



A STUDENT-CENTERED VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Last Updated:  
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### **Notice of Funding Availability: Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge Grants**

The application deadline for the Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge Grant has been extended to 5 p.m. Monday, April 5, 2021.

In spring 2019, Governor Phil Murphy unveiled a bold vision for higher education outlined in the State Plan for Higher Education, “[Where Opportunity Meets Innovation: A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education.](#)” Immediately following the release, higher education stakeholders, including institution and community leaders, faculty, staff, and students, formed working groups to develop high-impact strategies that would help New Jersey achieve its goal of 65% of working-age residents attaining a high-quality credential by 2025 (65 by 2025). This goal was prioritized in the state’s talent development plan, Jobs NJ, released in January 2020.

In March 2020, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) released the working groups’ [vetted best practices](#) on making college more affordable and accessible, closing equity and attainment gaps, and improving the safety and inclusion of campus communities. The vision remains that every New Jerseyan, regardless of life circumstances, should have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality credential that prepares them for a successful future. In implementing these strategies, state and college leaders must focus on populations that have been historically disadvantaged, including underrepresented minorities, low-income students, and working age adults. Many of these populations were among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marking the second anniversary of the release of the State Plan for Higher Education, Governor Murphy is committing nearly \$30 million of the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF II) to higher education, which was hit with significant financial burdens during the unprecedented public health emergency. This includes \$28.5 million to launch the Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge (Challenge Grants), which will award grants to public and private institutions to implement the working groups’ vetted best practices that will invest in students and increase college completion. In implementing these practices, institutions must focus on populations that have been historically disadvantaged, including underrepresented minorities, low-income students, and working-age adults. Many of these populations were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, which resulted in declines in enrollments, challenges to student success, and high unemployment figures.

GEERF II is provided through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA). The funds are provided to those that have been “most significantly impacted by the coronavirus” in order to “support their ability to continue providing education services to their students and to support the “on-going functionality” of these entities.” For more information about the GEERF, visit the Department of Education’s website at: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/governors-emergency-education-relief-fund/>.

**Purpose:**

New Jersey has the opportunity to transform higher education by prioritizing student needs for postsecondary education and ensure its workforce will be ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow’s post-pandemic economy. This is an innovative, competitive grant program designed to encourage institutions of higher education to implement sustainable best practices that boost student success and lead to a measurable impact on college completion. The grants will require institutions to focus on systemic reforms that will be sustainable over time. These Challenge Grants will enable institutions to integrate best practices vetted by the working groups.

**Eligibility:**

This challenge to implement vetted best practices will be open to all public and independent public-mission colleges that receive state operating aid. OSHE will seek to award grants in each of the five overarching categories of the State Plan for Higher Education, subject to receipt of applications, and will also seek to award grants in each region of the state.

Institutions may apply for a grant up to a certain amount based on Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) size category classifications.

IPEDS Size Category	Maximum Grant Award
Small (4,999 or fewer)	\$500,000
Medium (5,000-9,999)	\$1,000,000
Large (10,000 or greater)	\$1,500,000

The final amount awarded will vary based on the number and quality of applications. Institutions may be asked to revise their budgets and projects based on the final amount awarded.

This is a competitive grant award and applications must meet a minimum threshold score to be eligible for funding. Based on the federal guidelines, grant funding must be expended by September 30, 2023.<sup>1</sup>

**Challenge Grant Categories:**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/governors-emergency-education-relief-fund/>

OSHE recognizes that student success requires a comprehensive approach, from ensuring that students are adequately prepared to take on college-level coursework to providing affordable pathways to ensuring that they have adequate supports and to fostering a sense of belonging while enrolled. Each of these components is critical - and often interconnected - to ensuring student success.

Institutions will select from a menu of interventions (see Appendix A) that reflect the five overarching categories of the State Plan for Higher Education. These best practices were recommended by working groups of higher education professionals and stakeholders that Governor Murphy convened by executive order. OSHE will seek to award funding in each of the five categories, subject to the quantity and quality of applications received. **Each institution may submit an application seeking up to the maximum grant amount for their institutional size.** However, it may address more than one challenge grant category for use of funds. For example, a medium sized institution may choose to apply for \$500,000 for an intervention within the 'On-ramps to College' category and \$500,000 for an intervention within the 'Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment' category. The content for both of these categories should be incorporated within one submission from the institution in accordance to the requirements in the 'Application' section below. Institutions can focus on categories they feel will have the biggest impact on their student population.

#### **Application:**

Applications from each institution must include two documents: 1) Challenge Grant Narrative; and 2) Budget Justification Template. No more than one complete application may be submitted per institution.

#### *Narrative*

The narrative portion of the application must be submitted as a single PDF by each institution. Use the headings listed below within the application. Institutions must abide by the word limit indicated per section. Any information provided beyond the word limit will not be reviewed.

- **Application Cover Sheet:** See Appendix B for details.
- **Letter of Support:** The Institution's President/Chancellor must submit a one-page letter of support indicating the institution's commitment and capacity to carry out the grant proposal.
  - Word limit: 500 words.
- **Statement of Need:** Provide an explanation of the need for this project and describe the student population that will be served under the project, with a focus on how the institution/student population has been most significantly impacted by COVID-19. Note that this project should not supplant another initiative but demonstrate a bold and innovative approach to an identified barrier.
  - Word limit: 500 words per Statement.
  - One statement of need must be submitted per each State Plan category for which an institution applies.

- **Commitment to Equity:** How will this project take an equitable approach to serving students with the greatest needs, particularly in addressing those student populations most impacted by COVID-19?
  - Word limit: 250 words.
- **Project Goals:** List the goals of the project and describe how they align with the institution’s goals and State Plan for Higher Education. Detail how this project proposal will meet the needs identified. Goals should be results-oriented.
  - Word limit: 250 words each.
  - One goals statement must be submitted per each State Plan category for which an institution applies.
- **Project Activity Plan for “Insert Menu Name”:** Provide a brief description of your institution’s proposed project plan for each intervention selected from the menu of options. Indicate how the institution would successfully implement within the grant cycle, including suggested project activities with clear ties to the budget proposed, parties responsible (person or office) for implementing, and time-table.
  - Word limit: 750 words each.
  - One project activity plan must be submitted per each State Plan category for which an institution applies.
- **Project Evaluation:** Include how the institution plans to evaluate the impact of the grant with baseline data, appropriate milestones, and measurable impacts. Also, include the number of students impacted by the project (directly and indirectly).
  - Word limit: 500 words each.
  - One evaluation of project statement must be submitted per each State Plan category for which an institution applies.
- **Project Innovation and Sustainability:** Describe the innovations that the project will introduce to campus and/or how it will innovate pre-existing initiatives to generate stronger results. Detail how the institution will sustain the project at the end of the grant cycle, how the findings will be disseminated, and how this project will lead to long-term, sustainable change at the institution.
  - Word limit: 250 words each.
  - One sustainability and innovation of project statement must be submitted per each State Plan category for which an institution applies.

### *Budget*

The budget portion of the application must be submitted as an Excel spreadsheet utilizing the template provided. For interventions across state plan categories, institutions should complete the appropriate tabbed document (I.e. interventions on ‘Student Success’ should align with a budget template on the “Student Success” tab, etc.).

A key component of the budget template is the field designated for the “Narrative Description.” For each category of budgeted expenses, institutions must provide a “Narrative Description” which consists of a detailed list of, and justification for, each expense, including how each directly relates to the Project Activity Plan and addresses COVID-19 impacts. While the menu of

options provides examples of how institutions can utilize funding, institutions will need to provide a further breakdown within the categories in the budget template. The funding should be clearly tied to grant deliverables and any items charged must be grant specific. For specific guidance for what should be provided for the content of the 'Narrative Detail' are outlined in the "Directions to Complete" tab within the budget template provided. If the "Narrative Detail" cannot be provided within the space allowed within the template, institutions may submit a secondary spreadsheet with this detail, but all submissions must be in an Excel spreadsheet format.

In recognition of the capacity constraints caused by COVID-19 and to increase the potential for grant successes, institutions may utilize funding to support capacity building for items like salaries. Salaries and Benefits may include costs associated with expenditures for employees whose services are directly related to the Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge grant/intervention selected. The justification for the inclusion of these employee salaries should be tied directly to activity plan. However, no more than a combined total of 25% of the total grant amount may be utilized for this purpose. In utilizing the funding for capacity, institutions should be aware that this is one-time funding and notify anyone potentially hired with these funds that they will not be available past the grant expenditure deadline.

Funding must abide by state and federal guidelines. The menu of interventions (Appendix A) illustrates examples of how funding could be used. The U.S. Department of Education's website provides additional information on how GEERF funds can be used under the CARES Act.<sup>2</sup>

Link to budget template: <https://www.nj.gov/highereducation/documents/excel/omic-budget.xlsx>

### **Relationship with State**

The OSHE is responsible for overseeing the application process, selecting Challenge Grant recipients, disbursing funding to the selected institutions, and convening the grantees to share best practices and outcomes from utilizing the grants.

Grant awardees will be expected to submit semi-annual progress reports detailing budgetary information, work progress, student outcomes, and emergence of challenges or impediments to the institution's success until the funding has been fully distributed. Grantees will be expected to participate in statewide gatherings to share best practices and strategies from their participation in the Challenge Grants. The grant agreement with selected institutions will be subject to the terms and conditions set forth in Circular 07-05-OMB: Grant Agreements – Agency Contracts.

### **Deadline for Submission:**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/governors-emergency-education-relief-fund/>

The above requested information should be submitted as two files (one PDF of the narrative and one Excel spreadsheet of the proposed budget) to OSHE **no later than April 5, 2021 at 5 p.m.** **This is an extension from original deadline in notice.** Submissions may be emailed to OSHE@oshe.nj.gov with the subject line “OMIC Grant Funding – (Name of Institution)”. OSHE will confirm receipt of application. Late applications will not be accepted.

Questions about this notice of fund availability should also be directed to [OSHE@oshe.nj.gov](mailto:OSHE@oshe.nj.gov).

**Additional Resources (NEW):**

On March 16, 2021, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education held an informational webinar on this grant opportunity. To view the webinar, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4BPmaibxkQ>

A list of question and answers resulting from the webinar is also available at:

<https://nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/GEERII-FAQ.pdf>

**Appendix A  
Menu of Interventions**

<b>Menu of Interventions*</b>	<b>Examples of Funding Uses**</b>
<u><a href="#">Creating On-ramps to College:</a></u>	
<p>Not all students have access to pre-college opportunities. Racial and demographic equity gaps, exacerbated by COVID-19, persist in college enrollment. Funding in this category would be used to plan for piloting and/or scaling up programs aimed at early exposure to college with a focus on priority populations (such as underserved minority communities, etc.).</p>	<p>These funds can be used to: investigate college-level mastery best practices and models like Modern States to help students obtain college credit; add support services to dual enrollment programs or plan for a more comprehensive dual enrollment model; evaluate/audit current policies and advising models to incorporate alternate methods of earning credit; launch marketing campaigns to increase awareness of pre-college options; and/or create a pre-college program (Governor’s School, Accessing Careers in Engineering, and Science (ACES), summer bridge program).</p> <p>Funding may also fall under communications/marketing outreach to current and prospective students and shipping/postage.</p>
<p>Pilot year partnership for institution to offer an innovative dual enrollment model, such as PTECH or Early College, targeting low-income students and encouraging students to earn a year of college credit prior to graduating.</p>	<p>Funding can be used to assist with cost of credits for students; re-evaluating selection processes to allow for multiple measures for student eligibility; targeted outreach to student populations; supports for students to complete dual enrollment; and/or the creation of an institutional data system for tracking dual enrollment.</p>
<u><a href="#">Making College Affordable:</a></u>	
<p>Many students are unable to complete their degree due to the material hardships experienced. Institutions need to better connect students with these resources, and institutions can utilize the step-by-step guide</p>	<p>Funding to be used for survey and/or any start-up costs for material hardships initiatives, such as stocking a food pantry, developing materials for faculty/staff to use in outreach, providing training for faculty/staff on connecting to local resources, and/or developing open education resources for students.</p>

<p>from the working group to better facilitate the connection to resources available.<sup>3</sup></p>	
<p><u><a href="#">Fostering Student Success:</a></u></p>	
<p>Developmental courses slow student progress toward a degree and frequently prompt students to drop out. The co-requisite model enables students to receive extra help while taking a college-level course, which provides credit towards their degree, making that support useful for students.</p>	<p>Funding can be used to plan and establish a co-requisite instruction program; evaluate and redesign the developmental education structure; training for staff and faculty; and/or increasing academic supports for students in co-requisite courses.</p> <p>Funding may also fall under hardware, software, equipment rental/purchase, consultant services for online remote learning, shipping/postage, subscriptions for student learning tools.</p>
<p>Institutions can develop and implement prior learning assessment (PLA) procedures in collaboration with NJ PLAN, the organization that serves as the clearinghouse for credit for prior learning initiatives.</p>	<p>Funding can be used to train faculty and staff of PLA portfolio development and review; create student focused outreach to market their PLA initiative to current prospective students; and/or use the funds to create new portfolio development courses to assist students in preparing a quality portfolio to highlight the prior knowledge and skill as it relates to program and course outcomes for which they seek to gain credit for.</p>
<p>Institutions will implement a multi-intervention model by proposing a set of at least three interventions to support student success. Each proposal should include at least one intervention that serves as an advising or mentoring approach.</p>	<p>Funding can be utilized to develop and restructure advising/mentoring at institution, such as proactive advising; creation of new support structures; and/or develop a real-time data system to monitor student success.</p>
<p><u><a href="#">Promoting Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments:</a></u></p>	
<p>Students must feel safe and supported in their learning environments and a sense of belonging on campus. Institutions can get support for implementation of campus climate survey dissemination and the</p>	<p>Funds can be used for software for dissemination; incentives to stakeholders for participating; staff support for analyzing/reporting; printing and/or event to release results.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Public institutions may want to consider utilizing the Hunger-Free Campus Grant funding to address food insecurity. Institutions may not use state and federal funding for the same purpose. For example, if an institution receives funding for Hunger-Free Campus Grants, they cannot also utilize funding for same purpose and activities within the Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge.

<p>planning and implementation of an action plan that utilizes the survey data, a key priority in new legislation passed by the state.</p>	<p>Funding may also fall under materials and supplies (PPE); consultant services for remote learning or cleaning, subscriptions (counseling software).</p>
<p>Institutions can create safe and affirming spaces both on campus and in a virtual campus environment.</p>	<p>Funds can be used for switching restrooms to gender neutral; creating gender neutral housing communities; quarantine housing, updating data systems to allow students to use names other than legal first names; establishing/expanding a multicultural center; creation of committee/auditing of current policies to be more inclusive; and/or support for peer-to-peer programming.</p>
<p>Institutions can implement professional/educational development opportunities to help faculty and staff promote inclusive and more diverse campus environments.</p>	<p>Funds can be used for the creation of a tiered mentoring program; contracting with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider who offers strong training resources (such as the ones mentioned in the guidebook provided by the working group).</p>
<p>Institutions can put forth elements of the implementation guide on recommendations set forth by the Taskforce on Campus Sexual Assault:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention and education,</li> <li>• Investigation and adjudication, and</li> <li>• Community collaboration.</li> </ul>	<p>Funds can be used for conducting an evaluation of the investigation &amp; adjudication model, which may not have been adapted to an online environment; staff/faculty education and training of the process/resources; incorporating cultural relevance into programming; programming/partnership with community resources; and/or awareness building campaigns.</p>
<p>Institutions can enhance and ensure equitable access to mental health supports and resources on campuses and virtually to all faculty, staff, students, and community members.</p>	<p>Funds can be used to expand mental health services and personnel; provide crisis response and intervention training; and/or programming to boost mental health of students, staff, and faculty.</p>

<u>Cultivating Research, Innovation, and Talent:</u>	
<p>Institutions can provide supports to increase the number of students participating in undergraduate research, which was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Funds can be used to provide seed funding for student projects; funding for students to attend professional conferences and present their work; and/or to grow partnerships with business and industry using student researchers as a main component of that partnership.</p> <p>Funding may also fall under hardware, software, conferences and meetings, communications/marketing, equipment rental and purchase.</p>
<p>Institutions can establish supports and mechanisms to grow student entrepreneurialism.</p>	<p>Funds can be used to host seminars or training for faculty/staff and students around how to be entrepreneurial; to develop new or modify existing academic, co-, or extra-curricular programs on campus; host startup seminars, workshops with alumni or industry partners; and/or linking various incubators in the state with institutional faculty/staff/students.</p>
<p>Institutions can build capacity and support for institutions to expand experiential learning (EL) opportunities for students.</p>	<p>Funding can be used to acquire or develop a technological tool enabling them to centralize EL information, provide data and information on the quality and quantity of ELs, and better serve employers offering these experiences as well as the students seeking them; integrate ELs into academic course curricula (such as structuring internships that align with academic programs); support or expand the reach of IHE's career services office on campus; expand partnerships with employers that will yield more meaningful opportunities for students; launch a pilot to capture data on learning gains from students' internship experiences; ensure more EL opportunities exist for underserved populations (underrepresented minorities, low-income students, students with disabilities, etc.);</p>

	and/or promote ELs across campus to build awareness.
Institutions can develop and implement an initiative or strategy to support and grow the number of women and minorities majoring in STEM that is outlined in the working group deliverable.	Funds would be used to revise key gateway courses for specifically stated STEM degree programs; provide cohort-based advising; and/or professional development and support for faculty (funds could be used for developing, publishing/packaging training modules to help STEM faculty be more inclusive and change their teaching methods, course design, etc.).

*\* Applications from institutions must fall within the menu of interventions vetted by the State Plan Higher Education Working Groups. To learn more about the strategies and best practices to increase support for students at New Jersey's institutions of higher education, please see all five working group deliverables on the OSHE website: <https://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/workinggroups.shtml> or the hyperlinks listed above.*

*\*\* Eligible uses must fit within the GEERF II funding guidelines to continue providing education services to students and support the ongoing functionality of these entities, see [U.S. Education Department](#) for additional information.*

**Appendix B**  
**Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge Grant - Application Cover Sheet**

**Name of Institution:**

**Contact(s) for Application:** Please include name(s), title(s), email address(es), & phone number(s)

**What Challenge Grant categories from the menu of options is the institution applying for?**  
Please check all that apply.

- Creating On-ramps to College
- Making College Affordable
- Fostering Student Success
- Promoting Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments
- Cultivating Research, Innovation, and Talent

**Components of Application for Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge Grant**

Note: Before submitting, please review and check that the following components are included in the application. Only completed applications will be reviewed. Late submissions will not be considered.

- Signed Application Cover Sheet
- Narrative Application: Not to exceed 10 pages per Challenge Grant Category
- Budget: Excel spreadsheet using template provided

By signing below, the institution certifies that all statements provided in the grant application are true and correct and that the institution will comply with all applicable requirements set forth by the State and Federal Government if awarded the one-time grant funding.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of President or Appropriate Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date