

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
Grant Evaluator

ISSUE DATE:
December 15, 2021

E-MAIL SUBMISSIONS TO:
Joshua Howe, Deputy Executive Director of Workforce Training and Remote Working
jhowe@mccs.me.edu

SUMMARY

The Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce and the Maine Community College System seeks to enter into a contract with a qualified firms or individual to provide grant evaluation services for the Remote Work for ME grant.

In conjunction with project staff, the evaluator will design and provide rigorous assessments of project implementation and participant outcomes. The evaluator will be responsible for designing and developing an evaluation strategy which ensures there's alignment between the project objectives, activities and outcomes, and ensuring timeliness of the evaluation reports.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The MCCS is Maine's comprehensive two-year college system offering nearly 300 career and transfer programs, continuing education and customized training for business and industry.

Additional information about the institutions within the MCCS can be found at:
Maine Community College System (Augusta): mccs.me.edu
Central Maine Community College (Auburn): cmcc.edu
Eastern Maine Community College (Bangor): emcc.edu
Kennebec Valley Community College (Fairfield and Hinckley): kvcc.me.edu
Northern Maine Community College (Presque Isle): nmcc.edu
Southern Maine Community College (South Portland and Brunswick): smccme.edu
Washington County Community College (Calais): wccc.me.edu
York County Community College (Wells): yccc.edu

The Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce is the workforce training arm of the Maine Community College system. The Center pulls together varied current workforce training efforts into a single, logical, and accessible system that weaves together opportunities for both short-term training and longer-term degree/certification attainment. It will also provide clear, affordable, educational pathways to Maine adults no matter where they are on the job skill development continuum.

SCOPE OF WORK

MCCS programs are offered across 7 Maine campuses. Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected through the Learning Management System, BrightSpace, the student information system, Jenzabar, and through surveying participants. The MCCS has adopted BrightSpace as the systemwide tool for connecting key technology (student information, badging, and microcredentials) and managing online and traditional instructional delivery for both credit and

non-credit education and training, including course management, and outcome assessment.

Responsibilities

1. Work collaboratively with MCCS staff to fulfill all institutional and program-related evaluation requirements.
2. Participate in, face-to-face or virtual meetings or conference calls with project team to ensure proper implementation of data gathering and evaluation needs.
3. Train or coach project team, as needed, in using evaluation instruments, data and information collection systems, participant/case selection for sampling purposes, and/or other activities.
4. Establish and oversee procedures to ensure confidentiality during all evaluation phases.
5. Review and assess existing data collection and data management systems and make appropriate recommendations to achieve project data collection goals.
6. Bidder will work collaboratively with MCCS to develop tools and protocols for collecting, matching (where necessary), and aggregating core data across the project to evaluate the success of the project in meeting the project goals and deliverables as outlined in the grant (see Appendix A for full grant application narrative). Leveraging existing MCCS tools (Brightspace, Jenzabar) or other mechanism, data will be collected on enrollment, outcomes, credentials, and other relevant data elements, along with a capacity to administer surveys to enrollees. Data will need to be available at campus and aggregate at System level. Learner matching across campuses will likely be necessary.
7. Provide project team with 6 month and annual reports that can be submitted with the team’s reports. Areas of discussion should include project administration, project design, the extent to which these activities were implemented within the expected timeline, key challenges associated with implementation, the accomplishments associated with these activities (preliminary quantitative and qualitative outcomes), suggestions or recommendations for the remainder of the project period (when applicable), and any lessons learned or promising practices/challenge resolutions emerging in the project.
8. Produce a final evaluation and formal report at the end of the grant period. This report should include the following: 1) executive summary, 2) evaluation methodology, 3) summary of project (including case studies, if applicable), 4) Presentation of results (including a mix of graphic data representations and narrative explanations of findings, with an emphasis on outcomes, comparisons, and observations), conclusions and implications, and recommendations for future programming.
9. Provide technical advice/assistance to the institution’s information technology (IT) services in devising or adapting new data collection systems.
10. Provide recommendations to support the acquisition of data for future cohorts.

Evaluator Timeline

Below is an approximate timeline for reporting for the selected grant evaluator

Item	Date
Selected bidder begins work	January 2021
First Report – Project Annual	August 2022
6mo Report	January 2023
Annual Report	August 2023
6mo report	January 2024
Annual Report	August 2024
Final Report	September 2024

QUALIFICATIONS

The evaluator will be a highly qualified individual or team with extensive experience in grant evaluation, preferably with Community College system experience. They should also have effective communication skills, evidence of planning and organizational skills, ability to manage multiple priorities, and site, consensus building with evidence of effective collaborative skills.

RFP SCHEDULE

RFP Schedule	Date
RFP issued	December 15, 2021
Deadline for Questions	January 7, 2022
Response to Questions	January 12, 2022
Proposals due	January 21, 2022 12:00 PM
Winner selected and notified	January 28, 2022 By End of Business Day

Please submit questions by email to Joshua Howe, Deputy Executive Director of Workforce Training and Remote Working jhowe@mccs.me.edu. Questions will not be accepted by telephone. MCCS will make every effort to answer questions submitted by bidders to the best of our ability by the due date. We strongly encourage bidders to submit questions as early in the RFP process as possible. Response to questions will be posted on the RFP page on the date specified above.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

The following must be included in the submission:

1. A statement of qualifications; Provide an overview of your organization's background (including main contact's name, email, and phone number), website address, and years of experience. Please highlight experience pertaining to evaluation of rural and/or two-year/community colleges.
2. A list of previous relevant work; Include a description of at least two successfully completed project evaluations, including the scope of responsibility of the evaluator.
3. A schedule of fees; These should be specific to the scope of work.
4. List the qualifications of the person who will serve as the lead evaluator; if needed, identify any other individual(s) providing services on the project. Please provide resumes of all named staff and highlight experience pertaining to rural and/or two-year/technical colleges.
5. Confirmation that work can be started and completed per the timelines listed in the scope of work
6. A list of three references from past clients for work performed within the last three years.
7. Consultants have an obligation to disclose any situation of actual or potential conflict that impacts their capacity to serve the best interest of the Maine Community College System, or that may reasonably be perceived as having this effect. Failure to do so may lead to disqualification or the termination of the Contract.

The firm selected for this project will be required to show evidence of, and maintain through the completion of the project, all required insurance.

All responses should be addressed to: Joshua Howe, Deputy Executive Director of Workforce Training and Remote Working jhowe@mccs.me.edu

Review of qualifications will begin immediately and remain open until a market researcher for these projects are identified.

Additional information

MCCS reserves the right to reject any or all Proposals and to request any additional information it deems necessary to supplement the Proposals and/or reach agreement.

The terms and conditions, including pricing, of the final agreement resulting from this RFP process shall be available to any MCCS entity for the procurement of goods and services from the selected vendor(s).

The University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy, both public higher education institutions in the state, shall be permitted to piggyback off the MCCS's contract if they should so desire. The Contractor agrees to further provide the products and services, with all the same terms and conditions applicable, to these additional entities.

NOTICE TO VENDORS AND BIDDERS

STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLICABLE TO ALL MCCS CONTRACTS

The following standard contracting terms and conditions are incorporated and shall become a part of any final contract that will be awarded by any college or other operating unit of the Maine Community College System (collectively "MCCS"). These terms and conditions derive from the public nature and limited resources of the MCCS. **MCCS DOES NOT AGREE TO:**

1. Provide any defense, hold harmless or indemnity;
2. Waive any statutory or constitutional immunity;
3. Apply the law of a state other than Maine;
4. Procure types or amounts of insurance beyond those MCCS already maintains or waive any rights of subrogation;
5. Add any entity as an additional insured to MCCS policies of insurance;
6. Pay attorneys' fees; costs, including collection costs; expenses or liquidated damages;
7. Promise confidentiality in a manner contrary to Maine's Freedom of Access Act;
8. Permit an entity to change unilaterally any term or condition once the contract is signed;
9. Automatic renewals for term(s) greater than month-to-month;
10. Limitations on MCCS' recovery of lawful damages incurred as a result of breach of the contract;
11. Limitation of the time period under which claims can be made or actions brought arising from the contract;
12. Vendor's terms prevailing over MCCS' standard terms and conditions, including addenda; and
13. Unilateral modifications to the contract by the vendor.

BY SUBMITTING A RESPONSE TO A REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL, BID OR OTHER OFFER TO DO BUSINESS WITH MCCS, YOUR ENTITY UNDERSTANDS AND AGREES THAT:

1. The above standard terms and conditions are thereby incorporated into any agreement entered into between MCCS and your entity; that such terms and condition shall control in the event of any conflict with such agreement; and that your entity will not propose or demand any contrary terms;
2. The above standard terms and conditions will govern the interpretation of such agreement notwithstanding the expression of any other term and/or condition to the contrary;
3. Your entity will not propose to any college or other operating unit of the MCCS any contractual documents of any kind that are not in at least 11-point black font on a white background and completely contained in one Word or PDF document, and that any references to terms and conditions, privacy policies or any other conditions referenced outside of the contract will not apply; and
4. Your entity will identify at the time of submission which, if any, portion or your submitted materials are entitled to "trade secret" exemption from disclosure under Maine's Freedom of Access Act; that failure to so identify will authorize MCCS to conclude that no portions are so exempt; and that your entity will defend, indemnify and hold harmless MCCS in any and all legal actions that seek to compel MCCS to disclose under Maine's Freedom of Access Act some or all of your submitted materials and/or contract, if any, executed between MCCS and your entity.

Appendix A; Ascendium Grant Application

Online Letter of Inquiry to Ascendium

1. Briefly describe your proposed project, including goals, major activities, and current and anticipated partners. How will it advance the field? How will your efforts elevate equitable opportunity and outcomes for learners from low-income backgrounds so they can better achieve their academic and career goals?

Maine: The most Rural State in the US

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Maine is the most rural state in the U.S., with 61.3% of its population (over 825,000 of its residents) living in rural areas. Maine is the 44th largest state in the country by population, at 1.346 million, and has a growth rate of 1.37% between 2010 and 2020 and a population density of 44 people per square mile—only 10 other states have lower population densities. By area, Maine is the largest state in New England.

The Census defines “urban clusters” as having a population of at least 2,500 up to 49,999 people, and an “urbanized” community as having 50,000 or more inhabitants. By these definitions, of Maine’s ten largest cities only Portland is “urbanized”, with 66,215 residents. The next largest cities, Bangor and Lewiston, each have more than 30,000 residents, and seven more cities have populations between 20,000 and 26,000. Maine lists over 500 cities, towns, islands, Tribal lands and plantations, with 50 listing fewer than 100 residents.

The combination of geography and population density helps explain why a national report shows that Maine has the 32nd highest mean commuting time in the country. The *Portland Press Herald* reports that, between April and November 2020, State employees alone drove *1.1 million fewer miles every week* by working remotely, which averaged to over 61 miles per trip. Since Maine does not have robust public transportation systems even within its most populous counties, people who must commute to work need their own transportation and the income to support it.

Living in rural Maine has financial implications for its residents, including earning 18% less per-capita income than urban residents, a 3.7% higher poverty rate (13.7% rural vs. 10.2% urban) and higher unemployment.

The vast economic, health, and educational disparities between our state’s southern, coastal, more urbanized counties and the rural rest of the state have resulted in what is often referred to as the “Two Maines.”

Census data from the state’s two congressional districts clearly illustrate these disparities. Although only one-fifth the geographic size of the state’s sprawling 2nd district, the five southern, more urbanized counties that make up Maine’s 1st district are home to just over half of the state’s population of 1.35 million. Those residents are

wealthier, more highly educated, more likely to be employed, and enjoy far better health outcomes than the residents of the 2nd district.

District 1

- Median household income - \$67,382
- Individuals living below the poverty level – 8.9%
- Children below the poverty level (under 18) – 12.3%
- % of high school graduate or higher – 94.1%
- Bachelor’s degree or higher – 40.5%
- Population 16 and over not in the labor force – 34%

District 2

- Median household income - \$51,202
- Individuals living below the poverty level – 13%
- Children below the poverty level (under 18) – 15.4%
- % of high school graduate or higher – 92.3%
- Bachelor’s degree or higher – 25.4%
- Population 16 and over not in the labor force – 40%

As one researcher has noted: “If they were separate states, [the Two Maines] would consistently fall at opposite ends of state rankings on key metrics.”

The Two Maines are not confined to the state’s congressional districts. Maine’s wealth is congregated along its southern coastal counties. Even in the southern part of the state, rural inland areas are plagued by many of the same economic disparities as those in the 2nd district. And these data, from 2019, do not begin to capture the unequal impact of COVID 19 on our rural communities.

It will take time for more current data to be generated to reflect the full impact of the pandemic on Maine and the nation, but we already know that many jobs in core industries in Maine—tourism and hospitality—have been lost, perhaps permanently, affecting a large swath of lower-skill and middle-skill jobs. However, there is already an indication of how rural students, disheartened by all the losses and uncertainties of 2020, are reacting. With 61.3% of Mainers living in rural communities, the opportunity to earn a higher salary, avoid a long commute, and have greater job security would be of high interest to rural residents.

Initial Research on Remote Work

It started with telephone calls to major Maine employers to learn about the struggles they were facing in finding and preparing new and replacement workers to fill their current job openings. That led us to research both state and national reports. We found that there was a massive workplace change going on during the pandemic and that change is projected to continue. According to a recent report by the American Enterprise Institute, “Current projections say upward of 20 percent of American workers will continue to work remotely at least some of the time after the pandemic, nearly tripling the pre-pandemic level.” Clearly, remote working preceded the pandemic, exploded during the pandemic and will be a permanent part of the American workplace

post-pandemic. In a recent conversation, Dana Connors, President, Maine State Chamber of Commerce, said the vast majority of his 3,000 business members have all or some of their employees working remotely, and they are telling him remote work will be a major part of their workforce planning going forward. We will be issuing a survey with the state Chamber to learn more about employers' plans to utilize remote working post-pandemic. This survey should be in the field by the end of February.

We also conducted a remote business roundtable discussion with some of Maine's leading companies, all of which have at least a portion of their workforce working remotely. These conversations led to the creation of a Business Roundtable in October, hosted by the Presidents of the Maine Community College System (MCCS) and The Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges (FMCC) and moderated by members of the FMCC board of directors.

Moderators:

- The Honorable John R. McKernan, Jr., Former Governor of Maine; President, McKernan Enterprises; Chair, FMCC
- Elaine Rosen, Former President, UNUM; Chair, Kresge Foundation; Board Member, FMCC

Roundtable panelists:

- Sarah Cox, Vice President, Human Resources, L.L.Bean
- Heather Higgins, Director of Innovation Programs, IBM
- Robert Montgomery-Rice, President, Bangor Savings Bank
- Cindy Wade, Chief Operating Officer, Coastal Health Care Maine Health
- Lou Anne White, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, UNUM

The discussion concentrated on a specific series of questions about what the panelists found has been successful, what has been challenging, what types of jobs are most suited to working remotely, what attributes would be likely to ensure a candidate's success in working remotely, what personal and leadership skills would be needed to create successful work outcomes and how those outcomes could be measured. What was clear in the discussion was that while these business leaders have been focused on managing through the pandemic, they are also looking at what the changed business environment might look like after that and what work cultures, systems and people will be needed to be successful.

Several themes were emphasized by the group of Maine and national business leaders who participated in the discussion about their experiences with remote working and their view of its future. Consistent themes identified were:

- Everyone on the panel indicated they are learning about what working remotely means. Even those who have had experience working with employees in different locations or had themselves worked remotely for years said this sea change has been different since everyone is working remotely.

- Doing everything online is exhausting and the human contact that has not been possible is a real loss. All suggested that some balance of remote work and in-person contact is a better model.
- That said, the usual ability of management to oversee work by direct observation and in-person contact—particularly when on-boarding and integrating new staff—is considerably different in a remote work environment and requires new approaches to training, development, and monitoring of work for both new workers and supervisors. Clarity of expectations is essential. Focusing on outcomes more than process becomes necessary since people are not together.
- The keys to success will rest in the hands of people with personal and technical skills that match the rapidly changing, more highly digital world in which effective communication skills and initiative become even more essential.
- There are more jobs than originally considered that can be done remotely.
- To work at home, people must have access to high-speed internet connections that can enable the tools they need to do their work. This has long been an issue in Maine’s rural areas.
- The human side of working remotely has unexpected demands and benefits—supervisors and staff are in one another’s homes, seeing their space and often family and pets who wander in. This creates a different relationship and emphasizes the importance of trust in one another.
- The business’ cultures must be carefully defined and cultivated to make all of the other themes work successfully for the organization and its people.

The pandemic in 2020 has put a spotlight on the role of remote work in helping manage health and the economy. According to Global Workplace Analytics, 75 million U.S. workers hold jobs that include some tasks that can be performed remotely, but the pandemic surge caused employers who were taking a gradual approach to providing remote work options—most often to high-skill, higher-wage knowledge workers—to adapt quickly to this unique challenge. What has become clear, however, is that there is no going back to the slow, gradual adoption of remote work. It is here to stay, and it is expanding.

A recent article in *The Atlantic* about the potential changes in the workforce forecasts that, after the pandemic, one in every six workers will continue to work remotely for two days a week or more. Global Workplace Analytics projects that 25-to-30% of the workforce will be working remotely more than one day a week by the end of 2021.

Data from job postings in 2019 and 2020 that include “remote” indicate a similar trend. The MCCS uses JobsEQ as part of its market research regarding available job openings. Between 2019 and 2020 reporting from JobsEQ show there has been a significant increase in remote job postings.

- 74% increase in the number of employers posting for remote workers.
- 25% increase in the number of posts that mention remote.
- 39% increase in the occupations that appear in the search.

These sources offer startling views of where we find ourselves. The flexibility gained has value for employees and employers, but it is also obvious that both parties are on a steep, mutual learning curve about how to minimize the hurdles and maximize the benefits of this way of working.

The Atlantic article also notes the profound impact that the move to remote work will have on many industries, highlighting retail as an example. There, the shift in customer behavior from in-person to online shopping, which began before the pandemic but has exploded during it, has meant decreasing demand for in-person retail workers. This means that the people who have worked in traditionally low-wage, relatively low-skill jobs in a variety of industries will not have jobs to return to and will require training to upgrade their skills to qualify for the jobs that are available. This trend away from some traditional jobs is unlikely to reverse after the pandemic is tamed. In a 2017 survey, McKinsey Global Institute projected that over the next decade up to one-third of workplace activities would likely be automated, necessitating a massive retraining effort for workers available to move to higher-skill, higher-wage jobs, many of which might include more remote work opportunities. This likelihood plus the pandemic experience has accentuated the necessity for flexibility in workplaces as well as in employees and the necessity to address the need for a pipeline for skilled workers for whom flexibility is one of their skills.

The benefits of remote work accrue to both employees and employers.

Some Benefits for Employees

- The average savings for a person working remotely is \$4,000 per year (reflecting savings in expenses such as commuting costs, car maintenance, clothes, and eating out);
- 80% of people want to work from home some of the time;
- Flexibility is a high priority for millennials, higher than student loans or tuition reimbursement;
- A surprising measure of the value workers place on the kind of flexibility remote work provides is that they might sacrifice some pay for the ability to balance work and life demands; and
- Workers report 80% less stress when remote working, due to fewer interruptions and better work-life balance, and 90% say it increases morale.

Some Benefits for Employers

- Better ability to attract and retain employees—80% of workers in this country say they would refuse a job that did not have flexible work options. More than three-quarters of workers cited flexible schedules and remote work as the most sought-after, non-monetary ways to retain employees;
- Many employees believe they can work remotely at least part of the time, with two-three days per week being preferred;
- 85% of employers indicate that productivity has increased due to greater work flexibility options;

- 95% of employers indicate that remote work has a high benefit in employee retention; and
- There are expectations for potential savings to the employer from remote work in costs including space, energy, and maintenance.

This data illuminates a larger truth: while many businesses have been able to pivot to accommodate an unexpected situation this year, it has revealed that there are skill gaps that will affect the long-term success of the move toward more remote work. Of course, workers will need ongoing training in the changing technical skills altered jobs require. As work systems change, however, they will also need to learn how to be agile, communicate effectively with remote co-workers and managers, adapt to remote work platforms that are unfamiliar and become proficient in self-management and collaboration skills that are essential when not everyone works in-person. Not restricted by physical locations and provided with more flexible work structures, many workers will be able to live in places that meet their personal needs—such as rural Maine (as the recent boom in home sales might indicate)—while working remotely in other geographic locations.

While the learning curve in the move to remote work is challenging, there was a rapid response from employers and educational institutions to enable people to continue to work and learn in safer environments. This experience has provided beneficial insights into the full array of needs remote work presents, reinforcing the fact that flexible scheduling and work management require new skills and training for everyone involved. In addition, the technology to support them must be widely available, which Maine's commitment to significantly expanding access to highspeed internet service across the state through a bond issue passed this year will greatly enhance. Progress has been made, substantial knowledge gained and a foundation for future demands built. Now expansion is critical.

The Program: Remote Work for ME

The Maine Legislature established the Maine Community College System to offer academic and workforce development training as part of its core mission. While it has a long history of offering remote learning, the System was not prepared for a major workplace shift toward working remotely. The Remote Working for ME program provides an opportunity to develop a training model and test its efficacy.

The design of the Remote Work for ME program is based on national and state research and direct discussions with private sector leaders, as well as a roundtable discussion on remote working with leaders of Maine's most prominent and successful businesses. The companies involved in the roundtable discussion represented financial institutions, healthcare, insurance, retail, and computer industries. Each of the companies involved in our roundtable discussion anticipates an expansion of its remote workforce.

The program will provide rural workers with the required technical skills and basic remote working skills needed by Maine employers. All training will be free to participants with additional scholarships available for computers, related software, and internet

connectivity on an as needed basis. Employers will continue to be an integral part in the development of this program, its operations, and the content of program offerings. We will establish the Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working (MACRW) made up of business leaders who will provide guidance on the training developed and review feedback from both trainees and businesses engaged in the project. The program will have three core elements: Recruiting and training talent, preparing supervisors with the core skills necessary to be effective leaders of a remote workforce, and creating a digital resource center for businesses and potential trainees.

Core Program Components:

Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working (MACRW)

MACRW will consist of business leaders who have direct experience in leading a remote workforce. The Maine Community College System will recruit MACRW members who are representative of a cross section of Maine's industry sectors. The primary role of MACRW will be to provide guidance on all training developed, ensuring it meets the needs of employers and trainees. The council will also provide guidance on the development and content of a digital resource center which will be available for both Maine employers and residents who are interested in becoming remote workers.

The key to recruiting businesses and trainees to participate rests with the creditability of the MACRW. Our plan is to attract high profile and respected Maine business leaders whose companies are held in high esteem by other employers and the public. The MACRW will participate by providing counsel to the Director of Remote Working, guiding the development of the content and model for the delivery of the remote working certificate, and supervising a remote team certificate. The MACRW will also provide critical feedback of results of the program during the three years of operations. Included in the budget for the Remote Working for ME program is a \$58,000 line item that primarily will be used to recruit trainees to participate. In addition, the seven colleges will utilize their communication vehicles to recruit potential trainees to participate. Communication will include training program announcements, agreements with organizations serving low-income Mainers seeking employment for their clients and electronic newsletters distributed across the state.

Digital Resource Center

The Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working will work with MCCS staff to establish a digital library to collect national and state research and reports on remote working. The MCCS' seven colleges all have digital resource services as part of their libraries. We will turn to our college experts to design the digital resource center and will begin by utilizing open-source material.

In our discussions with Maine's private sector leaders, it was clear they are still learning how to operate in this new world of having a large portion of their workforce working remotely. They are all searching for best practices and specific industry needs. Their most prominent concern is training new employees and how to incorporate new hires into the organization's culture. Our goal is to develop a one-stop digital resource center for both employers and individuals interested in working remotely. The digital resource center will be a free service available for both employers and trainees.

Training

The MCCS will provide job skill training for a select group of Maine businesses who utilize remote workers and who anticipate that portion of their workforce expanding. The training will be for residents of rural communities who would be good candidates to fill the companies' job openings. Based on the job openings identified, the MCCS will develop technical skill training leading directly to employment. As part of developing the skilled training, the MCCS will assess what academic credit can be awarded towards a college degree. We anticipate some potential trainees will already have acquired the technical skills required to fill the position openings; these candidates will only have to complete the "Remote Working" certificate before being referred to businesses for employment. In addition, we see offering the "Remote Working" certificate as a valuable tool for current employees. Our plan is to offer training for Maine employers on a fee basis.

During our conversations with employers, they identified a need for training for their frontline supervisors who are new to supervising workers who are working remotely. The MCCS has well established supervisory training programs which will be modified to include the key elements required for supervising remote workers.

Training offered will be reviewed for potential equivalency with college credit. Because all seven MCCS colleges are accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges any credit awarded will be recognize by other higher education institutions. MCCS colleges will assist trainees by showing them how their credit awarded will fit into a full degree program. Our goal is to be a partner with the trainees to advance their skills which, in turn, will improve their employability and future prosperity.

The program proposes to serve 705 unduplicated trainees over the next three years. In developing this pilot program there were several factors that determined the number of trainees planned to be served. The key factors were available funding, sufficient number of trainees to test the model, a program robust enough to engage the private sector to participate and how the program fits with MCCS' vision to prepare Maine's workforce for the available current and future jobs.

There are four specific groups this program intends to reach. The first group includes unemployed and underemployed workers who lack the technical and remote working skills required by job openings. Prior to the pandemic, most workers who worked remotely held positions that required at least two years of post-secondary education. Our plan is to identify positions that require training equivalent to one year of college and deliver those programs in nine months or less. While there will be opportunities for short-term training, training will be tied to the potential wages earned by the participants, their upward mobility and employment security. The plan calls for preparing 200 trainees with the technical skills necessary to qualify both for employment and as a remote worker. Based on our experience, the training is projected to cost \$1,500 per trainee plus \$1,800 for computer, software and in some cases, connecting to high-

speed internet. Because this is a pilot program, we need the time to finalize the list of employers we will be working with, develop the remote working certificate, recruit students and deliver the training programs. Training of the students will begin by the summer of 2022 with 100 trainees and another 100 the following year.

The second group is made up of unemployed and under-employed workers who have job skills but lack the distance working skills. When we begin recruiting for the skill training programs, we anticipate finding workers who possess the technical skills but lack the remote working skills. This group of trainees will be offered free enrollment in the remote working certificate course. Once participants successfully complete the remote working skills program, we will refer them to employers who agreed to participate with this program. We anticipate training 25 participants in 2022 and another 25 in 2023.

The third group includes incumbent workers who need to upgrade their remote working skills. During our initial discussions, employers expressed concerns about preparing their current employees to be more proficient in doing their work remotely. They were finding the transition from employees working in an office to working independently from home caused some workers' performance to slip, thus endangering their continued employment. Our plan calls for 335 incumbent workers to enroll in our remote working certificate program. We will provide training for 125 participants in 2022 and another 210 in 2023.

The fourth group is frontline supervisors who need training in how to lead a team remotely. During our conversations with employers, they identified a need for training for this group of supervisors. The employers shared that supervisors whose leadership skills were average or less were struggling with leading remotely. They said their strong supervisors made the transition comfortably and were performing excellently. The MCCS has well-established supervisory training programs which will be modified to include the key elements required for supervising remote workers. Our plan calls for 120 frontline supervisors to participate in the training with 60 enrolling in 2022 and another 60 in 2023.

Training certificates will be the same for the unemployed, underemployed, and employed remote worker trainees.

We will work with members of the Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working (MACRW), who are subject matter experts on remote working, to identify the key learning outcomes for both certificates. The curriculum being developed for both certificates will also be based on the recommendations of the MACRW and staff research. The learning outcomes for both certificates will align with best practices for developing digital badge pathways. These include three levels of learner outcomes:

- Level 1 is exploration and discovery that will address and assess foundational knowledge, retention of pertinent information and understanding of how to apply knowledge of the material learned;

- Level 2 is skill development that will address and assess the learner’s practice of a skill, its application, analysis, and how that practiced skill relates to all aspects of being an effective remote worker or supervisor; and
- Level 3 focuses on leadership by addressing and assessing the essential skills necessary for current or future supervisors to be able to evaluate, mentor, and support trainees in improving their job performance.

Each successive badge level completed validates the learning and/or skills attained for that particular level. When all three levels are combined, a learner could be issued a Macro-Badge that signifies the cumulative assessment of skills, knowledge, and validation of the learning that has taken place.

Remote Work for ME Timeline

Year 1: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

- Identify businesses
- Select areas for training
- Create Remote Working Certificate
- Begin developing Supervisory Training Certificate
- Recruit trainees
- Provide skills training for 30 trainees
- Issue 30 certificates for remote work
- Develop a credit-bearing college course on Remote Working

Year 2: July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

- 70 trainees
- Issue 350 Certificates for Remote Working
- Recruit trainees for Year 3
- Complete Supervisory Training Certificate
- Provide Supervisory Training Certificate for 60 trainees
- Evaluate Year 1

Year 3: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2024

- 100 trainees
- Issue 335 Certificates for Remote Working
- Provide supervisory training for 60 trainees
- Evaluate Year 2

Program Evaluation

The MCCS will contract with a third party to evaluate the Remote Work for ME program. The evaluation will include reviewing participants’ demographic information, planned goals vs. actual outcomes, and surveys of both trainees and employers to learn their level of satisfaction with the program. The MCCS will collect and maintain all pertinent information concerning the

program and job placement of trainees including employer, position obtained, starting wage, full-time or part-time status, and whether the worker is working remotely full-time or under a hybrid model. The evaluation will be completed no later than four months after the conclusion of the grant. We have allocated \$60,000 for program evaluation, which is based on our experience for comparable programs. Our plan calls for selecting the evaluator prior to the start of the program.

2. Tell us about your organization and why you are best positioned to lead this project.

Overview of the Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges (FMCC)

The Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges is dedicated to ensuring that the state's seven community colleges have the resources they need to provide a high quality and affordable college education for Maine people. The Foundation seeks to enhance access to higher education and economic opportunity and to provide Maine employers with a highly trained and skilled workforce. To this end, the Foundation develops sustainable sources of philanthropic support for the Maine Community College System.

Chaired since its inception by former Maine Governor John R. McKernan, Jr., with community activist and philanthropist Lisa Gorman as Vice Chair, the Foundation helps the colleges achieve their mission of providing and increasing higher education opportunities for Maine people. Since its founding in 2009, the Foundation has raised over \$43 million from community and business partners, individuals, and philanthropic organizations in support of student success, innovative programs, scholarships, instructional facilities, updated technologies, and workforce training and development.

Overview of the Maine Community College System (MCCS)

Maine was one of the last states in the nation to offer its citizens access to community college. Established in 2003, the Maine Community College System was built on the foundation of Maine's Vocational Technical Institutes and Technical Colleges and was created in response to statewide concerns about the lack of affordable, local access to higher education in the state.

Today, the state's seven community colleges annually serve nearly 30,000 individuals through two- year degree and one-year certificate programs, short-term training, and transfer pathways to the University of Maine and other four-year institutions.

The majority of students enrolled in Maine's community colleges come from rural areas and are low- to moderate-income. They face significant financial challenges. Even though the state's community colleges offer the lowest tuition and fees in New England, nearly 64% of MCCS students are dependent on federal grants, as compared to 56% of their peers at other public two-year institutions across the nation. More than half of MCCS students depend on student loans to help finance their education, a rate twice

the national average. Although 56% of MCCS students report working more than 20 hours a week, 60% say they find themselves living paycheck to paycheck.

Maine's seven community colleges and their off-campus centers are within 25 miles of over 90 percent of the state's population. Through a recent expansion of online delivery and its Bring College to ME and workforce training initiatives, the MCCS has been able to increase programming to underserved areas of the state that need skilled workers to sustain themselves.

The seven-college system consists of:

- Central Maine Community College in Auburn;
- Eastern Maine Community College in Bangor;
- Kennebec Valley Community College in Fairfield and Hinckley;
- Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle;
- Southern Maine Community College in South Portland and Brunswick;
- Washington County Community College in Calais; and
- York County Community College in Wells.

Since 2003, the MCCS has awarded nearly 41,000 college credentials across the state, in fields that form the bedrock of Maine's rural communities, such as health care, public safety, business, construction, mechanic and repair technologies, and precision manufacturing.

The colleges have a proven track record of educating Maine people in programs that drive economic growth and meet the workforce needs of their communities:

- 94% of incoming degree-seeking students are Maine residents;
- 72% are enrolled in career and occupational programs;
- More than 90% of graduates are employed in Maine or continuing their education; and
- Over 75% of program options offered at the community colleges are the only ones available in the state.

Long History Serving Rural Maine

The MCCS has been serving rural residents and employers for over 60 years. It has established a strong understanding of the needs of rural Mainers and has earned a respected reputation among rural residents for preparing students for good jobs.

Five of Maine's seven community colleges are located in the 2nd Congressional district, serving the state's most rural areas:

- District 1: SMCC, YCCC
- District 2: CMCC, EMCC, KVCC, NMCC, WCCC

Maine has an estimated 300,000 rural adults who have not completed an associate degree or higher, the vast majority of whom are first-generation and low-income. Only 42.7% of all [Maine adults aged 25-64 have an associate degree or higher](#). Only three of the state's 16 counties exceed the national average. In several of the state's most rural

counties, the rate is below 30%. As a result, Maine's community colleges serve a significantly higher percentage of first-generation students than the national average.

The MCCS has placed a strategic focus on student success measures designed to support first-generation students and others who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education and who often face significant challenges in accessing postsecondary education, succeeding academically once they enroll, and completing a degree. Many of the strategies detailed below have been informed and accelerated by the Systemwide involvement in the Achieving the Dream network, made possible by a 2016 grant to the Foundation from the Kresge Foundation in recognition of "the collaborative approach that Maine's community colleges have taken to improve student outcomes for low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students."

These strategies include:

- New math pathways that align the math curriculum with the programs of study and career plans of each student. Research clearly indicates that failing to complete a college-level math class in the first year of college significantly increases the risk that a student will not complete his or her course of study. This is particularly true for the 59% of public two-year college students who enroll in noncredit developmental mathematics courses—many of whom are first-generation and low-income students. The work the colleges have done over the past several years to align the math curriculum with students' programs of study offers an impressive example of how effective evidence-based practices can be in improving student outcomes. With the introduction of math pathways, the percentage of MCCS students who complete a college math course by the end of their first year has risen from 39% for the fall cohort of 2014 to 47% for the cohort entering in 2019.

At SMCC, the first college to fully implement math pathways, the results are even more striking, rising from 34% for the fall 2014 cohort to 53% for the 2019 fall cohort. We fully expect to see this progress reflected in higher completion rates and outcomes for the first-generation students who first enrolled at our colleges in the fall of 2019.

- In addition, the MCCS has expanded the number of college navigators, or advisors, at all seven colleges, to help ensure that students—especially those with little experience of college— have the academic and personal supports they need to persist and complete a college degree.
- EMBARK is the MCCS high-school-to-college transition program for high school students who are unsure about what comes next and unfamiliar with the college application and financial aid process. Through partnerships with 80 high schools across the state, the program provides college advising and supports to students beginning in their junior year of high school and continuing through their second year of community college. Since 2003, students enrolled in the program have

been more likely to both return for their second year and graduate on time than typical community college students.

- The expansion of on-campus employment opportunities that allow students, especially those in rural areas, to build their work schedule around their classes and provide them with a stronger sense of community and a stronger support network.
- Intensive college readiness experiences offered at no cost in the summer before students enroll in a program of study, along with mandatory orientation and college-readiness courses.
- Finally, in a state with the lowest median income in New England, the Maine Community College System remains committed to making sure its colleges are as affordable as possible. The MCCS' tuition and fees remain the lowest in New England.

Rural Mainers are significantly more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, or disabled with almost no access to public transportation. By providing training that is accessible to them in their home communities and enabling them to acquire the skills they need to perform remote work, this project has the potential to create new jobs in rural Maine and to pave pathways to prosperity for many who have had few options or opportunities.

The pandemic has had an enormous negative impact on the people of rural Maine. Fortunately, it now poses significant opportunities as remote work moves into the mainstream of our economy and rural Maine becomes a draw for entrepreneurs and business owners seeking to locate their operations in an area of the northeast that is characterized by abundant natural beauty, close-knit communities, and hard-working, resourceful people.

Currently, the MCCS has over 16,000 students learning remotely. The Remote Working for ME program can provide prospective students with online education and in-person training for technical skill development.

The key to recruiting students rests in the design of the program and services that are tailored to their needs. To that end, the MCCS hired Critical Insights, a marketing research company, to assist in exploring how to reengage adults who have some college but who have not earned a degree and how to attract those Mainers (186,000) to return to college and complete a degree or earn a credential of value. We anticipate the Remote Working for ME program to be of high interest for this group.

Critical Insights has conducted three focus groups of a total of 27 potential students. The research suggests that to increase adult enrollment in credential of value programs in Maine, institutions should:

- Offer statistics about job placement rates and salaries for specific programs, thereby demonstrating how a credential can, on average, provide a financial return on investment and an increase in job advancement and security;
- Clearly identify how an education program has been built around the unique needs and constraints of adult students. This includes offering flexible class schedules, including on evenings and weekends, assignment windows rather than due dates to allow additional time to complete assignments, smaller classes, and assistance with transferring credits and dealing with other issues that may arise when they return to classes;
- Highlight training and certifications in the skilled trades, which would be of interest to current students considering a new course for their education as well as for those who want to switch careers;
- Offer both in-person and online classes to provide hands-on, engaging learning opportunities; and
- Provide assistance with finding grants and scholarships to help students avoid the prospect of student loans, completing application and financial aid forms, and offering dedicated advising in which an employee of the institution is charged with providing close, intensive academic and personal support.

The Remote Working for ME program will use the research gained from these focus groups in designing the program to effectively recruit rural students and enroll them in the program.

Strong Relationships with Maine Employers

The Maine Community College System is continually adapting its delivery of workforce training to create educational pathways that lead from short-term training to postsecondary credentials for Maine adults. This requires working closely with Maine employers to better understand the specific skills and types of training required in multiple industry sectors across the state. The MCCS maintains ongoing academic program reviews that require employer-led advisory groups at each college, engagement in trade associations, employer-led listening sessions, and through its 80 annual memorandum of agreements the Maine community colleges have created through the Maine Quality Center (MQC) training initiatives.

With over 250 occupational and academic degrees and certificates offered throughout the seven-college system, program faculty and campus leadership organize and host advisory sessions annually that include representatives from Maine's small, mid-size, and large employers. The program advisory groups receive updates on program enhancements as well as students' progress and achievement. These relationships help support the exchange of real-time information on skills being used by the local employers, as well as feedback to the college on how recent graduates and alumni are performing in the workplace. These meetings provide faculty and program designers critical information to guide curriculum enhancement as well as new equipment and training aids that best support the employer and industry needs.

The community colleges also engage in workforce employer-led summits or “listening sessions” that allow college staff to sit with employers and listen to their training and skills needs. More recent sessions included meeting with MaineHealth, Maine’s largest healthcare system, on the skill and training required for both CNA and Medical Assistants. Other sessions have resulted in the recent redesign of a Surgical Technician training, a new Construction Institute, and the redesign and deployment of a shipbuilding training program. Similar meetings have been held with industry trade associations resulting in the design and deployment of Covid-19 readiness training for thousands of Maine people in the Hospitality sector, the Ski Industry, and the HVAC industry.

Since its inception, the Maine Quality Centers program has served: 279 new or expanding Maine businesses; trained 22,548 Maine people for new positions or upgraded skills; and helped incumbent workers across the state upgrade their skills. In FY20, the MQC funded 44 training projects with 33 different Maine employers and provided an additional 39 college-sponsored programs that served multiple employers for each training. The FY20 numbers reflect a continued increase in the number of training opportunities and employers served over FY19 and FY18. Each MQC project requires a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to be signed with each employer to outline the responsibilities each party brings to the training partnership including:

- A company point person for the employer to oversee all phases of the training;
- Training details including start and end dates, curriculum and specific certificates, courses, and/or badges that will be earned; and
- A detailed budget outlining the portion of training covered by the employer and the portion the MQC grant will fund.

As part of the MQC application process, the employer shares current employment levels, new hires expected as a result of the training, and the wage it will pay new hires. In addition, industry is asked, when appropriate, to support the cost of training. Last year employers contributed \$920,000. Training application and training plans may be approved if they can show a return on investment of three years or less of the state’s investment.

MCCS to Launch a Comprehensive Workforce Training Division

The MCCS will be unveiling a comprehensive workforce training division in summer 2021 by establishing the Center for the Advancement of Maine’s Workforce (CAMW), which will house all short-term training and worker development services. The new center will offer trainees a development plan that will advance their skill level sequentially. In addition, trainees will have access to wrap-around support services including advising, childcare, emergency assistance funds, and stipends when needed. This holistic approach is designed to provide trainees a continuum of skill development starting with short-term training, followed by professional development while they are employed and on to college courses leading to a degree. The CAMW will create a digital transcript for trainees detailing each training module completed and listing the trainee’s knowledge gained and competencies demonstrated. Similar to a traditional college transcript, the CAMW will maintain a permanent record of training modules

completed by each trainee. The digital transcript will be made available to trainees and to any college wishing to conduct a prior learning assessment to award college credit. The goal of the center is to offer a new pathway to a college degree by recognizing a trainee's life, work, and job training experiences, in turn, shortening the trainee's path to a college degree.

Within the CAMW, a new Department of Remote Working will be established to oversee all training related to remote working. This new department will also create a digital resource library containing national reports and research on remote working, which will be a free service made available for both employers and trainees. If this grant is approved, the Department of Remote Working will have management responsibilities over this grant.

3. Identify the Ascendium focus area that most closely aligns to your proposed project and describe how partnering with Ascendium will advance your efforts.

Focus Area – Support rural postsecondary education and workforce training

The Maine Community College System and The Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges are excited at the possibility to partner with a national leader in rural postsecondary education such as Ascendium. The MCCS and the FMCC are both making significant investments in the \$1.2 million Remote Work for ME program, with support of \$400,000 from the MCCS and \$298,750 from FMCC. A grant of \$535,000 from Ascendium would allow us to implement a statewide pilot program that can potentially be used as a national model.

Preliminary questions and insights from Ascendium have been incredibly beneficial as we work to develop the critical details needed for the successful implementation of the program. Partnering with Ascendium throughout the three-year period would continue to provide important resources and guidance that are often needed when piloting new and innovative programs.

4. What outcomes and/or deliverables do you expect as a result of the proposed work?

Program Deliverables:

- Establish the Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working;
- Create the Remote Working Certificate;
- Create supervisory training program for leading a remote workforce; and
- Train 705 Participants Unduplicated as follows:
 - 200 participants enrolled in the technical skill training plus Remote Working certificates
 - 50 participants enrolled who meet the skills requirement, but need Remote Working certificate
 - 335 incumbent workers enrolled in Remote Working certificate
 - 120 trainees enroll in supervisory training for leading a remote team.

Program Goals:

- 85% of 200 trainees complete technical skills training;
- 75% of the program completers will be hired by Maine employers¹;
- 85% of 585 trainees complete Remote Working certificate; and
- 90% of 120 trainees complete supervisory training for leading a remote workforce.

5. Describe how you will collect or track relevant quantitative and/or qualitative data to assess progress and impact.

Quantitative and qualitative data will be collected through the Learning Management System, BrightSpace, the Student Information System, Jenzabar, and through surveying participants. The MCCS has adopted BrightSpace as the systemwide tool for connecting key technology (student information, badging, and microcredentials) and managing online and traditional instructional delivery for both credit and non-credit education and training, including course management, and outcome assessment. Through Brightspace, data will be collected on enrollment, outcomes, credentials, and other relevant data elements, along with a capacity to administer surveys to enrollees.

6. What are the mechanisms for sustainability?

As previously noted, the MCCS will be launching a comprehensive workforce training division this summer with the establishment of the Center for the Advancement of Maine’s Workforce (CAMW). Within the Center will be a permanent division dedicated to remote working. The Maine Community College System and the Foundation for Maine’s Community Colleges are together investing \$698,750 in the \$1.2 million project because we see remote working as an integral part of the MCCS workforce delivery system. By the conclusion of this grant, we will have established the operational infrastructure and experience to help support Maine workers and businesses succeed in this sea change in the workplace due to the rapid growth of remote working. It is our plan to seek funding from the state to permanently fund remote working as part of the CAMW.

7. Provide a narrative timeline for your proposed activities and key deliverables.

A detailed timeline of activities and deliverables, that includes start and completion dates, can be found in the attachment Remote Work for ME Project Plan.

Year 1: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

Dan Belyea, MCCS Executive Director of Workforce Development will:

- Recruit members for the Maine Advisory Council on Remote Working;
- Select a Director of Remote Work;
- Recruit key business partners; and
- Select a Remote for ME Program Evaluator.

¹ *Note for RFP: Additional program completer data may also be requested such as wages, position, remote/hybrid or in person employment.

Janet Sortor, MCCS Chief Academic Officer will:

- Develop the college course on Remote Working.

The Director of Remote Work will:

- Select technical skill training occupations for the Remote for ME Program;
- Develop the Certificate of Remote Working;
- Create the Digital Resource Center;
- Create the Certificate for Leading a Remote Work Team;
- Recruit technical skill training trainees for the 2021-2022 academic year;
- Prepare the Year 1, six-month grant progress report;
- Deliver technical skill training to 30 trainees for in the 2021-2022 academic year; and
- Deliver a Certificate on Remote Working for 30 trainees.

Year 2: July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

The Director of Remote Work will:

- Prepare the Year 1 final grant report;
- Deliver a Certificate for Leading Remote Work Teams for 6 trainees;
- Recruit technical skill training trainees for the 2022-2023 academic year;
- Deliver technical skill training for the 2022-2023 academic year for 70 trainees;
- Deliver a Certificate for Remote Working for 350 trainees; and
- Prepare the Year 2 six-month grant progress report.

Year 3: July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

The Director of Remote Work will:

- Prepare the Year 2 final grant report;
- Deliver a Certificate for Leading a Remote Work Team for 60 trainees;
- Recruit technical skill training trainees for the 2023-2024 academic year;
- Deliver technical skill training to 100 trainees in the 2023-2024 academic year;
- Deliver Certificate on Remote Working for 335 trainees;
- Prepare the Year 3 six-month grant progress report; and
- Prepare the Year 3 final report.

Upon completion of the three-year grant period, the evaluator will prepare the program evaluation by October 2024.

8. Describe in greater detail how your project will advance the field. For example, how will you share project progress, outcomes and lessons learned? For research efforts and creation of an evidence base, how do you envision the findings being placed into practice?

As the pandemic subsides, America's remote workforce is projected to double from pre-pandemic levels. We believe this initiative will advance the field of knowledge regarding how states can find opportunities to help rural, low-income workers gain skills necessary

to connect with higher paying jobs which they can perform in their home communities. The crisis caused by the pandemic has accelerated companies' understanding of how they can operate successfully with a large number of their workforce working remotely. This presents a golden opportunity for states to create a program that can address the historic challenges of serving low numbers of available rural workers in a training program that will qualify them for millions of jobs projected to be created over coming years. There are five areas in which this initiative will provide a model for how states can address the disparity of income and job opportunities by investing in a model of connecting urban job opportunities remotely with rural residents.

First, we are building a model of how to prepare low-income residents with jobs they can perform remotely. We believe this model can be replicated in other rural states. The program we have planned has sufficient numbers of trainees and a variety of industries to demonstrate the viability of the model. We believe we have a model which can be delivered at a price most community colleges can afford to offer. In addition, we will show how to recruit trainees and businesses and train and connect workers to available jobs. Finally, as part of this initiative two certificates will be created. The first will recognize workers' success in attaining skills and knowledge to be proficient in performing their job while working remotely. The second certificate will recognize frontline supervisors' achievement of key learning outcomes necessary to successfully lead a remote work team. Our plan is to collaborate with other community colleges from across the nation to deliver these certificates. This program will be permanently housed in the system's Department for Remote Work in the Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce.

Second, as part of this initiative the MCCS is establishing a Digital Resource Center. This Center will be a free resource for all employers and will contain all relevant national research, reports and findings of this initiative. All this material will be available to organizations from across the nation wishing to have access.

Third, we will be creating a new college credit course focused exclusively on remote work. This course will be made available as an elective for a variety of majors for the fall of 2022. We believe this course has the potential to become a required course in majors such as business.

Fourth, we would be interested in co-hosting a national webinar for community colleges on remote working in collaboration with Ascendium. We envision the webinar would include national presenters and sharing our model with the audience.

Fifth, near the end of the second year of the program we will be reaching out to national publications to share the early results of the program.

9. What obstacles might prevent you from achieving the anticipated outcomes? How do you plan to overcome those obstacles?

We feel confident, after a year of research and program design and with the expertise of the current Maine Community Colleges System staff, that we are prepared to deliver the

program and achieve the expected results. Below are some potential issues that may cause lower than expected outcomes along with potential solutions:

- Trainees' knowledge level of computer use may require upgrading prior to receiving training. We may have to use work study funds to hire computer majors part-time to assist trainees.
- We will be identifying lead businesses to work with on this project. Our training plan and schedule will reflect their hiring needs. We do not control any decisions they may make to delay hiring. While the training we offer will be tied to specific needs of lead businesses, the training offered will serve a wide variety of employers. We will not be solely dependent on the lead businesses for future job placement of our graduates.
- The certificates we plan on creating play a critical role in the success of this program. We may need to make adjustments based on feedback from employers and trainees. We will need to build surveying both trainees and employers into our plan to ensure the quality and effectiveness of training processes and content.
- If Maine's broadband expansion is delayed, that will impede our ability to expand recruitment to underserved areas. That said, there is currently a substantial number of rural Maine residents who want to stay in their community, and who want to access higher wages by working remotely.

10. Is there anything else about your organization or the proposed project you think could help advance your application?

We believe one of the strengths of this proposal is having the full backing and direct involvement of the Maine Community College System's senior leadership team. This is a very experienced four-person team who collectively have 120 years of direct work experience in workforce development and higher education. Here is a summary of the work experience of the members of the program design team. They will be directly involved in the execution of this initiative:

President David Daigler

As System President, he leads a community college system of seven campuses serving 29,000 students with a budget of \$170 million. He is focused on transitioning the community college delivery system to meet the needs of the post-pandemic, digital economy with the goal of it becoming more accessible to working adults. Prior to becoming President, he served as the system's Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. Before holding system leadership positions, President Daigler served as the CFO for Southern Maine Community College, which is Maine's oldest and largest community college. David has been in higher education for 20 years. Before joining MCCS, David worked for a major healthcare provider administering funded research and oversaw the construction of a 55,000 square-foot research facility. He also developed the strategy for merging two healthcare organizations.

Dr. John Fitzsimmons

John Fitzsimmons served as the Maine Community College System President for twenty-five years. During his tenure as system President, MCCS enrollment in degree

programs grew from 3,000 students to 18,000. He also led the efforts to transition from technical colleges to community colleges. He established the Foundation for Maine's Community Colleges and is now its President. Prior to being employed by the community colleges he was Maine's Commissioner of Labor. Before the labor post, he was the Executive Director of the Training Resource Center, which managed state and federal employment and training programs. Dr. Fitzsimmons has 38 years of experience in workforce development and higher education.

Dr. Janet Sortor

Janet Sortor is the Vice President and Chief Academic Officer for MCCS. Prior to joining the System, she served as the Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs at Southern Maine Community College. At MCCS, she has worked to increase access and student success, ensuring that Maine has a workforce with the advanced education and training necessary to meet the needs of the 21st century economy. She has built strong collaborative relationships with the University of Maine System and K-12 with whom she is working to raise aspirations, provide opportunity, and address the barriers that keep students from achieving their educational goals and participating in our rapidly changing economy. Dr. Sortor has worked in higher education for 30 years, beginning her career in Boston, MA, where she served in a variety of leadership roles at Bunker Hill Community College.

Dan Belyea

Dan Belyea is the Chief Workforce Development Officer at the MCCS. In this post, he is responsible for all state-wide workforce programs and liaison with businesses, trade associations and job training agencies. The training programs he oversees provided training to 3,600 trainees in 2020 and 4,500 year-to-date in 2021. Dan served as MCCS' Director of Administrative, Student Services and Auxiliary Enterprises prior to his current post. He also has worked in a variety of administrative positions at Eastern Maine Community College in Bangor, Maine. Dan has worked for the MCCS for 32 years.