



## **ACHE Request for Proposals: Summer Bridge Program Grants**

**Deadline for Submission: January 10, 2022**

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) is soliciting proposals from Alabama's public two- and four-year institutions for grants of up to \$100,000 to support summer bridge programs focused on improving college preparation and retention. Funds are available for new or existing summer bridge programs for Alabama high school students who will graduate in the spring of 2022 and plan to matriculate to a college or university in the summer or fall of 2022.

### **I. Background and Overview**

The State of Alabama established an ambitious goal to add 500,000 credentialed workers by the year 2025. Achieving this goal is critical if Alabama hopes to remain economically competitive with surrounding states and attract more high-skill, high-wage employers. The publication, *Building Human Capital: The Educational Path to Alabama's Economic Success*, which is the Commission's higher education strategic plan, establishes a number of priorities and strategies to advance this goal. Under the first priority of "Improving Access," the Commission identifies the need to "increase the number of high school students prepared for college in the institution's service area" and also "increase access to college and university offerings." Expanding summer bridge offerings is an important way to improve outcomes for students.

These programs are offered in the summer "bridge" period between high school and college, sometimes continuing into the first term of enrollment. Although the content of summer bridge programs can vary across institutions and by the population served, they typically last from one to six weeks and involve some or all of the following supports:

- an in-depth orientation to college life and resources, including financial aid
- academic advising and coaching, often continuing beyond the program period
- training in college success skills, such as time management and study skills
- co-requisite instruction of college-level math and/or English consisting of innovative instructional practices coupled with just-in-time student support
- accelerated academic or technical coursework

### **II. Funding Opportunity**

Funding for this grant opportunity is available through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF), which was intended to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the novel coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education at all levels, and students graduating from high school are now facing greater challenges navigating the transition between secondary to postsecondary

education. Students have experienced school closures, learning loss, and reduced availability of wraparound supports. There have been postsecondary enrollment declines in all sectors, but particularly at our community and technical colleges. Intentional efforts to expand existing or develop new summer bridge programs will help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 by providing students with the academic skills and social resources needed to succeed in a college environment.

### **III. Program Outcomes**

This funding opportunity is intended to produce the following outcomes:

- Increasing the number of students served by summer bridge programming
- Narrowing performance gaps in college course completion between prepared and underprepared students
- Increasing the number of first-time, full-time students enrolling in postsecondary education
- Increasing first-to-second-year retention rates of students participating in summer bridge programs, recognizing that increased retention rates are highly correlated with increased graduation rates

### **IV. Allowable Activities**

Below is a list of allowable activities that project dollars will fund:

- **Personnel Compensation:** Compensation would generally encompass a portion of salaries, wages, and benefits of personnel, including, but not limited to, project director and support staff. Allowable compensation must be in addition to compensation currently provided, which can include hiring new staff. Grant funds should not supplant existing payments to employees as “regular” salary or benefits.
- **Equipment Usage and Consumable Supplies:** Funds expended on equipment usage and consumable supplies must not exceed 15% of total project budget.
- **Stipends to Contractors:** contractor assistance would generally include, but not be limited to, hiring chaperones, instructors, or student staff.
- **Student Lodging and Meals (on campus)**
- **Facilities Rental**
- **Transportation Services for Program Activities**
- **Other Direct Costs:** Approval of expenditures for other direct costs is at the discretion of the proposal evaluation committee. These costs must be specifically identified and justified in the proposal budget.

Grant funds may not be used toward any of the following:

- Indirect costs
- Stipends or honoraria to administrators or executives of colleges and universities
- Personnel costs already covered by other revenue sources (i.e., grant funds should supplement not supplant existing personnel expenditures)

## V. Evaluation of Proposals

Institutions are invited to submit proposals to develop new summer bridge programs or expand existing programming with the intent of increasing college-going, improving first-year performance, and encouraging first-to-second-year retention.

Proposals should not exceed five pages, excluding budget, and will be scored on the following components:

- A. Project Description, Abstract and Narrative (50 points):** The project should outline the thematic and/or academic focus of the program; identify the divisions or departments involved; include the target number of students and proposed dates; describe the plan for student recruitment; demonstrate understanding of the academic support system or systems used to promote success that encourage a college-going culture; provide a professional development model for faculty and support staff; list the contributing partners that will support student mentoring or faculty requirements; explain the proposed outcomes/learning objectives; and create an evaluation model to be used to assess impact of the program. For proposals that seek to expand an existing program, please include a discussion of how the proposed funding will enhance existing offerings by reaching more students, reducing costs to students, expanding services, or the like.
- B. Resources and Capacity (25):** The proposal provides evidence of a commitment of the institutional resources and personnel necessary to support the proposed activities, meet the project's objectives, and assess the impacts of the program. It should include an explanation of on-campus logistics of the program, including lodging, meals, facilities, etc. The proposal also clearly describes the qualifications of all key faculty and staff implementing the program, including education and/or work experience.
- C. Scalability and Ongoing Support (15):** The proposal demonstrates convincing and compelling evidence that the project can be implemented fully over the life of the grant and can be sustained after grant funds are expended. Applicants must provide a detailed plan for following up with participants throughout the school year.
- D. Budget (10):** The proposed budget is clear, concise, and cost-effective, and costs are clearly justified in the budget narrative. Budgets must show projected revenue and expenses for the duration of the program, including how

Commission funding will be spent, what additional revenue has been secured to support the program, and any fees or tuition to be paid by students. Grant funding may not be used to supplant existing institutional or partner financial commitments, but may be used to reduce or eliminate costs to students and families. Note that proposals for programs that do not charge student tuition/fees will be prioritized.

A review committee selected and coordinated by ACHE staff will be established to evaluate the proposals. Proposals must score at least 70 points to be considered for funding. The maximum number of grants are contingent upon the amount of funding available and confidence in the quality and feasibility of programming proposed. ACHE reserves the right, once an initial selection has been made, to modify the scope of the RFP and negotiate the final terms of the agreement.

## **VI. Submission of Proposals**

- A. Applicants must secure a letter of support from the chief administrator (Dean of Instruction, Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, etc.) of the division/school that will be responsible for the administration of the grant funds. **For multi-institutional teams, please secure a letter of support from each institution.**
- B. Applicants must submit one complete electronic version of the proposal, with letters of support attached.
- C. Institutions may submit multiple applications; however, only one application from each institution will be accepted unless there are surplus funds. Individual applications may include multiple program tracks or sections.
- D. Proposals must be received by 5:00 pm CT on January 10, 2022, by the following designee:

Mr. Ron Leonard, Director of Special Initiatives  
[ron.leonard@ache.edu](mailto:ron.leonard@ache.edu)

Please use the email subject line "RFP Summer Bridge Program" to identify your submission.

## **VII. Award Notification**

After all proposals have been evaluated, the institutions that submitted proposals will be notified in writing by January 31, 2022 regarding the status of their proposal. ACHE reserves the right to accept or reject proposals in whole or in part and to negotiate any or all aspects of a proposal.

## **VIII. Other Terms and Conditions**

- A. Award winners will be required to have their institution's chief executive officer or chief academic officer sign an MOU with ACHE.
- B. Awards will be made in two installments: half of the amount will be awarded at the beginning of the project, and the second half will be awarded at the midpoint of the project, after successful implementation and provision of a progress report and any other requested deliverables.
- C. All activities funded through this grant opportunity shall be completed by December 1, 2022.