From the President: Welcome and Introduction to New Processes .................................................. 2
Background ........................................................................................................................................ 3
2015-2016 Goal .................................................................................................................................. 4
Eligibility ............................................................................................................................................ 4
Budget Information ............................................................................................................................ 4
Selection Process ............................................................................................................................... 5
2015-2016 Application and Award Cycle .......................................................................................... 5
Terms and Conditions of Awards ....................................................................................................... 6
Getting Started .................................................................................................................................. 6
How should I be prepared if I am invited to submit a full proposal? ............................................... 6
Contact Information .......................................................................................................................... 6
Mission of the National Board of Medical Examiners

The mission of the NBME is to protect the health of the public through state of the art assessment of health professionals. While centered on assessment of physicians, this mission encompasses the spectrum of health professionals along the continuum of education, training and practice and includes research in evaluation as well as development of assessment instruments.

From the President: Welcome and Introduction

It is with pleasure that the National Board of Medical Examiners issues the Edward J. Stemmler, MD, Medical Education Research Fund (“The Stemmler Fund”) 2015-2016 Call for Letters of Intent. Having received positive evidence of the program’s value in the Final Reports from Fund grantees in 2013, we look forward to the applications we will receive in the next cycle and their potential to “enhance the evaluation of those preparing for or continuing to practice medicine” and to advance the field of assessment in medical education.

The 2015-2016 Stemmler Fund program remains committed to the same broad goal as in prior cycles; namely, advancing research and development for innovative assessment methods in medical education or practice. We are soliciting brief, structured Letters of Intent from investigators as the first step in the application process. These Letters of Intent will be evaluated by the Stemmler Fund Steering Committee, who will focus on the innovativeness and attractiveness of the ideas, along with the design of the study. Feedback will be provided to all who submit Letters of Intent. A subset of investigators will be invited to submit full proposals, which will undergo similar rounds of peer and committee review, this time with a stronger emphasis on research design, statistics and methodology.

Applicants should consider how their proposed research will provide a departure from previous thought and practice or pursue new areas of investigation which will advance the field of assessment in medical education. Individuals or teams of investigators from medical schools accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) are encouraged to apply, either singly or in collaboration with other institutions. As the program’s guidelines note, the number of applications submitted by individual schools is not limited.

We look forward to your responses to the Stemmler Fund’s 2015-2016 Call for Letters of Intent. Applicants will be notified of the results of the peer and committee evaluation of Letters of Intent in November, 2015, and Invited Proposals that are selected for funding will be announced in April 2016.

Donald E. Melnick, MD
President
National Board of Medical Examiners

May 2015
Background

The National Board of Medical Examiners ("National Board" or "NBME") was established in 1915 in response to the medical profession’s desire to establish national standards for the practice of medicine. The earliest and continuing central purpose of the NBME has been to “provide an examination of such high quality that state licensing boards could justifiably accept the results without the need for further examination.” Today the NBME, together with the Federation of State Medical Boards and the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates, prepares and administers the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE™), which provides a common evaluation system for applicants for medical licensure regardless of their country of origin and training.

Over its 99-year history, the National Board has maintained the highest standards of excellence in its examination programs. Integral to its success has been the conviction that the precision of assessment can be continually improved by ongoing study of existing methods of evaluation, and this has been the back-bone of its intramural research and development program. Also central to those efforts has been the active contribution of the many experts from the faculties of medicine who serve as test committee members and as consultants to the NBME in the conduct of their common purpose.

In 1995, the Medical Education Research Fund program, as it was then known, was created by the National Board to serve as an extension of the NBME’s dedication to both its research mission and its central and common mission with medical schools: “…to assess ever more precisely the knowledge, competence, and qualification of those preparing for and continuing to assume responsibility for the health of the public.” The program was established to provide external funding support for research on and development of innovative assessment methods in medical education at schools accredited by the LCME and the AOA.

At the NBME’s Annual Meeting in March 2000, the Board unanimously elected to honor Edward J. Stemmler, MD for his leadership in conceiving the NBME Medical Education Research Fund program by naming the program after him. Dr. Stemmler served as the first chair of the Fund’s Steering Committee, which establishes its policies and operating guidelines. He was elected Chair of the National Board for two successive terms and received its Distinguished Service Award. He has also had a long and illustrious career as a physician and as dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

The Fund’s initial grants were for a maximum of $50,000 and were two years in duration. For the 1999-2000 cycle, the program’s success encouraged the Fund’s Steering Committee to increase the maximum grant amount to $60,000, and to establish an Invitational Grant award. For the 2000-2001 cycle, the committee increased the maximum grant available through the regular “Call for Proposals (CFP)” program to $70,000. The Invitational Grant program provided investigators who already received a grant through the open annual CFP with an opportunity to compete for an additional award of $100,000, to further advance their NBME-supported research. For the 2005-2006 funding cycle, the program again increased the amount of the awards to $150,000. The Invitational Grant program was also discontinued, and previously-funded applicants could apply for a competing renewal award of $150,000 to achieve their project goals. These remain the maximum grants available.

The 2015-2016 cycle continues the pre-application process whereby applicants are invited to submit brief, structured Letters of Intent. These Letters of Intent will undergo committee evaluation, and a subset of investigators will be invited to submit full proposals. All proposals, whether new or renewal, will compete for funding up to $150,000.

The 2014-2015 Stemmler Fund awards brought the current total of grants made by the program to about $7.1 million. Over seventy five grants have been made to over 50 different medical schools for a broad range of important assessment research topics (see the NBME website for information on prior grantees).
2015-2016 Goal

The goal of the Stemmler Fund’s 2015-2016 Call for Letters of Intent (CFLOI) is to provide support, through a program of annual grants, for research or development of innovative assessment approaches which will enhance the evaluation of those preparing to, or continuing to, practice medicine. Expected outcomes include advances in the theory, knowledge, or practice of assessment at any point along the continuum of medical education, from undergraduate and graduate education and training, through practice.

Pilot and more comprehensive projects are both of interest. Collaborative investigations within or among institutions are not only eligible but encouraged, particularly as they strengthen the likelihood of the project’s contribution and success.

Eligibility

The eligible applicants for Stemmler Fund grant awards are the medical schools accredited by the LCME or the AOA. Additional eligibility requirements include:

- The number of Letters of Intent submitted by any eligible school is not limited. However, an individual may not be principal investigator on more than one Letter of Intent. The designated principal investigator must represent the primary applicant institution and must be responsible for project oversight and reporting. (The applicant institution’s rules apply regarding eligibility of their faculty, staff, or associates to serve as investigators.)
- A maximum of two applications representing a revised Letter of Intent previously submitted to the Fund program will be accepted by the NBME. That is, applications addressing the same substantive study topic by the same investigators may be submitted for Fund consideration no more than a total of three times.
- The primary investigators of prior Fund grants are eligible to reapply and compete (with new applicants) for one additional award through the Stemmler Fund Call for Letters of Intent for the same line of study. Current award recipients are eligible to compete again only if any current NBME support is expected to terminate satisfactorily by the beginning of the 2015-2016 project period (usually around July 1, 2016).

Budget Information

In the 2015-2016 cycle, applicants may request up to $150,000 of NBME funding support for a project period of up to two years. While a detailed budget should not be submitted as part of the Letter of Intent, applicants are required to include estimates of funding requested and project length on the application cover sheet submitted as part of the Letter of Intent process, and should be prepared to provide a detailed budget and descriptive narrative if they are invited to submit a full proposal. (For more details, please see “How should I be prepared if I am invited to submit a full proposal?”)

Although only a budget estimate should be included in Letters of Intent, applicants who wish to be prepared to submit an Invited Proposal should consider the following regarding funds requested from NBME:

- Both pilot and more comprehensive or large-scale studies which meet the Stemmler Fund’s goals are eligible; the amount of funds requested should reflect the scale of the proposed project.
- A request for support, to purchase or lease equipment or for travel, is acceptable if the request has a unique association with the proposed project, is required to meet project aims, and represents a limited portion of the total request.
- The institutional administrative costs requested for each year of the proposed project is limited to 10% of the total direct costs requested for each year. As an example, $68,180 (direct) + $6,818 (admin) = an annual NBME request of $74,998.
Selection Process

1. All submitted Letters of Intent will be reviewed by NBME staff to ensure eligibility and completeness.

2. Committee members will then evaluate Letters of Intent using the following criteria:
   - The extent to which the proposed research is innovative or will advance assessment in medical education or practice
   - The extent to which the proposed research addresses an important problem or issue in medical education or practice
   - The extent to which the proposed research is likely to be successful given the described design and methodology

3. The Stemmler Fund Steering Committee will then review all Letters of Intent and select a subset of Letters of Intent (e.g., 10-15) to be invited to submit full proposals.

4. All Invited Proposals will be reviewed by NBME staff to ensure completeness.

5. Peer reviewers with expertise in measurement, research design and methodology will then evaluate Invited Proposals using the following criteria:
   - The relevance and significance of the proposal to the purpose and goals of the Stemmler Fund program
   - The adequacy and completeness of the research design or methodology
   - The qualifications of the principal investigator and primary project staff

6. The Stemmler Fund Steering Committee will then review all proposals and peer reviews, giving careful consideration to the adequacy of the budget, timetable, and other key project resources in each proposal, and select awards.

The process for consideration of new proposals and competing renewals will be identical. The number of grants awarded will depend on the nature, quality, and level of the requests received. The NBME will provide feedback detailing the comments provided by reviewers of applications not selected for funding.

2015-2016 Application and Award Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 13, 2015</td>
<td>Deadline for receipt of Letters of Intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2015</td>
<td>Invited Proposals Notified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Review Feedback Provided to Letter of Intent Applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>Deadline for receipt of Invited Proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2016</td>
<td>Awards Announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1, 2016</td>
<td>2016-2017 cycle project start date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Terms and Conditions of Awards

Grant awards will be contingent on the mutual agreement of the NBME and the grantee to applicable terms and conditions of awards, such as publication and ownership rights, grantor acknowledgment, prior approval requirements, required fiscal and progress reports, and so forth. Where applicable, a copy of the formal approval from the applicant’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) is required before a grant award can be made final.

The NBME requires ethical behavior in all aspects of its programs and activities and refers applicants to the Association of American Medical Colleges’ report “The Maintenance of High Ethical Standards in the Conduct of Research.”

Getting Started

Submitting a Letter of Intent is a paperless process. To begin your online application, please visit the online application center. There you can download a template for your Letter of Intent (1516 StemmlerFund LOI Template.doc), which includes a coversheet for basic information about the project, and instructions for completing the narrative. The Letter of Intent will be a structured description of the proposed research, encompassing no more than five pages.

A detailed budget should not be submitted as part of the Letter of Intent, but will be required as part of the Invited Proposal should an applicant’s Letter of Intent be selected. Similarly, appropriate IRB documentation and proof of the institution’s non-profit status is not required to submit a Letter of Intent (or Invited Proposal), though both should be available if a project is selected for funding.

Submitting your Letter of Intent Application

The Letter of Intent (one PDF or Microsoft Word document) must be emailed to stemmlerfund@nbme.org no later than July 13, 2015 (midnight) to be accepted.

Please include the last name of the principal Investigator in your email subject line and in all file names.

How should I be prepared if I am invited to submit a full proposal?

An “Invited Proposal Preparation Checklist” is available for download at the Stemmler Fund website.

Contact Information

If you have questions about the submission process you may contact the Stemmler Fund staff:

Email: stemmlerfund@nbme.org
Phone: 215-590-9657
Fax: 215-590-9488