**MN ReConnect**

**a pilot program to support adult learners**

**Institutional Application**

**Background**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) and Minnesota State invite institutions to apply to participate in MN Reconnect, a pilot program to support adult learners. Lumina Foundation for Education has awarded the Minnesota Office of Higher Education a four-year grant to support Minnesota State students’ return to college to ensure they earn a credential of economic value. MN Reconnect focuses on encouraging students who have some college credits but no degree to return to college using financial incentives, addressing barriers, and providing one-on-one support. Similar programs are underway in Tennessee[[1]](#footnote-1) and Indiana[[2]](#footnote-2). New pilot programs are launching in Maine, Washington and Oklahoma.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In 2016, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities served more than 254,000 students in credit courses[[4]](#footnote-4). Half of those students are students of color, American Indian students, first generation students or low-income students4. For students entering Minnesota State Colleges between Fall 2005 and Fall 2012 three-year completion rates varied from 33% to 57% in relationship to academic preparation and financial need of students4. Our non-completing students are now working adults with some college credits, likely some debt, but no certificate or degree. They likely make up a majority of the 143,000 Minnesotans reported by the Office of Higher Education in this category.

MN Reconnect is important because it allows our colleges to provide students another opportunity to achieve their educational dreams or create new ones. This program will focus on addressing issues of inequity within postsecondary completion, improving workforce preparation and helping students achieve their academic and professional goals. The racial, ethnic, economic, age and experiential diversity of our students brings significant assets to campus life and creates a dynamic community for learning together from one another.

The program has four components:

1. Targeted outreach and re-enrollment of former Minnesota State students
2. Navigation and support in the re-enrollment process
3. Targeted financial assistance, including emergency grants
4. Program evaluation

**Funding Available**

Participating institutions will receive financial and technical assistance for outreach[[5]](#footnote-5), re-enrollment assistance, student support/staff and program evaluation. Student support includes assisting campuses with the cost of providing navigators for academic and other advising. Students will receive funds to assist them in completing an undergraduate program to the associate’s degree level, campus-level staff support and other assistance in overcoming barriers to completion. Funding is provided by the Lumina Foundation and the Minnesota Office of Higher Education for the period January 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020 with funds for students being available beginning in Fall 2018.

**Overview of the Request for Proposal**

Eligible Applicant Institutions are limited to Minnesota State two-year colleges. Up to four institutions, representing both Greater MN and Twin Cities, will be selected to participate in the pilot program beginning January 1, 2018 (student enrollment commencing fall 2018).

Student Grants: Pilot institutions (collectively) will support an estimated 500 returning adult learners. Each participating student will receive an annual grant of up to $2,000 beginning with the 2018-2019 academic year in addition to all other grant assistance received by the student including federal Pell Grant and Minnesota State Grants.

Selected institutions will be expected to:

1. Coordinate with system office to identify students aged 25-44 *who have completed 15 college credits,*[[6]](#footnote-6)

2. Conduct targeted outreach and re-enrollment of identified former students,

3. Provide intensive navigation for re-enrollment, degree selection and program planning, credit for prior learning (CPL), and support for completion,

4. Offer targeted financial assistance from the grant program and offer access to any needed community resources,

5. Assist the research staff of Minnesota State Central and the Office of Higher Education in evaluation of the program, and

6. Develop recommendations to support Minnesota’s colleges and universities in serving adult students.

**Important Dates:**

Proposal release date: November 6, 2017

Webinar for prospective institutions: November 9, 2017 – 11:00 am CAO/CSAO webinar

Proposal due date: December 4, 2017 by 5:00 pm

Final institutions announced: December 20, 2017

**Evaluation Factors (Scored based on points as indicated)**

The factors and weighting on which applications will be judged are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Application Component | Scoring |
| 1. Expressed understanding of pilot objectives
	1. Application question 1 (5 points)
	2. Application question 9 (5 points)
 | 10 points total |
| 1. Able to successfully identify adult learners, recognize barriers they face and willingness to address re-enrollment barriers
	1. Application question 2 (20 points)
 | 20 points total |
| 1. Able or willing to support the academic needs of adult learners by enacting best practice programs and policies
	1. Application question 3 (20 points)
	2. Application question 4 (10 points)
	3. Application question 5 (10 points)
	4. Application question 6 (20 points)
 | 60 points total |
| 1. Able or willing to address students’ non-academic needs by leveraging partnerships and programs maximizing student well-being
	1. Application question 7 (10 points)
	2. Application question 8 (10 points)
 | 20 points total |
|  | 110 points total |

**Timeline of Work for Selected Institutions**

* Identify former student population – January – February 2018
* Prepare outreach/student engagement and communications plan – March 2018
* Launch outreach – April 2018
* Student enrollment – Fall 2018

**Proposal Submission**

Submit proposals via email to:

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Attention: Meredith Fergus

meredith.fergus@state.mn.us

Questions regarding this RFP or your submission may be submitted in writing to:

Meredith Fergus, meredith.fergus@state.mn.us

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

To apply for the MN Reconnect program, complete the following:

Name of institution

Proposal contact: Name, Title, Email, Phone

Additional contact(s): Name, Title, Email, Phone

**Application**

*Questions in black type indicate ‘minimum’ qualifications for participating in the program; ‘preferred’ qualifications are indicated by an \*. You may answer Yes or No to many of these questions. Feel free to provide explanations for your answers.*

1. **Overview** (provide a brief answer of approximately 400 words)

Describe your institution and its adult learners

Describe the anticipated benefits and challenges your institution would receive by participating in the Adult Promise program

How would participation in this program address issues of equity in educational attainment at your institution?

How would you define success following participation in the program?

1. **The population of returning adult learners**

Who are the students at your institution who would benefit from this program?

What approach would you take to addressing potential barriers to re-enrollment permitting them to return to finish a degree? Example barriers include failure to meet satisfactory academic progress, loan defaults, financial holds, housing insecurity, or lack of child care.

\* How do you currently conduct outreach for adult learners? Provide examples, if available. What else would you like to do?

1. **Support for returning adult learners**

What support do you currently provide returning adult learners, such as extended service hours, targeted or enhanced financial aid counseling, individualized support for application and re-enrollment, etc.?

\*What best practices would your institution implement to serve returning adult learners that build from your existing capacity?

\*Describe how your institution would utilize navigators or designated student support staff for program participants.

1. **Prior Learning Assessment**

Describe options for awarding credit for prior learning on your institution that are appropriate for adult learners.

Do you have established institutional policies and procedures for awarding credit for prior learning? Y/N

\*Do you offer an individualized studies degree program? Y/N

\*Do you offer a course for portfolio development for credit for prior learning? Y/N

If not, describe your process for working with adult learners and prior learning assessment.

\*Have you completed a review with the system office for military courses and occupations that are equivalent to college courses? Y/N

1. **Predictable scheduling**

Describe your institution’s approach to predictable or structured scheduling. For example, how do you support students in having **predictable** schedules to complete their degrees and how do you ensure that courses needed for program completion are available?

\*Do you have **structured or guided pathways** for students that your institution would utilize for this student population? If yes, describe. If no, would you be willing to implement for this program?

1. **Student advising**

Describe how you manage your student advising currently. What tools do you utilize?

\*Does your advising process have an early warning or intrusive advising component? Y/N

If yes, please describe. If no, how would you add these components?

1. **Support for students’ non-academic needs, e.g. childcare, transportation, SNAP, MFIP and housing**

Do you (check all that apply):

* Provide written or verbal referrals to access services
* Have identified staff with expertise in helping students navigate and apply for these services
* \*Collaborate with service providers to provide services on campus
* \*Established partnerships with local agencies, food shelves, etc.
* \*Engage in intentional/proactive outreach to students about these issues or services
* \*Advocate with external organization on behalf of individual students seeking assistance
* Other or additional comments:
1. **Emergency assistance for students**

Does your institution offer emergency assistance grants (funds to cover unexpected financial emergencies) to students? Y/N

\*Which of the following best practices for emergency assistance programs do you follow?

\*Please check all that apply

* A process for defining a need for student emergency aid
* A quick and timely response to student crisis
* Coordinated efforts across departments for administering student emergency aid
* Students are aware of emergency aid through active and visible program marketing
* Students learn personal financial skills in follow-up to applying for or receiving emergency aid so they can prevent or plan for future emergencies

Note: The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) will be issuing a Request for Applications in the next few months for institutions seeking emergency assistance funding for students. OHE receives $175,000 annually for matching grants in this area.

1. **Evaluation**

This proposal will evaluate the following components:

* Number of students selected for outreach who re-enroll in college
* Credits accumulated by participants in pilot year 1/progress to completion
* Persistence to pilot year 2
* Completion of an undergraduate credential

From your perspective, indicate 3 or more measures of success that you would use to evaluate this program based on the strategies used by your institution to support adult learners.

\*What would your institution hope to learn from participating in the pilot?

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1. <https://www.tnreconnect.gov/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://learnmoreindiana.org/adult-learners/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.sheeo.org/projects/adult_promise/plans> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees Meeting Packet, November 2016, page 249-289 <http://www.minnstate.edu/board/materials/2016/november-packet-revised.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Outreach will be done collaboratively in conjunction with Minnesota State central offices and OHE [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Eligibility criteria for student selection**

	* MN resident students
	* Students who have not been enrolled at an institution for the two academic years prior to enrollment
	* Students enrolling in a certificate, diploma or degree program to be completed within two academic years
	* No prior credential obtained [↑](#footnote-ref-6)