Request for Proposals
Credentials of Value in High School

Proposals are due no later than September 1, 2023, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time.

Background

It is part of Gary's and Ednium's vision that students graduating from high school have the skills, experiences, and relationships to live choice-filled lives. We, Gary and Ednium, believe **all** students graduating from high school with a credential of value[1] is critical to enabling that, whether they go on to pursue formal postsecondary options, or not. While a high school diploma used to be a path to a family-sustaining wage, today that's no longer true.[2] We imagine a world again where high school graduates can count on their high school diploma to provide for their families, propel them economically, and set them up for future learning and growth.

Importantly, this work is about **all** students. We know that high school credentialing programs have, at times, had an ugly history of tracking based on perceived ability, often along racial lines. As anti-racist organizations, Gary and Ednium are committed not only to disrupting that history, but to actively counteracting it. When **all** students learn skills and gain knowledge that lead to family sustaining wages, regardless of the postsecondary path they take, all students are better prepared for success.

Ednium has been working with local high school graduates to understand their experiences and unmet needs. Economic stability and access to ongoing wage growth are amongst the top issues facing our young people, regardless of their path after high school. In the words of the young adults with whom Ednium engaged, having a credential of value means:

- *If I don't go to college, I have the means to take care of my family.*
- *If I do go to college, it improves my chances of finishing and affording my degree.*
- *When I graduate from college, I have an additional set of skills that expand my employment options, allow me to be more entrepreneurial, and enable me to take more risks.*

In this way, we believe early credentials and skill-based learning are not alternatives to college, but rather foundational to college preparation, completion, and beyond. Also importantly, we heard this type of learning can and should be hands-on, relevant, and really fun!

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[1] Credentials that command at least $20/hr + benefits in high demand, high career growth sectors. Optimally, these credentials count toward high school graduation and advantage students in college enrollment and credit-building.

[2] Colorado's Strategic Plan for Higher Education: Building Skills for an Evolving Economy

As such, our shared goal is to ensure *all* high school students are afforded the skills and tools for economic self-sufficiency as a minimum threshold to access the broadest menu of post-secondary opportunities.

Description

In partnership with Ednium, The Alumni Collective: we seek to identify a cohort of four to six exemplar high schools, alongside their systems[3] partners, across Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson counties that are providing a substantial number of their students with a credential of value as part of their high school experience. This cohort will work together to learn from experts and one another, expand their model to more students, collect data on their program impact, and with time, inform potential changes to policy that enable credentials of value for ALL high school students.

Objectives

Our organizations' shared goal is to inform future policy and systems changes that enable high value credentials for *all* high schools students. The grant term will be 18 months (primarily spring semester 2024 through school year 2024-2025). Throughout the grant term, grantees will be working towards the following shared objectives:

- *Shared learning towards greater impact:* During the grant term, grantees will learn from each other and from local and national experts to 1) further their program quality and impact and 2) inform a long-term policy and systems environment that supports their programming.
- *Program expansion:* During the grant term, grantees will be working to remove barriers to more students accessing their credential-of-value programming.
- *Build & use data:* We know there is a lack of data infrastructure that connects high school experiences with postsecondary outcomes. During the grant term, grantees will be working with technical assistance providers to deeply understand the experiences of their participating students as well as measure the outcomes, qualitative and quantitative, that drive program improvement and inform future policy and public investments.

Grant Awards

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[3] When we reference systems leaders here, and systems support throughout, we are referencing District-level or charter management/board leaders. Applications require a supportive system leader to participate alongside schools in shared learning meetings, to be convened approximately six times over the 18-month grant period.

A $70,000-$90,000 grant will be awarded to each selected high school or system to support our shared goals:

1. <u>Cohort Shared Learning</u>: We value your time, and anticipate some of the grant budget will be used to make it possible for key school and systems leaders to attend shared learning events (through extra duty pay, stipends, general overhead, etc.). Please include in your budget the cost for approximately 2 staff members to participate in approximately 6 full day learning experiences over the 18 month grant term.

2. <u>Model Refinement & Expansion:</u> We anticipate the majority of the grant budget will be spent on addressing key barriers to scale as identified by the grantee.[4] Illustrative examples (certainly not intended to be inclusive of all ideas) may include:
   - Adding new credentials/pathways and/or expanding existing ones to more students
   - Addressing barriers to student uptake (e.g., scheduling, course sequencing, messaging, etc.)
   - Developing stronger employer or post-secondary trainer relationships
   - Providing and/or expanding student wrap-around services
   - Providing teacher professional development for greater credentialing capacity
   - Developing greater internal data capacity to inform program efficacy and scale

3. <u>Data & Outcomes Tracking:</u> All grantees will work with Ednium and a quantitative technical assistance provider to better understand the outcomes of their participants, ranging from student experience and alumni life, to employment and wage outcomes. (See the services section on the following page for more detail.) We anticipate approximately 5% of the grant budget will be used to support data building and long-term outcomes tracking.

Application budgets should be commensurate with the scope of work proposed and should not exceed the amount noted above. We anticipate awarding between 4-6 grants through this specific RFP. Please note that these are one time grants, which we anticipate to be executed over 18 months.

Proposal Requirements
We are specifically looking for program partners that:
   - Have identified barriers to serving more students and have a plan to address those barriers

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[4] When we say scale, we do not mean all students in a school or system would be experiencing a credential of value in the grant term, but that schools would be working to remove key barriers that allow a greater number of students to participate.

- Are excited about sharing and collecting more data on their program
- Have invested leaders at the school and system level
- Are excited to learn from other metro area schools, system-leaders and local and national experts

Foundationally, programs must:
- Have been operating their credentialing program for at least two years in order to have outcomes on their prior cohort(s)
- Issue credentials that lead to a family sustaining wage of at least $20/hr with healthcare benefits in a high-demand, high-career growth industry
- Have some student outcome data and are interested in getting a lot more
- Have at least one strong employer and/or post-secondary training partner

Priority will be given to proposals that:
- Are led by or led in partnership with BIPOC communities
- Have demonstrated systems-level sponsorship and support - we will expect appropriate system-level partner engagement at different points in the work.

We will not consider funding proposals that:
- Are not aligned with the spirit and intent of this RFP
- Are outside of the four county area (Adams, Arapahoe, Denver and Jefferson)
- Are not at the high school level
- Cannot demonstrate that at least one of their credential pathways leads to family-sustaining wages
- Are serving private schools (public schools of all types - traditional, alternative education campus, charter, district-managed and innovation are welcome to apply)
- Do not have at least one employer and/or postsecondary training/education provider
- Request funds for capital expenses (buildings, vehicles, etc.)

Services/Support from Gary and Ednium to Grant Recipients
Gary Community Ventures and Ednium will provide the following to grant recipients:

- Ednium will work alongside all grantees to study and codify qualitative data from participants and alumni. In particular, Ednium will conduct its participatory action research protocol (known as design labs) protocol to produce a report for grantees about the experiences of students and alumni of the program. Research questions will be co-developed with Ednium, Gary and the grantee. Grantees must be willing to connect Ednium to program participants and alumni.

- Gary is working to identify a quantitative research partner to support grantees in understanding their alumni's quantitative outcomes, including participation in future post-secondary learning (college or training program enrollment and graduation) as well as employment and wage data. As such, grantees must be able to share de-identified student data (complying with all student privacy laws through co-developed data sharing agreements).
- Gary and Ednium will support a learning cohort that brings grantees together, connects them to local and national experts to support continued model refinement, and elevates grantee voice to inform system and policy change. We anticipate this cohort will meet approximately 6 times over the course of the grant. Specific topics will be defined and co-designed with grantees based on interests and needs.

Gary and Ednium will cover the costs of the services listed in this section, other than costs associated with staff participation as articulated in the Grant Awards section.

Application
To complete the online application and or obtain a copy of the application questions to share with your team, view the Application Process section of the RFP landing page.

RFP Process
Applications are due at 5:00 pm MT on September 1, 2023. Applications will be reviewed during the month of September. Finalists will be notified no later than October 4 and may be asked for additional information, which could include interviews and/or site visits. All applicants will be notified of final decisions by 5:00 pm MT October 20, 2023.

Questions
For questions regarding this RFP, please contact both:
- Richard Maez, Deputy Director, Ednium: The Alumni Collective, richard@ednium.org; AND
- Angie McPhaul, Director, Youth Success, Gary Community Ventures, amcphaul@garycommunity.org.

Informational Webinar
There will be an optional information webinar where you can learn more about the RFP and ask questions on August 10 at 11:00 am. Zoom link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85201921454

Office Hours
Office hours are an optional opportunity to seek assistance and ask questions about the RFP. It will be held on: August 24 at 10:00 am. Zoom link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85778555618

Glossary of terms

- Credentials of Value: Credentials that command at least $20/hr + benefits in high demand, high career growth sectors. Optimally, these credentials count toward high school graduation and advantage students in college enrollment and credit-building. Please reach out if you believe your credential meets most but not all of these requirements, and we can tell you if it is a fit.
- Family Sustaining Wage: We rely on the [Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard](#) to establish place-based income thresholds customized to diverse family types. A single individual in the 4-county metro area needs to earn at least $20/hr with benefits (or $40,000 / year) to cover their basic costs of living. Credentials that do not enable students to start strong at this income threshold and continue their career growth are difficult to justify given the number of jobs offering equal or greater starting wages without any requirements at all.
- BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- High School: Public schools of all types - traditional, alternative education campus, charter, district-managed and innovation are welcome to apply. Programs that include public funding into a 5th year would also be eligible.