

Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN)

A National Network for Developing Higher Education Models

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATIONS DUE: January 31, 2014

SELECTIVE CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

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

With support from Lumina Foundation, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), led by higher education innovators and coordinated by Public Agenda, will be formed to support such a collaborative national effort involving up to 20 colleges and universities that have work well underway in building, implementing or refining competency-based degree programs. This opportunity is best suited for institutions with robust models that have an interest in accelerating progress that benefits their models and the field through structured collaboration involving rapid iteration and testing of practices, processes and concepts.

This is an invitation to apply for participation in the network, which will operate with foundation support for three years. Continued participation in the community, which is annually renewable, will be contingent upon completion of agreed-upon activities and team contributions to maintaining an open, collaborative and trusting environment. Additional calls for applications will be issued periodically. This is not a grant program, but related travel expenses will be reimbursed and participating institutions will have access to all findings, conclusions, recommendations and other shared learning resources.

This national network will consist of representatives from colleges and universities willing to commit time and effort to solving common challenges around developing quality competency-based models capable of scaling or spreading to affordably serve more students. The C-BEN steering committee, composed of institutional representatives, will guide the direction of work, with priority given to addressing significant obstacles that cannot be adequately resolved in isolation. To the extent possible, strands of activity will be designed to complement institutions' existing efforts and should not require additional hiring or resources.

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

- Accelerated progress on their own competency-based models through structured collaboration.
- Opportunities to learn from other leaders in the field and recognition of their own efforts.
- Access to experts on competency-based education, financial aid reimbursement, stakeholder engagement, program design, assessment, communications, business processes and systems, and so forth.

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- An enhanced ability to collectively influence the national dialogue while creating conditions for change, including informing separate-but-related foundation-sponsored policy convenings with state and federal government officials, accreditors and other stakeholders.
- Opportunities to work with other colleges and universities to develop and shape the broader market for competency-based education.

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

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

Note: Next Generation Learning Challenges, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is offering a related but distinct opportunity for institutions interested in getting started with competency-based education. Please follow this link for more information about this opportunity:

<http://tinyurl.com/CBEOpportunities>.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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

- Offer one or more competency-based degrees approved by a regional accreditor –OR– demonstrate significant progress toward the development of at least one competency-based degree program and intend to seek approval from a regional accreditor to offer the program.
- Identify an interdisciplinary team for the project of up to seven members, including faculty, academic leaders, business and financial aid officers, information technology leaders, institutional researchers, and marketing and communications professionals. These members should have support from institutional leadership to undertake project-related work.

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- Commit to working collaboratively, collegially and transparently on quarterly projects with representatives from other colleges and universities interested in scaling or spreading competency-based models.
- Commit to sharing information about what works and what does not (related to model design, competency development, assessment, navigation of regulatory systems, and so forth) with other participating institutions. *Institutions will not be required to share trade secrets or intellectual property that provides a competitive advantage. For example, a strand of activity could include formulating and testing principles of good assessment, but proprietary assessment tools could be kept confidential.*
- Commit to the participation of at least two-to-three team members in quarterly, two-day convenings, with participation occurring on a rotating basis guided by the nature of the work. *Travel expenses will be reimbursed for up to three members of each team to attend the quarterly convenings.*
- Commit to team participation of up to approximately 20 hours per month in R&D cycles designed to complement their existing efforts to design, build or refine a competency-based model. Note that a concerted effort will be made to ensure that as many of these hours as possible are tightly aligned with work already being undertaken by participating institutions.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and to the academic success of low-income and first-generation students, adults, and racial and ethnic minorities.
- Provide a letter from the institution's president (signed by team members) supporting the institution's involvement in C-BEN and commitment to working collaboratively to accelerate progress on common challenges to spreading and scaling competency-based degree programs.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION NETWORK GOALS

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

This will be achieved by:

- Creating a network of institutions and systems serving diverse student populations with a demonstrated commitment to developing, scaling or spreading competency-based degree models.
- Providing a structured set of processes for relevant, practical, real-time research and

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development on design issues fundamental to building robust models that lend themselves to a collaborative approach and testing across different contexts.

- Identifying best practices in design, delivery and assessment to support member institutions and the field more broadly.
- Applying what is learned through the network's iterative efforts to accelerate progress on challenges to developing credible models at scale.

The network is guided by several core principles:

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

LEARNING AND ACTION MECHANISMS

The processes for generating, sharing and making use of the resulting "next practices" consist of structured R&D cycles, quarterly convenings and communications tools such as a website, webinars and learning briefs.

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

Convening (April 2014)	Convening (July 2014)	Convening (Oct. 2014)	Convening (Jan. 2015)	
	R&D	R&D	R&D	

Structured R&D Cycles: Between each quarterly convening, cross-institutional R&D work groups will form around significant practice-based challenges of mutual interest, prioritizing those areas with the greatest potential to increase capacity for serving students. Potential topics for work strands include those associated with program design, learning assessment, program integrity and rigor, business processes and systems, sustainable financial models, stakeholder engagement, and communications and storytelling. Regular R&D cycles are intended to accelerate knowledge generation and provide frameworks through which lessons and "next practices" can be constantly tested and revised against emerging evidence about what is working and what is not working, for whom and under what circumstances. Institutional team participants are encouraged to participate in R&D work groups that support their existing efforts

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or challenges they want to address. The structured R&D cycles will draw on the 90-day cycle of inquiry methodology used by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI):

<http://www.ihl.org/about/Documents/IHI90DayResearchandDevelopmentProcessAug10.pdf>

Quarterly Convenings: The R&D cycles will be framed by quarterly convenings, during which members of the network will come together to discuss findings, share challenges, plan future work, and develop strategies and tools for designing their degree programs to spread and scale. At least two annual quarterly meetings will be two-day, in-depth working sessions structured for cross-institutional work groups to make significant progress on key issues of practice, to design R&D projects for the next 90 days, and to debrief and share lessons from the prior R&D cycle. Other meetings could be structured as site visits; demonstrations; intensive work with a subset of institutions intensively focused on high-need strands of work; or to engage external stakeholders, such as accreditors, state and federal officials, and vendor groups.

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

NETWORK STRUCTURE

The first two years of the network will be aimed at growing and maturing collaborative partnerships; the third year will focus on supporting the development of the community as a self-sustaining network with distributed leadership and well-established channels of communication and collaboration.

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

Steering Committee: The steering committee, comprised of institutional representatives, will develop and maintain a strategic vision, guide the overall work, make decisions about the annual composition of the community, and internally distribute leadership and oversight responsibility for individual strands of activity between the quarterly convenings. The co-chairs are Laurie Dodge, vice chancellor for institutional assessment and planning at Brandman University, and David Schejbal, dean of continuing education, outreach and e-learning at University of Wisconsin-Extension.

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Project Support: Public Agenda will provide infrastructure and project management support for the network. Southern New Hampshire University will provide meeting and logistical support.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Institutions that meet the eligibility criteria are invited to submit applications using the form included in this document to kbarth@publicagenda.org. The deadline for submissions is **January 31, 2014**. An informational call will be held on **December 17 at 2PM EST**. Please contact kbarth@publicagenda.org for call-in information and questions about the application process.

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About Lumina Foundation

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

About Public Agenda

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

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I. Institutional Information

Submission Date:

College or University:	
Mailing Address:	
Street Address (if different from above):	
Website:	

PROPOSAL CONTACT

Name:

Title:

Phone

Number:

Email

Address:

II. Program Information and Narrative

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

1. Do you offer at least one competency-based degree program?		Ye s			No
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- a) If not, what is the proposed date of implementation for your competency-based education program?

2. Is your competency-based program regionally accredited?		Ye s			No
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a) If not, are you seeking or will you seek regional accreditation?		Ye s			No
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b) Name of Regional Accrediting Agency:

3. Is your competency-based program a separate entity from your institution (or will it be)?					
		Ye s			No

a)

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A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the applicant to provide details about their institution and program. The box is currently blank.

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- The number of students your program(s) serves or will seek to serve.
- Plans for scaling or spreading competency-based degree programs to serve more students.
- Your institution's commitment to diversity and equity and how these are embedded in the design, development and implementation of your competency-based degree program(s).

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

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

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

- 8. Seven areas likely to be addressed by the Competency-Based Education Network are listed below. Please rank the top three (3) topics that your institution is interested in working on at the outset, with No. 1 as the highest priority:**

RANK

PRACTICE-BASED CHALLENGES

Program Design (measuring learning, determining student learning outcomes/competencies, establishing portability, identifying and implementing effective supports to guide students through self-paced

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learning experiences, ensuring continuous improvement)

Learning Assessment (determining criteria for valid, reliable student learning assessments, validating learning, ensuring quality)

Program Integrity and Rigor (identifying and implementing safeguards that protect students and taxpayers against fraud and abuse to ensure long-term viability of competency-based education, Title IV issues)

Business Processes and Systems (adapting or inventing new back-office practices that can support cost-effective business models, exploring new ways of doing business, tracking achievement of competencies, implementing new student information systems, credit portability)

Sustainable Financial Models (aligning student financial aid systems and processes, creatively finding flexibility within existing Title IV law and regulations, exploring affordability and pricing issues)

Stakeholder Engagement (engaging faculty/staff, gaining employer/industry acceptance, change management strategies, outreach to higher education communities, student voice)

Communications and Storytelling (developing a typology of competency-based education to help create shared understanding, establishing a common language, identifying effective communication strategies, telling the story of competency-based education, fitting competency-based education into the larger higher education narrative)

III. Institutional Team

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

Up to three team members must be able to participate in quarterly, two-day meetings. Travel expenses will be reimbursed.

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

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CT TEAM LEADER

Name:

Title:

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

TEAM MEMBER 2

Name:

Title:

Primary responsibilities at

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

TEAM MEMBER 6

Name:

Title:

Primary responsibilities at your institution including primary responsibilities

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responsibilities
with respect to
the CBE
program(s):

TEAM MEMBER 7

Name:

Title:

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

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

**Total
number
on team:**

White, Non-Hispanic/Latino:

Black, Non-Hispanic/Latino:

Hispanic/Latino:

Asian:

Native Hawaiian or other

Pacific Islander:

American Indian or Alaskan

Native:

Multi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial or

Other:

Women:

IV. Letter of Commitment

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

A letter of commitment is submitted with this application.
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Application Submission

Submit completed applications (including letters of commitment) by email to **kbarth@publicagenda.org**. The deadline for submissions is **January 31, 2014**. An informational call will be held on **December 17 at 2PM EST**. Please contact **kbarth@publicagenda.org** for call-in information and questions about the application process.