**Professional Learning Community Grants**

**Guidelines and Application – 2023**

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), previously called Faculty Learning Communities, are groups of WPI community members from multiple disciplines engaging in collegial inquiry, action, and collective learning around a central theme *in the area of pedagogical development or educational development and innovation.* Each participant in a PLC plans, implements, and assesses their own project, with regular peer review, feedback, and support from the group. PLCs may also work together to develop and test teaching and learning resources for the campus community.This grant mechanism is *not* intended to fund routine updating or renewal of courses, curricula, or teaching methods.

These grants are administered by the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center using funds from the Morgan endowment and the Academic Technology Center. Proposals are reviewed by members of the Educational Development Council and representatives of the Academic Technology Center.

1. **Eligibility**

Because faculty deliver our academic programs, faculty members must be included in a PLC, and some PLCs may consist only of faculty. All tenured and tenure-track faculty and full-time TRT faculty are eligible to apply. Part-time adjunct faculty are also eligible; in this case, the proposal or department head endorsement should make a clear argument for how the outcomes of their work will be sustainable. Faculty who will be in residence at an off-campus project center during the PLC period will be expected to participate remotely. Potential applicants in this situation should consider whether the time zone difference and advising duties will enable them to engage fully in the PLC during that term.

Staff members with educational roles are also eligible to apply.

The group may decide to include a student(s) as co-designers or co-researchers in the PLC. The name(s) of specific students need *not* be identified in the proposal.

Current members of the Educational Development Council are not eligible for these grants.

**B. Potential Themes and PLC Formation Mechanisms**

PLC themes emerge from collective interests. A **wine and cheese social** will be held on Wednesday afternoon, November 30 from 4-6pm in Higgins House to facilitate networking and identification of themes with broad interest. Following the in-person social, we will launch an online mechanism for faculty and staff who could not attend and for everyone to continue sharing ideas and interests. Two PLC formation mechanisms may be used:

1)  ***Self-formed:*** Applications are encouraged from self-identified groups of 4-10 people working around a common theme. Strong preference will be given to teams that include members across a broad range of disciplines.

2)  ***EDC-formed:*** Based on interests that emerge during and after the November 30 social, the EDC-ATC selection committee may announce its interest in a particular theme and invite individuals to apply. In this case, the review committee would review proposals from individual applicants and select a diverse group of PLC members. Any EDC-initiated PLC themes will be announced before the winter holiday break so that people have enough time to prepare their application.

Following are examples of recent learning community themes:

* ***STEM for Justice.***Each person in this self-formed group of 10 faculty from nine departments revised or created course activities or assignments to infuse social justice content into STEM curricula or to bring a STEM focus to non-STEM social justice-based courses.
* ***Reflections, Connections, and ePortfolios.***Each person in this EDC-formed groupredesigned a course or co-curricular experience using ePortfolio pedagogy, in an effort to increase reflective practice among students, to help students make intentional choices about their education, and to connect and transfer their learning across contexts.
* ***Ungrading: Improving Pedagogy and Increasing Equity Through Alternative Forms of Student Evaluation.*** This cross-departmental, self-formed group learned about nontraditional forms of student evaluation (contract-based, labor-based, individual development plans, etc.) that can positively impact student learning, motivation, equity, and engagement. Each member modified the grading mechanism and other aspects of one or more of their courses.

**C. Commitment, Expectations, and Funding of PLC Members**

PLCs require a 9-month or 12-month commitment during the range of May 15, 2023 to May 15, 2024, depending on whether summer planning for projects is needed. (The time period should be stated in proposals from self-formed groups. The EDC will communicate the time period for any EDC-formed groups.) Each PLC member will be expected to:

* prepare for, attend, and actively participate in monthly meetings over the PLC period
* conduct a project this is aligned with the PLC theme and assess the outcomes
* submit a summary of the outcomes of their PLC project by June 1, 2024 or contribute to a group report of outcomes
* share their work with a larger audience, by giving a presentation on their work, by providing resource materials on the topic of the PLC for the larger teaching community, by publishing the findings of their work, or through some other means

Each application for a self-formed PLC should propose its own budget. Because faculty have 9-month appointments, faculty stipends are typical and generally range between $1,000 - $3,000 depending on project scope. Following are some guidelines for faculty stipends:

* Estimate the time commitment for the projects in your PLC and propose a stipend accordingly
* Stipends on the order of $3,000 should generally signal that each awardee will undertake significant course redesign, resource development and testing, or assessment/ research projects. Lower stipends would be appropriate for smaller scale projects such as development of innovative modules or assignments.
* Other stipends recently offered for significant faculty professional development activities may serve as a point of reference:  summer course redesign ($3,000), KEEN ICE workshop and module development ($1,500), Great Problems Seminar Summer Institute ($1,500), Faculty Institute for Online Teaching ($1,500), Summer Institute on Teaching with Writing ($1,000).
* The EDC typically funds 1-2 PLCs each year at levels ranging between $15K - $20K each. Proposals with a balance of quality (see section E), potential impact, and cost effectiveness are more likely to be funded.

Stipends will be awarded when the work of the PLC is complete or may be split 50/50 at the midway and end points. Faculty stipends will be awarded as salary, in a lump-sum payment such that benefits will not be charged.

In addition to stipends, funds may be proposed to facilitate the work of the PLC. Examples include external speakers or consultants, books, food for meetings, and wages for student assistants or student members of PLCs. Justification must be included in the application. Note that MA minimum wage increases to $15/hour on January 1, 2023.

In the event that the EDC invites individual applications to join an EDC-formed PLC, the time period and stipend will be specified in the announcement.

Per HR/labor guidelines, exempt professional staff with 12 month appointments may not receive additional compensation. Staff who wish to be part of PLC should discuss with their supervisor how the project aligns with their work responsibilities or unit goals and the extent to which other work activities would need to be adjusted during the grant period. In other words, participation in the PLC should not be an unpaid overload. The budget may include funds for staff members to utilize toward specific professional development such as a conference, workshop, publications, or other resource or activity that will enable or enrich their project.

**D. Commitment, Expectations, and Funding of PLC Facilitators**

PLCs are facilitated by a faculty or staff member with experience or interest in the PLC theme. The Morgan Center can assist with identification of facilitators if need be. The facilitator should be clearly identified in the proposal.

The facilitator’s general responsibilities are to foster a collegial environment among the PLC participants and support them in achieving their individual and collective goals. Faculty who will be in residence at off-campus project centers should not be the group facilitator. Specific responsibilities include:

* Scheduling monthly meetings
* Setting the agenda for each meeting with input from the group
* Arranging meeting space and catering with the assistance of staff in the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center, when available
* Selecting some common reading for the group at the start of the PLC (encouraged)
* Facilitating discussion and dialogue that helps each person refine their ideas using constructive feedback during the planning and implementation stages. Submitting an informal mid-year update to the facilitator is recommended— including refined project objectives and deliverables and how their project is fitting into the community as a whole.
* Conducting some informal formative evaluation throughout the year about how the PLC is going and making adjustments
* Arranging for resource sharing through a Canvas site or other mechanism
* Budget oversight, with assistance from the Morgan Center as necessary
* Encouraging internal and external dissemination of the group’s work

Facilitators will receive a stipend of $1,000 for their facilitation role. If the facilitator also conducts their own project within the group, they will receive $1,000 on top of the stipend budgeted for PLC members.

**E.** **How to Prepare a Strong Proposal**

Proposals for self-formed PLCs must contain the following:

### **Cover Page and Budget with Justification** (see forms appended to this document)

* 1. **PLC Description:** This overview (one page maximum) of the PLC theme is usually prepared by the facilitator in collaboration with other members.

*Advice:* Strong descriptions will communicate: a) a need for the PLC theme that’s strategic, innovative, or distinctive in other ways; b) a collective goal for the PLC; c) the benefits of the PLC group composition (e.g., diversity, complementary expertise); d) the thematic coherence of individual projects; and e) anticipated collective impact of the PLC.

* 1. **Individual Narratives.** Each participant should contribute 1-2 pages (single spaced) that includes the following information:

1. Working title of individual project
2. Project synopsis (maximum of 80 words, for publicity)
3. Description of individual project that includes:

* Why are you interested in this particular PLC theme?
* What is your initial idea of a project to plan and implement within the PLC? How will you assess, evaluate, and/or disseminate the outcomes of the project? What will be the concrete deliverable or product, as best as you can plan at this time?

*Advice:* We understand that projects are likely to change and sharpen with feedback and collaboration in the PLC — that’s the great thing about PLCs! At the same time, vague or open-ended project descriptions will not be reviewed well. Thus, be as specific as possible at this stage—you can always change later.

* Why are you interested in participating in a Professional Learning Community? What would you bring to the group? How will working in the PLC improve or enhance your project?

***Proposals to join an EDC-formed PLC only include the individual narrative (item 3 above).***

Some prior successful PLC proposals can be found at this OneDrive location: [Teaching Innovation Grant Proposal Examples.](https://wpi0-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/cdemetry_wpi_edu/EocFTeArS_pEvRtFIJ1yEy0BGGj1f1hNlRx_HryChJI4FQ?e=3giJ40)

The proposal deadline for both self-formed and EDC-formed PLCs is February 1, 2023. Applications for self-formed PLCs should be a single compiled document that includes information provided by the facilitator as well as all individual information. Applications to join an EDC-formed PLC only need the individual information. Please submit proposals as an email attachment to [morgan-center@wpi.edu.](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu. )

***Department head endorsement:*** All PLC applicants are asked to discuss their proposal with their department head, program director, or supervisor so that those folks are aware of their teaching innovation goals and interests and potential time commitment. Please have a conversation with your department head about your application and its workload implications (e.g., do other things need to be taken off your plate?) This is especially important if you are applying for multiple grants; the review committee wants to know that you’ll have sufficient time for the project(s). Department heads or other supervisors are then asked to submit a very brief statement of support to [morgan-center@wpi.edu](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu) by February 8, 2023.

***Review criteria:*** The review committee will use the following criteria when evaluating PLC proposals: 1) group composition, thematic coherence among members, and commitment to collaboration; 2) potential scope of impact; 3) presence of strategic, innovative or distinctive elements; and 4) cost effectiveness.

Applicants will be notified in D term whether or not their proposal has been accepted.

**F.** **Reporting Requirements and Grant Conditions**

* Grantees are responsible for consulting with WPI’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine if the project involves human subjects and constitutes exempt or non-exempt activity.
* The facilitator is responsible for budget oversight and must approve any disbursement of funds. All funds unexpended by the end of the PLC period will be returned to the EDC or IT Division for redistribution the following year. Extensions should be requested in writing.
* Each PLC member is expected to submit a brief summary of the outcomes of their PLC project by June 1, 2024 or contribute to a group report of outcomes.  Failure to do this will lessen the likelihood of future funding from the EDC.

**G. Contacts**

Prospective applicants for Professional Learning Community grants are invited to contact any faculty member of the EDC (Marcel Blais, Esther Boucher, Jeanine Dudle, Chrys Demetry) or ATC staff (Kate Beverage, Mary Beth Harrity) with questions prior to submission, related to the theme and scope of PLCs or budget questions. With sufficient advance notice, Chrys Demetry ([cdemetry@wpi.edu](mailto:cdemetry@wpi.edu)) and Kate Beverage ([kwrigley@wpi.edu](mailto:kwrigley@wpi.edu)) may be able to provide feedback on proposal drafts. To inquire about the availability of our in-house evaluator or to discuss objectives and assessment methods, please contact the Morgan Center’s Senior Research and Evaluation Associate, Kimberly LeChasseur, by completing [this form.](http://wpi.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d5qjPrmLMUFMLmB)

**Please see application forms on next two pages**

**Teaching Innovation Grants 2023**

**Application[[1]](#footnote-2) for a Self-Formed Professional Learning Community**

**PLC Name/ Theme:**

**Brief Description of the PLC (maximum of 80 words, for publicity purposes).** Please include goal and potential impact.

**Name of Facilitator:**

**Participants:**(Include names, titles, department/program or unit affiliation)

**Start Date:**

**If any of the participants will be advising off campus during the PLC period, please indicate which member(s) and which term(s), and arrangements for participation while away:**

**Proposed Faculty Stipend Amount: $**

**Justification for Stipend Amount:**

**Additional Budget Items (if applicable):**

(Provide clear justification for how each budget item will facilitate the work of the PLC, using additional page as necessary.)

**TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST, including $1,000 facilitator stipend: $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**CERTIFICATION**

If selected for the PLC, I will commit to actively engage in the work of the PLC, attend monthly meetings, submit a brief summary report by June 1, 2024, and share my work with a larger audience.

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| **Signatures of Applicants:** (typed signature is acceptable) | **Date** |
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**DEPARTMENT HEAD / PROGRAM DIRECTOR ENDORSEMENT** is required from each applicant. Please ask them to send it as an email message to [morgan-center@wpi.edu](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu) by February 8, 2023.

**Teaching Innovation Grants 2023**

**Application[[2]](#footnote-3) to Join an EDC-Formed Professional Learning Community**

**PLC Name/ Theme:**

**Applicant Name and Title:**

**Department, Program, or Unit Affiliation:**

**Will you be advising off campus during the PLC period? If so, indicate which term and time zone difference:**

**CERTIFICATION**

If selected for the PLC, I will commit to actively engage in the work of the PLC, attend monthly meetings, submit a brief summary report by June 1, 2024, and share my work with a larger audience.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Signature of Applicant:** (typed signature is acceptable) | **Date** |
|  |  |

**DEPARTMENT HEAD / PROGRAM DIRECTOR ENDORSEMENT** is required. Please ask them to send it as an email message to [morgan-center@wpi.edu](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu) by February 8, 2023.

1. In addition to this cover page, a complete application includes the PLC description and individual narratives. See guidance in Section E on p. 4. Individual participants should send their document to the PLC facilitator. The facilitator should compile this cover page, their description of the PLC, and all of the individual documents into a single pdf and send it to [morgan-center@wpi.edu](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu%20)by February 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In addition to this cover page, a complete application includes an individual narrative (see item 3 on p. 4). Please compile together and send to [morgan-center@wpi.edu](mailto:morgan-center@wpi.edu%20)by February 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)