An American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funding Opportunity:

Redesigning Remedial and Developmental Education
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The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides a critical infusion of cash to state coffers to ensure that essential public functions like education have stable levels of funding during the current economic downturn. In addition, ARRA provides resources to implement just in time solutions for re-tooling the U.S. workforce for the high-skilled jobs that will drive the economy’s long term recovery. While there is a great deal of pressure on states to spend ARRA funds to fill budget gaps, President Obama is strongly urging states to use their investments to develop long-term solutions that will result in increased productivity of public institutions.

Postsecondary education, in particular, must be mindful of its current prospects for future public funding. If the current round of legislative sessions in each of the states is any indication, direct funding for postsecondary institutions will continue to be in peril as governors and legislatures ask for greater efficiencies from institutions while maintaining their investments in need-based financial aid. Wise investments that meet education and training needs, while also improving the overall productivity of postsecondary education, are critical to the long-term health of institutions that are expected to serve an increasingly diverse population of students.

This ECS Alert describes the various sources of ARRA funds and offers suggestions for how states and postsecondary institutions might use this funding for one time investments in education technology and curriculum development. Such investments would help meet the education and training needs of the growing dislocated worker population while also increasing the long-term level of institutional productivity.

ARRA Opportunities for Postsecondary Education

The following sources of funding are available to postsecondary education institutions through ARRA.

Education Stabilization Funds

If the 23 states that already have had their preliminary applications to the U.S. Department of Education for Education Stabilization Funding approved are any indication, postsecondary education institutions can count on receiving anywhere between zero and 65% of the first round of this funding. To date, the average percentage of state funds allocated for postsecondary education is at 20%. While states are able to allocate the funding through the 2011-12 fiscal year, many of the approved states are using most of their federal dollars to fill gaps in their the 2008-09 and 2009-10 budgets. Twenty-seven states have not yet submitted their preliminary
applications or are awaiting approval, which means that the opportunity to make long-term investments in postsecondary education has not yet passed.

**Race to the Top**

The $4.35 billion competitive grant process of the U.S. Department of Education termed Race to the Top encourages states to engage in system-wide reform of state standards, assessments, data systems, teacher preparation programs and low-performing schools. While the program primarily is focused on K-12 education, there are opportunities in all four goal areas for postsecondary education, particularly related to greater alignment between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

**Workforce Investment Act (WIA)**

ARRA allocated $3.95 billion for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs to include:

- $500 million for adult employment and training activities
- $1.25 billion for dislocated worker employment and training
- $200 million for national emergency grants for communities that have experienced plant closings, mass layoffs or other worker dislocations
- $750 million in competitive grants for worker training and placement in high-growth and emerging industry sectors, $500 million of which is specifically allocated for energy efficiency and renewable energy industries.  

While these funds are largely controlled by state and local workforce investment boards, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is strongly encouraging these boards to use the funds to create sophisticated systems that will enable dislocated workers to access the training they need as efficiently as possible. As a result, DOL expects that workforce investment boards will contract with postsecondary institutions, particularly community colleges, to provide timely education training to large numbers of workers in specific occupational skill areas, adult education and literacy services and customized training.

While the contracts are intended to provide training in high-need sectors or areas, the Department of Labor has made it clear that funding curriculum development for postsecondary institutions is an acceptable use of WIA dollars.

**Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP)**

Through its National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the U.S. Department of Commerce received $4.35 billion from ARRA to award competitive grants through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). These grants can support the acquisition and deployment of equipment, technology and other infrastructure necessary to promote access and educational/employment opportunities among low-income, unemployed and otherwise vulnerable populations. At least $200 million of the grant funds will support upgrades in technology at public computing centers, including community colleges. BTOP provides the opportunity for community colleges to build computer centers or purchase new equipment that can be accessed by dislocated workers and provide technology-based instruction.

**Investing in the Redesign and Improvement of Developmental Education**

These funding opportunities made available through the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Commerce present a unique opportunity for innovative postsecondary institutions to improve systems of support for adults and students who lack the skills to be successful. Investments in technology and curriculum redesign would help
deliver critical basic skills instruction to the growing numbers of students who are looking for timely and effective education and training.

The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, is collaborating with the Education Commission of the States, the National Center for Academic Transformation and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems to pilot the redesign of developmental math, reading and writing courses. The early results of this initiative suggest that this effort is a replicable model that would make for a competitive proposal to access ARRA funds. The following is a brief overview of the project, key elements and a strategy to help postsecondary institutions, their system offices or states develop redesigned remedial and developmental education programs.

**Tennessee Board of Regents Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative**

With approximately 70% of all new enrollees at Tennessee community colleges requiring remedial/developmental education, the Tennessee Board of Regents directed system office staff and institutions to engage in a significant reform of remedial/developmental education that would increase effectiveness and reduce costs. The result of this directive is the TBR Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative. The project uses the impressive Program in Course Redesign (PCR) developed by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT). PCR is a tested approach to course redesign that empowers faculty to incorporate the use of technology and competency-based learning strategies to deliver instruction that improves student success at a fraction of the cost of a traditional course. Through testing and continuous improvement of the redesign process, NCAT developed five models that have achieved measurable results for students and costs savings for institutions. The models either:

- Supplement traditional courses using technology to drive greater student interaction with course content
- Replace class-meeting time with online, interactive learning
- Abandon the traditional class-meeting by offering content in learning centers where students can engage the content they need on their schedule through the use of software and one-on-one instruction
- Offer a fully online model where course materials and faculty interaction occurs on the web
- Provide a “buffet” of learning options that customize instruction to the unique needs of students.

The Tennessee Board of Regents has learned that the program in course redesign is ideally suited to remedial/developmental education. Six separate pilots have employed one of the PCR models to redesign developmental math, reading and writing courses. While the full results of the pilots won’t be complete until later in 2009, to date, some of the findings have been encouraging. Among the findings being reported by the pilot projects are:

- Increased percentage of students completing redesigned courses
- Rapid student progression through remedial/developmental sequences with many students completing more than one course in a sequence per term through competency-based, self-paced learning modules
- Higher faculty productivity with faculty serving higher numbers of students per term
- Reduced reliance on adjunct faculty
Greater success in college-level courses for those who complete redesigned courses

Departmental cost savings through increased faculty productivity

Student cost savings as they progress through remedial/developmental sequences in fewer courses and terms.

**The Value Proposition**

Redesigning remedial/developmental education is particularly compelling during the current economic downturn, as it would use federal ARRA dollars to:

**Meet Workforce Needs.** Redesigned courses will enable colleges to serve the large numbers of dislocated workers seeking education and training by delivering customized basic skills instruction that will quickly move them on to job-specific training and degree programs.

**Improve Student Success.** The Program in Course Redesign Model has a proven track record of developing courses that increase student success. Increasing student success in developmental education courses leads to improved college persistence and graduation rates.

**Increase Faculty Productivity.** Successfully redesigned courses allow faculty to serve more students, without compromising quality.

**Generate Long Term Cost Savings.** Increased faculty productivity, improved student success and more rapid progression through remedial/developmental sequences results in cost savings to students and institutions and greater return on investment for policymakers.

**The Nuts and Bolts of Accessing ARRA Funds to Redesign Developmental Education**

We make the following suggestions for developing a strategy for accessing ARRA funds to conduct course redesign in your system and institutions:

- Engage your state or local workforce investment board about a contract to develop a redesigned curriculum in remedial/developmental instruction that will create self-paced, competency-based modules that enable students to quickly meet their remedial/developmental needs and move them on to high-demand job training programs.
- Partner with faculty in high-demand certificate and degree programs to identify the basic skills and knowledge required to align remedial/developmental learning modules with basic skill expectations of those programs.
- Pursue funding for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) to purchase software and hardware to outfit learning and resource centers that can be used in course redesigns, but also provide computer access for dislocated workers.
- Make the case for accessing U.S. Department of Education Stabilization Fund to support a model in course redesign that will reap long term cost savings for the college.
- Incorporate the delivery of redesigned remedial/developmental courses to high school students into your state’s *Race to the Top* application on the grounds that it will improve college readiness and assist low-performing high schools.
- Contact the Education Commission of the States for further assistance on how to develop your proposal for course redesign.

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For more information on the Tennessee Board of Regents Developmental Redesign Initiative, contact Bruce Vandal at bvandal@ecs.org, 303.299.3611 or visit the project Web site at http://tnredesign.org.


5 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


12 Ibid.