

John Adams Innovation Institute  
Research Center Matching Grant Program  
Bidders Conference for Interim Request for Applications  
April 16, 2004

Questions and Answers

**Question:** Could the \$35 million made available to the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) for the John Adams Innovation Institute (heretofore the “Institute”) be divided in equal sums to fund Engineering Research Centers (ERCs) of approximately \$3 million/per center?

**Answer:** There is no simple approach to projecting the number of centers that the program might fund. However, the entire \$35 million in funding for the Institute is not available for the Research Center Matching Grant Program. The legislation that created the Institute created two funds with allocations as follows:

\$15 million: regional technology growth initiative

\$20 million: university research center matching fund\*

\*With an unspecified allocation to fund 2 or more Centers of Excellence.

The final allocation has not been decided on, and this will be determined by the soon-to-be-formed Governing Board.

**Question:** How much funding will be available for each proposal and over what period of time? How would an applicant go about requesting multi-year funding in the application?

**Answer:** The Institute will provide applicants up to 20% of the federal funds provided to the center, up to a maximum of \$2 million dollars to support economic development related activities in a center. The funding will be provided based on a program plan and schedule developed by the applicant and approved by the Institute. Funding does have a 5 year time limit. Applicants should request multi-year funding at the time of their initial application. Their application should show how the funding will be allocated on an annual basis. A detailed projection is requested for the first two years. Budget estimates are to be provided for additional years.

**Question:** Is the funding provided to MTC for the establishment of the John Adams Innovation Institute expected to be an annual appropriation, or is this a one-time funding opportunity?

**Answer:** Under the economic stimulus legislation that provides this funding, this is a one time funding appropriation. It is conceivable that policymakers could elect to re-capitalize these funds if the program is successful.

**Question:** How long will funding be available under this RFA?

**Answer:** The interim RFA will be open until September 30, 2004. The Institute expects to issue similar RFA’s in the future.

**Question:** Does the funding expire at any point?

**Answer:** The money does not expire. Funds will be available until expended

**Question:** The application stresses the importance of economic development. However, some federal programs stress research education at the K-12 levels [such as the Academic Public Private Partnership Program (AP4) Planning Grant] and this can often take years before its full potential is realized. Will there be pressure from an applicant to show short-term results for the State? And is the Institute interested in proposals that go beyond pure science, such as AP4?

**Answer:** If an applicant is going after this type of program, it is important that the applicant propose interim metrics so that the Institute (and the federal funding agency) can better understand your future success. Although this is being funded under an economic stimulus package, it is understood that it may take several years to achieve some program objectives. The Institute is also interested in proposals that go beyond science, as long as it meets the main requirements of funding, which include increasing the research base in Massachusetts and increasing technology-based economic development in the state.

**Question:** It states in the application that the deadline for requesting a letter of commitment is three (3) weeks before the federal program deadline that the applicant is applying for. In the case of the Partners for Innovation (PFI) proposals, the deadline is May 17<sup>th</sup>, meaning that the Institute application would be due in less than a week, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004. If an applicant's proposal for a PFI is not complete by this date, could the applicant submit an application during the first week of May and expect a letter of approval from the Institute?

**Answer:** It is desired that the application to the Institute be submitted three weeks before the federal deadline date so that the Institute has the time necessary to undertake a peer review, secure necessary approvals and provide a letter of commitment. The Institute does not require submission of the full federal proposal in order to issue a letter of commitment. However, the Institute will not consider applications under this RFA that are submitted after the federal proposal deadline has passed. For those applicants that are unable to submit an application under this RFA at least three weeks prior to the federal deadline, the Institute will still consider the application but makes no guarantee that it can complete the internal approval process and provide the letter of commitment. The Institute encourages all applicants to make the best representation of their proposal on the application, and allow the Institute the full three weeks in order to review the application.

**Question:** The RFA states that the Institute is looking for applications submitted in conjunction with new centers. What if an existing federally supported center in Massachusetts is coming upon a new federal funding round—could this center submit an application?

**Answer:** Although the Institute could position itself to provide matching funds in the case of an existing center in the future, the Institute does not intend to fund activities at existing centers under this RFA. However, potential applicants submitting proposals for

renewal or expansion of existing centers are encouraged to contact Bob Kispert, Team Leader, to discuss funding possibilities under this RFA.

**Question:** I am concerned that by the time September 30, 2004 rolls around, there will no more funds left for my proposal, as they may have been committed to PFIs.

**Answer:** It is highly unlikely that NSF will fund that many PFI's from one state. In addition, the Institute has placed a cap on funding to any one center at 20% of the federal funding received up to a maximum of \$2 million. The Institute issued a Request for Information earlier in April. Based on the response to the RFI and our current knowledge of funding opportunities that may be available over the next six months, it is highly unlikely that all funds available from the Research Center Matching Grant Program will have been committed by September 30, 2004.

**Question:** Please define what it means when the Institute states that it does not expect to be the only source of cost share for the proposal. How many other sources are needed?

**Answer:** If the Institute were being requested to provide funds to meet a cost-sharing requirement in a federal solicitation, it would expect that the applicants would be providing some element of that cost share from their own funds. It would be reasonable to assume that each research partner would be providing cost sharing in proportion to their expected funding under the federal grant. Funding under this RFA could be used to offset some portion of the cost share required from Massachusetts-based research partners under the terms of the federal grant.

**Question:** With the National Centers and Networks of Excellence (NCECs) and Engineering Research Centers (ERCs), there are two submission rounds: pre proposal and full proposal. When should the applicant make a request for a letter of commitment?

**Answer:** The application may be submitted as soon as the applicant has sufficient information to make a credible presentation in sufficient detail for the Institute to undertake peer review. The Institute would provide a letter of commitment at the full proposal round.

**Question:** There is a strong focus on Massachusetts's economic development. What if a center has both Massachusetts and non-Massachusetts partners? Could it still submit an application?

**Answer:** Absolutely. The Institute does not discourage applicants from looking to non-Massachusetts partners or member companies for support for their center, as long as the proposed center will create Massachusetts-based research activity and provide economic development benefits to the Commonwealth.

**Question:** Some National Science Foundation (NSF) programs are directed towards improving education and workforce skills, such as the Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship Program (IGERT). Would the Institute fund such an application?

**Answer:** In general, the Institute looks to provide funding for applications that demonstrate a need for state match funds and that focus on technology-based economic development. A preliminary review of the IGERT program suggests that proposals

submitted by eligible institutions could qualify under this RFA. The program supports research (as well as education), and encourages innovative collaborations with industry as an element of graduate research and education. The institute would be particularly interested in applications from existing federally funded research centers, such as IUCRC's and ERC's. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the training proposed under the IGERT program meets a documented need in Massachusetts. In addition, the proposed activities must involve substantial collaboration with Massachusetts industry. Other NSF programs, which provide only training/workforce development, without both a research component and industry collaboration, are of lesser interest unless proposed as an approach to develop greater economic benefit from an existing research center.

**Question:** Some NSF programs have either limitations on cost share, or it is not requested at all. How does the Institute see the matching grant program fitting into a situation such as this?

**Answer:** The Institute is focused on making investments in activities that support technology based economic development. The Institute believes that most NSF center programs encourage/require the performance of activities that support technology based economic development objectives. Even if a federal program does not look for matching funds explicitly, there are often desired program elements that are consistent with activities that the Institute can support and thus strengthen the proposal. In cases where activities that support technology based economic development are outside the scope of interest of the federal agency, the applicant could still propose to the Institute to conduct such activities in support of the center, but outside their federal funding agreement.

**Question:** When the Institute states that it wants an application three weeks before the federal proposal deadline, what is the exact deadline time?

**Answer:** By the close of the business day, but preferably by 4:00 p.m. EST/EDT, as applicable.

**Question:** Has the External Review Team been formed? If so, who is on the Team?

**Answer:** The initial external/peer review team is still being assembled. The Institute does not anticipate publicizing the members of any peer review teams. The Institute sees the team being comprised primarily of people involved in technology based economic development, as well as others who are knowledgeable about the federal research proposal process. The Institute expects to rely on the agency receiving the applicant's federal proposal to provide the primary input on scientific and technical merit.

**Question:** In the application, the issue about sensitive information is mentioned. This could be a deterrent to a possible industry partner that is concerned about privacy.

**Answer:** In the application, the Institute does not expect to receive (and would prefer not to receive) any sensitive business information. However, we are required to inform prospective applicants about the state regulations that apply to the handling of sensitive business information, as defined under statute.