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TO: Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Dr. Noe Ortega, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

CC: Honorable Joanne Comerford, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Higher Education
Honorable David Rogers, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Higher Education

DATE: July 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Report on Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) Usage, 7066-0025

Pursuant to the provisions of line item 7066-0025 of the Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget, please find a report from the Department of Higher Education on the Performance Management Set Aside incentive program on the status of these funds as they pertain to the FY24 Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant program.

Higher Education Innovation Fund Grant Summary

The Department of Higher Education (DHE) released a request for proposals (RFP) on September 19, 2023, under the FY24 Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant program. The request garnered 10 proposals totaling \$2,019,289 in funding requests by the application due date of November 1, 2023. Of the 10 applications received, the DHE awarded seven grants, totaling \$1,338,114 in funding.

The primary objective of this grant is to seed and support evidence-based practices as well as new innovations in public higher education specifically aimed at the Commonwealth's overarching goal to eliminate race disparities in the Massachusetts public higher education system. The FY24 RFP continued, and expanded upon, the prior year's focus on the Department's Equity Agenda with funds supporting initiatives and activities that adopted an equity lens designed to increase enrollment and completion rates for Students of Color. The grant sought to accomplish these goals by actualizing three of the five strategies identified in the Department's [Strategic Plan for Racial Equity](#) as follows: 1) Transform Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded, 2) Reimagine and Build Culturally Relevant and Civically Engaged Educational Experiences for Students of Color, and 3) Prepare Students of Color to Thrive Beyond Their Time in Higher Education.

Four out of the seven projects funded during this grant cycle addressed the goal of transforming institutional cultures to be equity minded. Together these projects served approximately 170,922 students and trained over 166 faculty and staff. The other three recommended projects addressed the goal of reimagining and building culturally relevant and civically engaged educational experiences for students of color. These three projects served approximately 2,862 students and trained over 130 faculty and staff. Of these three projects, the proposal by North Shore Community College involved all Massachusetts 15 public community college for enhancing and accelerating post-secondary credit for prior learning options as an incentive for college entry, re-entry, and completion. The proposal by Springfield Technical Community College knitted together all the public higher education institutions in Western, Ma, and one private, Springfield College. The large numbers of students, faculty and staff among all the recommended projects had a transformative effect across the higher education system in building more welcoming and equitable institutions.

The HEIF grant is a competitive, one-year grant with funds available to September 2024 (FY24). See the list of grant awards in the table below.

Lead Applicant	Students Served	Admin/ Teach Served	Requested Funds	Applicant Matching Funds	Awarded
Bridgewater State University	168,662		\$250,000	\$75,000	\$250,000
Holyoke Community College	660		\$230,340		\$230,340
Middlesex Community College	30	18	\$204,813	\$57,350	\$168,813
Quinsigamond Community College		40	\$51,968	\$36,448	\$51,968
North Shore Community College	2832		\$139,828	\$46,000	\$139,828
Salem State University	1600	126	\$247,165	\$13,000	\$247,165
Springfield Technical Community College		120	\$250,000	\$10,872	\$250,000
Totals:	4432	246	\$1,374,114	\$163,670	\$1,338,114

Listed below are brief descriptions and dollar award amounts of the grant recipients for the FY24 Higher Education Innovation Fund:

1) **Bridgewater State University**

This project entitled "Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI)" worked to ensure racial equity tenets/practices were infused into all 18 Massachusetts partner institutions. The project goals included 1) identifying equity-minded key performance indicators (KPIs) to facilitate equitable student success, 2) developing assessment tools to gauge the developmental level of institutional functional units in the key performance areas, 3) curating developmentally specific materials and learning activities offered through a learning management system (LMS) aiding

campuses in deepening their competencies in equity-minded student success-oriented activities and, 4) providing analytics necessary to measure progress of each campus. The highly regarded reputation of this project for transforming equity practices on campus attracted interest beyond Massachusetts with 23 out-of-state institutions of higher education as additional members.

Goal Focus: Transform Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded

Partners: Berkshire, Bridgewater, Cape Cod, Fitchburg, Framingham, Greenfield, Holyoke, Mass Bay, Mass Maritime Academy, Massasoit, MCLA, Middlesex, Mt. Wachusett, North Shore, Northern Essex, Salem, Westfield, Worcester

Numbers Served: 168,662 students

Grant Request: \$250,000

Matching funds: \$22,508

Award recommended: \$250,000

2) Holyoke Community College

This project continued to build upon the Massachusetts Community Colleges Equity Consortium (MCCEC) of all 15 community colleges. The MCCEC was created for the purpose of learning, sharing, and adopting equity and antiracist resources, policies, and practices. Grant funded activities included building upon the work of the HEIF 2023 Equity Ambassadors and the Faculty Fellows by establishing a sustainable statewide program for staff and faculty professional development. MCCEC's purpose is to facilitate staff and faculty engagement with students in a way that recognizes and centers the cultural wealth students bring to their institutions.

Goal Focus: Transform Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded

Partners: All 15 Community Colleges

Numbers Served: 126 faculty, 660 students

Grant Request: \$230,340

Matching funds: \$0

Award recommended: \$230,340

3) Middlesex Community College

This consortium project, with Holyoke Community college (HCC) and Northern Essex community College (NECC), provided a Community Leadership Credit Certificate (CLCC). The CLCC consortium empowered students to assume active roles in their communities through engagement in community organizations as leaders and advocates in the organization's mission. Through internship placements, students learned communication, writing, organizing, leadership and self-advocacy skills. This diverse group amplified the voices of community members traditionally underrepresented and marginalized in the decision-making processes.

Goal Focus: Reimagine and Build Culturally Relevant and Civically Engaged Educational Experiences for Students of Color

Partners: Holyoke and Northern Essex Community College

Numbers Served: 30 students, 18 faculty and staff

Grant Request: \$204,813

Matching funds: \$57,350

Award recommended: \$168,813

4) North Shore Community College

This project, the Massachusetts Community College PLA Consortium, built on the Consortium's prior progress by continuing to develop prior learning assessment (PLA) options for a diverse student body. Activities included aligning course equivalencies for transfer partnerships, targeting marketing to Latino/Hispanic students, enhancing the PLA website for state practices, developing PLA opportunities for active military/veterans, and supporting the Consortium.

Goal Focus: Reimagine and Build Culturally Relevant and Civically Engaged Educational Experiences for Students of Color

Partners: All 15 Community Colleges

Numbers Served: 2,832 students

Grant Request: \$139,828

Matching funds: \$46,000

Award recommended: \$139,828

5) Quinsigamond Community College

This project developed a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Certificate Program as a continued investment in shifting campus cultures to ones of inclusion and acceptance. The project furthered higher education faculty and staff appreciation of the diverse backgrounds, histories and experiences students bring with them to better support their needs. The certificate program engaged participants in advanced DEI thematic work led by trained instructors. It played a crucial role in creating inclusive campus environments. This aspect of the program was particularly important to QCC as it prepared to apply for recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Goal Focus: Transform Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded

Partners: Anna Maria College, Middlesex, Worcester and WPI

Numbers Served: 40 faculty

Grant Request: \$51,968

Matching funds: \$36,448

Award recommended: \$51,968

6) Salem State University

The consortium partners sought to intentionally welcome and enroll Latinx students and be prepared to serve them. Activities included the creation of a consortium planning committee, the delivery of campus specific professional development, development and delivery of high-impact practices, creation of student leadership summit for Latinx and students of color, convening of a Hispanic serving institution conference/ planning committee, and post-conference implementation.

Goal Focus: Transform Institutional Cultures to be Equity-Minded

Partners: Bunker Hill, Holyoke, Mass Bay

Numbers Served: 1600 students, 8 faculty

Grant Request: \$247,165

Matching funds: \$13,000

Award recommended: \$247,165

7) Springfield Technical Community College

Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) initiated a second year of training entitled *The Equity Leaders & Guides (EL&G) 2.0 Consortium Project*. This project built upon the success of STCC's original 22-23 EL&G project with the new objective to scale its EL&G framework to a regional hub model. Partner institutions included Berkshire, Greenfield, Holyoke and Springfield Technical Community Colleges, Springfield College, and Westfield State University. The Communities of Practice formed from this consortium discussed promising and best practices for student success and retention of under-served student populations in the Western Massachusetts region with the goal of supporting the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

Goal Focus: Reimagine and Build Culturally Relevant and Civically Engaged Educational Experiences for Students of Color

Partners: Berkshire, Greenfield, Holyoke, Westfield and Springfield College

Numbers Served: 120 faculty

Grant Request: \$250,000

Matching funds: \$10,872

Award recommended: \$250,000