

**Awards for Innovation in Higher Education Cover Page**

**I. Contact Information for Application Coordinator**

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**II. List of Participants**

West Hills College, Coalinga  
West Hills College, Lemoore  
San Joaquin Delta College  
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)  
AcademyOne

**III. Abstract**

West Hills College Coalinga, West Hills College Lemoore, San Joaquin Delta College, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and AcademyOne propose to implement the Quick Path Program. Over the three-year funding period, the Quick Path Program will develop and implement a web-enabled prior learning assessment (PLA) infrastructure platform that will serve as a proof of concept during the funding period and lay the groundwork for innovation scale up throughout California. This evidence-based innovation will leverage lessons learned from similar regional and statewide PLA initiatives implemented in other states and will advance the efforts of partnering colleges and the state of California to award college credit for prior learning.

Key program outputs will include (1) policies for regional PLA implementation and PLA credit articulation; (2) training and resources to ensure institution-wide buy-in and fidelity of implementation; (3) a multi-institutional online platform to facilitate the PLA process; and (4) research studies that will document the innovation’s impact and promote its replication to other institutions of higher education throughout California. Program outcomes will include (1) increased college enrollment among nontraditional and low-income students; (2) increased student persistence and graduation rates; (3) reduced overall cost of attendance; and (4) reduced time to degree and credential completion. The Quick Path Program’s PLA platform represents a use of technology not common in higher education, and program impacts will especially benefit students traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including incumbent workers with some college and no degree, military veterans, nontraditional students, low-income students, and minority students.

**IV. Contact Information for Representative of Fiscal Agent**

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**V. Assurance and Signature**

I assure that I have read and support this application. I understand that, if this application is chosen for an award, West Hills Community College District will serve as the fiscal agent for the award and that the responsibility of the fiscal agent includes distribution of funds to any other participants in the application pursuant to any agreement between the participants. I also understand that, if this application is chosen for an award, the Committee on Awards for Innovation in Higher Education may request submittal of reports or other information.

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Dr. Frank Gornick, Chancellor  
West Hills Community College District

February 3, 2017  
Date

## 1. The problem to be solved

The proposed Quick Path Program will address four primary challenges faced by students at the colleges included in this proposal as well as at postsecondary institutions throughout California and will result in improved student outcomes, particularly among students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education. First, the majority of students at participating colleges face significant financial barriers to accessing higher education. More than 66% of target students are economically disadvantaged;<sup>1</sup> 53% report that they cannot afford the \$46-per-unit tuition;<sup>2</sup> and 36% must work more than 21 hours per week while completing course work.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, financial barriers disproportionately impact students from minority backgrounds and other underrepresented students,<sup>4</sup> and the vast majority of students served by partnering colleges belong to groups historically underrepresented in higher education—Hispanics/Latinos (60%), other underrepresented ethnic minorities (14%), current or former foster youth (1.5%), students with disabilities (5.4%), and veteran students (3.3%).<sup>5</sup>

Second, students served by the colleges participating in this proposal demonstrate low one-year persistence rates (53%), low completion rates (six-year completion rate of 39.2%), and lengthy time to degree or credential completion (the median time to complete an associate degree is 3.3 years).<sup>6,7</sup> These problems exist at colleges throughout California and disproportionately impact low-income students, students who work part-time, students from minority backgrounds, and students from other groups historically underrepresented in higher education.<sup>8,9</sup>

Third, partnering colleges serve communities in which a significant percentage of adults over 25 have not completed an associate or bachelor's degree (78.2%).<sup>10</sup> Many of these no college-educated adults lack the technical 21<sup>st</sup> century work-based competencies required by industries,<sup>11</sup> which increasingly need a highly skilled workforce to remain globally competitive.<sup>12,13,14</sup> In some cases, working adults have the skills and competencies required by industry but do not hold formal credentials or degrees, which significantly reduces the workforce income mobility fundamental to economic growth.<sup>15,16</sup> While an increasing number of California working adults over 25 are enrolling in postsecondary institutions, this population requires targeted outreach and incentives to pursue higher education.<sup>17,18</sup> In addition, working adults face a number of unique challenges that place them at high risk of multiple stop outs or dropout, including stresses related to the need to balance academic pursuits with work and familial responsibilities.<sup>19,20</sup> California colleges must better accommodate older students by modifying academic schedules, support services, and structures (which are historically designed for traditional students [e.g., 18–24 years old, full-time students]) in order to increase persistence and graduation rates and decrease the time to completion among this population.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, while recent policy reforms have approved the award of credit for prior learning and improved articulation and ease of transfer across California educational institutions (e.g., *Student Transfer Reform Act of 2010*, Associate Degrees for Transfer, UC Transfer Pathways, Executive Order 365), California college students' associate degree/credential completion and successful transfer continue to be deterred by campus-specific course requirements and policies requiring students to navigate through a maze of complex, varying cross-institutional agreements that often result in credit loss and course duplication, frustrating students and increasing time to completion and/or transfer. California colleges must continue to develop regional and statewide systems that improve articulation and seamless transfer.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. The innovation

The Quick Path Program will establish a regional prior learning assessment (PLA) framework and online PLA platform. This technology-driven, cost-effective innovation addresses each of the four core problems outlined in Section 1. By the end of the three-year program period, participating colleges will have demonstrated the innovation's proof of concept and will have established an infrastructure ready for replication throughout California. The program will explicitly address Awards for Innovation in Higher Education Goal #2 ("Allow students to make progress toward completion of degrees and credentials based on demonstration of knowledge and competencies, including skills acquired through military training, prior learning, and prior experiences"). It will also accomplish four Quick Path Program goals: (1) increase the number of nontraditional and low-income students who enroll in postsecondary institutions; (2) increase student persistence and graduation rates; (3) reduce the overall cost of attendance; and (4) reduce the time it takes students to complete degrees and credentials.

While partnering institutions, as with most California colleges, currently provide opportunities for students to earn credit by exam (e.g., AP, CLEP, IB exams) and educational experiences completed during military service, the Quick Path Program will expand opportunities for students to obtain college credit for knowledge and skills learned outside of postsecondary classrooms (e.g., through on-the-job training, voluntary service, self-study). In order to facilitate a uniform PLA process across the regional collaborative, the Quick Path Program will develop an online PLA platform, which represents a use of technology not common in higher education. This platform will (1) provide prospective and current students with a site that clearly explains PLA and how PLA can benefit students; (2) provide a workflow connecting the students, advisors, and assessors involved in the PLA process; (3) provide students with a mechanism for uploading artifacts (e.g., text files, scanned images, videos) to support a petition to receive academic credit for prior learning; (4) connect faculty from partnering institutions who will leverage their subject matter expertise to assess student e-portfolios; (5) provide reporting and metrics on PLA activities at each partnering institution and across the collaborative; and (6) facilitate the standardization of practices and processes across institutions. As detailed in Section 5, the online PLA platform will be designed to conveniently scale its use to other institutions throughout the state.

Successful implementation of the Quick Path Program will require college administrators and faculty, industry partners, and other key stakeholders to collaboratively make key changes to policies, practices, systems, and cultures.

Changes in Policies: The regional collaborative will develop policies for uniform implementation of the PLA process, leveraging of resources, and articulation of credits earned through PLA.

Changes in Practices: (1) Faculty and administrators will participate in initial and ongoing training to implement the PLA process with fidelity. (2) Partners will establish a PLA Management Team to meet regularly with all key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, industry partners, students) in order to ensure the PLA process aligns with institutional, industry, and student needs. (3) Strategic outreach efforts will disseminate information regarding opportunities to earn credit for prior learning and target nontraditional students, low-income students, and students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education, resulting in increases in college enrollment and degree/credential attainment among individuals less likely to pursue higher education without the incentives available through PLA.

Changes in Systems: The program will create a highly scalable regional PLA infrastructure, which includes a multi-institutional online platform to facilitate the PLA process and a workflow with defined student, faculty, and staff roles and responsibilities. The following is a summary of the proposed system for PLA student engagement, portfolio assessment, and credit approval:

(1) The student will use the PLA platform to explore PLA options related to prior experiences. (2) The student will submit a PLA eligibility request. (3) A college advisor will review and discuss the request with the student and, if approved, will assist the student in preparing a PLA application. (4) The student will develop and submit a PLA application. (5) The advisor will review the application and, if approved, will submit the application to a faculty member (“assessor”) trained to assess PLA applications. (6) If the application is approved, the student will create and submit an e-portfolio documenting prior learning. (7) The assessor will review the e-portfolio. (8) If the assessor determines that the e-portfolio meets criteria for PLA credit, the assessor will submit documentation for PLA credit to be added to the student’s transcript.

Changes in Culture: Providing college credit for prior learning will promote a postsecondary culture that validates student competencies gained outside the classroom, which will increase self-confidence and self-efficacy, especially among nontraditional students and students historically underrepresented in higher education.

While the opportunity to earn college credits for PLA and the articulation of PLA credits across California institutions of higher education will benefit all students, the Quick Path Program’s impact will especially benefit incumbent workers with some college and no degree, military veterans, nontraditional students, low-income students, and students from other groups underrepresented in higher education. As detailed in Section 6, key Quick Path Program partners have worked with college consortia in other states to successfully implement the proposed PLA framework, and multiple studies (including a longitudinal study tracking 62,475 students at 48 institutions over seven years) have documented this framework’s impact on improving student outcomes related to the four Quick Path Program goals, particularly among students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. First, strategic marketing of opportunities to earn PLA credit will increase the number of no college-educated adults and low-income individuals who are incentivized by PLA opportunities to enroll in college (Goal #1). Second, student persistence and graduation rates will improve as students are motivated by the fact that they can leverage prior learning toward a credential or degree (Goal #2). Prior evaluation studies (see Section 6) have found that earning PLA credits increases students’ self-confidence as successful learners and fosters intrinsic motivation due to the validation of students’ prior learning in nonacademic settings. The longitudinal study referenced above found that adult students with PLA credits were 2.5 times more likely to complete their degrees than students without PLA credits. Further research found that Latinos who utilized PLA were 8 times more likely to graduate. Third, earning PLA credits will reduce students’ overall cost of attendance by decreasing the number of units they must complete to obtain a credential/degree (Goal #3). Lastly, decreasing the number of courses students must take will reduce time to completion (Goal #4). Not only will this save students time and money while they work toward their degree or credential, but it will also produce long-term economic benefits for both students and the California economy—students will more quickly complete credentials or degrees, which will expedite their entry into high-skill jobs and increase individual earning potential; California industries will benefit from a more rapidly expanding pool of highly skilled workers with the credentials, degrees, and industry-aligned competencies California businesses require to remain competitive in the global economy.

### 3. The implementation of the innovation

A. Organizations involved and affected; actions to encourage support: The five core Quick Path Program partners are West Hills College Coalinga, West Hills College Lemoore, San Joaquin Delta College, CAEL, and AcademyOne. Over the past year, college partners have explored PLA as a prospective initiative that aligns with institutional priorities and goals related to (1) increasing student enrollment, persistence, and graduation; (2) decreasing cost of attendance and time to completion; and (3) facilitating successful transfer. CAEL and AcademyOne have collaborated since 2007 to successfully implement PLA frameworks and platforms in other states (see Section 6). Executive leadership from all five partners began formal planning meetings in early October 2016 and are fully committed to the program. These leaders also recognize that, for the program to be successful, strategic efforts must be made to secure buy-in from all of those to be impacted by the program, including partnering colleges' administrators, faculty, and staff at all levels; students; industry partners; and, eventually, colleges throughout the state. The Project Implementation Timeline (see Table 1 below) outlines key deliverables designed to build broad support for the program, which will increase at each program phase: (1) Initial PLA surveys will assess stakeholder perceptions regarding the innovation and guide action steps for securing commitment and support. (2) The "sandbox" version of the PLA platform will facilitate initial testing, training, and demonstration across each college campus, providing administrators and faculty with a firsthand experience of the PLA platform's functionality and its benefits for students. (3) Capacity-building and training workshops will provide all key college personnel with resources needed to successfully complete their respective roles in the PLA process. (4) Strategic marketing efforts will advise students of PLA opportunities. (5) Development of new articulation agreements for PLA credits will increase administrative collaborations across partnering colleges while disseminating information about the program's benefits to other colleges and universities, setting the groundwork for future replication. (6) The results of the rigorous evaluation (see Section 7) will be strategically disseminated to demonstrate program impacts and build the broad support required for statewide scale up.

B. Risks and actions to mitigate risks: Quick Path Program partners have identified two primary potential risks associated with implementing the innovation and developed strategies to mitigate these risks. First, target populations have limited Internet access and digital literacy. A 2016 California Public Utilities Commission report found that only 43% of Central Valley residents have broadband Internet access (compared to 95% of residents statewide).<sup>23</sup> Another 2016 report, "Disconnected in Silicon Valley's Shadow," documents the challenges many Central Valley residents, especially low-income families and minorities, face due to lack of Internet access and limited digital literacy.<sup>24</sup> To mitigate the risk that current and prospective students may struggle to access and navigate the PLA platform, partnering colleges will expand computer lab hours, dedicate computer lab space to PLA platform use, and staff designated PLA computer labs with personnel trained to guide students through the online PLA process. Second, partnering colleges serve communities in which many individuals have limited English-language proficiency. More than 43% of residents speak a language other than English at home, and 19% speak English less than "very well."<sup>25</sup> The vast majority (90%) of these individuals speak Spanish as their primary language.<sup>26</sup> Three strategies will address potential language barriers: (1) the PLA platform will be fully functional in English and Spanish; (2) all PLA marketing materials will be provided in English and Spanish; (3) at least one bilingual staff member will supervise PLA-designated labs to assist students requiring language assistance with accessing and navigating the PLA platform.

C. Implementation Timeline:

<b>Table 1: Project Timeline</b>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead(s)*</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End<sup>^</sup></b>
Conduct Management Team meetings to plan implementation, discuss evaluation findings, and make program decisions	MT	1 - Quarterly	
Conduct PLA assessment survey and evaluate results	PD, CAEL	1	3
Develop data management plan for formative and summative program assessments	E	2	2
Conduct initial PLA implementation training, including a high-level walk-through of the PLA process for all key stakeholders	PD, CAEL	2	3
Identify/select initial industry pathways to offer PLA credit	MT	3	5
Develop protocol to assist students with identifying PLA credits	PD, CAEL	3	6
Develop “sandbox” version of PLA platform for testing, training, and demonstration purposes	AO	3	6
Develop online PLA platform (setup and configuration, testing, skin and logo design, e-portfolio guideline development and importation, site registration, etc.)	AO	3	14
Identify PLA advisors and assessors	PD	4	6
Conduct capacity building workshops for administrators and faculty whose roles are impacted by the new PLA framework	PD, CAEL	5	8
Develop PLA marketing materials (print and digital)	PD	6	8
Develop evaluation tools for PLA advisors and assessors	CAEL	7	10
Conduct PLA advisor and assessor training workshops (2)	CAEL, AO	7	11
Articulate transferability of credits earned through PLA, partnering colleges and across non-partner institutions	PD, CP	6	12
Launch online PLA platform	CAEL, AO	12	12
Complete evaluation of Year 1 implementation, present findings to the Management Team, make recommendations for Year 2, assist MT with revising Year 2 Timeline based on recommendations	E	12	12
Conduct initial PLA marketing campaign	PD	13	20
Increase industry sectors, career pathways, and academic courses offering PLA credit; expand industry partnerships	MT	13 - Ongoing	
Complete evaluation of Year 2 implementation, present findings to the Management Team, make recommendations for Year 3, assist MT with revising Year 3	E	24	24
Conduct outreach to colleges statewide to disseminate program impacts and secure buy-in from new college partners	PD, CP	28	34
Identify resources to be leveraged from new college partners and develop implementation timeline for statewide replication	PD	32	36
Complete evaluation of Year 3 implementation, present findings to the Management Team, make recommendations for scale up	E	36	36

\***PD** – Project Director; **CAEL** – Council for Adult and Experiential Learning; **AO** – AcademyOne; **CP** – College Partners; **MT** – Management Team; **E** – Evaluator

<sup>^</sup>Represented in months

#### 4. The innovation's alignment with other local and statewide efforts in higher education

The Quick Path Program will advance the strategic vision, goals, and efforts of partnering colleges by establishing a cost-effective mechanism (PLA platform), structures, and systems designed to increase enrollment, persistence rates, and graduation rates and decrease cost of attendance and the time it takes students to complete degrees and credentials. Institutional goals to be advanced by the proposed program include the following: (1) “Promote and increase student success, emphasizing educational planning, basic skills, and timely completion;” (2) “Through the use of technology, increase access to educational programs and services that contribute to student success and strengthen the economic, social, and cultural lives of its diverse community;” (3) “Maximize access to programs and services throughout the region, focusing on all segments of the adult population;” (4) “Increase and coordinate Workforce and Economic Development activities that are designed to meet the needs of employers and improve student employment and success.” The Quick Path Program will supplement and enhance participating colleges’ existing collaborative efforts to advance these institutional goals. Current efforts include (1) a Governor’s Award for Innovation in Higher Education Program that redesigns education enrollment methods to increase student persistence and graduation rates through emphasis on completion-oriented educational planning; (2) two regional California Career Pathways Trust Programs designed to establish 9–14 career pathways in seven industry sectors and increase the number of Central Valley residents who secure credentials and degrees aligned to high-skill, high-wage, high-growth careers; (3) Adult Education Block Grants to expand the number of CTE credentials and reduce the time it takes student to obtain industry credentials leading to employment; and (4) a USDA Rural Business Development Grant to provide training leading to credentials and employment in high-wage, high-skill, high-growth occupations.

In addition to aligning with and advancing goals and efforts of participating colleges, the Quick Path Program will build on three key statewide priorities, initiatives, and investments in higher education, while serving as a new innovation that is distinct from other efforts. These statewide efforts aim to (1) establish and enhance 9–16 CTE pathway programs that increase the number of students with industry-recognized credentials and degrees; (2) improve regional collaboration among educational institutions, industry, and labor entities; and (3) increase opportunities for students to earn credit for prior learning. First, the program will build on statewide CTE pathway investments<sup>27</sup> by providing opportunities for students in CTE pathways to earn credit for work-based learning (e.g., internships, job training) completed in pathways, thus shortening time to credential/degree completion. Second, the program will advance statewide efforts (e.g., California Workforce Development Board’s SlingShot Initiative and California Community College Chancellor’s Office’s [CCCCO] Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy initiatives) to build regional collaboratives that “strengthen communication, coordination, and decision-making,” “regionalize course articulation along career pathways,” and “develop robust connections between community colleges.”<sup>28</sup> Third, the program will build on statewide priorities and efforts to award college credit for prior learning. While recent legislation (e.g., AB-2462, SB-466) established opportunities for students to earn credit for prior military experience, and the CCCC’s Strong Workforce Task Force recommends that colleges “recognize prior learning and work experience and development mechanisms to award credit,” there currently exists no coordinated effort to develop scalable policies, systems, and practices that award credit for prior learning. As detailed in Section 2, the program will implement a cost-effective, unique innovation that will advance the above statewide priorities and efforts.

## 5. The innovation's local scale up and replication throughout California

The Quick Path Program is designed to serve as a proof of concept and lay the initial groundwork for local, regional, and statewide replication. Three primary program components will ensure the innovation's successful scale up. First, systematic local, regional, and statewide scale up is central to the Project Timeline (see Table 1), which includes three phases: Start Up (Year 1), Implementation (Year 2), and Scale Up (Year 3). As CAEL and AcademyOne have successfully implemented statewide PLA programs, these partners have leveraged lessons learned from prior efforts in other states and recommended a three-year program period: Year 1: build local capacity across Quick Path Program partners and develop local policies, practices, and systems (e.g., PLA platform); Year 2: fully implement the innovation and begin to locally scale the program by increasing the industry sectors, career pathways, and academic courses offering PLA credit; Year 3: study the program's initial impact on student outcomes, disseminate results to colleges throughout the state, secure commitments from new college partners, and develop a plan for statewide replication beyond the initial three-year Awards for Innovation in Higher Education grant period.

Second, key program outputs will facilitate local and regional scale up in Year 2 and statewide replication in Year 3 and beyond. For example, PLA training materials and workshops, PLA platform protocols, institutional policies, multi-institutional PLA credit articulation agreements, PLA marketing materials, data management plans, and evaluation tools and methods will all be developed by the end of Year 1, refined in Year 2, and marketed as the comprehensive package of resources required for immediate replication of the innovation statewide in Year 3 and beyond. In addition to these capacity-building resources useful to institutions interested in implementing the innovation, the online PLA platform will be designed with future scaling in mind—Quick Path Program partners will be able to conveniently add new PLA credit opportunities to the platform, and each new participating college will be added to the platform without any major reconfigurations.

Third, program evaluation will advance efforts to scale the innovation during and beyond the program period. As described in Section 7, program evaluation will include both formative and summative assessments and use qualitative and quantitative methods. Formative evaluation will monitor the progress and fidelity of implementation and produce results useful for refining start up and implementation at new institutions during the scale up phase. Qualitative methods employed as part of the formative assessment will capture feedback from college administrators, faculty, students, and other key stakeholders regarding all areas of the innovation's implementation and functionality. The formative assessment will therefore result in key findings that articulate lessons learned, which will inform evaluator recommendations regarding how the innovation could be more effectively implemented at replication sites. The program's summative evaluation will capture the innovation's success in meeting the program's four primary goals, all of which relate to improving student outcomes (see Section 2). Summative evaluation results will add to the growing body of literature on PLA's success in improving student outcomes, particularly among students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. The evaluator will present the Management Team with formal evaluation reports at the end of Years 2 and 3 that highlight the innovation's success in improving student outcomes. Quick Path Program partners will then disseminate these findings to colleges throughout California in order to cultivate statewide partnerships, leverage resources, scale the innovation, and, ultimately, produce positive impacts on postsecondary students and the California economy.

## 6. Evidence that the innovation will be successfully implemented and effective

Evidence that the Quick Path Program will accomplish all four program goals includes (1) partner qualifications and experience, (2) lessons learned from prior implementation, and (3) research studies and evaluation reports on the impact of prior learning assessment.

A. Partner qualifications and experience: College partners have a history of implementing and sustaining multi-institutional, grant-funded initiatives that result in the student outcomes targeted by the Quick Path Program. Two ongoing efforts include the CCPT programs identified in Section 4. These and other current regional efforts (e.g., Central Valley Slingshot Consortium, Proposition 39 initiatives, the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium) demonstrate strong collaboration at unprecedented levels among colleges and universities, K–12 school districts, industry, and workforce investment boards, which have leveraged significant in-kind resources to develop 8–16 pathways that prepare students for high-wage, high-skill, high-growth jobs. Since 1974, CAEL has worked with postsecondary institutions, businesses, and government entities throughout the United States to develop systems that define, promote, and institutionalize PLA as a tool for improving student outcomes. AcademyOne is a software development firm specializing in creating user-centric solutions for institutions of higher education. CAEL and AcademyOne have partnered to successfully implement statewide PLA systems that have accomplished the same goals targeted by the Quick Path Program. Two recent example are (1) CollegeCredit FastTrack, funded by a \$20 million Department of Labor TAACCCT Grant, which established a statewide PLA platform and process for all 14 Pennsylvania community colleges, and (2) MontanaPLA, a scalable PLA platform and process similar in size and scope to that of the proposed program, implemented in partnership with three colleges.

B. Lessons learned from prior implementation: Since early October 2016, CAEL and AcademyOne have held numerous program design planning meetings with the executive leadership of partnering colleges. During these meetings, CAEL and AcademyOne shared lessons learned from prior PLA implementation in other states, which included key lessons for ensuring fidelity of implementation, such as (1) strategies for securing initial buy-in from key stakeholders; (2) the types of training required to build capacity among all college personnel with core roles in the PLA process; (3) the most effective timeline for PLA platform development, testing, and launch; (4) strategies for marketing PLA opportunities to students; and (5) strategies for sharing PLA information, including evaluation results, with other institutions in order to lay the groundwork for future scale up. While CAEL and AcademyOne’s prior PLA implementation in other states has been highly successful, lessons learned from these efforts will ensure the Quick Path Program is implemented even more efficiently and effectively than prior PLA efforts.

C. Prior PLA research studies and evaluation reports: Perhaps the most comprehensive research study to date on the impact of PLA on student success is a Lumina Foundation-funded study that analyzed the academic records of 62,475 students at 48 colleges and universities over seven years and found that students with PLA demonstrated (1) a higher persistence rate (average of 53.7 credits earned compared to 43.8 credits earned); (2) a higher rate of degree and credential completion (56% compared to 21%); and (3) shorter time to degree and credential completion (average decrease in time to completion of 3 months for associate degrees and 6.3 months for bachelor’s degrees).<sup>29</sup> Of particular significance to partnering colleges’ service population, the study found that Hispanic students who earned PLA credit obtained bachelor’s degrees at a rate that was almost eight times higher than that of Hispanic non-PLA students.<sup>30</sup>

## 7. Assessment plan to determine the innovation's success and inform future efforts

Program evaluation will be led by Dr. Scott Campbell. Dr. Campbell holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership and has extensive experience leading PLA evaluation studies. At the start of the program period, Dr. Campbell will develop a data management plan that aligns with the evaluation plan and identifies (1) what data are to be collected, (2) how data are to be collected, (3) when data are to be collected, (4) who is responsible for collecting data, and (5) how data are to be stored. The evaluation plan will answer the following two guiding research questions:

Research Question #1: *How successful was the program in implementing the PLA platform and process as outlined in the Project Timeline?* To answer this question, the evaluator will employ formative assessment using the following qualitative research methods: observation, interview (one-on-one and focus group), and survey. The evaluator will develop an observation rubric that will determine the program's success in producing stated outputs (e.g., trainings, marketing materials, progress in PLA platform development) in accordance with the Project Timeline and that will determine the fidelity of implementation. Evaluator-developed interview and survey questions will be designed to capture stakeholder perceptions of the innovation (implementation process and product). The evaluator will conduct site visits at the end of each six-month period to conduct observations and interviews. Stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, and students) will complete online surveys at the end of each six-month period.

Research Question #2: *How successful was the program in producing positive student outcomes related to each program goal (i.e., increased enrollment, persistence, and graduation; decreased cost of attendance and time to completion)?* To answer this question, the evaluator will conduct quantitative analysis comparing the outcomes of PLA students with those of non-PLA students as well as analysis to determine the program's overall impact on partnering colleges. The evaluator will coordinate with each participating college's Office of Institutional Research to collect data points related to student enrollment, persistence, graduation, cost of attendance, and time to completion and to segregate data by PLA student and non-PLA student as well as by other student characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age) in order to determine the program's impact across settings and on different student subgroups. Success will be determined if positive outcomes related to enrollment, persistence, graduation, overall cost of attendance, and time to completion are (1) achieved by PLA students at a significantly higher rate than non-PLA students and (2) positively correlated to the number of PLA credits earned by students at participating colleges. In order to determine the program's overall impact on participating colleges, the evaluator will compare institution-wide Year 3 data points related to each program goal with pre-implementation baseline data established prior to innovation implementation.

In addition to determining the Quick Path Program's success in improving student outcomes, the evaluation plan will produce key findings useful for making improvement decisions throughout the grant period and replicating the innovation beyond the grant period. The evaluator will document research findings in two formal reports (end of Years 2 and 3). These reports will summarize findings, highlight student outcomes, document lessons learned, and make recommendations regarding the innovations successful scale up. Quick Path Program partners will then strategically disseminate these findings to colleges throughout California to cultivate statewide partnerships, leverage resources, and scale the innovation in order to ensure its impact transcends the three-year funding period.

## 8. Commitment of resources and long-term sustainability plan

**A. Resources, commitments, and use of funds:** Under the direction of the West Hills Community College District Vice Chancellor's Office, the district will assist participating colleges with planning, implementation, oversight, and Awards for Innovation in Higher Education compliance assistance. Multiple district office units will contribute time, collateral material, and expertise that result in stimulating scalability of PLA throughout the Central Valley region, including development, marketing, educational services, academic services, web administration, curriculum content expertise, advocacy, and internal and external public education. The district will develop a series of workshops presented throughout the region and develop an online "how to" manual to assist with PLA implementation. Workshops will include district staff and college faculty to address issues and challenges experienced by colleges during the technical assistance and implementation phases of the project.

Awards for Innovation in Higher Education funds will cover the following costs: (1) 1.0 FTE Program Director salary and benefits; (2) faculty and staff stipends to participate in PLA training; (3) personnel to staff the PLA computer lab during extended hours; (4) PLA materials (e.g., training, marketing, outreach materials); (5) travel (e.g., CAEL and AcademyOne travel to provide on-site training and technical assistance, Program Director travel to monitor implementation at each site); and (6) contractual agreements with CAEL and AcademyOne (to provide training, technical assistance, PLA platform development and maintenance, data management, and program evaluation).

**B. Long-term sustainability:** Over the three-year funding period, the Quick Path Program will produce outputs and outcomes that will ensure the program's long-term sustainability beyond the Awards for Innovation in Higher Education grant period. Key outputs include the PLA platform, PLA protocols, PLA marketing materials, PLA implementation training, PLA advisor and assessor training, and evaluation tools. These deliverables will have minimal recurring costs beyond the startup and implementation phases and can be cost-effectively replicated during the scale up phase. For example, once PLA platform development and launch are complete (end of Year 1), new PLA credit opportunities, institutions, and students will be added to the platform without any major reconfiguration or significant increase in platform maintenance. Furthermore, economies of scale will be achieved as new colleges join the PLA platform and Quick Path Program partners share PLA protocols, marketing materials, training materials, and evaluation tools developed during the initial funding period with all new college partners.

In addition to producing outputs that promote the program's long-term sustainability, the Quick Path Program will produce positive student outcomes that will result in revenue generation for partnering colleges. As detailed in Section 2, the Quick Path Program will increase student enrollment and persistence, as evidenced by research studies documenting the innovation's success in producing these positive student outcomes (see Section 6.C). Therefore, the program will have the dual impact of decreasing the cost of higher education for students and increasing tuition revenue due to increased enrollment and persistence. Quick Path Program evaluation reports will highlight these outcomes, and the Management Team will present findings to the executive leadership of all college partners. Evaluation findings will fully justify institutional investment to sustain and expand the program beyond the initial Awards for Innovation in Higher Education funding period while also promoting the innovation's scale up to institutions of higher education throughout California.

## References Cited

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