



**State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
Fund for Excellence and Innovation**

Guidelines for the Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant

Issued by SCHEV

August 15, 2016

Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant Request for Proposals - Round One

Grant Application Deadline: October 21, 2016

Notification of Funding Opportunity: August 15, 2016

1. Purpose of Grants

Through the support of Governor McAuliffe and funding from the General Assembly, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) announces an Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant competition for the period of January 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018.

These one-time grants are funded through the Fund for Excellence and Innovation that was established during the 2016 General Assembly session to focus on two primary activities: *(1) to stimulate collaborations among public school divisions, community colleges and universities and to expand affordable student pathways and (2) to pursue shared services and other efficiency initiatives at colleges and universities that lead to measureable cost reductions.* This grant opportunity targets the first activity of affordable pathways and collaboration/partnership development.

Development of affordable pathways partnerships is a component of the [Virginia Plan for Higher Education](#), the statewide strategic plan, and supports the commonwealth's objective to be the best-educated state by 2030.

SCHEV defines affordable student pathways as sequential academic courses or learning experiences with connected support services designed to result in a cost savings to the student while in the pursuit of a degree and/or workforce credential. Grants awarded in this first round will target the expansion and creation of sustainable affordable pathways programs that focus primarily on high school to college-age students; strengthen PK-12 partnerships with higher education; implement or expand pathways that support cost savings to students such as opportunities for early college credit, improve time-to-degree/credential or completion rates, particularly for underrepresented populations; and lead to a degree, certificate or workforce credential. Underrepresented populations are defined by SCHEV as students who are a racial/ethnic minority, from a low-income background and/or are from areas of the state with low degree attainment rates, based on census data.

2. Award Amounts

In the first round of SCHEV's Fund for Excellence and Innovation, grants will be awarded in amounts up to \$140,000 for up to four successful applicants (Note: These funds are provided through the General Assembly and are subject to availability.).

Grant funding will support affordable pathway partnership expansion or implementation. A second round of smaller planning grants (\$35,000-\$40,000) is expected to be announced, in late 2016, for those entities with promising program and partnership concepts that need more time for development. Future awards may focus on other target areas that could

include private nonprofit institutions, college access providers, foundations and other student populations.

Eligible Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant applications will be reviewed by a multi-agency team and announced by December 1, 2016.

3. Performance Period

Grant funding will support an 18-month performance period beginning January 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018. Applicants proposing implementation of a new initiative must demonstrate the capacity to develop the partnership(s), implement the program and produce preliminary outcomes, within the grant timeframe.

4. Eligible Organizations

In order to help stimulate collaboration between PK-12 and higher education, proposed programs must include a partnership between: (1) at least one public high school, school division or regional school consortium and (2) a degree-granting public institution of higher education (IHE). A Virginia public higher-education institution must be the fiscal agent and applicant.

In order to enhance the proposed affordable pathways model and students' success, partnerships with additional high schools, middle schools, local education agency (LEA), regional school consortiums, higher-education institutions (public and private) and other organizations, such as nonprofit college access organizations, businesses, professional associations, state agencies, foundations or other public or private agencies are encouraged.

5. Pre-Proposal Webinar

A pre-proposal webinar is scheduled on August 25, 2016, 10–11 a.m. EDT to respond to queries from eligible organizations interested in submitting a proposal. Details to join the webinar are provided below:

Please join the webinar from your computer, tablet or smartphone:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/764199125>

You can also dial in using your phone:

United States: +1 (646) 749-3122

Access Code: 764-199-125

If this is your first GoToMeeting, please try a test session at

<http://help.citrix.com/getready>, prior to August 25.

The pre-proposal webinar will be recorded and available on a SCHEV grant resource page at <http://www.schev.edu/index/institutional/grants/affordable-pathways>. Additional application resource materials will also be posted.

6. Background

Overview

While Virginia has some of the highest high school graduation rates and public college and university graduation rates in the nation, gaps remain in the number of students who transition to higher education, particularly for students who may be first-generation, low-income, minority race/ethnicity or from areas of the state with low education-attainment rates — often referred to as underrepresented populations. Moreover, the rising costs of higher education over the last decade create increased barriers to education that may exacerbate these gaps.

As a result, [The Virginia Plan for Higher Education](#), the statewide strategic plan, developed through input from institutions, the general public, secondary education and policy makers, set an objective to be the best-educated state by 2030 with the [goals](#) of providing affordable access for all, optimizing student success for work and life, driving change and improvement through innovation and investment and advancing economic and cultural prosperity of the commonwealth and its regions. This grant opportunity supports the goals of the plan and will help Virginia progress towards the 2030 objective.

Virginia and its institutions have implemented many programs and initiatives to counter the rising costs of education and make higher education accessible and affordable for all populations. At a state level, these include the development of the guaranteed transfer agreements between two- and four-year institutions, the creation of the transfer grant program to provide incentives for low-income students to enroll in four-year institutions upon completion of a two-year degree and increased financial aid by the state and institutions.

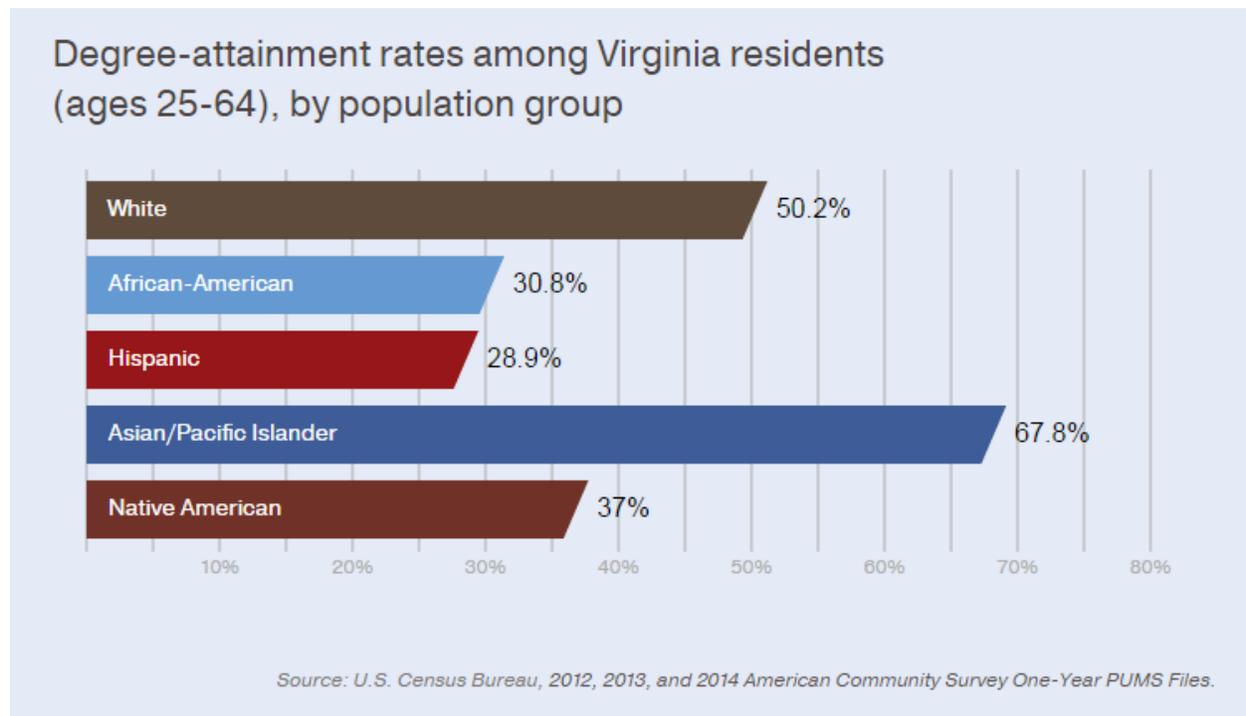
In addition to increasing student aid resources, institutions have implemented affordable pathway programs through opportunities to gain early college credit while in high school. They also have developed programs that promote cost avoidance strategies by reducing the average time-to-degree and increasing completion rates, thereby decreasing debt for students.

In 2016, the General Assembly further supported institutions in their efforts to reduce college costs to students by authorizing a Fund for Excellence and Innovation. A portion of these funds is targeted towards enhancing effective affordable pathways by strengthening PK-12 partnerships with higher education. Research on affordable pathways and review of Virginia data suggest that gaps in educational achievement may be addressed, in part, by creating greater alignment and working relationships throughout the educational system. Data on education gaps in Virginia and examples of affordable pathway programs are provided in the following sections.

Data Related to Education Gaps and Affordability:

Census data: In a recent Lumina report, [Stronger Nation](#), Virginia ranked in the top 10 states for the highest education-attainment rates, including degrees and certificates, for working-age adults, 25-64. However, disparities remain by race, regions of the state and by income levels.

As illustrated below, the degree attainment rate for white individuals is 50.2% of the population while it is 30.8% for African-Americans and 28.9% of Hispanic residents — roughly a 20-percentage-point gap.



Furthermore, gaps in regions of the state also remain for those with at least an associate degree. For example, Fairfax County in Northern Virginia has one of the highest education attainment rates at 66% of the population with an associate degree or higher, while only 11.5% of residents in Sussex County in southeastern Virginia hold a degree.

Additional education attainment data is available at <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2016/#virginia>.

Secondary to postsecondary enrollments: Postsecondary enrollments of recent high school graduates in Virginia reflect similar gaps by population group indicating that these disparities will continue without intentional efforts to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion for underrepresented students. Of the Virginia high school students graduating in 2015, 65% enrolled in a higher education institution within 16 months, while only 56% of Hispanic and 57% African-American students were enrolled at an institution of higher education within the same time period. Moreover, only 50% of economically disadvantaged students enrolled in higher education — a 15-percentage-point gap between disadvantaged students and the overall student population. These data are available by state, school division and high school on the Virginia Department of Education’s website under High School Graduates Postsecondary Enrollment Report.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/graduation_completion/index.shtml

Additional reports related to data by underrepresented populations at Virginia public institutions are available at http://research.schev.edu/enrollment/DistUnder_RepPop.asp.

Completion rates: Gaps by underrepresented populations also occur in postsecondary completion rates. As part of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education, a measure was developed to increase completion rates by closing the gaps between underrepresented students and traditional students. Based on current data, the completion gap between underrepresented students and traditional students is about 10 percentage points. A variety of reports are available on student completion rates based on different metrics, cohorts and benchmarks and by institution at <http://research.schev.edu/apps/info/Reports.Guide-to-the-Retention-and-Graduation-Reports.ashx>.

Student debt and affordability: Student debt has continued to rise in terms of the percent of students borrowing and the average per student debt amount upon graduation. To improve affordability for students, efforts that reduce a student's time-to-completion, provide no- or low-cost options for college credit and/or promote cost-avoidance strategies can improve economic outcomes for students. Data on student debt are available by institution at http://research.schev.edu/studentdebt/DebtProfile_SL001.asp.

Characteristics and Examples of Affordable Student Pathways Programs

For this grant, affordable student pathways are defined as sequential academic courses or learning experiences with connected support services developed to result in a cost savings to the student, while in the pursuit of a degree and/or credential.

Characteristics of an affordable pathways program may include a combination of the following or other similar practices that result in student cost savings:

- Reduce time to degree/credential.
- Utilize formal articulation agreements that define and ease the transition between education levels (e.g., 2-4 year, high school to community college, etc.).
- Create alignment between coursework leading to degree/credential across educational entities and industry.
- Provide financial aid/scholarships.
- Assist with the application and enrollment process in higher education.
- Offer accelerated coursework and/or flexible terms.
- Offer college credit during high school.
- Offer stipends/wages during programming (e.g. apprenticeship programs).
- Provide accurate and timely academic and career advising.
- Align and connect education with the business sector.
- Result in a degree/credential in a field of demand.
- Provide programming that helps students meet state learning standards and high school graduation requirements.
- Reduce need for academic remediation.

As mentioned, there are many examples of affordable pathways programs in the commonwealth. Some offer opportunities for early-college-credit while in high school and

others can provide opportunities that reduce time-to-degree and increase graduation rates once in higher education. The following are examples:

- The [Pathways to Baccalaureate](#) program led by Northern Virginia Community College which partners with other IHEs and PK-12 to support students on their path to college and career success.
- Early college initiatives at [John Tyler Community College](#) and [Reynolds Community College](#) partnering with area high schools.
- The [Community College Access Program](#) (CCAP)(administered by Virginia Western Community College where students from select high schools can attend tuition free if they meet program commitments.
- Summer Bridge programs that offer students opportunities to work in cohorts and earn college credit, including [SPARC](#) at Norfolk State University.
- Development of living-learning communities to support cohort models for student success, including those at [Virginia Commonwealth University](#).
- Accountability and incentive programming, like [GAP](#) at New River Community College.
- Retention programming, powered by data for student support customization, such as the [Exceptional Student Experience](#) program at Richard Bland Community College.
- [Patriot's Promise Summer Program](#) at George Mason University, where low-income students receive funding to take summer course while also receiving college success skills training.
- [Valley Scholars](#) and [Rappahannock Scholars](#) programs at James Madison University and University of Mary Washington that partner with high schools in their region and provide college preparation skills development and scholarships once in postsecondary education.

Some affordable pathways programs have strong PK-12 partnership imbedded in the program, particularly those that offer early-college-credit and the scholars programs. Programs that do not have a PK-12 partnership imbedded in the program, must develop a partnership that provides services to better inform students of affordable pathways programs opportunities and help prepare students for higher education in order to make more informed decisions to receive the resources needed for student success.

An active partnership between an IHE and PK-12 through awareness building and support services can provide opportunities for middle- and high-school students to learn about the benefits of and preparation for higher education while introducing them, and their families, to affordable college pathways opportunities. Intentionally connecting secondary students to these types of affordable pathways creates opportunities to reduce the average time-to-degree and increase completion rates, thereby decreasing debt for students and families.

7. Grant Requirements and Deliverables

In addition to carrying out the work as described in the grant proposal, recipients will be asked to form teams that are representative of their identified grant partners and participate in a one-day kick-off event in Richmond to take place in January/February 2017. Applicants should include these travel expenses in their budgets. In addition, grant recipients will work with SCHEV staff to help coordinate a regional partnership forum or event to facilitate collaboration across public and private sectors, in efforts to promote the value of education and support student success and affordability. While the regional event will be funded by SCHEV (this does not have to be included in the applicant's budget request), recipients are

expected to help identify potential attendees, promote participation, secure facilities, and aid with logistics and support awareness of the efforts in their regions. Additional training opportunities and resources may be offered throughout the grant cycle. Participation will be encouraged and supported by SCHEV, as deemed applicable to each grantee.

All grantees will be asked to submit to SCHEV mid-term and final written reports. Program site visits may be conducted by SCHEV, as appropriate.

8. Anticipated Outcomes/Goals

Grant applications will be evaluated based on the following outcomes:

Student Cost Savings through the Implementation or Expansion of Affordable Pathways:

For this grant, affordable student pathways are defined as sequential academic courses or learning experiences with connected support services designed to result in a cost savings to the student in the pursuit of a degree and/or credential. The definition notes that both academic and appropriate support services must be provided. Selected services and models of delivery must be research-based. The applicant must provide evidence-based justification of how/why it will be successful in supporting the identified students' success, while increasing affordability. Expansion programs should share current program impact and how expansion will improve outcomes. Expansion programs should be mindful that funding is available to enhance and supplement current programming, not supplant or replace existing resources or efforts. All applicants should specifically identify not only how the proposed efforts will produce cost savings or cost avoidance for students, but also quantify the estimated amount saved/avoided. Include calculation.

Enhanced Partnerships:

Applicants must include a partnership consisting of at least one public high school and one degree-granting public institution of higher education. In order to expand the scope of services and reach, partnerships with additional high schools, middle schools, local education agencies, a regional school consortium or higher-education institutions and other organizations, such as nonprofit-college-access organizations, businesses, professional organizations, state agencies, foundations or other public or private agencies, are encouraged but not required. The focus of the grant is not on the number of partnerships but on clear demonstration of the strength of the partnerships; the value of the partnerships to PK-12, higher education, and the region; and how the partnerships will be developed during the grant period. Enhanced partner engagement should be clearly articulated through identified roles and responsibilities, resource sharing/commitment and expressed leadership buy-in.

Increased Education Outcomes:

Grant applicants are expected to demonstrate how the proposed affordable pathways will help address achievement gaps and improve academic student performance. The applicant should indicate the expected improvement in specified educational outcomes, such as higher achievement for identified underrepresented student populations; reduced need for remediation; significant increase in the persistence and matriculation of the identified student population(s); and/or stronger preparation for postsecondary education. Data should be used to describe the target population(s) and measure expected improvements.

Program and Partnership Sustainability:

These innovative grants are intended to be one-time awards to develop sustainable capacity and/or to provide proof for additional funding either internally or from other funders. The applicant must demonstrate how the project intends to be funded after the award period or how the project will use grant funds for non-recurring one-time expansion costs. The sustainability plan should also indicate how the partner relationships will be maintained.

Program Scalability:

Applicants should describe how their projects could be increased in scope within their regions (and under what conditions) as well as provide an assessment of how the processes/partnerships/pathways could be duplicated in other areas of the Commonwealth.

9. Evaluation Criteria for Ranking Proposals

Proposals will be reviewed by SCHEV staff for completeness and compliance with grant guidelines and eligibility requirements. Some applicants may receive follow-up questions from SCHEV staff. Late, incomplete, or ineligible proposals will be eliminated from consideration. This decision will be final and applicants will be notified in writing.

Proposals eligible for review will be evaluated and ranked by a team of interagency professionals, with relevant experience and knowledge. The review team will assess proposals according to the following criteria and points:

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Program design (including review of Partner Identification forms)	55
Evaluation Plan	10
Work Plans	25
Budget	10
TOTAL	100

10. Proposal Format and Section Requirements

Listed below are the required components of a proposal in the order they must appear.

Cover Page: The provided cover page form must be completed and included as the first page of the applicant’s submitted proposal. It must include a signature (from an authorized organization representative. Electronic signatures are accepted.

Abstract: The Abstract should be a clear but brief one page description of the program to be implemented. It should identify partnering agencies and roles and provide a synopsis of the primary activities and strategies along with a preliminary description of the planned outcomes. *Only this section may be single spaced*, but may not exceed one page, 1-inch margins, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font.

Program Narrative:

The narrative section of the proposal must be double-spaced with 1-inch margins, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font. The program narrative section (Program Design and Evaluation Plan) may not exceed a total of 6 pages. This excludes the Cover Page, Abstract and Appendices – Partner Identification form(s) and Work Plan and Budget spreadsheets. Applicants must adhere to the page limitations and may not append additional materials beyond those allowed, as noted above. The application must include all of the following underlined headings and subheadings in the order presented below and address each of the bulleted components. Applications will be ranked and scored accordingly:

Program Design

55 points

The Program Design section should define the population to be served, the partnerships you have, the impact you plan to make and how the model will be maintained and may be replicated. Please paginate this section. Specifically, the Program Design section should provide the following (use provided underlined subheadings as noted below):

Need – (Why is the implementation or scaling up of this initiative, as proposed, necessary.)

- Data-driven rationale for program implementation and scaling up to include the identification of current barriers and performance
- Description of targeted student population(s), using local data of areas and/or populations to be served

Services/Activities – (How are you going to deliver the identified services?)

- Description of program support services and academic activities to be offered
- Research-based or empirical work that validates the pathways model, activities and services being proposed for the population(s) to be served

Goals and Outcomes - (What will be accomplished?)

- Identification of the program's expected results/outcomes.
- Description of how the proposed Pathway will bring about:
 - quantified cost savings or cost avoidance for students
 - increased educational student outcomes such as:
 - higher achievement for identified student populations
 - reduced need for remediation
 - significant increase in the persistence and matriculation of the identified student population(s)
 - stronger preparation for postsecondary education and training

Partnership Sustainability – (Who is supporting this effort, how will it be continued and how can it be replicated?)

- Description of partner(s) roles and responsibilities in expanding opportunities and engagement of students and ensuring sustainability of the pathways. Use the provided Partner Identification form(s) to provide more detailed descriptions of partner roles and commitments to demonstrate strength and relevance of partnership(s) to the pathways' success. A form should be completed and signed by each partner organization that will play an essential role in meeting the goals of the grant and utilizing and or contributing resources to the grant program.
- Plan for program and partnership sustainability

- Assessment of program scalability. Explanation of how and under what conditions the program can be replicated across the Commonwealth and/or increase the scope of existing programs.

Evaluation Plan

10 points

Proposals must include an evaluation plan that, at a minimum, assesses program processes and outcomes. Continue pagination throughout this section. The plan should describe how the applicant will monitor and evaluate the program, as well as how evaluation results will be used to support program improvement and decision making. The evaluation plan should include elements ensuring the following:

- That the plan is collaboratively developed with participating partners.
- That it is responsive to program modifications and has a process for updating.
- That it covers the entire performance period.
- That it assesses the entire program based upon the shared purpose, objectives and planned outcomes.
- That it provides opportunities for students and other stakeholders to contribute to the assessment process.

Work Plan

25 points

The Work Plan synthesizes the Anticipated Outcomes/Goals and the program narrative to charted associated tasks, timelines and measurements. A Work Plan spreadsheet should be completed for each of the five Anticipated Outcomes/Goals, as listed below. A tab is provided for each goal (see tabs at the bottom of the spreadsheet). Provide proposed activities and strategies for program implementation or scaling up, how results will be measured, responsible parties and a timeline for completion. Include the completed spreadsheets as Appendix B of the submitted proposal.

Anticipated Outcomes/Goals:

1. Produce student cost savings through the implementation or expansion of affordable pathways
2. Enhance partnerships, specifically between PK-12 and higher education
3. Increase education outcomes for underrepresented populations
4. Program and partnership sustainability
5. Scalability

Budget

10 points

Program budgets cannot exceed \$140,000. The budget should align directly with the activities and scope of work described in the program narrative and Work Plan sections. Complete the Excel spreadsheet to include personnel, consultants and contracts, materials and supplies, travel and all other expenses, with detailed cost calculations for each noted item. Be sure to include expenses for the one-day kick-off event in Richmond under Travel. Include the completed Budget spreadsheet as Appendix C of the submitted application.

Below is a list of allowable and unallowable expenditures for the Affordable Pathways Partnership grant.

Allowable Expenses

- All or part of administrative and support staff positions to support grant activities and produce deliverables. Administrators, administrative staff, education and training and support services positions—including advisors, coaches, and mentors—may be supported through the grant, either on a full or part time basis. Grant funds may be used to provide salaries and benefits of existing personnel provided that time and effort to be funded are dedicated to grant activities.
- National, state and local travel of sub-grantees and/or partners for grant -related activities (include travel expenses for Richmond program kick-off).
- Non-personnel administrative expenses such as laptops and office supplies that are specific to the activities of the grant project and that does not supplant or replace other available funds (less than \$5,000).
- Consultant fees and travel.
- Meeting costs including facility rentals, working meals, facilitation, and evaluation services.
- Research and evaluation projects, including costs of external evaluators, and associated fees such as travel.
- Costs of services and products to support the project, including education and training and support services provided to participants, if such support does not supplant or duplicate federal, state or local funds currently available to provide the same type or level of support to the targeted population of participants.

Unallowable Expenses

- Indirect costs are not allowable under this state funded grant opportunity. State general funds currently support what would be considered allowable indirect costs.
- Alterations to classrooms.
- Furniture and facilities other than a facilities rental fee for meetings, workshops, and other grant related events.
- Overhead or costs to operate the facilities of the authorized fiscal agent.
- Fines and penalties.
- Promotional items that do not also have identifiable educational or informational purposes that clearly relate to the affordable pathways grant. Brochures or websites that provide stakeholders or participants with information about the affordable pathways are allowable; general promotional items in support of the organization acting as administrative or fiscal agent that do not directly tie to the targeted affordable pathway are not allowable.
- Alcohol.
- Fund raising.
- Political lobbying.
- Contributions and donations to charitable organizations including foundations that are outside a standard contractual relationship for the delivery of specified product(s) or service(s).
- Gifts and awards.
- Costs that duplicate or supplant federal, state, or local funds available for the same purpose.

Fiscal agents for the Affordable Pathways Partnership grants must abide by the purchasing and procurement regulations that are applicable to their institution. All costs must represent fair market value for the type and level of service provided or product procured.

11. Proposal Submission Checklist

The following checklists notes the items that need to be submitted, in proper format and order, by 4 p.m. on October 21, 2016. Please see the provided application file that includes the fillable Cover Page and Partner Identification form. Access the provided Excel files to complete the required Appendix documents (Work Plan and Budget).

- Cover Page
 - Electronic signature permitted.
- Program Abstract
 - No more than 1 page.
 - Single-spaced.
 - 1-inch margins.
 - 12-point Times New Roman.
- Narrative Proposal (Program Design and Evaluation Plan)
 - Up to 6 pages.
 - Double-spaced.
 - Numbered pages.
 - 1-inch margins.
 - 12-point Times New Roman.
- Partner Identification form(s)
 - Submit as Appendix A of proposal.
 - Electronic signature permitted.
- Five Work Plan spreadsheets
 - Submit as Appendix B of proposal.
 - Use Excel file to complete the Plan spreadsheets (see tabs at the bottom of the spreadsheet for each anticipated outcome/goal).
- Line Itemized Budget spreadsheet
 - Submit as Appendix C of proposal
 - Use Excel file to complete the Budget spreadsheet

12. Proposal Submission Process

Please send electronic submissions in .pdf format, via email, by 4 p.m. on or before Friday, October 21, 2016, to:

Paula Fisher Robinson
Office of Access Policy and Programming
Email: schevcommunications@schev.edu
Please note "Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant submission" in the Subject line.

Each submitted application should include a signed cover page, abstract, program narrative, signed partner identification forms, five work-plan spreadsheets and a budget spreadsheet. Electronic signatures are accepted.

Incomplete proposals or those that do not follow the format requirements may not be reviewed for funding.

Faxed or late proposals will not be accepted for review.

13. Grant Timeline

The following table provides a timeline of events for the Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant:

Event	Date
Notice of availability of funding opportunity	August 15, 2016
Pre-proposal Webinar	August 25, 2016
Deadline for submission of proposals	October 21, 2016
Grant awards announced by SCHEV	December 1, 2016
Grant performance period start date	January 1, 2017
Affordable Pathways Grant Recipient Kick-off	January/February 2017 (date to be determined)
Mid-term progress report due date	October 2, 2017
Regional Education Partnership Forums/Events	TBD
Grant performance period end date	June 30, 2018
Final report due date	August 15, 2018