

## Request for Proposal: Connecting Business and Industry to Postsecondary CTE

The “skills gap” has become a hot button topic in education, industry and policymaking circles over the last several years. The theory behind the skills gap is that there are millions of unfilled jobs, but potential applicants lack the skills to fill those positions. The gaps are particularly severe for jobs requiring more than a high school diploma and less than a four-year degree, also known as middle skills jobs. Analysis conducted by the [National Skills Coalition](#) found that in 2015 middle-skill jobs accounted for 53% of United States labor market, but only 43% of the country’s workers were trained to the middle-skill level.

Postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) has been heralded as a potential remedy for closing the “middle skills gap,” and postsecondary CTE institutions, such as community and technical colleges, are well positioned to provide the necessary education for middle skills jobs. Despite such potential, a significant gap still exists between the number of openings and the number of unemployed individuals.

In recent years, educators have questioned if the lack of skills are actually at the root of this apparent gap in employment. Some have suggested that the gap could be a result of employers [requiring credentials](#) not necessary for successful employees, [low pay](#) in unfilled roles, or a [stigma](#) around CTE pathways.

While debate surrounding the root of the issue may continue, it is evident that there is an opportunity to strengthen the relationships between postsecondary CTE institutions and business and industry. ECMC Foundation believes bringing together business and industry leaders to build strategic partnerships with postsecondary CTE institutions will result in improved economic mobility for students and greater labor market outcomes for employers.

### Opportunity

ECMC Foundation is accepting letters of inquiry from organizations or institutions interested in developing and managing a program to support business and industry professionals seeking to more effectively align their work with postsecondary CTE institutions. Selected programs should aim to improve postsecondary CTE through stronger ties to business and industry while keeping student success at the core of the work. This competitive grant process will lead to the identification of one organization or self-identified coalition of organizations with a lead organization to receive funding.

Proposed concepts should include a plan to recruit and select program participants, offer innovative programming to build a community of practice among participants, and provide ongoing support for professionals seeking to advance in their career and/or refine their skills. The ideal program will engage participants throughout their involvement, allow for the exchange of ideas, and offer mentorship opportunities. Proposals should be national in scope and inclusive of all [CTE Career Clusters](#). Prospective applicants should indicate the number and size of cohort(s) to be assembled, if teams from individual companies, organizations, or regions should be considered, and the experience level appropriate for the program participants. ECMC Foundation will provide financial support to the selected organization to pay for management of the program, as well as pass-through funds for program participants, the use of which should clearly be articulated in the proposal.

The program should run for at least two years and grant activities should not start before September 2020 nor end after August 2023.

ECMC Foundation believes that a successful program will include the following activities in an effort to develop the individuals as leaders and advance the postsecondary CTE field.

- Support the design of projects and/or the development of written pieces;
- Offer skill building and networking opportunities;
- Attend a yearly ECMC Foundation CTE Leadership Collaborative convening with Fellows;
- Encourage attendance and presentations at relevant conferences; and,
- Make any produced research, data, or publications open access.

### 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.

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 postsecondary CTE programs that are part of career pathways leading to portable certificates or degrees.

### CTE Leadership Collaborative

This RFP is being released as part of the ECMC Foundation [CTE Leadership Collaborative](#) (LC), an initiative focused on bringing together diverse perspectives and equipping leaders with the tools, resources and skills needed to advance postsecondary CTE. LC grantees commit to similar branding and a common list of expectations focused on field-building to create seamless opportunities for collaboration.

The partner selected for this opportunity will join a community of organizations supporting leaders with the intent to improve the state of postsecondary CTE. Please see below for a brief summary of the first four grants made through the LC.

- The CTE Research Program at North Carolina State University advances CTE research and knowledge by supporting graduate students and postdoctoral researchers from a range of postsecondary institutions and a variety of academic disciplines. The goal is to grow high-quality postsecondary CTE research, which currently lacks significant visibility and financial support.
- The Postsecondary Leadership Success Program at ACTE supports current and aspiring leaders in CTE. The goal is to provide professional and career growth opportunities to the next generation of leaders at nonprofits and postsecondary institutions offering CTE programs.

- The Woodrow Wilson CTE Media Fellowship supports CTE Journalism Fellows focused on postsecondary CTE. The goal is to increase the number of journalists equipped with tools and networks to provide richer and more comprehensive coverage of postsecondary education, particularly CTE.
- The Strategic Data Project - Career and Technical Education at Harvard University helps data professionals at community colleges implement practices to improve student outcomes. The goal is to improve the Fellows' use of data to support students in the successful completion of CTE programs and generate insights about the workforce outcomes of their various CTE programs.

Fellows selected through each grantee program engage with other ECMC Foundation Fellows at the annual CTE Leadership Collaborative Convening, regular receptions at conferences, and through additional funding opportunities. The goal is to inspire engagement with leaders from different fields all with the shared intent to advance postsecondary CTE.

### Eligibility

Any organization or institution with a commitment to postsecondary education, business partnerships, professional development, and/or background in leadership development is eligible to submit a Letter of Inquiry.

### Timeline

**The deadline to apply is 5:00 PM (PT) on Monday, April 20, 2020.** Final notifications will be issued no later than April 30, 2020. The organization selected will be asked to submit a full proposal (including a detailed action plan and budget) to ECMC Foundation by May 15, 2020.

### Submission Process

In order to be considered for this opportunity, interested organizations must submit a Letter of Inquiry via ECMC Foundation's [online form](#).

### Selection Criteria

A 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 accomplish the expectations established by ECMC Foundation.

### Contact

Questions may be directed to Patrick Bourke ([pbourke@ecmc.org](mailto:pbourke@ecmc.org)).

## Connecting Business and Industry to Postsecondary CTE Letter of Inquiry

Please address the following questions and submit your answers via the [online form](#).

Organization Name	
Program Title	
Program Duration	
Requested Amount	

### Organization (character limit: 2500)

Provide an overview of your organization's purpose, relevant history, and data on its effectiveness.

- Does your organization have experience facilitating similar programs and how successful have those initiatives been?
- Does your organization have experience supporting relationships between business, industry, and postsecondary education?
- How do the goals of the RFP align with the overall mission of your organization?
- If you are collaborating with other organizations, please provide a brief overview of those organizations and their connection to this work.

### Proposed Program (character limit: 4500)

Explain how you will help business and industry professionals more effectively engage with postsecondary CTE institutions and their students.

- What supports will your organization offer that will prepare business and industry professionals to effectively engage with postsecondary CTE institutions and students?
- How will you provide professional development to individuals with time constraints?
- How will you utilize the pass-through grant funds? (e.g., unrestricted funding to participants, special project support)

### Program Timeline and Action Plan (character limit: 4500)

Provide the approximate start and end dates and a summary of the activities for which you are requesting support.

- What actions will you take over the course of the grant period to identify and support program participants?
- How will you develop the leadership capabilities and build community among participants?
- How will you incorporate the activities listed in the Opportunity section above?

### Measurements of Success (character limit: 2250)

Explain how you will evaluate the program's success and measure successful implementation and program effectiveness.

### Budget Narrative (character limit: 1250)

Include a detailed list of the expenses (e.g., staff time, professional development, stipends) that comprise the total amount requested.