Choose Ohio First Request for Proposals ("RFP")
Release Date: July 17, 2024
Submission Date: August 28, 2024

I.   Program Purpose

Choose Ohio First ("COF") is part of a strategic effort to deepen Ohio's economic strength by developing talent in Science, including health professions, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields and increasing the number of STEM teachers through the completion of post-secondary degrees and certificates. ODHE awards funding to Ohio's universities and colleges for Choose Ohio First scholarship programs that support students in academic programs developed by Ohio's two-year and four-year, public and private colleges and universities, along with their business partners. COF scholarship programs recruit and retain students in STEM and STEM Education fields by providing scholarship funds and connecting students to work-based learning experiences and careers in STEM fields.

II.   Eligible Applicants

Proposals will be accepted from Ohio's two-year and four-year public and private colleges and universities, acting alone or in collaboration with one or more public or private colleges, universities, or community colleges. A college or university may be the lead applicant on only one application but may participate in collaboration with another institution's application.

Joint proposals must be submitted by a lead institution and follow the format and all required elements described herein. In addition, joint proposals must include the following information for each collaborating institution:

   a. Letter(s) from all collaborating institutions detailing the commitment to the joint proposal, which should include a description of any financial relationship between the parties related to this Choose Ohio First scholarship proposal;

   b. Budget narrative describing the financial relationship between the collaborating institutions; and

   c. Each collaborating institution shall submit a completed FY25 Application Excel File.

III.   Eligible Academic Disciplines

Eligible academic disciplines include only those academic programs (degrees and certificates) in STEM and STEM education fields included on the Ohio Department of Higher Education's (ODHE's) list of eligible COF programs, defined by CIP codes. This list can be found here:

https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/highered.ohio.gov/cof/Approved_CIPS_6.12.2024.pdf

Selected CIP codes for a COF scholarship program must match the CIP codes used at the institution(s). Please note the STEM Designation column on the eligible CIP list which denotes the level at which the degree or certificate is eligible. For example, only Graduate Degrees and above are eligible for COF scholarships for CIP 42.0101, Psychology, General. Refer to the Associate of Science Guidance memo for information on how Choose Ohio First scholarships can be used to support these degrees. The memo can be found here:

https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/highered.ohio.gov/cof/Associate%20of%20Science%20Guidance%20Memo_FINAL_5.26.23.pdf.

IV. Anticipated Awards and Funding Models

Institutions may request between $100,000 and $1,200,000 in total funding for the five-year grant period. COF requires institutions to recruit scholars each year of the five-year grant. Each year will create a new cohort of students, as shown in the charts below.

ODHE will award a maximum annual allocation and maximum total grant amount to the selected institutions based on a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. The total institutional award is divided so that each cohort receives an equal allotment of money for each year that the cohort is active; this is called the "cohort amount". A new cohort must be recruited each year of the five-year grant. The entire cohort amount allocated for the first year of a new cohort should be used to recruit students. The sum of the cohort amounts each year totals to an institution's annual allocation. If an annual allocation is not fully expended in an academic year, the funds will not carry over to the next year and are no longer available to the institution.

Institutions can select one of two funding models for COF scholarship funds, a three-year cohort funding model or a four-year cohort funding model. The cohort amount and total annual allocation are shown in the following budget examples.

In the following **four-year cohort funding model**, the institution was awarded a total of $462,000. The cohort amount is $33,000 and the annual allocation increases from $33,000, to $66,000, to $99,000, to $132,000.

Four-Year Cohort Funding Model						
	AY 24-25	AY 25-26	AY 26-27	AY 27-28	AY 28-29	
Cohort 1	$33,000	$33,000	$33,000	$33,000		
Cohort 2		$33,000	$33,000	$33,000	$33,000	
Cohort 3			$33,000	$33,000	$33,000	
Cohort 4				$33,000	$33,000	
Cohort 5					$33,000	**Total**
Total Yearly Amount Available to the Institution	$33,000	$66,000	$99,000	$132,000	$132,000	$462,000

In the following **three-year cohort funding model**, the institution was awarded a total of $462,000. The cohort amount is $38,500 and the annual allocation increases from $38,500 to $77,000, to $115,000.

Three-Year Cohort Funding Model						
	AY 24-25	AY 25-26	AY 26-27	AY 27-28	AY 28-29	
Cohort 1	$38,500	$38,500	$38,500			
Cohort 2		$38,500	$38,500	$38,500		
Cohort 3			$38,500	$38,500	$38,500	
Cohort 4				$38,500	$38,500	
Cohort 5					$38,500	**Total**
Total Yearly Amount Available to the Institution	$38,500	$77,000	$115,500	$115,500	$115,500	$462,000

V.   Eligible Expenses and Project Term

Choose Ohio First funds can only be used for student scholarships applied toward tuition (instructional and general fees), book vouchers, and meal plans. There must be a notification on the student's tuition bill indicating this use and Choose Ohio First scholarship as the funding source. The entire grant must be used for the listed eligible uses and not for administration.

General fees are defined as those assessed uniformly to all students and those that do not allow for a waiver to be offered to any student(s). For example, a fee charged to students to provide health care coverage would not be considered uniformly assessed if students can opt out, and therefore would not be considered a general fee. A list of reported and approved institutional general fee amounts for public institutions are found at:

https://highered.ohio.gov/data-reports/key-topic-areas/dr-tuition-financial-aid/data-reports-tuition-financial-aid.

To be eligible for a Choose Ohio First scholarship, students must be

- An Ohio resident seeking an undergraduate or graduate STEM degree, or a certificate in an eligible STEM field of study; and

- Student must enroll in one of the institution's eligible/approved COF programs of study; and

- Student must be new to the program of study at the institution (Internal and external transfer students may receive COF scholarships)

  - External transfer is the process of transitioning previously earned college credit at one institution of higher education to another.

  - Internal transfer is the process of transitioning a student who is currently enrolled at your institution into a Choose Ohio First-eligible course of instruction (CIP); and

- Student must meet the institution's eligibility criteria.

Both full-time and part time students may receive COF scholarships, as well as former College Credit Plus students.

COF funds may be used prior to or after the application of Pell assistance, at the discretion of the institution. All awards should be prepared with input from the institution's Financial Aid office.

Eligible expenses incurred on May 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030, are allowable under this award. It is the intention of ODHE to fund students to completion of a degree or certificate.

Funding amounts in future years are subject to the appropriation of future general assemblies, controlling board approval (if applicable), performance of the grantee (including meeting project goals), the overall goals of the award cycle, and budget modifications of ODHE.

VI. Award Process

Proposals will be evaluated in compliance with the competitive process in Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3333.62. The Chancellor, after considering the recommendations of the review team, shall make the final determination about the amount of recommended funding for each applicant and the nature of any conditions on funding which proposals. All fiscal agents on behalf of an applicant or consortia will be notified of the outcome of their proposal after the Chancellor makes funding decisions. All recommendations are subject to Controlling Board approval. If requested, fiscal agents must attend the Controlling Board meeting when proposals are considered for funding.

VII. Proposal Review Process and Timeline

Proposals can be submitted beginning July 18, 2024, and are due no later than August 28, 2024, at 11:59 PM. To be considered complete, proposals must consist of three (3) electronic files. Those files are:

1. An Executive Summary of the proposal submitted as a Microsoft Word file.

2. The COF FY25 Application Excel File with tabs 2-4 completed.

> Tab 1: Instructions
>
> Tab 2: Contacts - contact information for the project.
>
> Tab 3: CIP Codes - the institution's requested program CIPs.
>
> Tab 4: Budget Table - the proposed program budget.

3. One PDF of the complete proposal including the Executive Summary and the COF FY25 Application Excel File.

Applicants are responsible for timely submissions of proposals. Proposals become property of ODHE and are subject to public record laws of the state. Proposals containing all the required elements will receive careful consideration but cannot be guaranteed funding. Accepted proposals will be evaluated by an ODHE review team and may have representatives from other state agencies and other stakeholders, following the rubric approved by ODHE. The Chancellor will make final decisions based upon the quality of the proposal in addressing the RFP criteria, its required elements, and past performance on COF. The schedule below may be revised by ODHE due to circumstances and any changes will be communicated to the applicants via the RFP portal.

Request for Proposals (RFP) Release Date:	July 17, 2024
Informational Webinar	July 30, 2024, at 1:00 P.M.
Proposals Submission Window:	July 18 – August 28, 2024, at 11:59 P.M.
Proposal Review Begins:	August 29, 2024
Public Meeting:	TBD
Notification of Awarded Proposals:	December 2024

Applicant questions are to be submitted in writing via email to COF@highered.ohio.gov, through August 22, 2024. Responses to questions will be posted in the FAQ document posted on the ODHE RFP portal. It is the applicant's responsibility to check the RFP portal for updates to the FAQs. Additional information regarding the program is available by contacting Emily Turner, Director, Choose Ohio First, at (614) 728-3090 or COF@highered.ohio.gov.

VIII. Proposal Requirements

Format Requirements

Proposals must be submitted in Arial font, 10 points or larger; there is an exception for tables and images. Proposals must adhere to the maximum page length noted in each section. Proposals should include and clearly label each of the following six (6) sections:

1. Cover Letter
2. Executive Summary
3. Project Narrative with six sub-sections
4. Budget Narrative
5. Required Attachments
6. COF FY25 Application Excel File with tabs 2-4 completed

Section Requirements

Please note: ODHE has provided a maximum number of pages for each section below. For proposals with sections that exceed the maximum number of pages, ODHE is not obligated to review pages that are above the stated maximums.

Cover Letter (one page maximum):

Institution(s) name(s); identify the primary contact, financial aid representative, legal notice(s) and authorized signatory by name, title, mailing address, phone number, and email address.

Executive Summary (two pages maximum):

a. Provide a rationale for the selected populations for recruitment, including recruiting underrepresented populations in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics or education majors with a STEM focus.

b. Provide an overview of the selected academic programs.

c. Provide a synopsis of the plan to address regional and statewide economic strengths and needs for these targeted academic programs.

d. Describe how the COF initiative is part of the institutional strategic plan, supports student achievement.

e. Describe commitments by the institutional that will lead to successful implementation of the COF program.

Project Narrative: (twenty pages maximum; 100 points total): Project narratives are required to address each of the following six sub-sections. Page count does not include attachments and exhibits.

1. **Project Rationale (5 Points):**

   Describe and explain the rationale for the institution's Choose Ohio First proposal.

   - The extent to which the proposal is integrated with the university's or college's mission and does not displace existing resources already committed to the mission;(3333.62 (C)).

   - Address the extent the proposal facilitates the completion of a degree or a certificate in a cost-effective manner, for example, transfer agreements or other advantages beyond reducing the cost of tuition. (ORC 3333.62 (F and G)).

2. **Recruitment Strategy (25 Points):**

   The chancellor shall determine which proposals will receive awards each fiscal year, and the amount of each award, on the basis of the merit of each proposal, which the chancellor, subject to approval by the controlling board, shall determine based on the extent to which a proposal recruits underrepresented populations in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics or science, technology, engineering, or mathematics education, ORC 3333.62.

   Describe and explain the institution's Choose Ohio First recruitment and selection strategy of underrepresented populations. The response should include relevant data and demographic information and reference to institutional priorities, as it relates to recruitment of underrepresented populations. Proposals should include a description of how the institution will recruit underrepresented populations.

   - Describe how the institution will market Choose Ohio First opportunities to potential students. Provide specific information about marketing initiatives, outreach, or any other activities to further a Choose Ohio First recruitment strategy.

- Identify the individuals(s) who will lead the recruiting and enrollment efforts. The Choose Ohio First enrollment strategy should include coordination and clear engagement with institutional admission and enrollment efforts.

- Describe the institution's Choose Ohio First scholar selection process. Include copies of sample or past application materials, published guidelines, or any other related materials.

- For previously awarded Choose Ohio First institutions, describe recruitment strategies and evidence of past success with increasing the number of underrepresented students in COF STEM programs. Include evidence such as enrollment and persistence data, marketing collateral and recruiting materials.

- New applicants should submit information about successes and programs with recruiting underrepresented students in STEM or other fields.

3. **Student Support (25 Points):**

Describe and explain how the institution will aid students with retention and completion.

- Describe and provide examples of student support services that the institution will provide to Choose Ohio First students in order to aid in retention and on-time completion.

- Describe and provide examples of how the institution will encourage a cohort model for its Choose Ohio First students. Include examples of emails, flyers, or another form of communication that will be used for this program.

- Identify the individual(s) who will lead the student support efforts. The Choose Ohio First student support efforts should include coordination and clear engagement with institutional support systems and career services.

4. **Work-Based Learning (20 points):**

Describe how the institution will ensure one hundred percent (100%) of its Choose Ohio First Students will participate in a work-based learning experience through a co-op, internship, research lab experience, or other work-based learning activity including clinicals and student teaching (ORC 3333.64). Work-based learning experiences based in or connected to Ohio employers are preferred.

- Describe how students will become connected to co-op, internship, laboratory research, or other work-based learning experiences.

- Describe how the institution will track the outcome and completion of the work-based learning experience. Include any business support letters or partnership agreements demonstrating there will be opportunities for students either on-site or remotely. Work-based learning experiences based in or connected to Ohio employers are preferred.

- Provide examples of career counseling advertisements, or job fair advertisements, and other ways students can become aware of co-ops, internships, and research experiences.

- Describe how the institution will maintain and expand its business partnerships related to the selected CIPS.

- Provide 4-5 recent examples of successful co-ops, internships, laboratory research, clinicals, student teaching, or other work-based learning activity at your institution.

5. **Programs of Study (10 Points):**

    Submit a list of proposed CIPs with the academic program name, CIP code, and correlating in-demand occupations on the provided COF FY25 Application Excel File. Proposed institutional COF programs must be on the list of eligible six-digit CIPs. The eligible CIP list can be found at:

    https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/highered.ohio.gov/cof/Approved_CIPS_6.12.2024.pdf

    You may include no more than 45 CIP codes.

    In the proposal, provide a narrative description of:

    - The quality of the program that is the subject of the proposal and the extent to which additional resources will enhance its quality (3333.62 (A)).

    - Provide an explanation of how the selected program(s) connect to the institution's strategic plan and the importance of the program(s) to the institution's mission and recruiting efforts.

    - Describe the extent to the institution has committed to, or demonstrated, an increase in total graduates within STEM or STEM education, consistent with a goal to increase the total number of Ohio residents in the workforce who are highly qualified in these disciplines (ORC 3333.62(D)). The explanation may include information about:

        o Specific program characteristics, research successes, and learning outcomes

        o Retention and completion data within the program, including student employment outcomes, student transfer or placement rate in graduate/professional school

        o Program ranking for the most recent three years

        o Data may be confirmed using third-party data sources such as HEI, IPEDS, and National Student Clearing House.

6. **Regional and Statewide Economic Needs and Strengths (15 Points):**

    Describe and explain the extent to which the proposal is integrated with the strengths of the regional economy (ORC 3333.62 (B)), and the extent to which the proposal meets a statewide educational need (ORC 3333.62 (E)).

    - Explain how the proposed program meets the talent and workforce needs of regional or statewide business or industry or K-12 education institutions in an in-demand occupation with long-term sustainability.

    - The institution should provide occupational and industry level information to support its proposal. Submit data documenting the explanation. Data sources may include Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive, Ohio Workforce Supply and Employment Projection Tools OhioMeansJobs, TopJobs, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Lightcast, Ohio Labor Market Information, and other resources.

    - Provide specific references to regional and/or state workforce needs and skills gaps that the selected programs will help address.

    - Businesses should include this information as part of their support letters.

    - Provide data regarding employment or future educational plans post completion for students in the CIPs included in this proposal.

Past Performance: Please include no more than one page of information about the applicant's past performance with COF. ODHE will review an applicant's past performance, including but not limited to timeliness of submitting required reports and payment files, the percentage of funding from prior Choose Ohio First awards used for scholarships, results of financial aid audits and achieving the goals of the Choose Ohio First grant program, prior to making final recommendations and award decisions.

Criteria:	
Project Rationale	5 Points
Recruitment Strategy	25 Points
Student Support	25 Points
Work-Based Learning	20 points
Programs of Study	10 Points
Regional and Statewide Economic Integration	15 Points
TOTAL	**100 Points**

Budget Narrative (one page maximum): The budget narrative will provide your estimated total five-year budget and average per-student scholarship amount. Each student is not required to receive the same scholarship amount. Your budget narrative should explain the rationale for your funding request. Please note that a Choose Ohio First academic year begins with the summer semester. Eligible scholarship funding for the FY25 round begins May 1, 2025, starting with your institution's summer '25 term, and ends June 30, 2030, with your institution's spring '30 term. Due to the state's fiscal year, the earliest funds for each summer term can be disbursed is July 1.

Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3333.66 establishes a minimum annual student award of $1,500 of Choose Ohio First funds for students receiving a scholarship (ORC 3333.66 (A)(1)) and a minimum annual student award of $500 (ORC 3333.66 (A)(2)) of Choose Ohio First funds for students receiving a scholarship toward a certificate program.

The maximum student award is half of the highest in-state undergraduate instructional and general fees charged by all state universities. For this purpose, if Miami university is implementing the pilot tuition restructuring plan originally recognized in Am. Sub. H.B. 95 of the 125th general assembly, that university's instructional and general fees shall be considered to be the average full-time in-state undergraduate instructional and general fee amount after taking into account the Ohio resident and Ohio leader scholarships and any other credit provided to all Ohio residents. (ORC 3333.66 (A)(1)). A student receiving multiple awards under division (A) of this section may not exceed the maximum permitted amount for each individual award.

For reference, the 2024-2025 annual maximum per student award is $9,081 noted in the Choose Ohio First Financial Aid Guidance Memo found at:

https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/v1719851144/highered.ohio.gov/cof/FA_24-25_FINAL.pdf

The budget narrative should also indicate how the institution proposes to provide the required 1:1 matching funds using institutional, public, and/or private resources. Matching funds should be supported by letters of commitment with specific amounts, or at a minimum by letters of support.

Required Attachments (15 pages maximum):

- The COF FY25 Application Excel Form with tabs 2-4 completed.

- Institutional support: Provide letters of support from each institution's career services and enrollment management departments, along with all other partners responsible for the implementation of this project describing the specific actions planned to support COF scholars. The letters should describe institutional outreach to the business community and identify the office and individuals responsible for this work.

- Business Support: Include customized, unique letters of support from each business partner (minimum of four) that describes its relationship to the COF program, co-op and/or internship opportunities, other work-based learning opportunities and any other ways it promotes and engages with the program. Provide additional attachments, informational brochures, and social media links and other supporting materials as appropriate. Letters should describe workforce needs and skills supported by the learning outcomes in the programs selected.

IX. Reporting Requirements

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) will monitor, which may include site visits and desk audits, each project for which an award is granted to ensure that there is fiscal accountability and operating progress, and that the desired outcomes are achieved. Regular reports will be required from all awardees through a standard reporting template or system. ODHE may request additional documentation up to three years after project completion to review the investments' impacts.

X. Promotion of Choose Ohio First and Use of Brand Management

All Choose Ohio First grant recipient organizations are encouraged to use the Choose

Ohio First logo and name on recruitment, scholarship information, and websites associated with the Choose Ohio First scholarship in an effort to raise awareness of the initiative. The Choose Ohio First logo is available in a .ZIP files on the Choose Ohio First website.

XI. Legal Notices

The applicant understands that if its application is accepted by the state, the applicant shall enter into an agreement with the state governing the use of the awarded funds. The applicant agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations in the conduct of the work hereunder.

The state reserves the right to fund any application in full or in part, to request additional information to assist in the review process, to require new applications from interested parties, to reject any or all applications responding to this announcement, or to reissue the announcement if it is determined that it is in the best interest of the State of Ohio. Issuing this announcement does not bind the state to making any awards. The state reserves the right to adjust the dates for this announcement for whatever reasons are deemed appropriate. The state reserves the right to waive any non-substantive infractions made by an applicant, provided that the applicant cures such infraction upon request.

All costs incurred in preparation of an application shall be borne by the applicant. Application preparation costs are not recoverable under an award. The State of Ohio shall not contribute in any way to recovering the costs of application preparation.

The funding decisions are final. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application(s) at the conclusion of the review process.

The applicant understands that the information provided herein is intended solely to assist the applicant in submittal preparation. To the best of the state's knowledge, the information provided is accurate. However, the state does not warrant such accuracy, and any errors or omissions subsequently determined will not be construed as a basis for invalidating this solicitation. Interested parties bear the sole responsibility of obtaining the necessary information to submit a qualifying application. The state retains the right to modify or withdraw this solicitation at any time. By submitting an application, applicants expressly agree to these terms.

XII. Trade Secrets

All lead applicants are strongly discouraged from including in a proposal any information that the lead applicant considers to be a "trade secret," as that term is defined in Section 1333.61(D) of the Ohio Revised Code. All information submitted in response to this RFP is public information unless a statutory exception exists that exempts it from public release under the Ohio Public Records Act in Section 149.43 of the Ohio Revised Code.

If any information in the proposal is to be treated as a trade secret, the proposal must:

1. Identify each and every occurrence of the information within the proposal with an asterisk before and after each line containing trade secret information, and underline the trade secret information itself;

2. Identify that the proposal contains trade secret information in the cover letter; and

3. Include a summary page immediately after the cover letter that lists each page in the proposal that includes trade secret information and the number of occurrences of trade secret information on that page.

To determine what qualifies as trade secret information, refer to the definition of "trade secret" in the Ohio Revised Code at 1333.61(D), which is reproduced below for reference:

(D) "Trade Secret" means information, including the whole or any portion or phase of any scientific or technical information, design, process, procedure, formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or improvement, or any business information or plans, financial information, or listing of names, addresses, or telephone numbers that satisfies both of the following:

(1) It derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use.

(2) It is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy.

a. The Ohio Department of Higher Education requires non-disclosure agreements from all non-ODHE persons who may have access to proposals containing trade secret information, including evaluators.

b. If the applicant claims that a record is not subject to disclosure under the Ohio Public Records law based on trade secret, it will bear costs of defending this claim.