REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

INVESTIGATING THE EVIDENCE FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

APRIL 2016
I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this grant opportunity is to provide new insights into the contexts, components, outcomes, and potential of student-centered learning approaches in education. That is, we are looking to understand the effectiveness of specific student-centered learning approaches, including the results for different populations of students, the supports that may be needed to ensure realization of positive outcomes, and the contextual conditions needed to sustain implementation. In the long run, our intention is for this research base to influence educational practice, policy, and public awareness.

Researchers from grant-eligible research institutions are encouraged to apply for funding of two-year projects investigating student-centered practices, while also measuring the effects of these practices on students, particularly those who are members of historically underserved subgroups. Detailed requirements and criteria are described in Sections IV, V, & VI below. The deadline for receipt of proposals is 12:00 noon ET on May 3, 2016. We anticipate announcing the recipient by the end of May.

II. BACKGROUND

Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a national nonprofit that works to ensure educational and economic opportunity for all. JFF develops innovative career pathways, educational resources, and public policies that increase college readiness and career success and build a more highly skilled workforce. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is the national leader in bridging education and work to increase mobility and strengthen our economy.

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF) is the largest philanthropic organization in New England that focuses exclusively on education. The Foundation supports the promotion and integration of student-centered approaches to learning at the middle and high school levels across New England where learning is personalized; learning is competency-based; learning takes place anytime, anywhere; and students take ownership of their learning. To elevate student-centered approaches, the Foundation leverages a four-part strategy focused on building educator ownership, leadership and capacity; advancing quality and rigor of student-centered learning practices; developing effective systems designs; and building public understanding and demand.

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i These subgroups include students who are low income, Latino, African American, English Language Learners, or have multiple risk factors that have been identified as early indicators of school failure. We are especially interested in how student-centered approaches impact the attainment and achievement of students from historically underserved groups and communities. Other definitions may be applied in proposed studies.
THE STUDENTS AT THE CENTER PROJECT

Initially conceived by NMEF in 2010, the Students at the Center initiative at Jobs for the Future has, for almost six years now, led the way in building the knowledge base for student-centered learning. Among its many accomplishments, the initiative has: established a powerful organizing framework for a field previously dispersed across a wide array of disciplines; collected, developed, and tested a variety of research-grounded, high-quality tools and resources necessary to implement student-centered approaches to learning; curated and disseminated existing research in a series of compelling white papers; cultivated and supported a broad range of stakeholders in a variety of settings; designed and maintained the Students at the Center Digital Hub (studentsatthecenterhub.org), which engages multiple audiences in using and adding to what we know about student-centered learning; produced a well-regarded book with Harvard Education Press (http://hepg.org/hep/book/187/AnytimeAnywhere); and begun to bridge the research, conceptual, organizational, and practice worlds by identifying the student-centered approaches (the “how”) and deeper learning outcomes (the “what”) with the greatest potential to enhance students’ college and career readiness.

With these efforts and more, Students at the Center has not only captured the current knowledge and future possibilities of student-centered learning, but increased its visibility and uptake in education. The work, however, is far from complete. The field has now matured to the point where knowledge development and implementation are the key levers required to capture and catalyze changes in systems, policies, and practices. With the support of NMEF, JFF and the Students at the Center team are therefore extending their commitment to deepen the evidence for, enhance the understanding of, and expand access to student-centered learning approaches in the years to come.

THE PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Multiple strands of research now identify an increasingly coherent set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions students need to succeed in the 21st century. Alongside NMEF since 2010, and joined in 2013 by the Hewlett Foundation, Students at the Center has been working with academics and researchers to compile, synthesize, and analyze hundreds of research articles to develop a grounded definition of student-centered learning and its relationship to deeper learning.iii The four key principles of student-centered learning—drawn from the mind/brain

iii Collected research syntheses and liked resources and tools can be found at: http://www.jff.org/initiatives/students-center/topics.
sciences, learning theory, and research on youth development, among other fields—are overlapping and complementary. iii They are:

- **Learning is personalized.** Opportunities to learn are customized and differentiated to match each individual student’s needs, interests, and skills.

- **Learning is competency based.** Students move ahead based primarily on their demonstration of key learning milestones along the path to mastery.

- **Learning takes place anytime, anywhere.** Equitable opportunities to learn extend beyond the school day and the school building and take advantage of community and technological resources.

- **Students have agency and ownership of their learning.** Students understand how to improve by applying effort strategically. They are given frequent opportunities to direct and reflect on their learning.

In combination, and when guided by a coherent and rigorous set of educational goals, these principles provide a strong foundation for the pursuit of deeper learning—the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to prepare every student for college, career, and civic life. A small but growing group of studies following the release of the Students at the Center framework further substantiates this vision (e.g., Zeiser, K., Taylor, J., Rickles, J., Garet, M., & Segeritz, M. 2014; Pellegrino, J. & Hilton, M., Eds. 2012; see also the studies cited at: www.nmefoundation.org/resources/student-centered-learning/centered-on-results).

Student-centered learning moves the emphasis from the teaching side of the equation to the perspective of the learner. This shift, while not novel, is being explored in a context of renewed urgency, as the U.S. remains behind other countries in educational achievement and attainment. Our national results both reflect and reinforce structural inequities by race, income, ethnicity, and linguistic heritage. At the same time, several bodies of research—including brain science (e.g., Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon, 2013; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009), research on motivation (e.g., Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013; Yonezawa, Jones, & Joselowsky, 2009), and other learning sciences (e.g., Farrington, et al., 2012; Harter, 1992; National Research Council, 2012; Sawyer, 2008; Steinberg, 2010; Tobias & Everson, 2009)—point to the importance of more personalized, meaningful educational approaches even as constantly evolving technological tools are creating increasing opportunities to scale up student-centered interventions for all students, especially those who have been underserved.

iii An interactive version of the student-centered learning framework can be found at: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/interactive-framework/
As our nation turns away from standardized, one-size-fits-all approaches to education, public sentiment is turning toward more personalized forms of instruction. More than ever before, classroom-based educators, afterschool learning professionals, district and state-level policymakers, and university- or nonprofit-based researchers are eager to understand and apply the scholarship that informs student-centered learning and the techniques that comprise it. Indeed, we have established a deep and growing understanding of how students learn and which forms of instruction are most likely to promote positive academic and social outcomes for each individual student. Student-centered learning approaches appear to have tremendous potential to accelerate achievement and enhance equity (see, for example: K. L. Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; P. Alexander & Murphy, 2000; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Downey, Von Hippel, & Broh, 2004; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Hake, 1998; Halpern, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Haystead, 2010; Johnston, 2011; Lambert & McCombs, 2000; McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010; Michael, 2006; Miller, 2007; National Academy of Education, 2009; National Research Council, 2012; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Peterson, Woessmann, Hanushek, & Lastra-Anadón, 2011; Resnick & Zurawsky, 2005; Shear, Novais, & Moorthy, 2010; Stern & Stearns, 2008; Sturgis & Patrick, 2010; Wolfe, Steinberg, & Hoffman, 2013). But important unanswered questions remain, and concerns about implementation and fidelity continually arise whenever educators attempt to bring student-centered learning to scale. So while it is clear that elements of student-centered learning weave throughout many important issues in education, we need to make sense of what remains a diverse and complicated field, and to centralize the resources that will help stakeholders realize the full potential of student-centered approaches.

THE RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

To address the above developments, Students at the Center, with initial support from and thought leadership of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, is launching a Research Collaborative that will clarify, focus, and consolidate the rapidly evolving domains of research, practice, and policy related to student-centered learning. The Research Collaborative will accomplish this via three overarching goals:

1. **Support new and innovative basic exploratory research on student-centered learning principles to catalyze development and build coherence within the field.**

2. **Serve as the curator, communicator, and sense-maker of work produced by Collaborative members and other teams investigating student-centered learning-related issues.**

3. **Continue to build the evidence base of good implementation, and develop approaches that help practitioners and policymakers apply student-centered learning research in their unique settings.**
The Research Collaborative will contribute to and expand the evidence-based resources already available at the Students at the Center Hub (www.studentsatthecenterhub.org) and www.jff.org/studentsatthecenter both by supporting new studies initiated by the Collaborative and by highlighting student-centered learning-related research conducted elsewhere (see the full concept paper describing the Research Collaborative: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RC-CONCEPT-PAPER.pdf).

This RFP is the first of several forthcoming calls associated with the Research Collaborative. We anticipate releasing two additional RFPs in May 2016: one for a similar exploratory study, and a second for a practice-grounded improvement science implementation study. Each of the forthcoming RFPs will follow a two-year timeframe as well. The improvement science RFP will contain additional funds to account for the deeper involvement of district and policy partners.

III. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

This RFP represents part of JFF’s ongoing commitment to supply needed clarity regarding the influencing factors and eventual outcomes of student-centered approaches in learning environments primarily serving secondary education students, especially those who have been historically underserved by our public educational system.

PRIMARY GOALS

The primary goal of this grant opportunity is to reveal contexts, components, and impacts of specific student-centered learning approaches. That is, we are looking to understand the effectiveness of student-centered learning practices, the conditions that support (and undermine) these practices, who most (and least) benefits, and why. Our intention is for practitioners to use this research base to influence their choices in various education settings; for policymakers to factor the research into how they allocate resources and design procedures; and the greater public to better understand the potential for student-centered learning to increase students’ college and career readiness, particularly for our most marginalized populations. As such, any Research Collaborative undertaking will consider the extent to which the outcomes of research are accessible and useful to those charged with actual implementation.

BASIC PARAMETERS

This RFP is soliciting grant proposals that detail an investigation of student-centered approaches as described below. This opportunity is the first among several RFPs associated with the Research Collaborative to be announced in the months to come. The RFP contains the following basic parameters:
• The project may be an extension of an existing research project or an original study. We expect to make a single grant of up to $300,000 over two years ($150,000/year for two years).

• The lead organization for a proposal must be an established research institution with a track record of high-quality research related to student-centered learning. Other organizations are not eligible to apply as the lead organization, but are strongly encouraged to participate in partnerships with qualified research organizations (see the detailed explanation in Section V, #3 and #4, on pp. 12 below).

• The Collaborative focuses on student-centered learning approaches as they are manifest in real-life learning environments with an emphasis on working with and serving practitioners and policymakers. Thus, we encourage applicants to build into their research design the kinds of active partnerships with practitioners and/or policymakers that inform and extend research into the arenas where it is most applied (see the Capacity cells in Section VI, p. 13, for more information). Partners may include individual public schools, school districts, charter management organizations, community-based organizations, state education agencies (SEAs), technical assistance providers, education intermediaries, and other research organizations. Partners are not required to be eligible to receive a grant or to meet the criteria listed above for lead organizations. Letters of support will be required from all partners.

• In addition to partnerships encouraged above, participation in the Collaborative carries the expectation of active participation in a burgeoning learning community. Should your proposal be selected, at least two consistent, leading team members are expected to attend bi-annual Collaborative gatherings. The first meeting of the Collaborative is expected to be early November 2016 in an easily accessible New England location.

• This RFP should not involve improvement science or other “rapid cycle” improvement and analysis methodologies. We will be seeking applications for such a study in late spring.

All studies should be concluded and reports written by June 2018.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Proposed projects should investigate student-centered learning approaches that fall into at least one of the following four areas:

• **How learning can be personalized**: the techniques employed to customize and differentiate instructional activities and curricula to match each individual student’s needs, interests, background, and skills.
• **How learning can be competency-based**: the methods educators use to encourage and effect student achievement that can be assessed by valid and authentic measures of mastery, proficiency, and growth over time, de-coupled from a pre-set pacing calendar.

• **How learning can occur anytime, anywhere**: the ways educators construct equitable opportunities to learn that extend beyond the school day and the school building and take advantage of community and technological resources.

• **How students can be supported to take “ownership” of their learning**: the set of practices that allow or promote students to be agents of their learning and/or that enhance students’ sense of belonging, motivation, academic efficacy, self-regulation, or other related outcomes.

**KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Regardless of which four areas are prioritized and combined, all three of the following research questions should be addressed by the proposed study:

1. What are the measurable effects of this approach on students’ academic achievement, preparation for postsecondary education, and/or career readiness?

2. What are the outcomes of the approach specifically for underserved students and other subpopulations (e.g., emerging bilingual students, students who qualify for special education services, students of color, low-income students, recent immigrants, etc.)?

3. What contextual, institutional, cultural, and/or procedural factors contribute to these outcomes?

**IV. PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

Please respond to each of the following questions in a narrative of 15 pages or less, using single-spaced 11-point (or larger) type with standard formatting. Submissions written in a point-by-point format that sequentially and specifically address each prompt below are preferred, but unified narratives are also acceptable.

1. **Research Framework**
   a. Which [specific area(s) of student-centered learning](#) and/or which specific approach(es) will you be investigating? Why is this important?
   b. How will this study respond to each of the three key research questions? What other questions will it address, if any?
c. What existing scholarship most informs and supports your project? How does your study leverage rather than duplicate similar inquiries? Summarize the literature briefly and cite minimally using exemplar references only. Be sure to note how your project will build on existing knowledge to advance the field.

d. Does your study consider contextual factors that can influence the eventual success or failure of student-centered approaches? For example, to what extent does your research design bring cognitive findings into conversation with sociocultural and social-emotional discoveries, and/or how might it integrate learning science, instructional design, organizational sociology, developmental psychology, economics, systems theory, and other relevant fields? How might your study explore issues related to policy development, institutional change, teacher beliefs, and content instruction?

2. Research Design

a. Summarize the overall research design. Suggested components include conceptual model, methodology, sampling approach, data collection instruments (e.g., number and timing of assessments, number and type of samples, method of observation, mode of collection, etc.), and data analysis methods. Include, if applicable, the extent to which practitioners and/or policymakers will be involved in the administration of the study and analyses of the data.

b. Describe the anticipated sample, including both school and student-level information, as applicable, either in the narrative or as tables included as appendices. Potential school/district data: size, ages/grades served, demographics of the student population, achievement outcomes (grades, test scores, course credits earned, etc.), attainment outcomes (dropout rates, graduation rates, and/or postsecondary enrollment), location (urban/rural/suburban/exurban), grade levels included, curriculum used (if applicable), and notable aspects of the school’s history or approach. Potential student data: ages/grades, demographics including racial/ethnic, ELL and FRL status, academic achievement and credit/diploma attainment data. What specific subgroups of students will be disaggregated and why? How will unplanned-for missing data be handled? If you are utilizing an existing data set, describe it and identify the variables related to student-centered learning that you intend to examine.

c. What is the unit of analysis? How do your research question(s), sample, and research design inform your decision to choose this particular unit of analysis?

d. What measures will you use or develop to examine the specific student-centered learning approach(es) at the core of your study? Will the intensity, fidelity, quality, or other characteristics of the approach(es) be measured? If so, how? If you are using an established instrument(s), supply its psychometric properties; and if you are proposing to develop a new measurement supply, a plan for its validation.

e. In what ways will you analyze your data to illuminate the extent to which underserved students experience (or do not experience) the benefits of the approach(es) being studied? Describe what instruments, observational techniques, or measures will be used to highlight issues of equity and your rationale for choosing them.
f. If your study possesses a comparative component, what **effect sizes** do you expect and will your sample provide adequate power to detect these effects?


g. Research suggests that external conditions—from state policy to school culture—can powerfully influence the outcomes of particular educational approaches. How will we know that the outcomes are the result of the student-centered learning practices identified in your study and not the product of other contextual factors? In other words, how do you intend to establish **validity and reliability**? Will you use experimental or quasi-experimental methods? If so, describe your approach, including selection and measurement related to the control or comparison groups. If not, describe how results will be attributed to the intervention or approach. How will you address threats to validity, including selection bias?

3. Projected Outcomes and Utility

a. What **new knowledge** do you expect to generate as a result of this study? How might that knowledge enhance our understanding of: student-centered approaches and their efficacy? institutional, cultural, or contextual factors that may support or hinder positive outcomes? unintended consequences?

b. What **implications** might the findings have for educational practices, for policy, or for public awareness? How might this project affect the way researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and/or the general public understand and use student-centered approaches? In particular, how will this study inform or bolster efforts to enhance equity in our schools?

c. Address whether you expect your study to yield information about the **necessary conditions for successful implementation** of specific student-centered approaches on a broader scale. What do your findings suggest about what researchers, policymakers, and practitioners may need to do to bring student-centered approaches to scale? How do you define scale in this circumstance?

d. Briefly, what **ideas for dissemination** of the findings do you have? Build into your budget and timeline adequate resources to work with editors and communications professionals to translate research findings for stakeholder audiences. Note that you will be expected to collaborate with Research Collaborative Fellows as you research the best outlets for and representations of your work. Also note that the staff at Students at the Center will be available to assist you as you prepare such materials and with the wider release.

4. Capacity

a. Briefly describe the **capacity of the lead organization and each of the partnering organizations/institutions** to carry out this research and any outreach, including a track record of similar efforts and partnerships. (Include in appendices letters of support from all partner and subcontracting organizations in appendices and, where appropriate, the places where practitioners and/or policymakers will be involved in the administration of the study and analyses of the data.)
b. Briefly describe **key staff** (from the lead organization or any subcontractors) and their roles in the project. For research staff, list other past and current research projects that are directly relevant to this proposal. If there are staff members who will be hired, describe the qualifications for these positions. For each key staff person, append a current CV or resume of no more than three pages.

c. Describe the **management plan** for this project including partnership cultivation, communications strategies, processes for writing and amending MOUs, tasking and monitoring partners, and ensuring accountability.

d. Describe your **access** to an appropriate sample of students, educators, school(s), and/or district(s) if not previously covered. If schools, a district or districts, or school networks are participating as partners, how will this shape your sample selection and methods? If the grantee will be recruiting schools, other organizations, or individuals, how will recruitment be conducted and on what timeline? What guarantees of participation do you currently have? And how will you guarantee a sufficient population of underserved learners to allow an examination of equity issues?

e. Describe two or three **key challenges** you anticipate in carrying out this project, and how you plan to overcome them.

**5. Work Plan & Budget**

a. Include in an appendix to the proposal a **work plan** with key tasks and timeline. If applying for two years of funding, all documents should include the full project timeline. If IRB approval is required, include plan and timing for attaining approval.

b. Supply a list of **deliverables, including interim findings** you would expect at the end of year 1 (or earlier), how broadly you might share those interim findings, and any final products including but not limited to a final report. Deliverables may be included in the work plan above.

c. Include a **budget** (template for download at: [http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Budget-Template-Student-Centered-Learning-Research-Collaborative-Study-RFP.xlsx](http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Budget-Template-Student-Centered-Learning-Research-Collaborative-Study-RFP.xlsx)) with a budget narrative for the full budget request. We recognize that the resources available through this RFP will not cover the full costs of some important research and evaluation projects. If funds from other sources beyond those requested are needed, identify specific sources and current status in your budget narrative (e.g., already obtained, awaiting decision, not yet submitted for funding, etc.). Budget should include attendance at two Collaborative in-person two-day meetings per year (each with likely one overnight). The Collaborative will cover lodging and meals for two members from each team. Additional members and all transportation for all attendees should be included in the proposal budget. The first meeting of the Collaborative is expected to be in early November 2016 at a convenient and accessible New England location.
V. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Please read this section carefully before submitting a proposal as it contains important information. Questions from prospective grantees will be answered on our RFP FAQ, posted on the Students at the Center Hub website at: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/RFP-FAQ/ and updated regularly over the course of the submission period.

1. The project may be an original study or an extension of an existing research project.

2. The project may request up to $300,000 over two years ($150,000/year for two years).

3. All applicants must be eligible for grants. This grant supports 501(c)(3) organizations that include higher education institutions and other nonprofit organizations that fall under the tax designation 509(a)(1) or 509(a)(2) and have an education focus, as evidenced in their articles of incorporation. Only 501(c)(3) organizations with the further designation of 509(a)(1) or (2) are eligible to receive a Research Collaborative grant.

4. Research organizations that meet the grant eligibility criteria described above are permitted to apply for this funding. The lead organization for a proposal must be an established research institution with a track record of high-quality research related to student-centered learning. Partnerships between research organizations and K-12 educational entities or other organizations are encouraged, as long as the lead organization has primary responsibility for the research activities that will be undertaken as part of this project.

5. The initial Collaborative funding focuses on educational entities in the six-state New England region. However, school sites and/or data from respondents located outside the New England region are eligible for this grant opportunity when there is clear reason to do so. If appropriate, explain in your narrative why data will include respondents outside the New England region.

6. One key early deliverable will be a clear, measurable framework for specific student-centered learning practices that are the focus of the proposed research project. This framework should include both a thorough description of the approach and a discussion of what parameters of high-quality implementation are considered to be important for positive and equitable results. The project may adopt an existing framework and provide rationale for this choice.

4. Proposals of no more than 15 single-spaced pages with at least 6 points of space between paragraphs, one-inch margins, and 11-point type will be considered. Appendices are not counted toward this maximum, but please do not append materials such as reports from previous projects.

5. Indirect costs are capped at 15 percent.

6. This work currently focuses on secondary education (high schools). While we do not have exact criteria for ages/grades, we do expect that most, if not all, sampled schools and students in the projects funded as part of this opportunity will be in secondary education. We will consider work that focuses in middle or postsecondary schools as long as the findings can be extrapolated for secondary education and implications are clearly stated.
7. IRB approval is not required at the time of submission. **However, all grants requiring such approval will need to obtain IRB approval prior to the disbursement of any grant funds.**

### VI. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

In addition to meeting the qualifications described above, the following are the criteria evaluators will use to determine which proposal will be funded. Below, we have supplied weighting to indicate how the proposals will be scored by evaluators. Note that Jobs for the Future reserves the right to revise these criteria prior to the review process.

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<th>Item</th>
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<th>Description</th>
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| 1. Research Framework         | 20                 | • Demonstrates understanding of and relevance to our definition of **student-centered learning** and clearly addresses one or more of the student-centered learning principles  
                           |                    | • Substantively engages each of the **three key research questions**  
                           |                    | • Scans, characterizes, and builds upon **existing scholarship** such that the new information generated by the study will effectively leverage rather than duplicate similar inquiries  
                           |                    | • Exhibits an awareness of the **contextual factors** that influence the success or failure of student-centered approaches and attempts to synthesize insights and paradigms from multiple fields to make sense of those factors |
| 2. Research Design            | 20                 | • Methodology for project reflects state-of-the-art **research design**, including methods, measures, and analyses  
                           |                    | • **Sample** is appropriate, subgroups are of sufficient size to yield significant results, and plans are offered for how to handle missing data  
                           |                    | • **Unit of analysis** is identified and explanations are provided to make clear its appropriateness  
                           |                    | • **Measures** and instruments to be used are explained, psychometric properties are supplied, and, if new measurements are being developed, plans for validation are provided  
                           |                    | • If applicable, **effect sizes** are specified as are the techniques to be used to establish adequate power to detect them  
                           |                    | • Research design includes and accounts for contextual influences and provides specific and rigorous methods to establish **validity and reliability** |
| 3. Projected Outcomes & Utility | 15 | • Generates **new knowledge** that promises to enhance our understanding of student-centered approaches and their efficacy, and/or illuminates those factors that may impede positive outcomes  
  • Suggests **implications** for practice, policy, and/or public awareness  
  • Yields important information about the **necessary conditions for the successful implementation** of student-centered approaches and, if possible, suggests how those approaches might be brought to scale  
  • Supplies tangible and achievable **ideas for dissemination** of the study’s findings |
| 4. Capacity | 15 | • The **capacity of the lead organization** is evident in its excellent track record of similar research in education, **and each of the partnering organizations/institutions** indicates its full support for the proposed study; tangible evidence of a robust partnership is provided  
  • **Key staff** and investigators are well positioned, well prepared, and adequately supported to conduct the study  
  • The **management plan** demonstrates strong partnership cultivation, communications strategies, processes for writing and amending MOUs, tasking and monitoring partners, and ensuring accountability  
  • Sufficient **access** to data and research participants is assured, and/or recruitment methods are sound and timely  
  • **Key challenges** are acknowledged and plans for overcoming them are advanced in a way that demonstrates the strength of the partnerships |
| 5. Equity | 15 | • **Research framework** substantively incorporates issues of racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, disability, and/or cultural inequity in the purpose of the study  
  • Throughout the **research design**, underserved student learners are highlighted and the effects of student-centered approaches on those populations are examined  
  • A significant proportion of the **sample** consists of underserved learners, and if a specific subgroup is identified (e.g., ELL students), the sample size is sufficient for analysis  
  • **Implications** either inform or bolster efforts to enhance equity in schools |
| 6. Work Plan & Budget | 15 | • **Work plan** is realistic and organized  
  • **Deliverables, including interim findings**, are useful, compelling, and promise to inform key stakeholders about the efficacy of student-centered approaches  
  • **Budget** is within the required range, detailed, and reasonable in scope and allocations |
VII. PROCEDURE

The narrative and all attachments must be submitted electronically by email to RCsubmit@jff.org by 12:00 noon ET on May 3rd, 2016.

Documents to be submitted are as follows:

- Narrative
- Budget
- IRS Tax Status letter
- Supporting documents
  - Budget narrative
  - Work plan
  - Information on lead staff (limit of 3 pages per individual)
  - Letters of Support from all identified partners

Questions regarding the RFP should be sent to rcsu submit@jff.org. Responses to questions will be posted in a frequently updated FAQ page located at: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/RFP-FAQ/.
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Provided below is an assortment of research questions the Students at the Center team, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, and our original research, practice, and policy advisors generated to outline potential directions the Research Collaborative may take. Questions are offered here not to suggest that applicants should investigate one of these (though you may consider doing so), but rather to serve as exemplars of the sorts of inquiries the Research Collaborative is interested in supporting. As you prepare your proposal, use this list to help define and refine the research questions you intend to pursue in your work.

1. In schools that have embraced some or all of the principles of student-centered learning, what differences in equity of college and career outcomes are we seeing? To what can we attribute those outcomes?

2. What forms of anytime, anywhere learning have the greatest positive impact on different subgroups of underserved/underrepresented students?

3. If schools move to a competency based system, how do you assess students’ developmental readiness? What should guide students’ learning progressions?

4. For whom do certain student-centered learning approaches tend to make the greatest difference? Why?

5. What are the commonly held beliefs and dispositions that must be overcome for student-centered learning to be successfully implemented? What methods have successful student-centered schools used to convince skeptical or reticent educators and parents?

6. What are the professional and pedagogical conditions that best cultivate learning environments where student autonomy and agency flourish?

7. What are the most efficacious techniques educators can use to encourage students to take ownership of their learning, exhibit agency, advocate for themselves, etc.? How might those practices be applied or adapted in online learning environments?

8. What adjustments/scaffolding are necessary to ensure that all students—particularly SpEd, ELL, low-income, and historically underserved students—can access student-centered approaches to learning?

9. What leadership models most promote the development of robust student-centered learning practices and outcomes?

10. Which specific techniques of personalization and differentiation promote the greatest student engagement? Which also allow the teacher to balance the pacing levels required by district, state, and national curricula with more developmentally rooted variations of pacing that accelerate the closing of racial and economically defined achievement gaps?

11. What kinds of scaffolding are needed to make sure our full diverse range of students all progress in and through rich, personalized learning experiences? In particular, what student-centered learning techniques facilitate the transition away from remediation to ensure that
students, such as English language learners or those who qualify for special education services, experience the forms of deeper learning and access the same opportunities afforded their peers?

12. What are the best ways to capture and measure the relative success of teachers who are using student-centered learning forms of instruction? How might that knowledge inform, for example, teacher evaluation instruments and school reform initiatives?

13. Are competency-based methods more successful in some subject areas than others (e.g., math vs. ELA)? If so, why? Does it make sense to have competency-based departments working alongside ones that aren’t, in the same school?

14. How, when, and where does student agency contribute to learning? When are opportunities for voice and choice most beneficial, and when might they be less so, or even counter-productive?

15. Which forms of anytime-anywhere instruction and which digital tools have the greatest positive impact on our most underserved students?
REFERENCES


