REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING APPROACHES

PROPOSALS DUE JULY 22, 2016
DECISIONS ANNOUNCED EARLY AUGUST 2016

BIDDER’S CONFERENCE HELD JULY 6, 2016
SIMPLIFIED LETTER OF INTENT DUE JULY 7, 2016
I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this Request for Proposals (RFP) 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 circumstances needed to sustain implementation. Rather than controlling for context, we are seeking proposals that examine and track its influences. In the long run, our intention is for this research base to influence educational practice, policy, and public awareness.

One crucial but often missing link between research and practice is implementation. For student-centered learning approaches, the ultimate proof of concept depends on the extent to which practitioners are able to understand and implement student-centered techniques in their unique settings so that positive measurable outcomes for all youth are achieved. Various methods of research and development have been developed in recent years to surface the institutional, professional, and cultural factors that shape a particular intervention’s eventual success or failure. These methods of research and development (described in more detail below) are well-suited to investigations of student-centered learning due to their unique capacity to reveal the complicated factors that influence the full and effective uptake of innovations in practice. By identifying specific reforms known to produce positive outcomes and capturing how those reforms evolve in real-life institutions for different types of learners, we can point the way to realistic and effective implementation at scale. This, at its core, is the purpose of this grant opportunity.

Proposals must therefore exemplify a research and development approach. A number of different methods exist within this growing field. Among those we believe are most aligned with the intentions of this RFP are: “improvement science,” “design-based implementation research,” “rapid-cycle evaluation,” and “improvement research.” While each systematic approach has unique characteristics, all are designed to produce practical, real-world-tested, and research-grounded solutions to meaningful problems as they occur in complex educational environments.

Researchers from grant-eligible research institutions are encouraged to apply for funding to support a two-year project investigating the implementation of student-centered learning 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, and VII below. The deadline for receipt of proposals is 12:00 noon ET on July 22, 2016. Decisions will be announced in early August 2016.

¹ We are especially interested in how student-centered approaches impact the achievement and college and career readiness of students from historically underserved groups and communities. These subgroups include students from low-income families; students who identify as Latino, African American, and/or Native American; those who qualify for Special Education services; emerging bilingual students; students from low-income families; recent immigrants; students in credit recovery; or those who have been identified as at risk of school failure. Other definitions of “underserved” may be applied in proposed studies.
II. BACKGROUND

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

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 a national leader in bridging education and work to increase mobility and strengthen our economy.

NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation 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.

OVERDECK FAMILY FOUNDATION

Overdeck Family Foundation’s mission is to help all kids achieve their greatest academic potential. We aim to support change in the field to create the next generation of engaged, passionate, creative thinkers. We fund efforts in education, across the birth-to-high school spectrum in the United States. We bring our data- and partnership-oriented mindset to education challenges by identifying gaps and inefficiencies in existing systems and developing creative solutions with our partners: building proof points, shining spotlights on what works, and scaling successes broadly. We recognize the complexity of the issues we explore and invest in, and believe in the power of collaboration to bring innovative solutions to persistent challenges.

THE STUDENTS AT THE CENTER PROJECT

Initially conceived as a Research Intermediary by The Nellie Mae Education Foundation 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 (http://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 The Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Overdeck Family Foundation, 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 The Nellie Mae Education Foundation since 2010, and joined in 2013 by the Hewlett Foundation, Students at the Center has been working with leading academics and researchers to compile, synthesize, and analyze well over a thousand research articles to develop a grounded definition of student-centered learning and its relationship to deeper learning. The four key principles of student-centered learning—drawn from the mind/brain sciences, learning theory, and research on youth development, among other fields—are overlapping and complementary. They are:

1. **Learning is personalized.** Opportunities to learn are customized and differentiated to match each individual student’s needs, interests, and skills.
2. **Learning is competency based.** Students move ahead based primarily on their demonstration of key learning milestones along the path to mastery.
3. **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.
4. **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.

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2 Collected research syntheses and liked resources and tools can be found at: http://www.jff.org/initiatives/students-center/topics.

3 An interactive version of the student-centered learning framework can be found at: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/interactive-framework/.
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: http://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.

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 it comprises. 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 continuously 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, making sense of what remains a diverse and complicated field and centralizing resources will help stakeholders realize the full potential of student-centered approaches.
THE STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

To address the above developments, Students at the Center, with initial support from and thought leadership of The Nellie Mae Education Foundation and now joined by Overdeck Family Foundation, has launched 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 (http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/) and at http://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-5-9-16.docx.)

The Research Collaborative currently comprises senior and support staff at JFF, eight eminent Advisors, nine Students at the Center Distinguished Fellows (an announcement of the Advisors and Fellows will be released in mid-June), a parallel Funders Collaborative, and an ever-growing circle of Research Collaborative Partners. By fall 2016, four research teams will be added to the Research Collaborative: two teams conducting basic exploratory research, and two teams conducting the research and development studies that are the subject of this RFP. Structures and supports are in place to provide a rich and rewarding experience for all members of the Research Collaborative and to generally facilitate the exploration, curation, and implementation of effective renditions of student-centered learning.

This RFP is the second of three spring 2016 research opportunities associated with the Research Collaborative. We anticipate releasing an additional RFP in June 2016. That third RFP will focus on basic exploratory science, will follow a two-year timeframe as well, and will be available here: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/ (please see Appendix A for how we are drawing distinctions between basic exploratory research and those types of studies that take a research and development approach).
III. OVERVIEW

This RFP represents part of JFF’s ongoing commitment to supply needed clarity and evidence 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 GOAL

The primary goal of this RFP 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 and policymaking.

BASIC PARAMETERS

• We expect to award two grants of up to $600,000 each, for a two-year study period (i.e., $300,000/year for two years for each grantee).
• The lead organization for the proposal must be an established research institution with a track record of high-quality research related to student-centered learning. All applicants must be eligible for grants (i.e., 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).
• Principal Investigators (PIs) must have demonstrated experience in conducting improvement science research (and/or design-based implementation research, improvement research, rapid-cycle evaluation, or innovation science).
• Partnerships with practitioners and/or school/district leaders are required. Letters of support will be required from all partners at the time of submission (see Section X).
• The subjects and samples of the proposed study should be drawn from secondary level schools (middle and high schools) that include sufficient proportions of underserved students to study impact on those populations.
• A grant from the Research Collaborative carries the expectation of, and funding support for, active participation in a burgeoning learning community. At least two consistent leading team members, one of whom must be a PI or co-PI, are expected to attend and actively participate in biannual (generally November and May) Research Collaborative gatherings. In addition, given the expertise of our Students at the Center Distinguished Fellows, research teams may be asked to present work-in-progress to Fellows and/or include them in their deliberations when appropriate.
Although additional analysis and customizing reports for various audiences may occur after summer 2018, a thorough written review of findings and final plans for dissemination are expected by August 2018.

IV. REQUIRED AREAS OF FOCUS

The overarching objective of the proposed study should be to answer the following questions:

- What happens when specific student-centered learning approaches are implemented in different contexts?
- What drives the inevitable variation in educator performance and the expected variety of student outcomes that are associated with that implementation?
- What works well, for whom, and under what set of conditions?
- Conversely, what does not work well, for whom does it fall short and by how much, and what conditions influence those negative or more lackluster outcomes?
- And lastly, how can the information arising from the above inquiries be used to improve student outcomes, particularly for underserved students?

Proposals must substantively address research questions associated with the principles of student-centered learning. Because these principles are often combined during effective implementation, applicants are encouraged to look for areas of overlap among the approaches below and to define clearly in their proposals how they intend to integrate or keep distinct the following student-centered approaches:

- **Personalized learning**: the techniques employed to customize and differentiate instructional activities and curricula to match each individual student’s needs, interests, background, and skills.
- **Competency-based learning**: 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 preset pacing calendar.
- **Anytime, anywhere learning**: 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.
- **Student agency, autonomy, and ownership of learning**: the set of practices that allow or promote students to be the drivers of their learning and/or that enhance students’ sense of belonging, motivation, academic efficacy, self-regulation, or other related outcomes.

As stated in the introduction, proposals must exemplify a research and development approach. A number of different methods exist within this growing field. Among those we believe are most aligned with the intentions of this grant opportunity are: “improvement science,” “design-based implementation research,” “rapid-cycle evaluation,” and “improvement research.” While each systematic approach has unique characteristics, all are designed to produce practical, real-world-tested, collaboratively constructed, and research-grounded solutions to meaningful problems as they occur in complex educational environments.

Lastly, proposals must prioritize research questions and forms of analysis that illuminate factors that promote or obstruct equity. Examining the impact of student-centered learning practices on underserved student populations is therefore paramount.
V. GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following questions are supplied to help guide applicants as they design their study and construct their proposals. Successful proposals will have answered either explicitly or implicitly many if not all of these questions within the narrative of the proposal (see further details below).

- What specifically is the student-centered learning-related problem of practice you are trying to improve? How do you understand this problem, including the organizational systems in which it is embedded?
- What changes, interventions, or practices will you use to address this targeted problem? If yours is a newer intervention previously or largely untested, what justifications can you provide for its study? (We understand answers to these questions are hypotheses subject to change based on knowledge gained in the improvement process.)
- How will you know if these changes associated with the intervention are an improvement, and one that can be sustained? More specifically, how will you know the extent to which the intervention has an impact on student learning?
- How will you capture the factors that influence implementation and how will you use those data to inform subsequent collaborative iterations of the changes, interventions, or new practices you’ve introduced? And when working with school- or district-based professionals, how will you establish the trust necessary to initiate and sustain those changes?
- What are the institutional, professional, cultural, historical, and procedural contexts in which the interventions will be applied and analyzed? What components of those contexts are of greatest interest to the research, and why?
- How will you measure and analyze the outcomes of the studied intervention specifically for underserved students and other subpopulations (e.g., students who identify as Latino, African American, and/or Native American; those who qualify for Special Education services; emerging bilingual students; students from low-income families; recent immigrants; students in credit recovery; or those who have been identified as at risk of school failure, etc.)?
- Knowing that we must be cautious whenever extrapolating findings for more general application, what might your study suggest about what other practitioners and policymakers should consider as they attempt to bring certain student-centered learning approaches to scale?

VI. PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

A narrative of no longer than 15 pages should include each of the following components. Submissions that adhere to this section-by-section structure are preferred, but seamless narratives will also be accepted.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

- The targeted area for improvement and the chosen intervention
- The intervention’s relevance to the principles of student-centered learning
• The questions guiding the study and their importance to practitioners, policymakers, and students, particularly for those students who tend to be least served by our educational institutions
• Existing scholarship and its support for this line of inquiry and this intervention
• Why the chosen methods of improvement science or other similar approach are well-suited for the proposed study

RESEARCH DESIGN

• Articulation of the problem the study is designed to solve and the questions driving the inquiry
• Rationale for chosen partners and sites plus provisions for collaboration
• Data sources, data collection instruments, and outcome measures to be used, and how they both demonstrate individual student growth as well as supply metrics that track group performance (note that if test scores are used as a student outcome measure, we expect to see other outcomes captured and analyzed to compensate for known limits in test scores' utility as a sole indicator of student learning)
• Methods of data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, where appropriate
• Members and roles of each member of the research/implementation team (i.e., those researchers, educators, administrators, and other participants who play a direct role in the intervention or in the interpretation of results)
• Systemic influences the study intends to observe, capture, and analyze, and to which it intends to eventually respond, often presented in both narrative and graphic form; some examples of how such features may be theorized and depicted include:
  o Expected local implementation drivers (i.e., those factors or “engines of change” that influence an implementation’s successes and failures, such as organization drivers, leadership drivers, cultural drivers, competency drivers, etc.) and their predicted effects on variation in performance
  o Predicted program improvement maps (for an example, see pp. 17-18 of Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2013) and how change is theorized to occur
• How the improvement of practice will be captured and revealed through disciplined, collaborative, iterative inquiry using rapid cycle prototyping, such as the “Plan, Do, Study, Act” process (see pp. 27 and 29 of this document, or p. 13 of this one for examples; other approaches may be appropriate as well), plus the nature and number of those cycles over the two-year study and how collaborations with site-based professionals will be structured and supported within each cycle
• Descriptions of key measurable process and progress measures, as well as leading and lagging outcomes, that will be used to track the changes that result in improvement (or don’t), plus characterizations of the extent to which such process and progress measures are embedded in the day-to-day work of research participants

PROJECTED OUTCOMES & UTILITY

• Expected knowledge to be gained and why it is important
• Who would most benefit from this knowledge and the changes it may yield
• Plans for subsequent dissemination of findings beyond the sites and samples included in the study, including a production timeline and persons responsible (though additional
future funding may support later dissemination, and the Student-Centered Learning Research Collaborative already possesses ample infrastructure to communicate findings to a wide range of stakeholders, initial dissemination plans should be included in project costs and responsibilities allocations)

CAPACITY

- Investigators’ experience conducting studies of this type and scope, plus any indicators of previous impact or uptake in schools and other learning communities
- Demonstrated competence at initiating and sustaining partnerships
- Letters of support indicating key leaders’ understanding of and willingness to sustain partner/site collaboration
- Established track record of conducting investigations that highlight issues of equity
- Ability to communicate findings to diverse audiences/stakeholders

EQUITY

- Research questions and methods demonstrate a consistent and prioritized concern for the impact of interventions and subsequent iterations on underserved populations.
- The research framework substantively incorporates such issues as they may become evident when racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, gender, disability, and/or cultural factors are explored.
- 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 sites selected and participants sampled consists of underserved learners and the educators who serve them, and when a specific subgroup is identified (e.g., ELL students), the sample size is sufficient for any quantitative or qualitative analyses that may be conducted.
- Hypothesized implications of the study either inform or bolster efforts to enhance equity in schools.

WORK PLAN, BUDGET, & TIMELINE

- Work plan with roles and responsibilities identified
- Budget and budget narrative (please use supplied budget template, available for download at: http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Budget-Template-Student-Centered-Learning-Research-Collaborative-Study-RFP.xlsx), including provisions for two members of the research team to attend the biannual meetings of the Research Collaborative (the first meeting is currently scheduled for Nov. 1–3, 2016, in Boston)
- Timeline presented with clear articulation of the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles

VII. 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. 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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| 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  
• 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 from multiple fields to make sense of those factors |
| 2. Research Design | 25 | • Exemplifies **a research and development approach** aligned with best practices in improvement science, design-based implementation research, rapid-cycle evaluation, and/or improvement research  
• Dedicates sufficient time, staffing, communication, and management resources to ensure that whatever **iterative, collaborative, prototyping cycles** are designed are carried out effectively  
• Supplies plans for **capturing and analyzing variation** in educator and student performance that are clear and achievable  
• Provides appropriate **provisions for collaborating** with district/school/site-based professionals to refine subsequent iterations of the intervention  
• Describes specific and rigorous methods to detect **macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors** that influence the success and failure of the intervention  
• Uses **data sources, data gathering procedures, and methods of data analysis** that are consistent with the highest standards of educational research  
• Explains **measures and instruments** to be used (if at all) and supplies psychometric properties where appropriate |
| 3. Projected Outcomes & Utility | 15 | • Generates **new knowledge** that promises to enhance our understanding of student-centered approaches and their efficacy  
• 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  
• Suggests potential **implications** for practice, policy, and/or public awareness  
• Supplies tangible and achievable **plans for dissemination** of the study’s findings |
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| 4. Capacity          | 10                | • **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  
• **Investigators are well positioned**, well prepared, and adequately supported to conduct the study, as are district/school/site-based professionals and support staff  
• The **management plan** demonstrates strong partnership cultivation, communications strategies, and processes for analyzing and iterating interventions collaboratively  
• Sufficient **access** to data and research participants is assured, and/or recruitment methods are feasible 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, gender, linguistic, socioeconomic, disability, and/or cultural inequity  
• 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 students experiencing the intervention consists of **underserved learners**, and if a specific subgroup is identified (e.g., ELL students), the sample size is sufficient for analysis  
• **Potential implications** of the study inform if not bolster efforts to enhance equity in schools |
| 6. Work Plan & Budget| 15                | • **Work plan** is realistic, well-organized, and aligns well with both the research plan and budget  
• **Deliverables, including interim findings**, are useful, compelling, and promise to inform key stakeholders about the efficacy of specific student-centered implementation strategies  
• **Budget** is within the required range, detailed, and reasonable in scope and allocations |
VIII. TIMELINE

- Public release: May 31, 2016
- Proposals due: July 22, 2016
- Decisions announced: on or before August 12, 2016

IX. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Please read this section carefully before submitting a proposal as it contains important information. Questions from prospective grantees will be answered during our Bidder’s Conference on June 30, and on our RFP FAQ which will be 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 $600,000 over two years ($300,000/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 required. However, the lead organization has primary responsibility for the research activities that will be undertaken as part of this project.

5. One key early deliverable will be a clear, measurable framework for the implementation of specific student-centered learning practices that are the focus of the proposed research project. This framework should include both a thorough description of whatever interventions were applied and a discussion of the parameters of high-quality implementation that were found to be important for positive and equitable results.

6. 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 be judicious in what you relegate to appendices and do not append materials such as reports from previous projects.

7. Indirect costs are capped at 15 percent (see budget template).

8. This work currently focuses on secondary education (middle and 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.
9. IRB approval is not required at the time of submission. However, all grants requiring it will need to obtain IRB approval prior to the disbursement of any grant funds.

X. PROCEDURE

To ensure that we have sufficient reviewers on hand to evaluate submitted proposals, we are requiring all applicants to submit by July 7, 2016, a simplified letter of intent (LOI) using the online form at http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/LOI. On that form you will be asked to submit the following:

- Names of Principal Investigator(s) (PIs) and co-PIs plus institutional affiliations
- Name of lead organization
- Topic of study (the phrasing of which can change between the LOI and the final submission date)
- Expected sample/partners/sites (e.g., region(s), schools, districts, charter management organizations, subpopulations of interest, etc.)

On July 6, the day prior to the LOI submission, we will be holding an online bidder’s conference. The conference will be conducted via WebEx and will be designed to give interested and eligible applicants a chance to ask questions regarding the RFP. Attendance is not mandatory. The details about the bidder’s conference will be announced on the RFP web page, which is http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/request-for-proposals/.

The final narrative and all attachments must be submitted by email to RCsubmit@jff.org by 12:00 noon ET on July 22, 2016. Documents to be submitted are as follows:

- Narrative
- Budget
- IRS Tax Status letter
- Supporting documents
  - Budget narrative
  - Budget, using provided template
  - Work plan
  - Information on lead staff (limit of 3 pages per individual)
  - Letters of support from all identified partners/sites

All documents should be combined into a single .pdf file in the above order.

Questions regarding the RFP should be sent to rcsubmit@jff.org. Responses to questions will be posted in a frequently updated FAQ page located at http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/researchcollaborative/rfp-faq/
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

The following graphic explains how understand some of the key distinctions between basic exploratory research, here called “experimental science,” and a research and development approach, here categorized as “improvement science.” It is adapted from p. 56 of: Lewis (2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Science Paradigm</th>
<th>Improvement Science Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example of Knowledge Scaled Up: “Proven” Program of Instructional Strategies to Build Students’ Mathematical Sense-Making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement the Program with Fidelity at New Sites</td>
<td>Integrate the Program with Local Knowledge-Building Systems at New Sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Nature of Scale-Up | Monitor fidelity of implementation at new sites  
| Design or approve customizations of program if needed  
| Use incentives to achieve implementation if needed | Expect modifications (of the program and site) as the program is integrated with local knowledge-building systems. Key activities might include:  
| - Building consensus on the importance of mathematical sense-making and how to measure its improvement  
| - Mapping the drivers of mathematical sense-making in the current system and how the program would change those; understanding variability in sense-making  
| - Using rapid PDSA cycles to enact and study program elements, refining them as warranted |

| Assumptions | Knowledge is “in” the program  
| Improvement occurs through faithful program implementation  
| Variation is problematic | Knowledge is also “in” people and systems that use the program  
| Program may need modification, driven by ongoing practical measurement  
| Variation can be source of ideas to improve program and site |

| Measurement | Use well-validated tools to measure implementation and impact | Use practical measurement tools to test leading indicators predicted by theory of change; use “balancing measures to check for adverse impacts |

| Optimal Improvement Conditions | **Sites**: Success most likely if new sites are similar to sites where program was proven  
| **Program/Tool**: Easy to transport and implement, foolproof | **Sites**: New sites need not be similar; success depends on organizational knowledge-building systems as well as program fit  
| **Program/Tool**: Supports knowledge-building, motivation, ownership and customization in many settings |