

**State Board Reserve Fund Request
Innovators-in-Residence Network: AI and System Innovation**

Purpose of Request

The State Board of Community Colleges is requested to approve \$40,800 in State Board Reserve funds to launch an Innovators-in-Residence professional development program that leverages college expertise to strengthen statewide innovation, continuous improvement, and AI-enabled student success redesign efforts across the 58 community colleges.

The investment connects strategic priorities and recommendations from the State Board's Transformation Committee and the NC AI Leadership Council to scale consistent AI integration strategies across the colleges. Colleges are experimenting with AI, advising redesign, onboarding, and curriculum redesign. This creates a way to learn from each other instead of recreating work in isolation. This program will elevate college successes across a variety of contexts and support colleges in documenting, piloting, testing, refining, and scaling replicable practices related to AI-enabled teaching, learning, onboarding, advising, curriculum redesign, and student momentum strategies.

Strategic Plan Reference

Goal 3: Student Success

Objective 3.2: Promote excellence in teaching and address the academic needs of learners

Strategy 3.2.1: Provide research-based teaching strategies that promote student learning and foster academic resilience.

Background and Need

As artificial intelligence and workforce changes reshape higher education, North Carolina's community colleges need a coordinated structure for innovation, pilot testing, and implementation support. Recent statewide planning and the proposed framework identified strong demand for practical guidance, peer learning, and scalable models that help colleges redesign student experiences for the future of work. Colleges have consistently reported challenges related to uneven AI capacity, fragmented innovation efforts, limited pilot-testing structures, and difficulty scaling local innovations across the System.

The proposed Innovators-in-Residence Network addresses these challenges by creating a statewide network of practitioner-leaders who will support design, pilot testing, peer learning, and implementation across key workstreams. The effort aligns with NCCCS priorities focused on workforce alignment, student momentum, onboarding redesign, and AI-era learning outcomes.

Proposed Initiative

The Innovators-in-Residence Network will operate as a statewide learning lab where colleges collaboratively design, pilot, document, and refine AI-enabled practices related to teaching,

learning, and student support. Subject Matter Experts (SME's) from across the colleges will share specific expertise on implementing college projects. Each SME will focus on a defined disruption challenge—such as onboarding barriers, curriculum redesign, advising workflows, or AI-related workforce shifts—and move through a structured design–test–refine cycle that includes pilot implementation, shared metrics, and peer feedback.

Potential pilot areas include:

- AI-enabled onboarding and intake workflows
- Cross-program AI × curriculum mapping
- Student experience mapping
- AI-supported advising and communication tools
- Faculty AI instructional redesign practices
- Student momentum interventions

The initiative will leverage the Student Success Center's existing improvement-science infrastructure and cross-college learning communities. Strategies, templates, and implementation guides will be documented and shared through a formal Community of Practice and OpenNCCC to support statewide replication and scalability.

Use of Funds

Requested reserve funds will support efforts such as:

- Stipends or mini-grants for Innovators-in-Residence participants
- Statewide design sessions and learning communities
- Development of implementation playbooks and shared resources
- Coordination of pilot projects and peer-learning activities
- Dissemination of scalable models through OpenNCCC

Deliverables and Outcomes

Launching this initiative will produce student success playbook templates; repeatable processes for scaling effective practices across the 58 community colleges. As practices in enrollment, retention, and instruction evolve, the templates will serve as a common resource for high impact strategies that can be customized to suit the specific needs of diverse colleges.

- A statewide Innovators-in-Residence framework
- Pilot projects aligned to statewide innovation workstreams and the AILC recommendations
- Implementation playbooks and reusable tools
- Cross-college learning communities and shared resources
- Replicable AI-enabled practices that can scale across the System

The project will strengthen NCCCS' long-term capacity to respond to technological and workforce change through structured innovation and continuous improvement.

Amount Requested

\$40,800 from the State Board Reserve.

Fund Source and Availability:

FY 2025-26 funding is available from the State Board Reserve from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. G.S. 115 D-5(j) provides that "[t]he State Board of Community Colleges shall use its Board Reserve Fund for feasibility studies, pilot projects, start-up of new programs, and innovative ideas." The State Board Reserve is a recurring funding source of \$250,000 annually.

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