



## NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

*H. Martin Lancaster, President*

March 20, 2006

**RESPOND BY: MAY 5, 2006**

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Presidents

FROM: H. Martin Lancaster, President  
System Office

SUBJECT: *Breaking Through* Request for Proposals

I'm writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity to join *Breaking Through*, an on-going national multi-year demonstration project led by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE). The goal of the project is to expand and strengthen promising and effective strategies for increasing the number of low-skilled adults to enter and succeed in college and the labor market. Currently, sixteen colleges from across the country are participating. With leadership and funding from the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation, five community colleges from North Carolina will be selected this spring to join this initiative that will support project activities over the next two and a half years.

#### Background

Almost 90 million adults in the United States lack the academic skills needed for admission to community college occupational/technical degree programs. The evidence is increasingly persuasive that a postsecondary credential is the key to jobs and careers that pay family-sustaining wages. Research shows that relatively few adults enroll in programs whose purpose is to increase academic skills, and very few adults in these programs ever advance to receive postsecondary credentials. Nationally only about 2 million adults annually enroll in Adult Basic Education, the major federal program geared to this population. Of ABE students, 7 percent complete the GED, about one-third of those who complete the GED enroll in college, and a mere 4 percent of GED completers earn a two-year college degree.

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**E-mail**

The goal of *Breaking Through* is to strengthen postsecondary outcomes for low-income adults by focusing on strategies that create more effective pathways through pre-college and degree-level programs. Refining and perfecting these strategies and disseminating them to other colleges are the ultimate goals of this project.

*Breaking Through* is the result of a unique collaboration between an organization committed to strengthening community colleges' success with low-income students—Jobs For the Future (JFF)—and an organization of community college-based workforce development leaders—National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE). JFF is a leading innovator in strategies to accelerate education and career advancement for both young people and adults. NCWE committed to this project in order to aid its members and develop effective pipelines for low-literacy adults into good technical programs.

### The Opportunity

North Carolina colleges interested in participating in *Breaking Through* will compete in an RFP process. One “Leadership Grant” and four “Learning grants” will be awarded. For either award, colleges must demonstrate a commitment to advancing low-skilled adults (8<sup>th</sup> grade testing level or below) to attaining college level degrees or certificates. The successful “Breaking Through Leadership College” will propose a cogent plan to strengthen, expand, or institutionalize an already-implemented approach for advancing low-skilled adults. The Leadership College will receive a \$250,000 grant over the two and a half year period and technical assistance to support this effort. The four “Learning Colleges” will have to show evidence of restructuring offerings to support advancement of low-literacy students to degree programs and demonstrate their commitment to doing more. These colleges will participate in peer learning events and receive technical assistance from both NCWE and JFF. While they will receive no direct funding, they will receive financial assistance to participate in conferences.

It is suggested that colleges interested in applying for participation in the project do a self-assessment before completing the RFP. At a minimum it would be helpful for colleges to accurately assess their status in the following areas:

- Does your college have a mission statement that demonstrates an institutional commitment to meeting the needs of low-skilled adults?
- Do the institutional structure and practices of your college directly support advancement of low-skilled adults into and through certificate and degree programs?
- Do you now have, or are you considering, specific strategies to increase the number of low-skilled adults who move from literacy/remedial programs to successful completion in degree or occupational certification programs?

### Process and Dates

If you have responded yes to the above questions, I hope you will consider completing the on-line RFP. The RFP is currently available on-line at: <http://registration.jff.org/mar06/>. It includes an extensive section with details and answers to “frequently asked questions.” **The RFP closes on May 5, 2006.** A Webinar will be offered for prospective bidders sometime between early to mid April. The Webinar will serve as an opportunity to ask specific questions about the RFP. Further details on the Webinar will be e-mailed closer to the date.

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Other important dates for prospective colleges to mark are:

- **Week of May 22:** Site visits to finalist Leadership colleges will be completed. There will be a very short turn around time between when colleges are notified of their finalist status and the scheduling of a site visit. Those colleges applying for the Leadership grant should plan accordingly.
- **Week of June 5 or 12:** A North Carolina Breaking Through event will be held in North Carolina- open to all NC Colleges- to share results achieved thus far in the national “Breaking Through” project.
- **October 21 – 24:** All of the participating/funded *Breaking Through* colleges are expected to participate in the National Council for Workforce Education 2006 Annual Fall Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Each college should plan on sending at least two participants to the event. (Costs for this event shall be included in the grant award)

You can find additional information about Jobs for the Future and the *Breaking Through* initiative at their website [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

Also included below is the link to the November 2004 research report that has formed the basis of this project.

[http://www.jff.org/JFF\\_Pages.php?WhichLevel=3&lv1\\_id=3&lv2\\_id=33&lv3\\_id=36&ShowProject=2](http://www.jff.org/JFF_Pages.php?WhichLevel=3&lv1_id=3&lv2_id=33&lv3_id=36&ShowProject=2)

I am pleased that the North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation has chosen the community colleges of North Carolina for an expansion of this exciting initiative. We all look forward to showcasing the work of our colleges through this national initiative. I hope you will assess your colleges and submit a proposal to participate in this endeavor.

For additional information, please contact: Vonna Viglione, *Breaking Through* Liaison, 919-807-7147 and email at [viglionev@nccommunitycolleges.edu](mailto:viglionev@nccommunitycolleges.edu)

HML/akb

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