

LaSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL
REGIONAL STEM CENTERS

Request for Applications

Three-Year Designation: 2023-26

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: February 1, 2023, 4:30 p.m. Central

DROPBOX LINK FOR SUBMISSION: <https://www.laregents.edu/lastem-regional-stem-center-applications/>

Louisiana Board of Regents

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**LaSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS: REGIONAL STEM CENTERS**

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

A. PURPOSE OF THIS REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

The LaSTEM Advisory Council, established by Act 392 of the 2017 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, is seeking nine entities to host Regional STEM Centers (Centers) across nine designated regions, collectively encompassing the whole state of Louisiana. For a map of the designated regions, see Attachment A.

The LaSTEM Advisory Council believes every citizen of Louisiana should have access to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) resources through a Regional STEM Center. The purposes of these Centers include:

- building strong foundations for STEM literacy;
- increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM; and
- preparing the STEM workforce of the future.

B. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR; QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS RFA

Written inquiries concerning this RFA and the requirements set forth herein must be directed to Dr. Clint Coleman, Louisiana Board of Regents' (Regents') LaSTEM Program Administrator (clint.coleman@laregents.edu). Questions will be accepted only in writing and must be received no later than January 15, 2023. All questions asked about this RFA and all answers provided in response to these questions will be posted on Regents' RSI website (<https://rsi.laregents.edu/lastem-request-for-applications/>) throughout the Q&A period. In order to ensure that all interested parties receive the same information, no questions will be accepted after the deadline date.

C. PUBLIC NATURE OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED

Once an application is received by Regents, it becomes public record. Submitting entities should be aware that, if a request for an application is made by the public, a copy of the application, by law, must be provided.

II. REGIONAL STEM CENTERS

A. STRUCTURE

The Louisiana Regional STEM Centers are a system of STEM leadership entities strategically positioned across Louisiana, whereby communities, parishes, multi-parish regions and the state can come together to provide improved STEM education, opportunity, advancement, and alignment of workforce needs with skills development. Centers must both serve their regions and participate in initiatives to build capacity and quality across multiple regions. Centers shall share information, work together, and be interconnected by coordination of resources, which should

also provide opportunities to expand networks and the scope and impact of initiatives. The LaSTEM Advisory Council, housed at Regents, coordinates relationships and joint initiatives, convenes regional partners, and supports the Centers on a statewide basis.

B. LaSTEM VISION AND GOALS

The following LaSTEM vision and goals were adopted by the LaSTEM Advisory Council:

VISION: The Louisiana Regional STEM Centers are envisioned to be a system of STEM leadership entities strategically positioned across Louisiana, similar to the Regional Labor Market Areas (RLMAs) identified by the Louisiana Workforce Commission, whereby communities, parishes, multi-parish regions and the State can achieve improved STEM education, opportunity, and advancement. It is expected that some current and developing STEM activities will span one or more STEM Regions. Regions will share information, work together, and be interconnected by coordination of resources which can also provide a gateway to other systems and initiatives. The Regional STEM Centers are connected with and serve the statewide LaSTEM Advisory Council.

GOALS:

1. Develop, implement, maintain and promote a seamless and collaborative communication system with other Louisiana STEM regions so that there is open and continuous sharing and development of resources, opportunities and promising practices, particularly those that span regions.
2. Create and maintain a comprehensive catalog and asset map of STEM activities and resources within each region that is shared and promoted.
3. Be the “voice” of and for STEM in all meetings and venues within each region and convene region-wide dialogues to build awareness of, interest in and shared beliefs about STEM-related activities and opportunities.
4. Foster the involvement of businesses in the region to help advance STEM education and work experiences, in addition to teacher development.
5. Work with the LaSTEM Program Administrator to identify, inventory, and lead discussions of regional workforce gaps and needs and convene key groups and individuals to explore and develop initiatives to address those needs.
6. Develop and address regional STEM goals in alignment with statewide LaSTEM Advisory Council Goals through comprehensive Statements of Work and Action Plans [Strategic Plan] based on data and deliverables.
7. Measure and refine all STEM initiatives and goals regionally and contribute to a statewide STEM expansion process.
8. Collaborate and provide oversight, as needed, for existing and new STEM-related programs at community and regional levels under direction from the LaSTEM Advisory Council and give accounts to the Council according to established guidelines.
9. Lead collaborative efforts to identify and leverage funding and other resources to support regional initiatives.

C. FUNDING

State funding for the LaSTEM Advisory Council and the Centers is subject to Legislative appropriation. Annual budgets for the Centers will be calculated based on the total appropriated for LaSTEM, minus funds designated for the LaSTEM staff and statewide operations. These initiatives are a cooperative endeavor between Regents and each Center. The submitting entity must provide to the proposed Center support in an amount totaling at least 60% of the amount provided by Regents. Centers may also seek non-public funding opportunities and business partnerships to enhance their work.

D. SUBMISSION CATEGORIES

Applications may be submitted by entities currently hosting LaSTEM-affiliated Regional Centers and new participants, with different application contents required for each type, as specified in the affected application sections. See Section IV.B of this RFA.

E. ELIGIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

1. **ELIGIBLE HOST ENTITIES:** Any public or not-for-profit entity may apply to host a Center. A submitting entity may be an existing or a newly formed collaborative group within the region. A collaborative group must identify a single entity to serve as its project lead entity and primary point of contact. The entity selected as project lead will also serve as the sole fiscal agent, with responsibility for managing any funding to collaborating groups.
2. **ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES OF CENTERS:** Activities of Centers selected for participation must align with the goals contained in Section II.B. of this RFA. Activities shall include both region-based and collaborative statewide initiatives incorporating the work of multiple Centers. Building STEM capacity and success within regions and across the state requires strong partnerships with stakeholders across the spectrum, from K-12 education through industry engagement, and proposed activities should demonstrate deep connections across sectors. It is expected that ongoing successful Center initiatives from the previous cycle will be continued, unless strong rationales are provided to discontinue them. All initiatives and activities will be implemented via a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (CEA) with Regents and must comply with budget guidelines provided in this RFA (see Sections V-VII) and with all state laws and policies.
3. **REGIONAL STEM CENTER DIRECTOR:** Host entities selected for participation are required to engage a Regional STEM Center Director (Director) to oversee the work of the Center, lead regional efforts to promote STEM, and coordinate statewide participation. The Director shall be a full-time employee of the host entity and shall provide a minimum of 75% effort to LaSTEM work. At minimum, the Director shall:
 - a. Develop regional STEM goals and objectives, along with plans for implementation, metrics to gauge success, and long-term strategic plans for Center development;
 - b. Direct and support statewide initiatives to address the goals of the LaSTEM Advisory Council;

- c. Assemble and maintain a comprehensive catalog and asset map of STEM activities and resources that can be shared within and beyond the region;
- d. Identify and promote STEM education, training, and opportunities within the region;
- e. Involve relevant business and industry, as well as community organizations to identify STEM-related needs and gaps within the region;
- f. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop STEM-related programs at community and regional levels to address needs; and
- g. Help to identify and manage a Regional STEM Advisory Committee made up of private and public representatives to guide and promote activities within the region.

F. DURATION

Entities will be selected to host Centers for a period of three (3) state fiscal years pursuant to annual CEAs with Regents. The amount of state support will be determined annually based on legislative appropriation.

G. NON-STATE SUPPORT

Submitting entities should be aware that this program is designed as a collaborative effort between Regents and the entity hosting the Center. As such, host entities shall commit support in an amount totaling at least 60% of the amount provided by Regents to the Center and its activities. All support committed by the host entity must directly support the Center and be documented in the annual CEA. Support commitments by the host entity are binding and may not be reduced or eliminated without approval of the LaSTEM Administrator and amendment of the CEA.

The host entity is required to provide appropriate physical space, furnishings, and standard office equipment needed to house the activities of the Center, its Director, and any affiliated staff. If the entity cannot provide these from existing resources, appropriate facilities, furnishings, and equipment shall be proposed by the host entity and mutually agreed to by both parties.

H. APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

All applications submitted shall be subject to external review by a Selection Committee, chosen by Regents based on members' expertise and lack of participation in any Center. Applications shall be evaluated and scored based on the rubric included in Attachment B. Selection Committee recommendations shall be advisory to the LaSTEM Advisory Council.

1. **SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS:** The LaSTEM Advisory Council shall have sole discretion to select applications for funding.
2. **DEBRIEFING:** Committee comments for submissions not selected for participation will be provided upon request.

3. **TIMETABLE:** The following schedule for submission, assessment, and approval of applications will apply for the 2022-23 application cycle:

December 2022	Request for Applications (RFA) issued
January 15, 2023	Deadline for submission of written inquiries, with answers posted to the online Q&A within 24 hours
February 1, 2023, 4:30 p.m. Central	Deadline for receipt of applications via Dropbox (https://www.laregents.edu/lastem-regional-stem-center-applications/)
February 2-March 23, 2023	Applications reviewed by Selection Committee
March 24, 2023	Selection Committee recommendations forwarded to the LaSTEM Advisory Council
April 20, 2023	LaSTEM Advisory Council selects applications for funding
May-June 2023	LaSTEM staff negotiate CEAs with selected applicants
July 1, 2023	Year-One CEA start date

4. **PROJECT REPORTING:** Centers selected for participation shall be required to submit periodic performance and cost reports to Regents per the schedule determined in the annual CEA. The format and contents of each report shall be detailed in each year’s CEA.

III. PROCEDURES AND DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

All applications must be complete upon submission and must be received electronically by Regents via Dropbox, using the following link: <https://www.laregents.edu/lastem-regional-stem-center-applications/> . The Dropbox link may also be accessed at <https://www.laregents.edu/regional-lastem-center-request-for-applications-rfa/>. No other form of submission (paper or emailed originals or copies, etc.) will be accepted. All applications must document approval of the CEO or equivalent of the submitting entity.

- A. **COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION OF MATERIALS:** The submission deadline is absolute and no materials will be accepted after the date and time published in this RFA. A submitted application may be withdrawn if the submitting entity determines revisions are needed, but the revised version must be received before the deadline.
- B. **CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT:** Regents staff will confirm receipt of applications via email within 24 hours of the stated deadline. Confirmation of receipt indicates that the document has been received but does not indicate that it is complete and/or correct.

IV. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND FORMAT

All narrative sections of the application should be presented in a single PDF document with pages numbered, one-inch margins at the top, bottom and on each side, and in type no smaller than 12 point.

The PDF file name should include the name of the submitting entity and the region for which the Center is proposed. The file must be uploaded to the <https://www.laregents.edu/lastem-regional-stem-center-applications/>. The Dropbox link may also be accessed at <https://www.laregents.edu/regional-lastem-center-request-for-applications-rfa/>.

Each application must include the following information:

- A. **COVER PAGE**: Provide basic information about the submitting entity and the Center, including contact information, location of the host entity, proposed location of the Center (if different), and Center name. Indicate whether the application is a renewal of an existing center or new submission.
- B. **NARRATIVE**: The narrative should not exceed twenty (20) pages and should avoid repeat information. Information applicable in multiple places may be referenced by title of section.

For applications submitted jointly by multiple collaborating entities, explain as appropriate the role of each partner in the Center and its activities. A collaborative project must identify its lead entity, which will serve as both leader of Center activities and sole fiscal agent, with responsibility for managing any funding to collaborating groups. Primary points of contact for programmatic and fiscal activities must also be identified.

1. **THE CURRENT SITUATION**: Briefly describe current structures and ongoing work to support STEM education, training, workforce development, and community engagement in the region in the following areas:
 - PreK-12 education
 - Postsecondary education
 - Workforce development entities, including local chambers, economic development officers, and others
 - STEM-focused business and industry
 - Government agencies
 - Not-for-profit entities
 - For applications for new centers, engagement with and support of the region's host entity/existing Center over the past three-year cycle
2. **CENTER MISSION AND GOALS**: Define the three-year goals of the Center and their relationship to the overall LaSTEM goals (see section II.B). Provide measurable objectives for each goal. Take care to ensure that the measurable objectives are realistic, tangible, as specific as possible, and directly related to the goals.
 - a. **For Existing Centers Seeking Renewal**: In addition to the above, detail goals and objectives of the previous three-year cycle and progress toward accomplishing them. Provide data on initiatives, participation, and community engagement to support narratives.
 - b. **For New Centers**: How do the proposed mission and goals align with and expand or reconfigure existing Center work and priorities? What plans are in place to ensure continuity of operations, engage the previous Center in transitional activities, and sustain successful programs if the new Center is selected?

3. **CENTER PRIORITIES AND PLANS:** Discuss general plans for the three-year participation cycle for the Center, identifying what kinds of initiatives and activities will be prioritized, what gaps/opportunities are most critical to address, and how the work will be staged over time while allowing for new opportunities or shifts in focus.
 - a. **For Existing Centers Seeking Renewal:** In addition to the above, provide a recap of activities undertaken in the first three years, their impacts, and how the experience of launching the Center has informed plans for the upcoming cycle.
 - b. **For New Centers:** How do the proposed priorities and plans align with and expand or reconfigure existing Center work and priorities? What plans are in place to leverage successful initiatives launched by the previous Center? If previous initiatives are proposed to be discontinued, explain the rationale for doing so.
4. **LaSTEM ALIGNMENT:** Summarize how the proposed Center aligns with the goals of the LaSTEM program (see Section II.B of this RFA).
5. **CENTER LOCATION AND STAFFING:** Identify the primary location of the Center, describe facilities available, and discuss why this location is appropriate to house a public-facing Center. Provide a list of all staff positions identified to support the work of the Center. Describe the facilities to be dedicated to the Center staff including professional offices, clerical areas, office equipment and supplies.
6. **SUPPORT AND RESOURCES:** Describe the support that the submitting entity and any partners will provide to the Center, as well as any fees or expenses it will waive if selected. These may include, but should not be limited to, necessities for basic operation: office space, administrative fees, support staff, furniture, office equipment and supplies, etc.
7. **IMPACT AND OUTCOMES:** Describe the anticipated impact and outcomes of the project in the region and statewide as related to education, workforce, and opportunity.
8. **STEM LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:** Describe the host entity's experience in managing centers of this type, engaging in community/regional STEM initiatives/advocacy, and/or other relevant activities. Include the qualifications of any current staff expected to participate in the Center.
9. **REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:** Indicate the composition of an existing or proposed Regional Advisory Committee to assist in guiding the Center and ensuring that regional needs are being met. Describe the submitting entity's experience in or plans for convening and facilitating such bodies.
10. **STATEWIDE COLLABORATION:** Identify any current initiatives or plans that would allow the prospective Center to participate in and/or lead scalable STEM initiatives with statewide impact, including collaborations among regions and pilot projects to be expanded.

- 11. EVALUATION:** Describe plans to assess/evaluate the project and the degree to which it has achieved its goal(s), as well as its contributions to the growth of regional and statewide STEM opportunities. Where possible use tangible and specific indicators.
- 12. SUSTAINABILITY:** Describe plans to grow and sustain the Center, with or without state support, including both the activities undertaken during the participation cycle set forth in the current RFA and the successful initiatives created by the previous Center, if applicable. How will the Center, whether continuing or new, maintain relationships with and support of existing partners and leverage these relationships to engage more stakeholders in the region?
- 13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Provide any additional information, data, or metrics the submitting entity believes are relevant to the prospective Center.

V. DISALLOWED BUDGET ITEMS

LaSTEM resources are limited and must be used only to support direct work toward the goals outlined in Section II.B of the RFA. The annual CEAs will include a comprehensive budget and a budget narrative/justification detailing the costs of and rationales for each expense budgeted to LaSTEM and hosting entity support. Indirect costs may not be budgeted to LaSTEM support but may be provided as host entity support, using the host entity's federal negotiated rate.

Given the targeted nature of LaSTEM support, LaSTEM funds may not be used for maintenance or repair of equipment, whether existing or purchased with LaSTEM funds. Long-term maintenance contracts for equipment cannot be budgeted to LaSTEM but may be provided as host entity support.

Submitting entities should also note that the scope of the program does not permit: (1) construction of facilities; (2) routine renovation or upgrading of facilities; (3) purchase of standard motorized vehicles such as cars, trucks, vans, boats, etc.; or (4) purchase of standard office furniture or routine office equipment (e.g., desktop computers and peripherals, copiers, desks, chairs, etc.). Each annual CEA budget must detail and fully justify the specific STEM-related educational, outreach, and/or training uses of the activities included in the proposed budget as related to LaSTEM goals and project objectives.

Costs of meals, snacks, and drinks may be included when necessary for a LaSTEM-related event or activity and must comply with State rates as set forth by the Division of Administration Policy and Procedure Memorandum 49 (the State General Travel Regulations). LaSTEM funds cannot be used for entertainment costs, including performers, musicians, and rental of entertainment venues. These activities may be provided as part of host entity support.

Equipment and supplies purchased with LaSTEM dollars (excluding promotional materials with no monetary value) may not be given to project participants (faculty, students, teachers, etc.) as personal property during or after the CEA period. These activities may be provided as part of host entity support.

Only under exceptional circumstances may LaSTEM dollars be used to support institutional memberships to business, technical, and/or professional organizations. Individual faculty/staff memberships to any of the above are disallowed.

Proposed budgets may not provide for shortfalls or deficits in budgets, tuition payments, augmentation of salaries of individuals pursuing regularly assigned duties (except regular merit or cost-of-living increases), or unspecified contingencies.

Discounts received for equipment purchases may not be counted as part of the host entity support.

VI. FUNDS FOR CENTER PERSONNEL

Each Center is required to house a Regional STEM Center Director who is a full-time employee of the hosting entity. While the Director is not required to commit 100% FTE to the Center, a time commitment of at least 75% of effort is required. Up to 100% of Center-related salary may be budgeted to LaSTEM support. Additional staff may be supported, depending on the availability of funds, for the percentage of time spent on Center activities. Fringe costs shall be reimbursed at the appropriate rate assigned by the host entity. For any staff charged at less than 100%, time statements showing effort provided will be required for reimbursement.

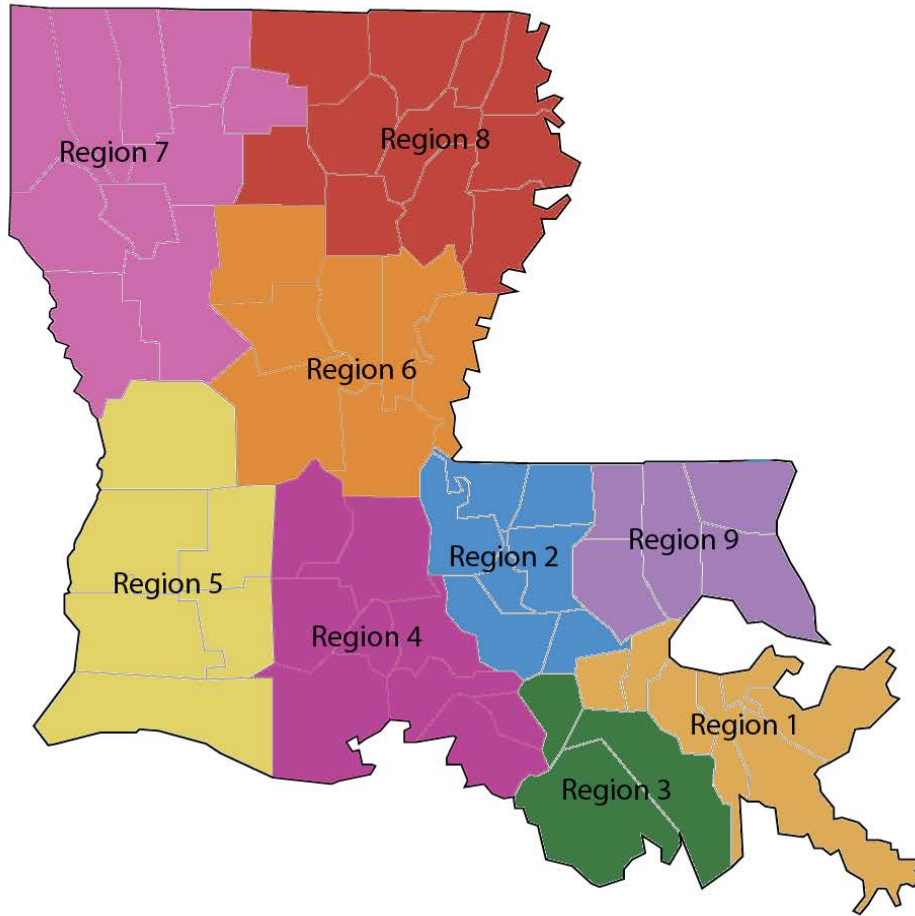
VII. OTHER EXPENSES

Except as noted in Section V, above, and subject to state procurement and purchasing guidelines, support may be budgeted for any activity necessary for Center work, as explained and justified in the CEA, including equipment, supplies, student support, professional LaSTEM staff travel, event expenses, consultants, and participant stipends.

VIII. PROJECT ACTIVATION, TIMELINE, AND DURATION

For selected participants, the year-one CEA will be issued with an activation date of July 1, 2023, and will terminate on June 30, 2024. CEAs for subsequent years will follow the state fiscal year. The maximum duration of the Center designation to be provided through this process is three (3) years.

Attachment A: LaSTEM Regional Map



Attachment B: Application Rating Form and Scoring Rubric

Category	Points Available
Current Situation & Experience	10
Mission/Goals/Objectives	15
Priorities and Plans	15
Impact (Regional)	20
Impact (Statewide)	10
Evaluation	10
Location and Resources	10
Sustainability	10
Total	100

Current Situation & Experience (10 Points): To what degree are proposed center mission and goals clearly stated, reasonable, achievable, and related to the mission and goals of LaSTEM? To what degree are the objectives measurable and related to the goal of producing candidates for STEM-related occupations? Does the proposed plan reflect a commitment to directly supporting the participation and success across all demographics of the region? Does the project team have the experience and relationships to maintain and grow the Center, whether new or continuing?

Mission/Goals/Objectives (15 Points): To what degree are proposed center mission and goals clearly stated, reasonable, achievable, and related to the mission and goals of LaSTEM? To what degree are the objectives measurable and related to the goal of producing candidates for STEM-related occupations? Does the proposed plan reflect a commitment to directly supporting the participation and success across all demographics of the region? Does the proposed plan leverage and sustain, as appropriate, ongoing work in the region?

Priorities and Plans (15 Points): To what degree does the application identify initiatives and activities that will substantially contribute to the Center and LaSTEM goals and objectives? To what degree does the plan clearly, realistically, and practically establish the tasks necessary for achieving proposed goals and objectives? For new Centers, is there a strong transition plan and process to sustain previous successful initiatives and maintain participation of previous Center participants and partners?

Regional and Statewide Impact (Regional 20 points, Statewide 10 points): To what degree does the application increase or improve the likelihood of expanding STEM-related educational and workforce opportunities in the region? In the state? To what degree does the project strengthen industry collaborations to support the LaSTEM ecosystem? To what degree does the project demonstrate scalability and adaptability to changing skill-need alignments? Would the project result in clear and visible success for all stakeholders?

Evaluation (10 Points): To what degree is a plan established for capturing and assessing data relevant to the success of the Center? Metrics should include: numbers of students/graduates, internships/apprenticeships, job availability/placement, credentials awarded, and other relevant information.

Location and Resources (10 Points): Are the proposed location and resources sufficient to support the goals and plans of the proposed center? Is the proposed location available to the public or have accommodations been made for public access? Is the proposed staffing level and expertise adequate for a Center?

Sustainability (10 Points): To what degree are the goals, initiatives and impacts sustainable beyond the three-year project term? To what degree are maintenance or sustainability plans in place for equipment/software, supplies, and staff/faculty/student support? Are plans in place to sustain existing successful initiatives as appropriate?