



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Literacy Courseware Challenge



BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*

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INTRODUCTION

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to invest up to \$6 million in web-based courseware that support students in mastering literacy skills for writing, writing to read, and writing to learn.

This document is an invitation for publishers, developers and entrepreneurs to submit proposals for awards in the amount of \$25,000-500,000. We invite you to propose your most innovative ideas for engaging, personalized digital courseware that helps students master the 4th through 8th-grade Common Core State Standards for literacy.

THE IMPACT WE INTEND TO SUPPORT

Our vision for education is that all students have access to what they need, when and where they need it. For some this will mean accelerating beyond the fixed pace of today's classroom. For others it will mean being given opportunities for extended practice of skills or content they have yet to master. For all students, it will mean learning experiences that are tailored specifically to their progress against a clear set of academic standards; receiving constant, actionable information on their progress; and experiencing the deep, one-on-one engagement with their teacher and other students that is often missing from today's classrooms.

Implementing this vision, which we and many others call *personalized learning*, at scale will require new tools to help teachers, parents and learners diagnose gaps in students' knowledge and skill and adapt the learning experienced based on their progress. We believe that adaptive digital learning tools or *courseware*, can transform the learning experience, particularly for students who are underserved by the current education system. Leading mathematics courseware products have already produced strong evidence that this is possible. Comprehensive courseware products such as [Reasoning Mind](#), [ST Math](#), and [Dreambox](#) are facilitating significant learning gains for students in even the highest-need schools, while apps like [Refractions](#), [Dragonbox](#), and [Motion Math](#) are demonstrating that even rigorous academic content can be highly engaging.

However, tools to support students in developing reading and writing skills are lagging far behind, particularly in later elementary and middle school. We – and a large body of practitioners at some of the country's most innovative schools – see an acute need for literacy courseware in grades 4 through 8. By fourth grade, many students in high-need schools are already a year or more behind grade level and have significant gaps in the knowledge and skills taught in kindergarten through third grade. And by middle school, even students working at or above grade level need greater support to use writing as a tool for learning, communicating, and facilitating their understanding of the complex texts prescribed by the Common Core State Standards.

Despite the acute need, there is sizable gap in innovative, high-quality products designed to help later elementary and middle school students build writing skills and in using writing to develop reading skills and content knowledge in English Language Arts, science and social studies. We believe this represents a significant opportunity for inspired, ambitious product developers. In a large market for supplemental materials supporting ELA, digital courseware currently accounts for only seven percent of annual sales (Education Market Research, 2012), leaving a huge gap between school needs and the market's current offerings. In order to highlight the need and opportunity, we are committing \$6 million over two years to fund innovative literacy courseware, a large school pilot program for these tools, and an external evaluation of the products. Through this process, we hope to:

- Orient education product development and entrepreneurship around urgent, high-impact problems affecting low-income and minority students

- Catalyze development of writing courseware to support mastery of the CCSS literacy standards and core academic content by innovative providers
- Infuse charitable funds to make it possible for product developers to make courseware available to the highest needs students at an affordable price
- Focus attention on sound instructional practices demonstrated by rigorous, high-fidelity research to improve students' mastery of literacy skills in grades 4-8
- Articulate the weaknesses in the current digital product offering and the gaps between what the market offers and what schools want to buy
- Provide non-dilutive capital to early-stage companies, allowing them to pursue complex challenges in education
- Minimize risk to all parties by supporting development, pilot testing, and knowledge sharing

We invite you to explore the challenge through the background information and request for proposals below, and to submit your most innovative courseware solutions for transforming reading and writing in grades four through eight. Below are guidelines for proposal development, as well as insight to the research, customer needs, and goals behind this effort.

This RFP also includes detailed instructions for submitting a proposal and a sample of the terms and conditions of the grant agreement, which outline the benefits and requirements of winning an award.

Importance of Literacy Skills and Urgency of Action

Despite growing acknowledgement of their importance and decades of reform, U.S. students' literacy skills have barely improved over the past 40 years (Reardon, Valentino, & Shores, 2012) and are failing to keep up with growth in competitor nations' (Thompson, et al., 2012). Currently, a third of US 8th graders are proficient in reading and writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011, 2012) despite the importance of literacy skill development to long-term success. Third- and eighth-grade reading ability is predictive of high school graduation and college attendance (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynne, 2010), while writing helps students express and argue for their ideas, deepen content knowledge in social studies and science, and demonstrate reading proficiency at all grade levels (Graham & Perrin, 2007). Competencies that are in high demand in the modern economy, such as active learning, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving (Carnevale, Smith, & Melton, 2011), are fostered by reading and writing, while communications skills themselves are predicted to be critical to success in all fields in the 21st century economy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009).

The Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by most states, are intended to prepare students for success in college and the workforce by mastering core academic skills prior to high school graduation. The CCSS will require students to closely read complex texts from both fiction and non-fiction sources, and to write increasingly complex texts of their own, including persuasive pieces that require them to evaluate and cite evidence. All students will

need to handle basic literacy processes subconsciously so they can devote full attention to cognitive processes such as analyzing arguments and evaluating sources; to use writing to support learning in all subjects, including science and social studies; and to employ a wide range of cognitive, self-regulatory, and social skills throughout the writing process. Supporting all students in mastering these skills will require new ways of teaching and learning, and new tools for both students and teachers that provide all students with personalized, Common Core-aligned learning experiences (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Instructional Practices for Building Literacy Skills

While the shifts to close reading and persuasive writing using textual evidence are explicitly described in the Common Core standards, the instructional strategies and processes needed to facilitate them are not. This work falls to education researchers, who have produced a large literature base describing the instructional practices and activities that build students' literacy skills. Writing, in particular, is identified in the literature both as a complex, highly valuable skill in its own right and as a tool for facilitating reading fluency and comprehension by requiring students to synthesize, analyze, and summarize key concepts in their own words (Graham & Hebert, 2011). Many of the practices that enhance students' writing abilities also enhance their reading abilities and have been validated through meta-analysis of writing intervention studies to have a significant positive effect on reading skills (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012). Writing helps students at all grade levels (a) better express thoughts, arguments, and ideas, (b) deepen content knowledge, and (c) demonstrate proficiency (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

The practice of writing involves giving and receiving feedback, reflection, and revision of understanding, which involves significant amounts of time and effort on the part of teachers and students, especially when manuscripts are paper-based. The iterative, multi-step, and reflective practice of writing is well suited to digital supports and tools, which generate digital artifacts that can be exchanged and also analyzed to reveal a student's thinking and skill development (National Research Council, 2001). In addition to increasing the efficiency of the writing process, the ability to access and analyze student-generated digital artifacts allows teachers and students to (a) use innovative assessments to provide real-time feedback on student progress (Seifried, Lenhard, Baier, & Spinath, 2012; Wade-Stein & Kintsch, 2004); (b) leverage the power of collaboration and peer engagement (Chuy, Scardamalia, & Bereiter, 2012); and (c) adapt students' learning experiences based on their work. As such, our goal is to support web-based solutions that instantiate the instructional practices shown by rigorous research to be effective in building students' literacy skills.

These practices include, but are not limited to:

- Employing writing strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing different types of text, including note-taking and answering/generating questions (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000)
- Using writing as a tool to support reading and learning, supported by formative assessment

- Building knowledge in science, social studies, mathematics, and other content areas through summarization, analysis, and argument in response to academic content
- Applying self-regulation techniques, such as goal-setting, planning, and self-assessment, to manage one’s writing (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000)
- Developing instructional arrangements where children work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012)
- Increasing the amount of writing required of students and the amount of instructional time devoted to writing (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012). This provides students with many opportunities to practice the skills listed above, to receive feedback from others, to review and revise their work.
- Modeling scaffolded practice and independently using writing supports.
- Mastering the baseline procedural skills of learning to read and write: spelling, grammar, sentence construction (particularly sentence combining), and typing within the context of reading and writing (National Reading Panel, 2000). Support for these skills should be embedded within the context of writing activities so that students can engage in higher-order thinking without interruption (Andrews, et al., 2004; Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012).

Current Market for Digital Literacy Solutions

Our vision is for literacy instruction, led by teachers, to be personalized in order to enable each student to progress at the appropriate pace. Technology can provide a mechanism to extend the reach of effective teachers, in order to give them the capacity to design and deliver personalized instruction to their students. Currently, 70 percent of US teachers report that their students use education technology to learn or practice basic skills during class at least sometimes; however, only 25 percent of teachers report that their students use education technology sometimes or often for deep engagement in academics (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2009). And, much of the innovation in recent years has been in the application of technology to mathematics skill development, particularly for elementary students. We believe that students, particularly those who are behind grade level, can benefit from personalized, adaptive technology that produces literacy learning gains at a rate closer to that which a 1:1 teaching experience would produce. Our research indicates that such solutions are not yet available on the market.

In 2010, the entire K-12 supplemental materials market grew more than 10% from 2009 to nearly \$3 billion in sales, including 20% growth in digital. The 4th-8th-grade supplemental ELA materials market is approximately \$800 million, 40% of which is digital. While at first glance this appears to be a healthy, growing market, the detailed sales figures show a market with little native potential for growth of innovative, personalized products targeted at improving student learning. Nearly half of spending on digital supplemental resources in 2010 was on interactive whiteboards. Assessments accounted for only 13% of spending, while courseware

(instructional software) accounted for only 7% of the market, and digital content for less than 5% (Education Market Research, 2012).

Much of the innovation in recent years has been in the application of technology to mathematics skill development, particularly for elementary students. Products such as [Reasoning Mind](#), [Refraction](#), and [ST Math](#) can facilitate large learning gains for struggling students; however, few literacy products can provide even moderate evidence that they positively impact student learning (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012). Through user research conducted in September and October, practitioners at 12 blended schools across the country validated the broader market data cited here, consistently expressing gaps between their needs and the current market for digital literacy tools on a range of measures, from the impact on student learning to the ease of implementation to the quality of the user experience.

In response, we conducted a market scan to identify the current number of digital literacy solutions for grades 4-8, which yielded more than 300 products to support K-12 literacy instruction and practice. It included 30 iTunes and Android apps, 25 videogames, 126 websites, 187 curriculum software packages, and 5 assessment packages. The scan further revealed that despite the large number of among the existing products on the market, there is a concentration of feature/functionality around early reading skills, and dearth of products with the features and functionality academics and educators are asking for, including:

- Personalization
- Adaptivity
- Common Core aligned
- Reinforcement of practice
- Persuasive writing/argumentation
- Abundant quantities of informational text
- Validated embedded assessment data on student performance

See the Resources page on our website for more information.

Educator Needs & Scenarios for Technology Use

Like all great consumer products, the best digital courseware will reflect a deep understanding of student and teacher needs and practices. In the section below, we describe the user research we undertook to shape this challenge. We encourage respondents to submit proposals that incorporate these insights, as well as their own experiences with teaching, product development, and user research, to produce the most effective, delightful products possible.

In September and October 2012 we interviewed teachers and curriculum specialists in 12 schools whose students represent those we seek to serve through this initiative. More than 80% of these schools' students receive free or reduced lunch; more than 20% are English Language Learners (ELL); more than 20% are special education students; and more than 80%

are working below grade level. Classrooms in these schools often contain students working at three or more different grade levels, with wide variation in the gaps in their academic knowledge and skill.

We asked the teachers and curriculum specialists to describe how they currently use digital courseware to personalize learning, to give examples of when and how technology works well, and to provide guidance for how digital courseware could be more effective, particularly in helping their students master the Common Core literacy standards for 4th-8th grade. The practitioners who participated in our user research, as well as many more we have interviewed informally over the past year, described a vision for technology-supported learning that consists of rich, dynamic learning experiences both online and off, and technology that enables teachers to engage deeply with their students one-on-one or in small groups. With their input, we identified four specific ways that digital courseware can support literacy teaching and learning, and developed two use cases that represent the conditions in which winning products will be implemented.

Applicants should describe how their products will respond to these or similar scenarios for digital courseware implementation. Additional resources on blending learning implementation are available in the Resources section of the Literacy Courseware Challenge website.

How Digital Courseware Can Help

Practitioners identified four specific ways that digital courseware can support writing-related teaching and learning:

1. Embedding scaffolding and instructional support to help students to work independently
 - Enabling teachers to work directly one-on-one or with smaller groups for differentiated instruction
 - Providing digital content aligned to teacher-delivered content to reinforce or help students to apply new concepts
 - Enabling a student or a student and parent to work together at home
2. Increasing personalization for students to allow each to learn at his or her own pace
 - Modifying the learning experience in real time based on student progress
 - Allowing students who need additional practice to continue working without holding others up
 - Allowing students to move ahead without having to wait for others to complete
 - Providing greater flexibility for all students to engage in the right learning experience, at the right time, based on individual needs
3. Providing a high level of engagement
 - Leveraging the capabilities of interactive technology to create an educational experience that isn't possible in a physical, paper-based world
 - Keeping students engaged throughout challenging or daunting tasks
4. Embedding formative assessment
 - Generating student performance data that can help students, teachers, and parents identify areas for further teaching or practice

- Showing students their performance in order to generate a sense of ownership and agency
- Freeing teachers to spend more time working directly with students rather than grading

Use Cases for Digital Courseware

Scenario 1: Team Teaching with Technology

Ms. Johnson is an experienced fifth-grade English Language Arts teacher who wants to spend more time working directly with her students to help catch them up to grade level. This year, she is also mentoring a first-year teacher, Ms. Dow. Ms. Johnson decides to introduce a [rotation blended learning model](#) that allows her and Ms. Dow to combine their classes into a single 90-minute block. Their 54 students rotate in 3 groups among computer stations, small-group instruction led by Ms. Dow, and group projects overseen by Ms. Johnson. This format allows Ms. Dow to focus on teaching practice while she builds her classroom management skills and enables Ms. Johnson to work one-on-one with 10-15 students per class period, something she could never do before.

During the computer rotation, students work independently using adaptive courseware that personalizes the learning pace and content in real time based on their progress. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Dow use real-time reporting from the computer programs to group their students as they rotate and to adapt their own small group and one-on-one teaching. Within a few months of implementing this model, many of their students are able to tackle grade-level work and rushing into the classroom each day to see their progress report from the day before.

Scenario 2: Learning labs

Last year at Mr. Gutierrez's middle school, all classes moved at a fixed pace, which worked well for most of his students, but required him to work after school or during lunch with high-achieving students and those who needed to catch up. Mr. G also struggled to provide detailed feedback on his students' essays, which became increasingly difficult to manage as he increased the volume and complexity of his students' writing assignments to prepare them for the Common Core. Just managing distributing and collecting printed copies of 125 student essays per week was overwhelming – and providing edited essays to all students was nearly impossible.

This year, Mr. G, his principal, and his fellow teachers developed a new class schedule that includes two daily computer lab blocks called Learning Labs, where up to 60 students at a time can work at their own pace. The school's technology teacher, Ms. Koerner, works with Mr. G and other teachers to select digital learning activities aligned to the core instructional objectives each week. Sometimes Mr. G's students use the Lab to write essays, while at other times they use adaptive courseware to practice typing, summarizing, or sentence construction in response to the texts they're reading in class. Mr. G reviews automated reports on his students' writing progress each day, and meets several times per week with Ms. Koerner to review their students' progress and adapt their Lab or classroom activities in response. Mr. G's students love that they receive extra support from Ms. Koerner and that they can easily see

how their writing has improved over the year. Mr. G loves that the courseware provides his students with instant feedback their essays and allows them to engage in peer editing before submitting to their work. As a result, Mr. G. doesn't have to do all of his grading by hand and can focus his time and attention where his students need it most.

Critical Features & Functionality

Educators believe that technology needs to help them more easily:

- Review student performance
 - Teachers want to be able to review their students' progress and performance, in order to obtain another view of performance and assess how to re-group students for differentiated instruction. Their goal is for performance data to be valid, simple to obtain, easy to integrate with other information, and helpful in continuing to personalize instruction.
 - Curriculum departments typically utilize multiple curriculum applications to address the needs of multiple grades and subject areas. They require performance data to be exportable into other programs to facilitate aggregated student performance progress.
 - Educators we spoke to note that they cross-check the validity of performance data from digital tools with their own assessments of student performance.
- Customize the learning scope, sequence, and content
 - Teachers or their curriculum departments want to sequence the units that are covered by their digital tools, in order for them to align with the instruction they are delivering in class. This activity typically takes place at the beginning of the year, and the scope and sequence is updated throughout the year.
 - The default scope and sequence that comes "out of the box" with the digital tool should make sense, however, in order to make the best use of the limited time that teacher have available.
 - Additionally, in order to address teachers' time limitations, the interface that teachers use to customize the sequence or differentiate practice for students must be simple and user friendly in order for it to ever be used.
- Engage and motivate students
 - Teachers want courseware to help students engage deeply with their work, maintaining student interest and participation through rigorous academic work and providing a learning environment that responds to individual student needs, behaviors, and interests.
 - Engagement is composed of three distinct, but interrelated dimensions which a learning experience should be designed to activate (Fredricks, et al., 2011; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004):
 - *Affective Engagement*, which includes interest and pride in success. It activates positive and negative reactions to physical, social, symbolic stimuli. Positive emotional engagement is presumed to create student ties to the learning experience and influence students' willingness to work.

- *Behavioral Engagement*, which includes persistence, effort, attention, taking challenging classes. It includes participation and involvement in activities.
 - *Cognitive Engagement*, which includes solving problems and using metacognitive strategies. It can determine a student's level of investment in learning. This dimension of engagement includes the extent to which a student (a) approaches tasks in a thoughtful and purposeful manner and (b) demonstrates a willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas or master difficult skills.
- Implement multiple best-of-breed applications
 - A key success factor for digital solutions is the ability to deploy in a variety of learning environments due to the diversity of implementation approaches that schools utilize. All proposals must meet the technical interoperability standards described in Appendix 1 to ensure that solutions can be deployed in multiple environments.
 - Schools purchase instructional technology solutions from multiple providers in order to address the needs of multiple grades and subject levels. Some schools aggregate many instructional materials from multiple providers, while others use a few comprehensive software packages. There is currently no consensus on devices for delivering digital literacy tools; e-Readers, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers are all in use in schools. We observed that schools where technology comprises a significant percentage of literacy instruction (>10-15%) use desktop computers or laptops to access web-based applications.

GRANT AWARDS & SELECTION CRITERIA

We are seeking to invest in digital literacy tools that show strong potential for providing personalized, adaptive, Common Core-aligned learning experiences for students in grades 4 through 8 by instantiating instructional practices shown to positively impact students' literacy skills.

Because this initiative is based on an acute need for classroom-ready digital literacy tools, we will only award grants to applicants with the potential to scale. For the purposes of this RFP, we define scalable solutions as those that:

- Have low technical requirements – i.e. use standard classroom hardware and are interoperable with other software solutions
- Are backed by plans for building the organizational capacity for growth
- Are supported by forward-thinking teams with strong visions for personalized learning
- Have strong financial models built on realistic assumptions about the digital courseware market, including pricing, market size, and operating and development costs

We expect that funding scalable solutions will minimize the risk of structural failures and allow us to concentrate risk in the innovations themselves. It will also allow us to build a strong cohort of for- and non-profit entrepreneurs focused on a common problem set, evaluated by common metrics, and supported by the range of monetary and non-monetary resources described in the Award Information section below. As such, all applicants should be prepared to attend 2-3 multi-day convenings during the grant period; pitch their products to potential customers and investors; report regularly on user activity and feedback; and participate in an independent evaluation of their products' impact on student learning. Challenge winners will be required to make the software-based solutions available, free of charge for pilot within our test bed schools. Test bed schools will learn about new products via demo days and choose which products to pilot. We will work with schools to implement a standard evaluation program and provide other evaluation feedback. All evaluation feedback will be available to the product developers for use in refining their solutions. A final report on the program will be made publicly available.

Like you, our goal is for students and teachers to have lots of great choices. We believe that a healthy market will have a variety of players that can sustain themselves independently. As a private foundation, we have to ensure that our grantees provide broad availability and affordable access to the products they build using our grant funding. We call this Global Access. Our grantees have achieved Global Access in many different ways. If you win an award, we will work with you to identify options that may work for your organization. The only time we would exercise a license to the work you build using this grant funding is if you do not fulfill the terms of the grant agreement, including developing and executing on a Global Access Strategy. See the Sample Terms and Conditions on the Resources page of our website for complete details.

Grant Award Information

Applicants may apply for one or more of several grant awards. The two categories of awards are **Solution Awards** and **Aggregator, System & Platform Awards**. “Solution” is our term for an application, game or website that comes from a single provider and addresses some or all reading and writing skills and content areas. “Aggregators, Systems & Platforms” are products that monitor a student’s progress across most or all reading and writing skills and content areas, and recommend discrete solutions from multiple sources to help build a student’s skills.

Within each category, we have made multiple awards available, based on the scope of the product and stage of development. Five types of awards are available:

Solutions

- Supplemental Solutions
 - Minimum Viable Product: Up to \$25,000
 - Early Stage: Up to \$100,000
- Early Stage Comprehensive Solutions: Up to \$500,000

Aggregators, Systems & Platforms

- Early Stage: Up to \$250,000
- Mature: Up to \$500,000

The tables below distinguish the awards from one another.

Minimal Viable Product (MVP) Solution Awards

Name	Minimum Viable Product (MVP) Solution
Definition	Single web-based solution, currently in the concept stage, that addresses a subset of literacy skills and/or academic content for grades 4-8
Size of Award	Up to \$25,000
Stage of Development	Concept
# of Awards	Up to 10
Grant Period	6 months
Target Outcomes	Not yet known due to the early stage of the product; aiming for 1.5x the typical learning growth in a given period of time
Purpose of grant	Fund development of business plan and product roadmap for developing a minimum viable product
Existing Usage	None
Evaluation	None

Due to the emergent nature of solutions in the concept stage and the small size of the MVP Solution grant award, we have established less stringent evaluation criteria requirements. See Proposal Evaluation Criteria for details.

Solution Awards

Name	Supplemental Solution	Comprehensive Solution
Definition	Single web-based solution that addresses a subset of skills or content for grades 4-8 Supplemental in nature; used as an add-on to traditional instruction for all students or a sub-segment	A comprehensive web-based solution that address most/all skills within a grade or grade band, covering multiple standards
Size of Award	Up to \$100,000	Up to \$500,000
Stage of Development	Ready for pilot or early stage	
# of Awards	Up to 15	Up to 4
Grant Period	18 months	18 months
Target Outcomes	1.5x the typical learning growth in a given period of time	
Purpose of grant	Support product enhancement and piloting to refine usability, outcomes, and adoption strategy	Support product enhancement and piloting to refine usability, outcomes, and adoption strategy
Existing Usage	> 500 students	>10,000 students or demonstrated ability to grow to >10,000 students within one year
Evaluation	Pilot implementations to be evaluated in student outcome studies facilitated by the Foundation	

Aggregators, Systems & Platforms Awards

Name	Early Stage Aggregator, System or Platform	Mature Aggregator, System or Platform
Definition	Web-based solutions that track a student's progress across most/all reading and writing skills and recommend discrete solutions from multiple providers to help build skills based on student performance	
Size of Award	Up to \$250,000	Up to \$500,000
Stage of Development	Ready for pilot or early stage	Publicly available now
# of Awards	Up to 5 total	
Grant Period	12 months	18 months
Target Outcomes	1.5x the typical learning growth in a given period of time	
Purpose of grant	Support product enhancement and piloting to refine usability, outcomes, and adoption strategy	Addition or enhancement of literacy tools and capabilities, refinement of usability
Existing Usage	<10,000 students	>10,000 students
Evaluation	Pilot implementations to be evaluated to be in studies facilitated by the Foundation	

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Effective proposals will meet the following criteria:

Student Impact

- Address at least one of the following Common Core State Standards for writing. Applicants are encouraged to propose solutions that also address the additional standards listed below by incorporating writing to read strategies and writing based on close reading of texts.
 - Writing – *Required*
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1-10
 - Reading & Language – *Encouraged*
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1-4, 8
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.Language Progressive Skills
- Explain how the solution will improve student achievement at a greater rate than traditional instruction.
- Describe what will give students, teachers, and parents confidence in the assessment of student learning made by the application or system. Competitive products will generate valid embedded formative assessment data on student learning to adapt the learning experience and provide actionable feedback that can be utilized to personalize instruction.
- Provide a plan for effectively validating assessment measures (only applicable to Aggregator, System & Platform Awards¹)

Feasibility of Use

- Present a user experience that is engaging and delightful to both students and teachers
- Respond to the use cases and user research described in the request for proposals
- Include an implementation model that is reflective of real school conditions, requiring minimal training or professional development
- Is affordable under current public school funding models and is broadly accessible to students in high-need schools through the application’s content, approach, pricing, and distribution models
- Meet the standards for technical interoperability defined in Appendix 1 (not applicable to MVP Solution Awards)

Capacity to Deliver

- Include a work plan that can realistically be executed on time and within budget

¹ 3 or more proposals at the \$300,000 level or higher will be selected for their innovation in embedding validated measures. We expect projects seeking to embed validated measures to apply part of their funds, if necessary, toward validating measures they intend to embed into their product.

- Propose a project team that has the skills and experience necessary for the proposed work and can work effectively in public schools
- Provide evidence that the team has the ability to scale the product if it succeeds in pilot testing (not applicable to MVP Solution Awards), including attracting outside resources such as financial and human capital, if needed

Proposal Scoring Rubric

Scoring Category	Points
Student Impact	50
Feasibility of Use	25
Capacity to Deliver	25
TOTAL	100

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Overview

Application & Selection Timeline

- March 29: Completed proposals due by 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time (PT)
- April: Proposals reviewed by external review panel and foundation review team
- April 25-26: Finalist interviews/demonstrations (as applicable)
- April 30: Finalists notified
- May: Work with finalists to complete due diligence and organizational review, and finalize grant agreements
- June: Grants awarded and announced when grant agreements are signed

Applicant Eligibility

- Both taxable and tax-exempt organizations are eligible to apply. Non-U.S. organizations may apply, but the primary focus of the grant-supported work must be in the United States. Individuals and single-person LLCs are not eligible.
- Organizations may submit more than one proposal.
- No member of the selection panel may submit a proposal.
- Applicants must agree to the below Charitability Requirements.

Application

- Application Narrative (10 pages max), including link to a 3-minute video
- Documentation of your organization’s tax status and financials
- Simple budget template
- Appendix A describing your planned outcomes and milestones (not required for MVP Solution applications)

Charitability Requirements	<p>Applicants MUST agree to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility of solution – our goal is to make solutions as widely accessible as possible at an affordable price without preventing reasonable revenue opportunity. With this in mind, organizations must agree to the Global Access clause in our standard Terms and Conditions on the Resources page of our website. • Evaluation data – we believe that a vibrant, healthy marketplace is grounded in the availability of solutions with high quality and transparent outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Availability – student and teacher activity data, anonymized student performance data and anonymized student profile data must be captured and available for use by the school and the applicant in order to enable ongoing research and evaluation ○ Reporting – the applicant agrees to participate in a Foundation-sponsored evaluation process during or after the grant period, with pilot schools of your own choosing or from a list of schools coordinated by the Foundation
Requirements	<p>By submitting a proposal, applicants signify that they have read and understand this document, and acknowledge that any information submitted on your behalf (including your proposal, reports, and any related documentation and communications) will be subject to and handled in accordance with such provisions.</p>

Application Narrative

The Application Narrative questions below intend to help us understand your most current and deepest thinking about the proposed solution design, content and assessment.

1. **Organization (1 page or less).** Please tell us about the people and organization(s) that will develop the solution. Provide background about how long the organization has been in operation, its mission and any products that are already available. Please list the team members, specify the activities each person will be involved in, describe how your team members know one another, and include any recognition for leadership in your field. Please also tell us why this team has the capability to develop and implement this solution.

2. **Logic model (1 page or less).** Please explain the strategic design of your solution using a logic or business model. Useful resources for building these models can be found on the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation website](#) and the [Business Model Generation website](#). In brief, please explain using a diagram:

- Who will use your solution, and what resources will they use?

- How, where, and how often will students and teachers use your solution? What activities will they complete?
- What outputs will be generated by the solution as a result of these activities?
- What specific measurable short-term (1 year) outcomes will students achieve based on utilizing your solution?
- What longer-term (3+ year) impact will your solution create?

3. **Solution description (6 pages or less).** Please describe the solution that you aim to develop.

- Who is the **target student**?
 - Our focus is low-income and minority students, among which there is often a higher percentage of ELL and special education learners.
- Which **literacy standard(s)** will your solution help students master, and how will the solution be structured accordingly?
 - Please cite the research basis for your approach.
- How will **instructional materials, activities, assessments and technology** will be aligned to the proposed learning objectives. Please include the following:
 - What **instructional materials** will be used? Please describe why you have chosen such materials.
 - What **activities** will learners engage in?
 - What **assessments** will be employed in the solution? What feedback will teachers and students receive based on these assessments, how, and how often?
 - What **technologies** will the solution utilize, and how will such technologies support the instructional approach?
 - What **teacher customization and controls** will your solution include? How much will be required, and how will the solution work if teachers do not customize it?
- How would you describe the **student experience** of your solution? Please include the following:
 - How will the solution be designed to enable **learner interaction and engagement**?
 - What **student scaffolds and supports** will be in place, and how will they work?
- How will you **price** your solution?

4. **Work plan (1 page or less).** Please outline the major activities associated with the development of the proposed solution, when they will be completed, and by what resources.

5. **Project budget narrative (1 page or less).** Please provide a narrative overview of the proposed budget that you detail in the Excel budget template, in order to provide a clear picture of the financial resources you are requesting to support the project. Important information to include:

- Strategy for how funds from the Foundation will be used to support the project
- Your assumptions about timeline and resources required

- Whether the staff are new or existing personnel
- Source and status of any additional funding you will use to support the project

6. **Short, three minute video.** In order to give us a different angle on the proposed solution, please submit a short video clip that demonstrates an example module or mockups of the module. The video does not need to be the final product, only illustrative of the style and approach you intend to use. Please upload the video to YouTube and include a link with your written narrative.

Additionally, applicants may provide up to five additional pages of appendices that specifically relate to solution design and content, such as screenshots, sample assessments, etc.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

Using the Application Portal

Start by clicking the application link below. The first time you visit the portal you will need to create an account. After you enter your information, a temporary password will be emailed to you. Return to the portal to personalize your password and complete your account profile.

Application Link:

https://unison.gatesfoundation.org/Applicant/_layouts/Portal/Applicants/ApplicationForm.aspx?RequestId=59e04ef1-9d56-e211-95d6-0019b9f2848b

You can save the application and return to it later by logging in any time with your email address and password.

Tips:

- On the Get Started page, check the box that says “Allow the foundation to view my application as I work on it.” This option makes it possible for foundation staff to provide assistance if necessary when you are ready to submit your final application.
- You can only hit “submit” once using the application tool, so we suggest iterating on documents offline and submitting your final versions. You will receive a confirmation email once you have successfully submitted your full application materials. If you do not receive the email (check your spam folder), please return to the portal and try again.

Filling out the Online Application

The directions on the application portal should be straightforward, but please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. You will need to fill out information in three tabs:

1) **Describe Project** tab. Please fill this out to the best of your ability, using the following guidelines:

- Project Title – a short title, including the name of the solution.
- Project Description – a short description about the solution and any unique features.
- Project Duration – 6 or 18 months, depending on the grant you are applying for.
- Project Amount – enter the amount you are applying for. Please consult the Award Information table above for guidance on the maximum amount for each award.
- Referred By – please note where you heard about the Literacy Solution Challenge.

2) **Add Contacts** tab. Please make sure you add a contact for the person who will sign the grant agreement if you are awarded a grant to facilitate the award process.

3) **Upload Files** tab. Please upload the following documents:

i. Application Narrative – follow the instructions above to complete a 10 page narrative description of your organization, logic model, proposed solution, work plan and budget. Be sure to include a link to a 3 minute video clip.

ii. Documentation of your organization’s tax status and finances:

- a copy of your IRS tax determination letter or certification of formation, as different grant terms and conditions may apply
- audited financial statements for the past two years, or a proxy if you have not had an audit
- your organization’s current-year budget
- list of your board of directors, if applicable

iii. Budget Template – this document will help us understand your projected use of funds. Download this simple Excel template and follow the directions on the instructions tab.

iv. Appendix A – this document will help us understand your planned outcomes and milestones during the duration of the grant. Download this simple Excel template and follow the instructions on the orientation tab. Note: you do not need to fill this out if you are applying for a grant of \$25,000 or less.

We encourage you to reach out if you have any questions related to the documents or our proposal process. Don’t hesitate to contact us at literacy.challenge@gatesfoundation.org. Please be aware that your question and the response may be included in a question & answer log that will be made available to all applicants.

SELECTION & AWARD PROCESS

Initial Application Review

After all applications are submitted, Foundation staff will screen submissions to address whether the proposal addresses the key needs described in the topic and adheres to the application requirements. Applications excluded during the screening process will be notified that their proposals were declined. **Due to the large number of proposals anticipated, applicants for proposals that do not make it beyond the initial application review will receive a notification of decline without specific feedback.**

Application Review, Scoring, and Finalist Notification

Next, a panel made up of Foundation and external reviewers will review submissions and issue a preliminary scoring based on the scoring rubric, a draft of which is shown below. At this point, a select number of organizations will be notified that they have been designated as finalists and invited to participate in conference call interviews (with a product demonstration as applicable).

Final Application Review and Winner Selection

After all interviews are completed and any necessary clarifications are received, the Foundation will complete a final review of each finalist's proposal and issue a revised score, taking into interview findings and written addendums. Organizations selected for investment will be notified on April 30. **Due to the large number of proposals anticipated, applicants for proposals that are not selected for award will receive a notification of decline with the scored rubric results of their proposal.**

We will ask organizations selected for investment to answer a final set of questions that enable us to perform a more detailed due diligence review. For-profit grantees or other entities subject to expenditure responsibility will have to answer a specific set of questions to enable the Foundation to comply with its IRS obligations as a private foundation. For more on expenditure responsibility, please review the ER Guidelines on the Resources page of our website. Upon successful completion of this review, finalists will be asked to sign grant agreements with the Foundation.

Execution of Grant Terms and Conditions

All grant awards will be contingent on execution of a definitive grant agreement. The Sample Grant Terms and Conditions can be found on the Resources page of our website.

These Terms and Conditions have been developed specifically for this RFP and are not negotiable. You are advised to ensure that your institution can accept these Terms and Conditions at the time of proposal submission. Grantees subject to expenditure responsibility may be subject to additional terms and conditions

If your proposal is selected, you will have a very limited amount of time after the notification of award to accept the grant and return the award letter with an appropriate institutional

signature. You must return a fully executed Grant Agreement to the foundation post-marked no later than the date indicated by the Grants Management team to receive a grant award.

Intent and Disclaimer

This RFP is made with the intent to identify organizations to build solutions as described in this RFP. The Foundation will rely on an organization's representations and consider them to be truthful as described. The Foundation assumes it can be confident in an applicant's ability to deliver the activities described in this RFP. The responses will be incorporated into a future grant agreement should the Foundation wish to support the proposal submitted by the applicant.

This RFP is not an offer to enter into a funding agreement. The Foundation assumes no responsibility for your cost to respond to this RFP. Until a written funding agreement is fully executed, the Foundation will have no obligations to any applicant.

The Foundation has put in place policies and procedures to restrict public dissemination of grant application materials including, when possible, having external reviewers sign confidentiality agreements and requiring that reviewers destroy or return to the foundation all copies of information acquired or created during the course of performing a review. In some instances, we are unable to put in place confidentiality agreements or to police the use of grant application materials.

As a general policy, the Foundation does not publicly disseminate or "publish" proposals or supporting information related to grant applications. For IRS compliance reasons, we are required to publish a list of grants that we have made. We also provide a general description of the grant on our web sites including www.gatesfoundation.org. These brief descriptions are also made available in press releases and other marketing materials.

To identify and avert conflicts of interest among reviewers, reviewers will not be permitted to submit proposals, or to review proposals from organizations in which they have self-identified conflicts of interest.

Appendix 1: Technical Interoperability Standards

The Literacy Courseware Challenge wants to support the creation of technologies that work together across browsers and delivery platforms, so they can be deployed in a variety of learning environments. We hope to enable schools to mix and match the best content for their students, and reduce the workload associated with integration. This is facilitated by using interoperability standards. Therefore, to expand the number of products that are interoperable, we will ask winners of awards of \$100,000 or more to incorporate interoperability standards in their product design.

As a baseline, applicants are encouraged to use content formats that have been adopted by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and are supported by a majority of web browsers. These include the following: HTML5, JPEG, PNG, GIF, SVG and XML. Due to patent encumbrances, the W3C has not specified standard formats for audio and video content. Grantees are encouraged to choose formats that are supported by current versions of at least two of the prominent web browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari and Google Chrome. These Wikipedia articles may help in selecting formats:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML5_Audio

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML5_video

Beyond that, we have prioritized three types of interoperability:

- 1) Presentation – rules governing an application’s display in a browser
- 2) Instructional content discoverability– rules to commonly describe what type of instructional material is contained in a resource, so that it can be discovered by other applications
- 3) Student data – rules for the data definition, format, values, and transport services that enable student data to be communicated from one application to another

1. Presentation

All products should strive to be completely web-based, requiring no installation by users including client side Flash or Java.

Aggregators responding to the Literacy Courseware Challenge should document integration policies that developers can implement if they wish to integrate with that platform. Describe your requirements for presenting other providers’ content. Solution developers, in turn, should be prepared to implement a different set of integration policies for each system or aggregator that includes their solution. Describe how your solution is expected to appear in other providers’ portals/websites/containers, etc.

2. Instructional content discoverability

We require content to be aligned to standards and discoverable by major search engines. Developers should take three steps to implement the content standards:

- 1) Align content assets to the Common Core using the identifiers listed in the [Common Core State Standards XML Representation](#). Finer grained identifiers are expected in February 2013. See here for details: <http://www.setda.org/web/guest/Interoperability>
- 2) Tag content using the schema of the [Learning Resource Metadata Initiative](#). The official schema is presently at <http://www.lrmi.net/the-specification>. Acceptance by Schema.org is imminent, although exact dates are not known.
- 3) Register content in the [Learning Registry Index](#) via API. A developer resource guide is located at <https://github.com/LearningRegistry/LearningRegistry/wiki>.

Your proposal should detail how you plan to make your content discoverable. For more information, see the [SLC website](#).

3. Student data

We require CEDS (<http://ceds.ed.gov>), which provides a data dictionary and logical data model. For data exchange, challenge winners should utilize SLC APIs and identity federation for interoperability. The [SLC Developer Site](#) offers resources for getting started. Optionally, you may consider supporting application-to-application communication. If you do, use REST and be prepared to publish your specification to facilitate integration.

Whenever custom code is used, grantees should choose a commonly-available programming language. Examples include the popular scripting/rapid-prototyping languages (Perl, PHP, Python, Ruby), Java, C/C++/Objective-C, and JavaScript/ECMAScript. Source code should be released under an open source license, should include adequate documentation and ancillary materials (e.g., makefiles) to support its fast and easy migration to other development environments, and, for compiled languages, should be ready-to-compile, without modification, in at least one freely-available, open-licensed compiler (e.g., the GNU compilers).

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