Request for Proposal: Long-Term Efficacy of Career Programs

A 2013 report conducted by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University found, "by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school." While the report estimates that nearly 24 million jobs will be added to the economy by 2020, it also found that at the current rate of degree attainment, the United States will fall short by five million workers with postsecondary credentials.

In response to the need for workers with postsecondary education, there has been a rise in workforce programs targeted at helping adults get the training they need to secure jobs that pay a family sustaining wage. While programs such as short-term boot camps have created opportunities for individuals who have not been prepared to enter the modern labor market, questions remain if the lack of accreditation and/or inability to transfer limit long-term opportunities for graduates.

There is a fair amount of research regarding wage gains for graduates of accredited career pathways programs with portable certificates or degrees; however, there is little information on long-term wage gains for non-accredited and/or non-portable programs. As a result, further research is necessary in order to evaluate what models best serve adult learners.

Key Terms as defined by ECMC Foundation (ECMCF)

Non-accredited and/or non-portable programs:
- Short-term boot camps
- Employer-sponsored training
- Non-credit bearing training at community colleges
- Certificate or degree programs up to two-years at for-profit institutions
- Apprenticeship programs lacking a postsecondary affiliation
- Programs offered by community based organizations that are not accredited or do not have articulation agreements with community colleges

Accredited career pathways:
- Credit bearing certificate or degree programs up to two years at community colleges
- Programs offered by community based organizations that are accredited or have articulation agreements with community colleges
- Apprenticeship programs with a postsecondary affiliation

(The above lists are not exhaustive of the various types of programs that may fit into the two categories.)

Transferable credits and portable credentials:
- Transferable credits are eligible for transfer to another postsecondary institution and count toward a learner's progression toward a certificate or degree
- Portable credentials (e.g., certificates and degrees) are recognized regardless of the employer or location

Background
ECMC Foundation is a Los Angeles-based, nationally focused foundation whose mission is to inspire and to facilitate improvements that affect educational outcomes—especially among underserved populations—through evidence-based innovation. It is one of several affiliates under the ECMC Group enterprise based in Minneapolis, which together work to help students succeed.

The Foundation makes investments in two focus areas.

- College Success is focused on increasing the number of college students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, including low-income and first-generation populations, who pursue and attain bachelor's degrees.

- Career Readiness is committed to connecting adults with limited or no education beyond high school to industry-informed, transferable, and accredited postsecondary CTE programs that are part of career pathways that lead to portable certificates or degrees.

Request
ECMC Foundation is looking to support a study on the long-term impact of enrolling in a non-accredited and/or non-portable program compared to enrolling in an accredited program within a postsecondary career pathway.

The Foundation is particularly interested in wage data, career growth, and highest credential earned (certificate or degree) for individuals who entered or reentered an accredited program within a postsecondary career pathway or a non-accredited and/or non-portable program as an adult learner (ages 18 and older). Successful applicants need not design a new study to track incoming learners; the Foundation will look favorably on applications that investigate the trajectories of former students who have already completed their programs and entered the labor market. The Foundation recognizes that partnerships and data sharing from accredited and non-accredited programs will be required for successful analysis and will value evidence of these relationships when reviewing Letters of Inquiry.

Requirements
In order to be considered for this opportunity, interested organizations must submit a Letter of Inquiry to the ECMC Foundation by March 19, 2018 using the guiding questions below.

All submitted Letters of Inquiry will be considered for this opportunity and one organization will be selected to conduct the research and produce written deliverables. The selected organization will be contacted no later than April 2, 2018 and asked to submit a full grant proposal (including a more concrete action plan and budget) to the ECMC Foundation by May 1, 2018.

Eligibility + Selection Criteria
Any organization with a commitment to education and background in research is eligible to submit a Letter of Inquiry. A small team from the Foundation will evaluate all submitted Letters of Inquiry. The team will select the organization with the strongest mission alignment and ability to carry out a comprehensive research project.

Process + Timeline
  Letter of Inquiry Deadline   March 19, 2018
  Winner Announced   April 2, 2018
  Full Proposal Deadline   May 1, 2018
  Funding Notification   August 1, 2018

Contact
Questions may be directed to Patrick Bourke (pbourke@ecmc.org). All final Letters of Inquiry must be submitted to Patrick by email no later than 5:00 PM (PT) on March 19, 2018.

Long-Term Efficacy of Career Programs Letters of Inquiry

Please prepare a brief (up to three page) Letter of Inquiry addressing the following questions.

Organization Name
What is the name of the organization requesting funding and who will serve as the project leader if funding is received?

Organization
What is your/your organization's commitment to postsecondary education for underserved adults? Do you or your organization have experience completing similar projects and what were the outcomes of those projects?

Program Summary
What research questions would you need to answer in order to complete this project? What data would you need to access? What is your strategy for gaining access to that data, and why will it be successful? What reporting formats or tools would you use to clearly communicate the results of the research?

Program Timeline and Action Plan
What actions will you take over the course of the grant period to collect data, conduct research, create corresponding deliverables, and disseminate findings?

Measurements of Success
How will you evaluate the success of the project?

Budget Narrative
What funds are needed for staff time, data analysis, creation of deliverables, and dissemination of findings over the grant period?