Technical assistance on dissemination grant 537

- Deadlines are not correct throughout the posted RFP. The deadline for letter of intent is **5 pm, March 28th**. The deadline for full proposals is **5 pm, April 28th**.
- Please use the eligibility spreadsheet to identify potential charter partners with whom to collaborate on an application. The Massachusetts Charter Public School Association may also be a resource in identifying potential partnerships.

Q&A from informational conference calls regarding the dissemination grant 537

**What is timeline for identifying partner schools?**
You need to identify a potential partner by the time the full proposal is due April 28th.

**Are you at a disadvantage if you don’t partner with other charter schools on the application but you do partner with underperforming schools nearby in order to disseminate to them?**
There are two meanings of the word partnership in this grant- one meaning is the Massachusetts public school or schools to which grant recipients disseminate their best practices. It’s fine if those partners are non-charter public schools nearby; it is a competitive priority to partner with a Level 3 or 4 school in a Gateway City.

The other meaning of the word partner is to partner with another eligible charter school in the grant application to share the funds and the project. This is encouraged in order to maximize resources, but not necessary. Applications from a collaborative of schools will receive points for meeting that particular competitive priority, but applications from single charter schools will also be considered (and could meet other competitive priorities).

**How will applications be considered in terms of the multiple competitive priorities?**
We are in the process of finalizing our rubric for review of proposals. When it is final, we will post it on our website so that applicants can see how different factors will be weighted. Some of the competitive priorities will be weighted more heavily than others. The rubric also includes points for other areas including capacity, budget, and interview. We do not anticipate applicants will meet every competitive priority and would not discourage applicants from applying just because they will not meet a particular one.

**How can you collaborate on an application with another charter school if you have mission differences?**
Effective collaboration can take many forms, including collaborating on the dissemination of a best practice in which there is overlap between the two schools, or working to improve academic achievement in which one charter partner disseminates math and the other ELA. These are just examples. Schools are encouraged to think creatively about collaboration with other charters.
Is it OK to use grant funds as stipends for faculty who work beyond their normal duties for the grant?
Yes. Grant funds cannot pay faculty’s normal salaries that would otherwise be paid by the school’s operating budget, but their salaries can be supplemented with a grant-funded stipend if they are specifically being paid for time spent on grant activities.

How motivated are district schools to partner? It will depend on the school. We encourage applicants to find schools who have a legitimate need and desire to partner, and we believe there are a lot of schools out there who fit that description. Applicants should ensure that there is mutual enthusiasm for the project.

Is there a way for us to find out what priorities for improvement and improvement strategies are already in place in low performing schools? You can visit this webpage http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/sss/turnaround/grants/default.html to see a list of Level 4 schools who have applied for School Redesign Grant funds. If you click on the zip files by cohort, you can get access to schools’ public redesign plans.

Can you explain the 1.5 FTE? In our study of successes and failures of dissemination efforts, we found that projects are more likely to be successful when staff is dedicated to those specific projects on more than just an ad hoc basis. The 1.5 FTE can be split up different ways- it could be 1.0 and 0.5, or .75 and .75, etc. with what makes sense with staffing needs.

One of the competitive priorities mentions Gateway cities. Which specific cities are considered gateway cities? Under M.G.L. c. 23A section 3A, a Gateway City is defined as a municipality with: a population greater than 35,000 and less than 250,000, a median household income below the state average, and a rate of educational attainment of a bachelor’s degree or above that is below the state average. The cities are: Attleboro, Barnstable, Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leominster, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, Methuen, Pittsfield, Quincy, Revere, Salem, Springfield, Taunton, and Westfield.

When will funding decisions be made? Interviews will be the second week in May, funding decisions will be made by the end of May, and funds will be available July 1, 2014.

Could the school to which you are disseminating be another charter school? Yes.

If you choose to disseminate to another charter school, does that school have to be on the grant eligibility list? No, and in fact they likely wouldn’t be. If an applicant chooses to disseminate to another charter school it would probably be because that school had a need in some area, which might preclude them from meeting the academic standards to qualify for grant eligibility.
Does the project have to be disseminating one kind of best practice to one school? 
We cannot offer strategic advice, but as the RFP states you should be able to demonstrate that the practices to be disseminated are effective and that there is a demonstrated need for those practices at a district school or schools.

If my school has completed a previous project with these federal funds and would need a USED waiver, can we find out what the previous project was so we can make sure the proposed new project is different? Yes, you can notify Sara Schnitzer at the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign by email sschnitzer@doe.mass.edu and someone from the office will email you details about the previous project.

If our school needs a USED waiver, when will we know the status of the waiver? Is it possible we won’t know before April 28th the deadline for full proposals? USED has committed to turning the waivers around as quickly as possible, but it may not be before the deadline for the full proposals. Please view it as part of the risk calculation schools have to undertake with any competitive grant. Waiver status will definitely be communicated before funding decisions are made.

Is it more beneficial to work deeply with one school or less deeply with a set of schools? We cannot offer strategic advice but would refer all applicants to the wording of the RFP: competitive priority will be given to applicants who design their dissemination activity to be carried out in repeated interventions over the course of the grant.

Does the competitive priority include all level 3 and 4 schools or only those also in Gateway cities? The competitive priority is only for applications who work with Level 3 and Level 4 schools in Gateway cities (listed above). However, this should not discourage applicants from partnering with Level 3 and Level 4 schools in other cities; the project will just not meet that particular competitive priority.

My school is interested in partnering on an application with another charter school. This potential partner school does not meet the eligibility criteria listed in the RFP. I want to know if this would decrease our chances of getting the grant? We cannot offer strategic advice but would refer all applicants to the wording of the RFP: A lead applicant charter school should be a Level 1 school with a school percentile above the 50th percentile. A charter school applying to serve as a partner applicant to a lead school in a collaborative application can be a Level 2 school with a school percentile above the 50th percentile. If a charter school does not meet this standard, it is highly unlikely that such a school would be awarded funds unless it can provide compelling evidence that it is an overall success, and is particularly qualified and has the capacity to successfully conduct the proposed project.

Can the grant also support work above and beyond working closely with a Level 3 and a Level 4 school? Yes, the proposed project can include work with Level 3 and 4 schools in Gateway cities but not be limited to those schools.
Will a lead applicant be penalized if it partners with a charter on its application and that charter does not serve the grades that would be targeted at the dissemination school? No, schools would not be automatically penalized as a particular type of partnership is not specified. The application should, however, make clear why the partnership would be an effective one if there aren’t overlapping grades. The review committee will evaluate the effectiveness of that argument as part of the review process.

Do we need to explain how our application connects to all the ESE priorities? No, the application should connect to at least one priority. It is not necessary to connect to all.

Can grant funds be used for benefits as well as salaries? Yes, as long as the benefits are funded proportionally to the staff members’ time allotted to grant activities. For example, if someone is working on the grant .25 FTE, you could not fund 100% of his/her benefits with grant funds.