CHOOSE OHIO FIRST – FY25 RFP
Frequently Asked Questions

August 26, 2024

I will be submitting our Choose Ohio First grant this year. However, I am not serving as the Principal Investigator. Which "Role" should I select for myself in the application portal? I have also included the PI as a team member in the portal.

We use the contacts tab in the application excel file to designate roles, not the role category for team members in the RFP portal. Please choose the option closest to you when filling in the information, as it is a required field, but do not worry if it is not a perfect fit. You just need something in that field in order for the portal to allow you to submit the application.

Should we include the COF FY25 Application Excel File? If so, would you like us to provide screenshots of each of the four tabs (Instructions, Contacts, CIP Codes, and Budget Table)?
Screen shots or pdf copies of Tabs 2-4 of the excel form should be included in the required attachments.

Additionally, I noticed that the directions do not mention including CVs/resumes from staff. Are we still required to include and submit these documents or is this no longer necessary?
Resumes and CVs are no longer required. Throughout the RFP, you will see that different sections suggest identifying the person/people responsible for those activities, i.e. student support, recruitment, etc.

August 23, 2024

I registered a COF account and am currently preparing my proposal submission. However, I am confused about the process. My question is: Do I need to click "submit" in order to upload the required documents, such as the PDF file, Excel file and other related documents? Normally, the "Submit" is the last step to do in a submission process, but I don't see any other options to upload files before clicking it.
Yes, please select the submit button. You will then be prompted to upload the necessary files after clicking the "Submit" button. Once you've attached the files, you will need select "submit" at the bottom of your screen a final time in order to complete the process.

The COF FY25 application excel file only allows me to submit up to 44 CIPs. Can I submit a proposal requesting 45 CIPs?

Yes, an updated version of the COF FY25 application excel file is available as of 8/23/24 through the RFP portal with space to request a total of 45 CIPs in the CIPs tab.

We are requesting funding for academic programs that are 2-years, 3-years, and 4-years to complete. Should we explain that in the proposal? Or just have the auto generated table in the proposal with the model we think is best and work with ODHE post-award if awarded? You should explain how you will divide your budget across programs in your budget narrative.

How many unique portal users can we have at an institution? In the past, one of our academic deans submitted our COF grant applications. This year, as Director of Grants, I will be submitting our grant application. Can I be added to the institution portal account? An institution may have an unlimited amount of individual RFP portal users. An institution may designate multiple roles/users for each proposal/project that is submitted. The person designated as the 'submitter' of the proposal/project may add additional individuals from the institution.

The instructions say to submit the excel file, then also include it as part of the full proposal. It is unclear to me whether in the full proposal part it should be part of section 5 the "required attachments" or whether it is a stand alone section 6, or whether it should be included in both places. Tabs 2-4 of the excel form should be included in the required attachments.

Since the CIP table is already included in the required COF FY25 Application Excel file, is it necessary to reproduce the same table within the Project Narrative PDF file? To conserve space and adhere to the page limit, can we reference the Excel file in the narrative instead of including the full table again? Tabs 2-4 of the excel form should be included in the required attachments of your PDF proposal submission. It is not necessary to include it in the project narrative.

August 16, 2024

Are funds awarded to graduate students including tuition costs and stipends, where contracted work hours such as Teaching Assistantships and Graduate Assistantships are required, allowable for match? Reasonable institutional, operational, and capital costs directly associated with delivering the COF program outcomes is an eligible source of matching funds. Tuition assistance is an eligible source of match as outlined in the Financial Aid Guidance memo, so long as that tuition assistance is not from state dollars or federal financial aid. While COF Scholar wages during an internship, co-op, or research experience are eligible sources of

match, stipends tied to required work hours, such as those for Teaching Assistants or Graduate Assistants, are not typically considered eligible match.

We have reviewed the financial aid guidance memo and are interpreting the matching funds as the following. Please let us know if we could proceed with the following as the matching funds from our office. This year we plan to include graduate students within the COF grant. Our institution provides graduate tuition scholarships that is not limited to domestic (Ohio resident) students. Can such scholarship funds be accounted as matching funds for the grant? For example, if for a program that is included in the CIP code for COF, we had 10 students of which 2 were on COF – can we count any of the tuition scholarship awarded across those 10 students as part of the matching funds?
No.

Due to page limitations, should exhibits be placed throughout the Project Narrative (which would make it over 20 pages) or at the end of the Project Narrative?
The Project Narrative has a page limit of 20 pages. Applicants can elect to include exhibits within or at the end of the Project Narrative. Reviewers are not obligated to review pages that are above the stated maximums in a section.

Our accepted CIP code for agriculture, which is a subject many of our pre-vet students minor in, is 01.0101. This is not among the available CIP codes in the excel spreadsheet. The first one is 010103. Not sure if I should "write it in" or just ignore it.
CIPS in your proposal must match CIPS on the approved CIP list. If the CIP is not on the approved list, it is not eligible for COF funding. If you include an ineligible CIP in your proposal, the reviewer will ignore it, and separate information related to the ineligible program from the other eligible programs. Additionally, it can impact the budget/funding request because funding will only be awarded to eligible programs. Ineligible CIPs will not be in an award agreement. We recommend submitting a proposal with only eligible academic programs.

Are we able to include a computer science endorsement for educators (131321), even though it isn't degree-granting?
Yes, this for credit program is eligible for COF.

When will the next COF competition be? (that may be dependent on the legislature).
You are correct, the next funding round for Choose Ohio First will be dependent on the legislature and securing funding for the FY26/27 biennium. We are cautiously optimistic that the program will continue to receive support from the administration and General Assembly.

ODHE is accepting proposals for the FY25 funding round through August 28. If the program secures an allocation through the upcoming budget process, ODHE will be able to offer funding rounds in FY26 and/or FY27.

I read in the FAQs that "letters of support should be addressed to the Chancellor (Mike Duffey)". Does this include all letters from businesses as well as those internal letters of support? I have already received letters of interest from a few companies which were just addressed "program coordinator" or something like that. Will I need to go back to them and have them change the salutation?

There is no need to modify the letters based on salutation. The content of the letters, including things such as how current they are and how the entity will support the Choose Ohio First program on your campus is more important than the salutation.

However, institutions that are currently participating in COF should be aware that reviewers have had a negative view on support letters that were written for previous proposals, as indicated by the date and/or because the letter was addressed to a past Chancellor.

August 9, 2024

If a program is listed on the eligible CIP code list for COF and marked all levels, does that include certificates that result in a national recognized certification in an eligible STEM field of study?

For-credit certificates with a CIP on the COF STEM CIP list with a STEM Designation of all levels are eligible STEM programs of study.

I see many places where the RFP references "recruiting underrepresented populations" in STEM. It is unclear to me whether this suggests that the scholarship recipients would necessarily be only of underrepresented populations, or if the recruited cohort could exist with some members being of traditionally well represented population with the majority being of underrepresented populations but that the recruiting would just take place on recruiting those who are underrepresented. To be specific, if the traditional population of the discipline was 50% white male, 30% white female, and 20% people of color, would a recruited cohort of 20% White male, 40% white female, and 40% people of color be considered a successful cohort? or would it need to be 0% white male, 60% white female, and 40% people of color? Can you clarify this point for me?

There are many goals to COF that make a successful proposal in seeking future awards, increasing STEM graduates generally, increasing applicants to COF from the underrepresented populations leading to more applicants to admissions/scholarship selection process, increasing any identified underrepresented population in STEM, but also student satisfaction with the college, and other goals.

Where do I download the FY25 excel workbook file

The FY25 application excel form can be downloaded from the RFP portal.

Since room and board is required at our institution and students are required to live on campus, can we apply COF scholarships to their room and board fees?
Meal plans are an eligible expense for Choose Ohio First but not housing.

For the submission page, it asks for a bio. Whose bio should we submit on the portal login page?
Regarding the bio, this is a required field of the RFP portal, but it is not something that we will be using in our review process. The bio is for the person creating the account in the portal. You are welcome to include a full bio for yourself or feel free to simply list your job title or "not applicable".

We have a program, and the CIP code aligns with the document provided by the state.
Is it an acceptable option if the program names are slightly different however, the CIP codes align?
The program is eligible as long as the CIP code for the academic program is on the approved CIP list and the degree level matches with the CIP list.

Is there any font size and margin requirement in the proposal?
Proposals must be submitted in Arial font, 10 points or larger. The RFP does not specify requirements for margins, but we recommend 1-inch margins.

August 2, 2024

Are there instructions on how to create the RFP portal account to access the application?
You can find detailed instruction on how to apply by selecting "Info" next to the COF RFP in the portal and downloading the PDF titled "Instructions_for_Applicants_COF_RFP_7.17.24_Final". If you have not used the RFP portal before, simply select "apply" next to the COF RFP. You will be prompted to create a password protected account as part of the initial application step.

If an institution decides to apply in FY25 and is awarded, would that institution lose the funds that have already been awarded in previous funding rounds?
That institution would keep their previous funding from previous rounds regardless of whether they apply for FY25 funds. FY25 funding is separate from other awards; awards are not connected or dependent on each other. If an institution applies for and receives an FY25 award, the award must be managed as a separate grant.

Are we setting up an account in the portal for the institution or can we set up multiple accounts? Is an account associated with this COF proposal or for all ODHE requests?

The institution may create a primary account if doing so benefits the institution's operations. Currently, individual staff typically have their accounts. Any proposal submitted through the account will be linked to all other applications or proposals associated with the same account in the RFP portal.

Do institutions need to provide a work-based learning experience if students cannot find them on their own? Can you describe this process?
Participating institutions are expected to help facilitate students' fulfillment of the work-based learning requirement. Students can complete their work-based learning requirements in a variety of ways. Institutions report students' work-based learning experiences to ODHE each term as part of the reimbursement process. Please see the WBL Newsletter on the Grantee Resources page for information about the work-based learning requirement: https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/highered.ohio.gov/cof/2022.4%20Work-based%20Learning%20Newsletter.pdf

Will the FY25 webinar presentation be available as a recording for future reference?
The webinar was recorded, and the recording and slides are posted to the RFP portal.

Are there specifications for font size for the proposal?
Proposals must be submitted in Arial font, 10 points or larger, with the exception of tables and images. They must also adhere to the maximum page length noted in each section.

You mention a "Completion Grant" opportunity when existing grant agreements end, in order to finish out the cohort. Is there a current release out for this? Where do I find more information about this "Completion Grant"?
Completion funding is not competitive and will only be available to the institutions who received an eligible award. Applications will be available toward the end of the five-year award period.

If we have a large portion of part-time students can a community college choose a four-year model? Or is the four-year model intended only for 4-year institutions?
Institutions can select either of the two funding models.

Just want to clarify: The funds disbursed as a reimbursement, correct?
Correct. Institutions will submit payment requests for each student through the Higher Education Information System and ODHE will provide payment after the request has been validated.

Any staffing allowable as a direct cost, as with ODHE Super RAPIDS?
No. COF funds can only be used for tuition, meal plans, book vouchers, and general fees.

July 26, 2024

When you said that up to 45 CIP codes could be selected, my initial thought was that I could, for instance, say that I am going to use COF to give scholarships to 15 biology majors and 10 chemistry majors. But I seem to remember that you also mentioned wanting cohorts. So does this mean you want the entire incoming COF group taking substantially the same schedule (which would not be the case with 15 bio and 10 chem)? Or could we have a cohort group of 15 in bio and a separate cohort group of 10 in chem?

You can select up to 45 CIPs from the COF Eligible CIP list to include in your proposal. Meaning, you can create a COF program that includes biology, chemistry, and 43 other majors, if you so choose.

You have the flexibility to divvy the scholarship funds up over the various CIPs that are part of your program (i.e. 15 bio majors, and 10 chem majors, etc.) and this mix can be different from year to year, if the institution chooses.

We use "cohort" in two ways with COF:
- As part of the funding model. Funding is allocated by year over five years, to support five cohorts (one each year).
- As part of the COF program at the institution. Institutions are required to provide support to COF scholars throughout their education, which may include creating a sense of community and identity for students as a COF scholar, thus creating a cohort. It is up to the institution to determine how to design and create a COF cohort. It could be by year, by major, one cohort for all COF scholars, or some other way that works best at your campus.
- There is no requirement for cohorts to take the same schedule, even if they are in the same major.

Who should the Letters of Support be addressed to in our proposal?
Letters of support can be addressed to The Chancellor (Chancellor Mike Duffey).

July 19, 2024

The sample allocation of dollars shows the same outlay per cohort per year. Is this the way it needs to be?
Yes. The amount of funding per cohort is the same for each cohort and each year. Additionally, we use only those two models which assume a cohort graduates in three years or four years.

If there is attrition within the cohort, could the amount awarded per student just go up to spend the allocation? Example, if I start with a cohort of 10 and have $40K allocated and I give them $4K each their freshman year. Then, for whatever reason, two students withdraw from the program. If $40K is allocated for the second year as well, can I just bump up their awards to $5K per year that second year?
Yes, the scenario you proposed is acceptable. Please refer to our cohort model and use of funds webinar for more information on this: https://youtu.be/mVQ_2_MYHC8

When it comes to matching funds, if I have internships being paid by an outside company does that count as matching dollars?
Yes, COF scholar wages during an internship, co-op, or research experience paid by an outside source, such as an employer for foundation grant, can count as matching funds.

I just noticed the updated CIP code list on the grantee resources page. Am I correct in that "all levels" means undergraduate and graduate? In my previous experience, many of the CIP codes only allowed awards at the undergraduate level.
The COF CIP list categorizes the CIPs by either "All Levels," which means institutions can provide scholarships to students of all levels (e.g. certificates, all degree programs) or "Graduate and Above," which means only graduate-level programs are eligible for COF scholarships.
A STEM designation at all levels means both undergraduate and graduate level programs are eligible.

In the excel file template provided, for a CIP code, there is a relevant column named "Correlating in-demand occupations".   Where can we find that information? I can find the CIP codes in the file "Approved_CIPS_6.12.2024.pdf", but no information about "Correlating in-demand occupations"
There are a variety of resources that can be used to determine correlated in-demand occupations, including the National Center for Educational Statistics CIP to SOC crosswalk (https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/resources.aspx?y=55) and resources listed on page 7 of the RFP (in the Regional and Statewide Economic Needs and Strengths section) such as the Ohio Top Jobs dashboard: https://topjobs.ohio.gov/top-jobs-list/ohios-top-jobs-list.

Is the Choose Ohio First team available to meet and help guide or answer any questions regarding the COF program and RFP process?
This is a competitive RFP process and COF staff are unable to meet with applicants. However, we can direct you to the resources available to all applicants. You can find the Request for Proposals and more information about the RFP and the program at this site: https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources. You can submit questions to COF@highered.ohio.gov and we will include the question(s) and answer(s) in the FAQ document.

There are multiple units in our university that would like to apply for Choose Ohio First

Funding. Do we submit our applications together or separately?
Only one application from each institution will be considered for funding. Colleges and departments within the institution are encouraged to work together to develop a unified application.

Are we required to provide scholarships for more than one year?
ODHE expects grantees to award COF funds each academic year beginning in 2025-26, starting in either summer or fall per the institution's recruitment cycle and academic programs. The award agreement provides funding for five academic years. The institution is expected to support COF scholarship students each year with a COF scholarship until they graduate and recruit a new cohort of students each year for five years.

May an institution that received a previous Choose Ohio First award submit a proposal?
Yes, an institution that received a previous award is eligible to apply for the FY25 COF program. If awarded funds, institutions will enter into a five-year grant agreement for AYs 26-30 which is a separate agreement from past agreements.

Could you explain the types of data and demographic information you're looking for in the proposals?
The proposals should be supported by data that informs the institution's decisions regarding recruiting practices, academic program selection, and how the COF program will contribute to the STEM workforce in Ohio. Additional data could include metrics regarding an institution's past performance with utilizing COF funds, as well as retention and graduation rates for COF students, and/or for selected academic programs.

Is an applicant institution able to resubmit a large portion of a past proposal with some modifications?
New and past applicants are encouraged to review the RFP carefully and develop a proposal that provides the information in the requested order and format as directed by the RFP. Please note that page limits may differ from previous funding rounds. ODHE is under no obligation to review pages that exceed the maximum page limit.

Must proposals be submitted for only one CIP category?
You may include up to 45 CIPs in your proposal.

Would a proposal for the FY25 RFP need to contain different CIP codes than other COF grants at the same institution from previous funding rounds?
No.

Can we include academic programs that are pending approval?
No.

Is there a webinar or additional information about this RFP? Will there be a recording of the RFP webinar? Where can I find it?
A webinar is scheduled for 1:00 PM on July 30, 2024. The link to access the meeting and the recording of the RFP webinar presentation will be posted on the ODHE RFP Portal. You can register directly at: https://oh-tech.webex.com/weblink/register/ra4500866544435d04baf77042b73de83.

I'm having trouble accessing the excel budget sheet. The sheet is "protected" and requires a password to edit for most of the items. I downloaded the excel file twice with the same issue.
Please refer to the instructions on the first tab of excel file for instructions. Only cells highlighted in yellow are available for inputs.

How should applications be submitted?
Submit all required documents at rfp.ohiohighered.org by 11:59 PM on August 28, 2024.

Will the public meeting be in-person or virtual?
It will be virtual.

What is the appropriation for COF in FY25?
Choose Ohio First received $30 million for FY24 and $32 million for FY25.

Does the Supreme Court decision about race in college admission have any impact on the COF application/awarding process?
Institutions should consult with their legal counsel regarding the Supreme Court decision. ORC requires the Chancellor to make awards based on the extent to which a proposal recruits underrepresented populations in STEM as well as other criteria stated in an RFP.

Does the list of eligible CIP codes change? Where is it published?
Requests to add CIPs to the STEM CIP list are reviewed by ODHE on a case-by-case basis. In the last year, 5 CIPs have been added to the STEM CIP list.
521304   Actuarial Science
010106   Agricultural Business Technology/Technician
010299   Agricultural Mechanization, Other
010205   Agricultural Mechanics and Equipment/Machine Technology/Technician
010308   Agroecology and Sustainable Agriculture

You can find the list on our grantee resources page at
https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources

Are non-credit programs eligible for COF funds?
No. Only for-credit certificates are eligible for COF funding.

Can current CCP students participate in COF?
Current CCP students cannot receive a scholarship from COF because they are enrolled at the institution as non-degree seeking students and do not pay tuition or other COF-eligible fees.

If a student receives a COF scholarship as an undergrad at our institution and then applies to an eligible COF graduate program at our institution, can the student receive the COF scholarship as a grad student?
Yes.

Where can I find more information about the work-based learning requirement?
Choose Ohio First's work-based learning (WBL) requirement is described in a newsletter and a webinar available on our Grantee Resources page:
https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources

Where can I learn more about reporting requirements and the reporting system?
Reporting and payments for COF is done mostly through the Higher Education Information System (HEI). General information about HEI can be found at https://highered.ohio.gov/data-reports/hei-system; specific information about Choose Ohio First can be found at https://highered.ohio.gov/data-reports/hei-system/hei-file-doc/hei-cof. You can also reference our Financial Aid Webinar from November 2023: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qavLG0LtGzo; the COF section starts at the 28 minute mark.

Where can I learn more about the requirements for COF matching funds?
The Financial Aid Guidance Memo is the best resource for match questions: https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/v1719851144/highered.ohio.gov/cof/FA_24-25_FINAL.pdf.

Where can I learn more about Choose Ohio First's funding (cohort) model?
The Cohort Model Guidance Memo and a webinar recording explaining the guidance in that memo are available on our Grantee Resources page: https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources.

The RFP mentions only 3- and 4-year cohort models. Some of our graduate programs take 1 or 2 years to complete. Are 1- and 2-year programs eligible? Is it possible to use different cohort models at the same institution, depending on expected time for degree completion and level?

One- and two-year academic programs are eligible. Institutions must select one of the two funding models provided through the RFP and select the model that fits their situation best. Please refer to the Cohort Model and Use of Funds webinar recording (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVQ_2_MYHC8&feature=youtu.be) and our Cohort

Model Guidance memo
(https://highered.ohio.gov/static/files/uploads/COF/Cohort%20Model%20Guidance%20Memo%202022%20DIST.pdf) for information on how to maximize the utilization of funds, including academic programs that do not neatly fit the cohort models.

July 17, 2024

How do I apply?

Institutions must submit a proposal by 11:59 p.m. on August 28 through the RFP portal at https://rfp.ohiohighered.org/. Complete proposals will include three files, the Application Excel form, an Executive Summary in Microsoft Word, and a PDF of the entire proposal, including the two aforementioned documents. More information about the Choose Ohio First program – such as the COF STEM CIP list and the Financial Aid Guidance Memo – can be found at the Choose Ohio First grantee resources page: https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources.