



Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education Request for Proposals (RFP)

Release Date: Friday, January 9, 2026

Submission Date: Friday, February 20, 2026

Program Purpose

To develop and maintain a biennial statewide research agenda that identifies key policy challenges and research priorities crucial to the state's future, the Ohio Department of Higher Education ("ODHE"), per Section 3333.952 of the Ohio Revised Code as enacted by Amended Substitute House Bill 96 of the 136th General Assembly, was charged with developing the guidelines and procedures to apply for funding through the *Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education*.

Through the *Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education*, ODHE seeks proposals from faculty and post-graduate students at state institutions of higher education and private nonprofit institutions of higher education to 1) Provide policymakers and practitioners with timely, relevant, and rigorous research findings on problems of significant importance to the state's citizens, enabling informed decision-making and effective policies; 2) Increase the active engagement of the state's higher education institutions in addressing real-world issues of direct relevance to the state's social, economic, and civic well-being, fostering a stronger connection between academia and public service; 3) Cultivate the next generation of policy-focused researchers and practitioners by providing valuable research opportunities to faculty and post-graduate students.

I. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include faculty and post-graduate students at state institutions of higher education as defined in Section 3345.011 of the Ohio Revised Code and private nonprofit institutions of higher education with certificates of authorization issued pursuant to Chapter 1713 of the Ohio Revised Code. Please note, ODHE will enter into award agreements with the institution on behalf of the chosen researchers.

II. Anticipated Awards

The total of all awards under the *Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education* will not exceed the total funding available. ODHE is not obligated to expend all funds set aside for this initiative and may request revisions to budget proposals.

1. Total award funding available: up to \$425,000.00
2. Maximum base award per eligible institution: \$50,000.00 per proposal

III. Eligible Research Topics and Project Term

Faculty and post-graduate students at state institutions of higher education and private nonprofit institutions of higher education seeking funds through the *Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education* should submit proposals that identify how the funds will help to develop research that aligns with the biennial research agenda identified below. Please note: The topics that are bolded have been identified by ODHE as particularly relevant to ongoing policy efforts and will be given priority points in scoring research proposals.

- **A 50-state comparative analysis, identifying which states currently fund public institutions of higher education on the basis of data regarding employment outcomes, how each state distribution formula works, and the relative investment of each state**
- **A 50-state comparative analysis, identifying which states currently have post-secondary programs similar to Choose Ohio First, Ohio's signature STEM scholarship, or an alternative means of supporting STEM talent pipeline growth, such as a state appropriation or funding distribution formula, and the relative investment of each state**
- **Benchmarking peer states' competitive investments in talent and workforce**
- **Measurement of positive outcomes for students receiving the Governor's Merit Scholarship related to retention, persistence, completion, employment, student debt and other generally accepted desired student outcomes**
- **Measurement of positive outcomes for students receiving the Ohio College Opportunity Grant related to retention, persistence, completion, employment, student debt and other generally accepted desired student outcomes**
- **Declining college-going rates in Ohio, reasons for rate changes over time, and estimated impacts on Ohio's production of college graduates to meet Ohio's workforce needs**
- **Analysis of market trends and the impact of online education, identifying net import/export enrollment effects, market share growth, the number of Ohio students participating in online education over time, revenue impacts for institutions, key attributes of these programs, relative student outcomes and related information as to whether Ohio institutions are positioned to compete in this fast-growth modality**
- **Analysis of physical facilities on Ohio campuses, service levels to maintain those facilities, deferred maintenance totals statewide/institutionally, and analysis of opportunities for strategic square footage reduction benefiting institutions and students**
- Workforce Pell implementation including data systems, strategies and opportunities
- Measuring employment outcomes for non-credit workforce programs
- Topics specifically related to Amended Substitute House Bill 96 of the 136th General Assembly, including new attainment goals, work-based learning, direct admission, general education review and reviews of institutional risk
- Research to support performance-based outcomes in higher education
- Review of institutional academic program offerings and relative alignment with enrollment and/or labor market trends
- Re-engaging adult learners to achieve credentials of value
- Three-year bachelor's degrees and dual enrollment pathways
- Dual enrollment (i.e. College Credit Plus) more broadly, including cost modeling and outcomes
- Analysis of the market impact of online education and opportunities

- Financial aid programs broadly, as well as student barriers to completion
- Civic education knowledge base and outcomes
- Analyses on the usage and impact of various early postsecondary credit options for matriculating and non-matriculating students
- High school career-technical education (CTE) connections with higher education institutions — joint programs, advanced credit, pathways into post-secondary
- Impact of AI on higher education enrollment, program types, and connections to K-12 systems to prepare students for those changes
- Determining barriers to employers' engagement with Ohio colleges and universities on workforce development initiatives and identifying solutions to overcome them
- Long-term learning impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Analyze current and emerging uses and impacts of AI and generative AI across the P–16 education continuum, including higher education enrollment, program types, instructional practices, student learning, assessment, academic integrity, and workforce preparation
- Assess how colleges can move from a reactionary model to a forward-looking workforce strategy by aligning curricula, credentials, and program capacity with the state's most in-demand and fastest-growing industries
- Student outcomes for non-credit courses and programs at state institutions of higher education and Ohio technical centers
- Analysis of 2+2 programs in the state and ways the model could be replicated
- Development of Statewide Centralized Data Consortium and Institutional Access
- Analysis of Workforce Outcomes with Regional Context and Programmatic Equity

This is not an exhaustive list of eligible research topics. Faculty and post-graduate students at institutions may propose topics which are not listed above in their proposal as long as they 1) Provide policymakers and practitioners with timely, relevant, and rigorous research findings on problems of significant importance to the state's citizens, enabling informed decision-making and effective policies; 2) Increase the active engagement of the state's higher education institutions in addressing real-world issues of direct relevance to the state's social, economic, and civic well-being, fostering a stronger connection between academia and public service; 3) Cultivate the next generation of policy-focused researchers and practitioners by providing valuable research opportunities to faculty and post-graduate students.

Public Policy Research Consortium on Higher Education proposals that are awarded funds through this RFP will have through June 30, 2027, to complete the scope of work for the program, beginning when an agreement is executed between ODHE and the applicant.

A final program report will be due from the institution 30 days after the end of the expenditure period. Reports should be sent to the ODHE at APenrod@highered.ohio.gov. Additional reporting may be set forth in the award agreement.

IV. Proposals Review Process and Timeline

The schedule below may be revised by ODHE, at the discretion of ODHE. Any changes will be communicated to applicants.

Request for Proposals Released	January 9, 2026
Proposal Questions from Interested Parties	January 9 – January 21, 2026

Proposals Due by 12:00 pm	February 20, 2026
Proposal Review Period	February 20 – March 13, 2026
Notification of Awarded Proposals	March 27, 2026

ODHE will provide information and assistance to interested parties and potential applicants by responding to questions submitted via e-mail to APenrod@highered.ohio.gov by January 21, 2026.

Responses will be posted at <https://rfp.ohiohighered.org/>

ODHE will initially screen proposals for completeness and eligibility. Any deficiencies must be addressed by the applicant within a period set by ODHE. While all properly submitted proposals will receive consideration, submission of a complete proposal does not guarantee funding.

Upon applicant approval, ODHE will provide an award notification letter to the applicant, which will include the total awarded amount. ODHE and the applicant will enter into an agreement prior to funding being disbursed.

V. Proposal Submission

Applicants are responsible for submissions of proposals within the period set by ODHE. Proposals must be received no later than 12:00 p.m. on February 20, 2026, and must be submitted in the following manner:

One electronic PDF file that includes: the cover letter, application form, the budget narrative, and the budget using the provided spreadsheet template, submitted to the ODHE RFP Portal.

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.

VI. Proposal Requirements

A. Format

1. Cover Letter (one page maximum):

- a. Background information on the researchers, project, students impacted, benefits, etc.
- b. Anything additional you want ODHE to consider that is not included in the application

2. Grant Application: Attached hereto as Exhibit 1.

3. Budget and Budget Narrative: In the provided Excel spreadsheet, the budget and budget narrative will document:

- a. Itemized costs for the grant. Please note, indirect costs must be capped at five (5) percent.
- b. The underlying assumption for each cost (i.e., base cost of the item or service, how it ties to the overall outcomes associated with the proposal, and number of persons involved/served, etc.)
- c. Any matching funds that will be leveraged, clearly labeled.
- d. The amounts for each budget line activity must be documented and justified in the budget narrative and summarized within the provided Excel workbook.
- e. The narrative should include an estimate as to the timing of expenditures in relation to the project plan.
- f. Costs should fall within comparative industry standards.

B. Scoring Rubric

Each proposal will be assessed using the scoring rubric attached hereto as Exhibit 2. Please note, ODHE reserves the right to make edits to the rubric at any point prior to the start of the proposal review. The rubric is being provided for informational purposes only.

VII. Legal Notices

The applicant understands that if its application is accepted by ODHE, the applicant shall enter into an agreement with ODHE 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.

ODHE 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. ODHE reserves the right to adjust the dates for this

announcement for whatever reasons are deemed appropriate. ODHE 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. ODHE 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 ODHE's knowledge, the information provided is accurate. However, ODHE 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. ODHE retains the right to modify or withdraw this solicitation at any time. By submitting an application, applicants expressly agree to these terms.

VIII. Trade Secrets

All Applicants are strongly discouraged from including in a proposal any information that the Applicant considers to be a "trade secret," as that term is defined in Section 1333.61(D) of the Ohio Revised Code.

1. 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.”

2. If any information in the proposal is to be treated as a trade secret, the proposal must:
 - a. 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.
 - b. Identify that the proposal contains trade secret information in the cover letter; and
 - c. 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.

3. The Ohio Department of Higher Education requires non-disclosure agreements from all non-Department of Higher Education persons who may have access to proposals containing trade secret information, including evaluators.
4. 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.