

# **An Invitation**

## **To Federal Agencies and Federal Organizations To Submit Proposals to Develop Internet-Based Learning Modules and Communities**

From the U.S. Department of Education  
On Behalf of the Consortium for Education  
April 6, 1998

**Deadline for Receipt of Proposals: May 19, 1998**

### **Imagine...**

teachers, federal agencies, and other partners working together to help all our children reach high academic standards and learn to think and solve problems like scientists, writers, engineers, scholars, artists and citizens. Imagine interactive learning experiences in communications-rich environments available on the desktop of millions of teachers, students and parents.

The aim of this Invitation to Federal Agencies and Federal Organizations to Submit Proposals to Develop Internet-Based Learning Modules and Internet-Based Learning Communities (hereafter referred to as "Invitation") is to help make that dream a reality.

## Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education, on behalf of the Consortium for Education (CE)<sup>1</sup>, seeks to support up to seven teams of teachers, federal organizations, and other partners who will use the Internet and other technologies to:

co-develop, pilot test (with students in classrooms), and refine online learning modules<sup>2</sup>.

create an electronically networked community around its module -- a community of teachers, students, and others who use communications technologies to improve, extend, and build on its module.

Each team will develop, within 12 months of being selected to receive support under this Invitation, an Internet-based learning module and an electronically networked community of users and contributors to that module. The quality and success of these two products are important deliverables for each team. An equally important deliverable is each team's contribution to what is known about the processes that enable and support partnerships of teachers, federal agencies and other organizations to use electronic communications in developing powerful online learning modules and robust learning communities. Our aim is to learn, develop, and share -- from the work of these teams -- a replicable process that federal agencies and others can use to co-develop, with teachers, hundreds more learning modules and networked learning communities.

## Background

On April 19, 1997, President Clinton directed federal agencies to improve access to their existing Internet-based education resources, to improve the quality of those resources, and to develop new ones. In response, more than 30 federal organizations formed a working group, chaired by the U.S. Department of Education. The "Federal Resources for Educational Excellence" (FREE) working group, as it is called, has made considerable progress toward identifying Internet-based education resources. It has also developed a website (<http://www.ed.gov/free>) and implemented two search tools, all in an effort to improve access to those resources. This Invitation is designed to take this effort to the next level.

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<sup>1</sup> The Consortium for Education consists of the FREE Working Group, teams supported under this Invitation, and other organizations interested in developing and strengthening partnerships among teachers and organizations to develop high-quality, standards-based, electronically networked learning modules and learning communities.

<sup>2</sup> *Learning module* means a set of resources that include student learning activities, teaching guides, lesson plans, instructional materials or units, primary documents, artifacts, scientific tools, data sets, and/or other learning resources organized around a particular topic. Each learning module will be designed for easy and intuitive use by teachers, parents, and/or students; will be tied to challenging academic standards; and will draw on federal resources.

## Proposals Are Invited

Federal agencies, in partnership with teachers and others, are invited to submit proposals to co-develop standards-based learning modules, pilot test those modules (with students in classrooms), improve the modules (over time), and build communities of users and contributors around the modules. Each module must offer interactive learning activities and experiences, focused discussions, and collaborative intellectual work. Just “putting information up on the web” is not what this is about.

Teams supported under this Invitation are expected to rely heavily on the Internet and other technologies (such as phone conferencing and intranets) to communicate and to develop their modules, as well as to present their modules, gather feedback and additional contributions, make improvements, build their user-contributor communities, and evolve as communities. These modules will reside on, and communities will be accessible through, agency or agency supported servers. Each team will coordinate with FREE to make sure that its module and community are included as links on FREE website, and each team will create metadata records for its module and community using the Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM)<sup>3</sup>. Any team that uses, as part of its learning module, materials or other learning resources -- including online resources -- developed by individuals or organizations that are not part of their team must obtain written permission to use those materials as part of its learning module.

Each team will document its work processes on a quarterly basis (every three months). This documentation will include descriptions of the team’s progress toward its goals and/or milestones, descriptions of how team members and other partners are using the Internet and other technologies to conduct the team’s work, what’s working and what’s not, any fine-tuning of goals or milestones, and other information. Each team will submit this documentation to the U.S. Department of Education via electronic files. This information will be analyzed and excerpted in regular reports, which will be shared by the U.S. Department of Education with the General Services Administration, the CE, and teams that received awards under this Invitation. The CE will use this documentation to develop a template outlining and describing a process that other agencies and organizations will be able to use in Year 2 to support the development of online learning modules and communities.

Up to seven teams will be selected to receive one-year awards of up to \$50,000 each. It is anticipated that awards made under this Invitation will be, by themselves, insufficient to

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<sup>3</sup> Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM) is a project supported by the National Library of Education (of the U.S. Department of Education) to develop a set of tools that will make it possible for teachers and others to type a topic, grade level, and other information into a search screen that will bring back lesson plans and other education resources from multiple participating websites, including the FREE website. The electronic tools and processes that will make this possible are being developed by a consortium led by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology at Syracuse University (<http://geminfo.org/>)

provide full and adequate support for creating new online learning modules and communities from scratch. Any partnership seeking to build new modules and communities where none now exist will want to include and describe additional sources of support in its application.

In developing applications, federal agencies are encouraged to partner with others who are already building online learning modules and communities. Federal agencies are also encouraged to consider partnering with other federal agencies in developing and submitting an application.

Funds under this Invitation may be used to help teams and their online communities document their work and evaluate impact of their work, refine and improve their work processes and products, extend their modules and expand their learning communities to additional sites and to new standards-based topics, and add new partners and needed expertise. It is expected that a significant portion of each award -- over 70 percent -- will be used to support the participation of classroom teachers in co-development, pilot testing, refinement, expansion, and other team activities. Funds may be used also to help cover travel and accommodations for teachers participating in teams supported under this Invitation. Please note that teams are expected to arrange and pay for all their own travel and other expenses associated with their work and with their participation in forums hosted by CE.

Forums will be hosted by CE to explore what's working and what's not, to exploit opportunities and avoid pitfalls, and to help develop and deepen a shared understanding of what processes work and what conditions are necessary for teams to develop online learning modules and communities successfully and efficiently. Several of the forums will be face-to-face; others will be conducted using the Internet or teleconferencing. Each team supported under this Invitation will be expected to participate in and contribute significantly to each forum.

*Each team will be expected to use funds under this Invitation to move its online community to new, higher levels of learning and performance.*

A second Invitation requesting proposals is expected to be announced in late 1998 or early 1999. Teams supported in the first year are ineligible for the anticipated second round of awards. Federal agencies that receive planning awards will be eligible to receive project development awards during the second round in 1998 or 1999.

All products and deliverables created or developed with support from an award under this Invitation must be available to teachers, students, parents, and citizens free of charge. Products and deliverables created or developed with support from an award under this Invitation must be accessible to persons with disabilities consistent with the requirements of applicable Federal law, including Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794b and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-104).

## **Deliverables**

Each team is expected to produce four deliverables by July 1999:

1. a new Internet-based learning module, or a pre-existing Internet-based learning module that has been (between July 1998 and June 1999) significantly improved and expanded. Regardless of whether it is new or already exists, the module is expected to be pilot tested with students (during the 1998-99 school year) and improved based on the results. (For the definition of “module,” please see Footnote 2 .)
2. a new Internet-based learning community of users and contributors around that module, or a pre-existing Internet-based learning community of module users and contributors that has been (between July 1998 and June 1999) significantly improved or expanded.
3. metadata records for its module and community using the Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM), with its module and community linked to the FREE website appropriately. It is expected that these metadata and links will be kept up-to-date.
4. a first-year report describing the team’s work and lessons it has learned about what works -- what conditions and processes appear to be essential -- for developing Internet-based learning modules and Internet-based communities of users of, and contributors to, those modules. This includes documentation of the team’s use of the Internet and other technologies to communicate and to develop its module, present its module, gather feedback and additional contributions, make improvements, build its user-contributor community, and evolve as a community.

Each team is also expected, as a condition of being selected under this Invitation, to articulate and share these lessons and documentation with the Consortium for Education (CE) by producing clear quarterly reports and by participating in and contributing to all CE forums, including web-based and email forums, teleconferences, and face-to-face meetings.

## **Planning Awards**

Any agency that opts not to submit an application but would like to enlist teachers in helping the agency create a plan for developing online learning modules and online learning communities may request up to \$5,000 for a planning award. It is expected that funds from this planning award will be used primarily to help compensate teachers for their assistance. The deliverable for each planning award, due no later than January 1999, is a written description of a learning module and an online community (of users and contributors around that module) and a plan for how that module and community could be developed. Questions in the Application Form should be used in developing the request. The same Criteria for Selection will be used in making up to 10 planning awards.

## Criteria for Selection

### 1. What is the *need* for the proposed online learning module and community? (30 points)

- \* Are the knowledge and skills -- and the topic -- for which the module and community will be developed essential for all students to learn, and are they reflected in national academic standards?
- \* To what extent will this module and community differ from other online resources in the same topic area?

### 2. Is the project *likely to succeed* in the first year? (30 points)

- \* Are the module and community likely to be used and participated in by many teachers and students?
- \* Are the module and community likely to help teachers and students advance toward the specified academic standards?
- \* Is the plan solid? Is “what will be done and how” explained sufficiently? Are the timeline and milestones reasonable and realistic?
- \* Is the budget realistic? Will teachers’ compensation add up to over 70 percent of the award?
- \* Who are the primary participants? Do they have experience or expertise that makes success likely?
- \* What resources or expertise are being brought (to the co-development of the module and community) by the organization and/or other partners that make success likely?

### 3. If the project succeeds in the first year, what is the *potential impact*? (40 points)

- \* Will the project build its community to include additional teachers and schools, create new online learning content and opportunities, add more new partners, and leverage other efforts both in the first year and in subsequent years?
- \* Does this project seem financially sustainable and of continuing benefit to the community?
- \* How important are the questions to be answered by this project about “what process and conditions can help teams use the Internet and other technologies to develop online modules and online learning communities?” How significant are the lessons that will be learned from this team for efficiently creating many more “distributed” teams that will be successful in using technologies to create online learning modules and online learning communities?

## Process for Selection

Panels of readers will be convened to read and score proposals (using the Criteria for Selection). Panelists will consist of FREE working group members, other federal employees, and teachers. The Secretary of Education will make awards based on panel scores and other relevant factors.

## Timeline (projected)

<i>April</i>	Teachers, federal agencies, and other organizations form teams and develop proposals ( <a href="http://www.ed.gov/free/partner.html">http://www.ed.gov/free/partner.html</a> ).
<i>May 19</i>	Applications are due.
<i>May 25</i>	Readers receive applications, score and return them (first tier).
<i>June 8</i>	Reader panels discuss and score top applications (second tier).
<i>June 22</i>	Secretary of Education announces awards.
<i>July 13</i>	Kickoff meeting held in Washington, D.C., for all awardees. (Teams arrange and pay their own travel and accommodations expenses.)
<i>July/August</i>	Teams develop modules/communities.
<i>September</i>	Teams continue developing modules/communities and begin pilot testing and refining modules. First quarterly report from each team is due.
<i>October through December</i>	Teams continue developing modules/communities. All teams have begun pilot testing and refining modules.

*Teams continue developing, refining, expanding, promoting, and building modules/communities from October 1998 into subsequent months and years.*

<i>January</i>	Second quarterly report from each team is due. Second "Invitation to Federal Agencies and Federal Organizations to Submit Proposals to Develop Internet-Based Learning Modules and Internet-Based Learning Communities" is announced.
<i>April</i>	Third quarterly report from each team is due. Applications under second Invitation are due.
<i>July</i>	Final first-year report from each team is due. Second round of awards is announced.

## **Guidelines**

A completed application consists of four parts: your responses to the Overview Questions (1-5), your response to Question 6 (the name, organizational affiliation, and contact information, including email address, for each participant on your team), your response to Question 7 (a letter of endorsement from an authorizing official in your agency), and your responses to the Application Questions (8-16).

Your responses to the Overview Questions should be no more than two pages. Your responses to the Application Questions should be no more than 10 pages. These responses should be single-spaced, with a double space between paragraphs and with a double space between questions. Questions should be included in responses. The text should be left justified (not full justified) and 12-point type size. Up to 10 pages of attachments (but not more than 10 pages) may be included in your submission. A complete application, with attachments, should consist of no more than 22 pages. Your response to Question 6 does not count as part of your page total.

Proposals may be sent in advance by email (cindy\_balmuth@ed.gov) or facsimile transmissions (202) 401-9027. However, in order to be considered for funding, the official proposal must be mailed (overnight or regular) or hand delivered by May 19, 1998. Seven paper copies and the electronic file(s) of the text and attachments (Word Perfect, Word, or other standard word processing software) must be included with the official proposal.

### **Applications Delivered by Mail**

An application sent by mail must be addressed to the U.S. Department of Education, Application Control Center, Attention: CFDA Number \_\_\_\_\_, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202-4725.

An application must show proof of mailing consisting of one of the following:

1. A legibly dated U.S. Postal Service Postmark.
2. A legible mail receipt with the date of mailing stamped by the U.S. Postal Service.
3. A dated shipping label, invoice, or receipt from a commercial carrier.

If an application is sent through the U.S. Postal Service, the Secretary does not accept either of the following as proof of mailing:

1. A private metered postmark, or
2. A mail receipt that is not dated by the U.S. Postal Service.

An applicant should note that the U.S. Postal Service does not uniformly provide a dated postmark. Before relying on this method, an applicant should check with its local post office.

An applicant is encouraged to use registered or at least first class mail. Late applications will not be considered and will be returned.

### **Applications Delivered by Hand**

An application that is hand delivered must be taken to the U.S. Department of Education, Application Control Center, Room 3633, Regional Office Building #3, 7th and D Streets, SW, Washington, DC.

The Application Control Center will accept hand delivered applications between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (Washington, DC time) daily, except Saturdays, Sundays, and federal holidays.

Individuals delivering applications must use the D Street Entrance. Proper identification is necessary to enter the building. For an application sent via courier service to be considered timely, the courier service must be in receipt of the application on or before the closing date.

### **Read and post on the FREE message board!**

Prospective applicants, potential partners, and others are invited to post on the FREE message board (<http://www.ed.gov/free/partner.html>) descriptions of online learning modules, online learning communities, and other standards-based resources for teaching and learning that you would like to see developed or that you would like to participate in developing. It is expected that this message board will become a source of ideas and potential partners for those interested not only in developing applications for this Invitation but also for anyone seeking to develop online learning resources and communities.

If you have questions or want additional information, please visit the FREE website, or email or call:

Cindy Balmuth  
Office of the Deputy Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
600 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 6233  
(202) 205-9661  
Fax: 401-9207  
[cindy\\_balmuth@ed.gov](mailto:cindy_balmuth@ed.gov)  
<http://www.ed.gov/free>