

Request for Proposal: Learning Partner for Single Mother Student Success Strategy

In January of 2021, ECMC Foundation committed \$10 million over the next five years towards one key goal: increase the six-year associate degree attainment rates to 25% for single mother students. These investments will rely on the learnings of the portfolio to date and align to the Career Readiness strategy, which is committed to improving outcomes for students from underserved backgrounds seeking academic credentials (e.g., certificate, associate degree) awarded for the successful completion of postsecondary career and technical education programs. The Career Readiness portfolio believes that learners who complete credit-bearing programs and earn academic credentials will be more successful navigating career pathways and experience improved economic stability and increased social mobility.

Over the next five years, ECMC Foundation will make grants targeting community colleges and organizations supporting community college students nationally, focusing on CTE when appropriate, but casting a wider net as needed to build capacity at the institution and system levels. The goal is to ensure community colleges have the resources needed to support completion among single mother students. Grantees will need to commit to efforts that are centered on equity, recognizing that Black and Indigenous single mothers face [significant barriers](#) to completion and are more likely to have started but not finished a college degree. In order to move the needle on degree completion, it is critical to examine and support the unique strengths, barriers and needs of these racial groups. All grantees will be asked to document learnings and disseminate promising practices to the higher education field.

About Single Mother Students

[More than 1 in 10](#) college students in the United States is a single mother¹. Among these single mother students, [90 percent](#) have incomes at or near the poverty line, a disproportionate amount are women of color, and [nearly half](#) (44%) attend community colleges. Although similar in many ways to other nontraditional students, single mother students bring a unique set of strengths, yet experience additional barriers to program completion. Unlike non-parenting students, single mothers face numerous [financial and time challenges](#) that further delay their postsecondary success.

Completion rates for single mothers are low, yet improving. In 2019, the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES) released the [Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study \(BPS:12/17\)](#). The study found that 12% of single mother students earned an associate degree within six years of enrolling in a community college, nearly double the rate (7%) reported in 2011 based on the previous study ([BPS:04/09](#)), but still less than the rate for all students (18%) to complete an AA. Further, while single mothers are less likely than other women to hold postsecondary credentials, they are [more likely](#) than other women to have started but not finished a degree, indicating that additional support can make a measurable difference.

¹ ECMC Foundation allows grantees to use their own definition for single mother students. The following definition is similar to IRS guidelines and consistent with those used in the field. Single mother: an uncoupled (e.g., never married, separated, divorced, widowed) woman who shoulders 50 percent or more of the financial and caretaking responsibilities of raising children.

About this Project

To measure the growth and efficacy of the funded projects and foster community among grantees, ECMC Foundation is seeking a learning partner to design an evaluation that captures the implementation and outcomes of the Single Mother Student Success Strategy and articulate a plan to facilitate community through convening former and current grantees.

- Between 2016 and 2020, ECMC Foundation made 13 grants to 10 organizations supporting single mother students pursuing postsecondary credentials. Nine grants will be completed by December 31, 2021, two are scheduled to end in 2022, one in 2023, and one in 2024.
- In January 2021, we committed \$10 million over the next five years to support single mother student success. We estimate that 4 - 5 grant funded partners will be supported each year with an estimated 25 grantee partners over the 5-year period.

Grants made to support single mother student success range in size and scope (from one-year planning grants to multi-year investments) and include funding for institutions and organizations implementing innovative approaches, intermediaries providing technical assistance to promote promising practices, and third parties researching, evaluating, or disseminating efforts to improve postsecondary outcomes for single mother students.

Scope, Timeline, and Key Deliverables

We envision two phases of the work between November 2021 and August 2026. Through this RFP, we will select a learning partner that will lead a 9-month planning phase. An implementation phase is anticipated once the planning phase has culminated in August 2022.

Planning Phase (November 2021 - August 2022). During the planning phase, the selected learning partner will become familiar with grants made to date, review data available through ECMC Foundation's grants management system (Fluxx), and read the internal evaluation conducted in 2020. While we are open to suggestions, we imagine this phase will include document review, interviews and/or focus groups with our grantees, and ongoing conversation with the ECMC Foundation team. The primary deliverable for the nine-month planning phase are evaluation and facilitation plans, which are further described below.

- **Evaluation.** The evaluation plan should include at least the following components: evaluation questions, metrics or indicators that will address these questions, and the methods by which these questions will be answered. The selected learning partner will make recommendations about the type of data (i.e., aggregate or student-level data) needed to measure the Foundation's impact towards the single mothers postsecondary attainment goal given a number of considerations including time and resource constraints.

ECMC Foundation's preliminary goal is that the evaluation will track completion rates for single mother students as measured by NCES' Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study towards our attainment goal. In addition, the evaluation will identify:

- shorter-term metrics that are shared among the cohort or a subset of grant funded partners and support grantees in tracking these measures
- lessons learned as well as factors that support or inhibit the work of our grantee partners

Our intention is that our current and former grantees will be engaged as full partners throughout this planning phase by providing their insights into research questions that the evaluation could explore, the feasibility of the evaluation plan, and potential topics for the learning community.

- **Convening and Facilitation.** The facilitation plan should lay out a tentative schedule incorporating at least one convening (in-person and/or virtual) each year and an agenda for the learning community including information about: the goals of each session, participants (i.e., all grantees or a targeted subset), approximate length of the session, and whether the session will be convened in-person or virtually.

Implementation Phase (September 2022 - August 2026). During the implementation phase, the selected learning partner will execute the evaluation and facilitation plan. While this RFP is focused on the planning phase, there will be an opportunity for the selected organization to continue partnering with ECMC Foundation through the implementation phase. Partnership through the implementation phase will be dependent on the satisfactory completion of the deliverables in the planning phase and mutual agreement to continue the relationship.

Budget

Given the evolving nature of this project, we will work with the selected learning partner to finalize an approach and budget that will best meet our needs. And yet, we understand the importance of offering budget parameters to inform responses to this opportunity. We have budgeted \$75,000 for the planning phase of this project; but this amount is negotiable.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Any institution, organization, or consultant with demonstrated knowledge of postsecondary education and experience in cross-functional facilitation and measurement and evaluation is eligible to submit a proposal. A team from the Foundation will evaluate all submitted proposals. Criteria the team will use to select the organization includes:

- strong understanding of the distinct needs of single mothers and/or parenting students enrolled in postsecondary programs at community and technical colleges
- experience designing learning opportunities for small and large groups of more than 100 individuals
- demonstrated experience designing formative and summative evaluations of similar scale and complexity
- commitment to culturally responsive evaluation practices
- commitment and past performance of working to reduce completion gaps for adult learners, particularly Black, Latinx and Indigenous students, and parenting students

Proposal Deadline

The deadline to apply is 5:00 PM (PT) on September 30, 2021. Please email proposals as a MS Word or PDF attachment to Rosario Torres at rtorres@ecmc.org. Send any questions about this opportunity to rtorres@ecmc.org. We will post a FAQ on our website as we receive questions. We may invite some applicants to participate in a Zoom interview in early October and will notify all applicants of their status by October 15, 2021.

How to apply

We invite proposals of six pages or less (plus appendices) and ask that you include the following elements:

- **Background and qualifications: Not to exceed two pages**
Provide background information about your institution, organization, and/or yourself (for consultants) including your approach to culturally relevant evaluation practices and facilitation experience. Describe relevant experience, including the scope, deliverables, when and for whom the project was completed.
- **Approach and methods: Not to exceed two pages**
Detail the proposed approach and methods for the planning phase of the project. The selected learning partner will work in close partnership with ECMC Foundation staff and grantees to develop and refine the evaluation and facilitation plan during the nine-month planning phase of this project. Please include a detailed timeline for the planning phase of the project.
- **Proposed team: Not to exceed one page**
Describe who will be working on this project including a brief summary of professional experience and how much time they will dedicate to this effort. If a team is proposed for this project, please describe each member's role on this project. Please note how the team will manage any staff transitions experienced during the project period.
- **Budget: Appendix, not included in the page count**
Provide a detailed budget for the planning phase of the project. The budget should include a break-down of staff time per proposed task, hourly rate for each proposed team member, and any direct costs. As part of the (\$75,000) budget for planning phase, please include honorarium amounts for grantees, if any.
- **Related work samples: Appendix, not included in the page count**
Provide two to three work samples that reflect your relevant experience and approach.
- **References: Appendix, not included in the page count**
Provide two to three references who can provide insights into your relevant previous work.

About ECMC Foundation

ECMC Foundation is a Los Angeles-based, nationally focused foundation with a mission to inspire and to facilitate improvements that affect educational outcomes—especially among underserved populations—through evidence-based innovation. It is one of several affiliates under the ECMC Group (www.ecmcgroup.org) enterprise based in Minneapolis. ECMC Foundation makes investments in two focus areas: College Success and Career Readiness; and uses a spectrum of funding structures, including strategic grantmaking and program-related investments, to invest in both nonprofit and for-profit ventures. Working with grantees, partners and peers, ECMC Foundation's vision is for all learners to unlock their fullest potential. For more information, visit www.ecmcfoundation.org.