

**FROM STUDENTS TO STEWARDS WATER LITERACY PROJECT:**

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:**

**IMPROVING GREAT LAKES LITERACY AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

I. Overview

The Michigan Departments of Education (MDE), Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), and Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO), and the MiSTEM Network [hereafter referred to as “the State Agencies”] have collaboratively developed *From Students to Stewards* (FS2S), a funding program that in 2020 will issue a minimum of five awards (of up to \$10,000 each) to applicants that propose to integrate place-based education and water literacy principles into their school curricula and school or district improvement plans.

*From Students to Stewards* has three primary goals:

- a) to close the water literacy gap and grow the next generation of water stewards, leaders, and decision-makers needed to solve complex water issues in a changing world;
- b) to investigate freshwater-focused, place-based education (PBE) as an effective way to address whole-child needs and enhance school performance, and to examine the process of connecting this type of teaching and learning to school or district improvement plans<sup>1</sup>; and
- c) to prepare Michigan’s students for high quality, water-focused STEM careers.

This grant program is intended for consortia (see further detail within) that have *already begun* to successfully integrate place-based, freshwater-focused programming into their curricula. The State Agencies will collaborate with successful applicants to a) understand how these early implementers came to adopt freshwater-focused PBE programs; b) learn how this programming has measurably impacted students, teachers, schools, and communities; c) learn how this programming can be effectively and meaningfully

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<sup>1</sup> The State of Michigan is in the midst of a planned shift from school improvement plans (in 2020) to continuous improvement plans (in 2021). This RFP calls for work on either school improvement or district improvement plans in 2020, depending on lead applicant’s underlying processes planned for 2020, but applicants are urged to frame language that aligns to continuous improvement planning under *The Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process*, a revised approach for improvement planning that embraces the needs of the whole child using the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model.

included in school or district improvement plans; and d) develop materials to help other entities emulate these grantees' successes.

As part of the overall project, the State Agencies will work with successful applicants to review and suggest improvements to an emerging set of state-developed resources for place-based education in a freshwater context. Grantees will review and suggest improvements for a toolkit of information, resources, and service providers intended to support schools interested in implementing freshwater-focused PBE. Lessons learned in the FS2S pilot year will also contribute to a broader playbook that will help Michigan schools systematically integrate place-based education and use it to foster environmental literacy, to address school and district needs related to the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child framework, and to improve school performance.

The FS2S 2020 grant program is funded by the Michigan Great Lakes Protection Fund and administered by the MiSTEM Network at Grand Valley State University. Approximately \$50,000 will be awarded in grants; no more than \$10,000 will be provided to any one applicant. The Agencies may seek to balance funding to ensure diversity among the participating sites. (See VIII. Evaluation Criteria)

All applicants will have access to technical assistance from MDE, EGLE, LEO, and the MiSTEM Network. These agencies encourage applicants to contact their staff and/or their regional MiSTEM Network Directors early in the proposal development process for assistance and guidance.

## II. Background

Michigan is the Great Lakes State. Bordered by four Great Lakes, it has hundreds of miles of freshwater coast, more than 11,000 inland lakes, and thousands of miles of rivers and streams. Michiganders have a deep connection to water through our culture, economy, and way of life. Despite this connection, many Michigan residents lack basic knowledge about the Great Lakes, watersheds, and how water resources are directly affected by the decisions and actions of people. Michigan schools can play a key role in closing this knowledge gap by incorporating place-based education focused on freshwater into their curricula.

*From Students to Stewards* seeks to incorporate and intertwine several principles, values, strategies, and commitments:

- *Place-based education* — A hands-on, inquiry-based, contextually embedded, and community-supported approach to teaching and learning that occurs *in and with* a place or community, is *about* a place or community, and *yields benefits for* a place or community;
- *Water literacy* — A state of being that includes care and concern for fresh water, understanding of water processes and threats to water quality, and capacity for appropriate action to protect and improve water quality;
- [\*The Great Lakes Literacy Principles\*](#) — A set of key understandings for every citizen of the Great Lakes region;

- *STEM-equipped students and educators* — A central goal of the MiSTEM Network and an outcome dependent on high-quality STEM experiences, empowered STEM teachers, and school-community collaboration;
- *The Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process* — A revised district improvement planning approach that embraces the needs of the whole child; and
- *The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model* — A model that emphasizes student voice, authentic experiences, and community connections to address each child’s cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development needs. Focusing on the whole child engages students in learning, and in so doing, propels achievement and well-being.

Through FS2S, successful applicants will demonstrate the potential of freshwater-focused PBE to help students achieve a variety of desirable outcomes—including improved capacity for freshwater stewardship, engagement in school and learning, and enhanced performance on measures of career and college readiness—and to address other, internally defined needs of schools and districts and meet related improvement goals. This program will also help to grow critical, foundational knowledge about water in a rapidly changing world at a time when understanding the effects of coastal influences, climate, water affordability and availability, emerging contaminants, and water shortages on a global scale is essential to being an informed, effective citizen-steward of Michigan’s freshwater resources.

FS2S is beginning with a pilot grant program for the 2020–2021 school year. Evidence from the pilot year will be used to support future efforts to integrate this and similar instructional strategies into continuous improvement plans that schools develop through the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process.

### ***The Michigan Water Strategy***

The [Michigan Water Strategy](#), developed through a statewide listening tour, is a roadmap for future use, enjoyment and conservation of Michigan’s water resources. One of the recurring themes from the development process is the need to increase the water literacy of residents of all ages, including K–12 students and local decision-makers. For example, 60 percent of respondents to a recent survey did not know they lived in a watershed. To close this water literacy gap, the Michigan Water Strategy calls for a unified set of water literacy principles as part of Michigan’s K–12 content standards. Implementing this recommendation is critical to fostering future stewardship for water and cultivating the next generation of water stewards, leaders, and decision-makers.

### ***MiSTEM Network Goals***

*From Students to Stewards* will help achieve the MiSTEM Network’s goal of making Michigan a leader in STEM education by empowering educators to engage all students in deeper learning that is relevant to their lives and transferable across contexts. The Michigan Department of Education and the MiSTEM Advisory Council have identified place-based education (PBE) as a promising practice that fosters deep learning and allows for rich, authentic career exploration opportunities that are local to where students live. Many current and future careers in Michigan are related in some way to water, making water literacy a major priority for the MiSTEM Network’s efforts across the state.

### III. Deliverables

Grantees will be responsible for the following deliverables:

- A school or district improvement plan that incorporates freshwater-focused PBE as a strategy for achieving meaningful school or district improvement goals and objectives (e.g., for student learning, engagement, or well-being). Grantees will be encouraged to identify goals and objectives that anticipate the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model and the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process scheduled for deployment in 2021, which will accommodate a broader array of goals and objectives than the current school/district improvement process.
- Enhanced, expanded, or institutionalized water literacy programming that is grounded in place-based pedagogy.
- A report, organized around prompts developed by the State Agencies, related to the grantee's review of the toolkit, the grantee's use of it (if applicable), and observations about the toolkit's effectiveness.
- Data collected over the course of the project according to a suite of measures identified early in the award period and aligned to the goals and objectives grantee has chosen to advance using freshwater-focused PBE. Representatives of the state agencies will work with grantees to help them identify and/or develop measures that fit their goals and objectives and to access tools and data.

### IV. Requirements and Terms of the Grant Program

#### A. Eligible Applicants

This funding opportunity is open to consortium applicants. To qualify as a consortium, the project team must include all the following:

- One or more Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), and/or Public School Academies (PSAs)
- At least one MiSTEM Network Region
- One or more community partners, such as non-profit or for-profit entities with experience and local involvement in freshwater stewardship and/or community stewardship

School districts should name in their application one or more focal schools for the project. The consortium may also include other organizations of different types at the discretion of the applicant.

All applicant consortia should have a strong history of working to implement place-based education and freshwater literacy in the school(s) and district of focus in the application. The MiSTEM Network Region(s)—and LEAs and ISDs if involved—should be those that provide services to the school(s) of focus in the grant.

## ***Definitions***

A **Local Education Agency** is a public school district as defined under MCL 380.6 and as organized under MCL 380.11a (general powers school district) or under part 6 (district of the first class) of the Revised School Code.

An **Intermediate School District** provides various administrative services and cooperative, coordinated education services to many LEA school districts in the name of economy and efficiency.

A **Public School Academy**, also referred to as a Charter School, is a state-supported public school without geographical boundaries. A PSA may include any grade up to grade 12, including kindergarten and early childhood education, or any configuration of those grades as specified in its context.

A **MiSTEM Network Region** is one of the sixteen regions shown [here](#). The Network focuses its efforts on four pillars: create a STEM culture; empower STEM teachers; integrate business and education; and ensure high quality STEM experiences for students.

A **community partner** is an organization from the nonprofit, for-profit, higher education, or governmental sectors wishing to partner with K–12 to achieve one or more goals. Appropriate community partners for this opportunity are organizations engaged in the management, stewardship, or active and persisting study of freshwater resources in the local community; or organizations engaged in ongoing community- or youth-development programming in the area served by the school(s) in the consortium. Educational consultants are not community partners, nor are individual volunteers.

### ***Consortium member roles in From Students to Stewards***

An LEA, ISD, or PSA must be the lead applicant for the proposal and provide fiscal services for consortium applicants. Focal schools or PSAs and districts will do much of the work of this grant, incorporating freshwater PBE into their improvement plans, describing the developmental course of their freshwater PBE efforts, collecting data, reviewing the toolkit, and expanding, enhancing, and/or institutionalizing their programs.

Community partners in your consortium will be interviewed to help the State Agencies build understanding of the development of freshwater PBE in your focal school(s) and district over time, and may (at your discretion) participate in your plans for expanding, enhancing, or institutionalizing your program. You may name more than one community partner as a consortium member.

MiSTEM Network Regions wish to learn from you and your work and to offer support.

#### **B. Ineligible Applicants**

Grants cannot be awarded to individuals.

An applicant for whom any of the following conditions existed in the 12 months prior to the application deadline for this RFP is not eligible for funding:

- EGLE grant contract terminated
- Unresolved EGLE enforcement actions
- History of inability to manage or meet EGLE contractual terms and conditions
- Listed on the federal/debarment list (sam.gov)

C. Grant Amount

Awards will not exceed \$10,000 per applicant.

D. Matching Funds

Matching funds are permitted, but not required, and will not increase your chances of receiving funding under this opportunity.

If you plan to use matching funds to help support your plan of work, describe match under VI.B.7. and in the budget narrative so that reviewers can understand the full context of your proposed project.

E. Project Award Period

Awards will begin in April 2020 and conclude in July 2021. Projects will be evaluated on project readiness and feasibility for completion within the designated time frame.

F. Eligible and Ineligible Uses for Grant Funds

- **Eligible expenses:** Grantees must use funds to a) integrate existing place-based, freshwater-focused programming into school or district improvement plans and b) expand, enhance, or institutionalize such programming. Some examples of allowable expenses are subgrants to community partners, materials and supplies consumed in place-based education efforts (such as dichotomous keys or water quality test kits), special-purpose equipment that is used in freshwater PBE at the school(s) (such as water quality testing equipment or waders), teacher stipends, professional development expenses, costs for substitute teachers, and other routine costs of freshwater-focused PBE.
- **Ineligible expenses:** General-purpose equipment (such as computers, tablets, calculators, staplers, telephones, microscopes) may not be purchased under this grant.

G. Application Deadline

Complete applications must be received no later than **5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2020.**

#### H. Application Submittal

Applications must be submitted online at <https://www.gvsu.edu/studentstostewards>. Follow the prompts on the “How to Apply” tab.

All materials must be submitted in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, or Portable Document Format (PDF), with PDF preferred. The combined size of uploaded files cannot exceed 10 megabytes.

### V. Additional Information for Applicants

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a grant agreement with GVSU with standard terms and conditions that are not subject to modifications. Failure of a successful applicant to accept these obligations will result in cancellation of the grant award.

Grant proposals are considered public information under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act, PA 442 of 1976, as amended.

### VI. Contents of Your Application Package

Applications can be no more than 10 single-sided pages in length with text no smaller than 10-point font size. Maps and illustrations may be included but will be subject to the overall 10-page limit.

Contents of the main application (exclusive of budget table [see section VI. E.] and required attachments [see section VII]) are described below.

#### A. Application Summary Page

The summary page should list:

1. The project title
2. Information about the applicant, including:
  - Applicant agency or organization name and mailing address
  - Authorized representative's name, e-mail address, and telephone number
  - Applicant Federal ID#
  - Applicant DUNS #
  - Name, title, and contact information of contact person, if different from that of applicant's authorized representative
  - Congressional District, State Senate District, and State House District numbers of applicant's location
3. Grant amount requested

4. Match amount provided (optional)
5. Total project cost

B. Detailed Description of the Proposed Project

The following information is required in the detailed description section:

- 1) A description of:
  - a) The demographic composition of the focal school(s) and broader community
  - b) The form of organization (traditional public, public school academy) of the focal school(s), any unique curriculum in use (e.g., Montessori), and grades served
  - c) Local freshwater resources, including the watershed and rivers, streams, and lakes that are accessible to the focal school(s) and potentially of use in place-based, freshwater-focused teaching and learning.
- 2) A description of the applicant's past and current efforts to develop and implement freshwater-focused PBE in the focal school(s), and, if relevant, the district. Your response to this section should include a description of what distinguishes the applicant as a compelling site for study of the process of establishing and sustaining freshwater-focused PBE. Include information about student activities, support provided to teachers, roles played by community partners, and the scope of involvement in this type of teaching and learning within your focal school(s) (e.g., grade levels engaged, academic subject matters incorporated). Provide enough history to establish your track record and trajectory.
- 3) A description of how the applicant will expand, enhance, or institutionalize its existing program using grant funds.
- 4) Draft language to incorporate freshwater-focused, place-based teaching and learning into the district improvement plan or the school improvement plan of the focal school(s) in 2020, if funded. For an example see the toolkit, available at [www.gvsu.edu/studentstostewards](http://www.gvsu.edu/studentstostewards). Your draft language should indicate the needs (identified in your needs assessment) that freshwater-focused, place-based education will help you address and the goals and objectives you would set.
- 5) If your proposed project is part of a larger plan of work, organized effort, or vision for freshwater-focused PBE, describe this broader context for reviewers.
- 6) List the key individuals who have played a role in establishing place-based, freshwater-focused education in your focal school(s) and/or district and a brief (1-2 sentence) description of the nature of their contribution. For example, you might include providers of professional development who helped with pedagogy, lead teachers who modeled for or mentored others, administrators who helped eliminate barriers or find funding, etc.
- 7) A series of commitment statements should be included in your application, with the following verbatim language, replacing [Applicant] with your organization's name:

- a. [Applicant] understands that, if funded, we must review a developing toolkit supplied by the State Agencies, use elements of it (if we desire), engage in discussions with representatives of the State Agencies regarding the toolkit, and prepare a report about our use of the toolkit and reactions to it using a format supplied by the State Agencies and/or GVSU. We commit to this action as part of our work under this grant.
- b. [Applicant] understands that, if funded, we must build freshwater-focused, place-based education into the district improvement plan, or the focal school(s) improvement plan(s), in June 2020; adopt measures of outcomes and impacts associated with this type of teaching and learning; and collect related data, as part of the process of integrating this commitment into a school or district improvement plan. We further understand that the form and nature of our goals, needs, and identified metrics should anticipate, to the degree possible, the continuous-improvement process scheduled for rollout in Michigan in 2021. We commit to this action as part of our work under this grant.
- c. [Applicant] understands that, if funded, we must meet periodically with representatives of the State Agencies to share information about progress, barriers encountered, emerging questions, and other situational issues that will affect the outcomes of the grant. We commit to such meetings as part of our work under this grant.
- d. [Applicant] understands that, if funded, we will meet with representatives of the State Agencies to provide a detailed, thoughtful history of our work to develop and support a practice of freshwater-focused PBE. For the State Agencies, this is a central goal of the grant—to learn from schools and districts that have already made substantial commitments to this form of teaching and learning, so that other schools and districts may benefit from what they have learned along the way. We commit to such meetings as part of our work under this grant and will facilitate access to people who played important roles in establishing place-based freshwater education in our school(s) and/or district.
- e. [Applicant] understands that, if funded, we will submit a series of narrative and/or financial progress reports to GVSU, based on a template or prompts supplied by GVSU. We will provide supporting documentation of our project’s direct expenses upon request. (Progress reports will be due quarterly with a final report due within 30 days of grant closing.)

C. Variable Tasks and Associated Schedule

In addition to the commitments listed above (B.7.a-e), grantees are also asked to expand or enhance their existing programs or to take steps to institutionalize them. These tasks, which will vary grantee to grantee, are referred to as “variable tasks” in this RFP.

Please use the table below to outline your variable tasks (related to program enhancement, expansion, or institutionalization). Describe/name each variable task and show the progress and completion of variable tasks by quarter, using “X” or similar

symbols to indicate quarters in which the task is active. Items in your table should align with your narrative description of program expansion/enhancement/institutionalization under section B.2. Where relevant, describe the outcome or product associated with each task. Add more lines if needed.

Variable Tasks	Apr - Jun 2020	Jul - Sept 2020	Oct - Dec 2020	Jan - Mar 2021	Apr - July 2021	Outcome/ Product
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

D. Organizational Capability

Describe the qualifications of the individual(s) anticipated to work on the project and the experience of the applicant in managing comparable grant projects. Identify a team member who will be playing a substantive role in the work who will serve as the key point of contact for the State Agencies.

Describe the history of the consortium’s collaborative work.

Explain how the project will be managed and coordinated across organizations and provide details about the division of responsibilities across the participating entities.

E. Detailed Project Budget

Please download and use the budget form on the project Web site at [www.gvsu.edu/studentstostewards](http://www.gvsu.edu/studentstostewards) located under the “How to Apply” tab.

The completed budget form should be included within your application in Excel, PDF, or MS Word. It will not count toward the 10-page application limit.

Within your 10-page document, provide a budget narrative that describes each line item.

VII. **Attachments**

- A. Applicants must attach proof that lead applicant is not debarred from federal contracts. Such proof can be obtained at <https://www.sam.gov/SAM>, which contains the electronic roster of debarred companies excluded from receiving Federal contracts or certain subcontracts and from certain types of Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits.

To search for your organization, click the "SEARCH RECORDS" tab and follow the detailed instructions available at <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/preaward/debarlst.htm>.

Save a copy of your results and submit along with your application.

- B. Attach a letter of support from each named member of your consortium other than lead applicant. Letters of support should indicate the organization's willingness to participate and the role the organization will play in the grant.
- C. A cover letter on the applicant's letterhead, signed by an authorized representative of the applicant, must accompany the application.

## VIII. Evaluation Criteria

Complete applications will be evaluated for funding based on the following considerations:

- Extent to which the project engages with local, regional, and state partners to promote outcomes that benefit students, schools, and the community as a whole.
- Strength of the applicant's practice or history of using place-based, experiential teaching and learning approaches to develop water literacy, including cross-curricular integration of PBE
- Thoughtfulness of plans to enhance/expand place-based, freshwater-focused teaching and learning
- Commitment to institutionalizing place-based, freshwater-focused teaching and learning as demonstrated by the draft language for inclusion in the school or district improvement plan(s)
- Overall quality and clarity of the application
- Organizational capability of the applicant to complete the project as proposed
- The feasibility of completing the proposed work within the specified grant period

Additionally, the State Agencies may seek to balance funding to ensure diverse sites in the pilot year, with attention to settlement pattern (urban, suburban, rural); region of Michigan (east/southeast, west/southwest, mid-Michigan, northern Lower Peninsula, Upper Peninsula); grades targeted (elementary, middle, high school); socioeconomic status and other demographic factors; and school format (traditional public, public charter).

## IX. Program Contact

If you have any questions regarding the program or the application process, please check for a FAQs document on our Web site (to be released soon after the release of this RFP) or submit a question using the form on the "Contacts" tab at [www.qvsu.edu/studentstostewards](http://www.qvsu.edu/studentstostewards).

If you need to contact someone directly, write to *Students to Stewards* Project Manager at [studentstostewards@gmail.com](mailto:studentstostewards@gmail.com) or call 248-716-3781.