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Funding Student Engagement Initiatives: Financing Cloud Solutions with Grants

Webinar Transcript • April 10, 2025

Presented by Michael Paddock, Emerson Silveira, Dr. Marc Smithers, Sam Rawdon, and Emily Nolan

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Welcome and Introductions

Michael Paddock:

Hello everyone, and thanks for joining us for Funding Student Engagement Initiatives: Financing Cloud Solutions with Grants. I'm Michael Paddock, CEO of Grants Office, and I want to welcome everyone to today's session. Before we get started, I want to thank our sponsor, Ingram Micro, for sponsoring today's session and making it possible for us to bring this information to you. There are a lot of changes afoot with both K-12 and higher education funding. We're here to talk you through it and let you know it's all going to be okay.

Housekeeping

We have a few housekeeping items for you before we get started. As many of you know, you can listen hands-free over your computer speakers or headphones. There's no need to dial in, but if you do become disconnected, you can go to the audio and video menu at the top of your screen to access alternative ways to connect to the audio portion of today's session. If you don't see the audio and video menu, there should be a little show menu bar button at the top that will show you those various menus, including the audio and video menu.

This session is being recorded, and Kate has been putting the link to both the replay and other resources that will be available by the close of business today. She'll put that in again as we go forward, so don't worry if you missed it. We'll have the replay as well as the slides and other resources available to you by the close of business today.

If you have questions, feel free to ask using the question and answer interface. If you don't see the Q&A interface at the bottom right-hand corner of your screen, you can go to the three dots to find it. Feel free to send in as many questions as you'd like, and we'll get to as many as we can toward the end of today's session with the time we have remaining.

Today's Agenda

Today we're talking about funding student engagement initiatives, specifically financing cloud solutions with grants. We're going to talk a little bit about defining student engagement. We'll talk about student

engagement in the grants space, and then get into the cloud technology piece and how we're seeing funding for both cloud technology and student engagement. We'll cover thoughts on building a grant-seeking team, and then we'll hear from our sponsor, Ingram Micro, about the Ingram Micro grant services that are available to you, before we get into the Q&A portion of today's session.

I'm joined by a great group of panelists today. Emerson Silveira, Anko Cloud Vice President of Business Development. Emily Nolan, Senior Program Manager for Grants at Ingram Micro. Dr. Marc Smithers, Grants Development Associate here at Grants Office, and Sam Rawdon, also a Grants Development Associate here at Grants Office. Welcome to all of our panelists. I think it'll be a very informative and fast-paced session today. We've got 57 more minutes to share all this information with you, so we're going to jump right in. I want to turn it over without further ado to Emerson Silveira to talk to us a little bit about Anko and the partnerships that they offer.

Connecting with Anko Cloud

Emerson Silveira:
Hello everyone. Good afternoon, very nice to meet you all. I'll try to be as brief as possible. I love to talk, so bear with me.

Personal Background

My name is Emerson Silveira. I was born in Brazil. I moved to the US in 1992. I live in Boca Raton, Florida. I have a wife, a 16-year-old son, and a dog called Shooty. She's a cat in a dog's body. I started in the education sector in 2014 doing international business development for ACT. Then I went to K12, now known as Stride. Then in the middle of COVID, I moved to Riiid, a Korean company focused on AI for education. It was incredible — we raised $125 million in 18 months. It was crazy. For the last twelve months, I've been the head of business development for Anko, a company founded in Brazil in 2014 by the brothers Cesar Maya and Gustavo Maya.

About Anko Cloud

They started the US operations in 2023 by invitation of AWS and Ingram, based on the amazing projects that they're already doing and the service they're providing in Latin America. Anko's built with one mission in mind: to help clients achieve their goals through customization, efficiency, and innovative solutions. I know that's kind of your topic, but these guys are very different, and I've traveled the world a lot in the last 14 years, and this is the best I've seen. We have been focusing on support and service on a very personal level, and we love very complex problems. Complex is already difficult, so we like very complex problems.

For over a decade, Anko has been an exclusive partner of AWS and Ingram — and I want to emphasize exclusive. We work with clouds — every, all different clouds — but exclusively we're a partner of AWS and Ingram. So we are one of the biggest partnerships that they have globally. We are forging a global alliance focused on cost optimization, cutting-edge cloud solutions, and enterprise-grade security. By combining all of those cutting-edge capabilities with Ingram's amazing distribution network and expertise, we can give clients end-to-end cloud solutions and drive innovation and business growth.

The Anko Team

Here's the team. This is one of my proudest things I've done. This is a global team of professionals that I'm working with — passionate innovators bringing cutting-edge solutions directly to schools, administrators, deans, IT managers, and academic leaders like yourselves.

Why education? Education has long nurtured the brightest minds, as you know, but hasn't always been at the forefront of technological innovation. This team wants to change that by giving back to education and society — by bridging the growing gap between learning, workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and technology. That is a fact, we all know that.

The team that is leading that transformation is Cesar Maya, one of my friends for over 20 years. Gustavo Maya, who we call the AI guru, the brain of the whole thing, one of the smartest people I've ever met in my life — he loves complex problems. Lamar Buntz, the person that gave me the opportunity to start working with education at ACT, where he was a board member. Today he's the Chief Transformation Officer at Dartmouth — not easy to change something that's been around for over 200 years. Where I am actually this week — I'm in Hanover right now. We're going to meet with the team tonight and tomorrow all day. Anko and AWS are launching a project with them.

David Cumberbatch, a former board executive of ACT, K12, and the Gates Foundation. Tony DeSantos, one of my dear friends and mentors. He's a former K-12 school and medical university owner and CEO in Brazil. He helped launch Google Education in Brazil. Today he's a board member of several education giants in Brazil and Latin America. Jim Larimore, one of the most incredible human beings I've ever met — a former Dean at Stanford and a former Dean at Dartmouth College, as well as a former board member of ACT and the Gates Foundation. I know you're probably seeing a pattern there. It is true. The team keeps on moving together. Working with people you love and trust makes things so much easier, more pleasant, simple, and of course more enjoyable. That is the idea of that team and the advisors that we have.

Innovation and the Cloud

Why innovation? School administrators and higher education executives should move systems to the cloud to reduce costs, enhance security, streamline operations, and unlock the full potential of AI and

data-driven decision solutions. It is a no-brainer — everybody knows that — but it needs to be in the cloud. How? Now's the perfect time to engage with AWS and Ingram for funding opportunities, for grants, for OLAs, for MAPs. Those are detailed assessments conducted by Anko with the help of Ingram and AWS. These assessments show the potential savings and opportunities, and as a matter of fact, now these assessments are mostly free of charge. I would say 99 percent of them are free, paid by AWS and Ingram.

After the assessment is done, if the client wants to migrate, there are several incentives from Ingram and from AWS that cover migrations — most of them are fully covered — as well as sometimes up to 50 percent in credits for the following year. So let's say you have something that costs $500,000 to migrate. You're going to get that all for free, and then you're going to get another $250,000 in credit. If it costs more, there's a cap at $5 or $10 million now that AWS and Ingram are covering. So it's pretty big, and that is fully covered, 50 percent of this in credits depending on the size.

One of the things that we really love doing — our preferred way of migration — is from on-premise. On-premise normally offers the best savings. If you're coming from another cloud, you may not get the same savings. But if you're coming from on-premise, Ingram can help with recycling all the hardware that you have on-premise, that will also come into credits for you. Beyond that, there are POCs — Proofs of Concept — for data, databanks, data lakes, GenAI. There's so much. Just be creative, and all of those right now are being fully funded by AWS. Take advantage of it. 2025 is the time to do it. And on top of that, you still have the grants and the funding team that you're going to meet after this. There is no better time to do it right now.

Anko Project Highlights

These are the projects we are working on right now. There are other projects that I just can't talk about, but those are the primary four that we can talk about right now.

Dartmouth — I'm here this week. We're doing a centralized AI-powered classroom system that optimizes scheduling, resource use, and carbon footprint, with saved personalized settings for each professor in the class, with one-click access to support and seamless hardware-software integration. It is really cool. It's really interesting — something they've been trying to implement for the past two years. It wasn't easy. Now we're here with the entire team of AWS and Anko, and this is a POC fully funded by AWS.

The second one is SUNY, the SUNY colleges, SUNY New York statewide schools. I personally visited Old Westbury Tuesday, the day before yesterday. They are going to migrate from on-premise to the cloud to reduce cost. We believe we can reduce their costs by 20 to 30 percent on what they spend right now, enhance security, and modernize academic operations while building a unified data lake across all 64

universities. Much bigger project. We are starting with the OLA and the mapping, which again is 100 percent free for SUNY. If we need to do 64, we're going to do all 64, all of it for free.

Digital Flex — this is a really interesting one that kind of touches my heart, because it's a little bit what we were doing at Riiid. It's K-12. They already have three huge projects funded. I can't get into details, but it's public, it's with some counties. They're reimagining K-12 education with a centralized AWS cloud system that unifies the SIS, the LMS, the content, mapped first with a dynamic data lake — unlocking the power of AI and creating knowledge tracing, personalized experience, and recommendations, as well as predicting student needs before they arise. That is something everyone's talking about. I haven't seen it. I've been hearing about it. Some people are doing it, but nothing I've seen in the past five years. This is also partially funded by AWS. They are also raising funding through grants and investors. They are at ASU GSV doing the presentations right now and raising funds.

Last but not least, SENAI Brazil. It's a large system, the largest education system in Brazil, with 4.5 million students in all 27 states. We're starting with the Santa Catarina state — kind of like the Florida of the US. It's the third or fourth largest state in population in Brazil. Huge budget, but maybe the number one in innovation in Brazil. A lot of big industries there. Technology is there. The S system, as we call it, is three different systems into one thing — and they are focusing on workforce. They are focused on workforce training and certification. They don't do undergrad or master's programs. They are fully transitioning to the cloud. We're cutting costs again — believe at least 10 to 20 percent savings, could be 30, from on-premise as well — also to do security, modernized learning, while delivering personalized AI virtual training co-created with clients for the industry. We're also doing POCs for them with GenAI fully funded by AWS, so the assessments are also fully funded by AWS.

This is the moment. Thank you guys. Sorry for the long chat. This is my information. Feel free to email, WhatsApp, text, however you prefer. Happy to help you. Michael, thank you.

Michael Paddock:
Thank you very much, Emerson. Good information, and we appreciate you joining us today. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Sam Rawdon to talk to us a little bit about the landscape that we're coming into for funding and some ways to start to conceptualize your grant-seeking strategy going forward. Sam?

Defining Student Engagement

Sam Rawdon:
All right, thank you Michael and Emerson, and just thank you to everyone able to make it today. I'd like to start off with a brief definition of student engagement and really what it means in both the K-12 environment as well as the higher education space. While they share very similar characteristics in both

environments, it's important to define student engagement from each perspective just for full transparency.

Student Engagement in K-12

What does student engagement mean in a K-12 environment? Mainly it can be referred to as the level of enthusiasm, involvement, and emotional investment that a student shows while participating in the learning process. It's not a singular concept, but rather a multifaceted idea that's not solely based on paying attention in class. Instead, it encompasses how actively students participate not only in their academic studies, but also in their social and extracurricular activities as well. In a sense, it can be perceived as a student's connection to their school environment, the curriculum, as well as their classmates and teachers.

Student engagement in K-12 is approached in a few different ways, primarily from a behavioral, emotional, and cognitive viewpoint. From a behavioral lens, this can include things such as regular class attendance, adherence to school rules, assignment completion, asking questions, actively participating in class discussions, and engagement in collaboration activities with other peers. From an emotional standpoint, this involves a student's sense of belonging, level of motivation, enthusiasm for learning, and overall attitude toward school itself. And from a cognitive perspective, this centers around the ways a student approaches challenging content, problem-solving skills, and their willingness to deepen their understanding.

Overall, student engagement in K-12 is important because it promotes better academic outcomes, can improve student behavior, and helps build social skills. Students that are more engaged in school have a greater likelihood of persevering through challenges they may face at school, in addition to performing well in their studies. Also, students who are highly engaged at school develop a greater positive attitude when it comes to the learning process — a frame of mind that students will be able to carry with them even beyond their K-12 education. Ultimately, the goal here is to provide students with the chance to take ownership of their education by being active within it, so that they feel more engaged in all aspects of the learning process. With that, I'm actually going to turn things over to my colleague Marc to talk about student engagement in the higher ed space.

Student Engagement in Higher Education

Marc Smithers:
Thanks, Sam. As Sam mentioned, there's certainly overlap between K-12 and higher education when it comes to student engagement, but there are a few key differences. Just like in K-12, student engagement in higher education involves a student's motivation and overall involvement in the classroom. But traditionally, student engagement in higher education involves the time and effort a student puts into their learning and other what are called educationally purposeful activities. Ultimately,

student engagement initiatives have as their end goal in the higher education space an increase in a student's ability to be retained, or to remain enrolled in higher education, and ultimately whether they will persist to graduation — that's typically measured within a four- to six-year time period.

This subtle difference comes from the main understanding that we have around K-12 education, which is open to all students and is seen as a public good and a right of all children. Whereas in higher education, this isn't typically viewed as compulsory or required for everyone. So the ultimate responsibility for a student enrolling, learning, and graduating from a college or university — it's not a given for all people who graduate from high school. There's a general sense that a student's ability to graduate from college is a bit more of the responsibility of that individual student than it is in the K-12 environment. Because of this difference, in higher education student engagement is a fairly broad term that incorporates a variety of activities within the classroom but then also including some cocurricular learning activities.

Grant Funding for Student Engagement

Marc Smithers:
When it comes to the student engagement initiatives that grantmakers are interested in funding, though, regardless of these differences between K-12 and higher education, funding actually looks fairly similar between these environments. In general, when grantmakers are looking to increase student engagement, they're typically focused on the transformation and enhancement of the student learning environment in three main ways.

Making Learning Environments More Accessible

First, grantmakers want to make student learning environments more accessible and relevant to all learners. This makes sense as a first step, because if grantmakers are interested in helping students engage more deeply with their learning and raising graduation rates and things like that, this would be impossible to do if the learning environment itself is not accessible to all people, or it's irrelevant to a student's background or their overall lives.

One of the things that we see in the grant space is a focus on accessible or supportive learning environments through things like academic enrichment opportunities, cocurricular learning activities, or out-of-classroom programs or initiatives that ensure that students are not falling through the cracks and that they have access to the support they need to succeed in their coursework. This could be through things like supplemental academic support systems, tutoring services, those academic enrichment programs, or through funding wrap-around student services that would typically involve individualized learning and growth plans tailored to that student and supported by administrative and academic staff.

These kinds of initiatives can include engaging a student's family — even in K-12 — through things like literacy programs or digital equity programs. Essentially, this first aspect of student engagement involves making sure that schools and colleges are better equipped to ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, have the access and support they need to succeed in their education.

Innovative Approaches to Learning

The second way that grantmakers support the transformation and enhancement of the student learning environment involves bringing innovative approaches to learning into the classroom. Grantmakers are increasingly interested in how educators can use new technology and new approaches to learning that improve teaching. This emphasis on innovation is particularly true in STEM areas — STEM being science, technology, engineering, and math — but we're also seeing an increased focus on innovation in the career and technical education space.

Grantmakers want to ensure that we are meeting the needs and demands of a changing workforce — one where workers are increasingly entering a technology-rich workspace. So engaging students in a technology-rich CTE program is an increasingly large focus in the grant space. Incorporating data and computing-resource-heavy technologies into the student learning space is a growing field for grant funders because they want to see students that are well-equipped for the workforce and are able to get ahead of the curve in an increasingly technology-enabled world. They want to make sure that this engagement is working, so analyzing the effectiveness of these new and innovative approaches to learning is also important. Capturing and analyzing this data is a funding opportunity as well.

Expanding the Reach of Learning Opportunities

The third way we see grantmakers support this transformation and enhancement of the student learning environment is through expanding the reach of learning opportunities to more individuals. It's similar to making these learning environments more accessible, but they're also interested in increasing the ways that students can engage with learning environments. Increasing the ways students engage in their learning can be through avenues like increasing distance learning opportunities, or enhancing the collaboration between multiple learning institutions. So initiatives that provide dual-credit enrollment programs to high school students, or even providing more flexible course offerings or upskilling programs to engage adult learners, or on-the-job training programs — these are all attractive to grant funders that are interested in student engagement. There are a lot of different ways that institutions can enhance their student learning through grant funding, but they typically will follow these three main ways that we're seeing grantmakers show an interest in student engagement.

Where Student Engagement and Cloud Technology Meet

Marc Smithers:
In terms of how student engagement and cloud technology meet — in any of these three avenues that we just discussed, there are a lot of opportunities for institutions to meet their technology needs, because many of these student engagement projects require a robust technology system to support a project's success. Grantmakers know that in order to move the needle on student engagement — if they want to see students become more engaged in their learning and take more ownership of their education, ultimately increasing their retention and graduation rates — this is most effectively done in an environment that utilizes technology well.

Data Collection and Analysis

First, a student engagement project will often need to collect and utilize a fair amount of data to be successful. If your institution's looking to increase the effectiveness of a learning environment to better attract, engage, and enable a student to succeed in their education, it would be impossible to know if you're being effective and how effective you're being in this work without data to support your efforts. Your institution needs to be able to collect, measure, and track student project progress in these projects, and this will often be best done through a robust technology solution that allows you to store and analyze this data. Justifying the funding of this technology will really ultimately depend on your ability as the grant seeker to connect the success of your student engagement project to the data that you need to store and measure, which will determine whether you've met the goals of your project.

Collaboration Technology

In addition to projects which require a lot of data to be successful, another component of student engagement projects that are technology-rich often involves some form of collaboration. This can be collaboration between a number of K-12 schools or a number of colleges and universities; collaboration between K-12 schools and institutions of higher education; or either K-12 or colleges collaborating with local employers. Grantmakers are always looking to see if a project that they funded has relevance beyond just the institution that they're funding. They want to see their money and their impact have broader societal meaning and impact. Partnerships are a great way to demonstrate that your project is relevant beyond just your campus.

In student engagement, collaboration can involve increasing access to distance learning opportunities or collaborating with other organizations, as I said — and Sam will touch a bit more on external collaborations later — but it can also involve providing students with different ways of collaborating with one another through things like remote workspaces that they can access from anywhere. Internal collaboration tools can also be really important for increasing a student's engagement in their learning, because it helps them to expand the scope of the learning environment and increases the time and

attention that they give to their academic achievement. Grantmakers want to see students engaging in their learning in new and innovative ways, and collaborative technology can be an important piece of a project that's focused on expanding educational opportunities and innovative learning environments.

Higher Education Grant Examples

Marc Smithers:
Now that we've looked a bit at some of the broad trends in grant funding for student engagement, I do want to give you a few specific examples of grants that will fund student engagement initiatives and the technology needed to ensure these projects are successful. I'll start by naming a couple of grants within the higher ed space.

Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants Program

First, the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants Program is an opportunity from the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. This program funds large comprehensive projects that help community colleges build their curriculum to better align with local and regional labor needs. To meet these needs, there are mandatory collaborations for projects that essentially show that the new or expanded curriculum offerings will demonstrably lead to students being employable and skilled in a number of different competitive fields — usually in things like information technology, transportation, or telecommunications.

Student engagement was a key piece of any project that was funded in the most previous cycle, both because students figured prominently in how the institution was supposed to tailor instruction to the students in those awarded programs, but also student engagement was important to the comprehensive student supports component that was part of any project that the agency would consider. In addition to those student supports and student voice, curricular innovation was a general central focus of this program, again highlighting the possibility of new kinds of technology that could be incorporated into instruction at two-year institutions.

In the most recent award cycle, which ended in the fall of 2024, $65 million was available in total funding, and that $65 million should be available again this year, since it's a line item in the recently passed continuing budget resolution. In last year's cycle, institutions could either apply as a single institution for a maximum award of $1.75 million, or they could apply with a consortium of institutions for a maximum award of $5.75 million. Whether a project is from a single institution or from a consortium, all projects needed to have that collaborative support with at least one local employer.

These collaborative requirements of the program, as well as its focus on innovative and comprehensive curricular change, make this a very technology-friendly grant for two-year institutions to consider. The collaboration required for awarded projects, for instance, could include funding for cloud technologies

that institutions and local employers could use to have a shared workspace that tracks student progress through their programs. Previous awardees have included in their funding activities things like producing and making available open educational resources on a public distribution site, or ensuring that first-generation college students had access to wrap-around student support services — and both of these could have included funding for cloud services to provide these kinds of seamless connections. We expect that the Strengthening Community Colleges program will open for a sixth round later this year, albeit probably with some tweaks in priorities and funding levels.

Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE)

The second program I'll mention briefly that funds student engagement initiatives is the Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program out of the National Science Foundation. This is a long-standing program out of the NSF that's actually more of an umbrella program that houses a number of different variations. There's an IUSE program that focuses exclusively on two-year institutions, and another one that's focused just on computing, but this IUSE: STEM Education that's mentioned here is the most general of these programs.

Regardless of the particular population or area of STEM that an IUSE program focuses on, in essence they're all trying to improve and broaden interest and engagement in STEM education, specifically at the undergraduate level. They aim to do this by bringing advances and innovations in STEM knowledge into the undergraduate student learning environment. Again, there's this focus on innovative teaching methods. There are two tracks that applicants can apply for — one that focuses on community or institutional transformation that involves large amounts of collaboration either within institutions or even between institutions of higher education, and another track that deals directly with engaged student learning, with projects needing to demonstrate novel methods of increasing student involvement and learning in undergraduate STEM programs.

In recent years, the NSF has awarded a total of $61 million annually through these two program tracks, and each of these have several levels of funding that institutions can apply for depending on the project's complexity, length, and the kinds of collaboration that are required for it. This is another grant that is very technology-friendly, and funding can be used for technology that supports curriculum development and implementation. Institutions could consider creating distance learning or tutoring opportunities in STEM areas between institutions, and funding the collaborative and cloud technology that's needed for the project to be successful.

Recently, previous awardees have engaged in activities like establishing AI-driven software that provides students with virtual teaching assistance in large and dispersed classrooms, and another collected and analyzed data from biometric sensors that measured student engagement in coursework as they did it. Each of these activities and many other previous awards could have easily incorporated cloud

technologies into their program budgets. The general IUSE program has an upcoming deadline in July and another deadline in early January, but there's still plenty of time to develop a competitive proposal for either. From here, I'll pass things over to Sam to talk about some opportunities in the K-12 space.

K-12 Grant Examples

Sam Rawdon:
Thank you, Marc. Transitioning from the higher education space to the K-12 space, there are two programs that immediately come to mind that can potentially fund cloud-based technologies for increasing student engagement.

Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST)

The first one I'd like to touch on is the Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers, or ITEST program, another program offered by the National Science Foundation. The goal of ITEST is to increase pre-K through 12 students' interest in STEM careers by providing engaging, technology-based learning experiences in STEM fields, with a focus on equity and broadening participation across diverse student populations.

ITEST can fund cloud technology projects that help to increase student engagement. For instance, cloud-based learning platforms can give access to online courses, virtual labs, simulations, and interactive content that students can utilize to become more familiar with STEM concepts. Cloud solutions can also facilitate collaborative efforts between students, schools, or even across different geographic locations, particularly those that foster teamwork in STEM education. Even professional development for teachers utilizing cloud technology that enhances their knowledge and teaching strategies in STEM-related fields can assist educators in enhancing their own lessons that foster growing student engagement.

ITEST saw approximately $30 million in total funding in the past year, and it is anticipated that applications will open sometime this summer with an expected deadline in August of this year.

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)

The other program that I would like to mention is Title IV, Part B, otherwise known as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, or the 21st CCLC program. The purpose of this program is to provide out-of-school academic enrichment and other activities for students, and is really there to help students meet academic standards as well as to prepare for college and careers. Projects that utilize cloud solutions for enhancing student engagement are primarily centered around these extended learning time opportunities.

21st CCLC can fund virtual learning opportunities that are powered by the cloud through, for example, virtual field trips, and these can really make educational experiences for students more dynamic or

immersive. Also, universal access and accessibility for learning resources through the cloud can really engage students who might have difficulties accessing these resources due to geographic or financial barriers. Any cloud-based assistive tools like screen readers or speech-to-text software can aid in increasing student engagement for those who may have disabilities to provide equal access to valuable learning content.

21st CCLC in total has about $1.3 billion, and that's how it was last year. Every state education agency runs their own application process, so the deadline is going to vary by state.

Building a Grant-Seeking Team

Sam Rawdon:
With just a sample size of the grant opportunities available for cloud-based solutions to enhance student engagement, you may be wondering, well, do I have to do all of this myself? Luckily the simple answer is no. In fact, many grant programs like SCC or ITEST require others to be involved in the project as well as the grant application process, not only from within the college or school district, but also outside of it as well. I would like to take some time to discuss the elements that will be needed in creating a fully robust grant-seeking team to help secure that much-desired funding.

Why Partnerships Matter

First and foremost, it's important to elaborate on why partnerships are crucial in the grant-seeking process. Partnerships can contribute toward a well-crafted application and can demonstrate various strengths through a strong proposal. For instance, a collaborative approach, which Marc touched on earlier, shows that a project is a collective effort, both internally as well as externally. Through working together, organizations can pool their resources, expertise, and networks to make proposals more robust, and can also demonstrate to the funder that the project garners widespread support, which increases the chances of success.

A project that is broad-reaching has the potential to impact more people and creates more value within the community or population that is being served by the project. Projects with far-reaching impacts are more appealing to grant funders since they assist with fulfilling those larger-scale missions, especially in the education space where services can be extended to underserved populations.

Proposals that show a collaborative effort are often a key indicator of credibility. Partnerships demonstrate to a grant funder that the project is not just a standalone idea, but rather has buy-in from multiple stakeholders and can see the potential for long-term success. Partners with relevant expertise can additionally contribute toward this credibility of a proposal by really showing that the project is feasible and aligned with the grant funder's priorities. Finally, a diverse set of knowledge, expertise, and resources from multiple partners benefits a grant application by demonstrating a holistic understanding

of the project itself. By providing various skill sets and perspectives, funders view this as a positive because it suggests that the project is thorough in its planning, as well as has the flexibility and support that is needed to achieve the project's goals.

Internal Partnerships

There are two types of partnerships I hinted at earlier: internal and external partnerships. Starting with internal partnerships, to build the right internal partnerships, several key steps are going to be required. First, it is important to determine which internal stakeholders or partners are going to play a role in the project's development. Identifying those who will successfully contribute toward the project will include noting who has the right know-how within the organization. It's important that those individuals or departments with specialized knowledge can provide that expertise and those resources. Think of it like putting together a dinner party and thinking about who is going to bring what to the party, just so that it's the most enjoyable experience possible.

Thinking of key internal partners, this can include executive leadership for strategic direction and decision-making, the finance department to assist with the accuracy of a project budget as well as the financial viability of a project, and the IT team for any technical expertise and support.

Once internal partners have been chosen, the next step will be to initiate conversations to set up a sense of collaboration. Set up a meeting with these partners to talk about the project, explain the grant itself, and also brainstorm how the project will align with the college or the school's mission. The aim here is to create a shared understanding of what the project will achieve and that all parties agree with the proposed outcome of the project. It's also ideal to set up a timeline for key milestones and deliverables for each internal partner so that everyone is on the same page.

Dovetailing from this previous step, defining roles and responsibilities for each partner is going to be the next step in this process, so that overlap, confusion, or missed responsibilities can be avoided. Typically, roles and responsibilities can include a project lead who oversees the entire process, which can include coordinating with other departments and other internal partners to make sure deadlines are being met, tasks are assigned properly, and the final proposal itself is cohesive. A designated writer will also be required to draft the narrative sections of an application, which includes the project's goals, expected outcomes, and alignment with the grant's requirements.

It is also ideal — and Marc hinted at this earlier — to have a data specialist to provide any relevant statistics so that the project is evidence-based, as well as to support the narrative itself with any accurate and compelling data. Especially with technology-focused grants like the ones mentioned earlier, an IT team will be needed to provide insight into the technical requirements of the project, as well as to provide any estimated tech costs to the stakeholder who would be in charge of the finances.

Speaking of which, probably most importantly, a finance manager will be required to essentially number-crunch and make sure that the project is financially viable and the budget is realistic in scope.

Once tasks have been assigned, establish clear communications to determine the most effective way to convey information between the team. Regular check-in meetings to discuss progress, address concerns, and share updates are found to be very effective here. So whether these meetings are weekly or biweekly, this will be key for keeping everyone on track and on the same timeline. Finally, to help make sure that the project moves ahead without conflict, and that everyone's input is welcome, it is helpful to build consensus through the encouragement of open feedback and discussion. This will create an environment where everyone feels heard and can contribute their expertise. This step will also be helpful in addressing any potential conflicts or concerns early on, so that they don't become larger problems later in the process, and can really help maintain that positive and team-centered dynamic.

External Partnerships

External partnerships are just as important as internal partnerships because they can offer additional resources and expertise to enhance a grant project's success, as well as demonstrate its broad support. First, choosing the right external partner is going to require an assessment of the project's needs, as well as where gaps can be filled when it comes to any expertise or resources. You'll want to ask yourself: Will the project require specialized knowledge that isn't available internally? Does the project need tangible resources that an external partner can provide? Which organizations will have a shared interest in the project's outcome?

Potential external partners can include any relevant nonprofit organizations, other government agencies, other academic institutions, or even community organizations. These external partners ideally should be in the same region or serving the same population. Once external partners have been identified, proactively initiate contact with them to talk about the project and what a potential collaboration will look like. The important thing to point out here is that you want to point out the mutual benefits of the project — by not only asking what can you do for us, but also what can we do for you? Conveying to them not only how your college or school will benefit from a partnership, but also how they will benefit as well, creates a win-win situation with both parties.

Once initial interest and alignment are confirmed, just like with internal partnerships, clearly define those roles and responsibilities. This is just to specify what each organization will contribute. Ask yourself: Who within each organization is going to be responsible for what? Really, who is going to bring what to the table? Usually with external partnerships, memorandums of understanding, or MOUs, can serve as an official acknowledgement of the partnership, and also clarify the commitment of both parties. These generally include what each partner is expected to provide, the timeline and scope of the collaboration, and any financial or legal obligations.

Lastly, external partners should be prominently included in the grant proposal, in addition to being involved with the project, to really strengthen the project's credibility. This is where letters of support can come in. These can also give concrete proof of their commitment by detailing the specific contributions they will make, as well as affirming their enthusiasm for the partnership and strengthening that credibility to a grant funder. With that, I'm now going to turn things over to Emily Nolan from Ingram Micro to talk about Ingram Micro's grant services.

Ingram Micro Grant Services

Emily Nolan:
Great, thanks, Sam. Good afternoon. My name is Emily Nolan and I'm the Senior Program Manager for the grants program at Ingram Micro. Prior to working at Ingram, I spent almost 20 years in the nonprofit sector, the last ten specifically focused on grant writing and proposal development, fundraising from private foundations and government sources. The goal of Ingram Micro's grants program is to help our partners and their customers with grant funding for cloud. We provide free grant writing services, including prospect research, grant writing, proposal review, as well as assistance with reporting on grants awarded. Thanks so much for joining us today. Michael, I'll pass it back to you.

Q&A Session

Michael Paddock:
Yeah, thanks very much, Emily, and thanks to our presenters, all one and all. It was really good information. We do have a couple of minutes left for questions, so I'm going to jump right in with some questions that have come in. Because we are a little limited on time, I'm going to summarize and boil down a few of the questions. A lot of them have related to collaboration.

Q1: Can K-12 schools participate in traditionally higher ed programs, and can higher ed institutions participate in some of the K-12 focused programs as well?

Michael Paddock:
Sam first, and then Marc — can you just give a high-level sense of how these collaborations can take shape and what they might do to reach out, from both the K-12 side and then Marc from the higher ed side?

Sam Rawdon:
Yeah, Michael, I can start. Really, when it does come to a collaboration effort that is between, say, an institute of higher ed and a K-12 school district, for example, it is possible. I think it kind of goes back to that point that I made about really thinking about those mutual benefits. Thinking of, say — I think a really good example is something like dual enrollment. I think that's a really good example of a

collaborative effort between a college and a K-12 district. Or even, say, a collaboration between a K-12 district and a community organization. As long as those goals and those priorities are in alignment, and it's really sort of harkening back to Marc's point about what sort of societal benefit the potential collaboration effort is going to achieve.

Marc Smithers:
I'll just add to that. I think Sam's exactly right. It really does depend on what that impact is. But I'll say specifically to the question about the Strengthening Community Colleges program — that one is really laser-focused on two-year institutions, so that wouldn't be the best program to think about collaborating between a K-12 institution and higher ed. The Improving Undergraduate STEM Education program isn't the best either, but the NSF more broadly, I would say, has quite a few programs to choose from that really do emphasize those collaborations between higher education and K-12. So definitely there are opportunities available, and it sort of goes back to one of the things we talked about — the kinds of things that grantmakers are really looking for when it comes to student engagement. They're trying to help prepare students to really be engaged in their learning, and that can take a lot of different shapes. But there are definitely programs out there that would be great ones to consider.

Closing

Michael Paddock:
Great, thanks. Big thanks to all of our presenters — Emerson Silveira, Anko Cloud Vice President of Business Development; Emily Nolan, Senior Program Manager for Grants at Ingram Micro; Dr. Marc Smithers, Grants Development Associate here at Grants Office; and Sam Rawdon, Grants Development Associate here at Grants Office. And to our sponsor, Ingram Micro, big thanks for sponsoring today's session and for making it possible for us to bring everyone all this information. To all of you, I hope you found this a valuable use of your time, and we'll look forward to seeing you again on a future webcast. Have a great day, everybody.

— End of Transcript —

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