

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Outreach and Marketing Contract Amendment for the Longleaf Commitment

Request: The State Board of Community Colleges is requested to approve an amendment to the existing outreach and marketing contract for the Longleaf Commitment Grant. The amendment to the contract is for an amount not to exceed \$700,000.

Strategic Plan Reference:

Theme: Student Interest and Access

Goal: Increase the percentage of North Carolinians, particularly within underserved populations, who are pursuing and easily accessing education or training through North Carolina community colleges.

- Objective 1.1: Improve the understanding and perceived value of educational opportunities, including lifelong learning, offered by NC community colleges.
 - 1.1.1: Implement a comprehensive, systemwide marketing and communications plan that focuses on the value of community colleges and promotes the image of the System and our institutions.
- Objective 1.2: Increase student interest and success in industries experiencing skills gaps.
 - 1.2.1: Market the value of technical education and workforce training for jobs/careers.

Background: North Carolina has received a total of \$137.8 million in aid from the Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund through federal COVID-19 relief packages. To date, the Governor has awarded \$86.4 million of GEER funds, including \$15 million to NC community colleges, to fund tuition assistance grants for students in high-demand workforce training programs.

On May 24, 2021, the Governor’s office announced the “Longleaf Commitment Grant,” which guarantees that eligible 2021 North Carolina high school graduates receive enough financial aid to cover tuition and fees for up to two years to earn an associate degree and/or credits to transfer to a four-year institution. Critical to the State’s attainment goal, this program will facilitate learning recovery and ensure today’s high school graduates remain in the education pipeline. The Commitment sends a clear message to students that they are not alone in the pandemic and college is in reach despite the challenging circumstances. The Governor has committed \$31.5 million to support this program, which includes \$25.5 million for student aid, \$5 million in matching funds to expand student support services, and \$1 million for communication/outreach and administration.

The first cohort of eligible 2021 high school graduates have claimed their Longleaf Commitment awards for the Fall 2021 semester. These students will be able to claim a Longleaf award for the next three semesters. After reviewing the financial status of the program, the Pandemic Recovery Office at the Office of State Budget and Management has determined that there are sufficient funds to extend the Commitment to an additional cohort of students—2021 high school graduates who enroll at a community college for the first time in the Spring 2022 semester. And there is also consideration of expanding the awards to 2020 high school graduates.

The Pandemic Recovery Office provided the System Office \$700,000 of GEER funds to help create awareness about the grant program among parents, 2021 high school graduates, and high school guidance counselors. The System Office contracted with APCO worldwide to produce a statewide

awareness campaign for the Longleaf Commitment to reach 2021 high school graduates and encourage them to enroll in the Fall 2021 semester. For the high school graduates who did not enroll in a community college or other higher education institution in Fall 2021, the Pandemic Recovery Office will provide funding to reach these graduates and make them aware that they are still eligible for a Longleaf award if they enroll at a community college in the Spring 2022 semester.

Rationale: An amendment to the existing contract will be the quickest route to reaching eligible high school graduates, as the existing vendor is familiar with the Longleaf program. Using the same vendor that was used for the Fall 2021 Longleaf campaign will provide branding consistency, an already existing webpage with content, already developed marketing material that includes language translation in Spanish, and an ability to quickly adjust messages if needed.

Method of Procurement: Section 1.7 of Session Law 2020-97 as amended by Section 3.12 of Session Law 2021-1 allows State departments, institutions, and agencies subject to Article 3 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes to obtain in the open market necessary supplies, materials, equipment, printing, or services to address the COVID-19 pandemic, including purchases that exceed benchmarks established in G.S. 143- 53.1 without the approval of the Department of Administration. A report on these expenditures shall be made a matter of record, and if the expenditure exceeds the benchmark, a report must be made to DOA's Division of Purchase and Contract. This provision applies to all contracts entered into between September 4, 2020, and December 31, 2021.

The System Office obtained a Request for Quotation to develop and implement the first campaign. The scope of work included developing the strategic marketing plan for the current campaign to target several different audiences, including underserved communities; recommendations for placement of advertising across a range of media; updating the Your Hire Education website to include information about this new program; and placement of ads. The System Office expected to follow a similar plan for this new campaign.

Contract Amount and Time Period: The contract is for the period through December 31, 2021 and shall not exceed \$700,000.

Fund Source and Availability: Funding is contingent upon a grant award from the Office of State Budget and Management from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER Fund) as authorized by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), Pub. L. No. 116-260 (December 27, 2020), and awarded to the North Carolina Office of the Governor by the U.S. Department of Education.

Contact:

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