

Invitation to Submit Letters of Interest: Implementation and Evaluation Grants

With funding from the John M. Belk Endowment and the ECMC Foundation, the UNC System Office has launched a Student Success Innovation Lab (SSIL). The SSIL will make competitive grants to UNC institutions to implement and evaluate initiatives that are designed to improve student success. A hallmark of the SSIL will be a commitment to rigorous, third-party evaluation that can produce high-quality evidence of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of particular student success interventions.

The main goal of SSIL grants is to enable UNC institutions to *implement new or scale existing student success initiatives and evaluate the results*. These grants are designed to inform institutional and System-level efforts to improve student success rates so as to achieve the goals outlined in the UNC System Strategic Plan (<http://northcarolina.edu/strategic-planning>).

This invitation outlines the process by which institutions can submit a **letter of interest** for one implementation and evaluation grant.

Institutions that wish to receive SSIL funding to implement an initiative will be required to partner with a third-party evaluator (or team of evaluators) to conduct a rigorous study of the intervention. Evaluators for SSIL projects will be drawn from a group of UNC System faculty and staff that have been selected to serve as Research Affiliates on the basis of their expertise and experience in program evaluation. The System Office will facilitate a matching process that pairs Research Affiliates with institutional implementation teams on the basis of common interests and compatibility. Note that Research Affiliates will not be from the same institution as the student success initiative being implemented.

GRANT TYPES AND PROCESS

The SSIL will fund two **types** of implementation and evaluation grants:

- *Development and Efficacy*: These grants will fund the development, implementation, and evaluation of a new student success intervention so as to rigorously test its effect on student outcomes.
- *Replication and Scale*: These grants will enable institutions to implement an existing intervention with promising evidence at greater scale, with a different group of students, and/or at a different site(s), and evaluate the results of that expansion.

The SSIL implementation and evaluation grantmaking **process** will include three phases:

- *Phase 1*: Interested UNC institutions will plan student success interventions that lend themselves to rigorous evaluation. Institutional teams will work with Research Affiliates in Phase 1 to detail these plans in **letters of interest**. The System Office will assign a Research Affiliate to each institution.
- *Phase 2*: A subset of institutions will be invited to submit **full proposals** based on their letters of interest. Those institutions that are invited to submit full proposals will be matched with SSIL Research Affiliates to assist in creating the implementation and evaluation plan.

- *Phase 3:* Project teams (institution and Research Affiliate) that are selected for funding will **implement** the intervention and launch the experimental or quasi-experimental **study** of the results.

Applicants invited to submit full proposals in Phase 2 will be eligible to receive grants of up to \$200,000 over two years if their project is selected for funding. Grant amounts will vary by grant type, and inter-institutional collaborations are encouraged. Letters of interest should demonstrate institution’s capacity to match award funds in dollars or in-kind contributions at the level of at least 25 percent.

AREAS OF FOCUS

SSIL grants will fund student success initiatives in the following broad areas:

1. *Innovations in teaching and learning:* Projects in this category harness new approaches to instruction to improve student learning and completion in key courses. Examples include: course redesign, integration of adaptive courseware, tutoring and academic support.
2. *Student advising and support services:* Projects in this category will develop and test the services and supports that can keep students on track to degree completion. Examples include: success coaching, case management approaches to student advising, financial aid counseling and application assistance.
3. *Innovative financial supports:* Projects in this category will aim to reduce financial barriers that may hinder student completion, create incentives for students to accumulate credits and complete a degree in a timely fashion, and/or combine financial aid and other student supports. Examples include: micro-grants/emergency aid, performance-based scholarships, summer grants.

SUBMITTING A LETTER OF INTEREST

- **Deadline for LOI submission: 5:00 PM on November 8, 2018.**
- **Length:** Not to exceed 1,500 words including any references, budgets, data tables, or figures.
- **Submission process:** Upload your Letter of Interest to https://northcarolina.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9vOPXAbnOzvP4Ut. Proposals should be submitted by an institution’s Office of the Chancellor or Chief Academic Officer.
- **What to expect:** A limited number of institutions submitting letters of interest will be invited to submit a full proposal in mid-November 2018 with proposals due mid-January 2019.

GUIDELINES FOR LETTER OF INTEREST

Each institution may submit only **one letter of interest for one student success initiative** in response to this opportunity. Letters should address the following:

- **Problem Statement:** Establish a clear and compelling problem statement that explains the challenge your institution seeks to address and how the proposed project aligns with your institution’s overall student success strategy and Performance Agreement goals.
- **Project Description:** Provide a clear description of the proposed intervention that will be implemented and specific populations on which the project will focus. Project should fall under one of the three areas described above (innovation in teaching and learning, student services and support, and/or financial supports), though some projects may span more than one area.

- **Impact:** Identify the student outcomes that the project aspires to affect and explain the proposed impact that the proposed initiative will have on those outcomes.
- **Evidence Base:** Describe available evidence that shows this strategy can improve student success among target student populations.
- **Evaluation Plan:** Provide a brief description of your evaluation plan.
- **Resources Required:** Provide a description of the resources needed to implement the project, broken out by spending categories (personnel, services, evaluation, 25% match).
- **Timeline:** Provide a timeline that is aligned with the proposed budget.
- **Initiative leadership and personnel:** Include information on the faculty and staff members that will lead the effort.

The attached rubric details how Letters of Interest will be evaluated.

INQUIRIES

Questions regarding the Student Success Innovation Lab should be addressed to Shun Robertson, Assistant Vice President for Policy Development and Analysis, at srobertson@northcarolina.edu.

**Implementation and Evaluation Grants
Rubric**

CATEGORY	HIGH RATING (2 points)	AVERAGE RATING (1 point)	LOW RATING (0 point)	Weight
Project Description	The letter of interest provides a clear and compelling description of the problem the initiative is trying to solve, how the project will improve student outcomes and for which groups of students, and the timeline for implementation.	The letter of interest provides a partial description of the problem the initiative is trying to solve, how the project will improve student outcomes and for which groups of students, and the timeline for implementation.	The project description lacks important details.	2.5
Evidence Base	The proposed initiative incorporates a strategy that is promising and based on rigorous evidence.	The proposed initiative incorporates a strategy that may be promising, but is backed by only limited rigorous evidence.	The proposed initiative lacks rigorous evidence.	5
Potential Impact (Students)	The proposed initiative should have a meaningful impact on the institution's overall student success rates.	The proposed initiative should have a positive impact on the outcomes of the target group, but will have limited impact on overall rates of student success.	It is not clear from the letter of interest what impact the initiative will have on overall student success outcomes.	7.5
Potential Impact (Research Contribution)	The proposed initiative represents a significant opportunity to contribute to student success research.	The proposed initiative will contribute some new information to student success research.	The proposed initiative's contribution to student success research will be limited.	5
Evaluation Plan	The proposed initiative will allow for a rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental study of effectiveness, as indicated by the evaluation plan included in the letter of interest.	The proposed initiative may allow for a rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental study of effectiveness, but the evaluation plan included in the letter of interest lacks important details.	It is not clear whether the proposed initiative will allow for a rigorous evaluation.	5