

Developing a Rural Educator Academy (REA)

Project Title: Developing a Rural Educator Academy

Overview: The Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA), seeks expertise to design and pilot a professional development program to enhance the skills that faculty, staff, and leaders at CCA member colleges need to improve rural student outcomes. The Rural Educator Academy is a unique, two-pronged approach to professional development that will yield sustained improvements in rural student success. Recognizing that changes must occur at the institutional level and at the course-level, the Rural Educator Academy will be designed as two complementary experiences: (1) a REA for institutional leaders, and (2) a REA for faculty and student services staff. Through this professional development Academy, CCA will create a community of practice across Appalachia focused on ways to improve student success for low-income students and students of color. See **Appendix A** for additional information about CCA. See **Appendix B** for expanded information about the expectations for the proposal.

RFP Purpose:

Through this Request for Proposal (RFP), CCA is seeking proposals from learning and development organizations to develop the curriculum for the REA with expertise in the community college setting. The development will focus on two goals.

- Goal 1: Design a professional development curriculum in the form of a Rural Educator Academy.
 - Define core competencies for rural student success.
 - Create the two-pronged REA curriculum
 - Assessments and Desired Outcomes
- Goal 2: Pilot Rural Educator Academy curriculum.
 - Faculty and Student Affairs pilot and Leaders pilot
 - Capstone Project
 - Data analysis emphasis

Project work will commence on or before February 1, 2022. The anticipated total budget for the work outlined in the proposal would be in a range of \$200,000 to \$225,000. The budget for curriculum development includes train the trainer for a minimum of six individuals and content accessible through an online delivery platform. The target timeframe for deliverables is: DACUM complete Apr. 2022; Curriculum framework complete Oct. 2022; Train the Trainer Nov. 2022; Pilot Participant Orientation Jan. 2023; Pilot Delivery Feb. 2023 – June 2023; Curriculum refinement delivered and uploaded Aug. 2023; final assessments and reports Sep. 2023; Project close out and delivery of final materials and reports Oct. 2023. This project is made possible through support from the Ascendium Education Group.

Outcomes and Deliverables:

Rural Educator Academy (REA) Project Outcomes

- Develop a Rural Educator Academy for leaders, faculty, and student services staff at CCA member colleges across Appalachia.
- Pilot Rural Educator Academy modules.
- Disseminate learnings and Rural Educator Academy pilot findings.
- Prepare the project deliverables for full scale-implementation as an immediate next step.

Deliverables:

1. Develop the Rural Educator Academy (REA) Curriculum.
 - Define core competencies using DACUM.

- Design REA curriculum for leaders and REA curriculum modules for faculty and student services staff.
 - Develop assessments to evaluate competency achievement.
2. Conduct pilots of the REA curriculum.
 - Pilot the REA curriculum for faculty and student services staff.
 - Pilot the REA curriculum for leaders.
 - Collect formative assessments for each curriculum module.
 - Revise the REA curriculum using feedback from formative assessment.
 3. Disseminate best practices and lessons learned.
 - Provide materials for dissemination of project goals and progress reports.
 - Provide report for dissemination of DACUM outcomes.
 - Provide reports focused on each prong of the REA curriculum, assessments, best practices, and lessons learned.

Timeline:

1. Design a professional development curriculum in the form of a Rural Educator Academy.

The program will develop participants’ competencies in teaching rural students and improving student outcomes. Further, the Rural Educator Academy will build institutional capacity to effect sustainable change throughout institutions. By developing leadership competencies through participation in the REA, leaders will learn strategies and become more capable of enacting and sustaining changes that will produce improved student outcomes.

1. Develop the REA curriculum – February 1, 2022 - January 1, 2023

- Deliverable 1: Curriculum for faculty and student services staff
- Deliverable 2: Curriculum for leadership
- Deliverable 3: Select and load content into online delivery platform
- Deliverable 4: Development of assessments for curriculum and capstone

Milestones:

- a. Review goals, expectations, and project timelines – January 2022
- b. Identify core competencies using a DACUM process April 2022
- c. Design REA for faculty and student services staff (virtual and in-person experiences) October 2022
- d. Design the leadership REA learning experiences (virtual and in-person experiences) October 2022
- e. Select and load content into online delivery platform October 2022
- f. Develop assessments October 2022
- g. Deliver Train-the-Trainer November 2022

2. Pilot the Rural Educator Academy curriculum

Once the curriculum is developed, a select group of faculty and student services staff and of leaders will participate in a REA curriculum pilot. Each pilot group will complete virtual offerings throughout the spring semester of 2023. Participants will provide formative feedback after each offering which will be used to refine the REA curriculum. At the conclusion of the pilot, curricular revisions will be made, resulting in a final REA curriculum product that will be ready for full-scale implementation.

- Deliverable 1: Conduct Train the Trainer November 2022
- Deliverable 2: Conduct REA Curriculum Pilots – January 2023 - June 2023
- Deliverable 3: Refine REA curriculum– July 2023- August 2023
- Deliverable 4: Final assessments and reports – September 15, 2023
- Deliverable 5: Deliver REA curriculum final products– October 31, 2023

Information Requested

Proposals must be submitted to [Dr. Anne McNutt](#), [Dr. Brian Swords](#), and [Dr. Gina Mounfield](#) no later than December 17, 2021. Please copy all three individuals indicated.

Proposals must be complete to be considered. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

Proposals must contain:

- Point of Contact Information/Organization Information
- Resume for each primary assigned facilitator/expert
- Capability statement that demonstrates you/your organization’s experience and ability to deliver the DACUM, curriculum development and assessment services
- A writing sample and one slide deck that clearly conveys knowledge of key components of this RFP and experience delivering content to educators in a post-secondary environment
- Proposed project management plan for completing the deliverables by milestones indicated in the RFP
- Budget
- Short budget justification
- Signed statement (see below) attesting to the accuracy of this proposal, the accuracy of your prior organizational capacity statement, and you/your organization’s ability to deliver DACUM, curriculum, train-the-trainer activities, selection, and upload of content to online platform, and assessment

Sample statement: I certify that this proposal reflects my organization’s best estimate of the cost, capability and capacity to fulfill the requirements of the RFP. The information in the proposal is accurate and complete as of the date of my signature.

Proposals will be selected based on the following criteria:

1. Capability of organization to deliver – 20 points
2. Project management plan – 15 points
3. Availability and capacity to deliver on stated timeline – 15 points
4. Alignment of organization with mission of CCA – 10 points
5. Evaluation of slide deck and writing sample – 20 points
6. Evidence of research-based and data-informed development practices – 20 points

All work done for the creation and delivery of the Rural Educator Academy will be considered work for hire. Prior to commencement of work the development organization and any of their subcontractors will assign all rights to materials produced to CCA.

Sample statement: _____ hereby assigns to CCA all _____'s rights, including copyrights, in all deliverables and other works prepared by the _____ for the Rural Educator Academy. _____ shall promptly sign and deliver any documents and take any actions that CCA reasonably requests to establish the rights assigned to CCA under this work for hire statement.

Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA) Organization:

An affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), CCA provides programs and services for its members responsive to the unique cultural, geographic, and economic challenges facing the Appalachian Region. Colleges eligible for membership in the CCA are those public institutions primarily offering a two-year associate degree or diploma and located within the Appalachian region defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

The vast majority of CCA's members in 2020-2021 are rural community colleges. Three state systems of community colleges—Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia—and the National Association of Community Colleges for Entrepreneurship (NACCE) are also members. According to the 2018 IPEDS report, the 82 CCA rural and rural serving colleges served over 300,000 students annually. Spanning the 13 state Appalachian region, CCA has 86 member institutions which work with students who face unique challenges: high poverty rates, low college participation, low graduation rates for those attending college, obstacles for social and economic mobility, food insecurities, and issues with equity.

Serving the Appalachian region for almost 30 years, the Community Colleges of the Appalachia (CCA) advances the common interests of its member institutions and the needs of their communities. The CCA supports the growth and development of its member colleges, collectively builds greater awareness of the importance of higher education, and advances an agenda that reflects the shared needs of its members. The organization's overarching goal is to provide programs and services that are responsive to the unique cultural, geographic, and economic challenges and opportunities facing the Appalachian region.

- The CCA engages member colleges by offering an annual conference where institutions provide professional development opportunities by sharing best practices in community, economic, and workforce development.
- CCA offers a fall conference, hosted by one of the member colleges in the more northern portions of Appalachia to provide professional development opportunities for CCA members.
- The CCA partners with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to provide professional development opportunities and for member colleges to engage in collaborative grants that address regional economic challenges.

Through these networking efforts, the CCA is recognized as the premier organization for providing professional development, convening like-minded leaders, and partnering with federal agencies and national organizations to address issues and capitalize on opportunities in the Appalachian region.

Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA) Strategic Plan

CCA's Strategic Plan contains a single goal: For its members, CCA will provide excellent programs and services that are responsive to the unique cultural, geographic, and economic challenges and opportunities facing the Appalachian region as well as being supportive of the goals of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).

CCA has developed four key strategies for the organization to fulfill its goal:

- Engage member colleges
- Provide services
- Nurture partnerships with professional associations and with businesses committed to the development of the ARC region
- Create sustainability of the organization through membership retention and other initiatives

In developing the curriculum for the Rural Educator Academy, CCA will employ each of these strategies. The work proposed in this project clearly engages member colleges and provides them services, assisting them in serving their students more effectively. In addition, the Rural Educator Academy will further CCA's partnerships and assist in creating sustainability of the organization.

Context:

Appalachia concurrently poses immense challenges and enormous opportunities. As defined by the U.S. Congress, Appalachia is comprised of 420 counties, across 13 states consisting of 205,000 square miles from northern Mississippi to southern New York and is home to 25 million people. Throughout Appalachia wherever community colleges are located, they play a central role in addressing key issues and in providing hope for the future, for a better way of life for the students, for their families, and for their communities. And they each do this in unique ways, with their program mix reflecting the ways that the individual college meets the needs of its communities and constituents. But too often in rural Appalachia the respective college's administration, faculty, and staff fail to grasp the breadth and depth of issues confronting low income, underserved individuals. Historically on most social, economic, education, and health indicators, Appalachia has not fared well. The region lags, with high rates of poverty, poor economic mobility, and low college participation and completion rates. A higher share of residents in Appalachia experience intergenerational poverty compared to other regions of the country.

[The Appalachian Region: A Data Overview from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey - Appalachian Regional Commission \(arc.gov\)](#)

The region's poverty rate is 15.8% compared to 14.1% for that of the United States. Appalachia's median household income of \$49,747 is only 82.5% of that (\$60,293) of the United States. Educational attainment lags in the region. While 32.9% of adults 25-64 in the United States hold a bachelor's degree, only 25.7% of those adults 25-64 in Appalachia hold a bachelor's degree. Data is available for the entire region but not specifically for rural areas.

Increasing post-secondary educational attainment is one solution to improving opportunity to move up the economic ladder. Earning a college degree is the strongest predictor of whether a person is able to move up the economic ladder. However, low-income students and those from low-income parents are less likely to enroll and less likely to complete college when compared to their middle- and high-income counterparts, even after accounting for differences in academic preparation (Chetty, Friedman, Saez, & Yagan, 2020).

In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, CCA remained a vibrant organization, retained over 80 member institutions, and persisted in advancing the organization's goals and serving the Appalachian region. Member institutions banded together to adapt professional development offerings, successfully delivering two virtual conferences over the past year. During board meetings and conferences, members discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on their institutions, and the majority of discussions centered on the impact on students. The global pandemic disproportionately affected low-income students and students of color, renewing the CCA's sense of urgency and adding new perspectives for the economic and social challenges across Appalachia. Members found the pandemic amplified long-standing problems, specifically lower retention and greater achievement gaps for underserved rural college students. After examining CCA's strategies and practices, members uncovered three problems.

1. Relatively few faculty and student services staff attend CCA conferences, resulting in these front line employees not fully grasping the Appalachian region's challenges.
2. No focused professional development is offered for faculty and staff to learn strategies to improve rural student success.

3. CCA does not offer leadership development focused on preparing member college leaders to enact systemic changes required to support rural student success.

The American Association of Community Colleges, the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement, and even the Chronicle of Higher Education have moved forward with initiatives to address these important areas for our nation's rural community colleges. While CCA member colleges understand their role in addressing these inequities, CCA needs to assure that key faculty who often lack an in-depth understanding and appreciation of these issues are given the skills to address these issues.

The Opportunity for a New Way of Working

Building upon its work in professional development for members, CCA will create and pilot the curriculum for a Rural Educator Academy, which when fully implemented a major portion to be offered in conjunction with its annual and fall conferences to build capacity of the community college faculty, student services staff to better support underserved rural students. A parallel series of activities will be developed for leaders to build institutional capacity required to bring strategies to scale and support systemic change. Structured in cohorts, the Academy represents a novel way for CCA to provide professional development, creating a community of practice focused on rural student success.

By offering cohesive professional development activities, this project seeks to develop faculty, student services staff, and administration so that their work will increase their college's capacity to incorporate new strategies that improve persistence and completion. College employees report the need for professional development to design and implement strategies to help students learn the skills and develop the behaviors required to be successful in school (Delasandro, 2016). Offering a Rural Educator Academy will create a forum for those charged with teaching and supporting community college students to learn how to better serve rural, lower income students and design interventions that will improve retention and completion rates.

The Community Colleges of the Appalachian Region (CCA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Community Colleges of the Appalachian Region does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to, the appointment to and termination from its Board of Directors, hiring and firing of staff or contractors, selection of volunteers, selection of vendors, and providing of services.

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>

Developing the Rural Educator Academy

The Rural Educator Academy is a unique, two-pronged approach to professional development that will yield sustained improvements in rural student success. Recognizing that changes must occur at the institutional level and at the course-level, the Rural Educator Academy will be designed as two complementary experiences: (1) a REA for institutional leaders, and (2) a REA for faculty and student services staff. For the purpose of this project, institutional leaders are community college presidents and senior leaders in academic and student affairs. Institutional leaders have the authority to change or create new policies and allocate resources across the institution. Faculty are defined as those charged with delivering instruction, and student services staff are defined as those employees who are charged with providing co-curricular programming and student support.

Structured as a cohort experience, the Rural Educator Academy will provide professional development for leaders, faculty and student services staff to create strategies and develop tactics to improve rural student outcomes, specifically for lower income students and students of color.

- The REA for institutional leaders will facilitate the development of competencies to lead organizational change necessary to improve rural student success.
- The REA for faculty and student services staff will emphasize teaching and learning strategies and tactics to improve student outcomes for lower income rural students and students of color.

Project Goals

The overarching purpose of the Developing a Rural Educator Academy project is to cultivate the competencies and skills required for Appalachian community college faculty, student services staff, and for leaders to improve rural student outcomes, particularly for lower income students and students of color. This project's goals focus on developing the REA curriculum and piloting the curriculum.

Goal 1: Design a professional development curriculum in the form of a Rural Educator Academy.

To develop the curriculum, this project will use Fink's (2013) design model comprised of three design components: goals/competencies, learning activities, and assessment. Starting with the end in mind, a set of core competencies will be defined that will guide the development of the REA programming and assessments. Next, REA curriculum activities will be created to facilitate participant learning. Assessments will be designed to measure participants' learning and to evaluate REA outcomes.

A. Define core competencies for rural student success.

The first step is to define a set of core competencies, forming a competency model that will be used to design a professional development curriculum and accompanying assessments that will measure the Academy's success. REA competencies are the knowledge, skills, and leadership capabilities needed to enact and sustain institutional changes to support rural student success.

Community colleges often use the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process for occupational analyses when developing programs. Accordingly, this project will use the DACUM process to define core competencies for the REA curriculum. Broadly, the process will begin with evaluating the purpose and goals of the Academy. Next, a DACUM facilitator, in collaboration with CCA staff, will conduct focus groups comprised of faculty, student services staff, and community college leaders to define core competencies. Once a set of core competencies is defined, the facilitator and CCA staff will conduct competency validation sessions, resulting in a final set of competencies.

The DACUM competency process will yield (1) a collection of core competencies required for faculty and student services staff that results in strong rural student outcomes, and (2) a collection of core competencies required for leaders to identify and enact student success strategies at scale in rural community colleges.

B. Create the REA curriculum

CCA will create a two-pronged professional development program (1) for community college faculty and student services staff, and (2) for leaders to produce a greater understanding of the depth of issues of social mobility, economic mobility, and equity facing underserved students. Using the core competencies defined from the DACUM process, the curriculum will focus on strategies and tactics that improve outcomes for low-income students and students of color and increasing institutional capacity to implement systemic change required to realize greater rural student success.

The following criteria will guide the development of the REA curriculum:

- Develop a deeper understanding of how poverty and rurality influence the mindsets of low-income students and disproportionately affect students of color.
- Introduce theoretical information and practical strategies that participants can use to improve course completion, persistence, and graduation.
- Incorporate use of college's completion data and data from other sources like the National Student Clearinghouse, disaggregated by ethnicity and socioeconomic status, to support to support potential learning and completion challenges at their college.
- Create opportunities to develop skills to assist students to be successful.
- Create opportunities for leaders to learn strategies to enact systemic change required to realize improved student outcomes across their institutions.
- Facilitate working in college teams and with individuals from teams from other colleges to develop competencies.
- Facilitate designing and implementing a capstone project at each participating college.

Curriculum Design Elements - The curriculum will consist of a series of structured learning events and assignments that will develop participants' capabilities to improve rural student outcomes. CCA envisions that the curriculum will frame problems of rural student success through an evaluation of regional and local college data. For example, participants will evaluate their college's completion data and data from other sources like the National Student Clearinghouse. These data will be disaggregated by ethnicity and socioeconomic status. As a result, participants will identify learning and completion challenges at their college. Participants will complete learning activities that incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion principles to understand persistent gaps in college success. Leaders will also examine institutional data and learn change management strategies that they can use at their institutions to drive and sustain change.

C. Assessments and Desired Outcomes

As an integral part of the curriculum, assessments will also be designed. Formative assessments will be designed throughout the REA to evaluate participants' learning progress. The summative assessment will involve the development and implementation of capstone projects that will improve completion, positioning the students to successfully progress in their educational programs, graduate, and enter the workforce. The Rural Educator Academy will lead to improved rural student outcomes, including persistence, course completion, and ultimately graduation and gainful employment. To ensure sustainability, the developer will offer a train-the-trainer to the Rural Educator Academy's project manager and an additional five individuals associated with CCA member colleges to deliver the curriculum.

Goal 2: Pilot Rural Educator Academy curriculum.

Preceding full-scale implementation, a small group of faculty and student services staff, and another small group of leaders will participate in a curriculum pilot. The purpose of the pilot is to deliver the curriculum and learning activities to assess the curriculum's effectiveness. The professional development program will be delivered using virtual and in-person modes. Small teams from each college will complete a series of learning activities and provide feedback to the curriculum developer and CCA staff. While this project will not involve full-scale implementation of the REA, feedback will be used to refine the curriculum, resulting in a refined REA model that will be ready for full-scale implementation as an immediate next step.

Participants will engage with virtual seminars around broad themes on rural student success, equitable outcomes, and learning strategies. The curriculum will include research-based frameworks with accompanying best-practice strategies. Seminars will be designed to facilitate participants to create a unique capstone project to be implemented at their community college. By designing the Academy in a hybrid format, the on-line components permit regional participation, and an in-person experience will continue as a key component of the CCA Annual Conference.

The curriculum to be developed for faculty and student services personnel will include capstone projects which will result in measurable improvements in student outcomes at each college. Curriculum will also include how student outcomes data will not only be used at the respective colleges, but also aggregated for CCA participating colleges as an illustration of a regional impact. Desired outcomes for the Academy will include changes in course completion rates, student persistence, and student completion. Data will be disaggregated by socioeconomic status and ethnicity to assess the extent to which achievement gaps were diminished.

The Rural Educator Academy curriculum will be designed to effect positive changes in campus culture by impacting how faculty work with their students and each other. The curriculum will provide a deep understanding of issues facing rural students, introduce effective learning strategies that address these issues, and employ a team-based approach to implement capstone projects. Thus, the faculty and student services staff develop a new way of working that leads to improved student outcomes.

The competency framework will provide the structure for designing the REA curriculum, and the competency framework can be a model for other rural-serving regions across the U.S. to create strategies that improve rural student success.

Evaluation of Curriculum and Project Goals:

Evaluating the development of the Rural Educator Academy will include formative and summative assessments of the Academy and participant feedback. The project will engage a third-party learning and development organization to design curriculum and curriculum assessments. This organization will also design summative assessments for the capstone assignments that will serve as the signature work from the Academy.

Executive Board:

We will assess our progress towards achieving project goals using an Executive Board comprised of a subset of the CCA Board. The Executive Board will be responsible for conducting periodic meetings to track completion of the curriculum, ensure pilot participants are identified and that pilots are completed, and oversee the completion of progress reports as required by the grantor.

Developing the REA curriculum will include piloting the REA. The evaluation will incorporate the following established student success metrics developed by the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Student Data Partnership as outcomes measures when the REA is fully implemented. Student outcomes will be tracked using cohorts defined by the academic term the capstone projects were implemented.

- Course completion: completion of a course with a grade of A, B, or C.
- Persistence to Next Term: The percentage of students who entered at any point during an academic year and who were retained to the subsequent academic term by re-enrolling or completing a credential from the cohort institution.
- Retention to Next Year: The percentage of students who entered at any point during an academic year and who were retained to the second academic year by re-enrolling or completing a credential from the cohort institution.
- Completion: The percentage of students who completed a credential within 150% of expected program time.

Future Flexibility, Capacity, and Currency:

The work from this project creates opportunities for CCA to replicate the Academy structure to meet additional member needs. The core competencies used to develop the REA can be used as a starting point for developing future professional development academies. Additional modules of competencies beyond lower-income and students of color may be used to center other professional development needs of CCA members. In a plug-and-play fashion, varying frameworks can be inserted into the Rural Educator Academy as new needs emerge. CCA can also replicate the Rural Educator Academy model to provide professional development and facilitate the implementation of projects that will meet the goals of the national change initiatives and its members' goals. Numerous member institutions are engaged in regional and national change efforts, including Achieving the Dream and the AACC's Guided Pathways work. These national efforts call for community colleges to evaluate their local data, design and implement changes, and assess the extent to which those changes impact student outcomes. One significant gap in these models is providing professional development contextualized for **rural colleges**. Accordingly, CCA can leverage our new faculty development Academy model to deliver contextualized professional development that advances the collective needs of its member institutions.

This project will use research findings to develop the Rural Educator Academy curriculum, providing participants with new competencies and a forum to design and implement local interventions to improve student outcomes. The REA structure will be designed as a scalable framework that can be used to offer other professional development needs. The competency model created in this project serves as a foundation for future professional development offerings. This project fills a gap between research and praxis while providing a framework to design and implement scalable interventions that are customized to regional and local needs.

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