

MENTORLINKS

ADVANCING TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: MENTORLINKS COLLEGES 2024-2026

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is pleased to announce a national grant competition for the MENTORLINKS program, developed with the support of the National Science Foundation (NSF). MENTORLINKS is designed to provide technical assistance and networking opportunities for the purpose of improving undergraduate programs that prepare technicians in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. AACC invites proposals from member colleges interested in working with a community college mentor who has successfully developed a new STEM technician education program or planned and implemented a major change in an existing program in a high technology field. This grant is primarily a professional development and technical assistance program, with emphasis on the development of a mutually beneficial mentoring relationship.

*"The MENTORLINKS program is an **excellent way** for colleges anticipating new programming to focus their efforts and energies as well as connect them to other colleges nationwide."*

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program



PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- **Assist colleges** in developing or strengthening technician training programs in STEM fields through mentoring, professional development opportunities, and technical assistance.
- **Establish connections** for colleges to identify new ideas, successful practices, and relationships through networking opportunities at program meetings and Advanced Technological Education (ATE) National Conferences.
- **Help colleges** gain insight about support for building and sustaining new STEM programs and strengthening existing programs.

A team of mentors, identified through a national selection process, will work with MENTORLINKS colleges. Mentors have expertise in their STEM disciplines, strong credentials, and extensive experience in planning and implementing advanced technology programs. AACC will pair mentors and colleges to maximize the effectiveness of the relationship.

College applicants must commit to working in a mentoring relationship. Proposals should identify clearly the program to be developed or strengthened; address the need for the proposed program or program modification; identify proposed activities and outcomes; and describe existing assets, such as current financial and intellectual support from business, community, and other education partners. A description of a recent need analysis would be beneficial. Applicants must explain how they would work with a mentor and how a mentor might assist them.

Examples of activities to be supported by the grant and mentoring relationships might include: designing a new program/curricula; implementing changes in an ongoing program to make it more responsive to industry/employer needs; developing or redesigning curriculum or materials; creating or improving training programs for faculty and staff; recruiting, supporting, and retaining students; engaging local industry/employers to encourage internships or other field experiences for students or faculty; and evaluating results. Grant funds may be used for faculty/staff time, release time, professional development, travel, meetings, and/or materials.

Colleges are invited to submit applications in the following program areas:

- Advanced Manufacturing Technologies
- Agricultural and Environmental Technologies
- Bio and Chemical Technologies
- Engineering Technologies
- Information and Security Technologies
- Micro and Nanotechnologies

“The MENTORLINKS program paired with the NSF/ATE Conference is transformational.”

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program

COLLEGE RESPONSIBILITIES

Grant awards will be made for a total of \$30,000 for the two-year grant period. The grant period is October 1, 2024 – November 30, 2026.

Each college must commit to the direct involvement of a two-person team: one faculty member in an academic/occupational science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field of study, and one administrator with oversight responsibility for that program.

Colleges are strongly encouraged to budget for release time for the program director as necessary to implement program changes or development. (Please note that the most successful MENTORLINKS colleges from previous rounds of the program budgeted for release time.) Colleges are encouraged to support the work of the second team member including attendance at three project conferences in Washington, DC, either through institutional or MentorLinks grant funds.

Mentoring

- Identify one faculty member and one administrator to participate in a mentoring relationship with a mentor assigned by AACC.
- Work collaboratively with an assigned mentor, AACC, NSF, and other colleges for the two-year period of the MENTORLINKS relationship.
- Share ideas, resources, issues, and outcomes through participating in virtual one-hour check-in meetings scheduled quarterly throughout the mentoring period.
- Participate in annual project meetings held in conjunction with three annual national ATE Principal Investigators' Conferences currently scheduled to take place in Washington, DC on October 22-25, 2024; October 28-31, 2025; and October 20-23, 2026.

Site Visits and Professional Development

- Host at least one site visit for the assigned mentor, ensuring that the mentor meets with the college's key stakeholders in the proposed program. Note: The college is not obligated to pay travel costs for the mentor as AACC will pay those costs.
- Conduct one site visit to the assigned mentor's college. Travel expenses for the college team to go to the mentor's institution or visits to other institutions should be paid from the MENTORLINKS grant or other institutional funds.
- Work with the assigned mentor to conduct either an initial site visit or a reverse site visit to the mentor's college within the first five months of the grant period.
- Participate in additional professional development activities, identified in consultation with the assigned mentor, such as an additional site visit, visit to another college, or attendance at relevant conferences and/or workshops.

Project Advisory Team

- Convene a local project advisory committee that will meet on a regular basis throughout the project to help set project goals, provide feedback on strategies or materials, and monitor progress.
- Include as team members at least one community college faculty member, one community college administrator, and one community or industry partner.

Leadership

- Collaborate with all participants in the MENTORLINKS program and share experiences and outcomes at annual MENTORLINKS meetings and with the national community college community.
- Conduct presentations on the MENTORLINKS program at AACC's conferences and events as requested.

Accountability

- Participate in all assessment and reporting activities identified by AACC or its evaluator.
- Meet AACC reporting deadlines, including the submission of quarterly expense reports, and an annual and final report that identifies achieved outcomes.
- Submit project director travel expenses to AACC within 30 days of the travel.

*“MENTORLINKS was the **catalyst, support, and assistance necessary** to move the program in the right direction. Instead of reinventing and constructing from scratch, we were able to use the experience, wisdom, extensive network, and plentiful resources of a wonderful mentor.”*

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

AACC welcomes proposals from AACC member colleges committed to developing or strengthening a specific science, technology, engineering, or mathematics program in order to better educate and prepare technicians in STEM fields. Proposals must identify clearly the challenge to be addressed, approaches to be taken, and expected outcomes. Please note that MENTORLINKS is only open to community college programs that are not currently funded through the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

Proposals will be judged by the following evaluation criteria:

Program Design – 50%

Sound conceptual approach with measurable goals and outcomes; clear explanation of need; well-conceived and well-organized activities with measurable objectives; description of how the program will facilitate student transfer and/or workforce readiness; timeline; identification and role of partners; clear statement of roles for mentor and college staff.

Institutional Capacity and Sustainability – 25%

Personnel, partnerships, equipment/facilities, and other support to launch and manage the project; demonstration of administrative and faculty support; plan for sustaining efforts beyond the two-year mentoring period.

Evaluation – 25%

Clear plan and processes that will evaluate the extent to which measurable goals were met; reliable mechanisms for monitoring quality; plan for reporting progress and sustainability.

*“Through our mentor and the support of this grant, we were literally able to **accomplish goals** in days that would have taken us months without help.”*

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program

*“MENTORLINKS is like an incubator, it is **an ideal way** to pilot test with a little bit of seed money and can better position a college for an ATE grant.”*

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program

HOW TO APPLY

1. Complete the application package

- All information requested on the Application Form, Budget, and Budget Narrative forms.
- Narrative description of the proposed project (no more than 8 pages double-spaced, 12-pt font) that addresses the criteria outlined in the Application Guidelines and provides specific details. Title sections of the narrative as follows:
 - Program Design
 - Institutional Capacity and Sustainability
 - Evaluation
- The Program Design section should include an explanation of need, measurable outcomes, proposed activities including a timeline, and partners.
- A resume for each of the two team members (no more than 2 pages per resume).
- Two letters of commitment, one from a community (business, K-12, or university) partner, and one from the president of the applicant college.

2. Submit the application package

Please fill out the application form, budget, and budget narrative forms online and upload your narrative description, team member resumes, and two letters of commitment in PDF format through the submission link at www.aacc.nche.edu/mentorlinks. The package must include letters of support on letterhead with signatures.

Deadline: Thursday, May 30, 2024 by 5:00 p.m. local time.
Submit to www.aacc.nche.edu/MentorLinks

*“This program has given a small rural community college the **opportunity** to see what other curricular development in the area of advanced technology is possible. The relationships we have developed with AACC, ATE, and our mentor have been **invaluable**.”*

—Participant, MENTORLINKS program

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Deadline: Thursday, May 30, 2024 by 5:00 p.m. local time.

Applications will not be accepted by mail or email.

Eligible Applicants: All AACC member colleges.

Eligible Projects: Projects for program development or enhancement in the following STEM fields: advanced manufacturing technologies, agricultural and environmental technologies, bio and chemical technologies, engineering technologies, information and security technologies, and micro and nanotechnologies.

MENTORLINKS is only open to community college programs that are not currently funded through the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

Grant: \$30,000 over a two-year period. In addition, AACC will cover travel costs for the project director to attend three project meetings to be held in conjunction with the national ATE Principal Investigators' Conferences. The dates for the project meetings and conferences are:

October 22-25, 2024; October 28-31, 2025; and October 20-23, 2026.

Commitment: Colleges must commit to the direct involvement of a two-person team: one faculty member in an academic/occupational science, technology, engineering, or mathematics field of study, and one administrator with oversight responsibility for that program. Colleges must work in a collaborative relationship with AACC and an assigned mentor, adhering to the guidelines outlined in the College Responsibility section of this application.

Suggested Support: Colleges are strongly encouraged to budget for release time for the program director as necessary to implement program changes or development. Colleges are encouraged to support the work of the second team member including attendance at three project conferences in Washington, DC, either through institutional or MentorLinks grant funds.

Project Duration: October 1, 2024 – November 30, 2026

Submission URL: www.aacc.nche.edu/mentorlinks

Contact: Courtney Larson, ATE Program Manager
American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, NW Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036-1176
Phone: 202/728-0200, ext. 275
Email: clarson@aacc.nche.edu
www.aacc.nche.edu/mentorlinks

MENTORLINKS COLLEGES – APPLICATION FORM

Please submit your MentorLinks application using the online form at www.aacc.nche.edu/mentorlinks.
The application fields that you will need to input are provided below for your reference.

Institution
Financial Contact Name
Title
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Phone
Email

Project Team Member #1
Project Director Name
Title
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Phone
Email

Project Team Member #2
Second Team Member Name
Title
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Phone
Email

President/CEO
President/CEO Name
Email
Phone

Name of proposed project

Goals for the mentoring program, including an "end outcomes" statement for measurable outcomes that the college plans to accomplish by the end of the grant period (75-100 words). An end outcome specifies changes that have occurred in the project, college, or partner institutions that are significant and lasting. (Examples include: increasing the number of graduates in the field, facilitating student transfer and/or workforce readiness, or new partnerships with business and industry, K-12, or universities.)

List any project partners (name, title, and organization)

List members of the project advisory team and their affiliations

Has your institution ever received a National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education (ATE) grant? Yes or No

If yes, please provide grant number(s) and title(s).

Please fill out the application, budget, and budget narrative form online and upload your project narrative, team member resumes, and two letters of support in PDF format through the submission link at www.aacc.nche.edu/MentorLinks.

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TWO-YEAR BUDGET & BUDGET NARRATIVE FORM

Institution Name

Project Name

Budget Category	MENTORLINKS Grant Funds	Suggested College Support (if applicable)
Personnel		
Benefits		
Travel		
Materials/Supplies		
Equipment		
Other		
Total		

NOTE: Total MENTORLINKS grant funds requested may not exceed \$30,000 for the two-year period. Indirect costs are an allowable expense but should be clearly identified and may not exceed the college's federally negotiated rate.

Personnel and Benefits: Salaries and benefits; faculty release time.

Travel*: Expenses for travel for a second team member to attend three national MENTORLINKS project meetings and three National ATE Conferences (held immediately following the project meeting).

Two team members are required to attend each project meeting. AACC will cover travel and lodging costs for the project director to attend the MENTORLINKS project meetings and the ATE Conferences. AACC will also cover registration fees for both the project director and second team member to attend the annual ATE Conferences. The estimated travel and lodging cost to/from Washington, DC for the second team member to attend the MENTORLINKS project meeting and ATE Conference is approximately \$1800.

Travel may also include expenses to travel for other professional development activities such as additional conferences, workshops, or college visits.

*Please note that AACC allows for flexibility in modifying budgets after awards are made if travel cannot be undertaken or is not permissible during the grant period.

Materials/Supplies: May include costs of materials or resources, hosting or presenting at local or regional meetings, photocopying, printing, and supplies.

Equipment: Equipment purchase, software, or rental costs pertaining to the program. Please note that equipment purchases and/or rental costs cannot account for more than 30% of the total grant.

Other: Expenses directly related to the MENTORLINKS program. May include costs for technical assistance, stipends or honoraria, indirect costs, etc.

Two-Year Proposed MentorLinks Project Budget Narrative. Please include a detailed narrative description that explains the totals for each budget category listed in the proposed MentorLinks budget. The budget narrative can be inputted online or uploaded as a separate PDF using the following fields.

Budget Category	Narrative Description of Expense
Personnel	
Benefits	
Travel	
Materials/Supplies	
Equipment	
Other	

Please fill out the application, budget, and budget narrative form online and upload your project narrative, team member resumes, and two letters of commitment in PDF format through the submission link at www.aacc.nche.edu/Mentorlinks.

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