Making the Most of Grantmaking:

A Primer for Designing and Launching Open RFPs

June 2019

educationfirst
experience | quality | results

Introduction

Rigorous and transparent open Request for Proposals (RFP) processes are one strategy grantmakers can use to source, vet and select high-potential grantees.[1] Done well, RFPs can introduce funders to new ideas and grantees while fostering more equitable grantmaking. Done poorly, however, open RFPs can be frustrating to applicants and funders while creating the same barriers to access as other grantmaking systems.

Education First, with the support of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI), sought to discover best practice for implementing RFP processes and avoiding RFP pitfalls. During the spring of 2019, we analyzed open RFP documents and interviewed representatives from large funders, CZI grantees and Education First staff with grantmaking experience (see Appendix A). We found that while basic RFP processes were similar across the field, each funder had its own approach and best practices.

Education First has compiled those best practices into this primer, which outlines key questions for funders to consider when designing, launching and managing open RFPs. **The purpose of this primer is to help foundation staff implement open RFPs in a way that prioritizes equity and transparency, while simultaneously ensuring a high-quality experience for grantees.**

Open RFPs: Rationale

An open RFP is one of many approaches to grantmaking a funder can choose.[2] An open RFP is well-suited to situations where funders:

- have a clear vision of the problem they want to solve and the outcome they hope to reach, but are agnostic about different solutions or approaches to that problem;
- want to find multiple grantees to help them advance specific goals through different approaches;
- want to mitigate some of the risk associated with grantmaking by providing information about the strengths, weaknesses and skill sets of potential grantees;
- want to test the waters to see if a field is ready for investment;
- are looking for new and diverse grantees and/or new approaches to implementation; and/or

[1] We distinguish open RFPs, which are the subject of this primer, and invitation RFPs. Open RFPs are publicly available and any organization that meets the eligibility criteria is allowed to apply. Invitation RFPs, also known as targeted RFPs, conversely, are available to only those applicants invited by the funder. Generally speaking, open RFPs are more competitive than invitation RFPs.

[2] This primer focuses specifically on open RFP strategy and best practices. There are other ways to engage potential grantees, including invitation or targeted RFPs (see footnote above); a Request for Information (RFI), which typically is used to collect information about the services or products offered by an applicant; or a Letter of Intent (or Inquiry) (LOI), which is a condensed version of the proposal that funders often request as a precursor to submitting a full proposal. Typically, both an RFI and LOI take less time and ask for more basic information than RFPs. For a more detailed discussion about the differences between RFIs and RFPs, see here, and for more information about LOIs, see here.

- anticipate supporting a lot of different organizations or approaches to a problem.

Primer Overview

The primer is organized into five sections, which correspond to the life cycle of an open RFP. Each section addresses the key design questions listed in the table of contents below, and includes additional resources, examples and advice from peer funders that foundation staff can use to design and launch open RFPs. As shown in the gantt chart in Appendix B, these sections--and the milestones they include--often overlap.

The organizational structure of this primer assumes that you are planning to use a **multi-step open RFP process--that is, the review process consists of different gateways, where lower-rated proposals are removed from consideration while higher-rated proposals are advanced and reviewed more carefully, or applicants are asked to submit additional information**. According to the research conducted for this primer, which included interviews with funders and philanthropic advisors, a multi-step approach is optimal in the vast majority of scenarios. A multi-step approach helps funders (especially large funders with high-profiles) manage the volume of applications they receive while ensuring that the process is equitable for all potential grantees. It also helps prospective grantees manage the amount of time and effort they put into developing proposals. See Appendix F for sample multi-step open RFP processes that funders can use as a starting point. For an explanation of one-step RFPs and when to use them, see the text box to the right.

When might you do a one-step RFP?

A one-step process asks for full proposals from potential applicants without any additional requests (for example, an LOI) before decisions are made. A one-step RFP process makes sense when you are looking to distribute a large number of modest-sized grants.

For applicants, a one-step RFP process can be less time-intensive than those that require multiple steps. A one-step RFP process allows funders to commit more resources to reviewing applications rather than helping applicants submit strong proposals. For example, NoVo Foundation's SEL Innovation Awards for teachers and districts offer applicants a low-lift, one-step application process for 100+ grants ranging from $5,000 to $25,000 dollars.

Primer: Purpose and Use Cases

Funders should not treat the guidance in the primer as axiomatic--every open RFP is different, reflecting different investment portfolios, goals and priorities. Thus, foundation staff should prioritize the questions in the primer based on their particular needs, the goals of the RFP, and the needs and interests of grantees.

The primer is over 60 pages long, and while it's comprehensive in scope, it may be overwhelming to read end-to-end. Accordingly, we recommend readers orient themselves to the content at a high-level, and then use the primer as a reference to answer questions that emerge during the design and launch process. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Read and internalize the introduction, especially the key design questions on pages 5-6. Instead of trying to internalize everything in the primer, focus on understanding these questions and use them to address issues that may come up during the design or launch process.
- Read the Gantt chart in Appendix B, which serves as a sample workplan or roadmap for designing and launching an open RFP, complete with milestones and estimates for how long different activities may take.
- Assess the foundation's needs and how far along it is in the RFP design process and determine which key questions are most relevant to your work.
- Refer back to the primer, as needed, for additional guidance to move forward with designing and launching your RFP.

Equity and Open RFPs

A final note about equity and this primer: organizations working in education have increasingly sought to emphasize equity in their work. Educational equity has been defined as a system "in which every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, disability, family background or income, citizenship or tribal status."[3]

There are opportunities to emphasize equity throughout an RFP process. Rather than discussing equity at the beginning of the open RFP design process, or at the point when you select grantees, equity should remain the north star in all stages of RFP design and launch. Accordingly, strategies to emphasize equity are infused throughout all sections of this primer.

[3] Aspen Institute, *Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action (2018*), accessed May 2018, https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/05/Aspen-Institute_Framing-Doc_Call-to-Action.pdf.

Table of Contents

The key design questions involved in an open RFP process are shown in the table below. Each question is hyperlinked to make it easy for readers to navigate the primer. The two far right columns of the table note whether the key design question **advances equity** and/or **promotes positive applicant experiences** (see also Appendix C and Appendix D). Readers interested in those topics should carefully review the best practices and resources for those key design questions.

	circumstances?		
	5. Given the size of grants, what are appropriate application demands and processes?		
	6. What does a typical RFP process with multiple review gateways look like?		
	7. How should we determine the amount and duration of the grant?		
	8. What is the basic timeline for the RFP, start to finish? When do grant funds need be disbursed?		
	9. What metrics or evidence can grantees use to measure their impact?		
C. Launch	1. How will applicants submit their applications (and other related materials)?		
	2. How will we disseminate the RFP to potential applicants?		
	3. How will we field questions while maintaining equity among different applicants?		
	4. How will we communicate with applicants about selection criteria and/or what an exemplar application looks like?		
	5. How long should we give applicants to complete a proposal?		
D. Review and Select	1. What eligibility requirements will applicants have to meet?		
	2. What selection criteria will we use to identify grantees from the pool of applicants? How does that criteria change at different points in the review process?		
	3. What capacity-building opportunities can we provide to applicants? At what points in the review process?		

	4. How much time should we give ourselves to review proposals and make final selections? What resources (e.g., staff hours, technical or content expertise, technology, etc.) do we need to review each application?		
	5. What tools (e.g., a review rubric) do we need to create? What supports/training/calibration exercises do we need to provide reviewers?		
	6. What metrics should we review related to the RFP (e.g., number of proposals, range of focus areas, geographic spread, etc.)?		
	7. What additional review processes should we consider, and when should we use them?		
	8. When should we bring in external reviewers?		
	9. How and when should we provide proposal feedback to applicants?		
	10. How can we minimize bias in the proposal review process?		
E. Post-award Expectations	1. What are appropriate reporting requirements for grantees?		
	2. For multi-year grants, should funding be conditioned on submitting grant reports and/or other grantee performance? If so, what activities/tasks must grantees complete?		
	3. What are the expectations for grantees to share their learnings with each other and the field?		
	4. Will there be follow-on funding? How will this be clearly communicated upfront?		

To compile the guidance and best practices in this primer, Education First conducted desk research, interviewed funders and grantees about their experiences with RFPs, and drew upon our own experience managing open RFPs and advising foundation clients about RFP processes. A full list of the people and organizations Education First interviewed is included in Appendix A. A Glossary of key terms and definitions used in the primer is included in Appendix E.

Section A: Plan

Overview: In the plan phase of an RFP process, funders should articulate the goals they hope to achieve with this investment, explain how the investment connects with their overall grantmaking strategy and reflect their understanding of the landscape they hope to affect. This phase is critical because without a clear vision, goals and objectives, grantees may struggle to submit high-quality applications and achieve what the funder intends.

A1. What organizational values and priorities should be reflected in the RFP? How is this RFP tied to our overall grantmaking strategy?	Best Practice	Explicitly naming the portfolio's and the funder's values and priorities is helpful in sourcing proposals that are aligned to the funder's goals. Funders vary widely in terms of the level of detail they offer, but describe their values, priorities and intended outcomes clearly.
	Detailed Questions	■ What level of detail do applicants need to know about the portfolio strategy and the funder in order to determine whether they can submit a high-quality application? ■ What background information, if any, do applicants need to complete a high-quality application? ■ Are there certain priorities or values we want to see directly reflected in proposals?
	Steps to Take	■ Consider developing a theory of action (TOA) that describes the expected outcomes for this investment and the pathway (i.e., strategies and tactics) to get there. Funders vary in how tight or loose they are in proscribing the strategies grantees should take in their proposals, but as a general rule, the outcome should be clear. ■ Draft an overview or introduction to the RFP that lists the Foundation's mission, vision, strategy and/or values, and describe how this RFP aligns with those principles. + **EXAMPLE**: The Gates Foundation Networks for School Improvement RFP explicitly lists a focus on low-income, Black and Latino students and also states that a core part of its strategy includes funding intermediaries. It also explains the rationale behind this strategy. ■ If the funder has communications staff, see if they have boilerplate language

		can be repurposed (or perhaps they can even write the overview/introduction).
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "I chose to apply because I knew what [this funder] stood for. I knew what they were trying to achieve. Therefore, I knew the alignment of our missions. Our organization is aligned in mission and values with what they're trying to do." - Grantee
	Resources	See a sample theory of action here.

Return to Top

A2. What problem are we trying to solve with this RFP?	Best Practice	Funders need to understand the problem they are trying to solve, usually acquired through a combination of lived experience and research. There are a variety of ways funders go about building their knowledge of the field. Some bring their own knowledge to bear, along with informal conversations with others in the field. Others conduct methodical landscape scans, while others seek feedback and input from the public or the communities. Most do a combination of all three.
	Detailed Questions	■ What do we already know about the problem we need to solve? ■ What gaps exist in our knowledge base? ■ What evidence do we have that our targeted communities need and want our intended intervention? ■ Who have we heard from and/or listened to in developing our understanding of the problem we seek to solve?
	Steps to Take	■ Conduct a "landscape scan;" i.e., research to assess the state of the field. Many landscape scans include the following: + Key research questions the investment will answer + Interviews or focus groups with "experts," potential applicants and grantees, and the ultimate beneficiaries of the investment (e.g., students, teachers) + Surveys of key stakeholders to get a broad range of perspectives on

		certain questions + Analysis of common themes about stakeholders' needs and readiness for change + A process to identify a diverse pool of potential applicants (through, e.g., desk research, crowd-sourcing, outreach to current grantees, etc.) ■ Informal landscape scans make sense when you already know a lot about the field; more in-depth or formal landscape scans make sense when you know little about the field, are trying to do something brand new or have a large pot of money you need to disburse.
	Resources	■ Here is a sample research plan for landscape scan used by a regional foundation to guide its investment strategy. ■ Education First conducted this national landscape scan of social and emotional learning (SEL) practices to help inform the NoVo Foundation's SEL investment portfolio.

Return to Top

A3. What do we aim to learn from this grant? What impact do we expect proposals to have?	Best Practice	High-quality RFPs are designed with an end--or impact--in mind. An impact statement should describe the change you expect to see in the world, or for the grant's intended beneficiaries, at the end of the grant period. The impact may affect students, educators, communities or a field of study. The impact may be a change in behaviors, attitudes or practices, or the impact may be a contribution to the field's knowledge about the problem you hope to solve. In some cases, it may be appropriate to identify short- and long-term impacts.
	Detailed Questions	■ What is the change we hope to see in the field as a result of this investment? ■ What is different for students, teachers and other stakeholders? How will their practices and mindsets shift? ■ When the grant period is over, how will we know whether this investment has been a success?

		■ What knowledge are we hoping to contribute to the field? What research questions are we hoping to answer with this investment?
	Steps to Take	■ Draft an impact statement that describes the change we hope to see as a result of this funding opportunity (alternatively, you can include an impact statement in a theory of action). Include this language in the overview/introduction section of the RFP. ■ Consider vetting the impact statement with practitioners to confirm it aligns with their needs and interests.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Whether by website or program officers, it starts with being clear about the goals of the grant, the impact, the qualifying criteria, what they want to see happen. To see if it's the right fit." - Grantee
	Resources	As part of a multi-stage open RFP process, the Hewlett Foundation requested LOIs for its Deeper Learning and Diffusion of Innovation grants. The request included a problem and impact statement on pages 2-3.

Return to Top

A4. Has this idea been tested with eligible applicants? How does the idea match their needs and interests?	Best Practice	Engaging with the communities you intend to partner with throughout all stages of the grantmaking process, from ideation to RFP development to review, increases the likelihood that grants are equitable and respond to the community's needs.
	Detailed Questions	■ What stakeholders should be engaged to either assess the field's readiness for investment or determine applicants' needs and interests? ■ What evidence do we have that targeted beneficiaries/communities need and want this investment? How have we involved that community in our planning and application process? ■ What level of outreach/communication/engagement is needed to build a pipeline of eligible applicants? Are there partners in the field who can be engaged to get the word out?

	Steps to take	■ At the start of an RFP process: + Draw up a list of the key stakeholders that will be engaged during the RFP process. + Solicit stakeholder input on initial ideas, including the problem and impact statements and potential solutions. Consider a variety of methods, including standard feedback mechanisms such as surveys, interviews and focus groups as well as non-traditional methods such as ideation sessions (see the resources section for more detail). ■ During the design and/or review process: + Bring stakeholders into the process to provide input and/or select winning applications. For example, consider having educators or community members review proposals prior to selecting grantees, or having current or former grantees review application materials prior to dissemination.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ “The community interviewed the provider and chose the provider. This wasn’t a foundation project, this was a community project. When we go away, we want the community to do the plan. When we try to bring intelligence, new partners, new resources, it should be in response to that community’s demands.” - Funder ■ “One thing that’s good to do: Once you’ve built the RFP, get a group of folks like your target audience to look at it and give you honest feedback. This will be hard to do, because grantees want to say you’re fabulous so they get funding. Or have another group of funders...look through an equity lens at your RFPs--what in this RFP privileges the white-dominant nonprofit? Because they’ll notice stuff you might not be cognizant of.” - Funder
	Resources	■ Education First supported Oak Foundation to develop a strategic plan informed by the equityXdesign framework. As part of this project, Education First facilitated an Ideation Session with the Oak team to identify community members from across the state to both inform their strategy. ■ This document, developed by equityXdesign, provides a framework for engaging community members and stakeholder groups on defining problems that can be addressed through grantmaking.

		■ This deck describes several effective sample ideation exercises and this accompanying facilitation plan describes the exercises in more detail. ■ These two videos (link 1, link 2) explain why bringing stakeholders together matters when crafting solutions to problems.

Return to Top

A5. What risks must we consider? How might these risks be mitigated?	Best Practice	There are inherent risks in grantmaking through an open RFP process. These risks include the chance that a funder might alienate the field, receive a number of applications that miss the RFP's vision and end the process with a grantee pool that doesn't match the original goals. Though specific risks will depend on the funder, the RFP subject matter and target audience, most risks can be mitigated through thorough planning with clarity and transparency throughout all stages of the RFP process.
	Detailed Questions	■ What are our most important goals for this grant? ■ What safeguards can we put into place to ensure we meet those goals while maintaining strong relationships with partners in the field? ■ What types of inequities might we reproduce with either the grant portfolio or our approach?
	Steps to Take	■ Consider the common risks associated with RFP strategies: + *Alienating the field:* Applicants can sometimes feel they are being taken advantage of and/or strung along in an RFP process. For example, this can happen when applicants submit multiple proposals, often spending considerable time on each one, and are continually rejected without a clear understanding of why or when funders decide to change course and not fund the program at all. Another example: Sometimes grantees apply for funding, share some of their intellectual property and ideas in the proposal, and then don't hear back from funders. Alienating the field reduces a funder's ability to effect change. ■ Mitigation strategies: View the field of applicants as an important constituent in the stakeholder group. Align the

		level of effort needed for the grant proposal with size of the award and the likelihood that an applicant will be funded. Be clear on selection criteria, and, if possible, provide general or specific feedback on why applications were or were not selected. If you decide to move in a direction away from the original RFP, provide a clear explanation as to why and consider honoring applicants' time with a small honorarium. + *Applications that miss the mark:* Applicants write proposals based on their understanding of a funder's goals. That understanding does not always align with perfectly with those goals. ■ Mitigation strategies: Be as clear as possible in the problem statement, goals of the grant, intended applicant profile and selection criteria. Conduct a webinar or other methods to answer applicant questions. If reviewers use a rubric to select successful applicants, create it before distributing application materials. Norming on the rubric will help reviewers align on the characteristics of high-quality proposals. Use a low-lift LOI at the beginning of an RFP process to communicate the purpose and outcomes to grantees. + *Final grantee pool that does not align with original goals:* Even if a funder starts with intended profile ratios in the final grantee pool (e.g., a certain percentage of organizations led by people of color, an even distribution of urban and rural organizations), that funder could easily end with a grantee list that doesn't reflect those goals. ■ Mitigation strategies: Target RFP dissemination efforts to organizations that fit the grantee profile. Offer technical assistance and capacity building support to applicants. Reduce bias in the proposal review process (see D10). Check for applicant diversity at every stage in the RFP process--if organizations led by people of color are not represented in the applicant pool or finalists, they won't be included in the pool of grantees. Consider adjusting selection criteria so that grantees include organizations led by people of color.

	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "We have seen, a number of times, a funder issues a big RFP, gets all these ideas, and then decides we don't want to go in that direction after all, and they don't fund the program...You don't want to convey the idea that the funder is just looking to get a bunch of ideas for free. There's intellectual property and content here." - Funder ■ "The biggest challenge was the outcome--people interpreted it differently. That was our biggest priority, so I kept putting out examples. When we got proposals of that didn't align with our outcome, we made phone calls, 'Is this what you mean and it's not coming across?'" - Funder ■ "Getting clear on the front end on what your criteria is and not wavering on that. If you want to support a set of organizations that don't always get funding in this field, for example, set goals that you want the leadership to be this percent leaders of color. Decide what criteria matter most on the front end, or else you default to the things that have perpetuated how the field looks like...What's most important about what we're trying to do for this RFP?" - Funder
	Resources	See the LOI for the Family Math Learning Community Grants, where the supporting foundations mitigated against the risk that they would not award grants by explaining "the process will highlight outstanding community work happening across the country that we can learn from and amplify in future awareness campaigns," and will be used to "gather information to determine if and how the foundations will use their resources."

Return to Top

Part B: Design

Overview: In the design phase of the RFP process, funders begin putting pen to paper and transition from ideation and brainstorming to drafting the actual RFP and related materials. In this phase, it may be helpful to pull together a "design team" with diverse viewpoints (including educators or members of the communities that will be served by the grant) to provide input on draft RFP materials and serve as a check on potential areas of bias. One of the most important things to do when designing an RFP is to be as clear as possible so that applicants are able to submit high-quality proposals aligned to the funder's goals and vision.

B1. What is the profile (or profiles) of the applicants we are intending to reach with this RFP? What types of organizations? In what geographies?	Best Practice	Once a funder has developed the goals of a grant, it's important to determine the type of organization best suited to reach those goals. Communicating a clear and focused profile for intended applicants will help organizations determine whether they are a fit for the program and, ultimately, they will be better positioned to submit high-quality applications. However, if a funder does not consider how the applicant profile directly ties to the goals of the grant, or if the profile is not well-suited to meet the goals of the grant, then more diverse organizations with new ideas may not respond to the RFP.
	Detailed Questions	■ Who are the ultimate beneficiaries of this investment? (e.g., students in large urban school districts, students who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, etc.) ■ What type(s) of an organization will be supported with this investment? (e.g., school districts, nonprofit, etc.) ■ What specific characteristics do intended grantees have? (e.g., districts in urban settings, districts that serve predominantly Black and Brown students) ■ What capacities, characteristics or relationships (with other organizations) do applicants need to be successful? ■ What does this cohort of grantee look like? If a mix of organizations will be funded, what's the right composition of organizations? ■ How do these decisions align to the funder's approach to equity, diversity and inclusion within this RFP?
	Steps to Take	■ Organize an RFP design team, comprised of stakeholders representing diverse roles, organizations and viewpoints, to design the RFP or provide input on RFP

		materials. Consider whether the design team members' organizations can submit proposals, and if so, whether they need to recuse themselves from the design process. + **EXAMPLE**: For the Family Math Learning Community Grants, Education First organized a coordinating committee representing diverse organizations, including funders, on the RFP design team, and awarded honorariums to team members. ■ With the RFP design team, brainstorm the beneficiaries served through this investment. Note, the beneficiaries are not necessarily the grantees. ■ Draft a profile for the organization(s) that serves those beneficiaries. Include any specific details and characteristics of those organizations (e.g., size, geography, capacity, student populations served, etc.).
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "If applicants have a set of non-negotiables [in the application materials], then they will know whether they are wasting their time. We made it really clear that you must meet certain criteria or you will not be funded." - Funder ■ "The difference has to do with how much time and expertise the funder is willing to invest in developing an RFP that is really clear and has a lot of guidelines. We're only going to fund this kind of organization, or this kind of project. We're only doing grants of this size, so if you're a smaller org, don't waste your time, because it's inefficient for us to make $50K or $100K grants. That's important in defining eligibility." - Funder
	Resources	The Hewlett Deeper Learning and Diffusion of Innovation LOI includes a detailed description of their intended grantees, "research-practice partnerships." See pages 11-12 in the Eligibility Section.

Return to Top

B2. Who (which orgs and/or individuals) is most likely to apply? What supports may	Best Practice	With a clear grantee profile, funders will be able to anticipate the specific organizations or individuals that are most likely to apply for a grant. Organizations that have a history with the foundation and/or are larger, more resourced organizations are more likely to apply than smaller organizations with no previous relationship. Once

be needed to broaden and/or deepen the applicant pool?		the funder has determined who is likely to apply, it should consider who might be missing from that list and target additional dissemination and support efforts to recruit more diverse applicants or those less likely to apply.
	Detailed Questions	■ What organizations fit the grantee profile? ■ Of those organizations, which organizations are most likely to apply for this grant? What factors make them more likely to apply? ■ Which organizations may be missing from the expected applicant list? What factors make those organizations less likely to apply? ■ How can the funder do to mitigate the factors that might prevent organizations from applying?
	Steps to Take	■ Identify specific organizations that fit the intended applicant profile and want to apply for the grant. Consider: + The organization's past relationship with the foundation. + The organization's size, resources and capacity to complete a proposal. + The organization's capacity to take on the activities of the grant. ■ Analyze the characteristics in the likely applicants for trends and compare those trends to the funder's goals. Consider racial diversity, size of organization, populations served, geography, etc. ■ Identify which organizations and types of organizations may be missing. What types of organizations have been excluded (e.g., by region, size, content, area). + Vet the initial list of potential applicants with a design team and/or trusted advisors who may have different networks. ■ Identify specific supports those organizations may need to complete a high-quality proposal. Consider the following: + Target dissemination efforts. Reach out to identified organizations directly. Identify other organizations and funders doing similar work and ask them to disseminate the RFP. (More information on dissemination strategies in the Launch phase.) + If an application takes considerable time and resources to complete,

		+ smaller organizations may have to take staff fully offline to complete the application. Consider reducing the work needed for the application. + Extend the timeframe given for proposal completion. Smaller organizations may not be able to complete lengthy applications in the same amount of time that larger, more resourced applicants could. Consider extending the time to give greater opportunity for all. + Provide targeted capacity building and technical assistance. If the grant requires organizations to create something new, such as a partnership with another organization or a new research configuration, consider providing workshops, networking, thought partnership or other capacity building supports (more information on capacity building in the Review and Select phase.)
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Just opening the process doesn't automatically lead to a more diverse pool of applications. You have to pair it with two things: intentional, hard core networking and capacity building. You need to be in a long game and build capacity." - Funder

Return to Top

B3. What are the basic elements of an RFP? Which of these elements should we include?	Best Practice	An RFP should give applicants enough information to know whether they are eligible for the grant, whether the goals of the grant aligns with their work and values, and how to apply for the grant. The RFP should be clear enough to direct applicants to provide the information the funder needs to make a confident decision in funding.
	Detailed Questions	■ What information does the funder need from applicants to make a balanced, informed funding decision? ■ What information do applicants need from the funder to submit high quality proposals?
	Steps to Take	■ Consider the following basic elements of an RFP: + *Background:* (Problem Statement) Describe the background of the

		project. This could include a quick description of the funder and their values, a discussion of the problem the grant is trying to solve and any previous work that has been done on the problem. + *Goals:* Describe what impact the funder hopes to have with the grant funds. This could include the intended solution to the problem listed above. + *Grant Overview/Opportunity/Benefits of Participation:* Describe the activities the grant will fund. List the amount of the grant, the length of the grant and the expected number of grants to be awarded. + *Eligibility and Selection Criteria?requirements/Applicant Expectations:* Describe any eligibility requirements for receiving funds (e.g., 501(c)3 status) and the intended grantee profile or abilities. + *Instructions/Directions/Questions:* Provide a list of questions and materials (e.g., budget documents) for applicants to respond to in their proposals. + *Submission Requirements:* List any proposal format requirements (e.g., 12-point font, .pdf or .docx only, etc.). Describe the submission process (e.g., email, online platform). Clearly state the submission deadline, specifying date and time (e.g., May 31, 2019, 11:59pm Pacific Time). + *Timeline:* List all upcoming dates for the RFP process, including, but not limited to, LOI submission deadline, notification of advancement to full proposal, proposal submission deadline, notification of advancement to any additional reviews (e.g, interviews), dates for additional reviews and final award notification. + *Inquiries/Questions:* Provide a method (e.g., email address, online form) for applicants to ask questions about the grant or RFP process.
	Resources	There are many different ways funders represent the basic elements of an RFP. See the following examples: the NoVo Foundation's SEL Innovation Fund; the High Quality Assessment Project (a funder collaborative that included the Hewlett, Helmsley, Gates and Lumina Foundations); Family Math Community Grants, funded by the Gates, Overdeck, Heising-Simons, McCormick and CME Group Foundations; and the Barr

		Foundation's RFP for new high school models.

Return to Top

B4. What additional elements of an RFP can we include, and under what circumstances?	Best Practice	Depending on the specific goals of a grant, an RFP may need to include additional elements that provide applicants with the requisite information to produce high-quality proposals. Additional elements are often necessary for RFPs that ask for something very specific from applicants or RFPs seeking proposals in a new or under-developed field.
	Detailed Questions	■ How does this grant align with the funder's previous work and grantmaking? How might any shifts be confusing for applicants? ■ What parts of this grant program might be the most unclear to applicants? What information can make them more clear? ■ What parts of this grant, if any, should be highlighted?
	Steps to Take	■ Consider the following additional elements of an RFP: + *Priorities:* Note any activities or applicant characteristics that will be prioritized during the selection process. Emphasize these priorities with language like the following: "We will give priority to applications that..." + *Mission, Vision and Values:* Consider adding the funder's or program's mission, vision and values as a reference. This will help ensure stronger alignment between grantees and the funder. + *Proposal or Budget Template:* Include a template that applicants can download and complete, especially if it's important for applicants to submit materials in a particular format. + *Glossary:* If the RFP includes a lot of technical terms that may confuse applicants, or jargon used within the funder organization, including a glossary that defines key terms will add clarity.

Return to Top

B5. Given the size of grants, what are appropriate application demands and processes?	Best Practice	The lift of a grant application should be commensurate with both the size of the award and the likelihood that an applicant will receive that award. This will require focusing RFP questions on the most important information and may involve increasing the demand on applicants at each successive stage of the RFP process. This approach not only ensures that applicants will feel that submitting a proposal was worth their time but also reduces the review burden on the funder.
	Detailed Questions	■ What information does the funder need to know at each phase of the RFP process (e.g., LOI, full proposal, etc.)? How can the funder gather that information with the least burden to applicants? ■ As the size of grants grows, what additional information do funders need to make an informed and balanced decision?
	Steps to Take	■ Walk through a few “scenarios” to determine how many (and which) steps are needed to result in a final pool of grants. Use past grants as a guide and think about the following: + How much detail (and in what format) does the funder need in order to satisfy internal foundation policies and processes? + How does the funder typically gather the information you need? ■ Written narratives? ■ Interviews/phone conversations? ■ Site visits? ■ Draft an LOI that seeks the minimum amount of information needed to elicit a base pool of applicants to then advance to the next stage of the review process.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ “Responding to RFPs, especially if it includes coming up with a detailed budget, can take a surprising amount of time. Perhaps ask for a short write-up that doesn’t include a budget until you’re ready to move forward with a potential grant.” - Grantee ■ “There’s a trade-off between time and effort. If there is a two page application for a $10K grant, I would do it. If it’s over $100K, I’ll put more work into it. Also a factor: How easily I can pull together the information? Another factor: Do I

		think I have a good chance at winning, based on relationship to funder and grant criteria?" - Grantee ■ "Certainly [there have been] times where I've seen an open RFP, and the amount of time expected to spend on it is unrealistic. If we're looking for 25k, expect people to spend a reasonable amount of time versus a multi-million, multi-year grant. That could be more labor intensive." - Grantee
	Resources	The Family Math LOI includes a PDF with directions for completing the application and a Google doc that applicants use to submit their responses.

Return to Top

B6. What does a typical RFP process with multiple review gateways look like?	Best Practice	The majority of funders and grantees recommended some kind of multi-step application process in order to: a) reduce the burden on applicants by only requiring full proposals from those most likely to be funded; and b) reduce the review burden on funders by not requiring review of full proposals from all applicants. In most cases, a multi-step application process starts with an RFI or LOI with questions that allow the funder to assess the applicant's capacity to meet the grant's goals.
	Detailed Questions	■ Will the review process have multiple rounds? Is there an opportunity to bring a group of finalists with strong concepts that may need additional work together to refine and then submit for final selection? ■ What low-threshold questions should be included in an LOI or at an early stage of the application process, and what more substantive questions should be reserved for targeted finalists?
	Steps to Take	■ Generally, a multi-step open RFP process begins with a lower-lift request, such as: + *Qualification Survey/Eligibility Quiz:* If the grant has specific requirements that are easy to assess (e.g., work in a specific state with

		a specific population, operating budget size, etc.), consider a quick qualification survey to initially suss out those details. Only send full application materials to applicants who meet the basic qualifications. + *Letter of Qualification:* If the grant has specific requirements that require more detail to assess (e.g., capacity to take on work, commitment to the funder's vision and values, etc.), consider expanding the above survey to a full qualification letter. Invite applicants to write 1-2 pages with their answer to 1-2 targeted qualification questions. Only send full application materials to applicants who meet these qualifications. + *Letter of Intent:* If the funder anticipates a large number of responses or if the application has another intermediary step (e.g., a partnership verification survey), consider requesting a letter of intent. Much like a qualification letter, this should be short and targeted to only a few key questions. LOIs can be used for two purposes: a) to determine how many full applications the funder should expect, in which case, send all applicants full proposal materials; or b) to remove applications with a low chance of success, in which case, only send full materials to promising applicants.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "If [the RFP is] completely open, without even geographic limits or grantee type limits, the more applications you're going to get, assuming you have a large enough application window. The reviewing process is the vast majority of your time on this. There are ways you can make it more efficient, by having a multi-step review process, or having an eligibility first screen. The first screen could be for basic quality checks--if your budget is complete and within bounds, or if you wrote a coherent budget summary, or if you're aligned with the mission and purpose of the grant. There's ways you could cut off the top percentage of the applicants and still have the quality in the remainder." - Funder ■ "We're doing an LOI, so we can learn from folks and get them on our radar without having a huge burden for them." - Funder ■ "Almost every open RFP we do is a two-tiered process. One process that's a

		little more control. An open process for the field and a second process for finalists." - Funder
	Resources	The Hewlett Diffusion of Innovation project started with a robust LOI that allowed the funder to assess each applicant's ability to carry out the terms of the grant. Strong applicants were invited to a capacity building workshop to build partnerships and strengthen their full proposals. The final RFP expanded on the previous two steps, directly noting the applicant's related previous work (e.g, "You will likely incorporate and build upon sections B, E, G, and H from your LOI."). The NoVo Educator Practice Community LOI offers a contrasting example. Considerably shorter, this LOI was used to determine how many applicants the funder could expect and verify partnerships early. Each applicant who submitted an LOI received the full RFP materials.

Return to Top

B7. How should we determine the amount and duration of the grant?	Best Practice	The amount and duration of your grantmaking should be directly tied to your theory of action. Once you've identified the problem you want to solve and your theory of how to solve it, consider the time and resources necessary for grantees to make that change.
	Detailed Questions	■ What problem this grant aims to solve? What solutions exist for this problem? ■ What is the theory of action or theory of change? ■ How long will it take grantees to implement? What resources will they need? What evidence will they need to collect? ■ What evidence base will the grant build? How long will it realistically take grantees to build that base? ■ What is the timeline for outcomes? ■ Does the theory of action require building on itself? How much time and resources will be needed at each iteration?
	Steps to Take	■ Reflect on the theory of action, including the problem statement, possible

		solutions and interventions grantees may implement and the outcomes for the grant. ■ Determine a realistic amount of time necessary to achieve the outcomes. ■ Determine the funds and other resources necessary for grantees to achieve those outcomes within the intended timeline.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "We wanted to learn as much as we could in two years--the length of our theory of action. We wanted to build an evidence base, so we included a much larger amount of funds for evaluation." - Funder

Return to Top

B8. What is the basic timeline for the RFP, start to finish? When do grant funds need to be distributed?	Best Practice	Be clear about the intended timeline, including dates for all events that require applicants' time (e.g., proposal due dates, interviews, site visits, etc), and stick to it. However, in planning, be generous with time to both give applicants sufficient time to complete all needed activities and give the funder sufficient time to review.
	Detailed Questions	■ By what date will grants be awarded? Working backward from that date, on what date will the review team finalize awards, when will the funder launch and close the application window? ■ How much time and effort does the RFP require of applicants? How many weeks will applicants require to create a high-quality proposal? ■ How much time will the funder need to review proposals? How complex will the review be for each proposal, and how many proposals do we expect to receive? ■ What additional processes (LOIs, interviews, workshops, securing external reviewers, site visits, etc.) does the funder or reviewers need to schedule? ■ What is the target turnaround time for reviewing applications?
	Steps to Take	■ Backwards map from the date you intend to award grants. Use the implementation plan provided in this primer as guidance (see Appendix B). ■ Allow significant time for applicants to write proposals, at least 6-8 weeks after RFP release for most RFPs. ■ Allow enough time to review applications on the back end--and anticipate the

		review process will take longer than originally estimated.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "I can't emphasize enough the pre-schedule of grantees time, for everything from pre-screening to selection retreats to site visits. Let folks know when that'll happen." - Funder ■ "It was helpful for calendaring to see all the deadlines listed out. It helps as we plan out if we're going to go for it...before we even get into conversation with the foundation. Yes, we can meet these dates; yes, we meet these criteria." - Grantee ■ "You also have to know that you're human, and you'll miss stuff and learn stuff. Don't be so urgent that you don't give yourself the time to learn. If you set too rigid a timeline or expectations, then you're locked into them, and that's a bummer because then you learn stuff and think, we should have done it that way." - Funder

Return to Top

B9. What metrics or evidence can grantees use to measure their impact?	Best Practice	Evidence of impact will look different depending on the goals and activities of the grant, from student growth on a particular outcome to the number of students served. Regardless of the metric, it is important to define what metrics the funder expects grantees to track at the beginning of the grant cycle to ensure that they have the capacity to track that metric and their records remain accurate.
	Detailed Questions	■ What outcomes are the most important? Most interesting to the funder? What outcomes are possible to measure grant period? How can those outcomes be measured? ■ Are grantees required to measure and report on a specific metric, or will the funder allow grantees to select and report on their own metrics related to the goals of the grant? ■ Are grantees required to collect data stipulated by the terms of the grant, or can grantees submit data that they already collect?

		■ What forms of evidence aside from numerical data can be used to measure the impact of the grant? Will the funder accept this evidence from grantees?
	Steps to Take	■ Reflect on the theory of action, including the problem statement, potential interventions and solutions, and possible outcomes for the investment. ■ Identify the metrics that best track the intended outcomes and problem statement. Identify any additional metrics that could provide additional insight. ■ Evaluate the capacity of potential grantees to track these metrics. ■ Determine whether grantees will be required to report on specific metrics or metrics of their choosing. Determine whether grantees will be required to submit only numerical data or other indicators of success. ■ Clearly state reporting requirements in the RFP or other grant documents (e.g., MOU).
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "We have a list of 8 student outcomes, so we track the one they selected in their proposal." - Funder ■ "We measure success by the performance of the organizations that we fund on the performance metric. Did we choose the right partners based on their achievement goals?" - Funder

Return to Top

Part C: Launch

Overview: In the launch phase of the RFP process, funders disseminate the RFP to potential applicants through a variety of channels, field questions from potential applicants, and clarify expectations about the application materials and criteria. The launch phase is critical for ensuring that the overall RFP process is transparent and equitable.

C1. How will applicants submit their applications (and other related materials)?	Best Practice	Setting clear guidelines for the format of applications will make the proposal review process easier. Reviewers will have a clear understanding of how to access all materials and know where to find each piece of information on the page. However, adhering to overly strict guidelines may require increased effort from applicants, and as such, page limits and word counts may expedite the review at the cost of disadvantaging less-resourced organizations. Each option for receiving applications has both pros and cons. Accepting all materials via email is an economical and user-friendly option, but email inboxes grow unwieldy as proposal numbers increase. Online review platforms can increase accessibility for applicants and ease of review for funders, but poorly designed and executed platforms may cause more problems than they solve. Regardless of the submission method, it is vital to have a centralized process to keep all materials together throughout the application and review process.
	Detailed Questions	■ How many applications does the funder expect to receive? ■ How much information is the funder willing to read from each applicant? Will the funder allow applicants to submit more information (or information that exceeds page limits in the application)? ■ What types of files (e.g., .pdf, .docx, etc.) can the funder successfully open and review? What fonts, font sizes and organizing mechanisms would most expedite the review process? ■ What proposal formats beyond a written narrative (e.g., a video proposal) will the funder consider? ■ What key elements should a grants management system include? (e.g., ability for applicants to save work and return, multiple reviewer accounts, embedded review rubrics, etc.)

		■ If using an email inbox to receive materials, where will the funder put all received materials? Who is responsible for managing that inbox?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine any formatting or file format requirements. Communicate these clearly in the RFP. ■ Determine how to receive applications that will a) be most convenient for grantees and b) be most manageable for the foundation. Communicate the determined submission method in the RFP. ■ Designate a system for keeping all application materials organized and together (e.g., a shared folder with subfolders for each applicant). ■ Assign staff to monitor and collect application materials as they come in.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Sometimes word count or page limits are more time-consuming than open-ended responses that don't have limits. My sense is that word limits are more for the reviewer's sake than the proposal-writer's. Perhaps encourage a certain page limit but don't mandate it." - Grantee ■ "I also had a positive experience with the online grant application system they were using. Some of those are really old school and time consuming. They used a system where you can go back to the RFP right in there; everything is tabbed and saved constantly. And it helped to have a chat box where you could email people and they'd get back to you quickly when things weren't working correctly. It was nice because I was submitting pieces as I went along and I worried about losing anything. And they had boxes with hints--remember that this should be a bulleted list. In the end, I had an issue with uploading a document, and they had an emergency email live until midnight that day. I was able to email the document and they did it for me. There was a real person there the day that the grant applications were due." - Grantee ■ "Their system is so confusing, because you have to open it like a bid. I would not recommend it. When you upload your documents, you have to submit that day. You can't come back to it. You have to hit cancel or send. It's just very cumbersome." - Grantee
	Resources	Vendors like WizeHive, ReviewR, Submittable, FluidReview by Survey Monkey, Smarter

		Select and SlideRoom offer customizable platforms that help with reviewing applications. Many of the vendors offer free demos that allow you to test the functionality before signing a contract.

Return to Top

C2. How will we disseminate the RFP to potential applicants?	Best Practice	Simply making an RFP open--or posting it to a website--will not guarantee that the application process is equitable or results in a diverse set of applicants. Rather, RFP dissemination must be well-planned and targeted. When considering a dissemination strategy, consider the key goals of the grant and plan targeted outreach to match. Recognize, however, that no dissemination strategy will ever be all-encompassing and reach every perfect candidate.
	Detailed Questions	■ Which elements of the intended applicant profile are most important (e.g., geography, population served)? What dissemination strategies would be most likely to reach organizations with that profile? ■ How targeted or open is the dissemination strategy? ■ What other dissemination networks--especially networks of peer funders--are available? ■ What organizations or funders are doing similar work? Is it possible to leverage their networks for dissemination? ■ What organizations are most likely to be missed in the dissemination strategy? What's the best way to address those dissemination gaps?
	Steps to Take	■ Develop a plan to disseminate the RFP. Consider any or all of the following options for dissemination: + *The funder's own networks:* Push the RFP announcement to the funder's own networks, including past grantees, partner organizations and any other email distribution lists. Include in the announcement a clear description of the targeted applicant profile, and invite email recipients to share the RFP with organizations that may be a match. + *Other organizations' networks:* Reach out to funders, funder

		collaboratives and community organizations who specialize in areas similar to your grant goals, and ask them to share the RFP with their networks. Consider reaching out to organizations (including other grantmakers) who work in education, student support and whole child development. If the RFP targets certain geographical markets, reach out to the community foundations and place-based organizations in those markets. + *Scouts:* Invite past grantees and known subject matter experts to recommend organizations doing work that aligns with the grant goals. Reach out to the recommended organizations directly. + *Industry and trade media outlets:* Reach out to publications such as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Nonprofit Quarterly* and *Philanthropy News Digest* to place the RFP. + *Targeted social media:* Invest in sponsored social media posts targeted to individuals and organizations that meet the applicant profile.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "It's almost impossible to have a completely comprehensive outreach plan...communication and outreach is a big part of it, without going one-on-one to multiple grantees." - Funder ■ "It's hard to get the RFP in the hands of people who might otherwise might have access to, so how are you going to monitor that? What structures will be in place?" - Funder

Return to Top

C3. How will we field questions while maintaining equity among different applicants?	Best Practice	Fielding applicant questions can be unwieldy for funders, but the greater clarity applicants have the more likely proposals will be high-quality and aligned to the proposal. Also, a process that includes open communication and ensures that all applicants have access to the same information, will help to empower organizations with less direct contact to the funder.
	Detailed Questions	■ What elements of this grant program may be most unclear to applicants?

		■ What information can be included in the application materials to make those parts more clear? ■ How many questions does the funder expect to receive? What is the funder's capacity to answer those questions? ■ What strategies for fielding questions are we most likely to keep up with?
	Steps to Take	■ Develop a plan to address questions from potential applicants. The plan may include the following: + *Webinars:* Host at least one webinar to present the goals and requirements of the grant and field early applicant questions. Use these early questions to begin developing an FAQ document. Invite participants to register for the webinar in advance so that you can collect contact information, and share any updated FAQ or grant information with all participants. Also consider recording the webinar and posting it online for applicants who are not able to join (or learn about the RFP after the webinar). + *FAQs:* Write an initial FAQ document with preliminary questions (e.g., the questions surfaced during the webinar). Common FAQ questions include: ■ Who should apply? ■ What are the eligibility and selection criteria? ■ What is the application timeline? ■ How should applicants submit materials? ■ What materials should applicants submit? ■ Where should applicants direct questions? Update the FAQ regularly with any other questions that arise more than twice. Proactively share FAQ information with applicants; don't expect that everyone will see every update on a public-facing website. + *Email:* Consider providing an email inbox to field questions, with three caveats: a) Remember that providing an email address creates the expectation that it will be monitored. Make sure staff has the capacity to respond to emails. b) Be sure to maintain equity in responses to emails. Offering a public inbox gives organizations a chance for

		information even if they don't already have a relationship with someone inside the Initiative. Don't use the public inbox to give more thorough answers to applicants with existing relationships with the funder. And c) If applicants raise the same question more than twice, add that question to the FAQ document so that all applicants have the same information. + *Phone Line:* Consider providing a grant phone number with clear guidelines about what times it will be answered. The three caveats for an email inbox noted above apply to a phone line as well.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "When you can't ask questions or get more information, it makes it challenging to make your application specific and tailored." - Grantee ■ "One of the best mechanisms would be the equivalent of a bidder's conference or a bidder's webinar where you're actually creating an opportunity for potential applicants to hear more specifically about the goals, the process and have an interactive exchange with the funder or some other entity." - Funder ■ "We did a continuously updated FAQ so that when anybody asked a question, everybody had access to the answer." - Funder ■ "Everybody thought I was crazy to put my email address on there, but I'm obsessive about email and I knew I'd give the answer I wanted given if I did it." - Funder
	Resources	The NoVo SEL Innovation Award RFP FAQ document is short (just over one page), and includes mostly questions about application logistics (e.g., eligibility, completing the application form and deadlines). For an RFP that is relatively straightforward and pertains to content that your audience is familiar with, this is an ideal format for an FAQ document. The Pritzker Children's Initiative State Competition FAQ document also includes information about application logistics, as well as questions about the content applicants should include in their proposals. If applicants are likely to be unfamiliar with the RFP's subject matter, include questions similar to the ones in this sample.

		Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) posts an online FAQ for organizations interested in submitting grant proposals. The advantage of posting FAQs online is that it's fairly easy to update and share with potential applicants.

Return to Top

C4. How will we communicate with applicants about selection criteria and/or what an exemplar application looks like?	Best Practice	If the RFP includes clear selection criteria and exemplar applications, then funders will more likely to receive high-quality applications that match their vision for the grant. As an added benefit, if applicants are able to tailor their applications to the selection criteria, funders may be able to streamline the review process.
	Detailed Questions	■ What selection criteria will be used to identify high-quality proposals? What do applicants need to know about the selection criteria in order to submit high-quality proposals? ■ Will the selection criteria be included in the RFP? In an appendix? As part of the information webinar or FAQ document? ■ If the RFP asks applicants to create new partnerships or programs, should it provide sample acceptable configurations? ■ If this is a repeated grant program, is it possible to share previous years' winning proposals?
	Steps to Take	■ Include the selection criteria in a prominent part of the RFP materials. Label it clearly. If one criterion (or more) is most important, list it first. ■ Review selection criteria to make sure it's clear. For a fresh perspective, consider having someone who hasn't worked on the RFP review the criteria. ■ Check criteria for any terms of art or jargon and clarify what those terms mean in the context of the RFP. For example, the RFP asks for "innovative" proposals, explain what "innovative" means and provide a few examples, if possible. ■ If an applicant reaches out for clarity on the selection criteria, be sure to share that information publicly with all potential applicants. ■ Share exemplar proposals, if possible. + **EXAMPLE:** The NoVo Foundation administers the SEL Innovation Fund,

		which awards grants to educators and school districts implementing innovative SEL projects. As part of their current year application materials, NoVo provides a link to the proposals that were funded the previous year.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "We have pretty specific things in mind. It's 21 competencies, a scoring scale. We use it from the beginning. We put a ton of material out there. People have asked us why we published so much content around our RFP, and the reason is that those organizations who can convince our director to have lunch with them get access to a ton of insider intel that nobody else gets access to. So we put it out there, even if it's a lot, so that everyone has the same access." - Funder

Return to Top

C5. How long should we give applicants to complete a proposal?	Best Practice	It takes time for grantees to create high-quality applications in response to RFPs, especially if those RFPs are lengthy or ask them to create new partnerships and programs. By offering a short application window, a funder risks receiving poorly constructed applications, receiving boilerplate applications that a grantee already has on hand, privileging more-resourced organizations that can afford to hire professional grant writers or requiring applicants to reallocate staff time to focus on grantwriting work. A 6-8 week window is usually considered appropriate; although, that timeline should be lengthened for particularly involved RFPs.
	Detailed Questions	■ How much effort on the part of applicants is required to respond to the RFP? ■ Do applicants have to create new programs or partnerships? Is this work new to the field or just new to the applicant? ■ Are there elements in the multi-step process (e.g., LOI, eligibility survey) that require a lighter lift and could have a shorter timeline? ■ Do applicants have easy, immediate access to information required by the RFP (e.g., financial reports) or something that will take time and effort to gather (e.g., letters of support)?

	Steps to Take	■ Identify the amount of effort required for each step of the proposal. ■ Determine how much time is necessary to complete each phase. Be prepared to support organizations with fewer resources.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "The other thing is the timing. Some grants, you know they're coming, but you can't prepare anything until you see it. So it'll come out, and you have 6 weeks, and it's really stressful. I think 8 weeks for all of that stress is really necessary. When you're asking for such a big chunk of money, you want to be as detailed and prepared as you can be." - Grantee ■ "Give them enough time to complete a high quality application (e.g., 1.5 months). It's also nice to know a decision within a few months as opposed to 6 months or later." - Grantee

Return to Top

Part D: Review and Select

Overview: In the review and select phase of an RFP process, funders determine and apply the criteria they will use to evaluate each proposal's merits. Equity-minded funders should allocate sufficient time and resources to this phase so that they do not revert to implicit biases to make funding decisions, or rush through a review process that privileges applicants from well-known organizations.

D1. What eligibility requirements will applicants have to meet?	Best Practice	If there are specific eligibility requirements that an organization must meet to receive grant funding (e.g., 501(c)3 status), clearly state those requirements in the RFP. However, be careful not to conflate eligibility requirements with preferred grantee profile characteristics, as doing so may cause capable and eligible organizations from applying.
	Detailed Questions	■ What eligibility requirements are mandated by the foundation as a whole? ■ What eligibility requirements are set within the terms of this grant? ■ Are these elements true requirements or prioritized profile demographics? What is the best way to communicate the difference to grantees?
	Steps to Take	■ Identify any eligibility requirements set by the foundation as a whole. ■ Identify any eligibility requirements set by the terms of this grant. ■ Determine which elements are true requirements and which are prioritized profile demographics. ■ Clearly label all eligibility requirements in the RFP.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "The difference has to do with how much time and expertise the funder is willing to invest in developing an RFP that is really clear and has a lot of guidelines. We're only going to fund this kind of organization, or this kind of project. We're only doing grants of this size, so if you're a smaller org, don't waste your time. That's important in defining eligibility." - Funder
	Resources	The Family Math RFP included an eligibility checklist ("Requirements") to help potential applicants determine whether they meet the criteria to submit an application.

Return to Top

D2. What selection criteria will we use to identify grantees from the pool of applicants? How does that criteria change at different points in the review process?	Best Practice	Funders use selection criteria to identify successful grantees from the pool of applicants. Selection criteria should capture the essential elements of a high-quality proposal, reflect a continuum of quality and allow reviewers to distinguish between high- and low-quality proposals. Finally, selection criteria should help the funder identify proposals and organizations that are well-positioned to advance the goals stated in the theory of action.
	Detailed Questions	■ What does a high-quality proposal look like? What are the essential elements of a high-quality proposal? ■ What selection criteria captures these necessary characteristics? ■ What do the answers to each RFP question need to include to meet these criteria? In other words, what are "model" responses to each question? ■ What additional criteria are most important? Least important? ■ How do selection criteria rank against each other? If two applications are tied overall, which criteria are used to break the tie?
	Steps to Take	■ Reflect on the theory of action, including the problem statement, potential interventions and outcomes. ■ Identify the essential elements of a high-quality proposal. ■ Determine how to assess an applicant's readiness on each criterion. Consider what specific language or ideas you might be looking for in applications. ■ Identify which selection criteria are most important and any criteria that should be minimized during the review process (e.g., typos).
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Which selection criteria do you hold tight on, and which are you looser on? Perhaps there's criteria that are really necessary and others are more flexible. In the first stage, we developed really detailed rubrics, and it was a massive document we were really proud of, because we were thoughtful about all the selection criteria. It became a hindrance to our work, because it boxed us down. In the next stages, we were looser, and identified the criteria that matter the most." - Funder

Return to Top

D3. What capacity-building opportunities can we provide to applicants? At what points in the review process?	Best Practice	Offering capacity building support helps create stronger proposals and can be an early intervention into the field, even for applicants who aren't eventually funded. Capacity building support is especially important when a funder wants to diversify applicants beyond the usual players or when a funder wants to use an RFP to create something new in the field.
	Detailed Questions	■ What do organizations to create or build with this grant? Is the content or mechanism new to the field or new to our targeted audiences? If applicants have to form partnerships, are those relationships already in place? ■ What kind of experience does the funder want applicants to have during the application process? Can the funder provide them with support and/or capacity building, even if they are not selected as a grantee? Can support and capacity building help applicants keep the momentum going in their own organizations/districts without funding? ■ Would the funder be willing to offer planning grants and/or technical assistance to applicants who had strong concepts and buy-in but who did not make it to the final list to help them be ready for the next year?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine the need for capacity-building among potential grantees. Consider: + *The specificity of the program you hope to implement.* If grantees are expected to adhere to a detailed plan, then they may need help understand and build the intended program during the application process. + *The originality of the program you hope to implement.* If grantees are working on a problem that is new to the field or approaching a problem through a new lens or intervention, then they may need help understand the new approach during the application process. + *The structures you hope grantees to build.* If the grant program requires organizations to form new structures (e.g., partnerships, research platforms, etc.), then applicants may need help to design and

		develop those structures. + *The diversity of the grantee pool you hope to create.* If the funder seeks to support organizations that are new grantees, organizations that may be new to the field and/or organizations that may be under-resourced, then the funder may need to help those organizations design programs, build structures and write proposals as if the whole grant program was new. ■ Assess the funder's capacity to provide technical assistance and capacity-building supports. ■ Determine what capacity-building supports will be offered. Consider webinars, hands-on workshops, individual coaching, etc.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "The project was more about building quality and capacity. This was a classic case of asking for grant proposals for research configurations that had never happened before. He had the foresight to say, 'I can't just open this up, I have to help people get to a place where they can complete a quality application.' We learned along the way that quality and diversity were one and the same. Diversity is an aspect of quality. You don't want to diversity because of tokenism. You want to diversify for the richness of ideas. The reasons all lead to better grantmaking and outcomes." - Funder
	Resources	This facilitation plan describes a capacity-building workshop for the Hewlett Diffusion of Innovation project. The workshop was designed to help participants build the skills and partnerships necessary for success in the grant program while strengthening their grant proposals on site.

Return to Top

D4. How much time should we give ourselves to review proposals and make final selections? What resources (e.g.,	Best Practice	Proposal review is often the most time-consuming part of an RFP process, and most funders agree that it always takes longer than anticipated. Be realistic about how long it will take to review at each stage, taking into account the number of expected applications, the length of applications, the detail and depth of each question and the criteria used to assess each application. Estimate the number of person-hours required to review all applications, then add 25-50 percent.

staff hours, technical or content expertise, technology, etc.) do we need to review each application?	Detailed Questions	■ What are all of the stages of this RFP process? What type of review (e.g., eligibility confirmation, rubric, interview, etc.) is needed for each stage? What level of expertise is needed for each stage? ■ How many applications will be reviewed at each stage of the application process? ■ How much time will it take to review an application? ■ What trouble spots might arise during the process? How will these trouble spots lengthen the review time? ■ Are there any tools (e.g., application portal, shared spreadsheet, etc.) that might help to shorten the review time?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine how many applications the funder expects to receive. Then, estimate how many applications will be reviewed *at each stage* of the RFP process before finalists are selected. ■ Determine how much time it will take to review an application at each stage, taking into account the length of applications, the detail and depth of each question and the selection criteria reviewers will use. ■ Consider what expertise is needed at each phase of review. Is it worth a program officer's time to review basic eligibility? ■ Identify any tools that may expedite review time. ■ Calculate the number of person-hours needed at each stage of review and add (a rule of thumb recommended by peer funders: add 25-50 percent to the total estimated number of hours).
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "If you have several checkpoints along the way at which you're screening and knocking out--ineligibility and [low-quality] proposals-- you need increasing expertise the farther along you get for people to really understand the work and whether this is a good idea or strategy." - Funder

Return to Top

D5. What tools (e.g.,	Best Practice	Rubrics are important, especially for the early stages of review. No rubric is perfect,

a review rubric) do we need to create? What supports /training/calibration exercises do we need to provide reviewers?		however, especially if it's created before the funder sees any actual proposals. Be careful of holding too tightly to a rubric in lieu of other decision making processes. But be aware that changing the rubric after the submission deadline may result in proposals that do not align with your review criteria.
	Detailed Questions	■ What does a high-quality review rubric look like? ■ What review tools and criteria will reviewers use at each stage of the process? For example, the criteria used to review LOIs--if the funder chooses to use them--will be different than the criteria used to assess a proposal. ■ What training and calibration experiences should application reviewers receive?
	Steps to Take	■ Align review tools with the selection criteria included in application materials (To make the review process super transparent, consider including the review rubric in the application materials). ■ Creating a high-quality rubric takes time and practice, and as peer funders note below, it's hard to make a good rubric without seeing proposals. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good, and keep the following principles in mind: + A good rubric has a few key elements, including a set of review criteria, rating categories (i.e., Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent), language that describes what each rating looks like for a given criterion, and an overall rating. + Current and former teachers are experts at creating rubrics. Consider engaging a group of educators and ask them to help create a review rubric. ■ Test the rubric before beginning the review process. + Share the with reviewers and ask them to flag any ambiguous or confusing language. + Calibrate with reviewers using actual applications. During a call or meeting, have reviewers evaluate the same application using the rubric. Share and discuss each reviewers' ratings and reach consensus on the "right" answer.

		+ Have additional calibration meetings throughout the review process, as needed.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "The most important is the development of the rubric and norming before you get started. The rubric will be [bad], even if the smartest people develop it, and you won't be able to refine it until you see real applications. And when you have real applications, you're in a panic that you need to get them reviewed. As you're planning, give yourself time to do reviewing and scoring, as well as time to get the rubric going and everybody normed. You need at least two passes on the rubric. I recommend that each application is scored by at least 2 screeners for interrater reliability. When the two come up with different scores, we make them resolve that between them." - Funder ■ "In trying to be objective, we over-rely on the rubrics and criteria. Not a lot of face validity on the rubrics we created a month ago and never tested. There's some balance about using that an input and using your own decision making process." - Funder ■ "We had maybe 9 people at a time, so they had to be able to log in and rate and score people. What is harder is the qualitative stuff like, people don't score the same. People carry individual biases. No matter how consistent your matrix is, you'll have differentials. We can pull that out. Somebody was scored lower because that team member scores lower." - Funder
	Resources	There are abundant online resources available on creating rubrics, such as this set of guidelines from ASCD.

Return to Top

D6. What metrics should we review related to the RFP? (e.g., number of proposals, range of focus areas, geographic spread,	Best Practice	Tracking metrics related to the applications received can help a funder determine the success of an RFP and several aspects of the process, including dissemination and reach. Though each funder will look at different applicant metrics (see Advice from Peer Funders below for a considerable list), it is key to track metrics that align with the goals of the grant.

etc.)?	Detailed Questions	■ What are the primary goals for this grant? What metrics reflect success on those goals? ■ What metrics could funders track to ensure that the final grantee pool matches that applicant profile? ■ What metrics align with any goals for equity and inclusion?
	Steps to Take	■ Identify metrics that align with the key goals of the grant. Consider organization size, geography, financial resources, classification and more. ■ Identify metrics that align with the foundation's goals for equity and inclusion. Consider organization leadership and staff populations, populations served and more.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "We thought about criteria for focusing on DEI. What are we looking for in those partnerships, and who are they reaching that would hit the particular DEI objectives for the grant opportunity. We went through an exercise with a program officer to pull in the right criteria, such as the right percentage of students of color, organization leaders of color, board members of color, etc." - Funder ■ "We track the location [of each applicant]. We track the school systems implicated in the work. The type of intermediary--district, non profit, etc. Majority minority boards, a minority CEO, majority minority program teams. Whether they are a new partner to the foundation." - Funder ■ "When I look at the measures, we're looking at geography and quality. For seven thousand early childhood education spaces, what makes them quality? Licensed? Training? Information about new tools and resources? Using those tools and resources? It's hard to track "quality," but we can pay attention to those metrics. Our ultimate goal is not the metrics, though. It's to have those kids be reading ready by third grade." - Funder ■ "Who they were, what their mission is. We coded for the type of organization. We didn't go so far as to code for people of color on staff. It forced us to go back to the drawing board--who haven't we reached?" - Funder ■ "One really basic one is 'Have these groups had a grant with us before?'" - Funder

		■ "Our first measure of success was how many proposals of decent quality we received." - Funder

Return to Top

D7. What additional review processes should we consider, and when should we use them?	Best Practice	Though time consuming, additional processes like interviews and site visits add a chance for a funder to get to know applicant organizations beyond what's possible on paper, often helping to reduce review bias. Such processes are especially important in finalist review processes for larger grants. Some foundations also include "non-traditional" selection processes to promote equity. For example, peer-to-peer workshopping and reviews can both help build capacity and bring field voices further into the selection process.
	Detailed Questions	■ What information about an organization is difficult to assess on paper? What review processes can help gather that kind of information? ■ What additional review processes does the funder have the capacity to undertake? ■ How can the funder ensure that additional review processes are equitable and not burdensome to applicants?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine the need for additional review processes. Consider the size, complexity and equity goals of the grant. Identify any specific criteria that should be assessed through additional review processes. ■ Identify which review processes would most effectively assess those criteria. Consider interviews, site visits, performance tasks and more. ■ Assess the burden to applicants for the intended review process. Determine if the burden is commensurate with the grant size. ■ Clearly list intended review processes and the expected timeline (e.g., Finalist interviews; 6/17-6/21) in the RFP.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Bias works in most when we're moving too fast. We use shortcuts about who we know, who we trust, because we're in a time crunch. Interviews really help. You'll choose the people you already know if you don't give yourself

		some mechanism to get to know other person whose ideas you've just seen on paper." - Funders ■ "A site visit is always valuable. I'm always shocked when people fund us and they don't see us. If I can get people in the building, there's no way that they'll say no." - Grantee
	Resources	Rockefeller & CZI's Communities Thrive Challenge and MacArthur's 100&Change offer some unique ideas about conducting inclusive and rigorous selection processes. Both include some version of peer review *among and between* applicants as well as external "expert panel review." For example, in the 100&Change competition, applicants "within the same domain" actually score each other's proposals (see selection process description here). These are followed by technical reviews and then intensive support to 10 finalists from the Board to further flesh out ideas and select winners.

Return to Top

D8. When should we bring in external reviewers?	Best Practice	Bringing in external reviewers can be helpful in at least two scenarios: ■ The funder expects to receive a large volume of applications and lacks the internal capacity to review them all expediently; ■ The proposals require extensive technical and/or content expertise to adequately review. For example, if the funder anticipates receiving proposals from applicants involving research, it should enlist a panel of expert researchers to assess the quality of the application's methodologies. When bringing in external reviewers, be sure to calibrate on all review processes to ensure fair evaluation from all parties.
	Detailed Questions	■ How many applications does the funder expect to receive? How much time will it take to review each application? Does the funder have the capacity to review applications on the intended timeline?

		■ What technical and content expertise is necessary to fully evaluate each proposal at each stage? Does the funder have the necessary expertise in house? ■ Are external reviewers needed, and if so, at what stage(s) of the review process?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine the capacity and expertise necessary for an adequate review of proposals. Consider the number of applications expected, the length and detail of applications and the technical content of the grant program. ■ Determine the capacity of the funder to conduct reviews. ■ Identify the specific stages of the grant where external reviewers are needed. ■ Identify and invite potential reviewers.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Then we identify external reviewers and each proposal is reviewed by 2-3 external reviewers. They're all scholars who work in research institutions… When we solicit external reviewers, it's open. There are people we go back to time and again, but essentially our pool is everyone out there who can speak to what a project is trying to study...We hope that at least one person will have content and method expertise for the proposal topic." - Funder
	Resources	The Hewlett Diffusion of Innovation project used this tracker for all of its external reviewers. The Instructions tab provides clear steps for all reviewers to take, and the CalibrationLOI tab was used to compare all reviewers' scores on a single LOI.

Return to Top

D9. How and when should we provide proposal feedback to applicants?	Best Practice	Providing proposal feedback to applicants can be time consuming but has the potential benefits of improving the quality of future proposals, increasing applicants' trust in the funders' grantmaking system, and serving as an intervention into the field even for those not funded. Feedback can be tailored for each application (more effort) or general to the trends across all applications (less effort).

	Detailed Questions	■ Were there trends among the winning applications? Were there trends among the applications that didn't move forward? ■ Does the funder intend to run a similar grant program in the future? Would feedback be helpful to improve future applications? ■ Can the funder provide insight that will help organizations further their work, even without grant funding? ■ What capacity does the funder have to provide feedback at each stage? ■ In which stages is providing feedback most important? How detailed should the feedback be at each stage?
	Steps to Take	■ If there are trends among applications (both successful and unsuccessful), consider sharing those in a post to the website or email to applicants. ■ Think of the amount of time and resources applicants put into their proposals. If applicants put a lot of time into their proposals, or if they advance to the second or third stage of a multi-step application process, then it's important to honor that time by providing feedback. ■ Choose a format to provide feedback given the funder's capacity. + *Low-lift options include:* trends in successful/unsuccessful applications (as noted above); posting descriptions of successful applications to a public-facing website + *Heavier-lift options include:* 1:1 feedback calls with unsuccessful applicants; providing detailed written feedback from reviewers to each applicant
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "If an application is declined, giving feedback to the applicants is sometimes super helpful. Sometimes applications get denied because of lack of funding of the grantor side, but we never know that. The feedback loop doesn't exist; that's problematic." - Grantee ■ "We provide a set of generalist feedback. It's not as satisfying as specific feedback. But, we say, 'of the applications who moved forward, this is what they looked like. Of applications who didn't, this is what went wrong.' For applicants in the final round, we gave them a direct call and talked about what was right about the application." - Funder

		■ "We didn't build in the time for us to have feedback for everybody and decided not to give feedback. You want to give feedback but you get 30 proposals, and it's a lot of work. A major capacity draw. Because if you're trying to be clear, you've got to be equitable, comparing that feedback." - Funder

Return to Top

D10. How can we minimize bias in the proposal review process?	Best Practice	Without paying specific attention to minimizing bias in the review process, a funder is likely to find themselves with a final grantee pool that largely reflects previous grantees and/or organizations that are already well-known in the field.
	Detailed Questions	■ What are the equity goals for this grant? What does the intended final grantee pool look like? ■ What parts of the RFP and the review process that are likely to privilege certain organizations? ■ What approaches can reviewers and the funder take to minimize bias during the review process?
	Steps to Take	■ Identify selection criteria that may privilege more resourced organizations, such as particularly polished language. Minimize these criteria in the interest of equity. ■ Identify pieces of the rubric that may privilege certain organizations, especially those with a history with the funder. For example, a funder's previous grantee may know the specific language the funder uses to describe its work and will include it in their application. Another organization--not familiar with the funder--doing the same work may not know the specific language the funder uses. A review process that only looks for that specific language would privilege the prior grantee. Consider what changes and additions to the rubric will allow for more applicants to be successful. ■ Determine the intended grantee pool profile data. Consider demographics such as geography, organization leadership of color, marginalized populations served, etc. At each stage of proposal review, revisit the intended pool profile

		and ensure that the advancing applications fit with the ultimate goals. ■ Allow adequate time to review each proposal. Moving too quickly often encourages reviewers to focus on criteria that are easy to assess (e.g., page limits, typos, funder-specific language, etc.) and ignore a holistic evaluation of the proposal.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ “There were things that we had high tolerance for, considering program officer biases. Frankly, if it wasn’t really written well, we said that was okay. We had applicants from Puerto Rico writing in English. It’s easy to give someone points on a rubric if they use the same words you do. We have discussions around the ways to describe this work that are not the way we do. If they pull language off our website, it’s easy for us to see what they mean. It’s a perennial problem.” - Funder ■ “Two things: 1) Blinding. The technology’s not great yet, but you should cover the names of the applicants and any particularly identifying information. Anything that’s a dead giveaway. 2) After each selection event--screening, interviews, site visits--schedule time for program officers to review the data and make decisions.” - Funder ■ “We’re not sticklers on page limits, typos. Folks who use those as objective, they have a differential impact on organizations who don’t have time and capacity to do that kind of application because they’re doing other stuff. We don’t build quality of writing into our reviews.” - Funder

Return to Top

Part E: Post-award Expectations

Overview: In the post-award expectations phase, funders communicate the responsibilities and obligations of successful applicants under the terms of the grant. Generally, these include reporting on progress towards meeting project goals and objectives, collecting data on impact, sharing lessons learned with the field and other activities specified by the funder. The best practices in this section are not unique to open RFPs; rather, these are best practices that apply to a variety of grantmaking approaches.

E1. What are appropriate reporting requirements for grantees?	Best Practice	Be clear about reporting requirements, including what grantees should be reporting and how, as you are executing awards. Be sure to talk to grantees about the systems they already have in place to collect and report out on data and prioritize making reporting as easy as possible for grantees. Most organizations prefer clarity around reporting expectations, particularly in terms of format and deadlines. If grantees are expected to report anything especially rigorous (e.g., data from impact evaluations), be sure to set aside funding to support the extra level of effort.
	Detailed Questions	■ How frequently does the funder need to receive progress updates? ■ What level of rigor is the funder seeking in terms of evidence about progress and/or impact? ■ What evidence and/or common data does the funder need to see across the entire portfolio? ■ What does the funder know about the kind of data the grantees already collect and how often they collect it? ■ What kind of feedback is the funder prepared to give grantees?
	Steps to Take	■ Determine what can be tight vs loose. For example: + What questions need to be standardized across grant reports? What can be more flexible? + What types of information needs to be documented formally vs. shared verbally during regular check-in calls with grantees? ■ With grantees, set a regular cadence for check-ins: + Work with grantees to determine how often these should occur, based on the project design as well as the funder's internal deadlines. + Be clear with grantees about who is responsible for driving the

		check-ins and what types of conversations you expect to have (e.g., Informal troubleshooting on a semi-regular basis? Formal progress updates?). ■ Create a formal reporting template for the long-term; avoid making changes to the template as much as possible ■ Set clear timelines for formal reporting well in advance, so grantees can plan ahead. ■ Determine how to share feedback with grantees and be clear about those plans at the outset (e.g., do you plan to draft a written memo response? Hold informal feedback discussions?).
	Resources	For a basic grant reporting template, see here. This is the reporting template used by the NoVo Foundation to collect information from educators and districts that received SEL Innovation Awards.

Return to Top

E2. For multi-year grants, should funding be conditioned on submitting grant reports and/or other grantee performance?	Best Practice	With multi-year grants, it will be important to build an ongoing, trusting relationship with grantees. Conditional funding makes sense for multi-year grants, but be clear about what factors will go into renewal and/continuation decisions.
	Detailed Questions	■ Under what circumstances would you consider pulling funding from a grantee? ■ What processes can you put into place to ensure there are no surprises at the end of the grant period?
	Steps to Take	■ Walk through some scenarios to test scenarios (and limits) for continuing funding. Consider how to handle things like: + Turnover of key staff + Failure to meet milestones + Issues with project implementation or other changes in context + Misuse of funds ■ Don't wait until the end of the year to ask for a project update; consider

		asking for updates on a more regular basis so that so surprises show up in a final report. ■ Identify opportunities to observe the grantee in action and see the work for yourself (e.g., ask to sit in on meetings, conduct a site visit, attend convenings, etc.).

Return to Top

E3. What are the expectations for grantees to share their learnings with each other and the field?	Best Practice	Ongoing networking and convening of grantees allows grantees to learn and share from others doing similar work. Requiring grantees to share their lessons learned with the greater field could drive progress nationwide, further the impact of grant dollars and position the funder as a thought leader. Be cognizant, however, of how timing or demands of grantees' time could impact their work, and be clear on those expectations at the beginning of the RFP process.
	Detailed Questions	■ Would grantees benefit from working with and learning from each other? ■ Would the greater field benefit from the learnings of this grant program? ■ How can grantees network or convene in a way that is beneficial without being burdensome? ■ How can grantees share learnings with the field in a way that adds and does not detract from their work?
	Steps to Take	■ Identify expectations for grantees to share lessons learned. Consider, at minimum, any expected in-person convenings, virtual meetings, blog or video posts and materials-sharing. ■ Consult with grantees and other stakeholders about the value of these activities for grantees and for the field. ■ Consult with grantees about the timing and processes that would be least disruptive to their work.
	Advice from Peer Funders and Grantees	■ "Because the nature of the work we're doing is different, it would help other schools and communities doing similar work. It's really helpful to be able to meet others... On the back end, once the RFP process is closed, identifying

		who is going to be supporting the work, bringing folks together is always really helpful." - Grantee ■ "I felt like I could not say no [to the funder]. I wanted to stay on their radar....They convened us in December, and these are all people who work in schools, and we're in the middle of finals! Not the best time to go, but we went. So be conscientious of what you're asking for and the timing." - Grantee

Return to Top

E4. Will there be follow-on funding? How will this be clearly communicated upfront?	Best Practice	In some cases, funders may provide follow-on funding that is distinct from a multi-year grant. Consider follow-on funding for things like: ■ Planning grants or funding for pilots. ■ Ad hoc follow-on funding to support continuation or expansion, based on grantee performance during the grant period. ■ Bridge funding to support organizations through transition and/or wind-down. ■ Funding to give grantees more time to identify other funding sources.
	Detailed Questions	■ What progress the grantee has made? Is the grantee's progress satisfactory? ■ What level of follow-on funding would make a difference? How would additional funding help the grantee? ■ What will happen if the grantee doesn't receive follow-on funding? ■ How would follow-on funding help advance the foundation's goals and strategy? ■ What tradeoffs would the funder make by offering follow-on funding (i.e., what other work would the funder NOT be able to fund)?
	Steps to Take	■ Avoid making decisions about follow-on funding in isolation. Conduct a stock-take with the team at a logical midpoint to evaluate progress of all the grantees in the portfolio. + Discuss how each grantee is doing, what challenges they are encountering, what their needs are and how the funder can help address those needs.

		■ If follow-on funding is available, but depends on the grantee demonstrating specific needs, milestones or outcomes, be sure to communicate those expectations to the grantee at the outset so that they can be prepared to provide the requisite evidence. ■ If follow-on funding is not available, but the grantee needs it, think about other ways to support the grantee secure funding. For example: are there other funders that support similar work?

Return to Top

Appendix A: Interviews

We conducted interviews with the following individuals to inform this primer.

Funders

- Gerry Cobb, Pritzker Children's Initiative
- Mae Hong, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
- Jenny Irons, W. T. Grant Foundation
- Jenn Ng'andu, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Pras Ranaweera, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Joe Scantlebury, W. K. Kellogg Foundation
- Zoe Stemm-Calderon, Raikes Foundation

CZI Grantees

- Stacy Barr, Turnaround for Children
- Emily Bloomfield, Monument Academy
- Kara Bobroff, Native American Community Academy
- Pati Fernandez, Wediko Children's Services
- Bethany Little, Education Counsel
- Tania Loenneker and Sandy Nobles, Momentous Institute
- Talia Milgrom-Elcott, 100Kin10*
- Luma Muflah, Fugees Family, Inc.
- Mark Murphy, GripTape
- Rosemary Murrain, Center for Mind Body Medicine
- Jennifer Schneider, CASEL
- Liz Wolfson, GALS Inc.

Education First Focus Group Participants

- Joe Anderson, Senior Consultant
- Matt Bachand, Senior Consultant

- Adam Brumer, Senior Consultant
- James Liou, Senior Consultant
- Robert Medina, Consultant
- Lisa Towne, Principal

*Participant provided feedback via email rather than formal interview

Return to Top

Appendix B: Implementation Plan

Phase	Key decision points and/or tasks	Workplan stage											
A. Plan	Review organization values and mission												
	Develop theory of action, problem statement and impact statement												
	Share theory of action, problem statement and impact statement with stakeholders for feedback												
	Revise and finalize theory of action, problem statement and impact statement												
B. Design	Determine any grantee eligibility requirements and develop a profile of the intended grantee organization												
	Determine the size and duration of the grant												
	Map out the RFP application process, including any LOI or other gateways before grants are awarded												
	Draft the RFP and accompanying materials												
C. Launch	Determine how applicants will submit their applications and related materials (including vendor selection, if appropriate)												
	Develop and execute a dissemination plan to reach organizations that fit the intended applicant profile												
	Set up systems for equitably fielding applicant questions												
	Launch the RFP; field inquiries from potential applicants												

D. Review and Select	Develop selection criteria and draft initial rubrics												
	Determine who will be involved in reviews and/or whether external reviewers are required; invite as needed												
	Determine whether interviews, site visits or other review processes are needed; set up as needed												
	Review proposals and select grantees												
	Share appropriate feedback with applicants												
E. Post-award Expectations	Determine appropriate reporting requirements for grantees												
	Determine any expectations for grantees to share their learnings												
	Develop grant report templates and share with grantees, along with other expectations related to sharing lessons learned, participation in events, etc												

[Return to Top](#)

Appendix C: Equity-Related Design Questions

Phase	Key Design Questions	Advances equity?
A. Plan	2. What problem are we trying to solve with this RFP?	
	4. Has this idea been tested with eligible applicants? How does the idea match their needs and interests?	
	5. What risks must we consider? How might these risks be mitigated?	
B. Design	1. What is the profile (or profiles) of the applicants we are intending to reach with this RFP? What types of organizations? In what geographies?	
	2. Who (which orgs and/or individuals) is most likely to apply? What supports may be needed to broaden and/or deepen the applicant pool?	
C. Launch	2. How will we disseminate the RFP to potential applicants?	
	3. How will we field questions while maintaining equity among different applicants?	
D. Review and Select	3. What capacity-building opportunities can we provide to applicants? At what points in the review process?	
	7. What additional review processes should we consider, and when should we use them?	
	9. How and when should we provide proposal feedback to applicants?	
	10. How can we minimize bias in the proposal review process?	

Return to Top

Appendix D: Participant Experience-Related Design Questions

Phase	Key Design Questions	Positive applicant experience?
A. Plan	4. Has this idea been tested with eligible applicants? How does the idea match their needs and interests?	
B. Design	1. What is the profile (or profiles) of the applicants we are intending to reach with this RFP? What types of organizations? In what geographies?	
	2. Who (which orgs and/or individuals) is most likely to apply? What supports may be needed to broaden and/or deepen the applicant pool?	
	5. Given the size of grants, what are appropriate application demands and processes?	
	6. What does a typical RFP process with multiple review gateways look like?	
C. Launch	1. How will applicants submit their applications (and other related materials)?	
	2. How will we disseminate the RFP to potential applicants?	
	3. How will we field questions while maintaining equity among different applicants?	
	5. How long should we give applicants to complete a proposal?	
D. Review and Select	3. What capacity-building opportunities can we provide to applicants? At what points in the review process?	
	7. What additional review processes should we consider, and when should we use them?	

	9. How and when should we provide proposal feedback to applicants?	
E. Post-award Expectations	1. What are appropriate reporting requirements for grantees?	
	2. For multi-year grants, should funding be conditioned on submitting grant reports and/or other grantee performance? If so, what activities/tasks must grantees complete?	
	3. What are the expectations for grantees to share their learnings with each other and the field?	
	4. Will there be follow-on funding? How will this be clearly communicated upfront?	

Return to Top

Appendix E: Glossary of Terms

Equity: Educational equity has been defined as a system "in which every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, disability, family background or income, citizenship or tribal status." In the context of this primer, equity can best be understood as a set of business rules and organizational principles that promote fairness between potential grantees, places the experiences of grantees at the center of the RFP application process and, in some cases, privileges experiences and organizations led by people of color and/or organizations who are typically overlooked by traditional open RFP approaches.

Landscape Scan: A formal analysis of the state of the field a funder hopes to influence, used to learn about potential needs, opportunities and gaps

Letter of Intent or Inquiry (LOI): A tool to gather initial information about an organization's interest and ability to complete a task or solve a problem, usually used as a precursor to a full RFP and often used to winnow out unlikely candidates early

Request for Information (RFI): A tool used to gather general information without guarantee of funding, often used to collect data on the state of the field and/or organizations that may be primed for future partnerships

Request for Proposals (RFP): A tool to gather specific information about an organization's interest and ability to complete a task or solve a problem; usually the largest and most time-intensive part of the grant application process

Theory of Action: A blueprint for an organization's work; aligns resources (what an organization is doing or funding) with results (how exactly these investments lead to better outcomes)

Return to Top

Appendix F: Open RFP Strawperson Processes

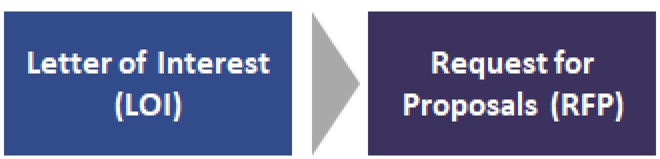
This appendix includes several sample open RFP processes that funders can use as a starting point when it begins designing an RFP. Note, many of the steps of these processes are modular in nature and can be inserted at different points in the process, or omitted entirely, depending on what works best for the funder and applicants. We encourage funders to be thoughtful about each step it includes and customize RFP processes.

Module Bank

Sample 1:

In this one-step process, the funder put out an open RFP and selected grantees directly from the initial applicant pool.

Sample 2:



The funder put out an open LOI then invited finalists to submit a full proposal. The funder selected grantees from the pool of proposals.

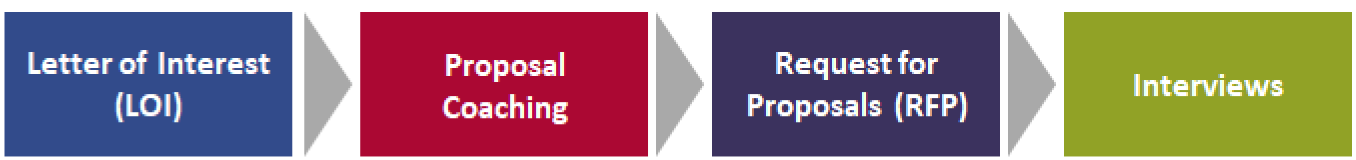
Sample 3:

The funder put out an open LOI then invited finalists to a capacity building workshop designed to help them strengthen their proposals and build skills necessary for success in the grant program. All finalists were invited to submit full proposals. The funder selected grantees from the pool of proposals.

Sample 4:

The funder put out an open LOI then used a survey to verify the partnerships identified in the initial applications. All verified partnerships were invited to submit full proposals. The funder identified finalists from the proposal applicant pool and interviewed each in order to a) get a better sense of the applicant's vision and capacity and b) provide feedback on the proposal. Finalists were invited to submit revised proposals based on feedback. The funder selected grantees from the pool of revised proposals.

Sample 5:



The funder put out an open LOI then identified promising applicants who may have structural disadvantages in writing full proposals. The funder assigned a consultant to coach those applicants through the remainder of the proposal process. All strong applicants were invited to submit full proposals, whether or not assigned a coach. The funder identified a set of finalists from the full proposals and conducted interviews to get a better sense of finalists' vision and capacity. The funder selected grantees from a combination of the proposals and the interviews.

Sample 6:

The funder put out an open RFI to get a better sense of the state and needs of the field and to identify potential grantees. The funder developed a theory of action and designed a grant program based on the learnings from the RFI and invited targeted organizations to submit full proposals. The funder identified a set of finalists from the pool of proposals and conducted site visits to get a better sense of finalists' vision and capacity. The funder selected grantees from a combination of the proposals and the site visits.

Return to Top