

RFP: Improving Online Postsecondary Career and Technical Education

ECMC Foundation is [accepting proposals](#) from nonprofit organizations, postsecondary institutions, and government entities positioned to help community and technical colleges improve online postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) over the next two and half years. This competitive process will result in the selection of one organization (grantee) to receive a grant up to **\$2.5 million** and lead a formal or informal coalition of organizations nationally recognized in their field.

As a whole, the coalition should have expertise in postsecondary education, CTE, and online education and experience working with community and/or technical colleges across the country. The coalition is expected to articulate best practices for transitioning hands-on learning to a virtual setting; help institutions incorporate learner-centered approaches, wraparound supports, and industry-informed pathways in an online environment; provide institution-specific guidance for faculty and staff; evaluate implementation efforts; and share learnings with the field.

The proposed program should focus on the [36%](#) of undergraduate students enrolled in credit-bearing CTE programs that lead to academic credentials. These sub-baccalaureate programs typically engage hands-on learning and require lab time and the individuals enrolled in these fields of study are often [adult learners](#) balancing family and work responsibilities. Submitted proposals must be centered on the overall goal of reducing completion gaps in online postsecondary CTE programs, especially for African American and Latinx students.

The Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic forced education providers to close their doors and convert their programs to viable distance learning formats [overnight](#). The move to an online format might be an attractive option for postsecondary institutions looking to [continue core programming and cut overhead costs](#) and students hoping to [learn new skills and acquire credentials](#). History tells us that while online only learning can widen access, it also tends to [lower the odds of completion](#).

In addition to the challenges students face in an online environment, many faculty who teach in CTE programs are not well equipped to teach online. Prior to the pandemic, many community and technical colleges were unable to provide the [professional development](#) necessary to help both full-time and adjunct faculty stay current with pedagogical trends. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues and adjunct faculty, who receive [limited professional development and institutional support](#) compared to their full-time peers, are at an even greater disadvantage in the move to online teaching. The [majority](#) of CTE faculty are adjunct instructors, oftentimes recruited from industry. While these individuals bring a wealth of experience in their respective fields, they often lack the pedagogical training and cultural competency that would lead to optimal student outcomes. A recent [online survey](#) of faculty members and academic administrators found that 39% of faculty members need professional development in online pedagogy to teach online this fall and 70% of administrators plan to invest in training for online teaching.

The challenges with online education have resulted in [low success rates](#) for students enrolled in online education compared to those attending in-person learning environments. These [gaps](#) in student success are greater when looking at CTE programs and far more troublesome when looking at success rates for African American and Latinx students when compared to their White and Asian peers. While this might all seem temporary, an Inside Higher Ed [survey](#) of college presidents reveals leaders plan to continue investing in and expanding online learning. This suggests that online education at the postsecondary level is here to stay, but there are fundamental changes that need to be implemented to improve student outcomes and close equity gaps.

Background

[ECMC Foundation](#) is a Los Angeles-based, nationally focused foundation with a mission to inspire and to facilitate improvements that affect educational outcomes—especially among underserved populations—through evidence-based innovation. ECMC Foundation makes investments in two focus areas: [College Success](#) and [Career Readiness](#); and uses a spectrum of funding structures, including [strategic grantmaking](#) and [program-related investments](#), to invest in both nonprofit and for-profit ventures. Working with grantees, partners and peers, ECMC Foundation’s vision is for all learners to unlock their fullest potential.

Strategic Alignment

The ECMC Foundation Career Readiness (CR) portfolio makes grants to improve postsecondary CTE outcomes for individuals from underserved backgrounds. The portfolio’s theory of change centers on the evidence that learners who complete credit-bearing programs and earn academic credentials will experience increased social mobility. Since launching the portfolio in 2015, the CR team has recognized virtual learning as a key strategy for postsecondary institutions and made several investments to improve online postsecondary CTE. These investments align to the key assumptions articulated in the CR theory of change - specifically the need for learner-centered approaches, wraparound supports, and industry-informed pathways. In line with these priorities, funding has supported third parties researching, intermediaries assisting, and institutions and organizations implementing innovative approaches to improve online postsecondary CTE.

Eligibility

In order to be considered for this opportunity, interested organizations must submit their concept via ECMC Foundation’s [online form](#). Preference will be given to proposals that bring together a coalition with expertise in postsecondary education, CTE, and online education and experience working with community and/or technical colleges across the country. ECMC Foundation is looking for one organization to lead this effort and mobilize partners working together to achieve the goals of the program; coalitions can be established or newly formed, formal or informal. Current and former ECMC Foundation grantees are eligible to apply.

Timeline

The deadline to apply is 3:00 PM (PT) on August 31, 2020. Final notifications will be issued no later than September 9, 2020. The organization selected will be asked to submit additional information (including a detailed action plan, budget, financial documentation, and signed Memorandum of Understanding from each coalition member) to ECMC Foundation by September 16, 2020. The identified partner should plan to begin grant activities in November 2020, start disseminating best practices in early 2021, and end the grant in June 2023.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed based on the coalition’s ability to articulate the following:

- expertise in postsecondary education, career and technical education, and online education;
- experience working with and access to community and/or technical colleges nationwide;
- understanding of the challenges online postsecondary CTE students face and opportunities to reform the current practices;
- track record supporting adult learners and incorporating learner-centered approaches, wraparound supports, and industry-informed pathways in an online environment;
- plans to evaluate the efficacy of the program and disseminate learnings;
- commitment to reducing completion gaps for students - especially African American and Latinx students - in online postsecondary CTE programs.

Contact

Please contact Rosario Torres by email (rtorres@ecmc.org) with questions.

Request for Proposal: Improving Online Postsecondary Career and Technical Education

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

Organization Name	
Program Title	
Duration	<i>MM/DD/YY - MM/DD/YY</i>
Program Location	<i>List the state(s) where the grant activities will take place.</i>
Requested Amount	

Organization (character limit: 3500)

Provide an organizational overview, relevant effectiveness, and geographic reach for your organization and each member of the coalition.

- Do members of the coalition have experience facilitating similar programs and how successful were those initiatives?
- What role will each member of the coalition contribute to the program’s success?

Statement of Need (character limit: 3000)

Contextualize the issue or challenge your program seeks to address, target populations, and location of the work. Include necessary program/organizational data, research, and citations.

Proposed Program (character limit: 5000)

Explain how you will help community and technical college leaders transform the way CTE faculty teach and students learn over the next two and half years.

- How will the coalition help institutions incorporate learner-centered approaches, wraparound supports, and industry-informed pathways in an online environment?
- What actions will the coalition take over the course of the grant period to provide institution-specific guidance for faculty, staff, and the administration?
- How will the coalition work towards reducing completion gaps for students - especially African American and Latinx students - in online postsecondary CTE programs?

Program Outcomes (character limit: 2250)

List the intended outcomes and explain how you will evaluate implementation and program effectiveness.

- How will you evaluate the efficacy of this program?
- What dissemination activities will be employed to share learnings with the field?

Budget Narrative (character limit: 1250)

Include a detailed list of expenses (e.g., staff time, technology needs, travel) with a brief description of what will be covered by each line item.