WHAT is the opportunity?

We invite educators to fundamentally rethink the core role(s) that assessment can play in learning, including emerging forms of personalized learning, to support student attainment of deeper learning.
The Assessment for Learning Project will support 12-15 grants with investments of varying size and duration from an initial pool of nearly $2 million.

WHAT is the need?

- Ensuring that all students are ready for college, career, and civic life, now that we have a broadened understanding of student success.
- Designing and implementing strategies and systems of assessment *for* learning and continuous improvement.
- Aligning accountability and related policies to promote attainment of the richer/deeper definition of readiness.
- Building assessment design capacity and literacy in educators, and agency in learners.

WHO is involved?

This work is developed and managed by:

Initiative Partners:

Center for Innovation in Education and Next Generation Learning Challenges

With Ongoing Support From:

2Revolutions as Lead Design Partner; The Assessment for Learning Project's Advisory Group; An array of high quality technical assistance partners

Eligible Applicants:
Are a public school, CMO, LEA, SEA, or NPO partnering directly with public schools; Directly address one or more of the Funding Priorities set forth by the Assessment for Learning Project and evidence a deep understanding of the problem(s) they are attempting to solve; Are able to demonstrate readiness for this work, strong capacity for managing change, a focus on innovation, and evidence of initiatives already underway that provide a fertile base; Possess a learning disposition and willingness to commit to full participation in the project's learning community.

HOW can I apply?

Please read on! Use the following pages in this document to determine your organization's level of interest and readiness to apply. Use the Supporting Materials for an array of resources to help you generate a competitive application.

Applications are due on December 10, 2015.

To access these documents and for more information, visit: http://nextgenlearning.org/AssessmentForLearningProject

Assessment for Learning Project Request for Learning (RFL)

Exploring New Roles for Assessment in Learning Design:
An Invitation to Apply (& Learn)

Introduction

Need

The nation's promise is that all children will experience a motivating, challenging education that prepares them to succeed in postsecondary learning, work, and civic life. Though America's public education system is doing a better job of reaching every child, it is abundantly clear that we are not, at present, fulfilling the promise of equity and excellence for all.

Supported by a national group of partner organizations, the Assessment for Learning Project is an opportunity for American educators to **fundamentally rethink the core role that strategies and systems of assessment should play to advance student learning and to improve our K-12 education system as a whole.** Since the turn of the millennium, public education has been defined by an increasing emphasis through high stakes accountability on assessment *of* learning against a too-narrow definition of student progress. Today, most states have better, higher quality academic standards and summative assessments; these are essential, but not sufficient. To enable significantly better outcomes for all, we must work for the design and implementation of systems of assessments in which multiple forms of evidence are integral to the learning process: **assessment *for* learning**.

Despite increasing interest in balanced approaches to measurement and to assessment system design that could support learning through the broader range of richer/deeper competencies associated with genuine readiness, few concrete, scalable examples exist in practice. We believe this is due to three key limitations within our current system:

- First, traditional assessments address only a small percentage of what matters most – the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most predictive of success.
- Second, assessment is too often treated as an event rather than a process – isolated from instruction and conflated with accountability.
- Finally, we are not sufficiently preparing and empowering educators to determine the most appropriate roles for assessment in support of learning.

Opportunity

To address the significant need before us, we see an opportunity *to catalyze new and scale existing innovations in assessment for learning design*, staked to richer/deeper definitions of student success, with two core goals:

Goal One: Advance our understanding of **assessment's essential roles in the learning process**, as learning models become more personalized, less cohort-restricted, more competency-based, and student-centered.

Goal Two: Help to inform and develop crucial enablers such as a) models of assessment and accountability system design, b) models of educator capacity building, and/or c) use of technology tools, all to advance Goal One.

What We're Funding: Priorities of the Assessment for Learning Project

This initiative will award grants for projects that directly address one or more of the following inter-related priorities. (To be competitive, applicants should be able to demonstrate the depth of their thinking and the relevance of their project across more than one.)

Advancing Goal One:
- The design and implementation of models of on-going formative assessment and feedback that improve learning, deepen student agency, and increase college and career readiness.
- Demonstrations that essential intra- and interpersonal skills and dispositions can be taught, learned, and assessed as a natural and necessary part of a child's experience in public education.

Advancing Goal Two:
- The development of models that build educator capacity to gather, interpret, and apply professional judgment of student learning based on multiple and varied forms of evidence across a wide range of student competencies.
- The design and exploration of systems of aligned assessment and accountability policies that embrace and enable richer/deeper success definitions for students and multiple, varied forms of measurement of student progress towards those definitions.
- The use of technology tools within systems of assessment to enable educators using formative assessment and related data to better inform instruction and a student-centered learning experience.

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How We're Funding: Design Principles of the Assessment for Learning Project

The Request for Learning (RFL) process is designed to mimic the change in thinking and behavior we aim to promote. The initiative will support well-designed local efforts that have capacity to inform changes in teaching and learning and policy and practice, across the broader field. Therefore, each successful applicant will need to be able to articulate a use case and *clear, testable hypotheses with corresponding evidence of learning* to substantiate their efforts and based on that learning, shed light on what scale could look like. Each grantee must be open to formative feedback and willing to consider refining and fine-tuning their work in consultation with the learning community.

The following principles underpin the effort and will be used to guide decisions about grantee selection, grantee supports, and indicators and evidence of impact. Commensurate with size and overall complexity, proposed innovations should promote learning-by-doing and be:

Design Principles

- Grounded in the concepts of *personalized learning and deeper learning,* with reference to building student agency in assessment as appropriate;

- *Focused on formative assessment* in ways that build from a foundation of prior learning;

- *Reflective of a strong vision of instruction* with clarity about how strategies and systems of assessments support better instructional practice;

- *User-centric and problem-specific*, illustrating good perspective on the relationship of the problem to the system within which it operates; and

- *Designed to be transformational versus incremental* with the potential to be scalable and contribute to the broader learning around innovative systems of assessment.

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Grant Specifics

In this first phase of the Assessment for Learning Project, we anticipate funding:

- Between 12-15 grants, with a duration of 6-24 months;

- Initial grant awards within a range of $50,000 - $225,000, commensurate with the complexity of the work (duration, extent of piloting, students being served, opportunity for systems-level impact);

- Additional technical assistance supports from an aggregated pool of high quality national technical assistance providers; and

- The potential for follow-on grants from a flexible pool of dollars to support deeper work and relevant learning for the broader field.

We are deliberately choosing not to ask applicants to fit their project scope and budget within pre-determined categories. Rather, we are providing broad contours of dollar amounts and duration; each applicant should propose scope, level of effort, and duration that genuinely extends from and represents innovation rising from work they are already pursuing aligned with the goals of this initiative.

Applicants may use funds for a range of purposes, including personnel, planning time, external consultants, meeting/travel support, technology tools, and other outside resources including per-pupil assessment costs.

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Is This Opportunity a Fit for You?

We are looking for applicants that have already made a deep commitment to exploring assessment *for* learning and can demonstrate ample readiness to design, test, study, and refine innovations in practice with awareness of systems-level implications. Understanding your readiness becomes an important bridge between your current context and the future strategies and systems of assessment you are working to create.

To help you determine if this opportunity is a fit, we are providing tangible archetypal examples of the work we envision funding through this initiative, detailed in the Supporting Materials. **These are not intended to be prescriptive**; instead, we provide these as illustrations of some types of work we believe are needed to push our collective understanding forward and develop a greater set of proof points of promising practice at different levels of the system.

Archetypal Examples of Competitive Project Ideas

- **Example A:** Assessing Deeper Learning Outcomes (School)
- **Example B:** Moving Toward Learning Progressions (Multiple districts)
- **Example C:** Building Assessment Literacy Through Professional Learning (Multiple districts in partnership with state and higher education partners)
- **Example D:** A Broader Definition of Personal Success Skills (Network of schools)
- **Example E:** Digital Tools Leveraged to Inform Instruction (District)

In the Supporting Materials, we also provide some examples of efforts that the Assessment for Learning Project would not likely support.

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How The Project Will Operate

What We Mean by "Request for Learning"

Through a Request for Learning (RFL), we are re-designing the traditional Request for Proposal (RFP) approach because we want each stage of this initiative to reflect the innovative thinking and action we are expecting of applicants, with an intentional focus on formative assessment throughout the process.

Given that the goal of the Assessment for Learning Project is to invite new and different ideas around assessment and to promote and reward cutting-edge thinking, we believe the proposal process should model this logic of assessment *for* learning. As we make the transition to next generation models of instruction and assessment, we're also eager to move toward an intentional process that prioritizes both impact *and* learning, which the Request for Learning (RFL) process is designed to do.

The Request for Learning (RFL) approach also allows us to "walk the talk," modeling the formative nature of the work the initiative is designed to support, through:

- *Continuous learning:* The grant-making structure for this Request for Learning (RFL) process itself promotes a culture of constant learning (i.e., design-test-learn-repeat) versus traditional grant tracks (e.g. plan and implement within established budget borders; once and done);

- *Personalization:* Meet grantees at the edge of their learning and promote their growth versus follow the traditional one-size-fits-all cohort model; and

- *Learning and innovation:* There are opportunities for additional investment in grantees that show effectiveness through evidence and an ability to capture key learnings that inform not only their own work but also that of others.

Ultimately, the Request for Learning (RFL) is an approach that is working to engage individuals, teams, and organizations that have a strong desire to explore, experiment, and innovate in order to advance learning at the levels of applicant, initiative, and ultimately the broader field.

Who is Involved?

Initiative Partners

The Center for Innovation in Education (CIE) was established at the University of Kentucky in early 2013 with funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support systems-wide shifts to personalized learning in support of deeper learning outcomes for all students. CIE focuses on creating verticals within states (at state education agencies, district, and local levels), and catalyzing cross-state work that coalesces people in similar roles around complex problems of policy and practice.

Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) was launched in October 2010 by EDUCAUSE, in conjunction with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges, the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). NGLC seeks to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States, maximizing student learning and closing achievement gaps, through the development of new, transformational learning and operating models and through the strongly integrated use of technology. To date, NGLC has awarded or committed to awarding more than $70 million in grants and catalyzed another $20 million in matching grants.

Funding Partners

The **William & Flora Hewlett Foundation** is one of the nation's largest, with assets of more than $9 billion. The Foundation's programs have ambitious goals that include: helping to reduce global poverty, limiting the risk of climate change, improving education for students in California and elsewhere, improving reproductive health and rights worldwide, supporting vibrant performing arts in our community, advancing the field of philanthropy, and supporting disadvantaged communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, guided by the belief that every life has equal value, works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, the Foundation focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people — especially those with the fewest resources — have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life.

Supporting Partners

2Revolutions, Lead Design Partner, is a national education design lab that designs and launches Future of Learning models and supports the enabling systems within which the work can scale.

The Assessment for Learning Project's Advisory Group serves as a thought partner for the project. To learn more about members of this group, you may access their biographies.

Supports for Grantees

Regardless of project size, all Assessment for Learning Project grantees will follow a full cycle of learning — from design, to implementation, and testing the hypothesis, to reflecting on and reporting results from the work (as it relates to both impact *and* learning).

Throughout the cycle of learning, the needs of grantees will be supported based on demand in ways that model the principles of personalization, competency-based education, and assessment *for* learning. Continuous support will be provided, including:

- *Learning Materials:* Beginning with the Request for Learning (RFL) itself and the support materials included to assist applicants, participants in the Assessment for Learning Project will have access to high-quality resources along the way.
- *Communication:* Through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous media, grantees will have access to timely communications to support and share the results of learning.
- *Practice Community:* Grantees will be connected with one another as a community of practitioners who share a passion for changing how assessment is perceived and used in support of learning; and, furthermore, who will actively contribute to collective learning through a diverse and complementary array of knowledge, skills, and experience.
- *Talent:* Grantees will have access to a range of individual and organizational experts who can help propel learning forward based on the unique needs of each grantee. This high quality network of technical assistance supports and tool providers will be available on demand and for short- to longer-term duration. These supports will be supplemental to financial investment. We are actively building out this pool of partners and will invite others to join.
- *Opportunity for Additional Funding:* Grantees will have access to a small, but flexible, pool of additional funds if a clear need or opportunity for increased impact becomes apparent during the grant period.

Expectations of Grantees

- Participate in a national community of practice.
- Attend all Assessment for Learning in-person convenings.
- Openly share all tools, models, and learnings.
- Respond to formative feedback and share learning through efficient interim reporting.

Ultimately, we are aiming to create a valuable experience that is **focused on the learning**. We want to **accelerate learning and growth** for all participants involved.

Your Vision

We are eager to learn about your vision to transform assessment. We are seeking a broad range of innovators for this opportunity. If you have historically received investment for "out of the box" approaches, we look forward to ideas that push your thinking to the next level and provide an opportunity for you and the field to learn from the work. If you have not historically received investment, but have a compelling idea, we strongly encourage your application.

While we are certainly not looking for applicants who have "figured everything out" and very much plan to support applicants and ultimately grantees in their learning, we are looking for applicant teams who demonstrate a minimum level of readiness as well as a strong disposition for learning.

In this section, we outline a set of core criteria that provide a framework for how applications will be reviewed, with an eye toward alignment with the Assessment for Learning Project's goals. Below each criterion, we have also included a set of corresponding guiding questions to support applicants in articulating your idea and vision for the work.

Ideas

Your team has an innovative idea or set of ideas about addressing core challenges in the realm of assessment for learning that do not reflect "business as usual." Your idea(s) for your proposed project should align to the funding priorities of the initiative.

- **What is your idea for advancing assessment *for* learning?**
- **What problems are you trying to solve about assessment *for* learning?**
- **Why do you believe that your ideas, reflected through your project, can help transform student learning in your context?**

Learning

Based on the ideas you have, your team can formulate a plan for advancing learning by clearly defining the problem, articulating a testable hypothesis(es), describing your plan for testing the hypothesis over a specific period of time, communicating what you've learned from your prototype, and ultimately unlocking another cycle of learning through your findings.

- **What is your team's testable hypothesis, driving the design of your project (i.e. if we do *x*, then we think *y* will happen)?**
- **How do you plan to test your hypothesis, and how will grant resources be helpful in actualizing this plan? What specifically do you hope to learn?**
- **At what scale will you test your hypothesis, and what implications for scale could your findings yield?**

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Impact

Your team, context, and ideas have the potential to further understanding and advance practice at multiple levels of the system in a way that directly addresses the funding priorities set forth by the Assessment for Learning Project.

- **How will engaging in this work accelerate your local impact and what broader implications might your idea have on your systems context?**
- **Ultimately, why do you think your idea has the potential to further understanding and advance learning beyond your context?**
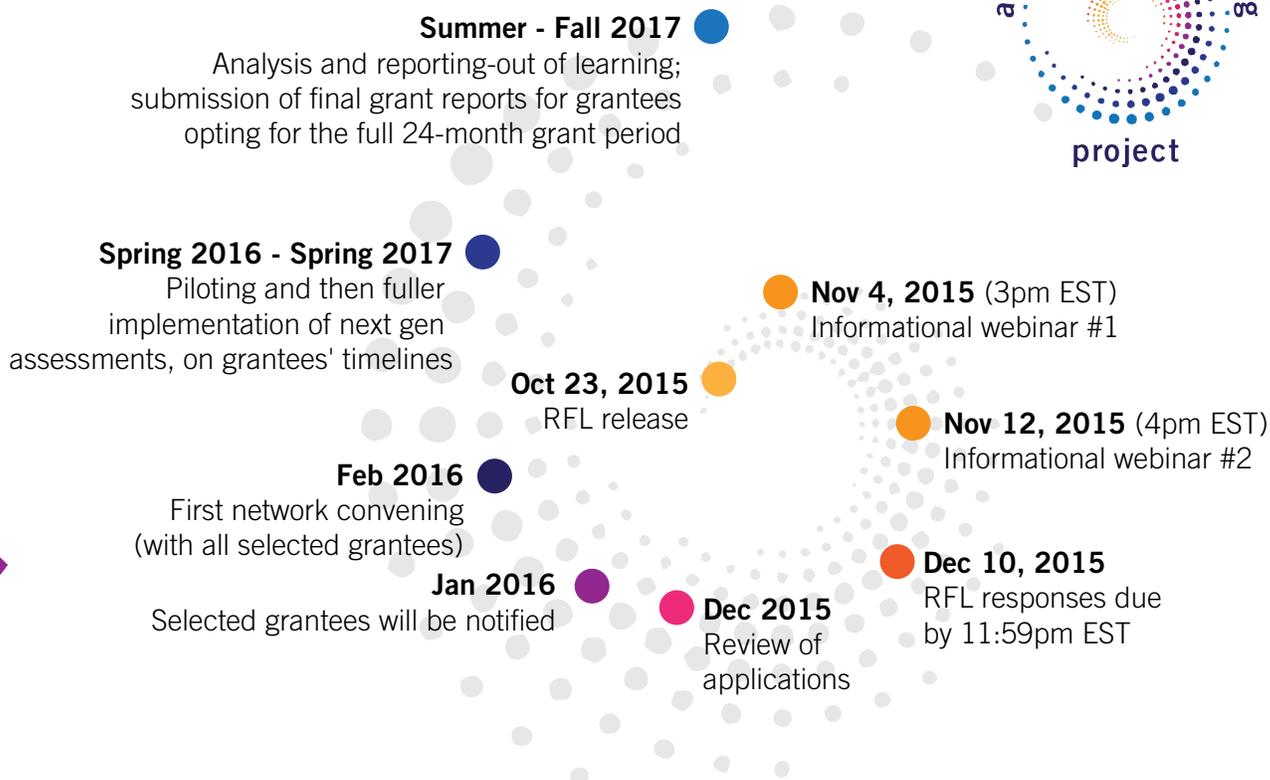
Readiness

You have the right team assembled for the work, including partners as appropriate; your team embodies the dispositions of learners and innovators (e.g. collaboration, communication, and creativity), can already demonstrate a level of knowledge and/or skill in assessment *for* learning, is eager and well-positioned to learn more, and can maximize the use of additional resources to propel learning forward.

- **Who is part of your team (including core partners, if any), and why do these team members comprise the right team for the work ahead?**
- **How does your thinking about assessment link to your instructional vision?**
- **What evidence can you provide to highlight your current knowledge and skill levels, along with the relevance of current or prior work? Feel free to reference this assessment for learning progression as helpful in gauging your current competencies.** *(Not required but encouraged)*

Please compile your team's submission into a Word document of **no more than five pages**, with **one other artifact** (i.e., no more than five PowerPoint slides, a video of five minutes or less, an illustrative graphic, a demonstration of related current work, etc.) of your choosing that will round out our understanding of your idea. The Word document should contain an overall narrative that addresses each of the application criteria detailed above. Your proposal does not need to address all of the Funding Priorities set forth by the Assessment for Learning Project, but it is essential for proposals to approach challenges in an integrative and holistic manner. Please refer to the Supporting Materials for more information on submission requirements.

Timeline

assessment for learning
project

Summer - Fall 2017
Analysis and reporting-out of learning;
submission of final grant reports for grantees
opting for the full 24-month grant period

Spring 2016 - Spring 2017
Piloting and then fuller
implementation of next gen
assessments, on grantees' timelines

Nov 4, 2015 (3pm EST)
Informational webinar #1

Oct 23, 2015
RFL release

Nov 12, 2015 (4pm EST)
Informational webinar #2

Feb 2016
First network convening
(with all selected grantees)

Jan 2016
Selected grantees will be notified

Dec 2015
Review of
applications

Dec 10, 2015
RFL responses due
by 11:59pm EST

Eligibility

Proceed to the Supporting Materials if each of the items below apply.

- Your team represents a public school, charter management organization (CMO), local education agency (LEA), state education agency (SEA), or not-for-profit organization (NPO) partnering directly with public schools.

- Your team is eager to learn and grow — and not simply scale the work you've been doing — after reviewing this Request for Learning (RFL).

- Your team believes you can submit compelling evidence against the Funding Priorities by which we'll be reviewing applicants, and you meet the core eligibility requirements presented herein and more deeply described in the Supporting Materials.

- Your team is passionate about playing an active role in a community of diverse learners working collectively to solve some of our most challenging and systemic educational problems.

- Your team believes that your vision has the power to transform — not simply incrementally improve — collective understanding and practice in assessment *for* learning.

- Your team will directly address one or more of the Funding Priorities set forth in the Request for Learning (RFL) and evidence a deep understanding of and alignment with the project's Design Principles.

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