**Request for Proposals:**

**Enhancing the State Role in Quality Assurance**

In its current strategic plan, Lumina Foundation has prioritized work to ensure the quality of the credentials that postsecondary students earn, including degrees, certificates, and other validated credentials. The foundation believes, at a minimum, that quality credentials are those that have clear and transparent learning outcomes and that are designed to set up graduates to succeed in employment and to take advantage of further learning opportunities.

State agencies and state systems of postsecondary education have essential roles to play. They deserve a larger role in our national dialogue about how to assure and improve quality across systems and how to increase equitable access to quality pathways and credentials.

To assist interested state agencies and state systems in these efforts, we are excited to launch the Lumina State Quality Assurance Grant Fund. The fund is designed to support state-level entities interested in developing or implementing new approaches to quality assurance and improvement. A recent report by SHEEO and NASH, [*Quality Assurance and Improvement in Higher Education: The Role of the States*](https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SHEEO_QualityAssurance.pdf), has significantly informed the development of this funding opportunity. Applicants are encouraged to review this report to inform their proposals.

# **Selection Criteria**

**We will accept applications on a rolling basis between July 15 and September 25, 2019.** An interested applicant must submit a letter of intent of no more than three, single-spaced pages using 11-point font. The strongest applicants will be invited within two weeks of their initial letter to the second stage to submit a formal application. Interested applicants are encouraged to apply early.

**Criteria.** Lumina Foundation invites state agencies and/or public state systems, working together or individually, to submit proposals that include all of the following five elements.

1. ***Identification as “design” or “implementation” request and budget.*** Lumina will consider two types of funding requests:
   1. **“Design” proposals** should come from applicants in the early stages of developing a concrete vision for defining and assessing quality, along with corresponding policies and practices for quality assurance. These proposals should request a smaller funding amount over a shorter time period, with the expectation that the grant period will end with a concrete implementation plan and buy-in from relevant stakeholders.
   2. **“Implementation” proposals** should come from applicants with existing foundations for effective state quality assurance and who seek resources to enhance implementation or to expand uses of new sources of data or new collection efforts. These proposals may request a larger funding amount over a longer time period, with the expectation that the grant period will end with tangible policy and practice changes *and* that the state or system can serve as a model or case study for others to follow.
2. ***One or more of the following activities.*** Lumina expects this grant opportunity to create concrete models and examples of the following activities in states and state systems in a variety of contexts. Proposals should identify at least one of the following activities as an anchoring element, though applicants are encouraged to select more than one.
   1. **Data-informed program review and program approval.** Applicants may propose creation or expansion of state- or system-level approaches to define, assess, and improve quality, including development of indicators that can apply across programs and providers AND plans to use those indicators in program review and program approval. Indicators might include post-graduation student success measures and alignment of programs with state workforce needs and other priorities.
   2. **Expanded transparency and accountability.** Applicants may propose the creation or expansion of a state-level data dashboard AND use of the dashboard in decision-making processes or in advancing institutional or system-wide goals related to quality. This might also involve defining specific quality areas of interest or need and defining and tracking high-priority learning experiences and/or outcomes data.
   3. **Increased alignment across state policy levers.** Applicants should have existing policy levers or structures focused on student outcomes data, such as outcomes-based funding, implemented definitions of “credentials of value” for non-degree credentials, and/or robust state data systems that can track “[Today’s Students](https://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/todays-student).” Applicants may propose efforts to build on these foundations by creating a common definition of quality or a more nuanced set of quality outcomes and indicators inclusive of all students across sectors, then applying those efforts across relevant levers.
   4. **Updated financial indicators.** Applicants may propose development or enhancement of state or systems approaches to identify, monitor, and support institutions in the state in financially fragile circumstances. This could involve the development of new triggers for bonding requirements and other financial protections that could go toward tuition recovery funds and/or other proactive protections for students in the case of institutional closure.
   5. **Enhanced consumer protections.** Applicants may propose development or enhancement of state or system approaches to student protections. Such protections could include new approaches to public transparency and notifications, oversight of potential waste/fraud/abuse, and/or coordination of teach-out agreements and other efforts needed when institutions close. This could involve new requirements and facilitation of articulation agreements so students can more easily transfer their credits to other institutions and/or new systems that ensure students’ access to their transcripts and other educational records even if their institution has closed.
   6. **Improved institutional authorization processes.** Applicants may propose the development of new approaches to state authorization that include efforts to identify indicators, assessments, and actions that will help the state improve institutional quality and protect students. Potential indicators associated with either initial authorization or with renewal might include those related to financial capacity and viability, consumer protection, licensure and governance, and educational quality.
3. ***Attention to the link between quality and equity***. Proposals should articulate the applicant’s commitment to quality and equity, including articulation of approaches to closing gaps in attainment rates across different racial/ethnic groups and ways of incorporating equity indicators into quality assurance approaches. Applicants also should clearly articulate how these equity commitments will be operationalized within the proposed activity or activities.
4. ***Collaboration and coordination*.** For each selected activity, applicants should describe the stakeholders needed for effective implementation of new approaches. This should include strategies to enhance coordination on quality assurance across state agencies (e.g., the state higher education executive officer’s agency, state and local workforce boards and agencies, the State Approving Authority for GI Bill administration) AND with other quality assurance actors (e.g., regional accreditors, professional accreditors, and federal agencies).
5. ***A clear articulation of state readiness for the work.*** Applications should provide a clear explanation of the state or state system’s goals and motivations for breaking new ground on quality assurance.[[1]](#footnote-1) For each selected activity from the list above, the proposal should include a clear articulation of the current context and the applicant’s vision for change over the grant period and beyond.

# **Grant Details**

**Eligible applicants.** A single state agency (e.g., SHEEO office or workforce agency), a state system of public institutions, a group of state agencies within a state working together, or any combination of these entities may submit proposals. The lead applicant should have a primary mission related to overseeing postsecondary education in the state. Existing Lumina grantees or applicants for other state-focused efforts (e.g., Adult Promise, TIE, Strategy Labs) may apply for this opportunity; we will identify opportunities for impact and alignment on a case-by-case basis through the proposal process.

Only one award per state will be granted under this fund. Lumina encourages collaboration within states when developing initial letters of intent. If multiple proposals are received from a state, Lumina will alert the different parties of each other’s proposals. If one or more of the applicants is invited to the formal proposal process, the foundation will encourage the entities to submit a joint application.

**Grant amounts and matching-fund expectations.** We anticipate two tiers of funding for up to seven grantees: (1) larger implementation grants of $200,000-400,000 over 18-24 months and (2) smaller design grants of $50,000-100,000 over 12 months. Initial proposals should include an overall estimated budget request, but itemized budgets are not required at the first stage.

All grants that Lumina awards will have an expectation of either a financial or in-kind match intended to help grantees leverage additional support for this work and help sustain the effort beyond the period of the grant award. Details on matching support can be provided if the applicant is invited to the second stage.

**Use of funds.** Lumina funds should be spent on activities such as adding expertise on quality to state or state system planning through new hires and/or contractors, building in-state partnerships necessary to launch proposed programs or to expand existing efforts through convenings and/or trainings, and/or creating new datasets or dashboards to inform quality decision making. Lumina funds may not be used to support lobbying or other efforts to support or oppose specific legislation.

**Other benefits.** Applicants and grantees may be invited to join upcoming convenings and other conversations hosted by Lumina Foundation and our partners on the state and state system role in quality assurance.

# **Next Steps**

Lumina will host a webinar on July 25th from 1-2 p.m. EST to discuss this RFP, share insights from partner organizations, and answer prospective applicants’ questions. The webinar will be recorded and available for subsequent viewing. You may register here: <https://luminafoundation.webex.com/luminafoundation/onstage/g.php?MTID=eb92c4243689b7ab4986c00acd7b71c91>.

**Letters of intent can be sent any time after July 1 and no later than 3 p.m. EDT Wednesday, September 25 to** [**QualityFund@luminafoundation.org**](mailto:QualityFund@luminafoundation.org)**. Proposals will be considered on a rolling basis.** Prospective applicants also may email this address with questions in advance of submitting letters of intent.

1. Each state should describe the conditions necessary to advance the proposed work, including any changes that will be necessary to existing policies. However, Lumina’s funds cannot be used to support lobbying or any related activities, including but not limited to supporting or opposing legislation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)