

# Strengthening Community Colleges (SCC)

## Project Spotlight

October 2024

## SCC Grants Overview

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awards multi-year grants (typically 3–4 years) to help community colleges expand their capacity to offer education and training programs that lead to employment in high-demand industries. SCC grants focus on improving colleges' ability to address regional workforce shortages by enhancing curriculum, strengthening career pathways, and fostering stronger partnerships with employers. The overarching goal is to provide equitable education and training opportunities that align with industry needs. These grants also encourage collaboration between institutions, enabling them to pool resources and increase their collective impact on meeting regional labor market demands.

## Collaborating to Foster Engagement

MI's collaborative approach has fostered consistent engagement with project teams, allowing us to gain deeper insights into the DOL's core objectives, the colleges' programs, and details of each institution's initiative rollout.

**Measurement Incorporated's key objectives include curriculum evaluation<sup>1</sup>, equity outcomes<sup>2</sup>, and sustainability<sup>3</sup>.**

## MI's Approach

MI implemented streamlined data collection processes, by creating tools to track outcomes, participation in support services, marketing and recruitment activities, and business partnership efforts. Additionally, we developed surveys and focus group protocols to collect feedback from students and other key stakeholders.

**MI has produced eight interim briefs to date, to assist project teams in understanding the engagement levels, progress, and perceptions of business partners and students involved in the programs.**

## Featured Projects

### *Industrial Maintenance and Community Colleges: A Pathway Forward*

- *Serving* 30 counties across Iowa
- *Target participants:* Low-income and minority groups
- *Clients:* Consortium of Colleges:
  - Des Moines Area Community College
  - Hawkeye Community College
  - Indian Hills Community College
- *Purpose:*
  - Expand **competency-based education** (CBE) programs in industrial maintenance curricula, increase student enrollment and completion, and enhance alignment with industry needs. Focus areas include Industrial Technician, Renewable Energy, Automation, Welding, Industrial Maintenance Technology, and HVAC.

### *Emerging Technologies Pathways at Harper (EmergingTech@Harper)*

- *Serving* 23 communities in northwest Chicago suburbs
- *Target participants:* Latinx, Black, and female students
- *Client:* William Rainey Harper College
- *Purpose:*
  - Promote equity by improving awareness, access, enrollment, retention, and completion in **target career pathway** programs for historically underrepresented groups. Focus areas include IT and emerging technologies, including Cybersecurity, Cloud Computing, and Artificial Intelligence.

<sup>1</sup> Assessing the progress of adapting and implementing curricula in the target programs.

<sup>2</sup> Monitoring recruitment, enrollment, retention, and completion rates among underrepresented students in these programs.

<sup>3</sup> Evaluating efforts aimed at embedding and sustaining program improvements within the institutions.

## Hybrid Evaluation Models

Our hybrid evaluation model—combining process-outcome evaluation as well as our quantitative research approach—received positive feedback from clients and the Department of Labor.

### SCC Milestones

- Building partnerships
- Industry alignment
- Facility upgrades
- Bridge programs established.
- Regional Accreditation
- Strategic marketing tactics deployed
- Underrepresented served
- High satisfaction amongst students and partners

### Thanks to our dedicated team at MI!

- Shaki Asgari
- Robert Strobel

## SCC Milestones Unpacked:

The Strengthening Community Colleges initiatives have reached several significant milestones since inception

### Building Partnerships

Collaborative relationships have been established with workforce development agencies, businesses, industry leaders, and community organizations.

### Industry Alignment

Regular feedback from industry partners has helped align curricula with workforce needs. The college consortium established an Advisory Board, while Harper College adopted the Business & Industry Leadership Team (BILT) model. Through ongoing meetings, program leaders and industry partners refine curricula, develop customized learning materials, and strategize ways to enhance student skills and employability. This collaboration benefits employers by providing access to highly skilled, job-ready graduates, reducing training costs, and boosting productivity.

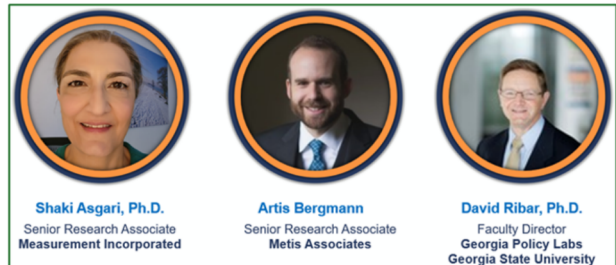
### Facility Upgrades

Significant progress has been made by upgrading laboratories, equipment, and technology to improve educational facilities.

### Bridge Programs

Harper College created two Technical Bridge programs to help underprepared students—those requiring ESL support or academic remediation—enter and succeed in career pathway programs.

## Best Practices Presentation and Panel: SCC1, SCC2, SCC3 Third-Party Evaluators



“MI’s success in these efforts led to an invitation to present at the Department of Labor’s Best Practices Panel, where we shared insights on our evaluation methods and the creation of beneficial measurement benchmarks. We’re now scaling these proven models across the nation.”

- Dr. Shelly Menendez, VP



### Marketing and Recruitment

SCC3 projects launched comprehensive marketing and recruitment campaigns to boost student awareness, increase enrollment, and attract more business partners.

### Accreditation

One program has already achieved regional accreditation, with other applications underway.

### Support for Underrepresented Students

Well-planned student support systems have been established, particularly to benefit underrepresented groups.

### Positive Stakeholder Feedback

Surveys and focus groups show high satisfaction among students and industry partners regarding program content, support services, instruction, and facilities. Industry partners have also shared suggestions for strengthening partnerships and better preparing students for in-demand careers.

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