

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE HIGHER
EDUCATION COOPERATION ACT (HECA) GRANT PROGRAM**

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: At its September 19, 2005 meeting, the Board of Higher Education approved Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) grant allocations for fiscal year 2006. The Board also discussed the need to evaluate the HECA program, including reviewing the program's priorities, the application review process, and the grant allocation process. This item recommends the establishment of a Board committee to oversee this HECA review project and outlines a five-point charge to the committee to be completed by winter 2006, in time for the release of the fiscal year 2007 Request for Proposal (RFP).

Action Requested: That the Board of Higher Education establish the Committee to Review the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Grant Program and charge the committee to examine and address the issues outlined in this item.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

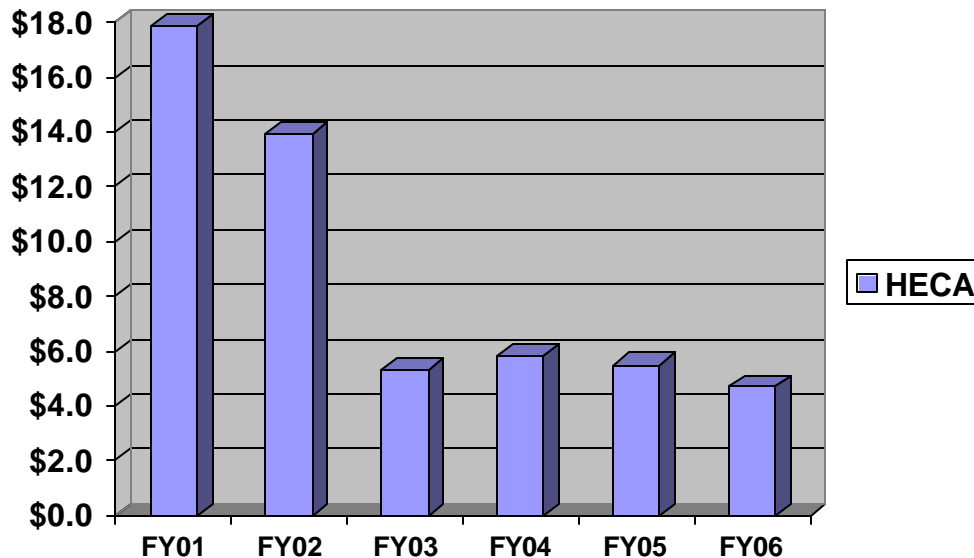
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Background

At its September 19, 2005 meeting, the Illinois Board of Higher Education reviewed fiscal year 2006 Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Grant recommendations. At that meeting, the Board approved the grant allocations and discussed a number of issues related to the need to take a closer look at the program, including statewide collaboration and replication of successful projects, a focus on statewide needs and policy issues, and improvements to the application review and grant allocation processes.

The Board has administered the HECA program since 1972. Over the years, the program has gone through a number of changes; grant categories have been created and eliminated on institutional needs, statewide policy issues have emerged, and the state's fiscal condition has changed. Table 1 and the following summary points provide a brief context for the current conditions and issues facing the program, including resources, competition, priorities, and accountability.

Table 1: HECA Appropriations for Competitive Projects FY2001-FY2006
(\$ in millions)



- **Resources:** As seen in Table1, funding for competitive HECA projects has decreased from \$17.9 million in fiscal year 2001 to \$4.6 million in fiscal year 2006.

- Competition: Decreased funding provided for HECA, combined with institutional funding pressures has resulted in increased competition for HECA resources.
- Priorities: Due to the growing list of policy issues and areas of concern, the need to focus on priorities is critical. Collaboration and careful attention are needed to set priority areas to be addressed by limited HECA funds.
- Accountability: Processes should be evaluated and improved to increase program accountability.

Establishment of The Committee to Review the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Grant Program

Staff recommends the establishment of The Committee to Review the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Grant Program. As noted previously, the declining resources provided for this program underscore the need to improve the collaborative nature of the program, increase the accountability, and direct resources toward statewide priority needs. The Access and Diversity goal of *The Illinois Commitment* is the only category of the program currently funded, and while these program review efforts are intended to make program improvements, additional efforts also are needed to restore funding for two previously funded HECA categories -- Teaching Learning and Quality and Workforce and Economic Development.

Proposed Charge to the Committee

Due to the ongoing cycle of the HECA Grant Program process, the primary focus of the Board committee will be to address the issues outline below with a target completion date of winter 2006, at which time the fiscal year 2007 HECA Request for Proposal (RFP) can be released. With this target in mind, staff recommends that the committee be charged to do the following five activities:

1. Review the purpose and origins of the HECA Program, including the:
 - (a) statute;
 - (b) administrative rules;
 - (c) appropriation bill language; and
 - (d) past processes.
2. Examine the Board priorities for the HECA Program, both past and present including *The Illinois Commitment* and statewide needs/policy issues.
3. Examine current processes and identify areas of improvement, including:
 - (a) examining the application peer review and approval process;
 - (b) increasing the transparency of the process (i.e. improve visibility and collaboration);
 - (c) increasing the emphasis on evaluation of program results; and
 - (d) disseminating grant project products by sharing results and methods on a statewide basis.

4. Examine current accountability processes at the state and institutional levels to determine what works, what needs improvement, what can be eliminated, and what might be added.
5. Make recommendations to the Board of Higher Education on each of the above items for consideration in the development of the Board's fiscal year 2007 HECA Request for Proposal (RFP).

Due to the short time frame involved, staff recommends that an organizational meeting of the committee be held in early November 2005 to review the charge and outline a work plan and timeline for completing the review. In supporting the work of the committee, Board staff will supply all necessary documentation including previously completed HECA grant program evaluations, Board reports on HECA, request for proposals, and other past HECA Board items.

Staff recommends adoption of the following resolution:

The Board of Higher Education hereby establishes the Committee to Review the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Grant Program and charges the committee to examine and address the issues outlined in this item.

