Q & A: Funding for Informal STEM Programs from the U.S. Department of Education

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Q: Are informal learning organizations such as science centers and natural history museums eligible to apply as the lead applicant or must they partner with a school or college/university?

A: STEM is a priority in over 60 grant competitions from the U.S. Department of Education; the type(s) of entities that are eligible to apply for a particular opportunity will depend on the grant competition. Read the solicitation carefully, participate in webinars associated with a funding opportunity and read the FAQs to get clarification on this matter.

Q: How can we get involved in some of these projects like the STEM Learning Ecosystems?

A: The STEM Learning Ecosystem initiative is being spearheaded by the STEM Funders Network. I would encourage you to check out the STEM Learning Ecosystems web site (www.stemecosystems.org) to determine if any of the 37 communities currently involved in this initiative are near where your institution is located. You may want to reach out to the technical assistance lead for the STEM Ecosystems to learn more about how to get involved with the effort.

Q: What's the likelihood of funding for an afterschool or enrichment program that is not 21st CCLC?

A: That is very difficult to say. It will depend on how responsive a proposal is to the solicitation priorities or goals.

Q: Were any of the funded initiatives mentioned re: informal education collaborations also have 21st century school sites in Hawaii?

A: The 21st CCLC program is a formula grant program. Formula grant programs are noncompetitive awards that are made to states based on a predetermined formula, such as population. The 21st CCLC program is administered in Hawaii but I don’t have information available regarding specific grantees.

Q: Do any of the equity data publications referred to also reference Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations? This has been an area we find difficult when trying to locate the most up to data to refer to.

A: Information about the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) can be found here: (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/data.html). The slide of CRDC data I presented was from the
2011-12 CRDC data collection and did include information for ‘Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander’. The 2013-14 data are now available here (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2013-14.html).

**Q:** Ellen spoke about "successful" programs. While I'm not questioning that they are probably great programs, but I'm curious about how these programs were deemed successful. What do we as potential applicants for some of these opportunities need to know about how to evaluate our proposed programs? What standards is the ED using when examining programs?

**A:** This is a great point to raise – criteria for what is defined as ‘success' will generally be specific to, or defined by an individual program or project. STEM is a priority for over 60 different programs at the U.S. Department of Education so there isn't a single definition that applies across the board. However, as potential applicants, your best bet is to read the solicitation carefully, participate in all webinars about an opportunity, and read the FAQs. If you still have questions, submit them by email – program officers are very responsive to questions from prospective grantees and seek to clarify such information to the greatest extent possible.

**Q:** Besides i3, are there any specific discretionary grant opportunities that museums should look at?

**A:** Again, so much depends on the specifics, both of the solicitation and of the program(s) for which a museum is seeking funding. I’d suggest you look at the Dear Colleague Letter mentioned during the webinar and also look at the links on the STEM Office web page: [http://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/stem/](http://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/stem/), under ‘how we’re investing in STEM’.

**Q:** Is it too late to apply for any 2016 opportunities if we did not submit a pre-proposal?

**A:** Look at the funding forecast: [http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html](http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html) and check out the requirements for upcoming opportunities, some require pre-proposals and some do not. If you are unsure, reach out to the email address provided on a program’s web site and the program officer can advise you whether a pre-proposal is required.