

STEP RFP Q & A

Note: An update was made to page 27 of this RFP regarding MWBE. The language now states that the 30% goal will be applied to each budget year.

Budgets/Cost Share

1. *Would the federal work-study program be allowable as a cost-share on the STEP grant?*
Yes, it can be part of the institutional match or cost share.

2. *If awarded for Year 1, can future year budgets be adjusted to reflect salary and/or fringe increases?*
Future budgets, per the RFP (p. 23): “An institution awarded a contract and accepting STEP funds must submit an annual budget and budget narrative, for the first year and each succeeding year in a form and manner prescribed by SED”. Yearly budgets may be altered to reflect changes in salaries and/or fringe rates.

3. *From page 21, Section B: Allowable Expenses*
 - a. *What is meant by evaluation materials and activities?*
Materials and items may be purchased that enable the program to evaluate their progress towards reaching all programmatic requirements. (i.e., surveys, questionnaires, etc.)
 - b. *Can you give an example of subcontracts?*
Per the RFP it states, “Subcontracts for program services can be made.” Therefore, a program can propose in the budget to subcontract or purchase a service to provide program services. (i.e., financial literacy, career exploration/planning, etc.)

4. *Is there a page limit for the budget narrative?*
Per the RFP (p. 33-34): “Utilize the STEP Budget Narrative form located at <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/step/> “

5. *Please provide more clarification on the FTE designation by example. Specifically, which of the following is true:*
A teacher is hired to teach math in STEP for approximately 160 hours over the course of a year (the equivalent of one month of a year). The budget entry for the teacher’s pay for the 160 hours is noted in category #15, and associated benefits are in category #80. The 160 hours is the entirety of the teacher’s obligation to work with STEP for the year. Is the teacher considered a 1.0 FTE for these 160 hours, or is the teacher considered a .083 FTE for these hours?
Per the definition provided in the RFP (p. 7): **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE):** A way to measure worker's involvement in a project. Full-time equivalent for staff is defined as the

percent effort for each activity and/or service provided by the worker. An FTE of 1.0 means that the person is equivalent to a full-time worker and spends 100% of their time on the project; an FTE of 0.5 signifies that the worker spends half-time of their time serving the project.

6. *"Full-Time Equivalent (FTE): Full-time equivalent for staff is defined as the percent effort for each activity and/or service provided by the worker. An FTE of 1.0 means that the person is equivalent to a full-time worker and spends 100% of their time on the project; an FTE of 0.5 signifies that the worker spends half-time of their time serving the project."*

To what extent should staff positions list the percentage of their service of the program? For example, support staff may only spend 0.1 of effort for activities; is this granular level of reporting required for the application?

All staff working on or for the proposed program should be listed and their FTE should be provided.

7. *Are we to write a budget justification to explain the budget narrative, or are we to submit only the Budget Narrative Excel form?*

As stated in the RFP (p. 37):

Applications shall include the FS-10 and STEP Budget Narrative in MS Excel format. The FS-10 must provide all proposed expenses requested from STEP funds. The FS-10 form may be found at: <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/caf/forms/>

The STEP Budget Narrative Form must provide complete information and indicate all proposed expenditures from STEP, institutional, and other sources for the operation of the project. All projects must provide at least a 25% match in institutional and/or other non-NYS fund sources. The budget narrative will describe how funds are going to be expended for allowable STEP activities. The STEP Budget Narrative form located at:

<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/step/>

8. *Please confirm if this is the correct scenario for calculating indirect expenses provided by the institution for matching funds: For example, an institution's minimum matching contribution is \$25,000. Would the maximum amount of indirect expenses that can go towards the match be 20% of \$25,000? $\$25,000 \times 20\% = \$5,000$?*

This calculation is correct.

9. *Can funds be used to pay for student tuition for college level course, i.e. Trigonometry for high school and college credit?*

Using funds to pay for tuition to ensure a student is college ready, special summer courses, or to provide academic enrichment would be allowable expenses.

10. *Can funds be used to purchase bus passes? Would it be considered as subcontracted program services?*

Bus passes for student use would be considered an allowable expense. It is not subcontracting as it would be a transportation cost.

11. *What are the guidelines for use of grant funds to cover food expenses when the primary purpose is related to student programming such as academic/career seminars/workshops/events? A workshop in the during a mealtime (lunch/dinner)*

SED does not object to funds being utilized for food expenses during events/activities.

12. *What are the guidelines for use of grant funds to cover food expenses related to supporting Parent Advisory committee?*

SED does not object to funds being utilized for food expenses during events/activities.

13. *Is it acceptable for partner schools to contribute cost-share? In one section of the RFP it reads that Matching Funds can be from "Institution's own funds, private resources, other **non-New York State Governmental sources**....*

Yes, partner schools may choose to contribute to the cost-share.

14. *The old (Word) budget narrative is included in the RFP packet. Should this be completed in addition to the newer Excel narrative version and FS-10?*

As stated in the RFP (p. 57): Complete the proposed Budget Narrative/Composite, which may be found in Excel format at: <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/step/>
Complete the Proposed Budget FS-10 which may be found in Excel format at: <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/cafe/forms/>

General

15. *Is there any prohibition on an institution applying for – or being awarded - both a STEP and a CSTEP program?*

These are two (2) separate RFPS, one (1) STEP and one (1) CSTEP. An applicant must meet the eligibility requirements in order to apply for either or both. (p. 9, Institutional Eligibility)

16. *The RFP Proposal Narrative page limit is 10 pages. With the Program Requirements Matrix being 7 on its own and the Proposal Narrative and Project Operation sheets taking up 2 more pages, that leaves only 1 page to squish in the Institutional Expertise, Cooperative Relationships, Recruitment, Retention and Project Staffing, correct? Or are the Proposal Narrative and Project Operation sheets not considered part of the Proposal Narrative?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative, Project Operation, Budget Documents and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered attachments and not included in the 10-page maximum.

17. *With a 10-page limit. could you please let us know if it includes all sections A – G. Specifically addressing G as that is the budget and has its own section and F which is Project Staffing & Management that includes resumes, organization chart etc.*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative and Project Operation and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered an attachment and not included in the 10-page maximum.

18. *For the 10-page narrative – do we include a summary of the requirements?*

Per the RFP (p. 33-34): “The proposal narrative should describe all 2020-2025 proposed activities in detail that meet the priorities and requirements as stated in this RFP. The completed proposal narrative document should reflect a cohesive program that reflects the mission of STEP. The maximum length of the proposal narrative is 10 pages, not including attachments.”

19. *Based upon the guidelines included in the RFP with regards to the Proposal Narrative should not exceed 10 pages in length, can you please confirm that the Matrix (Attachment I) and the Budget Narrative is not included within this length?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative and Project Operation (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered an attachment and not included in the 10-page maximum.

20. *Please clarify whether the 10-page limit for the STEP proposal narrative includes the Budget Narrative A – G?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative, Project Operation, Budget Documents and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered attachments and not included in the 10-page maximum.

21. *The provided checklist does not explicitly state where the Proposal Narrative Attachments (pages 45 & 46) should be included in the application submission. Will you please clarify where/how the required attachments should be included?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative, Project Operation, Budget Documents and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered attachments. The attachments should be presented after the 10-page narrative.

22. *Is the Performance Matrix considered to be part of the Proposal Narrative? If so, does the Performance Matrix count towards the 10-page maximum that is set for the Proposal Narrative? If the Performance Matrix is not considered to be part of the Proposal Narrative, where should it be included in the submission? i.e. After the Proposal Narrative and before the Statement of Assurances?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative, Project Operation, Budget Documents and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered attachments and not part of the 10-page maximum.

23. *For programs re-applying, is there an expectation of a summary progress report for the term? And if yes, what is the format for the report?*

This is not specifically requested in this RFP.

24. *Are subawards allowed on this grant?*

Per the RFP projects are (p. 13): "PROHIBITED from sub granting funds to other recipients. The applicant/fiscal agent is permitted to contract for services with other consortium partners or consultants to provide services that the fiscal agent cannot provide itself."

25. *Is the grid "Programs leading to professional licensure, scientific or technical careers" part of the narrative?*

This is not a part/section of the STEP RFP.

26. *Is there any limitation on what can be included in the appendix?*

This is not specifically designated in the RFP.

27. *Who should the letter of supports be addressed to?*

Beth Berlin, Acting Commissioner of Education or Anael Alston, Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Access, Equity & Community Engagement.

28. *I am writing to enquire about the eligibility to apply for the Funding Opportunity Number: RFP #: GC20-005; Science and Technology Entry Program 2020-2025.*

If the applicant meets the definition of "New York State degree granting postsecondary institution or consortia of such institutions with registered scientific, technical, or health related professional or pre-professional programs that lead to professional licensure or to employment in scientific, technical, and health related fields", then we do not have an objection to that institution applying.

29. *Can a non-profit apply for the available STEP RFP?*

An eligible applicant is a New York State degree granting postsecondary institution or consortia of such institutions.

Per the RFP (p. 2) **Eligible Applicants:**

"According to § 145-6.5 of the Commissioner's Regulations, eligible applicant means a New York State degree granting postsecondary institution or consortia of such institutions with registered scientific, technical, or health related professional or pre-professional programs that lead to professional licensure or to employment in scientific, technical, and health related fields may submit proposals. The institution submitting the proposal, or if the applicant represents a consortium then at least half of the institutions in the consortium must be located within a school district with an enrollment that is at least 20 percent Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian/Alaska Native, or located near such a district that is easily accessible by public transportation."

30. *Does the STEP Collaborations and Operations Summary Forms count toward the 10-page maximum that is set for the Proposal Narrative?*

The Program Requirements Matrix, Proposal Narrative, Project Operation, Budget Documents and Proposal Checklist (pp. 42-58 of the STEP RFP) are considered attachments and not part of the 10-page maximum.

31. *I am wondering if you can clarify/explain the reduction in page limit for the narrative from the 2015. The questions are all exactly the same, but the page limit has decreased from 30 pages to 10 in the current RFP. Is this an error?*

As stated on p. 32 of the 2020-2025 STEP RFP:

“The maximum length of the proposal narrative is 10 pages, not including attachments. Proposal narratives will not be reviewed beyond the maximum number of pages. The proposal narrative is to be prepared in Calibri, 11-point font, single spaced, with a .5” margin. The name of the institution must appear in the top right corner of each page. A specific format (Attachment I) is requested for the Program Requirements, and Measures of Positive Performance Matrix. Clarity, conciseness, completeness, and quality of writing will be evaluated in the proposal review in addition to the specific programmatic information requested in the narrative. Applications that do not follow the format described in this document will be converted to conform with the formatting requirements, and excess pages beyond the 10-page limit will not be read or scored. Applications that fail to include all information requested under each major category may lose points according to the corresponding category in the scoring rubric.”

32. *How are RFP reviewers selected?*

Reviewers are selected by the Program Office, and submitted to the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Access, Equity and Community Engagement Services for approval.

33. *According to the RFP, the narrative application will be scored by two reviewers. Will both reviewers read each narrative in its entirety? Or will they only read portions of a narrative application?*

The two reviewers will review the entire proposal and score the entire proposal.

34. *Will reviewers have a working knowledge of the program mission and operation?*

All reviewers shall be subjected to a training.

35. *Are proposals submitted ahead of the November 8th deadline going to be reviewed ahead of time? Will these proposals be given notice ahead of their competitors?*

No, all proposals must be postmarked by November 8, 2019 and all proposals shall be logged and reviewed after that date. Anticipated Preliminary Notification of Awards should be mailed approximately late January 2020.

36. *Is there a competitive advantage to submitting earlier?*

No, all proposals must be postmarked by November 8, 2019 and all proposals shall be logged and reviewed after that date.

37. *Can you clarify easily accessible? Would pre-arranged busing be allowable?*

Easily accessible, as referenced in the STEP RFP, for purposes of eligibility, means the ability for students to have access to transportation to programming and services. Pre-arranged busing would be allowable.

38. *Can a full-time/part-time STEP Coordinator work with CSTEP too?*

FTEs must be indicated on the budget to show how much time and portion of budget are devoted to the individuals time on STEP and/or CSTEP.

39. *The minimum number of students(headcount) that must be served annually in a STEP project is 30 participants, is there a suggested number of student participants to be complete/serve?*

SED does not suggest a recommended number to serve. It is up to the discretion of the applicant to request funds to serve the number of students which they feel they are capable of recruiting and providing the required services to throughout the 5-year cycle.

40. *Will programs that exceed max number enrollment in their proposal be considered a priority for additional funds should the legislature increase funding for programs?*

No, as stated on p. 16 of the RFP, if new or additional funding becomes available, and NYSED chooses to distribute this funding to applicants of this current RFP, NYSED will allocate the funds in this order by:

- Making whole any funded programs that have received a partial award;
- Approving awards, in rank order, for eligible applicants who received passing scores, but who did not rank high enough to receive the initial funding;
- Allocating funds among already awarded programs to serve additional students. NYSED will offer awarded programs the opportunity to serve additional students based on the per student maximum request amounts outlined in this Funding Limitations section of the RFP. This opportunity will be offered to all awarded programs that have not fallen below 95% of their enrollment goal, according to the most recently submitted rosters of students (see the Shortfalls in Enrollment Goals section below). Maximum request amounts will be established by distributing funding proportionally (based on total annual budget) to those institutions that accept the opportunity to serve additional students.

41. *Program Requirement Matrices require increasing measures of positive performance. How do existing programs address this with already successful activities? We do not want to start measures at lower levels than they currently are, but for example, if participation is already close to 100%, we are unable to put down increases.*

As this is a new grant cycle all proposals are new therefore any/all proposals shall be reviewed as such in all areas.

Institutional Expertise

42. *For continuing programs-do we incorporate previous assessment results?*

This is not specifically requested in this RFP but is not prohibited.

43. *Is there anything that would preclude us from referencing our demonstrated success of our past STEP program in our application?*

This is not specifically requested in this RFP but is not prohibited.

MWBE

44. *Is the MWBE percentage requirement over the 5-year grant cycle or each year?*

The language now states (p. 27) that the MWBE goal of 30% applies to each applicant's **annual** discretionary non-personal service budget, rather than to the total, multi-year discretionary non-personal service budget. Please use the MWBE Goal Calculation Worksheet to calculate the annual dollar amount of the MWBE goal for your grant application. The dollar amounts in each category on the MWBE Goal Calculation Worksheet should match those on the annual FS-10 budget. If you have any questions about how to complete the MWBE forms, please email MWBEgrants@nysed.gov for assistance.

45. *"M/WBE participation does not need to be the same for each year of a multi-year grant" (p. 29). What does this mean? Please provide an example.*

This sentence has been removed from the RFP.

46. *Should the MWBE Package be calculated only based on expenses for Year 1?*

Yes, additionally we have revised the language in the RFP. The language now states that the MWBE goal of 30% applies to each applicant's **annual** discretionary non-personal service budget, rather than to the total, multi-year discretionary non-personal service budget. Please use the MWBE Goal Calculation Worksheet to calculate the annual dollar amount of the MWBE goal for your grant application. The dollar amounts in each category on the MWBE Goal Calculation Worksheet should match those on the annual FS-10 budget. If you have any questions about how to complete the MWBE forms, please email MWBEgrants@nysed.gov for assistance.

Prequalification

47. *If we are already a pre-existing STEP program, do we need to submit the prequalification application?*

The requirement is to be prequalified on the deadline. If you are prequalified, then nothing needs to be done. If you are not, then you must submit the document vault in advance of the deadline to allow for prequalification.

Per the RFP (p. 3): “This includes all currently funded not-for-profit institutions that may have previously received an award and are in the middle of the program cycle. Please review the additional information regarding this requirement in the Prequalification for Individual Applications section of this RFP.”

48. *Should the pre-qualification application be submitted at the same time as the full application on November 8th, or should we submit the pre-qualification application before that to get approval?*

The requirement is to be prequalified on the deadline. If you are prequalified, then nothing needs to be done. If you are not, then you must submit the document vault in advance of the deadline to allow for prequalification.

Per the RFP (p. 29): ***** Proposals received from not-for-profit applicants that have not Registered and are not Prequalified in the Grants Gateway on the proposal due date of 05:00 PM on 11/08/2019 cannot be evaluated. Such proposals will be disqualified from further consideration. *****

49. *Should the person who registers on the Grants Gateway be the head of the organization or another individual?*

Per the RFP (p. 29-30): “Information on these initiatives can be found on the Grants Management Website (<https://grantsmanagement.ny.gov/>), therefore please refer to this site for guidance.”

50. *We have been trying to figure out how to prequalify through the grants gateway with our Research Foundation but when we log in there isn't an option to register. So how do we register?*

As stated in the RFP (p. 30): “Specific questions about the prequalification process should be referred to your agency representative at prequal@nysed.gov or to the Grants Management Team at grantsgateway@its.ny.gov.”

Program Requirements and Measurements of Positive Performance

51. *Are measures of positive performance to be based on percentages?*

Per the RFP (p.47): “For each activity and/or service, indicate the level of positive performance you feel the activity and/or service are providing in each year. For example: select Level One = Beginning, Level Two = Developing, Level Three = Proficient (see template below).”

52. *Under requirements – can we list activities and services as years 1-5 rather than year to year?*

As stated in the RFP (p. 47): “It is expected and understood that fundamental activities, such as academic tutoring, advising, etc., will be included in each funding year.”

53. *For Day of Service – is it one per year?*

As stated in the RFP (p. 12): “Host Day of Service events to provide exploration of and exposure to careers in the licensed professions, scientific, and technical fields, to students not currently attending STEP programming.”

54. *Is there a limit to the number of pages of the Requirements grid?*

Number of pages is not noted however per the RFP, (p.47): “Using the template found below, provide a separate chart for each requirement”

55. *Can you define what you mean by beginning, developing and proficient level for the positive performance matrix?*

Per the RFP (p.47): “For each activity and/or service, indicate the level of positive performance you feel the activity and/or service are providing in each year. For example: select Level One = Beginning, Level Two = Developing, Level Three = Proficient.”

56. *In the Requirements (Attachment 1), is the FTE listed to be broken out for each activity/service, or is the FTE related to the overall responsibilities of each position listed for the entire grant? For example, the program manager is full time. Is the FTE 1.0 for every activity, or would it be divided into a percentage of time spent on each activity?*

As stated on p. 47, Instructions for Addressing Requirements and Measures of Positive Performance Matrix: “For each activity and/or service, indicate the **Full-time equivalent (FTE)**. FTE is a way to measure a worker's involvement in a project, or a student's enrollment at an educational institution. Full-time equivalent for staff is defined as the percent effort for each activity and/or service provided by the worker. An FTE of 1.0 means that the person is equivalent to a full-time worker and spends 100% of their time on the project; an FTE of 0.5 signifies that the worker spends half of their time serving the project.”

57. *When reviewing Section C (Program Requirements and Measures of Positive Performance Matrix), will the reviewers weigh the narrative portion the same as the actual matrix chart (Attachment 1)?*

Section C (Program Requirements and Measures of Positive Performance Matrix) is the actual matrix chart that is included as part of Attachment I and will be scored based on those charts.

Project Staffing and Management

58. *Can there be more than one PI on the grant?*

All proposed staffing structures are individually reviewed by the Program Office based on the following as stated in the RFP (p. 36): “Describe a management plan that will assure the effective completion of project activities, given the fiscal and other resources available.”

Recruitment and Retention

59. *If a student withdraws from the proposed STEP program, can that student be replaced in order to maintain the enrollment goals or would that still be considered a shortfall in enrollment?*

Once a student has enrolled and has participated in programming where expenditures were utilized that student should be noted on the student roster and included as part of the enrollment goal for that grant year. Enrolling additional students would be up to the discretion of the program.

60. *Is it expected that the same students remain in the pipeline within the middle school component and the high school component or can new students be recruited each year for each component?*

It is not required to maintain the same students from middle school throughout high school in the program, however, per the STEP RFP (p. 14) programs must maintain an enrollment of 95% of the contracted total.

61. *If the whole district receives free/ reduced lunch, is a free/ reduced lunch letter sufficient as proof, or will we need to request income documents from those students?*

Students must individually provide documentation to support their economic eligibility for participation in a STEP program, therefore district wide participation in free/reduced lunch is not sufficient, and the program would need income verification, or eligibility individually for free/reduced lunch, directly in reference to the individual student.

62. *Are multi-racial students in a school district classified as minority group students for the purposes of establishing “an enrollment comprised of at least twenty percent (20%) minority group students” as*

they were in the last round?

Eligible applicants, per the RFP, and as stated on p. 2: “The institution submitting the proposal, or if the applicant represents a consortium then at least half of the institutions in the consortium must be located within a school district with an enrollment that is at least 20 percent Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian/Alaska Native, or located near such a district that is easily accessible by public transportation.” If the school district can verify that the multi-racial students encompasses one of the noted categories as stated then it would be applicable.