of the chosen stream, all proposals are expected to meet the following criteria:

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

The Teagle Foundation approaches the challenges of improving teaching and learning with the conviction that 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 monitor continually 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 a better understanding of how reshaping the curriculum influences student learning. We encourage faculty to work together across departments on a given campus, and to benefit as well from cross-campus collaboration in multi-campus projects.
- **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 project to project, but they are as important as the actual implementation of curricular redesign. For example, for institutions focused on strengthening the rigor and quality of liberal arts pathways, the curriculum needs to be redesigned 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. For institutions establishing transfer pathways, both two- and four-year colleges should attend to the work of becoming "transfer-friendly" institutions in their practices with regard to financial aid, orientation, and academic advising as part of establishing effective and sustainable academic partnerships with grant support. Grants from the Teagle Foundation 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. With this initiative, 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**

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

Requests for grant support will be considered following our two-stage application process. First, we ask that prospective grantees share brief concept papers. After review of the concept papers, a limited number of applicants will then be invited to submit full proposals. For complete details on the

submission process, please refer to information on how we grant here:

<http://www.teaglefoundation.org/Grants-Initiatives/How-We-Grant>

We encourage interested institutions, organizations, or consortia to submit a 3-5 page concept paper that names all the campus partners and sketches the project description, with an eye towards meeting the criteria discussed above for faculty-led curricular reform and how the work will be institutionalized and sustained. The guiding questions to keep in mind while developing your concept paper (and if invited, your proposal) are: In what ways will your curricula be substantively different as a result of a grant? And how will those curricular innovations be sustained beyond the life of a grant?

We consider concept papers on a rolling basis. The Teagle Foundation's Board of Directors reviews all grant requests when it meets in February, May, and November. If a proposal is invited, program staff will confer with applicants to determine the appropriate timeline for submitting a full proposal in line for potential review by the board. All concept papers should be submitted electronically at proposals@teagle.org. If invited, full proposals will be submitted through the Foundation's online application system.

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