Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort:
Industry, Education and Community Partnerships to Increase Inclusive Economic Growth

Overview

The Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives Foundation (ACCEF) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) have received funding from Lumina Foundation to support communities in increasing credential attainment for Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) workers. From January 2022 to June 2023, core teams from six to eight communities will participate in the Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort program to learn from and with peers across the country.

Teams will have access to technical assistance and subgrant funding to address equitable credential attainment in their own communities. By the end of the program, teams will be able to demonstrate increased credential attainment and have a roadmap for continuing to increase credential attainment, particularly for BIPOC workers, beyond June 2023. Each team will be eligible to receive a subgrant of up to $50,000 to support this work.

Background

Partnerships between chambers of commerce and community colleges have the potential to significantly increase the number of adult learners of color completing high-quality, relevant short-term credentials and degrees. Given the current spotlight on upskilling and the resources that are being reallocated to fund short-term credentials, now is the time to capitalize on the potential for these partnerships.

Chambers of commerce have strong relationships with employers and industry partners and are an efficient way to connect with a wide range of businesses, including small and mid-sized businesses. They have a pulse on the demand for labor in their communities and work with businesses to understand labor needs and challenges. Chambers are known for being able to quickly rally their members and other members of the community to advocate for specific actions. However, employers are only one piece of the talent pipeline equation, and chambers need other partners to provide a full set of supports to employers and employees.

Community colleges bring a wide variety of tools to address degree and credential gaps for adult learners. They are actively engaged with their local students and partners and can institutionalize solutions and approaches in nimble and responsive ways. Integrating community colleges into this work will help to create more long-term sustainability for these efforts; this is not a fleeting strategy that will be here and gone.

Between chambers of commerce and community colleges, there are also countless links to other community partners and organizations in the workforce and economic development space. These organizations work directly with communities of color and bring critical grassroots perspectives to these teams. Community partners can deliver training and services in different ways than chambers or community colleges, making them a critical component of this work.

Convening and providing support to a cross-organizational Core Team taps into the expertise of all organizations and creates an opportunity to amplify individual successes. While each organization brings unique perspectives and strengths, the entire Core Team will be responsible for the outcomes of this work and will share responsibility for ensuring that racial equity is at the center of this work.

To support the development of these partnerships and to increase the number of workers with in-demand credentials and degrees, the Lumina Foundation has provided a grant to jumpstart progress in cities or regions. ACCEF and AACC will identify a cohort of six to eight cities or regions assembled into Core Teams. Each Core Team will be comprised of a chamber, a community college partner and an organization that directly represents BIPOC communities.

A designated representative from each of these organizations will make up the leadership team for each Core Team and will participate in this virtual 18-month Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort program. The full leadership team will be expected to participate in this program. Teams will work together to drive the growth of credentialing and degree programs in their regions and to place workers, particularly BIPOC workers, in well-paid jobs with opportunities for career advancement.

Core Teams in each community will come together to identify both quick wins and longer-term solutions for increasing credential and degree attainment in their communities. Throughout the grant period, each Core Team will regularly engage with employers to solicit feedback and to identify pathways to quality employment and higher wages for those who have earned credentials. At the end of the grant period, each Core Team will have demonstrated results from key strategies that they have already begun to implement and a roadmap for moving forward to increase credential attainment for BIPOC workers.

Program Specifics

The goal of the Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort is to support communities in building partnerships that allow more workers, and particularly BIPOC workers, to gain the credentials or degrees they need to secure well-paid jobs with career advancement opportunities. At the end of the program period, each community will be expected to show how they have increased the number of credentials earned in their community and to have a roadmap for continued progress through 2025.

Participants in this cohort can expect to attend one virtual convening each month to help teams identify the barriers to credential attainment, identify quick-win solutions to implement and develop a strategy for longer-term collaboration to continue the momentum after the grant period has ended. Based on the needs of the selected cohort, sessions might include:

- Facilitated activities to get to agreement on the issues and challenges using data available to different members of the team.
- Guidance on how to identify high-value credentials that will lead to well-paying jobs and a process for engaging business and industry on this topic.
- Guidance on how to access and navigate various local, state, and federal sources of funding that might be available for credential attainment.
- Sharing best practices for connecting employers with those who have earned credentials to create a sustainable talent pipeline.

Each city or region team will also have regular check-ins with ACCEF and its partners to support the development of customized, site-specific supports and guidance on moving the needle on attainment in their region. This will include:

- Working with each team to set milestones and metrics through regular (e.g., monthly) technical assistance and on-demand supports.
- Providing direct one-on-one connections with local, state, and national experts to support teams as they work through barriers to attainment.
- Providing surveys, agendas, and facilitation materials for engagement sessions with community organizations, small and mid-sized business, industry groups, and workers of color.
- Supporting teams as they develop a plan to deepen engagement with employers as a strategy for placing workers after they have earned a credential.

Core Teams will also have optional in-person convening opportunities to share successful strategies and approaches for increasing credential attainment and employment for BIPOC workers. Possible convenings opportunities could include AACC's annual Workforce Development Institute (January 2022), ACCE's Annual Convention (July 2022) and ACCE's Annual Meeting of talent and economic development practitioners (Fall 2022). Throughout the program, ACCEF and AACC will also showcase the work of the Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort to the broader chamber of commerce and community college audiences.

Reporting and Evaluation
Each Core Team will be asked to report back on a few key metrics throughout the course of the grant. We anticipate that different members of the Core Team will be best suited to collect specific pieces of information. ACCE and AACC will provide support on possible ways to collect this information. At the beginning of the grant, Core Teams will be asked to share some baseline data around the current population of credential/degree earners served and some additional information about the current credential/degree landscape in the community.

Throughout the 18-month period and at the end of the grant, each Core Team will be asked to share:

- Number of jobs obtained by those who have earned a degree/credential
- Number of degrees/credentials attained (total and disaggregated by race, age and gender)
- Number of students enrolled in credential/degree programs (total and by race, age and gender)
- Number and type of new and/or improved credential programs developed

We anticipate that chambers of commerce and nonprofit partners may be best suited to report on the first metric, while community colleges likely have existing mechanisms in place to report on the three additional metrics. Regardless of which partner is collecting data for and reporting on these metrics, each Core Team is jointly responsible for these metrics. More information about reporting and evaluation will be provided to the Core Teams selected to participate in this grant.

Proposal Components

Eligible Organizations	Each Core Team will have a diverse leadership team consisting of: • a representative from the chamber of commerce • a representative from the local community college • a representative from a community-based organization that serves at least one BIPOC community in your city or region The chamber of commerce representative will serve as the project lead for the team. Selected communities will need to demonstrate that they have previously worked together effectively to accomplish identified outcomes and that they are well-positioned to address challenges related to credential and degree attainment for workers of color. Questions about eligibility can be addressed foundation@acce.org.
Submission Deadline and Format	Proposals should be submitted electronically in one email to foundation@acce.org by November 5, 2021. Proposals should be no more than seven pages on 8.5"x11" paper in single-spaced 11-point font.
Review Criteria	• Question 1: 30 points • Question 2: 35 points • Question 3: 20 points • Question 4: 10 points • Question 5: 5 points
Resources Available to Cohort Members	Selected communities will have an opportunity to submit a budget for up to $50K to accomplish this work. More details will be provided to Core Teams after selection.
Timeline	Applicants will be notified in late November about their selection to the Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort.