



Nellie Mae Education Foundation

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and Invitation to Prospective Grantee Conference

Project Compass

In April 2007, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation will launch **Project Compass**, a multi-year regional initiative to help more underrepresented minority students succeed in and graduate from public four-year institutions of higher education in New England. This initiative will support innovative institutional programs and strategies that strive to eliminate achievement gaps and significantly increase academic success, retention, and graduation rates for minority and low-income undergraduate students.

Project Compass will create a learning community of colleges and universities that will measurably improve academic outcomes for underrepresented students, while at the same time change institutional policies and practices to sustain and expand those efforts.

Any public four-year institution in the six New England states is eligible to apply. Priority will be given to proposals focusing on underrepresented minority students; proposals designed to serve first generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds will also be considered. Institutions anticipating increases in minority student populations in the near future are encouraged to apply.

Interested applicants are invited to attend a Prospective Grantee Conference, convened by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), to be held:

Tuesday, April 3, 2007

10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

**University of Massachusetts Medical School
Hoagland-Pincus Conference Center
Shrewsbury, Massachusetts**

(Near Worcester, off I-290 – for directions, go to
www.umassmed.edu/conferencecenter/index.aspx)

Attendance at the Prospective Grantee Conference is **not** required in order to submit a proposal, but attendance is strongly encouraged. Lunch will be provided.

The conference is designed to encourage leadership teams from New England's four-year public colleges and universities to:

1. Meet with representatives from the Foundation and NERCHE to learn about the aims and goals of **Project Compass**;
2. Learn more about the grant application process, including timeline, available funding levels and eligibility criteria;
3. Learn more about the proposed initiative, including its goals, anticipated outcomes, range of activities, evaluation plans and expectations of funded institutions;
4. Offer feedback to help the Foundation shape the criteria included in the Request for Proposals, which will be issued later in April 2007; and
5. Meet and share information with representatives from other institutions with similar student populations, challenges and priorities.

The Foundation is interested in working with institutions that demonstrate a level of readiness to improve retention and graduation rates of minority students, first-generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds. The Foundation encourages proposals from institutions that are prepared to undergo broad-based, structural change in order to develop the means to sustain and expand these efforts beyond the grant period. To achieve such ambitious goals, it is essential that high-level administrators from academic affairs, student affairs, multicultural affairs, institutional research, and financial aid are actively engaged. For this reason, institutions are encouraged to send teams of three to four individuals to the Prospective Grantee Conference, representing a wide ranging group of campus leaders.

Contingent on the quality of proposals, the Foundation intends to award grants in the range of \$100,000 to \$200,000 to three to six institutions to support an initial year of needs assessment, capacity building, structured institutional planning, and program development. NERCHE will design and manage planning year activities, convene regular grantee meetings, and provide technical assistance to each grantee institution. During the planning year, grantee institutions will develop proposals for continued support from the Foundation; if institutions make adequate progress and demonstrate adequate institutional commitment during the planning year, the Foundation will award four-year implementation grants of \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually. NERCHE will continue to work with campuses that receive the four-year implementation grants. The Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University will conduct the project evaluation.

Registration Information: To register for the Prospective Grantee Conference, please complete the web-based registration form at www.nerche.org/compass/webreg/webreg.php by **March 23, 2007**. The Foundation will reimburse attendees for mileage at the current federal rate. If your institution would like to request additional travel cost reimbursement or if you have further questions about the initiative or the conference, please contact Glenn Gabbard, Project Compass Director, at NERCHE, (617) 287-7744.

Based in Quincy, Massachusetts, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest philanthropy in New England that focuses exclusively on promoting access, quality and effectiveness of education. Established in 1998, the Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs in New England that are designed to improve low-income and underserved students' academic achievement and access to higher education. The Foundation also funds research that examines critical educational opportunity issues affecting underserved students, adults and families. It convenes educators, policymakers and community members to discuss and influence pivotal education issues. Since 1998, the Foundation has awarded nearly \$72 million in grants and support to education programs in the region. For more information, visit www.nmefdn.org.

Affiliated with the Graduate College of Education at University of Massachusetts, Boston, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) is a center for inquiry, applied research, and policy. Since its inception in 1988, NERCHE has supported administrators, faculty, and staff across the region in becoming more effective practitioners and leaders as they navigate the complexities of institutional innovation and change. NERCHE's research projects, programs, and activities draw upon the practitioner perspective to improve practice and to inform and influence policy, moving from the local to regional and national levels.