RFP GC25-001 - Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)
Questions & Answers Summary
Webinar

1. STEP RFP indicated there would be an informational webinar today 10/8/2024. Please direct me to the link

   The webinar can be found on NYSED's STEP website.

Go Anywhere/Obtaining Access-Registering /Submitting RFP

2. I am trying to register for the Go Anywhere Website so that I am able to upload the 2025 – 2030 application that is due in November 2024. I am not finding any links to the registration, only a login page. Is it possible to receive the registration page so that I can register?

   Applicants without access to GoAnywhere should send an email to steprfp@nysed.gov to request access. New applicants for the STEP grant must create and test their GoAnywhere accounts, and current grantees must test their GoAnywhere account, by November 13, 2024, to be able to submit the grant application.

3. In the RFP it states that applications need to be submitted using the "Go Anywhere" portal. We do not believe we have an account, so when we click on the website in the RFP. (https://sedftm.nysed.gov/webclient/Login.xhtml), it asks for username and password, but nowhere to register. Do we use credentials from another portal (SFS)? If not, then we are requesting access to the portal.

   Applicants without access to GoAnywhere should send an email to steprfp@nysed.gov to request access. New applicants for the STEP grant must create and test their GoAnywhere accounts, and current grantees must test their GoAnywhere account, by November 13, 2024, to be able to submit the grant application.

   No, you do not use credentials from another portal such as SFS.

4. I do not have access to a STEP folder or a CSTEP folder. I will be submitting applications to both these programs shortly, and I will need access. Please advise.

   Applicants without access to GoAnywhere should send an email to steprfp@nysed.gov to request access. New applicants for the STEP grant must create and test their GoAnywhere accounts, and current grantees must test their GoAnywhere account, by November 13, 2024, to be able to submit the grant application.

5. Who should be submitting the RFP in Go Anywhere?

   Anyone from the institution can submit the RFP in GoAnywhere. Current projects already have access to Go Anywhere; therefore, it would be quite easy for them to submit. However, they may need to clarify with their RF/Sponsored Programs Office as to who is submitting or who is submitting what documents or sections of the proposal.

6. If an institution is reapplying for a STEP grant while also submitting a new CSTEP grant, is a new GoAnywhere account required for the CSTEP submission?

   There are separate folders for STEP and CSTEP; therefore, if you apply for one program that you currently do not have on your campus you would have to request access to Go Anywhere for that other program.

7. If an applicant has a Go Anywhere account for CSTEP, do we need to create a new one for STEP?

   Yes, there are separate folders for STEP and CSTEP, therefore, if you apply for one program that you currently do not have on your campus you would have to request access to Go Anywhere for that other program.

8. Do we submit the complete application to GoAnywhere as one single document, with narrative attachments, program work plan, FS-10 budget form, budget narrative, M/WBE documents, payee information form, and attachment I?

   The completed application may be submitted as a single document or several separate documents. If submitted as several separate documents, please label each with appropriate file name.

9. I have access and I have created a new folder that is labeled RFP #GC25-001. Is this all that is needed? We merely uploaded all of the different required forms into this one folder as I did not see anything that was already labeled for the RFP.

   RFP #GC25-001 is the appropriate folder to upload these documents. The completed application may be submitted as a single document or several separate documents. If submitted as several separate documents, please label each with appropriate file name.

10. What format should we submit the RFP in? Should it be broken into sections and then put into Go Anywhere, or should it be one file?

    The completed application should be submitted as a single document or several separate documents; please label each with appropriate file name.

11. Should the complete application be sent as one pdf or should the different parts be uploaded separately and if so, how?

    The completed application should be submitted as a single document or several separate documents; please label each with appropriate file name.

12. When submitting the grant through the GoAnywhere portal, is it acceptable to create a single folder to upload all related grant documents? If so, is there a recommended naming convention for the folder to

ensure that NYSED can easily identify and differentiate the grant documents from programmatic documents submitted in previous years?

RFP #GC25-001 is the appropriate folder to upload these documents. The completed application may be submitted as a single document or several separate documents. If submitted as several separate documents, please label each with appropriate file name.

Budgets/Cost Share (Institutional Match)

13. I am working on the budget and on the 2028-29 code 40,45,46...90 tab the cell for supplies and materials narrative (Line 11) is not functioning correctly. I cannot select the cell and consequently, cannot add text. I have gone back to the SED website and downloaded the sheet again and the same issue is occurring. Since the sheet is protected, I am not able to fix it on my end. I do not wish to reenter all the data as I am almost finished.

The original STEP Composite-Narrative Budget 2025-2030 had a few errors due to an improperly formatted Budget Narrative; therefore, a revised STEP Composite-Narrative Budget 2025-2030 was uploaded on the NYSED STEP website by 10AM on Friday, October 25, 2024. Therefore, if you downloaded the STEP Composite-Narrative Budget 2025-2030 prior to then, please download the updated version.

Can the budget narrative spreadsheet be modified to permit changes in cell size? This is particularly important for the Description of Item and Calculation of Cost columns where more space is needed than is currently visible.

The format of the budget narrative may not be altered. The instructions on the Composite/Narrative Budget form state: "**Briefly explain** how proposed expenditures ... help fulfill programmatic requirements of the grant." Please be sure you are not using the composite/narrative budget form posted on the NYSED website before 10AM Friday, October 25, 2024.

14. On the 5-year summary (composite) tab, the total number of students must be listed. If FS10s are different in each year, what student count number should be used?

Student headcount should be the original number of students your institution intends to provide services for as stated in your application.

15. What elements in the budget narrative are essential to justify using grant funds and ensure clarity for NYSED reviewers?

Provide descriptions for all expenses entered onto the five FS-10 budgets. The Budget Narrative justifies all proposed expenditures, which must include details clarifying their nature, and the method of the calculation for each cost (p. 3). The instructions on the Composite/Narrative Budget form also state: "**Briefly explain** how proposed expenditures ... help fulfill programmatic requirements of the grant."

16. The RFP says to include the FS-10 in excel. What about the signature page? Or would to be in a PDF.

Per the RFP (p. 3):
The following forms of e-signatures are acceptable:
• handwritten signatures on faxed or scanned documents
• e-signatures that have been authenticated by a third-party digital software, such as DocuSign and Adobe Sign
• stored copies of the images of signatures that are placed on a document by copying and pasting or otherwise inserting them into the documents.

17. Will the state be awarding different amounts for each year at the outset? If not, what is the 5-year projection's intent, and will the budget submission process change in years 2, 3, 4 and 5? Rather than submitting a new FS10 and Budget narrative each year, would we be required to submit a FS10A in the spring after the state budget is approved for the following year instead?

The total on the FS-10 for each year of the grant period should be the same. Consult the Funding Levels for STEP Projects charts on Pages 18 and 19 to determine the maximum funding request. Should changes within funding categories of less than 10 percent be needed during a subsequent year, the organization can submit an FS-10-A.

18. Should we assume level funding as we complete budgets for a five-year period?

Yes.

19. Will each budget need to include matching letters, or will a single year's budget with matching letters suffice for all years?

The following budget documents are to be submitted:
FS-10 Budget forms (Complete and submit a separate FS-10 for each year of the program)
Budget Narrative (including Composite Budget)
No other documents pertaining to the budget are required per the RFP.

20. Can space rental charged by the school district be included in the match?

Yes, it can be part of the institutional match or cost share.

21. Regarding "organizational dues," it is understood that dues for APACS, the network's professional association, cannot be drawn from the grant. Can dues be counted as part of an institution's 25% match?

Yes, it can be part of the institutional match or cost share.

22. Regarding the statement that "State STEP funds cannot be used to pay the salary or stipend of the STEP project lead's Supervisor, or someone designated as a Principal Investigator for the grant contract (in their role as supervisor or PI)," is it permissible for institutions to allocate PI salary to the institutional budget instead?

Yes, it can be part of the institutional match or cost share.

23. How should the 25% match of institutional or non-NY state funds be documented and maintained in financial records?

The 25% match (institutional or non-NY State funds) is reported on the Composite/Narrative Budget form. The applicant should keep records of the institutional match or cost share like other fiscal documents for the program (See STEP RFP p. 23, H. Records Retention, bullet 2).

M/WBE

24. Please clarify the submission requirements for the M/WBE Document packet. Specifically, do we need to provide only the "M/WBE Goal Calculation Worksheet" for each of the 5 years and submit the full packet (including the Notice of Intent) for just the first year? Or are we required to prepare the full packet for each of the 5 years?

Application Submission (STEP RFP, p. 3)
Applicants must complete one set of MWBE documents to cover all five years of the program. In other words, the one M/WBE packet encompasses the total award for the 2025-30 five-year grant cycle contract.

25. Do there need to be separate MWBE Documents for each of the five years of budgets?

Application Submission (STEP RFP, p. 3)
Applicants must complete one set of MWBE documents to cover all five years of the program. In other words, the one M/WBE packet encompasses the total award for the 2025-30 five-year grant cycle contract.

26. Please clarify the submission requirements for the M/WBE Document packet. Specifically, do we need to provide only the "M/WBE Goal Calculation Worksheet" for each of the 5 years and submit the full packet (including the Notice of Intent) for just the first year? Or are we required to prepare the full packet for each of the 5 years?

Application Submission (STEP RFP, p. 3)
Applicants must complete one set of MWBE documents to cover all five years of the program. In other words, the one M/WBE packet encompasses the total award for the 2025-30 five-year grant cycle contract.

27. Does a project's request for waiver interfere with its application for funding? How does a project's ability to meet its 30% requirement factor into an application's rating?

All grantees must secure M/WBE approval whether that is through full compliance, partial compliance or a full waiver before the initial payment is released. MWBE utilization does not factor into scoring an application.

28. **T**he M/WBE packet requires a Project Number in two locations. Should we use a project number based on our current award and updated for the new fiscal year, or should we leave it blank?

Yes, you may use your current project number, with the first five (5) digits as follows: 0516-25. Applicants who don't already have a project number can enter the RFP number: GC25-001.

Allowable Costs

29. With regard to state funds not being allowed for cultural enrichment or other social activities, what are acceptable events that will be allowed considering the well-documented importance of a "sense of belonging" and how belonging relates to persistence in targeted fields we are designed to address? Can you specify what are acceptable examples of expenditures?

(STEP RFP, Allowable Costs, p. 20)
Allowable costs include the following:

- Program administration, including professional and non-professional salaries, benefits, staff travel for required program administration as approved by NYSED.
  *Note: All Out-of-state travel requires prior approval by NYSED liaison
- Stipends for students participating in approved STEP activities including, but not limited to, supervised research opportunities and internships (the maximum stipend must be consistent with the average for similar activities at the institution or in the region).
- Program activities in accordance with the mission of STEP, such as field trips, student conference expenses, program achievement/awards, and related fees/charges, standardized tests/instruction fees, etc.
- Expenses related to program attendance such as participant transportation.
- Student classroom supplies, including laboratory supplies, calculators, etc.
- Administrative and instructional supplies, materials, and equipment (including instructional or administrative computer software and computers, lab equipment, etc.). When equipment/technology is purchased with STEP funds, it is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that an inventory is completed and that a copy is submitted to NYSED upon request. If a program closes, any equipment purchased with NYSED funds must be released for transfer to another STEP program so that equipment continues to support STEP students. NYSED staff will assist in arranging the transfer of such equipment.
  Note: Those items with a unit value of $5,000 or more and having a useful life of more than one year must be reported in the equipment category on the Budget Form.
- Evaluation materials and activities.
- STEP staff development/training (*All out of state travel requires prior approval by NYSED).
- Program brochures/materials and promotional activities.
- Subcontracts for program services can be made.
- Indirect costs at no more than 8% are allowed.

30. Is a program fee for dual enrollment an allowable expense, or can it be considered for a matching cost?

Using funds to pay for tuition to ensure a student is college ready, a special summer course or to provide academic enrichment would be an allowable expense. It would also be acceptable as part of the institutional match or cost share.

31. Is tuition for credit or non-credit programs an allowable expense, or can it be considered for a matching cost?

Using funds to pay for tuition to ensure a student is college ready, a special summer course or to provide academic enrichment would be an allowable expense. It would also be acceptable as part of the institutional match or cost share.

32. Can I give stipends to graduating seniors?

Using funds to provide stipends to students would be an allowable expense.

Institution Eligibility

33. I am reading through it, and it appears that the school district we choose to work with must have 20% of the population be considered historically underrepresented. Before I begin this process, I want to ensure we're eligible. According to NYSED, we have about 10% racial diversity in our district but over 50% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. Would we qualify by this criterion?

Per the RFP, eligible applicant means a New York State degree-granting postsecondary institution or consortia of such institutions with registered scientific, technical, or health-related professional or pre-professional programs that lead to professional licensure or to employment in scientific, technical, and health-related fields. The institution submitting the proposal, or if the applicant represents a consortium then at least half of the institutions in the consortium, must be located within a school district with an enrollment that is at least 20 percent Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian/Alaska Native, or located near such a district that is easily accessible by public transportation.

Without knowing all the particulars of your district, NYSED cannot provide a definitive answer.

34. Does this criterion "*A location within a school district with an enrollment comprised of at least twenty percent minority group students*" include multi-racial students?

Eligible applicants, per the RFP, and as stated on p. 2: "The institution submitting the proposal, or if the applicant represents a consortium, then at least half of the institutions in the consortium must be located within a school district with an enrollment that is at least 20 percent Black or African American,

Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian/Alaska Native, or located near such a district that is easily accessible by public transportation."

How the student identifies determines their eligibility based on what's required in the RFP.

35. Can you clarify easily accessible by public transportation as noted in the "Eligible Applicants" section? Would pre-arranged busing be allowable?

Easily accessible, as referenced in the STEP RFP, for eligibility purposes, means students can access transportation to programming and services. Pre-arranged busing would be allowable.

Student Eligibility

36. Are NYS-domiciled students who attend schools outside of NYS eligible to be served as STEP students? For example, a student with a permanent address in NYS who attends school outside of NYS.

Per the RFP (p. 10): "For the purpose of STEP, a student is eligible to participate if the student is: a New York State resident (The student is a resident of the State if the individual's domicile is in New York State and the student is enrolled in grades 7 through 12) and interested in pursuing careers in the scientific, technical, health-related, and licensed professions".

37. Historically Underrepresented Minority: Regarding the Black or African American criteria, do students who self-identify as "North African" (not self-identifying as Black/African American) qualify as Black/ African American due to the location of North Africans coming from the continent of Africa? If not, is it correct to then apply economic eligibility standards?

If a student does not self-identify specifically as Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, then they must show documentation of economic eligibility.

38. Previously, student eligibility was outlined using free lunch documents or tax documents. What does economic eligibility look like for school districts that have instituted universal free lunch? Free lunch qualification was particularly helpful for undocumented students seeking to be served who do not have access to tax documents.

Students must individually provide documentation to support their economic eligibility for participation in a STEP program; therefore district-wide participation in free/reduced lunch is not sufficient, and the program would need income verification, or eligibility individually for free/reduced lunch, directly in reference to the individual student.

39. What other types of acceptable documentation can be used for students from those districts providing free lunch? Is there a standard form?

There is no standard form. Students must individually provide documentation to support their economic eligibility for participation in a STEP program; therefore, district-wide participation in free/reduced lunch is not sufficient, and the program would need income verification, or eligibility individually for free/reduced lunch, directly in reference to the individual student.

Per the RFP, "Economic disadvantage documentation could include a copy of the parent's or legal guardian's signed most recent year's tax returns (IRS form 1040, 1040A, 1040EZ or 4506) or proof of free or reduced lunch eligibility. The economic eligibility standards set forth apply only at the time of admission as a first-time student to a STEP program. Annual income eligibility criteria will be distributed by NYSED."

Additional documentation could include a student who participates in, or whose family participates in, economic assistance programs such as:

- Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program (Note that the United States Department of Agriculture has authorized the use of eligibility in free and reduced-price lunch programs to identify students from low-income families for Title I reporting purposes.)
- Social Security Insurance (SSI);
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Foster Care;
- Refugee Assistance (cash or medical assistance);
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC);
- Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP);
- Safety Net Assistance (SNA);
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); or
- Family Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

For districts participating in the Community Eligibility Option (CEO), identify only those students who would qualify to participate in the federal Free Lunch Program independent of CEO. For example, do not identify students who participate in the federal Free Lunch Program solely because the LEA is CEO eligible. Please consult NYSED's Office of Child Nutrition Program Administration for guidelines. If one student in a family is identified as low income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low income. Once admitted, a student may continue to receive supportive services as needed, even if the family income rises above the current eligibility standards.

Contracted Headcount/Student Enrollment

40. Can an existing program request a new minimum number of students when they submit the RFP?

NYSED does not suggest a recommended number to serve. It is up to the discretion of the applicant to request funds to serve the number of students that they feel they are capable of recruiting and providing required services throughout the 5-year cycle.

41. For single institutions that are currently serving more than 301 students in the current cycle, do they need to continue to serve that number of students and increase the budget to reflect the corresponding student headcount?

NYSED does not suggest a recommended number to serve. It is up to the applicant to request funds to serve the number of students they feel they can recruit and provide required services throughout the 5-year cycle.

42. If a program has routinely exceeded their current student requirement, would they be able to apply for a higher student number in the 2025-2030 RFP?

NYSED does not suggest a recommended number to serve. It is up to the applicant to request funds to serve the number of students they feel they can recruit and provide required services throughout the 5-year cycle.

43. If we receive more students than budgeted for, how should we proceed? Also, how should we budget for the additional students we plan to serve (more than the 301)? Will projects that serve more than 301 students receive additional funding in the future?

NYSED does not suggest a recommended number to serve. It is up to the applicant to request funds to serve the number of students they feel they can recruit and provide required services throughout the 5-year cycle. Projects that serve more than 301 students will not receive additional funds per student served over the 301.

44. If we are a continuing program and we agree to support more than the 301, are we responsible for the 95% of 301 students or the number we are going to serve?

An applicant is responsible to serve at least 95% of their contracted headcount; therefore, if an applicant states they will serve 450 students, then they must serve at least 95% of 450, or 427. Further, while individual projects that provide services to more than 301 students will not receive additional funds per student, serving higher numbers of proposed participants will be viewed favorably by reviewers in the scoring rubric for the Recruitment period.

45. What are the consequences if an applicant cannot meet enrollment targets, and how can this be mitigated during the planning phase?

STEP does not provide a planning phase. Therefore, to mitigate consequences, if not meeting enrollment goals, IHEs should be planning for what they might do immediately if awarded.

Additionally, the STEP award recipient institution will furnish NYSED with a mid-year report indicating the number of students enrolled in its program as of February 15 in each program year. This roster is due March 15. The number of students listed in this roster will be compared against the number of students proposed to be served in the RFP's Composite Budget. The Composite Budget is part of the Budget Narrative form, which can be accessed ion the NYSED STEP webpage.
Circumstances in which the IHEs will be put on probation:

1. Not meeting 90% threshold for contracted headcount for two consecutive years.
2. Non-compliance with RFP requirements (e.g., not submitting reports and budgets or submitting them late).

The IHEs not meeting contracted headcount and those on probation will have to submit a performance improvement plan and are subject to receive a site visit at NYSED's discretion. An IHE not meeting the above requirements for the last year of the previous RFP cycle may be put on probation in the first year of the upcoming cycle should they apply for and be awarded a grant.

46. What is the requirement for student headcount? 90% or 95%?

Projects are required to meet 95% of contracted enrollment. Per the RFP, Required Program Reports, 3a. (p. 24): The STEP student headcount indicated on the report will be used to ensure that the institution has minimally met 95% of their budgeted STEP student headcount.

However, if a project goes below 90% of their contracted enrollment for 2 consecutive years, the STEP Grantees are placed on probation. Per RFP (p. 17) Probation for STEP Grantees Circumstances in which the IHEs will be put on probation: Not meeting 90% threshold for contracted headcount for two consecutive years.

Documentation/Records Retention

47. What are filing standards and expectations? Technology has allowed for electronic applications to be generated. Electronic storage is available at some institutions. If available, can electronic filing be used? If so, what are standards that should be observed? If e-storage isn't available, should electronic applications be expected to be printed and filed?

Yes, electronic filing can be used if the required documentation is maintained.
RFP (p. 10) Documentation:
To be accepted, all required documentation must be complete. The application and all required documentation must be kept on file for each student at the STEP project site and must be readily available for review by New York State Education Department (NYSED) staff. In consortia's case, a copy of each student's application must be available at the home campus site and at the lead institution or project headquarters.

48. Can you confirm that records are to be preserved for six years from when a student departs the program or graduates? For example, a HS freshman (class of 2028), should student records be preserved from when that student's class graduated or left the STEP program?

The RFP states (p. 23): "Student records must be maintained for six years after the student graduates." Therefore, if a STEP student graduates in June 2028, you must maintain records on that student until June 2034. Additional information on records retention can be found on page 23 of the RFP.

49. Regarding the requirement for maintaining student records, what is the expectation of maintaining records for students who have left the program and not graduated as STEP students? Should those records be preserved alongside active students for six years after their expected graduation date?

The RFP states (p. 23): If a student withdraws from the institution prior to graduation, the student STEP record must be maintained for six years from the end of the academic term in which the student withdrew, or longer if required by institutional policy or practice. Therefore, if a student withdrew in June 2028, you still must keep that student's record until June 2034. Additional information on records retention can be found on page 23 of the RFP.

Staffing

50. For a program with 50 – 99 students, can an institution employ 1 FTE as director using grant funds? Or will grant funds cover only a .5 FTE?

Per the RFP (p. 11), the suggested minimum staffing for a program serving 50-99 students is .5 FTE.
NYSED does not object to more than that amount of staffing. Grant funds can be utilized for professional staff.

51. Does this minimum staffing requirement apply whether the staff person is full-time or part-time (e.g., is a faculty member or the staff person is split between different programs)?

Per the RFP (p. 11), the proposed staffing amount is based on the contracted headcount or number of students to be served. Also, all professional staff should have a background in working with students in grades 7-12.

52. Previously, NYSED directed institutions to start building infrastructure and salary expectations. Can the last grant RFP, with its job descriptions, be used as a reasonable model for the 2025-2030 RFP?

NYSED does not supply job descriptions or salary expectations. The Professional Staff FTE per contracted headcount is a suggestion, not a requirement. Per the RFP (p.11), STEP Suggested Minimum Staffing: the number of staff should match the requested contracted headcount (number of students to be served) for the application, and all professional staff should have a background working with students in grades 7-12.
Also, the project lead for the proposed STEP project should report directly to a senior administrator of the institution. A senior level administrator is one who directly reports to either the institution's President, Chief Academic/Student Affairs Officer, and/or governing board.

53. Our goal is to serve a minimum of 301 students. The RFP indicates in the chart at the bottom of page 11 that we need at least two full-time professional staff members. Does this mean we must hire at least two, with the option to hire additional staff if needed?

Per the RFP (p. 11):

STEP Suggested Minimum Staffing: the number of staff should match the requested contracted headcount (number of students to be served) for the application, and all professional staff should have a background working with students in grades 7-12. The Professional Staff FTE per contracted headcount is a suggestion, not a requirement.

54. The organizational structure at my institution is one in which the program currently reports to the Dean of the School, and the Dean reports to the Vice Chancellor/Provost. Does this structure align with "overseen by academic or student affairs at the institution/senior level administrator?" (page 11 of the RFP)

Per the RFP (p. 11):
The project lead for the proposed STEP project should report directly to senior level administrator of the institution. A senior level administrator is one who directly reports to either the institution's President, Chief Academic/Student Affairs Officer, and/or governing board.

55. After the Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action, subsequent complaints were filed with the US Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights. Are projects allowed to reside in offices outside of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs?

Per the RFP, projects are required to be housed in academic or student affairs at the institution and provide suitable institutional support. If there are compelling reasons the project should not be, please contact your program office, should the IHE be awarded.

56. Can staff split time on both C-STEP and STEP programs? (0.5 FTE on STEP and 0.5 on C-STEP)

Yes.

57. Can staff working on STEP and C-STEP have the same direct supervisor?

Yes.

Fringe Benefits

58. Is the use of the fringe rate approved by the Office of Naval Research for the college acceptable for budgeting for the covered employee's benefits? Does the RFP language mean that the state will require reconciliation to the actual amount of benefits received by each of the covered employees at the time of the FS10F?

STEP RFP (p. 21):
If the rate for fringe benefits does not exceed the actual rate paid by the institution, NYSED has no objections. The rate for fringe benefits cannot exceed the actual rate paid by the institution for benefits received by the covered employee. Only administrative costs directly attributable to the program are allowed by law; it is not permissible to deduct fringe benefits costs for employees who do not receive the benefits.

RFP GC25-001 - Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)
Questions & Answers Summary
Accessibility of Web-Based Information and Applications

59. Can you clarify section XII.F Accessibility of Web-Based Information and Applications? What does that mean practically for programs that use electronic applications through platforms like SurveyMonkey, etc.?

This section of the RFP (p. 30) requires that state agency web-based information, including documents, and applications are accessible to persons with disabilities.

60. What is the timing of the quality testing and is conformance necessary prior to contract awarding, or is this a stipulation that the sites must agree to conform with as part of the contract?

This policy establishes accessibility requirements for web-based information and applications developed, procured, maintained, or used for all NYSED web-based content. Therefore, compliance would need to be in place by any awardee once they have a contract.

Prequalification

61. Do institutions that currently have a STEP grant need to Prequalify?

The requirement is to be prequalified by November 26, 2024. If you are prequalified, then nothing needs to be done. If you are not, then you must submit the prequalification application and the required documents in advance of the deadline to allow for prequalification. If you are unsure if you are prequalified, please send an email to steprfp@nysed.gov .

Detailed information on how to register with SFS and become prequalified is available on the Grants Management website (https://grantsmanagement.ny.gov/).

Disclaimer: *New York State reserves 5-10 business days from the receipt of complete Prequalification applications to conduct its review. If supplementary information or updates are required, review times will be longer. Due to the length of time this process could take to complete, it is advised that nonprofits Prequalify as soon as possible. Failure to successfully complete the Prequalification process early enough may result in a grant application being disqualified.*

62. We are currently prequalified until 11/15/2024. The documents need to renew that prequal become available from our Finance Office on 11/14/2024. That will be the earliest date we can submit the prequal renewal. NYS can take up to 10 days after that to review and get back to us with any revision requests. This will further delay the prequal approval. With the RFP due date being 11/26/2024, there is the possibility that prequalification may not be approved as of that submission date. Is there any room to allow for the successful submission of the application while the prequalification process is still being reviewed? Any insight will be greatly appreciated and will benefit our approach to submitting this project application.

Not-for-profits must be prequalified by the application deadline or any application will be disqualified. If an organization submits a Notice of Intent (to steprfp@nysed.gov by November 12) prequalification specialists will be able to monitor the "In Review by Agency" queue up to the deadline and try to expedite a prequalification application by that organization. However, if documents are missing or require modifications during the review process, the applicant may not become prequalified in time.

Vendor Questionnaire Form

63. Does the Vendor Questionnaire Form have to be completed ONLY IF all three bullets are true?

Subcontractors:

For vendors using subcontractors, a Vendor Responsibility Questionnaire and a NYSED vendor responsibility review are required for a subcontractor when:

the subcontractor is known at the time of the contract award;

the subcontractor is not an entity that is exempt from reporting by OSC; and

the subcontract will equal or exceed $100,000 over the life of the contract

Yes, that is correct. If all three statements apply, a VRQ is required.

Public Relations/Attributions of Funding

64. How should projects included in centers or divisions housing other grants distinguish themselves to adhere to this policy?

As stated in the RFP (pp. 13-14):

To ensure the continued support and the commitment of resources to State-funded Science and Technology Entry Program projects, there must be public awareness of the program's positive impact on the lives of project participants and their families, schools, and communities. Positive publicity and community awareness also help to ensure that those who are eligible and who could benefit from participation are informed of the project's existence.

To facilitate public awareness, all funded Science and Technology Entry Program projects are required to ensure that all public relations materials, websites, and program-related activities acknowledge that the project and its activities are supported, in whole or in part, by a grant from the New York State Education Department. In addition, when local, statewide, or national media report on the project's success or on honors received by students or staff, New York State Education Department funding must be acknowledged. In addition, the project lead should submit copies of all local, statewide, or national media stories about the project and/or the project participants and staff to the State Education Department at the following address:

Attn: STEP
Office of Postsecondary Access, Support and Success
New York State Education Department

RFP GC25-001 - Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)
Questions & Answers Summary

89 Washington Avenue, EBA 960
Albany, New York 12234
Telephone: *(518) 474-3719*
Email: *kiap@nysed.gov*

Questions about this policy may be directed to the appropriate project liaison. The foregoing publicity requirements are subject to any additional terms and conditions that are defined in the master grant contract.

General

65. Where can we find the Regents district on the cover page? I found judicial, but not regents.

See this link on the NYSED website.

66. Should our STEP Application be a part of the Narrative, or should it be an attachment?

The STEP Student Application is not specifically requested in this RFP but attaching it is not prohibited.

67. Are additional attachments other than those listed allowed to be included?

Additional attachments are not specifically requested in this RFP but are not prohibited.

68. Do we need an abstract for the proposal? If yes, how many points and how many pages? Will the abstract be counted in the number of pages for the narrative?

This is not a part/section of this RFP.

69. Will a program abstract be included in the proposal?

This is not a part/section of this RFP.

70. Does an abstract need to be included in the proposal?

This is not a part/section of this RFP.

71. I have not seen a place for the Abstract. Is that eliminated from the narrative for this current RFP?

This is not a part/section of this RFP.

72. Are there student participation percentage requirements? Can a student attend only part of the total programming and be considered a STEP participant?

STEP RFP (p. 8):
STEP Student: an active member of a participating STEP project who is also a student enrolled in an appropriate grade at an eligible school. Active shall be defined as having applied for and then accepted into STEP at the institution and participation in STEP activities. Participation in the number of activities per semester will be defined by the STEP institution.

73. What is the difference between a "first-generation college goer" and a "first generation college student?"

For purposes of the STEP RFP, there are no differences in these terms.

74. How does NYSED define the child of a parent who has "pursued post-secondary education?" Is it only acceptance and matriculation, or acceptance, matriculation, and completion of at least one semester?

For purposes of the STEP RFP, attended but did not complete a four-year degree.

75. What is the definition of a parent group and/or parent component?

For the purposes of STEP, a parent group/component is gathering of parents, grandparents, guardians of the enrolled STEP students who meet at least twice a semester to establish a relationship between the parents and the program.

76. Is there a clear guideline on when an MOU should be utilized (other than the school district we are working with) vs. a letter of support?

STEP RFP (p. 8):
An MOU is a written document or agreement between the school district and the IHE (Institute of Higher Education) that delineates all roles and responsibilities with which the parties shall commit to in the contract.

For purposes of the STEP RFP, a letter of support would show the applicant's credibility, their credentials, and reasons why they should be awarded the funding.

77. Does the MOU need to be signed by both parties, or just the entity agreeing to participate with the C/STEP program? Is the MOU format restricted just to the school districts and IHEs, or can it also be for other formal understandings where services are being committed?

An MOU should be signed by both parties and can be modified for other partnerships (besides school districts) however it must delineate all roles and responsibilities with which the parties shall commit in the contract.

78. What constitutes an acceptable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between institutions and local schools?

An acceptable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between institutions and local schools must delineate roles and responsibilities with which the parties shall commit in the contract.

79. Could you please provide clarification on the difference between college freshman and "pre-freshman"? For example, if we ran a "pre-orientation" program for students who have graduated from high school and are accepted and enrolled at our institution for the fall semester, my understanding is these are freshman, and this would qualify as a CSTEP Summer Program. If we ran a "summer bridge" summer program for high school graduates that are preparing for college to improve preparation for college level math and science – individuals who may or may not be enrolled at a college. Would this be an eligible STEP Summer Program – despite the fact that they have graduated from high school? Or are high school graduates who have not enrolled at our college in a weird grey area that we cannot provide any programming for?

An eligible STEP student must be a resident of NYS and enrolled in grades 7 through 12. Once a student graduates from 12th grade they are no longer eligible for STEP. Pre-freshmen includes students who have graduated high school and then been accepted to your institution of higher education but have not yet started classes.

80. Could you clarify the meaning of "persistence rate"? Is this referring to the retention of current STEP students, or is it focused on the persistence of those students remaining in STEM-related majors after graduating from the program and enrolling in higher education institutions?

As stated in the STEP RFP in the section on Program Requirements (p. 11):
Persistence rate is referring to the persistence rate of participating students, persistence of students in completing mathematics and science courses, and the college placement rate of these students in professional or pre-professional programs in scientific, technical, or health-related fields.

81. What strategies or institutional expertise should be highlighted to demonstrate a solid commitment to serving STEP-eligible students?

As referenced in the STEP RFP:
Provide the institution's expertise and commitment in providing services and educational programs to similar populations and neighboring secondary school(s). Highlight institutional expertise in promoting careers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, healthcare, and the licensed professions.

82. How can applicants demonstrate the effectiveness of their partnerships with community organizations and local schools in the application?

Per the STEP RFP (p. 33):
Provide a brief description of formal collaborations between the proposing institution and local education agencies such as local (public, private or charter) schools and school districts, CSTEP Programs, professional organizations, other agencies that will be involved in the project and/or others who will participate in the proposed project. Specify how each participating party will contribute to the project.

83. What procedures must be followed if a program needs to change its leadership or organizational structure after receiving the grant?

Per RFP (p. 20, X. BUDGET, A. Use of Funds):
Program changes (especially leadership, organizational structure, and space) must have prior written approval from NYSED.

84. Can STEP and C-STEP be co-located on a campus?

Yes.

85. What criteria will NYSED use to evaluate the institution's past performance, and how can a new [applicant] maximize points in these areas?

As a new applicant, priority points are not applicable. Per the RFP (p. 33), applicants should describe the institution's expertise and commitment in providing services to similar populations regarding science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health-related careers, and the licensed professions. Also describe your institution's experience conducting educational programs with students at neighboring secondary school(s).

86. How can applicants ensure their applications avoid common issues that might lead to disqualification or a lower score?

Some issues include not thoroughly reviewing the RFP and the scoring rubric as well as not submitting all required materials noted on the application checklist. Some major disqualification issues are not submitting by the due date and not ensuring enough time to get through the prequalification process if needed.

Work Plan/Program Requirements

87. Can you clarify if the timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool are needed on the Work Plan?

Per STEP RFP (p. 34): Program Work Plan should identify the activities, timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool associated with the following program requirements.

88. On slide 33 states "Work Plan should identify the activities, timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool associated with each of the program requirements." The actual form does not include timeline, staff, or evaluation tool. Do we just insert these topics where we think they best fit?

Yes. Per STEP RFP (p. 34): Program Work Plan should identify the activities, timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool associated with the following program requirements.

89. In the new Work Plan template, there is no specific request for staff responsible, FTE, timeline. Should that be incorporated in the "Task" portion? It does mention including it in the description within the RFP itself.

Yes. Per STEP RFP (p. 34): Program Work Plan should identify the activities, timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool associated with the following program requirements.

90. Where do we list the staff, timeline and evaluation tool(s) that support the Objectives?

Per RFP (p. 34): Program Work Plan should identify the activities, timeline, staff responsible, and evaluation tool associated with the following program requirements.

91. If we have more than one Task, can we rework the form? Or does the Objective have to be listed above each Task?

Per STEP RFP (p. 34): Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures.

92. It's not very clear how we are to input the information requested under the Objectives within the workplan template. Why are there 2 tasks for one objective?

Per STEP RFP (p. 34): Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the spaces provided for Tasks and Performance Measures.

93. Can you provide more information on the structure of the Program Workplan template?

Use the template posted with the RFP. The work plan includes all five years of the program.
RFP (Attachment C-Work Plan) Instructions: A standard template for the work plan is included, which identifies the objectives that need to be met and one or more associated tasks to be completed. Each task is associated to one or more performance measures. Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the table if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures. For multi-year contracts, each period will have a separate work plan – a contract that has five periods established would have five separate work plans outlined here.

94. How do we know what Performance Level we're writing to… (e.g., level 1.1,1.2 or 1.3)?

This is not specifically requested in this RFP.

95. If the activities are the same for the 5-year grant cycle, do we need to duplicate the work plan for each year, or can we enter "years 1-5" on the tasks?

No. Instructions on Attachment C- Work Plan state the following:
For multi-year contracts, each period will have a separate work plan – a contract that has five periods established would have five separate work plans outlined here. Each work plan conceivably could be the same or very similar.

96. How specific do the tasks need to be in the work plan? For example, can I say career planning workshops instead of naming each workshop we are conducting?

Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures. The level of specificity is up to the applicant.

97. What detail is required in the Work Plan to ensure it aligns with the expectations for all five years of the program?

Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures. The level of specificity is up to the applicant.

98. Are we required to input projected numbers/percentages for the performance measures?

Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures. While projected numbers/percentages are not required, per page 34 of the RFP a method for assessing and/or measuring the performance of the task is required on the Work Plan.

99. The reviewers' forms ask the reviewers to rate requirements but we're writing objectives. What are we writing and where are the directives?

Objectives are provided, which align to the program requirements. Per the Attachment C - Work Plan instructions: Applicants may add Tasks or Performance Measures to the Work Plan tables if needed and also do not have to use all of the provided spaces for Tasks and Performance Measures.

100. Can you provide a completed sample of the work plan?

No, as Work Plans are based on each institution's respective capacity to meet program requirements.

101. Enrichment Curricula were devised around regents' standards that are now optional. What new standards are available for programs to standardize their enrichment learning objectives?

Per the STEP RFP (p. 12):

Provide services and activities to enhance and increase students' mathematical skills and experiences in the sciences and laboratory science in accordance with the current NYSED standards for high school graduation. Program activities must enhance and support students' abilities to perform tasks in computing, statistics, algebra, and geometry, and increase students' knowledge in at least one field of science such as biology, chemistry, or physics. All activities must be in compliance with the most current NYS learning standards, which can be found at the NYSED website.

102. In requirement 8, do we list our non-STEP partnerships, i.e., CBOs?

This is not specifically requested in this RFP but is not prohibited.

103. What are acceptable forms of service learning?

Awarded applicants should explain in their Work Plan how service-learning projects are important to their students and communities. According to The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), service learning serves to, "Give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences." (See the AACU website for more information.)

104. What specific roles and activities must the STEP Advisory Committee undertake to meet the program's requirements?

Per the RFP (p. 12): The purpose of the STEP Advisory Committee is to meet, at minimum, annually to discuss upcoming programming or the calendar of events and assist with the self-review process.

Priority Points

For the priority points, are these awarded solely for on-time submission, or would points be withheld if adjustments are needed after the specified deadlines to ensure an accurate and complete submission?

It is based on the submission of documents, both programmatic and fiscal, by required date.

105. Regarding the statement: Priority points are to be awarded if your 20-23 STEP program met the required 95% enrollment. For programs that initially proposed an enrollment number at application (say 305 students for example), and then each year were offered and awarded additional funding to serve a larger number of students, are the priority points to be based on the initial application estimates (305 students), or on the increased numbers of total students to be served with the additional funding in those subsequent years?

It is based on your initial contracted headcount for each grant year.

106. If our original contract specified serving a certain number of students during a funding cycle, and we received additional funding to serve a larger number that same funding cycle but did not meet this increased target, will we still be eligible for the priority point for that year?

It is based on your initial contracted headcount for each grant year.

107. Can projects be penalized for institutional delays in producing fiscal reports?

Priority points will not be awarded if fiscal documents were not submitted to NYSED by due dates.

108. Will the pandemic be considered when given priority points over the last 5 years? Will staffing be considered? For example, there was no Director for our program for over a year which led this position to be unfilled.

Priority points will be awarded based on initial contracted headcount, submission of interim/final reports by the due date, submission of required fiscal documents, and spending of awarded funds for each of the indicated years.

Awarding of Priority points is as follows:

1. Enrollment (2 points maximum)
   A. If your 20-23 STEP program met the required 95% enrollment for:
      - 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
      - 3 years - 1.5 pts
      - 2 years - 1 pt
      - 1 year - 0.5 pt

2. On-time submission of budget documents and interim/final reports as described in the 2020-25 RFP (2 points maximum)

   A. Budget documents (1 point maximum)
   - On time for 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
   - On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
   - On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
   - On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

   B. Interim/Final reports (1 point maximum)
   - On time 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
   - On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
   - On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
   - On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

3. Spending of awarded funds (2 points maximum)

A. Expended 90% or more of initially awarded funds in a given year

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

109. Regarding priority points for current STEP projects, during the 2022-23 school year, projects were offered additional funding for increasing their funded headcount. Because this funding came so late in the academic year, NYSED permitted these additional funds to roll over to 2023-24. Given this, Will falling below 95% enrollment in 22-23 reduce the priority points that a program receives? Will not expending 90% or more of the full award for 22-23 (i.e., Taking advantage of the rollover) reduce the priority points that a program receives?

Priority points will be awarded based on initial contracted headcount, submission of interim/final reports by the due date, submission of required fiscal documents, and spending of awarded funds for each of the indicated years.

Awarding of Priority points is as follows:

1. Enrollment (2 points maximum)

A. If your 20-23 STEP program met the required 95% enrollment for:

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

2. On-time submission of budget documents and interim/final reports as described in the 2020-25 RFP (2 points maximum)

A. Budget documents (1 point maximum)

- On time for 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

B. Interim/Final reports (1 point maximum)

- On time 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

3. Spending of awarded funds (2 points maximum)

A. Expended 90% or more of initially awarded funds in a given year

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

110. I'm wondering how we might be able to be considered for the Priority Points (specifically regarding Enrollment), or if there will be a way to account for institutions that were named in lawsuits a year and a half ago, to be considered to obtain those points if we were unable to reach our numbers in said year—because of the lawsuit … as we awaited directives from State Ed? Being that we were not able to actively recruit students as some of our legal departments guiding us to not stir the water and to tread lightly (therefore possibly not reaching and retaining our contracted number of students); I'm wondering how we would be able to compete for those points if our numbers were not met?

Priority points will be awarded based on initial contracted headcount, submission of interim/final reports by the due date, submission of required fiscal documents, and spending of awarded funds for each of the indicated years.

Awarding of Priority points is as follows:

1. Enrollment (2 points maximum)

A. If your 20-23 STEP program met the required 95% enrollment for:

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

2. On-time submission of budget documents and interim/final reports as described in the 2020-25 RFP (2 points maximum)

A. Budget documents (1 point maximum)

- On time for 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

B. Interim/Final reports (1 point maximum)

- On time 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt

- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

3. Spending of awarded funds (2 points maximum)

A. Expended 90% or more of initially awarded funds in a given year

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

111. In light of COVID19, I'm wondering how we would be able to compete for Enrollment points if our numbers were not met?

Priority points will be awarded based on initial contracted headcount, submission of interim/final reports by the due date, submission of required fiscal documents and spending of awarded funds for each of the indicated years.

Awarding of Priority points is as follows:

1. Enrollment (2 points maximum)

A. If your 20-23 STEP program met the required 95% enrollment for:

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

2. On-time submission of budget documents and interim/final reports as described in the 2020-25 RFP (2 points maximum)

A. Budget documents (1 point maximum)

- On time for 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

B. Interim/Final reports (1 point maximum)

- On time 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 1 pt
- On time 3 years - 0.75 pt
- On time 2 years - 0.5 pt
- On time 1 year - 0.25 pt

3. Spending of awarded funds (2 points maximum)

A. Expended 90% or more of initially awarded funds in a given year

- 4 years (20, 21, 22 and 23) - 2 pts
- 3 years - 1.5 pts
- 2 years - 1 pt
- 1 year - 0.5 pt

112. How can applicants claim priority points or demonstrate that they were earned? Or does NYSED provide this information to readers when calculating points?

Up to 6 priority points will be awarded to the applicants from previous STEP awards in accordance with their compliance in each area. These are not applied unless the application scores 60 out of 75. NYSED Program Office will assign the points.

113. Does NYSED verify and assign the Priority Points or do programs have to submit documentation?

Based on our records, NYSED Program Office will assign the points.

114. How will the priority points for on-time submissions and expenditure of funds impact the scoring of a first-time applicant?

Priority points are not applicable for new applicants.