

Next Gen Learning Challenges

Improving college readiness and completion through applied information technologies

How do we better engage young people in learning and demonstrate its relevance to “real life” and their future aspirations?

How do we personalize learning to simultaneously accelerate and deepen learning?

How do we encourage persistence and completion in spite of the competing demands of students’ lives?

How can institutions and educational systems afford improvements in student success in light of flat or declining budgets?

How do we encourage institutions and policymakers to make the hard decisions to implement promising new ways of educating young people?

Next Gen Learning Challenges (NGLC) will accelerate the adoption of the most promising, cost-effective technology solutions that address these questions, in service of improved college readiness and completion.

The Challenge. The high school graduation rate in the United States is just over 70%, and, for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students, the rate hovers at slightly more than 50%. Of those who do graduate from high school, only half are prepared to succeed in college. For those who enroll in postsecondary education, only about half will actually earn a degree or a certification, with as few as one quarter of low-income students completing a degree. We face these challenges in college readiness and completion in the midst of the worst economic crisis in decades. Once first in the world in educational attainment, the United States is now just 10th and continues to be passed by other nations, even as postsecondary education is increasingly critical to individual and family financial security, to a vibrant economy, and to an engaged and participatory society.

NGLC seeks to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States through the applied use of information technology.

The Focus. Information technology has transformed the way we live, work, and play, and the power of IT will be a central component of U.S. efforts to improve college readiness and completion rates, particularly for those who need education most.

- *Goal.* NGLC seeks to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States, especially among low-income young adults.
- *Vision.* NGLC envisions an educational system that rigorously develops and scales breakthrough

solutions to persistent educational barriers, resulting in significant improvement in college readiness and completion through the use of information technology.

- *Information-technology focused.* Effective learning technologies can enable sound pedagogies and processes. The initiative seeks to identify ways that proven and emerging technology-enabled solutions can scale improvements in college readiness and completion.
- *Student success.* The initiative emphasizes higher-quality learning experiences to facilitate greater students success.
- *Proof-of-concept and early scale.* The initiative seeks to identify solutions displaying early promise and move them from “islands of innovation” to proof-of-concept and greater scale.
- *Secondary and postsecondary.* The initiative is focused on young adults, spanning secondary and postsecondary education (grades 9–16). Although the institutional context and age of the learners differ, the problems facing students and educators are similar. NGLC addresses college readiness and completion as a continuum of interrelated issues.

This initiative is only one of many that will be required to dramatically improve college readiness and completion. Other important improvement efforts are under way, such as those in policy, measurement and accountability, and financial aid. There are other critical periods in education, such as grade school and early learning, and other important populations, such as adult learners. No single initiative, however, can address all ages and approaches. The hope is that NGLC’s efforts, combined with those of others, will increase the educational attainment level of the United States.

Program Elements. NGLC is designed to provide investment capital, build evidence, and develop an active community of innovators and adopters.

- *Investment capital.* The initiative will provide investment capital through multiple funding “waves” launched approximately every 6–12 months, each involving a select number of “challenges.” The first wave of funding, announced at NGLC’s fall 2010 launch, will focus on postsecondary education. The second wave will target high schools. Awards will range from tens of thousands to more than one million dollars. The initial commitment is through 2012, with the potential for extension beyond 2012.
- *Evidence.* The NGLC community will develop and share evidence on which others can build. Professional evaluation—of individual projects and of the overall effort—is an inherent feature of the program and will document efficacy and cost-effectiveness, which will ensure the integrity of projects as well as guide future public, philanthropic, and private investments.
- *Community.* The initiative seeks to spark new dialogue and community building. Through the deployment of a vibrant social network and community engagement, NGLC will catalyze new ideas, foster solutions, and bring together unique collaborations that span institutions and disciplines.

Because of the importance of college readiness and completion, NGLC will engage technology and educational innovators, entrepreneurs, higher education executives, faculty, secondary education experts, teachers, students, employers, foundations, and other advocates to support or adopt innovations designed to help students succeed.

Challenge Focused. Each wave of funding will focus on challenges that address barriers to educational success. The first barriers the initiative seeks to address are:

- *Design and delivery systems.* Brick-and-mortar, time-based models of learning dominate education. Innovative models that redefine instructor roles and use technology to enhance learning are operating below scale.
- *Student engagement.* Diverse student needs and styles require tailored approaches that allow students to more fully engage in learning. The traditional seat-time-based classroom model only meets the needs of some students.
- *Data-driven monitoring.* Use of data in monitoring individual student progress enables early interventions to ensure retention and effective learning. Many institutions do not track individual student data, nor do they actively use data in student monitoring.

Initial Waves. The following waves are currently in development.

- *Wave 1: Building Blocks for College Completion* (fall 2010). The first wave of funding will focus primarily on postsecondary education, with an emphasis on four “building blocks,” which when combined begin to shape the next-generation learning experience.
 - *Challenge 1: Deploy open core courseware.* Assemble and deploy open, modular courseware for the top-25 developmental and general education courses for the end of high school through the first two years of college that integrate interactive multimedia and multiple learning pathways, as well as frequent assessment and feedback to students and instructors.
 - *Challenge 2: Scale blended learning programs.* Identify models that combine the best of face-to-face and online learning and that have established their capacity to improve learning effectiveness and expand their use across colleges and universities, systems, states, and regions in a cost-effective manner.
 - *Challenge 3: Encourage deeper learner engagement.* Develop “proof-of-concept” for the effective deployment of one or more of the following interactive, online technologies: digital video, gaming/simulation, social networking, or adaptive learning engines.
 - *Challenge 4: Mobilize learning analytics.* Foster models and applications that make learning performance information readily available to students, instructors, and academic advisors; encourage the adoption of such models and applications across higher education.

- *Wave II: Building Blocks for College Readiness* (tentative announcement: Q4 2010 or Q1 2011). The second wave of funding will focus primarily on grades 9–12. The initial structure of this wave is currently being shaped by funders, implementation partners, and a national advisory panel.
- *Wave III: Innovative Delivery Models* (tentative announcement: Q2 or Q3 2011). Community input will help shape future waves. Preliminary plans are for Wave III to focus on integrated delivery systems that bring together multiple elements that contribute to college readiness and completion.

Community Input. The initiative will not be able to address every issue or pursue every worthwhile idea, and not every approach will be successful. NGLC invites input from the entire community to help us refine ideas and keep learner success at the center of our focus. The website www.NextGenLearning.com and other social media will be used to engage with the community and highlight problems, progress, and promises. Ideas, evidence of what works, and innovative approaches will be shared so that all institutions and educators have access to this emerging body of knowledge and related resources. Whether an institution receives a grant, it will be better able to adopt and scale effective solutions.

Eligibility. Eligibility will vary by challenge. Because Wave I focuses on postsecondary education, challenges will be open to institutions and organizations targeting postsecondary learners. Corporate, nonprofit, college and university, government, and military institutions are eligible. Specific eligibility details will be provided in each RFP. Because of the desire to scale solutions, many challenges will involve teams that might include:

- An implementing institution (e.g., a community college, a four-year college);
- A solution provider, which could be the institution itself or a third-party nonprofit or for-profit partner; and
- A “scaling partner” who will take the solution to scale, engaging multiple institutions and learners (e.g., a state system, a network or consortium of institutions, a commercial partner).

Selection Process. Wave I of NGLC will use a two-staged selection process. In the first stage, applicants will submit a five-page pre-proposal, which will be evaluated by review panels; finalists will be invited to submit full proposals (20 pages). Full proposals will be rigorously evaluated by a panel consisting of experts and NGLC partners.

Four principles will guide selection of award winners:

- *Focus.* Does the solution focus clearly on one or more of the most significant barriers to student success? Does the solution have documented positive impact for learners, particularly low-income secondary and postsecondary learners?
- *Speed.* Does the solution build on preexisting assets and knowledge, representing a solution that has matured beyond the initial development cycle? Is the solution positioned to move quickly? Can the team quickly prototype, test, and revise based on evidence?

- *Scale.* Can the solution reach a large number of learners to “innovate at scale?” Does the solution have a path to reach even larger numbers of students if it is successful? Does this plan include a viable model for financial sustainability?
- *Data.* Does the solution have a clear “test” with a rigorous evaluation plan that will document its effectiveness? Will the evidence collected contribute to the greater body of evidence on student success?

Outcomes. NGLC will judge effectiveness based on a solution’s demonstrated impact on increasing college readiness and completion in terms of improved mastery of learning outcomes; accelerated time to mastery of learning outcomes; and an increase in progress toward and completion of a college-ready high school diploma or a postsecondary credential with value in the workforce.

More detailed outcomes and criteria will be published with individual RFPs.

Expectations of Grantees. Beyond the work proposed by grantees, all participants in NGLC will be asked to agree to a set of principles and practices that will ensure their work goes beyond the specific project.

- Grantees agree to participate in a national collaborative, facilitated by NGLC, which will enable grantees, practitioners, and experts to share effective practices and lessons learned.
- If an annual meeting of NGLC grantees is held, each grantee agrees to send two participants.
- Grantees will document implementation strategies so that others in the community can adopt their practice.
- NGLC will commission an external evaluation of all projects selected for funding. All grantees agree to participate in this overall evaluation, as well as evaluation of their own projects, and provide data on the outcomes of their projects.
- Grantees agree to make their innovations and solutions accessible to large numbers of low-income young adults at zero or nominal cost. This may include fully open licensing or otherwise making data, analyses, models and frameworks, and applications broadly available to low-income learners.

Governance and Management. A national Advisory Panel including the initiative’s philanthropic investors, technology visionaries, educators, and innovators will provide guidance on strategic directions. Challenge Panels of recognized experts will review applications for each challenge. An Executive Committee—comprising EDUCAUSE, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the partners (the League for Innovation in the Community College, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, and the Council of Chief State School Officers) will guide the overall efforts. EDUCAUSE has management and fiduciary responsibility for the program.