

Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN)

A National Consortium for Designing, Developing and Scaling New Models for Student Learning

SELECTIVE CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

APPLICATIONS DUE: January 15, 2015

Collaboration needs to improve among colleges and universities to address common challenges in designing and developing high-quality competency-based degree programs and their related business models. Only then can the field better meet the learning needs of greater numbers of students from all backgrounds while ensuring quality and academic rigor.

With support from Lumina Foundation, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), led by higher education innovators and coordinated by Public Agenda, supports such a collaborative national effort. C-BEN is composed of 18 public, private and for-profit colleges and universities, as well as two public higher education systems in Kentucky and Wisconsin serving a total of 42 campuses that are building, implementing or refining competency-based degree programs. C-BEN seeks to expand the number of institutions or systems by up to 12 new members.

This opportunity is best suited for colleges and universities with robust competency-based education models. Institutional leaders must have an interest in accelerating progress by addressing challenges to implementing these models in ways that benefit their own work and the field, collaborating on the rapid iteration and testing of practices, processes and concepts.

After selection by the C-BEN steering committee, continued participation in the community is annually renewable and will be contingent upon completion of agreed-upon activities and team contributions to maintaining an open, collaborative and trusting environment. Additional calls for applications will be issued periodically.

This is not a grant program, but related travel expenses for three C-BEN convenings per year will be reimbursed and participating institutions will have access to all findings, conclusions, recommendations and other shared learning resources.

This national network comprises representatives of colleges and universities willing to commit time and effort to solving common challenges around developing quality competency-based education models capable of scaling to affordably serve more students, especially students from low-income families, racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation college students and working-age adults. The institutional representatives serving on the C-BEN steering committee guide the direction of work, with priority given to addressing significant obstacles that cannot be adequately resolved in isolation. Strands of activity are designed to complement institutions' existing efforts and should not require additional hiring or resources.

The benefits to participating colleges and universities with competency-based degree programs in design, development or refinement phases include:

- Accelerated progress on common and individual challenges through structured collaboration.
- Opportunities to learn from other leaders in the field and to gain recognition for their own efforts.
- Access to experts on competency-based education, stakeholder engagement, program design, assessment, business processes and systems, communications and policy issues.
- An enhanced ability to collectively influence the national dialogue while creating conditions for positive change, including informing policy convenings with state and federal government officials, accreditors and other stakeholders.
- Opportunities to work with other colleges and universities to develop and shape the broader market for competency-based education and to help surface shared standards of practice while protecting diversity in the field.

There is strong demand for collaborative approaches to resolving shared, practice-based challenges that impede progress toward making competency-based education more widely available. These challenges include issues associated with program design, program integrity and rigor, communications and storytelling, business processes and systems, learning assessment and sustainable financial models.

Support from the Lumina Foundation enables Public Agenda, a New York-based nonprofit research and public engagement organization, to manage regular, iterative research and testing, or research and development (R&D) cycles aimed at more rapidly developing a knowledge base that enables high-quality competency-based models to gain wider support and use. Through a separate Lumina grant, Southern New Hampshire University handles arrangements for three convenings per year intended to initiate collective strands of work, share lessons from recently completed cycles of activity and identify and develop best practices for providing affordable, quality education.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Participation in the network will be determined through a competitive selection process. The process is open to regionally accredited colleges and universities that:

- Currently offer one or more competency-based degrees -OR- plan to launch at least one competency-based degree program during 2015.
- Create a strong interdisciplinary team of up to seven members, including faculty, academic leaders, business and financial aid officers, information technology (IT) leaders, institutional researchers and marketing and communications professionals. These members must have support from institutional leadership to undertake project-related work in C-BEN.
- Commit to working collaboratively, collegially and transparently on projects with representatives from other colleges and universities interested in scaling or spreading competency-based education models.
- Commit to sharing information about what works and what does not (related to model design, competency development, assessment, navigation of regulatory systems and so forth) with other participating institutions. Institutions will not be required to share trade secrets or intellectual property that provides a competitive advantage. For example, a strand of activity could include formulating and testing principles of good assessment, but proprietary assessment tools could be kept confidential.
- Commit to the participation of at least three team members in three annual, three-day convenings, with participation occurring on a rotating basis guided by the nature of the work. Travel expenses will be reimbursed for up to three members of each team to attend the three annual convenings.
- Commit to team participation of up to 20 hours per month in collaborative R&D cycles designed to complement existing efforts to design, build or refine a competency-based education model. Note that a concerted effort will be made to ensure that as many of these hours as possible are tightly aligned with work already being undertaken by participating institutions.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and to the academic success of low-income and first-generation students, adults and racial and ethnic minorities.
- Provide a letter from the institution's president (signed by team members) supporting the institution's involvement in C-BEN and commitment to working collaboratively to accelerate progress on common challenges to spreading and scaling competency-based degree programs.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION NETWORK GOALS

The network's overarching goal is to work collectively to resolve common challenges in the design and development of quality competency-based education models capable of scaling or spreading to serve more students from all backgrounds.

This is achieved by:

- Creating a network of institutions and systems serving diverse student populations with a demonstrated commitment to developing, scaling or spreading competency-based degree models.
- Providing a structured set of processes for relevant, practical, real-time research and development on design issues fundamental to building robust models that lend themselves to a collaborative approach and testing across different contexts.
- Identifying best practices in design, delivery and assessment to support member institutions and the field more broadly.
- Applying what is learned through the network's iterative efforts to accelerate progress in addressing challenges to developing credible models at scale.

The network is guided by several core principles:

- A shared commitment to the overarching goal and a relentless focus on the "big picture."
- A commitment to diversity and equity in educational outcomes for all students.
- Collegiality, active participation and transparency.

LEARNING AND ACTION MECHANISMS

The processes for generating, sharing and making use of the resulting "next practices" consist of structured R&D cycles, three convenings per year and communications tools such as our website (CBENetwork.org), webinars and learning briefs.

Here is an example of what a series of cycles look like:



Structured R&D Cycles: Between each of the three annual convenings, cross-institutional R&D work groups form around significant practice-based challenges of mutual interest, prioritizing those areas with the greatest potential to increase capacity for serving students. Potential and existing topics for work strands include those associated with program design, program integrity and rigor, business

processes and systems, communications and storytelling, learning assessment and sustainable financial models. Regular R&D cycles accelerate knowledge generation and provide frameworks through which lessons and “next practices” can be constantly tested and revised against emerging evidence about what is working and what is not working, for whom, and under what circumstances. Institutional team participants are encouraged to participate in R&D work groups that support their existing efforts or the challenges they want to address. The structured R&D cycles will draw on the 90-day cycle of inquiry methodology used by the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#) (IHI).

Convenings : The R&D cycles are framed by three annual convenings, during which members of the network will come together to discuss findings, share challenges, plan future work and develop strategies and tools for designing their degree programs to spread and scale. The convenings will be three-day, in-depth working sessions structured for cross-institutional work groups to make significant progress on key issues of practice, to design R&D projects for the next 90 days and to debrief and share lessons from the prior R&D cycle.

Sharing Lessons: Webinars, learning briefs and other communications tools will be used to share knowledge within the community and with the broader field to hasten creation of competency-based degree programs that ultimately enable more students from all backgrounds to affordably earn quality postsecondary credentials.

NETWORK STRUCTURE

General Membership and Working Teams: Each participating college or university will, at a minimum, commit a team that comprises a top institutional leader (dean level or higher) from the academic or business side and up to six other officials representing academic, business, financial aid, IT and other aforementioned fields critical to building sustainable new delivery models. These teams commit to forming collaborative, cross-institutional working groups delegated with designing and testing key elements of new models, executing reasonable scopes of work and sharing lessons learned.

Steering Committee: The steering committee, comprised of C-BEN members who have provided exceptional leadership to the effort, develops and maintains a strategic vision, guides the overall work, makes decisions about the annual composition of the community and internally distributes leadership and oversight responsibility for individual strands of activity between the three convenings each year. The co-chairs for 2015 are Laurie Dodge, Vice Chancellor for Institutional Assessment and Planning at Brandman University, and James Selbe, Special Assistant to the Chancellor at Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

Project Support: Public Agenda provides infrastructure and project management support for the network. Southern New Hampshire University provides convening and logistical support.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Institutions that meet the eligibility criteria are invited to submit applications using the form included in this document to kbarth@publicagenda.org. The deadline for submissions is January 15, 2015. Please contact kbarth@publicagenda.org regarding questions about the application process.

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.

About Public Agenda

Public Agenda is a nonprofit organization that helps diverse leaders and citizens navigate divisive and complex issues. Through nonpartisan research and engagement, it provides people with the insights and support they need to arrive at workable solutions on critical issues, regardless of their differences. Since 1975, Public Agenda has helped foster progress on K-12 and higher education reform, health care, federal and local budgets, energy and immigration.

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APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATIONS DUE: January 15, 2015

I. Institutional Information

Submission Date: _____

College or
University: _____

Mailing
Address: _____

Street Address (if different from
above): _____

Website: _____

PROPOSAL CONTACT

Name: _____

Title: _____

Phone
Number: _____

Email
Address: _____

II. Program Information and Narrative

Please answer the following questions regarding your competency-based education program. **We favor clear, concise responses.**

1. Do you offer at least one competency-based degree program? Yes No

a) If not, what is the proposed date of implementation for your competency-based education program? _____

2. Is your institution regionally accredited?

Yes No

a) Has your CBE program been reviewed by your regional accrediting agency? Yes No

b) Name of Regional Accrediting Agency: _____

3. Are there any restructuring, legal or other considerations that may impact your ability to participate in this network?

4. In three (3) pages or fewer, describe the competency-based degree program(s) offered by your institution, including:

- A brief description of how the CBE program(s) was developed.
- The length of time the program(s) has been offered or date(s) of program launch.
- How competencies are defined and assessed.
- Discipline(s) in which competency-based education is offered.
- In general terms, the racial, ethnic, gender, age and income diversity of students your competency-based program(s) serves or will seek to serve.
- The geographic focus of your program(s) (national, state, metro).
- The number of students your program(s) serves or will seek to serve.
- Plans for scaling or spreading competency-based degree programs to serve more students.
- Your institution's commitment to diversity and equity and how these are embedded in the design, development, and implementation of your competency-based degree program(s).

5. In one-to-two (1-2) paragraphs, describe why you want to participate in the Competency-Based Education Network. What do you hope to gain? What do you believe your institution would contribute to the network? Please describe your institutional and team member commitment to the network and specify any questions you may have.

6. In one-to-two (1-2) paragraphs, describe what factors have facilitated efforts to design and develop competency-based degree programs at your college or university. Who have been the critical players involved in the development of your program and what have their roles been?

7. In one-to-two (1-2) paragraphs, describe the specific challenges or barriers in academic and/or business model development your college or university is experiencing related to efforts to design, implement, or scale competency-based degree program(s). How could participating in this network help your work?

III. Institutional Team

Participating institutions will assemble a team that includes a top institutional leader (dean level or higher) from the academic or business side and up to six other officials representing academic, business, financial aid, IT, and other aforementioned fields critical to building sustainable new delivery models. Teams should be developed in consultation with members, rather than by appointment. Each team must be able to dedicate a total of approximately 20 hours per month. The monthly time commitment of an individual team member will vary based on her or his role in each R&D cycle.

Up to three team members must be able to participate in each three-day convenings. *Travel expenses will be reimbursed for up to three members to attend.*

8. List the name, title and responsibilities of up to seven C-BEN team members.

PROJECT TEAM LEADER

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 2

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 3

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 4

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 5

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 6

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 7

Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities with respect to the CBE program(s):

9. Provide the following information about the makeup of your project team:

Total number on team: _____

White, Non-Hispanic/Latino: _____
Black, Non-Hispanic/Latino: _____
Hispanic/Latino: _____
Asian: _____
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander: _____
American Indian or Alaskan Native: _____
Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial or Other: _____
Women: _____

IV. Letter of Commitment

As part of this application, you are expected to submit a letter from the institution’s president (signed by team members) supporting your involvement in C-BEN and commitment to working collaboratively to accelerate progress on common challenges to spreading and scaling competency-based degree programs.

A letter of commitment is submitted with this application.

Application Submission

Submit completed applications (including letters of commitment) by email to kbarth@publicagenda.org. The deadline for submissions is **January 15, 2015**.