



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: LUMINA'S HBCU ADULT LEARNER INITIATIVE

Rationale

To meet Lumina's national goal of 60 percent of adults holding a high-quality post-secondary credential by 2025, and to build a more prosperous country, millions more individuals over the age of 24 must pursue and complete their degree programs. Adults already make up 40 percent of today's degree and certificate seeking learners and many of them are juggling other responsibilities while pursuing their credentials. Yet, adults who enroll in a four-year institution are far less likely than younger learners to complete a program within six years—only 41.7 percent of adults who enrolled in 2011 completed a credential within six years, compared with 61.7 percent of those who started when they were 20 or younger. The data on adult learners are even more dismal when disaggregated by race. Almost 7 million Black adults aged 25 and older have a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest level of attainment and are not enrolled in postsecondary education. In addition, five million Black Americans aged 25 and older have some college but no degree. Despite the gains in degree attainment over time for Black adults, these gains have not been enough to close a persistent gap between Black and White attainment. Racial gaps in attainment result from a variety of historical and contemporary factors including economic, social, and educational obstacles that systemically hinder and stifle the progress of Black people in the United States. Despite these hindrances Black adult learners continue to seek to enter and re-enter post-secondary education as options for upward mobility become increasingly limited without a post-secondary credential.

As North Carolina continues to pursue its goal to increase the share of adults that have some form of postsecondary credential, it is critical that institutions implement policies, interventions, and incentives that will enable more Black students to successfully navigate the traditional educational pathway to degree completion and help Black adults — who may have stopped out of college or never enrolled— find a pathway to completing a high-quality college credential or degree. **Toward this end, Lumina Foundation is releasing this Request for Information, which seeks to partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in North Carolina to address these obstacles through targeted capacity-building supporting institutional sustainability and student success, particularly for adult students.** Through these efforts, successful institutions will implement changes to remove institutional policy barriers and launch new or expand existing efforts to better support Black adult learners.

Background Context

HBCUs are an essential part of a postsecondary educational system that is more equitable and that helps to remedy the legacy of racism in American higher education and society. They are also key to fulfilling contemporary state and national workforce and economic needs and our urgent societal need to revitalize democratic and civic commitments and institutions. HBCUs are higher education institutions that were founded in the United States prior to 1964 with a specific mission to serve Black students. These institutions and their students encountered a difficult academic year as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn strained the budgets of already under resourced institutions. Additionally, anti-racism protests swept the country last year after the murder of George Floyd. Nonetheless, 2020 also brought some hopeful news to HBCUs. Philanthropists and federal policymakers gave renewed attention to HBCUs. Some HBCUs had record years for alumni giving, and others saw an increase in enrollment as

Black students sought a sense of belonging and security in light of continued and highly publicized police killings of unarmed Black people.

There are HBCUs nationwide such as [Morehouse College](#), [Southern University](#), and [Morgan State University](#) that have made significant progress in student success rates and who are eager to continue that progress with specific attention to serving more adult learners. North Carolina in particular has seen above average increases in degree attainment for Black adults with a 6.9 percentage point gain increase between 2009 and 2019. As of 2019, North Carolina's degree attainment for Black adults was slightly above the national average at 33 percent. North Carolina is home to 13 percent of the nation's HBCUs and the state's HBCUs enroll 45 percent of all Black undergraduates in NC and award 43 percent of Black undergraduate degrees. Additionally, NC has 603,000 Black unenrolled adult learners making it the state with the fifth largest concentration of this population.

Lumina's work in North Carolina extends back more than a decade to a 2009 grant that funded the Minority-Serving Institutions within the UNC System to improve retention and graduation rates for minoritized students. More recently, in 2018, Lumina awarded through a [competitive national RFP](#) grants to the University of North Carolina and North Carolina Community College Systems to support various statewide approaches to serving adult learners. This effort included support for system-wide prior-learning assessment policies and the scaling of Wake Tech's [Finish First NC](#) tool to all public NC community colleges, resulting in the identification of about 59,000 previously unawarded credentials and about 211,000 students who are within one semester of completing a credential. This work also informed a policy change in 2019 to lift an old requirement that students with more than 140 credits had to pay out-of-state tuition, a change made possible by the strong advocacy of the state's HBCUs. Lumina's state policy team has also supported equity-focused policy reform in NC, the establishment of a state attainment goal, the creation of [MyFutureNC](#), and the roll out of the state's emergency aid program.

Eligibility

Eligible institutions include public or private HBCUs within the state of North Carolina:

1. Bennett College
2. Elizabeth City State University
3. Fayetteville State University
4. Johnson C. Smith University
5. Livingstone College
6. North Carolina A&T State University
7. North Carolina Central University
8. Saint Augustine's University
9. Shaw University
10. Winston-Salem State University

Only one response per institution will be accepted. Lumina encourages collaboration among departments and divisions within institutions when developing responses. If multiple responses are received from an institution, Lumina will alert the different parties of each other's responses and require them to do a joint submission.

Funding

Upon evaluating RFI responses we estimate selecting 4-5 institutions to submit full grant proposals for funding that will range from \$125,000 to \$200,000 each over 18-24 months, starting in August 2021 and ending in early 2023. Grant amounts will vary based on the institution's budget request and the quality of the proposal.

Use of Funds

Lumina funds cannot be spent on scholarships, creating scholarship funds, or other forms of direct financial support to students. They also may not be used for lobbying at the local, state, or federal level, or to the general public. Institutions should use the awarded funds to build the capacity necessary to implement policy changes that will result in improved outcomes for Black adult learners or to expand existing efforts to serve Black adult learners. This may include but are not limited to:

- A portion of staff time
- Internal convenings of campus teams
- Research or consultant expenses
- Memberships, publications, and travel associated with relevant organizations and projects in the field
- Data infrastructure investments (e.g. case management software)
- Data collection related to adult learner efforts
- Faculty release time

Lumina is interested in strategic investments that increase institutional sustainability and effectiveness to implement student success strategies for Black adult learners. Grant activities may include, but are not limited to:

- **Data infrastructure:** Without the right data, institutions cannot adequately assess obstacles faced by adult learners and develop ways to keep those individuals on a path to a degree or reconnect with those individuals and build additional on ramps to completion. Applicants may propose the creation or expansion of data infrastructure to collect outcomes data on adult learners and/or new systems to enable key institutional actors to use those data to inform when students receive proactive outreach from student support services staff and/or faculty.
- **Adult-Centered Student Services:** Applicants may propose to develop or enhance an area of their student services (e.g., advising) to center more directly on the needs of adult learners. An applicant also might propose to develop and/or integrate specific student support systems like navigators, coaching, alternative instructional delivery modes, or comprehensive student supports that address adult learners' life and career goals throughout their educational pathway.
- **Credit for Prior Learning¹:** Applicants may propose the development or implementation of CPL policies and practices. CPL is the process for evaluating and awarding credit for college-level learning that has been acquired outside of the classroom through work and life experience. CPL has a positive correlation with student persistence in higher education, higher graduation rates, and shorter times to degree attainment for adult learners yet, according to [recent research](#), due to the historic underfunding of HBCUs, CPL has been underutilized.
- **Teaching and Learning for Adult Learners:** Applicants may propose enhancing faculty knowledge and capacity to teach adult learners and take advantage of the assets they bring to the classroom and institution through the redesign of their courses and their methods of instruction.
- **Clear and Coherent Degree Pathways:** Four-year institutions have increasingly been taking a [comprehensive approach](#) to institutional transformation through the design and

¹ Credit for Prior Learning is also referred to as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

implementation of pathways. Applicants may propose to build institutional capacity to define clear and coherent pathways for degree completion and to ensure high-quality learning while on those pathways. This may include reforms that serve adults such as degree mapping to prevent excess credit accumulation, degree audits of students that have stopped out, course redesign, early alert systems, or career exploration in the first and second year of enrollment.

Adult Learner Assessment. As part of this work applicants should include an assessment of their institution's effectiveness in serving adult learners by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data on how the institution's rules, policies, and practices may create obstacles for adult learners. This will allow institutions to better understand the experiences of their adult learners and the institutional practices that impact them. Findings will be used to create work plans. If an institution has already previously completed an adult learner assessment or audit those findings can be submitted in lieu of this part of the work.

Adult Learner Initiative Team. Collaborative, shared leadership among administrators, faculty, and staff is a key component to creating campus environments that foster student success.² Moreover, cross-functional work groups can be powerful vehicles for launching and institutionalizing policy and practice changes. As part of this work, we will require each institution to create a cross-functional Adult Learner Initiative (ALI) Team comprised of individuals in essential institutional roles.³ Engaging individuals with these operational capacities are essential to the implementation and sustainability of the work.

Each ALI Team must consist of five representatives in total. At least three of the members should be from the following areas:

- Adult learner or Continuing Education Office
- Institutional research
- Information technology
- Student affairs
- Academic affairs

Additionally, a senior executive with leadership across one or more of the aforementioned areas should be on the ALI Team for accountability purposes and to support overall efforts. This senior leader should *not* be solely from the continuing education office.

Criteria

Lumina Foundation will select applicants to submit full grant proposals based on their ability to address the following criteria in their RFI responses:

- ✓ **Alignment:** A connection between the proposed work and the strategic direction and priorities of the institution
- ✓ **Adult Learner-Focused:** Clear interest in adult learners and a strong articulation of how proposed grant activities will serve them
- ✓ **Institutional Readiness:** Prior evidence of serving adult learners or evidence of serious planning and leadership devoted to expanding service to this population
- ✓ **Project Outcomes:** Namely the identification of potential key institutional policy barriers for adult learners, the development of an action plan to address one or more of these barriers, and a configuration of the right team that is committed to implement the action plan

² Kezar, A. (2005). Promoting student success: The importance of shared leadership and collaboration.

³ York, T. T., Rodriguez, A., Looney, S., & Cole, A. (2019). Guided Pathways Model at Access-Oriented 4-Year Institutions: A Student-Centered Approach to College Access and Success, Washington, DC: Association of Public & Land-grant Universities.

Lumina staff will select the institutions invited to submit full proposals. However, external evaluators familiar with the subject matter of this project will serve as “non-scoring” reviewers whose written feedback will inform the staff evaluations.

Evaluation

In keeping with our commitment to oversee, evaluate, and learn from grants, Lumina will conduct an independent external evaluation of the awarded projects (including, but not limited to, site visits). The awarded grantees are expected to provide their full cooperation to the Foundation in any site visit or other evaluation effort.

Other Benefits

Applicants and grantees may be invited to join upcoming convenings and other conversations hosted by Lumina Foundation and our partners.

Through participation in this project, institutions that are selected to submit full grant proposals will also receive technical assistance in the development of their work and agree to engage with a designated journalist tasked with telling the stories of the HBCUs that are funded.

HBCU ALI RFI Timeline

Milestone	Date(s)
RFI Released	June 21 st
RFI Deadline	July 11 th
RFI Evaluation Window	July 12 th - July 22 nd
Selection Deadline	August 9 th
HBCU Adult Learner Initiative Convening	October 4 th

Next Steps

RFI responses should be sent to HBCUALI@luminafoundation.org by **9pm EST on July 11, 2021**. We will notify applicants in early August about the statuses of their requests. Prospective applicants also may email this address with questions in advance of submitting proposals.

Lumina Request for Information Form

Section I: Organization Information

Answer the following questions for Section I in the space provided below.

Submission Date: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

Total amount requested: \$

PROPOSAL CONTACTS

Project Director

Name:

Title:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Address (if different from above):

Who has legal authority to execute a grant agreement on behalf of your organization?

Name:

Title:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Address (if different from above):

Financial Contact

Name:

Title:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Address (if different from above):

Section II: Proposal Narrative

The proposal narrative should not exceed 5 pages. Use 12-point font and standard one-inch margins. The proposal should closely follow the outline below, retaining sections and headings, and be submitted in narrative form. It is not necessary to respond to the questions directly within this form.

Organization Description

Please share your organization's mission statement. Please describe how serving Black adult learners and increasing adult student success through this project would align with your strategic direction and priorities. You are welcomed to link to any public statements or documents to support your narrative, if applicable.

Institutional Readiness

Why is your institution well-positioned to serve Black adult learners?

What existing policies, practices, and other initiatives that serve adult learners at your institution have been effective? How will you leverage them for this project?

Data

If available, share any baseline data or data from the latest available year on enrollment, retention, and/or completion disaggregated by age. For the purposes of this work an adult learner is defined as a student between the ages of 25-65.

Project Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this work are to identify institutional policy barriers for Black adult learners and implement an action plan to change these policies. What will your institutional outcomes be? What do you expect to accomplish or produce, and how will the proposed work enable the institution to make progress toward its goals?

Student Outcomes Measurement and Assessment

In addition to policy change, we will be measuring progress on student-level outcomes, specifically, adult learners who enroll and re-enroll, earn 24+ credits in the first year, and are retained in the second year. If those data are not available, we may ask for adult learner data on major declarations or programs of study and earning credits within that program of study within the first two years. Based on the data available to you, how will you measure progress on the expected outcomes throughout the course of this grant?

Sustainability

Briefly explain the strategies you will use to maintain momentum or sustain the spirit and impact of this work after grant funding ends.

Staff

Provide a list of all the people who will work on the project and their title or credential as it relates to the project. This list should include administrators, faculty, students, and/or staff who will participate on the Adult Learner Initiative Team, which is a requirement.