Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), updated as of 1/12/16

Eligibility

Can private non-profit colleges apply?
Private non-profit colleges may apply. Costs that will be borne by students and not covered by the applicant, such as tuition, must be described in the budget narrative. Tuition can be donated but in-kind donations such as tuition that exceed one-third of the total public match will not be given weight in the selection process.

Can private for-profit colleges apply?
No, for-profit colleges cannot apply.

Can multiple education institutions jointly submit an application?
Yes, multiple education institutions can apply together but one institution should be identified and serve as the lead applicant for all communication and accountability purposes. Also, the proposal should clearly delineate specific roles and responsibilities of each partner institution.

If multiple education institutions are involved, is there a preference regarding which should be the lead applicant?
In general, the partner that will be providing the dedicated program manager and overseeing the overall coordination of the program should be the lead applicant.

Will you accept a joint proposal from a consortium of colleges and universities acting and organized in concert?
Yes. But there must be one lead applicant that will coordinate and ensure project implementation and integrity, and roles and responsibilities must be extremely clear on the workplan form (Form C).

Can an organization be part of more than one application?
Yes.

Can organizations other than institutions of higher education apply?
Yes, organizations with 501(c)(3) status are eligible to apply. These organizations must partner with an accredited institution of higher education and must be primarily dedicated to providing college education to currently or formerly incarcerated students.
Can a prison be the applicant?
No, but a prison must be a partner for any prison-based program proposed. Also, a prison can be a partner receiving a sub-contract. Be advised that sub-contracting with a state agency can be complicated.

Who do you mean by “currently incarcerated” students?
For the purposes of this RFP, “currently incarcerated” students includes adults incarcerated in state, federal, or county correctional facilities in California. It does not include individuals incarcerated in juvenile facilities.

Can one of the partners be part of the juvenile system, such as juvenile probation or a juvenile facility?
Students under the age of 18 are not a permissible program target. Any justice-involved student over the age of 18 can be the target of the proposal. Working with a juvenile criminal justice partner such as juvenile probation is discouraged because of the difficulties in isolating the over-18 population, and because the over-18 population ages out of the juvenile system relatively quickly. Anticipated difficulties and proposed solutions should be addressed in the proposal narrative.

Who do you mean by “formerly incarcerated” students?
For the purposes of this RFP, “formerly incarcerated” students includes anyone who is currently being supervised by adult probation or parole or who has a prior conviction record. For example, students who have served only a probation term may be considered “formerly incarcerated.” However, students who have an arrest record but do not have a prior conviction record will not be considered “formerly incarcerated” for purposes of this RFP.

What is included in the category of “higher education” programs?
Eligible higher education programs include credit-bearing academic programs and may also include certain career technical education (CTE) programs. Proposals for CTE programs must provide evidence that the proposed program contributes to a viable career pathway for their students. As a general rule, programs that offer isolated career training or CTE certificates, without stackable credentials or demonstrated opportunities for greater educational achievement, will not be funded.

Do proposed programs have to focus exclusively on currently and/or formerly incarcerated populations?
Proposed programs under this RFP must serve exclusively currently and/or formerly incarcerated students. Funding will only be awarded for program components serving exclusively this population of students. However, these proposed programs may be part of a larger initiative at the college, university, or community-based organization that serves a broader range of students.

Can existing programs apply?
Existing programs can apply but the application must be limited to the expenses necessary to enhance their current offerings or add capacity.
Can a community college propose a program outside its district boundary?
Yes. However, a MOU between the applicant college and the host district should be included with the application. If an MOU cannot be obtained, a letter from the host district should accompany the application. If a letter is submitted, it should outline the contours of the agreement between the districts and include a timeline for the completed MOU.

Does a program have to choose only one of the three categories (prison, jail, community)?
No.

If more than one category is involved, how should the cover sheet be completed?
Please designate a primary category. If resources, staffing and focus will be evenly split, you may check more than one category on the cover sheet (Form A).

**Project Scope and Requirements**

Do all courses offered have to be transferable?
Transferability of courses should be a priority for a high-quality program.

Can we provide career-technical education (CTE)?
Applicants that provide career-technical education may be funded, but these applicants must provide evidence that the proposed CTE program contributes to a viable career pathway for their students. They should also demonstrate that the CTE program lays the groundwork for a student to continue on the pathway to further academic credentials should the student desire to do so. A strong CTE program might include stackable credits, standards-based academics with a career-relevant, sequenced curriculum following industry-themed pathways that are aligned to high-need, high-growth, or emerging regional economic sectors, and/or articulated pathways to postsecondary education aligned with regional economies. All programs must be housed within the higher education context. Programs housed within probation or parole will generally not be funded. Apprenticeship programs will not be funded.

Can we provide distance education?
Distance education is strongly discouraged. Proposals including an element of distance education must make a compelling showing of need. Any distance education provided must be high-quality, interactive education. Correspondence education will not be funded.

Will a proposal using hybrid in-person or distance education be funded?
Renewing Communities will fund high-quality higher education programs designed to achieve positive outcomes. In-person education is always preferable. Hybrid or other distance models are not prohibited, but applicants must make a strong showing of need and must demonstrate that their program model will result in offering high-quality education and yielding positive outcomes for this particular population.
Are we required to serve a particular number of people?
No particular capacity is required. Successful applicants will present a feasible plan for effectively serving as many students as they can serve well, with a plan for growth and/or replication.

Do we have to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with our partners?
It is not necessary to have a formal MOU at the time of application. A formal letter of commitment signed by the partners is acceptable. A MOU will be required as part of the contract process for applicants that are awarded funding.

The requirements include connecting students with reentry and social services. Who must provide these services?
These services do not have to be provided directly by the educational institution or applicant, though applicants should demonstrate their awareness of the reentry needs anticipated by their participant students and a plan for addressing them. Programs can connect students with these services through partnerships with local agencies and community-based organizations. Some examples of relevant services include: providing bus passes or other transportation support, housing assistance, employment placement services, and expungement services to clear criminal records.

Do prison-based programs, especially those serving students without an imminent release date, need to have formal agreements with reentry organizations?
Prison programs should help students plan for continuing their education upon release to the greatest extent possible. This may take a different form for prison-based programs compared to jail-based programs and community-based programs, as students in prison may not be released to the community in which the prison is located and because participating students may be serving lengthy prison sentences. However, because nearly all incarcerated students will eventually be released, prison-based programs should address how they will partner with relevant organizations and help students plan for release to the extent possible.

Do we have to provide credit-bearing courses if the program is jail-based?
Jail-based programs may offer college readiness courses alone as long as there is a bridge for students to continue into credit-bearing college courses in the community after release. Jail-based programs are encouraged to creatively build on-ramps from the jail to a local higher education institution. This may take the form of intensive short-term classes, readiness courses, or other preparatory classes provided by a higher education partner that link jail inmates with the higher education institution. A partner support program at the higher education institution is strongly encouraged.

Can we provide noncredit college readiness/developmental/remedial courses?
All applicants may – and are encouraged to – include college readiness as a pathway into a credit-bearing college program. Prison-based programs cannot offer only college readiness courses; they must also include a credit-bearing component. Applicants should all include a plan for the provision of student readiness courses for those students who do not assess into the academic classes being offered.
For a community-based organization applicant proposing a program in prison or jail, may the applicant teach the courses of instruction, or must the courses be delivered by a college or university partner?

Either the community-based organization or the educational institution can deliver the courses, as long as the courses are high-quality and students receive course credit from an accredited institution of higher education. It is acceptable for community-based organization applicants to offer the support and wrap-around services while partnering with an education institution that provides the coursework.

Does a program for formerly incarcerated students have to provide academic programming or restrict the academic courses that students can take?

A program for formerly incarcerated students need not itself provide academic courses, but it must provide services and support for participating students enrolled in the college or university. Through the provision of counseling services and other supports and services, the program must direct students onto a high-quality academic pathway. See earlier FAQ for CTE pathways.

When do we need to begin delivering services/instruction to students?

There is a maximum three-month planning phase allowable under the grant. We expect instruction and support services for students to begin fully no later than Fall 2016, and we encourage programs to begin serving students as soon as effectively possible.

For prison- or jail-based programs, do we have to identify particular faculty who will teach in the prison or jail?

Faculty must be identified only if they will be part of the key staff for the program, providing services or support other than teaching. Although faculty who will be teaching need not be identified, applicants should address their plan for selecting and working with faculty who will teach inside the prison or jail. In addition, applicants should also specify the sequence of courses that will be provided over the three-year term of the initiative.

When you say a “program director” is required, does that person have to work exclusively on this initiative?

No, the program director does not have to be exclusively working on this initiative, but he or she must spend a significant amount of time focused on this work to ensure its effective launch and successful implementation.

Can anyone be the dedicated program manager?

The program manager should be fluent in the processes, practices and regulations of the higher education institution. The person’s experience should be described in the proposal narrative, particularly if he/she is not an employee of the higher education institution.

What are the reporting requirements?

Successful applicants will be required to submit quarterly reports to The Opportunity Institute. Information such as the number of students served, the number of students assessed, and implementation progress reporting will be included. The Opportunity Institute will also conduct regular check-ins with the selected sites, both in person and by phone.
Will you require time sheets for verification?
We will not require time sheets, although we will require certification as part of the reporting process. Note that repurposed spending such as dedicated staffing can be considered part of the cash portion of the match. Note also that the in-kind portion of the public match can be no greater than 1/3 of the total public match.

How will the evaluation work? Will applicants conduct their own?
The Opportunity Institute will oversee the evaluation of Renewing Communities, including the individual pilot sites.

What do the checks (✓) and Xs mean on the table?
Check (✓) indicates that the component is a required part of the proposed program; X means it is not a required component but could be included.

Why is there an X under “provision of credit bearing college courses” for community-based programs?
Because community- or campus-based programs serving formerly incarcerated students generally do not directly provide or control the academic courses taken by those students.

What constitutes a college readiness component?
College readiness includes both developmental education in core academic subjects, and the development of soft skills such as note taking, study skills, and classes designed to support persistence and resilience.

Is there a limit on the number of partners?
No, but there must be one lead applicant for each proposal.

Can a reentry partner provide the college readiness classes?
Yes, but the provider must demonstrate capability and experience directly related to higher education.

Can adult education providers be partners?
Yes.

What is the content of the signed statements from partners?
Statements should describe the role of the partner and should confirm information contained in the proposal narrative, budget narrative, and workplan.

Can we submit a letter from a partner even if the partner is not providing matching funds?
Letters from all partners are strongly encouraged, whether or not the partner is contributing financially. The letter, proposal narrative, and workplan (Form C) should specify the role(s) the partner will play.
Can we submit letters from faculty who will be involved?
Yes, but they are not required. If submitted, please specify the role the faculty member will play.

Can we request separate financial contracts with sub-contractors?
Partners are strongly encouraged to work together so that the lead applicant manages all sub-contracts. In very limited situations it may be necessary for an applicant to request a direct contractual relationship between The Opportunity Institute and a sub-contractor. While not prohibited, The Opportunity Institute is dedicated to minimizing unnecessary administrative costs and the increased costs associated with additional contracts and contact management may be considered in the proposal review process.

Is there a minimum or maximum amount of duration length for each program?
The proposal and budget should cover one full year (12 months). The education program provided must be high-quality and should also be responsive to the needs and limitations of the student population and environment. In some cases, this will mean the need to deliver shorter-term, more intensive education components.

Can academic institutions conduct their own evaluation and publish their results?
The contracts with The Opportunity Institute will require that data developed by pilot sites using Renewing Communities funding be shared with The Opportunity Institute, but will not restrict pilot sites’ ability to evaluate this data on their own or publish results based on their analysis of the data. However, the contract provisions may include requiring the awardee and/or its partners to wait to release or publish data until Renewing Communities has released or published its own.

Can a jail-based program include students who are in jail but not convicted of a crime?
Yes. We understand that many people in jail are awaiting disposition of their case, and they may not end up with a conviction. A proposed program can include everyone in jail. In addition, the program could continue to serve those students on their release even if the students did not have a conviction upon release, so long as the students started in jail.

Can a jail-based program include students who are referred to the program from the community?
Yes, but only if those students are formerly incarcerated as defined in these FAQs. Students living in the community without prior convictions cannot be included.

Can the program include work experience or work study?
To the extent that work experience or work study is a component of a high-quality college education as envisioned by the proposal, it may be included but should be justified.
Budget

How much funding will each recipient receive?
The amount of each award will vary by number of students served, location, program intervention, potential for growth, and other factors.

Is there a limit on the amount any single proposal will receive?
Yes, no single proposal will receive more than $500,000.

Does the $500,000 limit apply per site or per proposal?
Per proposal.

Does the $500,000 limit in year one mean a $1.5 million limit over three years?
For now, yes. Additional funding may be made available in years two and three; this funding might be used to support new pilots, program expansion, and/or program replication. There is no guarantee that any particular pilot will receive additional funding in years two and three.

When will funds be distributed?
The funds will be distributed in late Spring 2016 following successful contract negotiations between the awardee and The Opportunity Institute.

Do you want a budget covering one year or three years?
Submit a one-year budget using the budget form (Form B). Submit a budget narrative describing the one-year budget, but describe in the budget narrative how the budget might change in subsequent years.

What are non-allowable expenses?
Non-allowable expenses include cash transfers directly to students and subsidized housing for students. Expenses can include technology for student participants (tablets, e-readers, etc.) but funding will not be provided for students to keep the technology permanently.

Is it acceptable to budget for student assistants?
Yes, including paid students assistants or mentors in your budget is acceptable. All budget items will be evaluated for reasonableness and quality as part of the review process.

Can the budget include expenses to support students such as transportation passes, meal vouchers, and book vouchers?
Yes, provided those expenses are directly related to the students’ participation in the higher education program.
Can funding for reentry services be part of the proposal?  
Renewing Communities is a higher education initiative. The provision of higher education must be the core of the proposal, with reentry services serving to complement or support the provision of higher education services. Reentry services cannot be the primary focus of the proposal.

Can the budget include the cost of reentry services such as computer literacy?  
Renewing Communities is a higher education initiative and the budget should reflect the fact that the provision of higher education is the primary goal and core service of the proposal. Reentry services should complement and support the higher education academic program, but should not be the primary service offered. Reentry services provided to those who are not higher education students participating in the program cannot be included or covered in the program budget.

Can the budget include evaluation expenses?  
Yes, proposal and accompanying budgets can include evaluation expenses. Like all expenses, they must be justifiable particularly in light of the fact that the initiative will be conducting its own initiative-wide evaluation. The provision of higher education services must be the core of the proposal.

Can childcare expenses for program participants be included?  
Yes. All reentry or other support services should support the provision of higher education services, but should not be the primary focus.

Is purchasing a modular building an acceptable expense?  
The only prohibited expenses are cash transfers to students and subsidized housing. For all other expenses, they should support and complement the provision of higher education but should not be primary. As with all expenses, the necessity of the expense and value added of the expense will be part of the review process.

Can the budget subsidize extra seats required for minimum enrollment?  
Yes, but explain why this is necessary to operate a high-quality program and how it is sustainable over time.

Can grant funds be used to offer training for faculty or staff who are entering and/or teaching in a prison or jail?  
Most, if not all, correctional facility partners will require that faculty or staff receive training before entering; either the facility or the academic institution can propose to cover the cost. If additional training is deemed necessary, the cost of that additional training should be reflected in the budget and the rationale should be addressed in the budget narrative.

Are currently and formerly incarcerated students eligible for financial aid awards?  
Applicants are encouraged to work with the financial aid counselors at their higher education institution to determine the financial eligibility for program students. In general, students incarcerated in both prison and jail and formerly incarcerated students are eligible for BOG Enrollment Fee Waivers at theopportunityinstitute.org
California Community Colleges, and they may be eligible for other types of financial aid. Prison students are not currently eligible for Federal Pell Grants although jail students are eligible. Applicants should consult Appendix C: College Admission and Financial Aid Overview for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Students in *Degrees of Freedom* or the Financial Aid Office of the college or university applicant or partner for further information on financial aid eligibility. Federal financial aid cannot count as a matching resource. Financial aid in the forms of loans cannot count as a matching resource.

**Who can supply the public matching resources?**

For all programs, the matching resources must come from a local or state public source but need not come entirely from the applicant entity. It is encouraged that the match demonstrate commitment from both criminal justice and education stakeholders. Possible sources of the match include funding from California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (including Equity funds, SSSP funds), the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, local government grants, AB 109 funds, AB 86/AB 104 funds, or other sources. For example, a portion of the cash match could be a dedicated employee in the County probation department, who will receive training from the education institution and who will be a point of contact for the proposed project.

Matching resources from private and federal public sources will not count towards the match requirement in evaluating proposals but are encouraged.

**Can Student Equity funding, AEBG, and/or SSSP be used as public matching funds?**

Yes.

**Can foregone facilities and administration expenses be matching funds?**

No, unless those facilities and administration expenses would otherwise be charged as cash expenses to the applicant for the *Renewing Communities* program in particular.

**Can unfunded indirect costs, particularly as related to a federally negotiated indirect cost rate greater than 10%, be considered an in-kind match?**

No, unless proof is provided that it is always the institution’s practice to directly charge to the program as a cash expense the difference between the 10% allowable indirect cost rate and the federal rate. The applicant would also need to show that in this particular situation collection of that amount has been forgiven.

**Does the matching have to be one-to-one?**

No, the matching resources do not have to be one-to-one. The public match must comprise a minimum of 25% of the total project budget. In-kind matches can constitute no more than one-third of the total public match.

Applications with a greater portion of their budget covered by the public match and applications that increase the proportion of the budget provided by public sources over the three-year period will receive greater weight in the selection process.
Can subsidized housing be considered part of the public match?

No, subsidized housing is not an allowable expense because housing expenses can be so disproportionate. Costs associated with providing housing can be included so long as the provision of higher education is the primary focus of the proposal and budget.

What constitutes an in-kind match?

The public match may include up to one-third in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions could include dedicated space in the prison, jail, or education institution; tuition and fee waivers (including BOG Enrollment Fee Waivers); materials and supplies provided by the prison, jail, or education institution; or computer or IT support and materials provided by the prison, jail, or education institution.

The remaining amount of the public match must be cash or repurposed spending such as dedicated staffing. Staffing cannot be counted as a match if the contribution would be within the person’s normal job duties. For example, a financial aid counselor who provides assistance to all students, whether formerly incarcerated or not, could not be considered part of the match for the portion of the time the person spends counseling formerly incarcerated students. However, a career counselor who develops expertise in the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated students and dedicates a significant portion of his or her time to the applicant’s program could have that portion of his or her salary count.

What are in-kind matching expenses?

In general, an in-kind matching expense is a necessary program expense that, but for the in-kind contribution, would be directly charged as a cash expense to the applicant or a partner for the proposed program. In-kind matching expenses must directly relate to the program proposed in the application. Forgiveness of general applicant or partner expenses will not be considered in-kind matching expenses.

When do the public match resources need to be available?

It is acceptable if the cash portion of the public match is not available to the applicant until July 1, 2016 or the start of the applicant’s next fiscal year.

Is there a limit on the Indirect Cost Rate?

No application containing an indirect cost rate greater than 10% will be permitted, and applicants are encouraged to submit applications with the lowest indirect cost rate possible.

I had heard this was a three-year program. Why does the grant period cover only one year?

Renewing Communities is a three-year initiative, and we expect contracts to be renewed at the end of the one-year grant term. Renewal is not guaranteed and will be subject in part to performance and implementation reviews conducted during year one.

Do subcontractors of subcontractors have to submit separate budgets?

It is not required, but if you believe the subcontractor of the subcontractor is important to your proposal, you may want to include greater detail or a budget form.
Is the indirect rate calculated on funds passed through in a subcontract?
If your institution of higher education or non-profit has an existing rule on this point, cite the rule and follow it. If there is no rule, the applicant may make their own determination. Note that, while we recognize that there are costs to the applicant to manage funds that are passed through to a sub-contractor, budgets that apply standard indirect rates more than once to the same funds will likely be evaluated less favorably in the review process.

Is it allowable to include work study or internship wages and/or stipend payments?
Unrestricted cash transfers directly to students are prohibited but paid student assistants or mentors are allowable. Wages or stipends provided for a work study or internship position may be acceptable if the compensation is for work done by the student, and if the work study or internship is a component of the proposal for delivering high-quality higher education. As with all expenses, the necessity of the expense and value added of the expense will be part of the review process.

Application Forms

What documentation is needed to support the public match?
If the match is being provided by the lead applicant, the signature on the budget form is sufficient. If the match is not being provided by the lead applicant, submit a letter signed by an individual with binding responsibility and authority to make the commitment for the agency providing the match.

Can we include tables?
Yes, provided the proposal narrative with tables does not exceed 15 pages.

Do references count in the 15-page limit?
References may be attached separately.

Should there be a separate workplan for each education entity in consortium applications?
No. There should be one workplan (Form C) for the proposal as a whole, with the primary person(s) and organization(s) identified for each activity.

What is the content of the signed statements from partners?
Statements should describe the role of the partner and should confirm information contained in the proposal narrative, budget narrative, and workplan.

What does it mean that the workplan should address all three years of the initiative?
A high quality program will recognize long-term needs and have a long-term strategic plan. However we recognize that asking for staffing and other specific details over three years may be difficult. Be as specific as you can. We understand that estimates provided in the workplan may need to change in years two and three.
For campus-based programs, do we need to articulate the services provided by the campus?

Program students in a campus-based or community-based program can and should utilize all campus-provided services that might be beneficial. RFP applicants are not required to describe or detail those services in their application. However, services and supports will differ by campus and applicants should not assume that all services and supports are known to all members of the Selection Committee, so applicants may want to consider describing or articulating those services if they are relevant to the program model.

Other

Is there any statewide coordination for jail and prison systems?

The Opportunity Institute is working with, and will continue to work with, statewide, regional, and local partners to further the goals of *Renewing Communities*. 