OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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REQUEST FOR EXPANSION

MN RECONNECT

A Program to Support Adult Learners

MINNESOTA STATUTES 136A.123

DEADLINES:

Application – ~~April 3, 2020~~

New Application Deadline - May 1, 2020

PROGRAM PERIOD:

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

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REQUEST FOR EXPANSION OF MN RECONNECT

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) and Minnesota State Academic and Student Affairs division invite institutions to apply to participate in the expansion of MN Reconnect, a program to support adult learners at Minnesota State Colleges.

Program Overview

The Minnesota Legislature has awarded the Minnesota Office of Higher Education funding to support adult learners' return to college to complete a college certificate or degree. MN Reconnect focuses on re-engaging adult who have some college credits but no certificate or degree to return to college using financial incentives, addressing barriers, and providing one-on-one support. This program focuses efforts on closing the attainment gap within Minnesota. Similar programs have proven successful in Tennessee[1] and Indiana[2]. The program began as a pilot program with four institutions in 2018. This expansion proposal will allow an additional two to six institutions to participate in the program.

In 2016, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities served more than 254,000 students in credit courses[3]. Half of those students are students of color, American Indian students, first generation students or low-income students[4]. 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 students[4]. 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 allows Minnesota State Colleges to provide students another opportunity to achieve their educational dreams or create new ones. This program addresses issues of inequity within postsecondary completion; improving workforce preparation and helping students achieve their academic and professional goals. The racial, ethnic, economic, age and

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[1] https://www.tnreconnect.gov/
[2] http://learnmoreindiana.org/adult-learners/
[3] 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

experiential diversity of Minnesota students brings significant assets to campus life and creates a dynamic community for learning together from one another.

The MN Reconnect program has four components:

1. Targeted outreach and re-enrollment of former Minnesota State students, including people of color, the first in their families to go to college and low-income households
2. Navigation and support in the re-enrollment process addressing individual barriers
3. Targeted financial assistance, including emergency grants and funding to alleviate debt from financial holds, and
4. Program evaluation/reporting.

Funding Available

Funding is provided by the legislature through June 30, 2021. Funding is provided by the Minnesota Office of Higher Education for the academic year with grants for students being available fall 2020.

Eligible students enrolled at participating institutions will receive:

- Financial assistance - $1,000 MN Reconnect grants per student for each term enrolled for up to 6 terms in addition to all other grant assistance received by the student including Federal Pell Grant and Minnesota State Grants or local campus scholarships.
- Financial assistance – fund to pay off student financial holds prior to re-enrollment.

Participating institutions will receive:

- Communications products and support in promotion of MN Reconnect.
- Limited technical assistance for program participation and evaluation.
- Institutions will have access to limited funding to complete the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Adult 360 assessment (approximately $8000 per campus).
- Institutions having completed the CAEL assessment may receive funding for institutional support services.

Note: Funding for 2021 does not includes funds to pay for staff at this time.

Requirements and Eligibility

Institutions eligible to apply to participate in MN Reconnect include Minnesota State two-year colleges. Two-six additional institutions, representing both Greater MN and Twin Cities, will be selected to participate in MN Reconnect beginning May 2020 with student eligibility

commencing July 1, 2020. All institutions (collectively) will support an estimated 500 returning adult learners in fiscal year 2021.

Selected institutions will be expected to:

1. Coordinate with system office to identify former students aged 25-62 *who have completed 15 college credits,*[4] and engage in efforts to do outreach to and facilitate re-enrollment of identified students,

2. Provide intensive advising for re-enrollment, degree selection and program planning, credit for prior learning (CPL), and support for completion; no additional funding will be provided for staffing,

3. Offer targeted financial assistance from the grant program and if possible offer access to or referrals for any needed community resources or alternative funding,

4. Develop recommendations to support adult students, including people of color, the first in their families to go to college, and low-income students.

Priorities

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making. The Policy on Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities.

The proposals for the expansion of this program will:
- extend and strengthen persistence and completion of all adult learners;
- assist in the elimination of opportunity and student success gaps;
- support the development of innovative, adult learner education programs, services or practices; and
- Meet rigorous standards for creating environments that attract, retain and cultivate talent, including people of color, the first in their families to go to college, and low-income households.

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[4] **Eligibility criteria for student selection**
- MN resident students
- Students who have not been enrolled at an institution for the two academic years prior to re-enrollment
- Students enrolling in a certificate, diploma or degree program to be completed within two academic years
- No prior credential obtained (short term <16 credit certificates are acceptable)

Grant outcomes will include:

- Identification of at least 100 students who are eligible to re-enroll in college and utilize MN Reconnect grants,
- Identification of at least 100 students from lower completion groups who are eligible to enroll in the MN Reconnect program, and
- Increase the number of students persisting and completing college.

Timeline

Proposal release date: March 2, 2020
Webinar for prospective institutions: April 20, 2020, 3:00 PM (will be recorded)
Proposal due date: ~~April 3, 2020~~ NEW DUE DATE: May 1, 2020
Selected institutions notified: ~~April 17, 2020~~ NEW DATE: May 13, 2020
Institutions Identify former student population   May-June 2020
Institutions prepare outreach plan   June 2020
Institutions launch outreach plan   June 2020
Students begin enrollment   July 1, 2020

Application Submission

All applications must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. Central Time, on May 1, 2020.

Late applications will not be considered.

Applications must be submitted by email to:

Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Attention: Meredith Fergus

meredith.fergus@state.mn.us

Optional registration information meeting:

MN Reconnect Technical Assistance Zoom meeting

Monday, April 20, 3:00pm – 4:00pm

Meeting ID: 439 725 880

Password: 043359

Email: shelly.auldrich@minnstate.edu to register for the session. You will be provided with a confirmation email with a link for the Webinar.

Selection Criteria

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

Application Component	Scoring

1. Expressed understanding of program objectives
      a. Application question 1 (15 points)
      b. Application question 8 (5 points)
	20 points total

2. Able to successfully identify adult learners, including people of color, the first in their families to go to college and low-income households, recognize barriers they face and willingness to address re-enrollment barriers a. Application question 2 (20 points)	20 points total

3. Able or willing to support the academic needs of adult learners by enacting best practice programs and policies
      a. Application question 3 (20 points)
      b. Application question 4 (10 points)
      c. Application question 5 (15 points)
	45 points total

4. Able or willing to address students' non-academic needs by leveraging partnerships and programs maximizing student well-being
      a. Application question 6 (20 points)
      b. Application question 7 (10 points)
	30 points total

	115 points total

Contact Information

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Conflicts of Interest

We will take steps to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers per Minn. Stat.§16B.98 and Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making.

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- a grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the Department due to competing duties or loyalties
- a grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Public Data

Per Minn. Stat. § 13.599
- Names and addresses of grant applicants will be public data once proposal responses are opened.
- All remaining data in proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified in §13.37) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by Office of Higher Education or Minnesota State as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified in § 13.37) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).

Appendices

- Appendix A Institution Application for Participation

Application Content

You must submit the following in order for the application to be considered complete:

- Appendix A Institution Application for Participation

Appendix A: Institution Application for Participation

To apply for the MN Reconnect program, complete the following and attach additional sheets if necessary. Application is limited to 9 pages total:

> Name of institution

> Proposal contact: Name, Title, Email, Phone

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

Application must be approved by the College Senior Academic Officer or Senior Student Affairs Officer.

> Signature: _____ Role: SAO/SSAO   Date: _____

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 this grant 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?

2. **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 a diverse population of adult learners 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 successfully identify adult learners, including people of color, the first in their families to go to college and low-income households? How do you assist in recognizing barriers they face, and what is your capacity to reduce re-enrollment barriers? Provide examples, if available. What else would you like to do?

3. **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 like to implement to serve returning adult learners that build from your existing capacity?

* Have you completed an adult learner assessment? Y/N
    If yes, please detail how you would augment current adult learner support services on campus.
    If not, please describe what and how you would evaluate and augment adult support services on campus.

4. **Prior Learning Assessment**

    Describe options for awarding credit for prior learning at 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

5. **Student advising**

    Describe how you manage your student advising currently. What advising model do you utilize and how does your advising differ for adult learners?

    *Adult learners are served better with a designated advisor, how are you prepared for working with this population?

6. **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 on behalf of individual students with external organizations
   - ☐ Other or additional comments:

7. **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

8. **Evaluation**

This program will be evaluated by the following components:
- Number of students who re-enroll in college and utilize scholarships
- Number of students from our lower completion groups that enroll in the program
- Persistence and progress to completion
- 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.

*How would your institution benefit from participating in the scholarship program?