Department of
Higher Education

Choose Ohio First

FY26 Request for Proposals Webinar

January 23, 2026

The heart of education.

Choose Ohio First FY26 RFP Information Session

- Welcome

- Important Changes from Past Request for Proposals (RFP)

- Review the RFP
  - Presentation slides contain edited content from the RFP.
  - Refer to the RFP for complete instructions and information.

- Collect questions submitted through the chat feature
  - Responses to questions will be included in the FAQ document at https://rfp.ohiohighered.org/

Program Purpose

- Choose Ohio First (COF) is a workforce development initiative
  - Increase talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and increase the number of qualified STEM teachers.
  - Meet the needs of employers by filling STEM-related positions
- $257 million committed to scholarships (AY2021 through AY2030)
- 2019 – 3,051 students received a COF scholarship
- 2025 – 7,001 students received a COF scholarship
- $27.4 million was awarded to students in AY2025

Program Purpose (Con't.)

- Proposals aligned with Ohio's workforce priorities will receive additional consideration.

- Expectation that institutions will commit to <u>increase</u> the total number of students enrolling and completing STEM degrees and credentials**.**

- Proposals <u>must</u> include work-based learning opportunities for scholarship recipients. Examples include robust co-op education, internships, laboratory research, or similar experiences supporting permanent employment in Ohio.

- ORC 3333.60 to ORC 3333.69, ORC 3333.38 and ORC 3345.32 pertain to COF.

Choose Ohio First FY26 Themes

- Performance-based funding decisions

- Driving enrollment in STEM programs

- Increasing completions

- Allowing for measurable outcomes

- Simplifying the RFP

Choose Ohio First FY26 Changes

- Maximum amount based on actual spend in AYs '23, '24, and '25.
- Pledge enrollment growth in selected fields/programs/CIPs.
- Reduced CIP list more directly aligned with Ohio's Priorities.
  - Select CIPs from the CIP list that will be part of your enrollment and completion strategy.
  - No maximum number of selected CIPs in your program.
  - Students can move out of selected CIPs and still be eligible if they move to another CIP on **the FY26 COF Eligible CIP list**.
  - Only students in your selected CIPs will count toward your enrollment pledge.

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Choose Ohio First FY26 Changes (Con't.)

- Awards will be "up to" a maximum amount with annual evaluation and award letters.
- Budget Model has changed.
  - No cohort model.
  - No set cycle for recruitment.
  - Develop your budget based on new students and supporting continuing students.
  - 4-year program period.
- Intend to support students to completion – even after the program period ends, possibility for completion grants remain part of the program.
- Timing of RFP and continuity of your COF program – consider the timing of when your programs end, continuity and future funding rounds.

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Eligible Applicants

- Ohio's state universities and colleges.

- Independent, non-profit four-year colleges and universities.

- Each institution may be the lead applicant in no more than one proposal.

- Collaboration with other institutions is encouraged.

- Joint proposals must be submitted by a single leading institution, following the format and required elements described in this RFP.

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Academic Disciplines

- Eligible academic disciplines are listed on the **FY26 Choose Ohio First Eligible CIP List.**
  - Institutions can petition to include other CIPs through their proposal.
- Students must declare an eligible major or pursue a for-credit certificate matching eligible CIP codes.
- CIP Codes for Associate of Science degrees are not on the FY26 Choose Ohio First Eligible CIP List but students in these CIPs may be eligible for COF if they are in an eligible STEM pathway.
  - Refer to the Associate of Science Guidance Memo.
  - Similar guidance for Education majors.

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Award Amounts

- Maximum award was calculated based on actual expenditures.

- Applicants can request more than the award amount in the letter. Support such requests in the proposal.

- Funding decisions will consider the institution's commitment to increase enrollment and completion in STEM programs and past performance with Choose Ohio First.

- Annual awards will be aligned with performance, including enrollment growth, completions, and overall progress toward growth in STEM fields.

- Future years' funding is subject to the appropriation of future Ohio General Assemblies, Controlling Board approval, and performance of grantees.

Program Period

- Selected institutions will be awarded a total maximum amount of funds to be drawn down over a **four-year program period**, May 1, **2027**, through June 30, 2031.

- Each year, ODHE will evaluate the performance of the institution and issue a dynamic annual award letter based on performance.

- Annual awards may be reduced mid-cycle if performance falls short of the institution's proposal or increased if performance merits an increase.

Eligible Use of Funds

- Choose Ohio First funds are intended to be used only for student scholarships – to be applied toward tuition and general fees, **lab fees**, book vouchers, and meal plans.

- Institutions must specifically list and itemize "Choose Ohio First scholarship" in financial aid award letters, tuition billing invoices, institutional website portals and similar communications with students in which the Choose Ohio First scholarship is a component of the student's overall financial aid package.

- Institutions may not use any portion of funds for administration.

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Student Eligibility and Scholarships

- A minimum student award of $1,500 for degree seeking students and a minimum student award of $500 certificate students, each academic year.

- Max award changes each year and is based on a formula.

- Both full-time and part-time students may receive COF scholarships.

- To be eligible for a FY26 Choose Ohio First scholarship, students must be:
  - An Ohio resident seeking an undergraduate or graduate degree, or a for-credit certificate in a program of study that has a CIP code on the FY26 Choose Ohio First Eligible CIP List; and
  - Be new to the program of study at the institution; and
  - Meet the institution's eligibility criteria.

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Submitting a Proposal

- Submit proposals through the ODHE RFP Portal.

- Due not later than March 2, 2026, at 11:59 PM.

- Complete proposals consist of three (3) electronic files uploaded to the RFP portal.

  1. The Executive Summary of the proposal submitted as a Microsoft Word file.
  2. The COF FY26 Application Excel File with tabs 2-5 completed.
  3. One PDF of the complete proposal which includes the Executive Summary and the COF FY26 Application Excel File. Joint proposals must have a completed FY26 Application Excel File for each institution.

Proposal Review Process and Timeline

- The Chancellor shall make the final decisions based on the quality of the proposal in addressing the RFP criteria.

- The President of selected institutions will be notified of the award. All awards are subject to Controlling Board approval.

Request for Proposals (RFP) Release Date:	December 17, 2025
Informational Webinar	January 23, 2026
Proposals Due:	**March 2, 2026, 11:59 P.M**.
Proposal Review Begins:	March 3, 2026
Public Meeting:	TBD
Notification of Awarded Proposals:	Summer 2026

- Selected institutions will be awarded a total maximum amount of funds to be drawn down over a four-year program period, May 1, 2027, through June 30, 2031.

Format

- Proposals must be submitted in a standard font, 11 point and double spaced with one-inch margins; there is an exception for tables and images, where the font may be single spaced. Please see below for page allocations for each section. ODHE is not obligated to review pages beyond the stated maximums.

- Proposals should follow the outline below and each section should be clearly marked.

Proposal Criteria

1. Cover Letter (one page maximum)
   - The cover letter must include an endorsement of the proposal by a senior leader at the institution, the name of the institution(s) and identify the primary contact.

2. Executive Summary (two pages maximum)
   - Will be used in the public meeting.

3. Project Narrative (21 pages maximum)

4. Application Excel File

5. Attachments (15 pages maximum)

Project Narrative

a) Project Description and Rationale (10 Points)

- Integrated with the institution's mission and does not displace existing resources already committed to the mission.

- Institution's commitment to and performance with increasing STEM graduates.

- Facilitates completion of a degree or a certificate in a cost-effective manner.

- Encourages students to complete a certificate program of value.

- Past performance with COF: increased enrollment in eligible programs, success with degree and certificate completions, use of funds, timeliness of required reports and payment files, and the results of financial aid audits.

- Budget narrative: total four-year request, average scholarship amount, selection and award process, responsible for ensuring scholarship funds are utilized.

- Source and amount of 1:1 matching funds. Matching funds should be supported by letters of commitment with specific amounts.

Project Narrative

b) Recruitment Strategy (10 Points)
- Describe and explain the institution's Choose Ohio First scholar recruitment and selection strategy.
- Institution's confidence in meeting pledged growth.
- Provide relevant data and references to institutional priorities.

c) Student Support (10 Points)
- Describe and explain how the institution will support students with on-time completion.
- Preparing students for WBL and other support necessary for success.

Project Narrative

d) Work-Based Learning (WBL) (25 Points)

- All COF recipients – one WBL experience.
- Co-op, internship, research lab experience, or other WBL activity.
- WBL experiences based in or connected to Ohio employers and provide letters of support from those employers may receive priority funding.

e) Programs of Study (25 Points)

- Describe and explain the quality of the selected STEM program(s) at the institution and the extent to which COF funds will enhance their quality.
- Describe enrollment and expected labor market demand.
- Describe and explain how the proposal/selected STEM programs meets a statewide educational need.
- Degree level or credential.

Project Narrative

f) Regional and Statewide Economic Needs and Strengths (20 Points)

- Programs integrated with the regional/state economy and JobsOhio talent pipeline goals.
- Include occupational and industry level information to support the proposal
  - Strong evidence may merit additional consideration and result in prioritization of the proposal.

COF FY26 Application Excel File - Instructions

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FY26 Application - Instructions

General Instructions

Please fill out the following four pages of this workbook. Any cell highlighted in pale yellow is available for inputs. All other cells should not be modified. If you are pasting information into the worksheet, please avoid pasting data from merged cells in excel, as it will disrupt the integrity of the workbook formatting.

Instructions | Contacts | CIPs | Enrollment Growth Pledge | Budget Table ⋯ ＋ ⋮ ◀ ▬▬▬▬

COF FY26 Application Excel File - Contacts

Choose Ohio First
FY26 Application - Contacts

Institution Name:	
Institution ZIP Code:	
Institution Mailing Address:	
Institution Email:	
Institution Phone Number:	

	Honorifi Name	Title	Email	Phone	Mailing Address
Primary Contact/ Key Personnel					
Program Manager					
Legal					

Contacts | CIPs | Enrollment Growth Pledge | Budget Table ⋯ + ⋮

COF FY26 Application Excel File - CIPs

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FY26 Application - CIPs

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Eligible CIP Codes for FY26 COF RFP	**CIP Code(s) for Institutions STEM Enrollment Growth Evaluation**
010901 Animal Sciences, General	
011003 Brewing Science	
011201 Soil Science and Agronomy, General	
011302 Pre-Veterinary Studies	
018301 Veterinary/Animal Health Technology/Technician and Veterinary Assistant	
030101 Natural Resources/Conservation, General	
030103 Environmental Studies	
030104 Environmental Science	
030201 Natural Resources Management and Policy	
030208 Natural Resources Law Enforcement and Protective Services	
030299 Natural Resources Management and Policy, Other	
030301 Fishing and Fisheries Sciences and Management	

Instructions | Contacts | CIPs | Enrollment Growth Pledge | Budget Table ⋯ + ⋮

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COF FY26 Application Excel File – Enrollment Growth

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FY26 Application - Enrollment Growth Pledge

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2023-2024 STEM enrollment:	
2024-2025 STEM enrollment:	
2025-2026 projected STEM enrollment:	
2026-2027 projected STEM enrollment:	
2027-2028 projected STEM enrollment:	
2028-2029 projected STEM enrollment:	
2029-2030 projected STEM enrollment:	
2030-2031 projected STEM enrollment:	

Pledged increase in students	
Pledged percent enrollment growth	

ions | Contacts | CIPs | **Enrollment Growth Pledge** | Budget Table ··· + :

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COF FY26 Application Excel File - Budget

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FY26 Application - Budget Table

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Average annual per-student scholarship amount:					

	4-Year Funding Period				
	AY27-28	AY28-29	AY29-30	AY30-31	Total
Number of COF students awarded					
Requested annual allocation	$-	$-	$-	$-	$-

Contacts   CIPs   Enrollment Growth Pledge   **Budget Table**   +

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Attachments

5. Attachments (15 pages maximum):

- Institutional support letters from each office that will support the COF program describing the relationship to the COF program.

- Joint proposals must include letter(s) from all collaborating institutions.

- Partner organizations and employer support letters that describe the relationship of the business to the COF program.

- Letters should be addressed to Chancellor Mike Duffey.

Scoring Rubric

Proposals will be scored on a 100-point scale with the following values:

Project Rationale	10 Points
Recruitment Strategy	10 Points
Student Support	10 Points
Work-based Learning Opportunities	25 Points
Academic Programs	25 Points
Integration w/ Regional & Statewide Economic Needs	20 Points

ODHE Choose Ohio First Contacts

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THANK YOU!