

DAN PHELAN ENCOURAGES SMALL & RURAL COLLEGES TO TAP INTO CCPI-STEM TO PREPARE ATE GRANTS



Jackson College President Dan Phelan attributes his new optimism about the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program to the Community College Presidents' Initiative in STEM (CCPI-STEM). Jackson College has submitted proposals to the National Science Foundation's ATE program numerous times in the past, but has never been awarded a grant.

Through CCPI-STEM, Phelan said, faculty and staff members from Jackson College were connected last year to resources and a support system of community college educators who taught them how to write a competitive grant proposal, develop an economic impact study, and recruit employers to serve as project partners. ATE grants require industry partnerships.

"Now, it seems possible. I see a pathway to getting it done," he said. And if the proposal the college submitted in October 2022 is declined, Phelan plans to have his team try again.

As a CCPI-STEM Midwest Regional Network Chair for Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, he's encouraging other presidents of small, rural colleges to tap into CCPI-STEM project and prepare applications to the ATE program as well.

"This is your time. This is the time to be able to engage in practices where you can participate no matter how rural you are. No matter how small you are," he said.

Pathway

In a Zoom interview Phelan talked about his frustration during more than two decades of failed attempts to obtain ATE grants and his new understanding of the program that supports innovative technician education programs led by community college educators.

"For the first time—by virtue of this CCPI-STEM program—I now see a pathway that's there for us to be able to access STEM funding. I now see support that wasn't there. I see a network of colleagues that have been successful in the past who can be helpful in advising us through mentoring.

"I see grant-funding support to help pay for our faculty and staff to learn how to write these grants. I see annual summits where we can go to collaborate with peers from across the nation about what's working well, what's not working well, what's not being funded and what is, as well as to have a broader conversation than we've ever had before with more of a national focus. And this is being led by community college people so they understand how best to help us," he said.

The "us" he is referring to are the small, rural colleges that make up the largest segment of U.S. community colleges, but that have not historically submitted ATE grant proposals in significant numbers nor fared well in the NSF merit review process. That's not to say that many small, rural colleges have not received ATE grants. They have, but not in proportion to the number of institutions.

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Since the program began in 1993 NSF program officers have encouraged proposals from faculty at small, rural colleges. However, every ATE proposal goes through NSF's merit review process, which involves a panel of educators—and sometimes subject-matter experts—reading the proposals and writing their assessments about the workability of the proposed innovation, its intellectual merit, and its potential broader impact.

CCPI-STEM Resources

"There's really an art to submitting grants," Phelan said, explaining that the NSF application process requires "precision" that is different from teaching and the many other roles that small colleges' faculty and staff members carry out. Small colleges' staffs also rarely include grants professionals.

Phelan praised the CCPI-STEM team for understanding the challenges facing small, rural colleges and clarifying the benefits of ATE grants.

"George Boggs and Charlene Dukes [CCPI-STEM co-principal investigators] and the whole team behind them, backing them up, are really smart. They've been really smart in the way they approached it," he said, adding "There's just a ton of good information on the web page," he said.

For instance the resources page on the CCPI-STEM website has links to six ATE-funded mentoring initiatives that offer everything from multi-day professional development workshops to two years of mentoring for STEM program development. Most of the ATE-funded mentoring programs provide travel support for faculty and staff to attend in-person instruction.

Phelan sees CCPI-STEM as a "structured way" to inform presidents across the country about the support available for their faculty-led teams to learn about the ATE application process and procedures. "I'm excited about that," he said.

He suggests that presidents who want more information should call him at 517-787.0809 or contact Jesse Wallenfang, Midwest Regional Network Coordinator, at wallenfjesse@jccmi.edu.

He plans to spread the word about CCPI-STEM and the ATE program at the Higher Education Learning Commission Annual Conference, the American Association of Community Colleges Annual Conference, PTK Catalyst, and the Association of Community College Trustees Leadership Congress.

Help with ATE Grant Proposals

The [National Science Foundation](#) funds several mentoring initiatives to help community college faculty prepare competitive proposals for the [Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\)](#) program. They include the following:

- [FORtifying Cybersecurity and Computing Education through ATE grants](#)
- [Mentor-Connect](#)
- [MentorUp](#)
- [Pathways to Innovation](#)



Jackson College Faculty Team

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