



The Grow Your Own Teachers Implementation Grant RFP: A Road Map and Commentary

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This RFP is both coherent, and tied the real world. Not only do all the pieces of the proposal have to fit into an integrated program design, they have to respond to a specific complex environment: a set of identified schools with specific personnel needs; a particular community; a specific teaching certificate; and above all, these particular candidates - all responded to by a particular consortium of organizations, with identified staff and a viable mode of collaboration. And since the goal is to help these candidates become certified, take positions in those schools, and ultimately become long-term productive teachers in those communities, the story you have to tell in this proposal covers "as long as it takes" for a realistic portion of these candidates to achieve this goal.

In other words, the RFP asks you to tell the story of the future of this cohort and your consortium - how the consortium will work together, how the candidates (given needs and the strengths that they bring to the table) will be supported and how they will progress to and beyond their achievement of an initial certificate. You have to show that your overall plan is feasible, that it not only could but should work to ensure that a high proportion of your candidates graduate, get jobs in the target schools, and become productive long-terms teachers there. The reader of your proposal needs to be convinced that you've tailored your work to the setting and the people. It's a great challenge.

Our role in Grow Your Own Illinois is to help eligible consortia make strong applications for grant funding and successfully implement those projects that are funded. In the past we've assisted many groups in forming their consortia, applying for planning funds, and carrying out planning activities. This commentary is the next in this series of products.

We've divided this analysis into three sections. The first deals with general issues that you should be on top of before beginning to address the actual writing of your proposal. The second is a point-by-point analysis of the narrative outline proposed in the RFP. The third is some guidance on the financial part of your plan - this should be available on or about July 5th.

Finally, you should know that this précis has not been vetted by ISBE. We given you our best guesses as to the significance of individual points in the RFP, which are based on our work with the law and the rules since the first version of the law was passed in 2004. In addition, we come to this work with a lot of program development and proposal writing experience of our own, and hopefully have been able to imagine the questions that are most important to those of you who are preparing to write proposals. Ergo, you should treat this document as the reflections of peers who are struggling with the same issues you are.

I. General Issues

1. Read the Law

The Grow Your Own Teachers Act, available in its recently amended form on our website, is required reading, if you haven't gone through it before. For the purpose of the proposal writing, you should note that there are basically three kinds of statements in the law:

- Statements about components of the project that are required, and those that are forbidden.
- Statements about components of the project that are allowed – e.g. optional members of the partnership, and allowable expenses.
- Statements about the criteria that ISBE should use to judge proposals, most of which are contained in Section 25.

The amendments to the law in this year's SB 2235 are somewhat significant, but are currently not being used by ISBE to evaluate the grants. For example, the flexibility that the amendments give for loan forgiveness for people who can't complete the program shouldn't be included in your narrative. On the other hand, you should anticipate that SB2235 will be in effect by the time the grants awarded, so you should not propose something counter to its provisions – e.g. a program for people who already have bachelors degrees.

2. Rolling Deadline

The RFP takes a somewhat unusual approach to the grant deadline. Essentially, ISBE will consider proposals at any time until they have exhausted the \$2,250,000 they have allocated for this competition, with an absolute submission deadline of March 1, 2007. The rationale for this is that some projects want to move very quickly so that they can be running in August, and others need more time to develop their cohorts and their programs. But it is probably not realistic to expect that there will still be implementation funds available in March 2007; it is likely that the last round of funding will be for programs that begin in January.

If you are shooting for an August start date, get your proposal done soon! The actual review process may not take too long, but there will be many issues around putting the first round of grant award letters together after ISBE has decided to award you a grant.

3. \$200,000

The RFP is clear that this figure is the maximum grant that ISBE expects to make. This is a little puzzling for a couple of reasons. First, there is language in the law that suggests that there is a limit of 10 projects across the state, and that would mean that the average grant should be \$225,000. Second, it would seem to be obvious that projects that don't become fully operational until the second semester will not require the same amount of funds as those that begin in August. For these reasons, we expect some clarification and flexibility from ISBE, and we believe that there will be no penalty if you submit proposals that have a higher budget total.

4. Forgivable Loans

ISBE is working very hard as we write this to come up with some mechanism for handling the management of forgivable loans under the program. At this point, you



shouldn't include anything in your narrative that specifies how you are going to manage the funds under this provision. However, you do have to have a reasonable calculation of the total amount of loans in your budget work.

5. 10 Pages ?!

Yes, that's what the RFP says is your limit for the narrative section. This is an extremely complicated grant, as the narrative outline suggests. (It took us six pages just to write the description in the next part of this document.) But at this point we have no reason to believe that this is an area of flexibility. So you should have a detailed outline, with an estimated length for every paragraph. And you should be looking to put things into the "objectives and activities" section, or in appendices and attachments whenever it is logically possible.

6. The "Objectives and Activities" table (RFP, P.4, #4)

This is your chance to show that you have thought out the duration of your work with the cohort. Most projects have some kind of tabular form that can be used to lay out a work plan with objectives and dated activities and/or milestones. ISBE is not prescribing a particular format, so you can use what you're comfortable with. Remember that if you think it will take five years for the cohort to complete the certification program, you should lay out at least five years of objectives and activities (in the 5 pages allocated.)

II. Parsing the Narrative

Part 1: "Evidence that an eligible consortium exists"

1. List the partnership members

2. Tell how you have collaborated "with specific reference to the consortium's decision-making methods"

If there is already a formal decision-making process, describe it here. Since the future of the collaboration needs to be preserved, it's probably important that this process not be simply "one organization one vote" – real disputes among key partners should be worked out.

3. Prior success of the University in preparing people for low-income schools

(The evaluation criteria also include reference to the prior work of specific staff of the university that will be working with the cohort to demonstrate that they have worked successfully with similar candidates in the past.)

4. Describe the targeted schools, and the nature of hard-to-staff positions

The RFP asks you to name specific schools, and document their needs. District- or region-wide averages may not satisfy the criteria. If you have decided to prepare people for highly specialized positions (e.g. special education) you may need to document expected numerical needs by school during the years when your candidates should graduate; if your candidates will be working towards a standard elementary certificate, it may be sufficient to show that current turnover rates, projected into the future, will produce a specific number of estimated vacancies in those years. (Note: GYO Illinois can



help you document turnover and teacher vs. student ethnicity (see below) for specific schools in Illinois; contact us at info@growyourownteachers.org for more information.)

5. Commitments of schools

You might want to include a resolution from the school board on these basic principles as one of your attachments.

To supporting candidates while they're in training

For candidates who are currently school employees, it's important to say that the school will help them coordinate work assignments so that they can be used to help fulfill practicum requirements. For those candidates who don't work for the schools, you have to show that you have thought about ways of making sure that their work schedules will not conflict with practicum requirements, and that there are good opportunities within the target schools for attaining the richness of practical experience that they will require.

In addition, this could be an opportunity to mention how the school-communities as a whole, including principals, faculty, and other parents and community members, will welcome, assist, and celebrate the work of these candidates.

To employing them when done

This is not speculation – when they are committing to this program, school districts are making this promise. Show that you have thought about how the process might work.

6. Community Organization

History of involvement in education organizing, i.e. efforts to mobilize parents and community members on campaigns to improve schools

This is not a "criterion" – this is a requirement under the law. Give specific examples with dates.

Capacity to recruit and provide support to candidates

The best evidence on recruitment may be the efforts the organization has already undertaken to recruit the current cohort and help them through the testing, application processes, and developmental classes. On "support" you can elaborate later, but list the facilities, staffing, and other "capacities" that will be used (e.g. training on community issues) here.

7. If community college, some kind of clear definition of roles and articulation policy. (Not in narrative outline but in proposal evaluation description)

As planning grant work has been carried out in those projects with community colleges, this has turned out to be a key issue. Obviously, there is not room in 10 pages to lay out a specific curriculum plan for each individual candidate, but the proposal needs to show that particular groups of candidates have well-defined paths through the two institutions, and that there is an absolute commitment to ensure that the credits earned at the community college under the plan will transfer and are relevant to the degree program – attach

copies of agreement documents if relevant.

Part 2: A Cohort exists or will exist

The existence of a cohort is clearly not a theoretical matter. Even if you have not already finally identified your candidates, you should have pretty strong evidence that the individuals you are looking for exist, are eligible for the program under the rules, and are interested.

1. Demographic composition and how that contributes to diversity in the target schools

The logic behind this section that where there is a substantial gap between the racial-ethnic profile of a schools teaching force and that of its students, one goal of the program should be to change the teaching force so that it more clearly resembles the students. In most cases this should not be hard to demonstrate. If, for example, 80% of the students in your target schools are African-American, and the current teaching force in those schools is only 30% African American, then a cohort that is more heavily African-American than the current teaching force meets the test.

2. Profile of candidates

Barriers

The RFP reminds us at several points that the reason why the state legislature provided money for this initiative is to give the consortia additional resources to meet the particular needs of these candidates. Here the RFP asks you to outline what those needs are, so that they can be satisfied that the supports you are paying for address those needs. The more this analysis is built on actual information about your cohort, the better, of course.

(Not in RFP) Strengths

Implicit in the RFP is the question of the likelihood that these particular candidates will complete the program and become successful teachers. One of the ongoing themes of our work at *Grow Your Own Illinois* has been that the kinds of candidates this program attracts have maturity, rich life experiences, good skills with children individually and/or in groups, and various levels of prior education. When you tell this story, it strengthens your case that these candidates will achieve the goals that the program has set for them.

3. How the program will:

“Ensure that the cohort moves through the program together”

It's likely that your cohort will include two or three different groups of candidates starting formal course work at different stages. This has to be an explicit part of your overall plan. However, this only reinforces the need for a common seminar, regular meetings, an electronic forum, and/or other methods for building the relationships among cohort members creating common bonds and mutual support, maintaining exchange of information and experiences, and creating a common understanding of the educational issues in the community.

Allow people to keep working, especially paraeducators

This is where you have to be explicit about building your program around the actual needs of cohort members. Instruction has to be accessible, in time and in location. If the largest group of candidates is working during the weekdays, instruction should be offered in the evenings and on weekends, or through alternative delivery systems. Holding all or a large portion of classes in the community where the target schools are located is also important because the connections to that community are critical to all aspects of the program.

ISBE also has a particular concern about paraeducators. On the one hand, teacher aides and other similar school employees have the ideal situation for Grow Your Own candidates because they have access every day to the educational environments this program is working for. But it is very important that the school administrators and other personnel affirmatively support the goals of these individuals, and not restrict their progress with arbitrary decisions as to their work assignments. Based on the experience of similar programs, we recommend that you have some formal mechanism (a renewable letter of agreement, regular review meeting, etc.) which can keep all the parties on the same page on combining work and schooling as the candidates progress.

Finally, note that SB 2235, the amendments law passed this year, explicitly allows paraeducators to be paid during their practice teaching period. But many districts will need to set policies for implementing this and in some cases a school employee union may need to accept the policies. At minimum your proposal should address how you will work to get these agreements.

Provide support throughout the program

It's important to imagine how the support requirements will change over time, especially if it's anticipated that students will take more classes on the University campus in later years and thus have access to learning resources there.

4. Details of the certification program: How far along people are and when they might finish

Note that this issue also comes up under program – see below, Part 3, #5. To save space, answer the question once and refer to it in the other place. Some planning grant projects are essentially laying out a tentative semester-by-semester course and practicum plan for each of their cohort members, in order to estimate for each term what offerings will be required, in which locations. A summary of that analysis will be the most accurate answer to this question about the cohort.

Part 3: Program

1. Overcoming obstacles through provisions such as flexible scheduling, tutoring, child care

Note that this is a good example of an item that needs to justify specific budget items, so you need to estimate not just what is needed but how

much. Also notice that this list of examples does not include a provision specifically mentioned in the law and the evaluation criteria – that a significant part of the instructional program be offered in community locations. (This can also be addressed above in relation to Part 2, #3.)

2. IHE capacity: faculty and other resources for preparing this cohort

The four-year institution has to show institutional experience in preparing teachers for schools like the target schools; and the evaluation criteria also ask for the specific experience of key faculty and staff.

3. Demonstrate that the comparable resources are being spent on these students before grant

Another way to say this is that the higher education institutions have to show that the expenditures under the grant are not being used to replace what the institution would spend on direct costs of instruction, learning resources, etc.

4. Show how students are given access to financial aid

Likewise, the forgivable loan fund can only be used to pay student expenses when all other reasonable sources of funding are exhausted. Ideally, you will already have actual data about the aid eligibility and needs of your cohort or at least of typical cohort members and have established a process for them to maintain and renew eligibility from year to year.

5. Lay out the map of expected progress of students and match it to resources (See above, Part 2 #4)

6. Evaluating candidate's teaching, and the program overall

Evaluation is very much on ISBE's mind, and it has several components. First there is the distinction between what evaluation people call "formative" and "summative" evaluation. The former has to do with building cycles of review and revision that will help programs stay on track, the latter with being able to demonstrate that the program actually produces effective teachers for the target schools who stay in those schools.

Under the bullet point at this point in the narrative, the summative evaluation is emphasized. (Note that this, like the following point, requires commitments by the consortium far beyond the timeframe of the grant.) The critical issue is how you plan to estimate the quality of the candidate's teaching. The GYO law is quite explicit as to what is at stake here: the state wants to know that GYO graduates are "as prepared for teaching" as the other graduates of the University's teacher preparation programs.

7. Support by program for at least two years of graduates of the program

The law clearly recognizes that no matter how good the preparation of our candidates is, their first years of full-time employment will be critical to their development as effective teachers, and requires that consortia make commitments to mentoring and other forms of support that are outside what the grant will pay for directly. The school districts are of course critical in this regard, and you should feel free to describe their current professional development strategies – but there is a clear sense here that "someone" needs to track GYO graduates proactively to ensure that they get all the

resources they need.

Part 4. Miscellaneous (these are the filled-in bullet points on p.6 of the RFP)

1. Identify the coordinator for the cohort and show that the person is qualified

While the RFP seems to envision the Coordinator as a single person, many planning grantees have been talking about splitting the job into two positions, one at the University and one in the community. If you've arrived at this kind of model, the responsibilities of each position should be specified, and you should address carefully any extra processes of coordination that are required.

Note that there are very specific categories for evaluating the credentials of coordinators in "Experience and Qualifications" section of the evaluation criteria of the RFP. The coordinator position is well discussed in the "Best Practices" document on the GYO website, www.growyourownteachers.org.

2. Budget Narrative

We are preparing a separate chapter of this analysis on budget issues for distribution in early July. Until then, note that:

- *ISBE wants an estimate of budget requirements for the entire period that you have specified as required for your cohort to become certified;
- *ISBE wants specifics about the matching resources that will be contributed by the consortium members. Note that the law specifically mentions that one key contribution could be stipends for the student teaching period.

3. Reduction of funding requirements over time

One way to respond to this point is to add to the plan of work a commitment to seek other government and private funding. Also note that if additional cohorts are expected, as suggested in the evaluation criteria and #5 below, the total cost of the consortium's work will increase, but perhaps there could be economies of scale.

4. Formative evaluation (see above, Part 3, #6)

At this point, the RFP seems to be referring to the Sec. 20, Paragraph (7), Part P of the law that requires reports on candidates' progress towards graduation at least year, but also a report on the impact of the program on the target schools and the community.

5. How consortium members will secure "additional community support" in order to establish new cohorts

We've asked for some clarification about what would constitute this support, and will post any new information we get on this issue. But clearly it's important for the community organization to commit to ongoing work the schools and the community on improvement issues, as well as strategies for maintaining the "front end" of the Grow Your Own pipeline by preparing paraeducators, parents, and community members for the beginning of the next cohort.