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Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE): Grant Writing Webinar

Webinar Transcript • April 21, 2026

Presented by Elizabeth Evans and Dr. Marc Smithers • Grants Office, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Elizabeth Evans:
Hello everyone and welcome to our event. My name is Elizabeth Evans, the Manager of Research and Consultation here at Grants Office. Today, we will be discussing the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education grant program, or IUSE, which offers $61 million each year to U.S.-based institutions of higher education and associated organizations.

The folks here at Grants Office are really excited about today's session. At this point, we've done a few of these series of webinars, each one focusing on a specific grant program. As you likely know, we do dozens of events throughout the year on grant-seeking advice in general, how to position your organization broadly for transportation funding or cybersecurity funding or school safety funding. Our purpose with this new 2026 series is to get far more granular on our information and our grant-seeking advice, focusing a full 30 to 45 minutes on just one grant that is relevant for this time of year.

We very much hope that you like today's event, and I encourage those of you in the audience who are representing an institution of higher education or an associated organization today to consider who else among your peers may benefit from today's session and pass this recording along to them. As Marc will detail in a few moments, this is a competitive grant program. The more folks who can learn about IUSE and secure themselves grant funding for STEM education, the better.

Housekeeping

Elizabeth Evans:
Before we get started, I've got two housekeeping items for you. You may ask questions at any time during today's event using the question and answer interface on the right-hand side of your screen. Feel free to submit as many questions as you like. We'll get to as many as possible toward the end of today's presentation.

Also, know that this session is being recorded. The recording will be available for download at the Grants Office website starting tomorrow. Our amazing webcast producer, Kate, has shared the link in the chat

for you already. It's pointing to this event's registration page at the moment, but will transition to become a resources page for the event once we begin the Q&A portion of today's session. The PowerPoint slides presented here today, along with a free step-by-step application workbook for the IUSE grant, will also be available at that same location. We'll talk more about that workbook here shortly.

Today's Speaker and Agenda

Elizabeth Evans:
In the meantime, today we're talking about the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program, and I'm joined by Dr. Marc Smithers, our in-house expert on this funding opportunity. Marc has helped dozens of organizations just like yours to navigate the ins and outs of IUSE. I personally have had the joy of joining him on some of those calls and I can attest — he is so very knowledgeable, he is so creative, and he is committed to getting institutions of higher education across the finish line with this challenging grant program.

If you're a regular reader of our free e-magazine, FUNDED, you may even recognize Marc from his article on building organizational capacity to expand grant funding opportunities. If you're not familiar with FUNDED, I definitely encourage you to go and check it out on our website. In short, Marc has a wealth of grants expertise in this program, and I think you're going to learn a lot from him today.

Here's a quick run-through of our agenda over the next 30 minutes or so. Once I pass things over to Marc, he's going to run through a high-level introduction of the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program. What is it? What does it help you pay for? Who can go after it? We want to make sure before we dive into the nitty-gritty details that this grant is right for you. Once we've cleared those hurdles, Marc has a load of information on how to prepare a competitive IUSE proposal. He'll talk about the different elements of a successful project, deadlines to keep in mind, and so much more. Then we'll end with a quick overview of some of the additional services Grants Office can provide you on this grant program, whether you need someone to come in and review a draft of your proposal or even someone to put pen to paper on your behalf and actually write the narrative components.

So with that, I'm going to pass things over to the very capable hands of Marc, who's going to get us started.

Program Overview

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Thanks so much, Elizabeth, and thank you for your kind words, and thank you everyone for joining us today. It's a great opportunity to speak with you and hopefully you leave with some actionable tools that you can go on and use for your grant-seeking purposes.

As Elizabeth said, we'll be focusing on the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education grant program. It's commonly called IUSE, and it sits within the Directorate for STEM Education at the National Science Foundation. The IUSE programs are one of the NSF's long-standing investments in higher education, and in the most recent budget passed by Congress, $90 million was allocated to their various programs. As Elizabeth said, $61 million is specifically for the Directorate program.

IUSE as an Umbrella Program

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Now, one important thing to understand right away is that IUSE isn't just a single program. It's more of an umbrella program, and under that umbrella are several variations that target different populations and have different priorities. There are tracks that are focused specifically on two-year institutions, and I'll touch on that program. But there are others that have been centered on things like computing and programs that support institutions like Hispanic-serving institutions.

Today we'll focus primarily on that main IUSE program in the Directorate for STEM Education and also touch on the two-year innovation program as well. But the Directorate one is the one that's most broadly applicable and where many institutions begin.

Core Goals of IUSE

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Regardless of which IUSE program you're focusing on, the core idea is basically the same: they're seeking to improve and expand undergraduate STEM education by bringing innovation into how students actually learn. Within the Directorate program, there are two program tracks: Engaged Student Learning, and Institutional and Community Transformation. In these tracks, the program aims to do three things. First, bring recent advances in STEM knowledge into undergraduate education. Second, incorporate evidence-based practices. And third, grow STEM teaching and recruitment efforts.

I'll get into each of the different tracks within these programs in the coming slides, but for now I want to first mention that within this Directorate program, again, they typically have about $61 million annually that they award to projects across the various program tracks and the various levels within each track.

Two Annual Deadlines

Dr. Marc Smithers:
It's also important to mention that there are actually two different deadlines annually, and they correspond to those distinct levels of the two tracks within the Directorate program. The upcoming deadline on July 15 is only for more advanced projects within each track. So if you're planning to apply for the Institutional and Community Transformation track with a Level 2 project, or if you're applying for a project within the Engaged Student Learning track at either a Level 2 or Level 3, then that's the date to keep in mind.

All other projects — whether it's a Level 1 Engaged Student Learning or a Level 1 or Capacity Building project in the Institutional and Community Transformation track — these are due next year on January 20, 2027.

Who Is Eligible

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Unlike some of the other NSF programs, this is a great program for all institutions to consider, in part because really any institution of higher education is eligible to apply. If you look at the awards that have been made through this program since 2021, institutions in 47 states have received funding. Some of those are large research institutions like the University of Washington or the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and some have gone to smaller institutions like Drake University in Iowa or Cedar Crest College in Pennsylvania. Really, any college with STEM programs — that is, programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — is eligible to develop innovative approaches to STEM education through this program.

This means not just exposing more students to STEM, but making that experience more effective, more inclusive, and more aligned to how students learn today. A big part of that is taking advances in STEM knowledge and translating them into the classroom environment. So instead of STEM innovations staying in research labs, IUSE ultimately wants to bring those innovations directly into teaching and curriculum design and student experiences.

Directorate Program Tracks and Levels

Engaged Student Learning Track

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Let's look at the specific tracks within the Directorate program. The first track is called Engaged Student Learning. This track focuses on funding the development, testing, and use of teaching and curricular

innovations that ultimately engage students and improve their learning, persistence, and retention in STEM.

While students are the focus of this track, it doesn't mean that students necessarily need to be involved directly. A project that's focused on faculty development or training faculty in innovative teaching methods that ultimately serves to better engage students is a great example of a project in this Engaged Student Learning track that directly works just with faculty. No matter who is the target of the intervention or innovation directly, the ultimate beneficiary in an Engaged Student Learning project needs to be the students themselves, whether that's indirect or direct depending on the nature of the project.

Engaged Student Learning Levels

Dr. Marc Smithers:
As I said earlier, there are three levels that you can propose a project for, and the level you would be choosing ultimately comes down to a few factors, such as the number of students, faculty, departments, institutions, or other groups that the project will include, as well as the scope of that work and how long of a project period is needed to complete the project's objectives.

A Level 1 project typically involves early-stage or exploratory research that's done on a small scale, typically from a single institution. This level has a maximum award of $400,000 with a three-year project period.

Level 2 typically involves a research project that engages some larger groups — maybe departments or multidisciplinary faculty or even other institutions. The award range for a Level 2 project can be between $400,000 and $750,000 with a three-year project period.

Finally, a Level 3 project is a large-scale project. It usually involves two or more institutions, and these are really larger-scale. The award range is $750,000 to $2 million with a five-year project period.

As a reminder, the Level 2 and Level 3 projects are the ones that have that upcoming deadline of July 15, while the Level 1 deadline is next January 20.

Institutional and Community Transformation Track

Dr. Marc Smithers:
The next track, the Institutional and Community Transformation track, funds institution-wide transformation of colleges and universities that ultimately helps them implement highly effective STEM teaching and learning. These are really larger-scale efforts that typically involve collaboration across departments or across institutions, sometimes even across states.

The goal here is systemic in nature — systemic change, one that shifts how STEM education is delivered at a broader level. By extension, there is an expectation in these awards that the projects could have an impact not just within the funded institutions but within STEM learning environments in a regional sense, maybe even in a statewide sense.

Institutional and Community Transformation Levels

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Just like in the Engaged Student Learning track, there are three levels of funding in this track as well. The first is Capacity Building. This level is meant to help new applicants identify future projects of interest, and so this track almost serves as a kind of seed funding that will help institutions explore potential areas of further inquiry down the road. Single awards in this level are $200,000, or $400,000 for joint awards that involve two or more institutions. This level has a two-year project period.

The next level, Level 1, funds early-stage or exploratory research done on a small scale, just like in the Engaged Student Learning track we heard about earlier, and these are also projects typically from a single institution. The maximum award for Level 1 is $400,000, and this has a three-year project period.

Finally, Level 2 projects are again those typically large-scale, usually involving two or more institutions in a wider sense, and this has an award range of between $400,000 and $2 million with a five-year project period.

IUSE: Innovation in Two-Year College STEM Education

Dr. Marc Smithers:
I'd also mentioned that the IUSE program offers a variety of different programs, and this program is specifically designed for two-year institutions: IUSE Innovation in Two-Year College STEM Education. This is a very similar program to the more general Directorate program, as it also aims to fund innovative approaches to undergraduate learning and teaching, but aims to specifically fund this work at two-year institutions.

The NSF has had some programs that specifically target funding at two-year institutions, such as the Advanced Technological Education program, known as ATE, but there's a concerted effort to increase the involvement of two-year institutions in NSF programs more broadly. This IUSE two-year program is a prime example of that initiative. They're specifically seeking ways to ensure that students at two-year institutions have ample opportunity to learn STEM concepts more effectively, exposing them to new and innovative methods and technologies, and equipping faculty specifically at two-year institutions with the training and equipment needed to improve those learning environments and ultimately helping students at those institutions to succeed in STEM fields, either through going on for further education in

STEM or maybe even entering the workforce right away and putting those learning concepts into practice.

Two Tracks, Single Funding Level

Dr. Marc Smithers:
This program has two tracks as well, each of which is very similar to the tracks I mentioned earlier in the general Directorate program. The first focuses on academic experiences of two-year college students, and the second focuses on leveraging institutional strengths and innovation.

Unlike the Directorate program, the two-year program does not have various funding levels within these two tracks. There are just the two tracks that each support projects for up to $500,000 each with a project period of up to three years. Institutions that haven't received NSF funding in the past five years can apply for an additional $100,000 that can be added to their budget for a total award size of $600,000, but with an overall project period of four years.

The deadline for this program is expected to be December 9 of this year, but this actually hasn't been confirmed yet by the NSF. They're awaiting final budgetary numbers for their various programs and how these will be spread out. It's possible, maybe even likely, that new program guidance will be issued fairly soon. Just keep that in mind — there may be some potential program changes. That being said, we encourage you to use current program guidance to begin to form a competitive proposal if you're interested in this two-year IUSE program.

Is IUSE Right for You? Four Guiding Questions

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Now that you know all of the options that are available to you, we want to give you some help in determining whether this program is right for you and which track and level may be best for you to pursue. Before choosing a program track or level, it's first important to remember that the NSF exists to advance scientific research and understanding. So even as this program exists within the STEM Education Directorate, this is ultimately a research grant. Any project needs to have research as a central component. Here are four guiding questions that we encourage you to ask yourself before deciding whether the IUSE program is a good one for you to pursue.

1. Can You State the Problem?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
The first question is, can I state the problem I wish to address? Here, you're trying to succinctly explain what gaps currently exist in the current STEM learning environment. How do you see these gaps at your institution or within the institutions that you plan to partner with? The NSF looks for projects that have

broader impact. So also ask why this problem should matter to external stakeholders, not just the stakeholders in the funded institutions.

2. Why Are You Uniquely Equipped?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Second, you need to be able to convincingly describe why you are uniquely equipped to address this problem. Grants are an investment that are made in specific individuals and institutions. So why are you a good investment? What about your unique expertise and experience makes your project compelling, and why are you, and if you have them, your co-principal investigators, the right people to tackle this project?

3. Can You Identify Clear Objectives?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Third, ask yourself whether you can identify two or three clear objectives that will make up your project. Knowing the problem is not enough. You must have clear, evidence-based solutions that your project is ultimately testing. What specific outcomes are you hoping to produce in your project, and how can you provide convincing evidence that these objectives are likely to be produced? Whether that's in things like improved test scores or increased interest in STEM fields or increased access to innovative STEM concepts in a variety of different learning domains.

4. How Is This Project Novel?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, ask yourself, how is this project novel or innovative? Remember, agencies have limited funds and only want to award projects that expand their current capabilities, not simply repeat existing solutions. So how is your project meaningfully new? And again, remember, this is ultimately a research grant, so how is this project adding to scientific literature on STEM teaching and learning that will ultimately impact the greater field of STEM learning and teaching on a broad scale?

Choosing Your Program, Track, and Level

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Once you feel like you have a good handle on those four questions, meaning that you feel like you have a compelling project that fits the unique focus of this program from the NSF, it's up to you to determine which program you're planning to pursue: the general Directorate program or the Innovation in Two-Year Institutions program.

Two-Year vs. Four-Year Eligibility

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Two-year institutions are eligible to apply for both programs, though the two-year program is more limited by the scope and size of available awards — they don't have those different levels, they just have the two tracks. Four-year institutions are eligible as a sub-recipient in the two-year program, but projects in that program are expected to be led by a two-year institution. The general Directorate program may be more suitable for four-year institutions, especially if they're interested in being a lead applicant. Other than award sizes and length of project periods, the Directorate program and the two-year program are really very similar, so you can look at the ways they overlap and then look at the distinctions between those two as you decide which program is the right one for you.

Matching Project to Track and Level

Dr. Marc Smithers:
The best way to determine what program, track, and level may be suitable for your project is to consider your institutional demographics, what the specific focus of your project will entail, and finally the scale and scope of your proposed project.

A project that's done primarily at a two-year institution with no external institutional partnerships is likely geared more toward the Innovation in Two-Year Institutions program than the more general Directorate one. The demographics of that institution then help to determine the best fit in that case. If, however, you serve as a faculty member at a two-year institution and may want to partner with a local four-year institution that has a more robust research portfolio, it might make sense to consider the Directorate program.

Then look at who is serving as the focus of the project. If the project's focused on bringing innovative methods into student learning environments, engaging them directly or indirectly in the objectives of the project, then the Engaged Student Learning program may make sense. If the project is more systemic in nature, whether that's engaging larger departments or multiple institutions or communities, then the Institutional and Community Transformation track may make more sense.

Once you've chosen the appropriate track, it's then important to nail down the projected scale and scope of your project. If it's a project that focuses on developing just one or two courses, or maybe involves some early-stage research, the scale and scope of that project is fairly small. In that case, looking at a Level 1 project probably makes the most sense. If the project is more far-reaching or if it involves some later-stage research, a Level 2 or Level 3 project might be the right way to go.

More than anything, if there's any doubt, it's never a bad idea to reach out to the program manager at the NSF or the IUSE program to get their feedback. They regularly communicate with potential

applicants and have even held regular office hours in the past for these programs. Take advantage of all of these resources to make sure that you're setting your project up well for success.

Elements of a Competitive Proposal

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Beyond considering the appropriate track and level of your project, keep at the forefront of your mind the need to ensure that your project is as competitive as it can be. There are several pieces required for a competitive proposal, and we've created a free workbook that will help you organize the components of your project into the sections that the NSF reviewer will be paying particular attention to.

Solid Knowledge Base (Intellectual Merit)

Dr. Marc Smithers:
First off, your project needs to have a solid and compelling knowledge base that you're building off of. All NSF projects have two criteria from which they review all proposals: intellectual merit and broader impact. The knowledge base for a project is this intellectual merit piece. It's important that you're basing the work of your project in existing and compelling scientific inquiry, but also that you're building off of that knowledge base and pushing into new territory in STEM learning and teaching.

Clear, Evidence-Based Evaluation Plan

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Next, your project needs to have a clear and evidence-based evaluation plan — one that you are using to cogently measure the effectiveness of your project, and where these objectives are clearly aligned to the project's activities. Many projects are passed over in the NSF review process simply because they have vague or maybe even non-existent evaluation plans. Clarity and concision are essential here.

Research Questions and Data Plan

Dr. Marc Smithers:
If your project is research-based, be sure to clearly present any relevant research questions that your project will be seeking to answer. Remember, these research questions need to be novel and timely. This gets at that second criteria that NSF reviews proposals for: broader impact. How are these research questions relevant beyond just your unique environment and situation? Also clearly show how you plan to collect data in this research and in your project, how you plan to analyze this data, and finally how you plan to share the findings of this project so that your work can have an impact beyond your institution.

Sustainability

Dr. Marc Smithers:
Finally, grant funders want to know how you plan to sustain your project once their funds have been expended. How is their money going to not only fund this one-time project, but how is this investment going to pay dividends in the long term beyond your students and ultimately for the larger field of STEM teaching and learning?

Key Deadlines and Free Workbook

Dr. Marc Smithers:
At the risk of repeating myself too much, I do want to just remind you of a final point as you consider whether IUSE is right for you. There are distinct deadlines for each of these programs that depend on the level and track that you're applying for.

In general, if your project is larger in scale, involves multiple institutions, or is building on previous NSF funding, the upcoming July 15 deadline is probably for you. If your project is likely to be smaller in scale with just one institution, or you're not building on previous NSF funding, then January 20 is probably the one you want to keep in mind. Finally, if you're looking to go after the two-year innovation program, again, it hasn't been confirmed yet, but the projected deadline is December 9 later this year.

Please do take advantage of our free workbook to help you organize your project for either of the IUSE programs. It's a great way for you to get your thoughts out in a structured way to help you ideate potential projects and to get you a sense of the kinds of things that go into developing a competitive NSF proposal. It'll get you well on your way to developing a competitive project, and one that we hope you use over the coming months to prepare well in advance of those upcoming deadlines. From here, I'll pass things over to Elizabeth.

Grants Office Services

Elizabeth Evans:
Thank you so much, Marc, for that excellent information. I'm going to give you a few moments to grab a glass of water before we start our Q&A session. So for the audience, if you have any questions, please look to the bottom right-hand corner of your screen to drop them in the chat.

On the Federal Funding Landscape

Elizabeth Evans:
First off, I want to call attention to the number of folks who have reached out to us in the last several months trying to understand what is happening with the U.S. federal budget. While we are seeing state

budgets and foundation budgets remaining relatively stable and reliable forms of funding, we are also seeing quite a bit of discourse surrounding how and when the U.S. federal government provides grants. There's a lot of conflicting information coming from the White House, Congress, cabinet members, federal agency heads, and other representatives, and it can be incredibly challenging to keep track of.

So if you haven't already done so, I encourage you to check out our website under the Guidance for Grant Seekers tab, where we have a series of five-minute videos on the U.S. federal budget — what's passed, what hasn't passed, how much funding is available, what changes are we seeing in the grant funding landscape at the federal level, et cetera. All of those videos are available for you on demand and are completely free on our website right now.

Grant Writing and Editing Services

Elizabeth Evans:
I also want to call out Grants Office's grant writing and editing services that I referred to at the beginning of today's event and Marc mentioned as well. Our team here, filled with folks just like Marc, has over 25 years' reputation across both the U.S. and Canada in proposal development work. We help organizations just like yours to plan out and articulate their projects in a way that is going to really speak to the funder's goals and objectives.

So if you followed along with today's session and are planning to apply to the IUSE grant but feel like you could need a little assistance to help you get across that finish line, please don't hesitate to reach out. We offer full proposal development and writing. What this means for IUSE is that you can come to us with a completed IUSE application workbook like Marc mentioned, and we will get you a grant writer who can translate all those ideas into a competitive and compelling narrative that you can then submit to the National Science Foundation.

If you are writing the proposal yourself but would like an extra set of eyes on your draft to make sure you've dotted all your i's and crossed all your t's, as well as really answering the questions that are being asked, we do offer proposal editing services at 25 percent of the cost for grant writing as well.

How Working with Grants Office Looks

Elizabeth Evans:
What does working with Grants Office look like? If you're interested in exploring our support, the first step is to contact us at grantwriting@grantsoffice.com. You want to come to that email that you're drafting having already read and worked through most of the questions in that workbook that Marc mentioned earlier. You don't need to have full sentences or beautiful prose for all the prompts, but we do ask that you've given each component of your project a fair deal of thought.

From there, you're going to meet with our team members like Marc to discuss your project goals and your development needs. If you contract with us for writing, we'll get you connected to a writer who will start putting pen to paper on your behalf. We try to give you at least two opportunities to review the applications that are drafted and make sure we've captured your organization's goals, missions, and project plans correctly. As you work toward the IUSE deadline, we'll give you those application materials so you can upload them into the grant portal and click submit as well. So again, if this is something you're interested in, please contact us at grantwriting@grantsoffice.com to get started. I see that Kate has dropped that email address into the chat box as well in case you want to copy it directly.

Other Grants Office Services

Elizabeth Evans:
If you followed along with today's event and you do not think IUSE is right for you, I also want to call your attention to our other Grants Office services that are available. We have Research and Consultation services that allow you to sit down with a consultant, discuss your upcoming projects, and then be provided with a list of state, federal, and even foundation grants that would best support those initiatives you're looking to have funded. We also have Project Building services that again allow you to sit down with one of our consultants like Marc to build out a competitive project idea and application to an entirely different grant program. And last but certainly not least, we have our subscription service, Grants Office Communities, which gives you access to our database of more than 26,000 state, federal, and foundation grants so that you can do the research, project building, and funder prospecting all on your own inside a platform that was designed for and by grants people. Grants Office Communities always offers a free two-week trial, so if you haven't gone over to check that out yet, I definitely encourage you to do so.

Q&A Session

Elizabeth Evans:
With that out of the way, hopefully Marc has had a chance to catch his breath and have a glass of water. Let's move on to our questions.

Q1: I work in my college's grants office and I'm interested in the institution pursuing this opportunity, but I'm not sure who to talk to on the faculty side. Who do you suggest?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
A lot of this will depend on your relationship to faculty and the size of your institution. From my own experience, I think it would be advisable to reach out to a dean or academic director of some of those different STEM programs just to see if there's any interest. One of the things that's really important to keep in mind with any sort of grant-seeking efforts is to make sure that there's a sense of collaboration

and openness to those conversations. So I think maybe just starting with some of those academic leaders could be a good way to go about getting some of that interest.

And then I will say one of the things that is always helpful is to just look at the kinds of activities that your faculty are already engaged in. What are the associations that they're a part of? What recent papers have they published in their field? Pay particular attention to those faculty members that are engaged in maybe some crossover between not just scientific inquiry but also looking at learning theories or STEM education, so that you're paying particular attention to that crossover between scientific research and STEM education, because that's really where this program shines — that overall happening.

Q2: In a multi-campus institution, is each campus considered separately?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
I do know that there's a variety of different ways that institutions organize themselves. Some have different campuses, some are actually just considered different sites according to state laws and things like that. I'll say in general that IUSE — if you remember some of the levels that we talked about for funding — talks about multi-institutional partnerships. Depending on how your campus is organized, I think it would be characterized more as that multi-institutional award. So I think that's probably where that institution would fall.

I will say, just to keep in mind, that when you think about some of the eligibility requirements for this program, the award is made to institutions, but each award has what's called a principal investigator and some co-principal investigators. People are not able to apply for more than three IUSE projects as a principal investigator. So it's important to keep in mind that the number of institutions isn't necessarily the key determining factor here. It's more the principal investigators that are involved on the project level. Even as you look at some of the awards that are currently being funded through the IUSE programs, there are institutions that have multiple IUSE programs that have been funded, just with different principal investigators within their different STEM departments. So it'll be sort of on an institutional basis and how you're organized, but in general, it would be sort of multi-institutional.

Q3: I work at a community college and I'm not sure if I'm able to take on a research-intensive grant like IUSE, particularly with my workload as a STEM faculty member. How do you recommend I talk to my department chair about this possibility?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
I think this is a very common challenge, particularly at two-year institutions, and the Innovation in Two-Year College STEM Education program is a great way to maybe dip your toe into that possibility. In terms of how you go about talking with institutional leaders about this possibility, I think it's important to raise it as a way that the institution as a whole can really up its game from a STEM teaching perspective.

Institutions are always looking for people that are passionate about bringing new ideas, new approaches, and new funding to their initiatives. So if you frame it as an opportunity that will really raise the institutional profile and that you would serve as a kind of grant champion, I think that would be a great way to start that conversation.

I will say, you should always follow that conversation up with: I need other people around me to help me. Going in as a solo person to taking on a grant like this is possible, but it's definitely going to be more advantageous to bring others along with you. Maybe coming to that conversation with a definite interest and definite passion that they can get behind, but then also some ideas around support that you can have around you so that you can have others to rely on to manage that grant as well. That's going to be something institutions are really excited to talk with you about. Not saying it's a surefire thing, but I think having that initial conversation is always a great way to take that first step.

Q4: What is the difference between the projected deadlines and the deadlines you've shared here today? I see one listed on the NSF IUSE page — what should I expect?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
The NSF has, for the last couple of years, moved toward having recurring deadlines. They typically will say something like, the upcoming deadline is July 3, and every second or every first Tuesday of July annually. That's where the projection comes from.

The IUSE program last year had a December deadline, and along with that program guidance they had put in their language about annual deadlines relative to the second Wednesday in December. The reason that we're not exactly sure that's going to be the deadline this year is just because we're waiting for new program guidance specifically for that Innovation in Two-Year College STEM Education program. We don't expect that the deadline itself will change meaningfully — that's why we're keeping that December 9 as the projected deadline. But there's potential that the program itself will change a little bit. I think the thing that's remained constant, though, regardless of which IUSE program you're talking about, is again that focus on bringing innovative teaching and learning opportunities into STEM undergraduate spaces. That's going to remain a constant. How that actually plays out and what new program guidance is released — we're still waiting to see at this point.

Q5: How can community college faculty apply to research grants if their campus structure does not give them incentives for applying to grants or conducting research, such as a course release for leading a grant-research program?

Elizabeth Evans:
It sounds like that's a bit of an organizational cultural challenge, but do you have any recommendations from your own experience within higher ed about how individuals can self-advocate for these kinds of changes?

Dr. Marc Smithers:
I have two or three things pop up for me initially. Number one, I think the way that you can maybe raise this issue can be that old adage: success breeds success. Look at some of the work that you or your colleagues are doing that's already getting grant funding, whether that's smaller foundation funding or serving as a co-PI on a research grant led by a larger research institution. Something the faculty is already doing that you can say, this is something that our colleagues are doing, and this can really raise the level of instruction and success of the institution if we pour more resources into that. You don't have to start with an NSF program that is a little bit of a big undertaking. Maybe you start with other programs that make a little more sense in terms of the situation that you're in. That's the first suggestion that I would make.

Second, this is where if you look specifically at that IUSE program's second track, the Institutional and Community Transformation, they have that Capacity Building track that's a potential for you to apply to. As you mentioned, the article that I wrote about organizational capacity building — I think capacity building is one of those things that we don't necessarily give a lot of attention to, but it's super important and can play a really great role in building the profile of an institution in their grant-seeking efforts. It's essentially funding to grow your own ability to seek more funding in the future. Whereas it's not an easier lift by any means, it is a little bit of a different lift. It's one that you can use to grow your ability to do something later in the future.

So maybe approaching academic leadership from that perspective — not necessarily saying I want to do this research project that has these particular aims, but instead going to them and saying, look, there's this Capacity Building grant that I really think could be a great way for us to fund things like taking a step back and having some intentional conversations within the department about, these are some gaps that we're seeing, we don't know exactly what to do with it, but these are the gaps that we have. This capacity-building approach may give you some additional time and resources to actually come up with some potential solutions that you could then apply for funding in the future about.

Those are the two things that come to mind most, but the third thing is I empathize. This is definitely a common concern, particularly from faculty members at two-year institutions, and I think hopefully this gives you some resources and information that you can take back to institutional leaders and hopefully do something with.

Closing

Elizabeth Evans:
Wonderful insights, Marc. Thank you so much for sharing. It looks like we don't have any more questions in the chat at this moment, so with that, I think that wraps everything up that we have for today. I want to thank everyone so much for hanging on with us as we addressed all of these questions. Great

audience! If you do have an additional question that pops up later as you're reflecting on today's content or anything you just think about later, please feel free to email us at grantwriting@grantsoffice.com. Thank you so much for joining us today, and as always, we hope you found this a valuable use of your time. Thanks, everybody. Take care.

— End of Transcript —

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