

Educational Opportunity Center Grant Proposal

For the University of Wisconsin --

River Falls


by

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**Abstract**

Many adults in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota do not pursue postsecondary education and are employed in low-paying jobs. Meanwhile, employers need highly skilled workers as jobs become more specialized and retirements reduce the labor pool. Access to postsecondary education can solve both problems. The University of Wisconsin – River Falls (UWRF) requests \$230,000 to fund an Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) to provide this access for adults. The UWRF EOC will serve a minimum of 1,000 students in a five-county area in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Based upon client needs and the plan of operation, the UWRF EOC proposes the following ambitious and attainable objectives:

1. Fifty percent of participants not already credentialed will receive a secondary school diploma or equivalent.

2. Eighty percent of participants who are college-ready will apply for financial aid.
3. Eighty percent of participants who are college-ready will apply for college admission.
4. Sixty-five percent of participants who are college-ready will enroll in a postsecondary education program.

To fulfill these objectives, the UWRF EOC has focused on two areas as the cornerstone of the project: quality of personnel and strategic outreach to high areas of need. Rigorous evaluation and involvement of community partners are the pillars of the UWRF EOC proposal.

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*Table of Contents*

	Page
.....	Page
Abstract.....	2
Chapter I: Introduction .....	7
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Grant Proposal .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	8
Assumptions .....	10
Methodology.....	10
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	11
Introduction of Research Supported Need/Problem .....	11
High Percentage of Low-Income Families in the Target Area.....	12
High Percentage in Target Area with Education Levels Below Baccalaureate Level .....	17
High Need to Meet Changing Employment Trends .....	19
Other Indicators of Need for the Project.....	25
Chapter III: Project Goals and Objectives .....	26
Goal 1: Provide Information and Assistance to Individuals in Enrolling and Completing a Program to Obtain a Secondary School Diploma or Its Equivalent .....	26
Goal 2: Increase the Percentage of Low-Income and First Generation Students Who Pursue Postsecondary Education Opportunities .....	26
Chapter IV: Project Methodology .....	28
Action Plan and Timeline .....	28
Evaluation Plan and Tools.....	31

Dissemination Plan .....32

Budget Narrative.....32

Table 1: Budget.....34

References.....35

Appendix A: Cover Letter .....39

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

In an equitable world, qualified adults would be able to further their education regardless of where they live, their economic status or the education level of their parents. The problem is many adults who live in rural areas of poverty do not further their education. Potential first generation college students often do not pursue postsecondary education, and many do not even complete their high school education. This is especially true in rural northwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota. Amongst this rural, stoic generation in the midst of their prime working years, there is a strong subculture that values hard work and devalues education, a subculture that often views the two values as mutually exclusive. These are the people who went directly from high school, some without finishing, into general labor, clerical and government jobs. They worked hard. They were promoted from within. They made good money and planned to stay at their companies. The problem is they went into the game under one set of rules, and now the rules have changed before they were done playing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Low-income adults from rural areas in northwest Wisconsin and Pine County, Minnesota, are being displaced as general labor and clerical jobs are being replaced with jobs that require postsecondary training and education. To make the transition to high demand and skilled jobs, they will need to enter postsecondary programs. An Educational Opportunity Center is needed in northwestern Wisconsin and Pine County, Minnesota, to provide information and to assist adults in enrolling in postsecondary education in the contiguous counties of Pierce, St. Croix, Polk and Burnett in Wisconsin and Pine in Minnesota. In the proposed service area, an average of 81% of the adults over the age of 25 have less than a baccalaureate degree, and 13% do not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009).

When these averages are broken down to localities, pockets of severe need are revealed. In the village of Bay City in Pierce County, only 5.3% of the adults over the age of 25 have obtained a baccalaureate degree. Still more astounding, one-third of this same group has not earned a high school diploma or equivalency. There are similar pockets of need dispersed throughout the target service area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). The University of Wisconsin – River Falls is requesting funding for an Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) to specifically serve these high need areas. This EOC will not only serve the logistical needs of connecting displaced workers to education and to jobs, but will also facilitate the cultural paradigm shift to one that values education for the betterment of self, family and community. Studies indicate furthering one’s education will increase opportunities for participants (Center on Wisconsin Strategy for RISE, 2009, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, & Wisconsin’s Worknet, n.d.).

### **Purpose of the Grant Proposal**

The purpose of this grant proposal is to solicit funding for an Educational Opportunity Center to be carried out by the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. Financial resources from this grant will be used to establish outreach services to the highest areas of need in the five-county target area. The funding will be used for staffing, travel, instructional materials and equipment to advise and assist low-income and potential first generation college students with entering postsecondary training and education. This project will benefit the potential adult clients, workforce and communities of Polk, St. Croix, Pierce and Burnett Counties in Wisconsin and Pine in Minnesota.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Educational Opportunity Center (EOC).** Grant-funded program designed to 1.) provide academic and financial information to those who desire to pursue a program of



postsecondary education; 2.) provide assistance in applying for admission, financial aid and applications to postsecondary education; 3.) improve the financial and economic literacy of participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 50).

**Potential First Generation College Student.** “An individual neither of whose parents received a baccalaureate degree; or an individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and whose supporting parent did not receive a baccalaureate degree” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 55).

**Low-Income Individual.** “An individual whose family’s taxable income did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount in the calendar year preceding the year in which the individual initially participated in the project. The poverty level amount is determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of Census of the U.S. Department of Commerce” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 54).

**Postsecondary Education.** “A formal instructional program whose curriculum is designed primarily for students who are beyond the compulsory age for high school. This includes programs whose purpose is academic or career and technical, and excludes secondary career and technical education and adult basic education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 58).

**Adult Basic Education (ABE).** Services offered for free at technical colleges in Wisconsin and some community colleges in Minnesota. Typical goals of ABE students are to 1.) complete General Education Development/High School Equivalency Diplomas; 2.) improve basic academic skills for job obtainment, retention and mobility; 3.) improve skills to enter post-secondary programs.

**General Education Development (GED).** “A nation-wide credential, with minimum standards being set by the GED Testing Service in Washington DC” (Western Technical College, n.d.). Candidates of a minimum of 18.5 years of age must successfully complete orientation, examinations in five subject areas and career awareness. The five subject examinations are in reading, social studies, science, math and writing.

**High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED).** “Unique to Wisconsin, and is obtained by completing Health, Civics and Employability Skills in addition to passing the GED” (Western Technical College, n.d.).

### **Assumptions**

This grant proposal assumes that disadvantaged adults often do not further their education due to lack of information and access. It is unknown how many adults will choose to participate once they are made aware of their options. While the grant proposal addresses financial and economic literacy through information and assistance, there will still be an unknown quantity of adults who will not pursue postsecondary education due to other financial limitations.

### **Methodology**

Chapter two will contain a literature review on the impact of low educational levels upon disadvantaged adults, the work force and communities, as well as best practices for intervention. Chapter three will detail goals and quantifiable objectives of the proposed project. In chapter four, methodology will be explained, including the plans for operation, evaluation and dissemination. The budget will be a part of this chapter as well. A cover letter for the grant proposal will be included in the appendix.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will review the need for an Educational Opportunity Center in the five-county area of northwest Wisconsin and Pine County, Minnesota. Of the 109,155 residents who are 25 years old or older, 14,190 do not have a high school diploma, and 88,415 do not have a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009.). What this means is 14,190 adults are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of employment possibilities and many other socioeconomic factors. As the reviewed literature will demonstrate, these adults need the services of the University of Wisconsin – River Falls Educational Opportunity Center (UWRF EOC) that are in line with the first standard objective of all EOC projects, completing a secondary diploma or equivalent.

Educational Opportunity Centers are TRiO projects funded through the Department of Education. TRiO, originally a set of three, is a series of educational programs that provide support for low-income and first generation college students. TRiO has a strong track record. In a study spanning 15 years, it was determined that 93% of 332 TRiO program participants from all over the country had earned bachelor's degrees compared to fewer than 20% of students from similar backgrounds who were not TRiO participants (Cole, 1998, p. 434). In the target area, there are 88,415 potential clients who need services that fall under the remaining three standardized objectives. These objectives are all related to the overarching goal of EOC projects, “to increase the percentage of low-income and first generation students who pursue postsecondary education opportunities” (U.S. Department of Education – Office of Postsecondary Education, 2010, p. 111).

The five-county target area is mainly rural. Its citizens have been affected by the shifts in employment trends from general to highly specialized/automated manufacturing and from

general clerical to technical and medical employment opportunities. These changes have resulted in the need for a workforce with postsecondary training and education. There are pockets of severe need within the target area in terms of low educational attainment and its corresponding socioeconomic issues that demonstrate the disparity of resources within Burnett, Polk, St. Croix and Pierce Counties of Wisconsin and Pine County in Minnesota.

Systematically excluding certain demographic groups from advancing their education, and consequently their economic status, disservices individuals, blights communities and leaves employers short of employees with up-to-date skills. These factors drive the impetus for the UWRF EOC. The foregoing pages will demonstrate the needs of the target area's adults and how they may be met while simultaneously meeting the needs of the employers and capitalizing on the exceptional postsecondary network that is unique to the target area. The UWRF EOC will be the path to match this work ethic with academic and technical skills to lead to high-wage, high-demand jobs.

### **High Percentage of Low-Income Families in the Target Area**

In the state of Wisconsin, 1.4 million people, ages 25-54 have no two- or four-year degree and/or speak little or no English. Of these 1.4 million people, 92.8% are working, and 23% of them are living in poverty. A total of 53% of those working in Wisconsin without postsecondary degrees earn less than the 2007 median wage, \$15.11 per hour (Center on Wisconsin Strategy for RISE, 2009). These statistics reflect Wisconsinites' work values that are magnified in the northwest corner of Wisconsin and northeast corner of Minnesota. Unfortunately, while these adults work hard, they are often stuck in low-wage jobs without benefits and without a path toward family-sustaining wages.

**Pine County.**

Pine County suffers from a high percentage of poverty and the lowest average wages in the entire state of Minnesota. The average weekly wage is \$509 in Pine County compared to \$875 for the state and \$870 for the nation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Two major K-12 school districts in Pine County are Hinckley-Finlayson and Pine City. Pine City School District reports that 44.6% of their students receive free or reduced rate lunches based upon their household income. Broken down, 31.5% receive free lunches and 13.1% received reduced rate lunches. In the Hinckley-Finlayson School District, 50.4% receive free and reduced rate lunches with 37.1% free and 13.3% reduced (MDE, 2010).

The high rates of low-income families are significant and relevant to the UWRF EOC. The low-income ratio for EOC projects is 150% of the poverty level as established by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), while the allowance for free lunches is more stringent at approximately 129% of the poverty level. The allowance for reduced rate lunches is less stringent at approximately 185% (MDE, 2010). Stated another way, it is statistically likely that more than 31.5% of the families in the Pine City School District and more than 37.1% of the families in the Hinckley-Finlayson School District would qualify as low income individuals, potentially eligible for the services from the UWRF EOC. In light of these facts, the UWRF EOC will set up outreach services in Pine County at the facility of its partner, Pine Technical College.

**Burnett County.**

Webster School District, located in Burnett County, has the highest rate of free and reduced lunch rates in the target area at 73.8%. In Wisconsin, the Department of Public Instruction does not differentiate in its reporting of free and reduced rate lunches. The other two

districts in the county follow with Siren having 66.7% of students receiving free and reduced lunches and Grantsburg having 49.7% (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010-11). This information corroborates with information gathered from participants of the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) project that provides nutrition assistance to low-income families. Despite receiving assistance, 69% of the sample population surveyed reported low to very low food security in 2007, up from 64% in 2002 (Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, 2007).

These factors combined with Burnett County's high unemployment rate of 11.2% (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker) paint a picture of great need for the UWRF EOC in terms of a high percentage of low-income adults. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000 & 2009), veterans make up 19.1% of the population over the age of 18 in Siren, considerably higher than the veteran population of the state at 12.1% and the nation at 12.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). Because of this, the UWRF EOC will set up outreach services located in Siren, where the Veterans Service Office is located. This site will be near to Webster in the same facility with partnering agencies, Burnett County Job Center and Indianhead Community Action Program.

### **Polk County.**

Polk County has nine school districts with an average rate of 39.6% free and reduced rate lunches. The average does not tell the whole story. There are large demographic differences between the east and west sides of the southern three counties of the target area. The western sides of Polk, St. Croix and Pierce Counties generally fare better economically than their eastern side counterparts. The communities located on the west side of each of these counties border the St. Paul, Minnesota, metro area and are within commuting distance for better paying jobs. While

Polk border-communities such as Osceola have a high rate of free and reduced rate lunches at 30.1%, this is still approximately half the rate of the three school districts located furthest from the metro area in the northeast corner of Polk County: Clayton, 52.6%; Unity, 59.6%; and Frederic 65.3% (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010-11).

This information corroborates with information gathered by West CAP from respondents in Polk County who applied for heating assistance. West CAP is a community action program based in Glenwood City, Wisconsin, that provides services to low-income individuals in the target area. West CAP is a partner of the UWRF EOC. Out of 483 respondents, 61% reported incomes below \$15,000, and 60% stated income and employment as having the biggest impact on their families last year (Hadley & Trechter, 2010). To meet these high needs, the UWRF EOC will set up outreach services in Clayton and a full-time office in Balsam Lake at the project partner's site, the Polk County Job Center. U.S. Census figures indicate that veterans comprise 18.4% of Balsam Lake's population over the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). This is half again the rate of the state and nation. Balsam Lake is the county seat where the Veterans Service Office and Unity School District are located. Frederic is centrally located between Balsam Lake and Siren and could receive EOC services from either site.

### **St. Croix County.**

St. Croix and Pierce Counties demonstrate an even greater disparity between their western and eastern communities, directly in proportion to their distance from the St. Paul, Minnesota, metro area. While Hudson, directly across the border from St. Paul in St. Croix County, has a free and reduced lunch rate of 16.6%, Glenwood City in eastern St. Croix County has a rate of 37.3%. To serve these potential clients, the UWRF EOC will provide outreach services with partner, West CAP, at their center in Glenwood City. New Richmond follows next

in St. Croix County with a free and reduced lunch rate of 28.8% (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010-11). Neighboring community, Deer Park, has the highest veteran ratio in our target area at 20.6%, more than half again the state and national rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). According to West CAP, 53% of the 314 St. Croix County respondents who had requested heating assistance stated they had incomes of less than \$15,000, and 17% had been homeless sometime in their lives (Hadley & Trechter, 2010). To meet these needs, the project will also set up outreach services in New Richmond at partner, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College's campus.

### **Pierce County.**

In Pierce County, the greatest need is again revealed outside of the commuting range of the St. Paul, Minnesota, metro area. The most distant community, Plum City, has the highest rate of free and reduced lunches at 42.1%, correspondingly followed by Elmwood at 38.6% and Spring Valley at 37.7% (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010-11). Elmwood is a central location for these three communities and has a veteran population of 13.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). To ameliorate these needs, the project will establish outreach services in Elmwood.

River Falls, home of the UWRF EOC, has a higher than average percentage of individuals living below the poverty level at 14.9%, compared to the state's 8.7% and nation's 12.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). Out of the 234 Pierce County respondents of the West CAP survey, 63% reported an income of less than \$15,000, and 53% have been to a food pantry in the last year (Hadley & Trechter). To address these needs the UWRF EOC will establish a full time office at the UWRF campus. This location will allow the project to capitalize on resources offered by the campus's Veterans Services and institutional support. The



University was recently awarded a grant to fund a full time Veterans Service Office, the only one in the state, and a model for the Midwest. Serving veterans is a priority of the UWRF EOC.

Partnering with the UWRF Veterans Service Office was a logical choice.

### **High Percentage in Target Area with Education Levels Below Baccalaureate Level**

As explained in the preceding sections, the UWRF EOC will strategically establish service sites where the highest needs exist and where key community partnerships can be formed. Not surprisingly, the areas with the lowest incomes are also the areas with the lowest levels of education.

#### **Pine County.**

Only 10.3% of Pine County's residents over the age of 25 have a baccalaureate degree, and 21% do not have a high school diploma or equivalent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). To capitalize on Pine Technical College's programs in the high-demand, medical field, the UWRF EOC will partner with the college to provide services at its campus in Pine County. The Veterans Service Office is located within commuting distance in Sandstone.

#### **Burnett County.**

One quarter of the adults over the age of 25 in Siren do not have a high school diploma or equivalency, and only 11.9% have a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). Working in tandem with partners, Indianhead Community Action Program and the Burnett County Job Service, the UWRF EOC will establish outreach services in Siren to meet the needs of Burnett County residents. The project will also work closely with Adult Basic Education instructors at LCO Ojibwa Community College, located in Hertel of Burnett County.

#### **Polk County.**

Only 5.4% of Clayton's population over the age of 25 has a baccalaureate degree and

25.8% do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. Outreach services will be provided to address these needs in Clayton. Based upon Balsam Lake's 11.6% rate of baccalaureate degree completion and 16.3% rate of no high school diploma or equivalency for residents over the age of 25 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009), the UWRF EOC will establish a full-time office at the Polk County Job Center in Balsam Lake. The office will be in the center of the target area and within close proximity of the Polk County Veterans Service Office.

### **St. Croix County.**

In St. Croix County, 21.4% of Glenwood City's adults over the age of 25 do not have high school diplomas, and only 13.7% have earned a baccalaureate degree. In Deer Park, a neighboring community to the project's outreach site in New Richmond, only 6.4% of the residents have completed a bachelor's degree. More concerning still is Deer Park's high veteran population (20.6%) and high percentage of workers employed in manufacturing (37.9%) within close proximity to many companies going through mass lay offs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). The UWRF EOC will establish outreach sites to meet these needs at partners, Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College in New Richmond and West CAP in Glenwood City. Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College provides Adult Basic Education services and offers a full array of postsecondary programs.

### **Pierce County.**

One third of Bay City residents over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, and only 5.3% have earned baccalaureate degrees. These rates are significantly worse than the state and national rates. Bay City also has a higher than average veteran population, 16.2%. In response to these high needs, outreach services will be provided in Bay City. In Elmwood only 10.6% of adults over the age of 25 have bachelor's degrees and 22.6%

do not have high school diplomas or equivalencies (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & 2009). A second outreach site will be established in Elmwood to address these needs.

### **High Need to Meet Changing Employment Trends**

The disparity caused by the need for further education is especially apparent in northwest Wisconsin and Pine County in Minnesota as many manufacturers in the target area have either closed their doors or laid off employees. According to Bonnie Fredrickson, Workforce Resource Coordinator for Polk County, the following manufacturers have or will close in the five-county target area: Polaris (Polk), Motorbooks (Polk), Clopay (St. Croix), Principle (Polk), Ufe (Polk) and Beuthling (Polk). Additional closings include Duro Bag and New Richmond Bus Service, impacting 109 employees in St. Croix County; Amtec of Polk county, affecting 55 employees; and Capeside Cove nursing facility, displacing 74 employees in Burnett County (WORKnet, n.d. PCML).

Polaris will phase out its operations in its Polk County plant by January 2012, leaving 539+ people in a town of 2,500 displaced. The majority of these workers, 346, reside in Polk County, and 92% live in the UWRF EOC target area. Veterans comprise 6% of the laid off workers. Four percent do not have a high school diploma or equivalency. Six months after the lay off notice, 461 of the 539 employees stated they still needed assistance in becoming re-employed (Lienau & Fredrickson, 2010). To address these unusually high needs, the UWRF EOC will have a full-time director centrally located at the Polk County Job Center who will work in partnership with the Job Center's response to the Polaris mass lay off and other issues. The site will also provide a commuting base for outreach to Pine and Burnett Counties.

Fredrickson stated in an interview that many employers in the target area have had large, departmental lay offs: Andersen Windows, a large employer within commuting range of the

target area, has laid off 450 employees going back to 20 years of seniority. Other lay offs include Durex of Polk County and Donaldson of St. Croix County. In Pine County, 53 employees have been laid off from Coborn's Inc. Supermarket and 67 from Ad Graphics, which is located within the commuting area (Minnesota Dislocated Worker Program, n.d.).

An Educational Opportunity Center is required to serve a minimum of 1,000 adults during each project year (Ed.gov, n.d., Purpose). Mass lay off notices document a total of 1,308 displaced workers in the five-county target area. This total combined with the unknown numbers of individuals laid off from multiple, smaller employers, demonstrates an acute need and pool of potential clients for the project. Further indication of the need for employment assistance is manifested in Pine County's March 2011 unemployment rate of 11.7%. This rate is over half-again Minnesota's overall unemployment rate and well above the national rate for the same time period (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The same is true for Burnett County with an 11.2% unemployment rate that is 38% higher than Wisconsin's overall rate and significantly above the national rate of 9.2% (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker). These unemployed adults would benefit from postsecondary education and training for available jobs that demand a new set of skills.

Many adults are not aware of the multitude of educational programs and that there is financial aid available to help them attend college. In a study of non-traditional students enrolled in community colleges, seven out of eight students reported financial concerns. A common theme expressed was a previous lack of knowledge about financial resources for college. One student explicitly stated: "It's amazing; I mean I could have gone to college right after high school, but I really didn't know that" (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005, p.31). The UWRF EOC will be

ready to assist these adults and provide access to the needed education, training and financial resources.

**Pine County.**

Pine County is located in northeast Minnesota and is contiguous with the other four counties of the target area, located in northwest Wisconsin. According to Positively Minnesota (n.d.), the fastest growing occupations in the northeast section of Minnesota between now and 2019 will be Substance/Behavior Counselors, Purchasing Agents, Crushing/Grinding Machine Setters, Computer Software Engineers, Dental Assistants and Registered Nurses, with Registered Nurses topping out the list for the most jobs projected at 3,963. All of these occupations are high-demand, high-skill and high-wage opportunities open to those who pursue postsecondary education, ranging from a year to four years. The hourly, median wages for these jobs range from \$18.33 to \$35.99 (Positively Minnesota, n.d.).

What is most important to note is that the current average wage for Pine County workers at \$12.72 per hour is the lowest average wage in the entire state of Minnesota (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). This is not a livable wage. The target area of the UWRF EOC is home to three technical colleges, one tribal college and one university. The UWRF EOC can work to ameliorate this situation by assisting these workers in enrolling in a variety of postsecondary programs offered by the network of five partner schools that will lead to living-wage jobs.

**Burnett County.**

In Burnett County, the largest employers are St. Croix Casino, St. Croix Tribal Council, Burnett Medical Center, Burnett Dairy Cooperative and Park Hannifin Corporation, followed by local government/schools (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker). Despite an 11.2% unemployment rate, there are jobs available at these employers requiring specific skills and

postsecondary education. For example, Parker Hannifin Corporation, a manufacturer that makes parts for power equipment, hires inspectors for the Grantsburg plant, located in Burnett County. Inspectors are required to have a high school diploma, and preference is given to those who have an associate degree (Parker Hannifin Corp., 2011). Associate degrees in manufacturing are offered at the neighboring UWRF EOC partner school, Pine Technical College. Competitive applicants may start out in the inspector position at over \$16.00 an hour (Parker Hannifin Corp., 2011).

As is true in all five of the counties of the target area, the medical sector is one of the top five employers in Burnett County (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker). Many of the jobs at the Burnett Medical Center require certificates, diplomas and degrees in medical programs. There are openings in such programs at UWRF EOC's partner, Pine Technical College. The college is located in Pine County and within the commuting area of Burnett and Polk Counties.

Pine Technical College (PTC) was awarded a \$4.2 million grant to train healthcare workers. "PTC's statistics show Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties in Minnesota and Burnett and Polk Counties in Wisconsin are facing an escalating amount of retirees, a growing demand for health care, (and) fewer workers" (Pine Technical College, 2010, p. 1). In response to the regional worker shortage, Pine Technical College received a Health Occupations Providing Economic Stimulus (HOPES) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Some of the opportunities provided by the grant include \$270,000 awarded in scholarships; "opportunities for assistance with childcare, transportation, and other barriers students may face;" and "delivery of a medical technician degree to students in the region through a partnership between PTC and Lake Superior College" (Pine Technical College, 2010, p. 2). Again, healthcare jobs represent living wages for adults in the target area. A registered nurse in

northeast Minnesota may enjoy a median wage of \$31.18 per hour (Positively Minnesota, n.d.). As one of Pine Technical College's partners, the UWRF EOC will be able to help adults connect to these opportunities through direct assistance and the chain of partner referrals the project will provide.

### **Polk County.**

In Polk County the ten largest employers include three medical centers, local government/schools, Walmart, Polaris and Scientific Molding Corporation (SMC), a tooling and injection molding manufacturer, (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker). Residents may choose from medical, trade and technical programs offered at partner institutions, Wisconsin Indianhead and Pine Technical Colleges, located in the target area within commuting distance of Polk County. Current employment postings at SMC's Amery facility reflect a need for highly skilled employees with postsecondary credentials. Examples include Robot Technician, Maintenance Technician, Manufacturing Engineer and Process Engineer. These positions require either extensive prior experience or certificate through associate degree credentials (SMC Ltd., 2011).

According to Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC), the average wage for students who earn a technical diploma in Machine Tooling Technics is \$15.75 per hour, and the placement rate is 87% (WITC, 2010). Graduates with an associate degree from the Industrial Automation, Controls, and Networking program may expect an average wage of \$24.13 per hour and an employment rate of 88% (WITC, 2010). The UWRF EOC can be the path to help move Polk County from an unemployment rate of 9.6% (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker) to supplying the employer pipeline with highly skilled workers.

### **St. Croix and Pierce Counties.**

The largest employers in St. Croix and Pierce Counties are local government/schools, the medical sector, Walmart, Lakeside Foods cannery, Nor Lake refrigeration, SMC and Phillips Plastics (Wisconsin's WORKnet, n.d., Job Seeker). Phillips currently has openings in multiple positions including Director of Sales and Project Engineer located in St. Croix County and within the Pierce County commuting area. These positions require a baccalaureate degree in Business or Engineering respectively (Phillips, 2011). Similarly, the majority of the local government and school occupations in the area require baccalaureate degrees, often in business or education.

The home institution for the UWRF EOC, the University of Wisconsin–River Falls (UWRF) offers degrees in all of these areas and is located near the border of Pierce and St. Croix Counties. Better still for UWRF EOC participants is that UWRF has entered into articulation agreements with UWRF EOC partner institution, Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), for the Early Childhood and Business programs. This means that participants may be able to take the first 60 credits of a baccalaureate degree at CVTC at a lower cost and perhaps more convenient location and time. CVTC is located in Pierce County and within the commuting range of some of Polk and all of St. Croix Counties.

According to CVTC, students with an associate degree in Business Management may earn an average wage of \$17.67 and have a placement rate of 87% (CVTC, 2010). This associate degree at CVTC and complementing baccalaureate degree at UWRF are examples of multiple-level opportunities and exit points that participants can benefit from when postsecondary institutions work together. The UWRF EOC can assist students in understanding their options and work with schools to make additional articulation agreements. UWRF has an articulation



agreement with WITC for the Early Childhood program as well. Thanks to conversations started by the UWRF EOC project, UWRF has also initiated conversations with Pine Technical College to negotiate articulation agreements for Biotechnology and Business programs.

### **Other Indicators of Need for the Project**

The University currently holds TRiO grants for Upward Bound, Student Support Services and McNair Scholars. These three programs assist traditional-aged, low-income and first generation students get to college, stay in college and go to graduate school respectively. An EOC program is directed to serve adults, age 19 and older, typically non-traditionally aged students (Ed.gov, n.d., OPE). This group of adults is precisely the ones who need the most help at this time of economic transition in northwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota.

As Cheryl Keenan, Director of the Department's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, stated last fall at the Adult Basic Education Conference in Appleton, Wisconsin, 70% of the President's goal of 8 million more students in college by 2020 will be non-traditional-aged students. Established EOC programs have a strong track record in meeting these objectives; they are the only program to serve adults and displaced workers. Between 2006 and 2008, the postsecondary application rate increased 3% over all in areas served by an EOC, and participants enrolling in a program to complete their high school diploma or equivalency increased 7.1% in the same time period (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The UWRF EOC has the resources to match a large pool of displaced workers to education programs in five quality, postsecondary institutions for jobs in the new economy, thus demonstrating the value of education to a largely pragmatic group of people. We will use our TRiO experience and solid understanding of local economic needs and educational resources to reach out to the low-wage and no-wage earners to make them aware of the paths and resources to these opportunities.

### **Chapter III: Project Goals and Objectives**

The project personnel reviewed the target area's demographics, success rates of local General Education Development/High School Equivalency (GED/HSED) programs, and overall performance statistics of current Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) projects, as well as the Department of Education's past goals for EOC projects. As required in the Application for Grants Under the Educational Opportunity Centers Program, the University of Wisconsin – River Falls EOC has directly copied the standardized objectives and inserted a percentage goal. Thus, it is believed that the targets for the standardized objectives are both ambitious and attainable. The overall goals for the project that will guide outcome goals for the standardized objectives follow.

#### **Goal 1: Provide Information And Assistance To Individuals In Enrolling And Completing A Program To Obtain A Secondary School Diploma Or Its Equivalent**

**Obtain a secondary school diploma.** Fifty percent of participants served who do not have a secondary school diploma or its equivalent will receive a secondary school diploma or its equivalent during the project year.

#### **Goal 2: Increase The Percentage Of Low-Income And First Generation Students Who Pursue Postsecondary Education Opportunities**

**Submit financial aid applications.** Eighty percent of participants served who are not already enrolled in a post-secondary education program and who: 1) are high school seniors; 2) are high school graduates; or 3) have obtained a high school equivalency certificate, will apply for financial aid during the project year.

**Apply for college admission.** Eighty percent of participants served who are not already enrolled in a post-secondary education program and who: 1) are high school seniors; 2) are high

school graduates; or 3) have obtained a high school equivalency certificate, will apply for college admission during the project year.

**Enroll in postsecondary education program.** Sixty-five percent of participants who graduate from secondary school and are not already enrolled in a post-secondary education program will enroll in a post-secondary education program immediately following participation in an EOC program or will have received notification, by the fall semester, of acceptance for deferred enrollment until the next academic semester (e.g. Spring semester).

## **Chapter IV: Project Methodology**

“In America, education must be the great equalizer,” U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated in his October 5, 2010, address to the White House Summit on Community Colleges. He went on to state, “Community colleges now educate almost half of all college students...No other system of higher education in the world does so much to provide access and second-chance opportunities as our community colleges” (Duncan, 2010). Many adults in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota do not pursue postsecondary education and are employed in low-paying jobs. Meanwhile, employers need highly skilled workers as jobs become more specialized and an aging population reduces the labor pool. Providing low-income adults access to postsecondary education can solve both of these problems. The overarching goal of this grant request is to increase the percentage of low-income and potential first generation college students who pursue postsecondary education. This chapter will include an action plan and timeline to meet the goals of the project. An evaluation and dissemination plan will be detailed, followed by the budget for the project.

### **Action Plan and Timeline**

#### **Action plan.**

The UWRF EOC will partner with technical colleges as an integral part of the plan to deliver services. Letters of commitment have been drawn up between the project and the three technical colleges that serve the target area to share resources, services, space and referrals. The technical college system in Wisconsin is also the provider of Adult Basic Education. The UWRF EOC project will be the bridge from Adult Basic Education programs to college programs and will strive to eliminate the gaps in the steps up the education and career ladder (Duncan, 2010).

Just as the Department of Education is partnering at the national level with the Department of Labor, the UWRP EOC will be partnering with local Workforce Resource departments in support of the Trade Adjustment Assistance program for dislocated workers (Duncan, 2010). One specific example is the collaboration with the Polk County Job Center to provide assistance to the 539+ dislocated workers from Polaris, who will be receiving Trade Adjustment Assistance to enroll in postsecondary education. Outreach services will include the Job Centers in the target area. Letters of commitment are on file for the sharing of resources, services, space and referrals as well.

Outreach is paramount for the UWRP EOC project, which makes assurances that two-thirds of clients will be low-income and potential, first-generation college students. The UWRP EOC will have anchor offices at UWRP and at the Job Center in Balsam Lake. The outreach schedule will include weekly visits to the followings sites: Bay City, New Richmond, Siren, Hertel, Clayton, Glenwood City and Elmwood in Wisconsin and Pine City in Minnesota. Education will be made accessible to clients by bringing UWRP EOC services and technology to them. The project activities and timeline are detailed below.

**Project activities timeline.**

Month	Activities
September 2011	Create and distribute promotional materials
	Inform partners of goals, eligibility requirements and outreach schedule
	Inform and recruit potential clients
	Begin outreach services per outreach schedule
October 2011	Inform and recruit potential clients
	Continue outreach schedule and services

	Conduct financial literacy workshops
November 2011	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Perform benefit-cost analysis
December 2011	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Collect client success stories
	Distribute, collect and tabulate client satisfaction surveys
January 2012	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Collect and report GED and postsecondary student enrollment data
	Convene first meeting of UWRF EOC Advisory Board
	Disseminate success stories, enrollment data and service analysis
February 2012	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Perform benefit-cost analysis
March 2012	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Collaborate with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs to help clients complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
	Collaborate with local high schools' financial aid night presentations
April 2012	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Conduct FAFSA workshops
	Distribute, collect and tabulate client satisfaction surveys
May 2012	Continue outreach schedule and services
	Perform benefit-cost analysis
	Collect client success stories
June 2012	Inform and recruit potential clients

Continue outreach schedule and services

Convene second meeting of UWRF EOC Advisory Board

Disseminate success stories, enrollment data and service analysis

July 2012

August 2012

Inform partners of goals, eligibility requirements and outreach schedule

Inform and recruit potential clients

Collect and report GED and postsecondary student enrollment data

Conduct external evaluation and report

Perform summative benefit-cost analysis

Complete Annual Performance Report (APR)

Disseminate highlights of summative benefit-cost analysis, APR, surveys

### **Evaluation Plan and Tools**

With an ambitious agenda for outreach and services, the UWRF EOC has built time into the schedule to assess progress regularly. The purpose of the University of Wisconsin – River Falls Educational Opportunity Center’s evaluation plan is to ensure that the objectives are met by successfully engaging the target area’s clients, improving the education levels and consequently the livelihood of the project’s clients, and maximizing the efficiency of service delivery costs. Best practices indicate that higher education programs should measure in their evaluation process participants’ reactions, learning, behavior and results (Darussalam, G., 2010).

Keeping in line with the Department of Education’s High Priority Performance Goals for newly authorized programs for the 2011 budget (Department of Education, n.d.), the UWRF EOC has established formative and summative evaluation checkpoints for each of the objectives. The functional status of the clients will be measured to determine the results of interventions.

The project will employ benefit-cost analyses to identify the least expensive service alternative that provides the same objective outcome as other comparable methods. Benefit-cost analysis will be performed quarterly to ensure that the project does not exceed the \$230 per participant maximum expenditure. Clients will be asked to complete satisfaction surveys. Success stories will be collected as well. The UWRF EOC will establish an advisory board comprised of agency partners, clients and staff that will meet twice a year. Summative assessments will include the mandated Annual Performance Report, an end of the year cost-analysis report, compilation of client surveys and success stories. Lastly, an external evaluator will be hired.

### **Dissemination Plan**

The formative and summative reports and success stories generated from evaluation methods will be shared with stakeholders, clients and future clients. In a project covering five counties, serving 1,000 participants and collaborating with multiple agencies, dissemination is a vital activity. The UWRF EOC will engage in active and passive dissemination activities to distribute information to our stakeholders and partners about the results of our activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, reporting mandated objectives progress in the Annual Performance Report, providing semester reports to postsecondary programs and Adult Basic Education programs to provide quantitative and qualitative information about client referrals, and visiting sites to meet with key agency staff to review referral process and plan for the future.

### **Budget Narrative**

The UWRF EOC requests an annual grant from the Department of Education in the amount of \$230,000 to fund an Educational Opportunity Center. The project will serve a target population of 1,000 low-income and potential first-generation college students in the target area that covers Pierce, St. Croix, Polk and Burnett Counties in Wisconsin and Pine County in



Minnesota. The mission of the University of Wisconsin – River Falls EOC Project is to provide quality, knowledgeable information and access to secondary and post-secondary schools.

To accomplish this, a high priority is placed upon the quality, knowledge and availability of personnel for the project. To successfully fulfill the objectives of the project, \$170,094 is requested for staffing and fringe benefits for a Director, Coordinator, Program Assistant, four Tutor/Mentors and one Student Office Worker. The staff will be strategically located to serve the highest need areas and to be accessible to the greatest amount of participants in a large, rural area. To bring services to the clients, \$16,664 is requested to cover the cost of travel. The University will provide \$34,072 in support for the Program Assistant and rent to be paid to outreach sites located in community facilities.

Technology is another large part of the budget request. All of the key activities of an EOC project rely on access to the internet. Many low-income people do not have internet access to apply for financial aid, take entrance exams and apply for admission to college. The UWRF EOC is requesting \$8,300 to bring the necessary technology to clients at the outreach sites. Please see the following table for the budget request detail.

**Table 1*****Budget***

Description	USED Funds	UWRF Funds	Total
<b>Personnel</b>			
Project Director	\$54,000	\$0	\$54,000
Project Coordinator	\$35,000	\$0	\$35,000
Program Assistant	\$0	\$15,600	\$15,600
Student Worker	\$8,320	\$0	\$8,320
Four Peer Tutors	\$32,000	\$0	\$32,000
Fringe Benefits	\$40,774	\$12,948	\$53,722
Staff Travel	\$16,664	\$0	\$16,664
<b>Supplies</b>			
Laptops, Printer	\$4,700	\$0	\$4,700
Office Supplies	\$2,500	\$0	\$2,500
Diagnostic Tools	\$7,000	\$0	\$7,000
<b>Other</b>			
Speakers	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,000
Podcasts/Webinars	\$1,600	\$0	\$1,600
Telephone Service	\$1,800	\$0	\$1,800
Access to Network	\$330	\$0	\$330
Photocopying	\$1,275	\$0	\$1,275
Printing	\$1,500	\$0	\$1,500
Outreach Site Rent	\$0	\$3,000	\$3,000
External Evaluator	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$230,000</b>	<b>\$34,072</b>	<b>\$264,072</b>

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**Appendix A: Cover Letter**

May 13, 2011

Rachel Couch  
EOC Program Specialist  
Office of Federal TRIO Programs  
U.S. Department of Education, OPE  
Higher Education Programs  
1990 K Street, N.W., Suite 7000  
Washington, DC 20006-8510

Re: Letter of Intent  
Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) Proposal  
University of Wisconsin – River Falls

Dear Ms. Couch:

This letter conveys our intent to submit a formal proposal in response to your recent Request for Proposals for TRiO Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC). Our proposal will be based upon the collaboration of several community agencies and will combine expertise from our state's university and technical college systems. We will serve low-income and potential first-generation college students, and we will specifically address the acute needs of the many recently displaced workers from manufacturing in northwestern Wisconsin.

You will receive the proposal through the required electronic submission process in advance of the May 23, 2011, deadline. In the meantime, feel free to contact me for further information. Thank you for your consideration of our proposal. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Carla J. Cornwall  
College Success Program Coordinator  
Academic Success Center – 105 DL  
University of Wisconsin – River Falls  
410 S Third Street  
River Falls, WI 54022-5001