

Request for Proposal for the Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL)

Association of Community College Trustees
&
Education Strategy Group

October 1, 2021

You are invited to review and respond to this Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and Education Strategy Group (ESG) Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL). In submitting your proposal, you must fully comply with these instructions.

All proposal submittals must be received electronically on or before:

November 1, 2021 (5:00 PM EDT)

Attn: Annie Phillips
Associate Director - Education Strategy Group
aphillips@edstrategy.org

ACCT and ESG reserve the right to:

- Modify the RFP as described in this solicitation.
- Reject any proposal if it is conditional, incomplete, deviates from the specifications, or for any other reason at ACCT's and ESG's discretion.
- Withdraw or modify this solicitation at any time before or after submission of proposals, without prior notice and without liability or obligation of any kind or amount.
- Decide not to award any contract to any respondent responding to this solicitation.

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Project Description

With support from ECMC Foundation, ACCT and ESG will be implementing the Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL), a two-year initiative to support ten community college governance units (e.g. systems, districts, or colleges) to develop new or improved pathways between noncredit and credit programs. This initiative will leverage the framework for noncredit and credit pathway alignment in ESG's guide, [A More Unified Community College](#), to inform the design of a community of practice and set of technical assistance provisions. ACCT and ESG plan to use the findings from this initiative to build the case among community colleges that noncredit and credit alignment is critical for both students and institutional bottom lines.

1.1 Project Objectives

The NCAL project has two major objectives:

1. Help participating colleges get to full implementation (i.e. all five elements of a high-quality pathway are underway) of one (1) high-quality pathway between noncredit and credit programs and begin implementation on one (1) additional high-quality pathway between noncredit. Based on the framework developed by ESG, high-quality pathways will be defined as those that 1) treat noncredit students as equal to credit students; 2) provide automatic or semi-automatic credit determination for noncredit learning experiences; 3) promote the next step on the pathway through clear communications and advising; 4) align operations functions as demonstrated through joint leadership, shared data systems, and/or coordinated processes; and 5) remove barriers to transitioning related to finances, financial aid, registration, and others.
2. Measure, analyze and disseminate lessons-learned from a vanguard group of 10 community colleges working to better align noncredit and credit functions.

1.2 Expectations and supports for participating institutions

Participating institutions will be expected to:

1.) Set a vision for alignment by leveraging tools available through [A More Unified Community College](#), such as a detailed self-assessment.

2.) Increase cross-functional ownership for alignment between noncredit and credit programs through the strategic use of student voice and best practice examples.

3.) Develop new or improve current pathways between noncredit and credit functions which may include the following:

- Embedding noncredit credentials in credit programs;
- Improving noncredit advising structures to more formally communicate opportunities to earn credit;
- Conducting a policy audit to address the academic and administrative barriers that get in the way of students transitioning and acting to remove the barriers once they emerge;

- Exploring and laying the groundwork to align administrative functions such as governance structures, data systems, and registration; and/or
- Developing articulation or equivalency agreements to ensure all noncredit programs are deemed “credit-worthy”;

4.) Provide student-level data on relevant noncredit and credit programs at the beginning, middle and end of the project.

To achieve these objectives, the participating systems, districts, and colleges will have meaningful spaces to learn and receive support from their peers and national experts. Throughout the two-year grant period, participating institutions will receive a suite of technical assistance supports tailored based on specific governance structures. This assistance will include:

- **Community of practice meetings** to launch deep implementation of the work and foster relationships across practicing institutions. Community of practice meetings will occur on a quarterly or bi-annual basis and anchor the work across institutions;
- **On-site facilitation** of student and other stakeholder groups to understand the diverse needs and challenges of community college learners in noncredit and credit programs;
- **Access to national experts** who will assist with project alignment and provide examples of best practices in the field;
- **Personalized coaches** to assist institutional leaders with goal setting, action planning, student focus groups, developing constituency buy in, project management, and more; and
- **A small stipend** to offset the costs of data collection and submission.

Proposal Response

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to invite prospective community college governance units (e.g. systems, districts, or colleges) to submit a proposal to participate in the NCAL initiative. This RFP process is open to state systems, districts, and individual colleges in order to gather a diverse sample that captures the wide variety of community college governance models.

Through this competitive RFP process, ACCT and ESG will recruit ten community college governance units to participate in this initiative. Grants of \$3,000 - \$10,000 per governance unit will be offered to offset data collection costs. The size of the grants will be determined based on the size of the selected institutions. Successful participation in Year 1 initiative activities will be necessary to receive Year 2 funding.

Please provide the following information in your proposal, organized by section number:

1. An overview of your system, district, or college. Please include in this description an overview of student body demographics and note whether you are a rural-serving institution, a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), or a Tribal college. (200 words max)
2. The vision of your system, district, or college to promote alignment between noncredit and credit programs, including identification of a minimum of two programs of study in which your system, district or college would like to develop pathways. NOTE: While ACCT and ESG recognize significant opportunities for alignment exist in programs such as healthcare and information technology, extra consideration will be given to systems, districts or colleges that seek to develop or improve pathways within at least one program of study outside of these fields. (500 words max)
3. A description of your institution's existing efforts and assets to promote alignment between noncredit and credit programs. Your response should include a focus on assets related to the five elements of alignment identified in [A More Unified Community College](#) and included again below. (750 words max)
 - **Serve all students equally** to make the student experience across noncredit and credit programs more equitable.
 - **Ensure clear connections between noncredit credentials and relevant degree programs** for students to seamlessly stack credentials and receive strong advising regardless of status.
 - **Align departments and governance** to scale and sustain successful collaboration between noncredit and credit programs, and their faculty, staff, and students.
 - **Make noncredit programs credit-worthy or credit-based** to help students transition into degree programs and remain responsive to employer demands.
 - **Remove barriers to transition** by reducing administrative burden and bureaucratic structures that are often difficult for students to navigate.
4. A description of your institutions' capacity to measure and monitor student outcomes across both noncredit and credit programs. (200 words max) Please describe your ability to retrieve the following data points:
 - The number of noncredit pathways articulated for credit;
 - Enrollment for both noncredit and credit programs and the ability to disaggregate demographic information of students within those programs.
 - Completion in both noncredit and credit programs and the ability to disaggregate demographic information of students within those pathways.
 - Student transitions from articulated noncredit programs to credit programs and student transition from nonarticulated noncredit programs to credit programs.
5. Identification of cross-functional teams at your system, district, or college for your current or planned programs to promote noncredit and credit program alignment. Please include name and title for each team member. Teams must include at a minimum: academic and workforce

leadership, key faculty in non-credit and credit programs, and key administrators from the registrar and financial aid.

6. A signed copy of the Respondent Certification found at the end of this RFP.

RFP Process

1.1 RFP Schedule of Events

The following is a tentative schedule that will apply to this RFP, but may change in accordance with ACCT's or ESG's needs or unforeseen circumstances. Changes will be communicated by e-mail to all invited respondents. Information on the webinar to clarify goals and provide leaders with the chance to ask questions will be sent to invited respondents after the issuance of this RFP.

Issuance of RFP	October 1, 2021
Webinar for Potential Respondents with RFP Q&A	October 18, 2021 (See registration link below)
Respondent Questions	October 1 – October 20, 2021
RFP Closes 5:00 PM EDT	November 1, 2021
Final Award Notification	November 5, 2021

October 18 Webinar Registration Link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8YTIK36aS7uibhUHwCO_bA

1.2 Respondent's Understanding of the RFP

In responding to this RFP, the respondent accepts full responsibility to understand the RFP in its entirety, and in detail, including making any inquiries to ACCT and ESG as necessary to gain such understanding. ACCT and ESG reserve the right to disqualify any respondent who demonstrates less than such understanding. Further, ACCT and ESG reserve the right to determine, at their discretion, whether the respondent has demonstrated such understanding. That right extends to cancellation of award, if award has been made. Such disqualification and/or cancellation shall be at no fault, cost, or liability whatsoever to ACCT or ESG.

1.3 Good Faith Statement

All information provided by ACCT and ESG in this RFP is offered in good faith. Individual items are subject to change at any time. ACCT and ESG make no certification that any item is without error. ACCT and ESG are not responsible or liable for any use of the information or for any claims asserted therefrom.

1.4 Communication

Verbal communication, apart from communication in the webinar for potential respondents, shall not be effective unless formally confirmed in writing by an authorized representative from ACCT or ESG. In no case shall verbal communication govern over written communication, including email.

1.4.1 Respondents' Inquiries. Applicable terms and conditions herein shall govern communications and inquiries between ACCT/ESG and respondents as they relate to this RFP. Inquiries, questions, and requests for clarification related to this RFP are to be posed in the webinar for potential respondents or directed in writing via email to:

Attention: Annie Phillips,
Associate Director - Education Strategy Group
aphillips@edstrategy.org

Questions must be received on or before October 20, 2021 (5:00 PM EDT)

Respondents shall recommend to ACCT and ESG any discrepancies, errors, or omissions that may exist within this RFP. Respondents shall also recommend to ACCT and ESG any enhancements, which might be in ACCT's and ESG's best interests. These must be submitted via email and can be included in the proposal.

1.4.2 Addenda: ACCT and ESG will make a good-faith effort to provide an email response to each question or request for clarification that requires addenda within three (3) business days. All questions, answers, and addenda will be shared with all respondents.

1.5 Proposal Submission

Proposals must be delivered via email to:

Annie Phillips, Associate Director - Education Strategy Group
aphillips@edstrategy.org

on or prior to **November 1, 2021 (5:00 PM EDT)**

1.6 Criteria for Selection

The evaluation of each response to this RFP will be based around the goal of securing a diverse and representative cohort of institutions to participate in the Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Demographic information on the student body of those applying to current programs, including factors such as MSI status, institutional focus on transfer, and rural-serving criteria.
2. Vision for alignment between noncredit and credit programs and identification of programs of study.
3. Experience with and assets to promote alignment across the 5 elements of the framework.

4. Ability to describe the overall approach to contribute to the NCAL initiative and what separates your system, district, or college from others with regard to promoting alignment between noncredit and credit programs.
5. Composition of cross-functional teams in response to the criteria identified in this RFP.
6. ACCT member status (preference will be given to ACCT member institutions).
7. Quality of data in noncredit programs and demonstrated ability to track students across noncredit and credit programs.

Additional Terms & Conditions

The following additional terms and conditions apply to this RFP:

1. ACCT and ESG reserve the right to require any respondent to enter into a non-disclosure agreement.
2. The RFP does not obligate ACCT or ESG to pay for any costs, of any kind whatsoever that may be incurred by a respondent or any third parties, in connection with the preparation of a proposal.
3. The respondent should not use any intellectual property of ACCT or ESG including, but not limited to, all logos, registered trademarks, or trade names of ACCT or ESG at any time without the prior written approval of ACCT or ESG as appropriate.
4. All accepted responses shall become the property of ACCT and ESG.
5. This RFP and the respondent's proposal shall be governed by the laws of the District of Columbia.
6. ACCT and ESG shall not be liable to any respondent, person, or entity for any losses, expenses, costs, claims, or damages of any kind:
 - Arising out of, by reason of, or attributable to, the respondent responding to this RFP; or
 - As a result of the use of any information, error, or omission contained in this RFP document or provided during the RFP process.
7. This RFP, any addenda to it, and any attached schedules, constitute the entire RFP.

Respondent Certification

This certification attests to the respondent's awareness and agreement to the content of the **Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab RFP** and all accompanying calendar schedules and provisions contained herein.

The respondent must ensure that the following certificate is duly completed and correctly executed by an authorized officer of the respondent.

This proposal is submitted in response to the **Noncredit and Credit Alignment Lab RFP** issued by ACCT and ESG. The undersigned is a duly authorized officer, and hereby certifies that:

(Respondent Name)

agrees to comply with the terms, conditions, and provisions of the RFP and any addenda thereto in the event of an award. Exceptions are to be noted within the submitted proposal. The submitted proposal shall remain in effect for a period of sixty (60) calendar days as of November 1, 2021.

Signature of Authorized Officer:

Name: _____ Title: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____