Congressional and Administration Updates

Policy Update: ED Releases Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund III (HEERF III)

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced that it was releasing funding under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund III (HEERF III), as authorized by the American Rescue Plan (ARP). The $39.6 billion available under HEERF III is available to institutions of higher education to support students and aid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the $39.6 billion, $36 billion will go to public and private non-profit institutions, $3 billion will go to support Minority-Serving Institutions, $198 million will go to institutions with the greatest unmet need from the coronavirus, and $396 million will go to support students at for-profit institutions.

At least half of an institution’s HEERF III allocation must be used to make emergency financial aid grants to students while the remainder may be used for institutional purposes. New for HEERF III funding, a portion of institutional funds must be used to:

- “implement evidence-based practices to monitor and suppress coronavirus in accordance with public health guidelines; and
- conduct direct outreach to financial aid applicants about the opportunity to receive a financial aid adjustment due to the recent unemployment of a family member or independent student, or other circumstances, described in section 479A of the HEA.”
Perhaps the most significant change is all students enrolled at an eligible institution of higher education on or after March 13, 2020 are eligible for emergency financial aid. This includes students who have not filled out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and those that are not Title IV eligible, including refugees, asylum seekers, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program recipients. International students and domestic students studying abroad are also eligible for emergency financial aid, though ED is emphasizing the need for institutions to prioritize students with exceptional need.

Institutions that already received HEERF II awards from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) are not required to submit a new or revised application to receive HEERF III funding. Institutions are encouraged to spend the funds from HEERF III, along with any remaining funds from CRRSAA and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act within one year of ED obligating its HEERF III funds. ED has stated that no-cost extensions may be granted but likely not beyond 12 months. Drawing down any amount of HEERF III funds constitutes an institution’s acceptance of the applicable terms and conditions under ARP, which will be included in the Supplemental Agreements that will be attached to the Grant Award Notification. Institutions receiving HEERF III awards must adhere to quarterly reporting requirements established by the CARES Act. Details on an annual HEERF III report, which ED will collect data for in early 2022, will be released at a later date.

Highlighted below are certain provisions related to the student aid and institutional portions. Many of these provisions are similar to provisions included in CRRSAA for HEERF II.

- The ARP requires that institutions prioritize students with exceptional need, such as students who receive Pell Grants, in awarding financial aid grants to students.
- Institutions should carefully document how they prioritize students with exceptional need in distributing financial aid grants to students.
- Funds received for students enrolled exclusively in distance learning may be used only for financial aid grants to students.
- Financial aid grants for students may be used for any component of the student’s cost of attendance or for emergency costs that arise due to coronavirus, such as tuition, food, housing, health care (including mental health care) or childcare.
- Institutions must minimize the time between drawing down funds and paying incurred obligations.
- Institutions may use their funds to retain students by providing academic and mental health students or re-engage students who have left by discharging debts accrued during the pandemic.
- Examples of evidence-based practices to monitor and stop the spread of COVID-19 include testing and its associated costs, campaigns to get students vaccinated, and setting up vaccination sites on or off campus.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The ED HEERF III FAQ document, which includes additional details on allowable uses of funds, is available at [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/arpfaqsample.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/arpfaqsample.pdf).
- ED’s final rule on student eligibility is available at [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/finalheerfnfr.pdf](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/finalheerfnfr.pdf).
Funding Opportunities and Agency Updates

**Funding Opportunity: DOD Releases FY 2021 DEPSCoR Research Collaboration Program**

The Department of Defense (DOD) released its fiscal year (FY) 2021 Research Collaboration Program (DEPSCoR) through the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR). DEPSCoR intends to grow the breadth of the DOD’s research capacity across the country and foster existing or enable new research capabilities within states that are less active in the DOD enterprise. There are 34 DEPSCoR-eligible states within the U.S., which are listed in the full solicitation. DEPSCoR is run by the Basic Research Office (BRO) within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSD(R&E)), awarded by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR), and administered through the Office of Naval Research (ONR).

The DEPSCoR research collaboration program encourages collaborations on basic research projects of interest to DOD and is structured to form a two-person team between an investigator with prior funding from the DOD (within the past seven years) and a researcher who has not previously received funding. DOD plans to host a “DEPSCoR Day” on **June 23, 2021** to provide additional information on DEPSCoR to interested researchers.

The FY 2021 DEPSCoR competition is seeking proposals aligned closely with 14 priorities from the military Service research organizations, listed below:

**Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR)**
- Physics of Sensing
- Space Propulsion and Power
- Complex Networks
- Atomic and Molecular Physics

**Army Research Office (ARO)**
- Modeling of Complex Systems
- Biomathematics
- Solid Mechanics
- Environmental Chemistry
- Electronic Sensing

**Office of Naval Research (ONR)**
- Nanoscale Computing Devices and Systems
- Marine Mammals and Biology
- Additive Manufacturing
- Social Networks and Computational Social Science
- Hypersonic Aerothermodynamics

More information on the topics, sample research of interest, and respective program officers can be found in the full solicitation.

**Due Dates:** Applicants must register with the new [nVision](#) portal to submit white papers. Applicants are strongly encouraged to register with nVision by September 16, 2021. White papers are required and due on **September 20, 2021 no later than 11:59pm ET**. Notification of white paper selection is expected on December
Funding Opportunity: DOD Releases FY 2021 DEPSCoR Capacity Building FOA

The Department of Defense (DOD) released a new capacity building funding opportunity announcement (FOA) for its fiscal year (FY) 2021 Defense Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (DEPSCoR). DEPSCoR intends to grow the breadth of the DOD’s research capacity across the country and foster existing or enable new research capabilities within states that are less active in the DOD enterprise. There are 34 DEPSCoR-eligible states within the U.S., which are listed in the full solicitation. DEPSCoR is run by the Basic Research Office (BRO) within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSD(R&E)), awarded by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR), and administered through the Office of Naval Research (ONR).

The goal of DEPSCoR’s Capacity Building opportunity is to improve defense-related basic research capabilities in science and engineering at institutions of higher education (IHE) in eligible DEPSCoR states/territories. Funding from this program could support new hires, equipment purchases, graduate students or postdoctoral fellows, and other relevant efforts to build capacity in a specific DOD-related research area and improve industrial or economic competitiveness, if applicable. Proposals must be aligned with the institution’s strategic objectives. Support from regional partners through letters of recommendation are required. DOD plans to host a “DEPSCoR Day” on June 23, 2021 to provide additional information on DEPSCoR to interested researchers.

Due Dates: Applicants must register with the new nVision portal to submit white papers. Applicants are strongly encouraged to register with nVision by September 16, 2021. White papers are required and due on September 20, 2021 no later than 11:59pm ET. Notification of white paper selection is expected on December 3, 2021, with full proposals by invitation only due on February 22, 2022 no later than 11:59pm ET through www.grants.gov.

Total Funding and Award Size: DOD anticipates $1 million in total funding for one award to an institution of higher education over a two-year period.
Eligibility and Limitations: Only institutions of higher education are eligible to apply. The proposal must be led by a member of the institution’s executive staff (i.e., Vice-President for Research) who will serve as the applicant (team lead). Institutions are limited to one application.

Sources and Additional Information:
- The full FOA is available here, or at www.grants.gov under solicitation number “FOA-AFRL-AFOSR-2021-0008.”
- Lewis-Burke’s one pager on DEPSCoR can be found here.
- The DEPSCoR website can be found at https://basicresearch.defense.gov/Pilots/DEPSCoR-Defense-Established-Program-to-Stimulate-Competitive-Research/.
- The Basic Research Office website can be found at https://basicresearch.defense.gov/.

EPA Releases Several Notices of Intent
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has posted several notices of intent for solicitations that will be “coming soon.” Aside from program titles, there is no publicly available information about these opportunities. To assist faculty who may be interested to prepare for these forthcoming opportunities, below we include some background information.

- National Priorities Program – Two notices of intent, including the Approaches for Detection and Public Health Surveillance of Coronaviruses and Other Pathogens in Wastewater and the Water Innovation, Science, and Engagement to Advance Water Reuse, are designated as a part of the Congressionally mandated National Priorities Program. This Program funds extramural research on water quality and availability. Grants support research activities that are national in scope and are less narrowly focused. In the past, the requests for applications (RFA) has been released once a year, though the timing has varied. Awards typically range between $1.5 million and $2 million over a performance period of three years and require a 25 percent cost share from the grantee institution. A total of $7.5 million is available for this program in FY 2021, but it is unclear what portion of these funds would be utilized to support the notices that have already been posted and if there may be additional opportunities this fiscal year.

- American Recovery Act Funding and Environmental Justice – Some of the notices listed below may be part of EPA’s response to funds included in the American Recovery Act of 2021, which contains $50 million allocated to EPA “for grants, contracts, and other agency activities that identify and address disproportionate environmental or public health harms and risks in minority populations or low-income populations.” The Innovative Water Technologies: Lagoon Wastewater Systems in Small Communities and the Climate Crisis, Environmental Justice, and Vulnerable Lifestages opportunities may fit under this category.
  - In the past, EPA’s environmental justice programs have been welcoming of university participation but required NGO’s/community/state organizations to be prime on the grant. We expect that faculty interested in the Climate Crisis, Environmental Justice, and Vulnerable Lifestages opportunity may be well-served to start thinking about community partnerships before the opportunity is posted.
Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Program – Based on the notices, we anticipate some will be research grants managed by the Office of Research and Development under the STAR Program. STAR is EPA’s primary funding mechanism for extramural research and development, with an annual budget of $28.6 million per year for FY 2021. The program provides individual grants ranging between $750,000 and $1.5 million over a performance period of three years. Depending on the work scope and research objectives of the RFA, some STAR awards may be geared toward early career researchers. STAR RFAs are released throughout the year.

We will continue to track these notices and to provide information as it becomes available.

DOD AI Engagement Opportunities

Lewis-Burke would like to make you aware of two upcoming opportunities to engage with the Department of Defense (DOD) in its artificial intelligence (AI) activities. Both are excellent opportunities for principal investigators and AI experts at your institution to publicize their work with policymaking and acquisition audiences inside the Department.

1. 2021 DOD AI Symposium and Tech Exchange (virtual, June 22-24): Brings together thought leaders from across the National Security enterprise to discuss themes critical for transforming the U.S. military through the acceleration and integration of AI. Topics will include competitive challenges, technological opportunities, Research & Development, Responsible AI, and AI Readiness and Implementation. The symposium is sponsored by DOD's Joint AI Center (JAIC).

2. Air Force Office of Science & Research (AFOSR) Trusted AI Challenge: AFOSR is seeking white papers from researchers and experts in four funded topic areas: Verification of Autonomous Systems, Human-AI Performance Optimization, Dynamic Bi-Directional Trust in Human-AI Collaborative Systems, and Trustworthy AI Certification. Deadlines for submission is June 4. Multiple grants in each area will be awarded from $50,000-$100,000.