

## Request for Proposal

# Collaborative Opportunity Grants (COG)

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## Section I – Project Overview

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### 1.1 About APLU and USU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is a research, policy, and advocacy organization representing over 230 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations. The total includes 75 U.S. land-grant institutions, of which 19 are historically black institutions. Founded in 1887, APLU is North America’s oldest higher education association with member institutions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, Canada, and Mexico. Annually, member campuses enroll 4.7 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.2 million degrees, employ 1.4 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$42.7 billion in university-based research.

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a president-led network of public, urban-based research universities dedicated to improving urban health and reducing health disparities, strengthening urban economies, and developing a capable, diverse workforce for the 21st century. USU is led by a 15 member board composed of university presidents and chancellors that set policy for the organization. The board’ agenda focuses on three crucial areas or strands (Workforce, Health, and Strengthening Communities), each overseen by member presidents or chancellors. USU partners with Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to oversee a joint Office of Urban Initiatives.

### 1.2 About the *Collaborating for Change* Initiative

*Collaborating for Change* is a six-year initiative implemented by USU and APLU, and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to work with public urban research universities planning and implementing transformational—often disruptive—campus practices to advance student success. These transformations are particularly focused on admitting, retaining, educating, and graduating high need, traditionally at-risk students while reducing costs, reexamining campus business models, and fostering mutually beneficial campus-community engagements.

Collaboration, both on campus and off, is a powerful strategy to move the dial on student success. Through the initiative, APLU and USU seek to accelerate and scale transformative approaches to improve student success at member institutions. These solutions will integrate a holistic understanding of the student experience, from recruitment to completion, while leveraging efficient solutions and partnerships within a university’s entire community (both internally and locally). Universities will have the opportunity to apply and receive support through the project’s *Collaborative Opportunity Grants (COG)* to collaborate and share innovations that work.

### 1.3 Program Purpose

The *Collaborative Opportunity Grants (COG)* is designed to support emerging and/or new innovations that transform institutional practices, programs, policies, and culture to improve student success. Grants

will only be awarded to collaborative projects. This is the second call for proposals in a larger proposal process that will release RFPs in 2018 and 2019. The principal goals for the second round are to:

- 1) Identify emerging innovative practices that improve student success (e.g. access, retention, completion, etc.); and,
- 2) Support collaboration between public universities and external organizations that lead to meaningful and sustained change.

Awards will be made across five investment areas (See Section 2.2). These areas will support innovations that improve a student's experience and subsequent outcomes. Proposals must touch on one or more of the investment areas in order to be eligible for funding.

### **1.4 Process for Participation**

The process for participation is as follows: (1) institutions will submit proposals according to RFP guidelines; (2) a national advisory committee including, but not limited to, representatives from philanthropy, higher education, urban issues, organizational transformation, innovation, and student success will narrow the pool; and, (3) a subset of the expert committee will conduct follow-up reviews via phone or video conference if needed.

Selection criteria will include: (a) alignment; (b) innovation; (c) evidence of strong collaboration(s) that meaningfully contribute to institutional change; (d) sustainability including the potential for scale; and, (e) project outcomes and performance metrics.

### **1.5 Program Design**

A little more than \$1 million is available in the *COG* fund. Grants will be awarded to collaborative projects (Box 1, p. 5) that demonstrate promise at implementing innovations within a given investment area (Section 2.2, p. 7 ). Awards will be available for the next two years and institutions will have multiple opportunities to apply. **In this stage, institutions will receive up to \$50,000 to support promising and innovative interventions that work to improve student success outcomes.** Award duration is for one year with the potential for receiving additional funds through future RFPs. Institutions will have an opportunity to receive up to \$100,000 over the course of 2 years.

The second round of award decisions will be made no later than by the end of April 2017. **A total of 8 awards will be available.** Conditions for awards follow:

- The proposed project/initiative must demonstrate evidence of a collaboration in which meaningful institutional change is supported as related to student success.
- Collaborating organizations may include peer universities, community colleges, K-12 school districts, community-based organizations, government agencies, workforce boards, or local employers.

- Emerging innovations must align with at least one of the investment areas: engaging faculty, rethinking financial aid, leveraging community assets, aligning and engaging employers, and strengthening K-16 systems (Section 2.2, p. 7).

**Box 1:**

**What is Collaboration?**

All proposed projects/initiatives must be a collaboration between the university and another organization. Proposed collaborations must follow the conditions below.

- The applicant university must serve as the lead and at least one or more institution must serve as a partner.
  - Examples of potential partner organizations include but are not limited to: community non-profits, universities, K-12 school districts or individual schools, community colleges, government agencies, workforce development boards, local businesses or business associations, foundations.
- The collaboration must show evidence of working together.
  - Collaborations must demonstrate shared governance, responsibility, and financing across partners.
  - Proposed activities must be mutually reinforcing (e.g. aligned with a common agenda and/or goals related to student success).
- The nature of collaboration should break down divisions and span boundaries—internally and externally.
  - Internally: Collaboration should be cross-departmental, divisions, and offices (e.g. academic affairs, student affairs, IT, financial aid, etc.).
  - Externally: Collaboration should engage and span across to community group(s)/partner(s) organization(s) relevant to the proposed project (refer to list above).

Upon award receipt, grantees are required to submit evidence related to outcomes, an interim, and a final report throughout the duration of the award. APLU and USU will provide technical assistance to grantees through work-based meetings and other mediums (e.g. webinars).

**Questions?** If you are unsure about any of the conditions above, please contact us (Section 3.3, p. 10).

**GENERAL TIMELINE**

**Year 2017\***

**January:** Second round of RFPs

**February:** Letter of intent and proposal submissions

**March:** Proposal review and award decisions

**April:** Award announcements and signed grant agreements

**May:** Inaugural *Collaborating for Change* convening

\*Timeline is subject to change based on lessons gleaned from this proposal round.

### *Note on Future Funding:*

Years 2018 and 2019 will also include a call for proposals. Institutions that receive funding in 2016 will not be eligible to apply for funds in 2017. Institutions may apply for extension funding or new funding in 2018 and 2019. Timelines and details will be provided at a later date.

## **Section II—Eligibility & Investment Areas**

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### **2.1 Eligibility & Selection Criteria**

**Eligibility:** Applying institutions must be a USU or APLU member. Preference will be provided for urban universities. **Additionally, an institution may only submit one proposal.**

**Key Elements:** Applicants must demonstrate evidence of the following key elements in their transformative collaborative project/initiative:

**Alignment:** The proposed project/initiative aligns with one or more of the identified investment areas. The purpose of the proposed project/initiative is also aligned to your institution's expressed student success goals and priorities. The project should identify how outcomes and success measures align with institutional accountability measures and/or local community goals and initiatives.

**Collaboration:** The institution has engagement, capacity, and support for innovation and institutional change at all levels and across collaborating partners. Collaboration must be both internal and external. Internally, the project team spans across departments and divisions (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, financial aid, colleges/schools, advising, IT, etc.) and is well-positioned to carry out the proposed tasks within the proposed budget and timeframe. Externally, the proposed collaboration demonstrates a high level of shared responsibility, authority, and accountability across all parties.

**Innovation:** The project or practice presents an emerging approach to improving educational opportunity and outcomes for all students. The proposed project/initiative builds off and adds value to existing structures and integrates prior learning from previous attempts or failure. The project should demonstrate potential to push traditional theories, practices, and strategies related to student success. *For additional clarity on what is meant by innovation, please refer to Box 2.*

**Sustainability & Scale:** The project or initiative demonstrates the capacity to sustain and increase institutional change. This piece considers how the project/initiative is both internally and externally sustained (e.g. changes to practices and policies such as hiring, staffing, structural reorganization, business models, etc.). There is also evidence that specific practices may be ready to scale or replicate at other universities.

**Project Outcomes & Metrics:** The project or initiative has a clear assessment plan that includes consideration of both standard metrics and alternative measures to determine project success. Specific

mechanisms and practices are described that will be used to identify, track, and interpret data. This should include either or both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessing project outcomes.

## Box 2:

### What is innovation?

Innovation is the execution of new ideas, processes, services, partnerships, and/or products that work to transform existing structures and culture.

This initiative will invest in innovations that demonstrate the following elements:

- **Entrepreneurial:** the project assumes a level of financial risk new to the university that leverages costs and has potential for high rewards in terms of student success.
- **Prior learning:** Failure is a necessary part of innovation. The proposed project will cite specific instances in which change occurred as a result of both desired and undesired outcomes.
- **Student oriented:** The proposed initiative or project is student-centric and is oriented towards this group's perspective and experience.
- **Iterative:** The proposed project employs an iterative implementation process. Different stages of the innovative project are evaluated and improved upon on an ongoing basis.

**We will NOT fund projects in nascent stages (e.g., idea generation or planning projects) or well-established interventions (e.g., summer bridge programs).**

The proposed innovation should be past an early experimentation phase and be ready to begin some form of scale. The innovation should also leverage the expertise and strengths of a diverse pool of individuals, offices, and organizations.

## 2.2 Investment Areas

Institutions must align the proposed project/initiative with one or more investment area. Below are summaries of each investment area that provides context for what may be supported through the grant. If you are unsure how your project fits within one or more of the areas, please contact us (Section 3.3, p. 10).

### Investment Area 1: Engaging Faculty

Proposed programs or initiatives in this area should increase opportunities for, and/or improve the quality of, faculty engagement within student success efforts. We are particularly interested in programs that improve faculty capacity, training, and support for students and related success initiatives. We encourage proposed programs to have at least one dedicated faculty lead that will support and help shape the direction of the collaborative work. Potential projects may address curricular barriers, academic policies, academic advising, pedagogical techniques, mentorship, faculty incentive structures, and assessment/tracking of student outcomes. Potential partnerships may include collaborations with other universities, community colleges, consultants, community-based organizations, and local government agencies.

## **Investment Area 2: Rethinking Financial Aid**

Rethinking financial aid considers both academic and non-academic financial indicators important to student access and success. We are interested in supporting programs that move interventions and supports beyond traditional means of financial aid supports (e.g. grants and loans). This may include simplifying existing financial aid processes, diversifying funding sources or aid, transforming merit- and/or need-based aid opportunities, and alleviating specific costs that may prohibit college attendance such as housing, transportation, childcare, and food access. Potential partnerships may include collaborations with local housing agencies, food banks, public transportation providers, childcare providers, and banks.

## **Investment Area 3: Leveraging Community Assets**

Proposed programs or initiatives should touch on a student's broader support system in their community. A "community asset" can be any person, place, or organization that improves the quality of the student's experience. Potential assets include families, peers, community social workers, K-12 educators, guidance counselors, hospitals, libraries, workforce development boards, faith-based organizations, etc. Programs and initiatives in this area should consider how institutions develop meaningful partnerships and activities that improve not only academic readiness but social and emotional supports to strengthen student access and success.

## **Investment Area 4: Engaging Employers and Workforce Organizations**

Successful proposals in this area will align projects and actively engage in partnerships with local employers and workforce organizations, which could include but are not limited to industry associations and intermediaries and the public workforce system. Proposed projects should consider how employers may engage at any or all stages of the student experience. Potential projects may focus on degree planning/development, course development/placement, identification and acquisition of skills and competencies/learning outcomes aligned with industry needs based on labor market information, design and access to rigorous work-based learning opportunities design, leveraged employer assets to strengthen programs of study (such as equipment, facilities, and instructors), employment opportunities while enrolled, career advising, student-level data systems that leverage workforce data, and job placement post-completion. Strong proposals will demonstrate evidence that employers and workforce related organizations will have an active role beyond an advisory capacity.

## **Investment Area 5: Integrating & Strengthening K-16 Systems**

Successful proposals in this area will focus on better integrating and strengthening K-16 systems to improve student access, success, and completion. With respect to this grant, "systems" encompass the various access points and relationships into and through the university. Such systems may be external to the university (e.g. K-12 alignment, community college partnerships, employer-supported programs, etc.) or internal (e.g. advising and placement processes, admissions procedures, etc.). This investment area will consider key academic and non-academic transition points. We are also interested in how barriers may be reduced and pathways may be seamlessly aligned and strengthened.

### What will NOT be funded?

- Stipends for faculty\*
- Professional association membership dues/fees
- Job/career fairs
- Endowments or similar funds
- Scholarships and other forms of direct aid to students
- Gift certificates or cards
- Text books and/or related course materials
- Internships/apprenticeships
- Fundraising events
- Capital costs

\*Stipends refer to any supplemental funding beyond salary. Course releases and summer support are allowable.

## Section III—Submission of Proposals

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### 3.1 Letter of Intent (LOI)

A Letter of Intent (LOI) from each interested USU or APLU institution must be submitted no later than 5pm (EST) on January 25, 2017. The LOI should state your intent to respond by the proposal deadline. Letters of intent must not exceed one page and should include the following information:

- ❖ Name of applicant institution.
- ❖ Name of project director/coordinator, including phone number and e-mail address.
- ❖ Identification of which investment area(s) you will apply to.

### 3.2 Proposal Narrative and Selection Criteria

In its proposal, each applicant should address each selection criteria by answering fully each section below. Applicants must identify which investment area(s) their project applies to and how the proposed project is innovative in addressing that topic.

#### A. Alignment

**Significance:** Discuss the university's overall commitment to increasing student access, retention, and success while finding significant cost efficiencies utilizing evidence-based decision making. Describe how the proposed activities align with the university's student success efforts and one or more investment area(s) of the Collaborative Opportunity Grant.

- How does the project align with institutional accountability processes and practices?
- How are, or will, efforts leverage wider changes across the university and within the local community to further the institution's ability to achieve its goals in this area?
- Why should this institution be selected?

## B. Collaboration

**Project Design & Capacity:** Provide a summary of the project's overall design and how it achieves meaningful and mutually reinforced collaboration internally and externally. Please include details of all shared goals, activities, staffing, and data. Explain the overall management structure, timeline, and key personnel qualifications and time commitment involved in the project/initiative's implementation.

- What specific mechanisms will be considered and deployed for decision-making? Describe how the project design, staffing, and financing will align both internal and external collaborations.
- What overall strategic communication strategy will be created that will establish formal and informal communication channels among key stakeholders?

**Engagement & Buy-In:** Provide evidence that there is a collective will or agreement among key stakeholders to participate and ensure the project's success.

- What existing or emerging mechanisms (e.g., agendas, initiatives, etc.) are in place to foster strong collaboration and buy-in from key stakeholders, and build new champions and networks?
- What role will students play in the project/initiative?

## C. Innovation

**Scope & Originality:** Describe the innovation(s) that are the focus of the project. In the description, please provide a short narrative of the innovation's life cycle to date, including the design and implementation, engagement of key stakeholders, and some evidence of promising student success outcomes.

- How is this project pushing boundaries around higher education's understanding of student success?
- How is the project changing policies, processes, and organizational structures at your institution and with your collaborating partner(s)?

**Elements:** Describe how the innovation aligns with the identified innovation elements (Box 2, p. 7). How does the project:

- Assume an entrepreneurial approach in leveraging costs and potentially producing high rewards
- Integrate lessons learned from previous implementation efforts
- Include students and/or the student perspective into planning and implementation; and,
- Exhibit an iterative approach that builds off and/or adds value to existing structures?

## D. Sustainability

**Institutionalization:** Explain how the institution plans to finance, sustain, and institutionalize the proposed project/initiative.

- How will infrastructure costs such as human capital, data, and resource development be determined and addressed to further sustain and institutionalize the project/initiative?

- What other leveraged resources from strategic partners will be identified?
- What roles and responsibilities will key partners play in sustainability efforts?

**Scale:** Identify evidence that the innovations are ready to scale or identify other enabling conditions that need to be addressed before scaling.

- What are the specific steps and approaches the team intends to deploy in an effort to scale (internally and externally)?
- What new scaling partners, networks, and funding will be pursued to spread and endure the innovation?

## E. Project Outcomes & Performance Metrics:

**Outcomes/Assessment:** Please describe your assessment approach. More specifically, if applicable, identify the population(s) you are supporting as well as any standard metrics or alternative measures that will be used to determine project success.

- How will project results be identified, collected, and tracked? Include quantitative and qualitative measures.
- What additional data points or outcomes will be monitored in addition to select key performance indicators to be reported throughout the grant (e.g., number of students served, retention, etc.)?

### 3.3 Point of Contact

Shannon Looney

Project Manager, Urban Initiatives

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)/Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)

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### 3.4 Proposal Delivery

One electronic copy (e.g. PDF or word) should be emailed to the Project Manager.

### 3.5 Proposal Timeline

Interested respondents must submit a proposal no later than 5pm (EST) on **February 24, 2017**. APLU/USU reserve the right to not consider proposals received after this time.

The anticipated timeline is as follows:

RFP release:	January 11, 2017
Optional information session I (general questions):	January 19, 2017
Letter of Intent (LOI) due:	January 25, 2017

Proposals due:  
Selections announced:

February 24, 2017  
April 2017 or earlier

### **3.6 Proposal Format**

Proposals should be no longer than 5-8 single-spaced pages (excluding CVs, budget information, and appendices). The submission package must include:

- Cover Page (see 4.1)
- Executive Summary (1 page maximum, 12 point font)
- Proposal Narrative(see 3.2, please address each of the selection criterion)
- Indicate which information contained in the proposal is confidential/proprietary
- Detailed Budget (see 4.2)
- Budget Narrative (see 4.3)
- Curriculum Vitae: Provide a CV for the project director/coordinator and key personnel who would participate in the program. Individual CVs should not exceed 5 pages.

### **3.7 Evaluation & Monitoring**

Each site will be required to submit data and progress reports based on a schedule provided upon award receipt. The APLU/USU project manager will schedule site visits over the course of the grant to meet with stakeholders and monitor progress.

### **3.8 Follow-up/Additional Evidence**

APLU/USU may require a teleconference with the institution in the final stages of the selection process. APLU/USU may also request additional evidence on any of the responses provided in the proposal.

### **3.9 Revision of the RFP**

The right is reserved, as the interests of APLU/USU may demand, to revise this RFP prior to the date set for receiving proposals. Such revisions, if any, will be announced by amendment to this solicitation. Copies of such amendments, as maybe issued, will be furnished to all institutions. If the revisions are of such a nature as to mandate material changes in information requested, the date set for receiving proposals may be postponed by such number of days as, in the opinion of APLU/USU, will enable the institutions to revise their proposals. In such cases, the amendment will include an announcement of the new date for receiving proposals.

### **3.10 Cancellation of the RFP**

APLU/USU may cancel this RFP, in whole or in part, at any time before signing a contract. Issuance of this RFP creates no obligation on the part of APLU/USU to award a contract.

### **3.11 Costs of Proposal Preparation**

APLU/USU will not pay any costs the institution may incur in responding to this RFP, including those associated with proposal preparation and demonstrations. APLU/USU assumes no liability for costs or damages incurred by the institution during or resulting from this RFP process.

### **3.12 Acceptance/Rejection of Proposals**

APLU/USU reserves that right to accept/reject any and/or all proposals, in whole or in part, received as a result of this RFP or to negotiate separately with any sources whatsoever in any manner necessary to serve the best interests of the Collaborating for Change initiative.

### **3.13 Proposal Opening**

There will be no public opening of the proposals. Proposals will not be returned to the institutions.

### **3.14 Additional Terms**

Participation in the RFP process is the institution's sole decision. Although APLU/USU intends to adhere to the process as stated herein, they reserve the right to modify the process, requirements, and/or timetable. The RFP should not be construed as a contract to purchase services, and APLU/USU shall not be obligated in any manner until a written agreement has been duly executed, prior to the commencement of any work. Receipt of proposal by APLU/USU will be considered acceptance of these terms and conditions.

Each institution represents and warrants that is available to participate in the collaborative awards program as outlined in the RFP in a professional manner and, furthermore, that is under no conflicting obligations that may interfere with its duties to APLU/USU because of work it may have undertaken with others if its proposal is accepted or that it has disclosed any potential conflicting obligations.

## **Section IV—Supporting Documents**

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### **4.1 Presidential Commitment Letter**

A one-page letter/statement of commitment to be signed by the President or Chancellor highlighting his/her commitment to the initiative.

### **4.2 Collaborating organization(s) Commitment Letter**

A one-page letter/statement of commitment to be signed by identified collaborators/partner organizations.

### **4.3 Cover Sheet**

See Appendix.

#### **4.4 Budget Template**

The budget template is to be completed and included in the application package. The template includes a tab summarizing project costs and a tab requesting itemized/detailed costs.

#### **4.5 Budget Narrative**

Please provide a one-page description of the budget and how funds will be dispersed.