Project #	Agency	Project Title
13-01	Nebraska Department of Education	Nebraska Transcript Project

SUMMARY OF REQUEST (Executive Summary from the Proposal)

[Full text of all proposals are posted at: http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/nitc/documents/fy2007-09/index.html]

The Nebraska Transcript Project – a coalition including the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), the University of Nebraska P-16 Project, and representatives from the Postsecondary Coordinating Commission, public high schools, the community colleges, and private colleges – requests $250,000 over two years in Nebraska Information Technology Commission funding to lay the necessary groundwork for an electronic transcript system. This system, which is starting to gain momentum nationally, will be contracted with a private company to allow a transcript to be sent to a postsecondary institution, track the request from the high school to the institution, and receive confirmation of it's receipt – all electronically. For students, who are increasingly demanding technology-based access to information it will be a convenient, immediate, and secure way to facilitate their college application process. For high schools, the system will save time and money while providing data about students' college applications and admissions. Also, postsecondary institutions will benefit from a simpler transfer of information and a secure, accountable system.

In order to move toward this electronic system, the Nebraska Transcript Project believes it is critical to address two areas: 1) develop common course descriptors; and 2) design a common electronic transcript for Nebraska high schools. By creating common course descriptors, colleges can more accurately assess, from a transcript, the scope and rigor of the coursework undertaken by an applicant. The descriptors will be based on the national course standards released this year by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). A Project Coordinator with steering committee oversight will educate teachers and administrators through a series of workshops about the new standards and lead a process to involve these entities in the design of a "roadmap" between local courses and the national standards. A common electronic transcript creates a uniform data set for Nebraska students, allowing NDE to track, and when appropriate, report where Nebraska students are applying to colleges, their admission rates, and where they actually attend. This data will help NDE, legislators and the public evaluate how well high schools prepare students for college as well as how successfully Nebraska postsecondary institutions recruit and admit Nebraska students. A committee with representatives from the University of Nebraska P-16 Initiative, the Nebraska Department of Education, the state and private colleges, Nebraska high schools, the community colleges, the Postsecondary Coordinating Commission and registrars from both the high school and postsecondary institutions will meet to review national standards, the formats used on electronic transcript software, and successful models from Iowa and Indiana. From this information, the group will create a Nebraska transcript prototype and promote its voluntary adoption in the state's high schools. NITC funds will support hiring and equipping a full-time coordinator and half-time office support as well as costs to providing four statewide informational workshops.

FUNDING SUMMARY

	Estimated Prior Expended	Request for FY2007-08 (Year 1)	Request for FY2008-09 (Year 2)	FY2009-10 (Year 3)	FY2010-011 (Year 4)	Future	Total
1. Personnel Costs		$ 96,996.00	$ 99,264.00				$ 196,260.00
2. Contractual Services							
2.1 Design							$ -
2.2 Programming							$ -
2.3 Project Management							$ -
2.4 Other							$ -
3. Supplies and Materials		$ 1,000.00	$ 500.00				$ 1,500.00
4. Telecommunications		$ 1,343.00	$ 1,341.00				$ 2,684.00
5. Training		$ 2,000.00	$ 2,000.00				$ 4,000.00
6. Travel		$ 16,716.00	$ 15,000.00				$ 31,716.00
7. Other Operating Costs		$ 3,825.00	$ 3,825.00				$ 7,650.00
8. Capital Expenditures							
8.1 Hardware		$ 2,800.00					$ 2,800.00
8.2 Software							$ -
8.3 Network							$ -
8.4 Other		$ 3,390.00					$ 3,390.00
TOTAL COSTS	$ -	$ 128,070.00	$ 121,930.00	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 250,000.00
General Funds		$ 128,070.00	$ 121,930.00				$ 250,000.00
Cash Funds							$ -
Federal Funds							$ -
Revolving Funds							$ -
Other Funds							$ -
TOTAL FUNDS	$ -	$ 128,070.00	$ 121,930.00	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 250,000.00

PROJECT SCORE

Section	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 3	**Mean**	Maximum Possible
3: Goals, Objectives, and Projected Outcomes	12	12	13	12.3	15
4: Project Justification / Business Case	16	20	23	19.7	25
5: Technical Impact	15	13	20	16.0	20
6: Preliminary Plan for Implementation	8	6	10	8.0	10
7: Risk Assessment	6	7	7	6.7	10
8: Financial Analysis and Budget	20	13	20	17.7	20
			TOTAL	**80**	100

REVIEWER COMMENTS

Section	Strengths	Weaknesses
3: Goals, Objectives, and Projected Outcomes	- The project goal of standardizing course descriptors and creating a common electronic transcript will ultimately provide high school students with an efficient means to submit college applications while also providing policy makers and instructional practitioners with data to better understand this process. Identifying and assembling a representative group of key stakeholders is critical to this process. - The concept of a statewide digital transcript is commendable. - Project integrates well with the State technology plan as well as utilizing work from our peer states through MHEC	- Obtaining a representative group of stakeholders will be a challenge. Obtaining agreement on course descriptors will be a difficult process, but the idea that this will translate to a verifiable and reliable measure of academic rigor does not necessarily follow. -The transcript approach should be mandated and not optional. One of the outcomes of the project should be a scope and sequence and timeline for total participation; not a roadmap. It is difficult to discern the exact outcomes or objectives from the Section 3 text. - While the document indicates that there will be involvement from other postsecondary institutions that involvement is not detailed in terms of representation and this reviewer was unable to find any documentation on the web that detailed the membership of the coalition. One could infer from this that postsecondary outside of the University system have not been involved in the planning process.
4: Project Justification / Business Case	- Answering the need to streamline the submission process for high school seniors and higher education institutions. Providing the opportunity to achieve a broad base of support for this process - Many benefits of the statewide transcript project were described. - The benefits of the program are well established	- The primary rationale provided is that there is a growing expectation that such a system will be available and citing students' use of electronic devices as evidence. The goals and objectives of this project are important, however, greater emphasis must be given to a true business case for this undertaking including cost savings and obtaining data that can be used to assist and guide students through the process of selecting and applying to colleges. - No alternative solutions were evaluated other than 'doing nothing'. It appears that participation in electronic transcripts thrusts Nebraska to the forefront of other states. Is this true? Can an overview of other state-

Section	Strengths	Weaknesses
		level electronic transcript efforts be included? - The analysis of alternatives is weak. Doing nothing is not the only alternative. What are other MHEC states doing if they aren't participating in the MHEC program - how about states outside MHEC?
5: Technical Impact	- The intended outcome of this project is clear and is a necessary step toward the adoption of technology that will streamline the college submission process. - Description of electronic versus paper transcripts was adequate.	- While the funding being sought does not impact technology directly the expected outcome will pave the way for a process that will be technology based. Practically no information was provided on the eventual technology that will used beyond the fact that it will be contracted and is Web-based with hooks to email. This is very scant evidence upon which a reviewer can base her/his evaluation. If the system that will be adopted is good than it will be embraced, however, this reviewer believes that more information on the eventual system that will be used should have been provided. - No technical descriptions were given and said to not be necessary. Is this just an I.T. planning project? How can an electronic transcript be an outcome of the project without hardware and software to maintain it?
6: Preliminary Plan for Implementation	-Clear and concise timeline -Clearly articulated goals aligned to project activities and expenditures - Multi-sector involvement is described and is necessary for a project of this scope.	- The project lays the foundation for broad acceptance; however, it does not provide the on-going support that will be required to help smaller rural districts comply with the requirements. There is significant work that will need to be done in the way of communication as well as assisting districts in a process that will impact their current data systems. This expense will all be pushed back on the schools and ESUs with no additional funding. -The project points to the leadership of Joe Rowson, when he is no longer with the P-16 Initiative, who will be replaced by another P-16 Coordinator.
7: Risk Assessment	- Recognition of the financial and logistical barriers associated with obtaining project outcomes and ensuring that a system will be available beyond the scope of this project. -Alignment with the NCES standards is identified as important.	- Beyond the recognition of the barriers very little was communicated about addressing them beyond suggesting that they are not insurmountable. This is tantamount to saying there are risks but everything should be okay. -Again, a "roadmap" is referred to as helping guide schools toward an electronic transcript. NO mitigation of non-compliance is identified. - While the plan is well laid out the difficulty of the task is substantial and I have doubts that the number of sessions and classes planned will be adequate to facilitate the degree of change required.
8: Financial	- Costs are low relative to the benefits of the	- The salary for the project leader seems

Section	Strengths	Weaknesses
Analysis and Budget	expected outcomes	very low based on what will be required to ensure the success of the project. -It's not clear how the new FTE personnel relate to the project or how their salaries will be assumed in the long term.

TECHNICAL PANEL COMMENTS

Technical Panel Checklist	Yes	No	UNK	Technical Panel Comment
1. The project is technically feasible.	✓			
2. The proposed technology is appropriate for the project.	✓			
3. The technical elements can be accomplished within the proposed timeframe and budget.	✓			

EDUCATION COUNCIL COMMENTS

- The Education Council recommends this project be categorized as a highly recommended project.
- The Education Council disregarded the technical review scores due to the apparent inconsistencies in scoring.
- The Education Council recognizes that the Department of Education project is working cooperatively with MHEC (Midwest Higher Education Compact), an 11-state purchasing consortium, to achieve transcript standardization.

NITC COMMENTS

- Tier 2 (Recommended. High strategic importance to the agency and/or the state.)

APPENDIX

AGENCY RESPONSE TO REVIEWER COMMENTS

Section	*NDE Response to Reviewers Comments*
3: Goals, Objectives, and Projected Outcomes	-We do not anticipate problems in assembling a representative group of stakeholders. The steering committee that helped to develop the proposal contained folks from all stakeh9older groups. All groups have expressed an interest in participating in the implementation of this project. We agree that the development of the new course descriptors will be a difficult process but we do not see this as a weakness of the project. The new NCES standards have already been developed; the only agreement required is whether or not to adopt the new standards. If adopted, new standard course descriptors will be a more reliable measure because each course has a detailed and comparable definition, which was lacking in the past. -The Department of Education is mandated by rule to collect data on the courses taught in Nebraska schools. There is no such mandate for a common transcript. We believe that a common transcript will benefit both secondary and postsecondary education and therefore the incentive to participate will be great. The project team is looking for sponsorship that would make the electronic transfer of transcripts free to students. -The focus of this project is all of PK-16 education. The Nebraska P-16 Initiative is located at the University of Nebraska and the U of N will play a central role in it's implementation. All of postsecondary education, including private postsecondary was involved in the planning process. This fact was reiterated during the presentation before the NITC Education Committee.
4: Project Justification / Business Case	-The primary focus of this project is to perform the detailed planning necessary to implement the common transcript and the common course descriptors. We are confident that a more than adequate business case will be established as we proceed through this project. -While this project will place Nebraska at the forefront of transferring transcripts electronically, it is difficult to obtain much information from other states. We have talked extensively with folks in Indiana, where a full-blown electronic transcript project is being implemented. We have also visited with our colleagues in Iowa, where they are working on defining data elements for a common transcript. These are the only two states that are currently working on this type of project. -We really do not believe that doing nothing is an alternative since school districts and postsecondary institutions will be adopting electronic transcript products in the very near future. The only question is whether there will be a logical, statewide implementation.
5: Technical Impact	-Without directing the reviewers to specific companies that are selling this service, it is difficult to adequately describe the details of this process. In truth, this is a fairly simple web-based application which requires only a few hours of training. We believe that a key strength to this project is that very little new technology will be required to implement this project and that its web-based nature will be very familiar to students and educators at all levels. -We believe that one strength of this project is that it leverages the investments that school districts and postsecondary institutions have already made in their local student information systems and their hardware networks. Westside High School in Omaha has already demonstrated that drawing transcript data from their current SIS and sending it to a vendor is possible. In addition, SIS vendors with multiple Nebraska customers will be able to design a single extract program to serve all of their customers.
6: Preliminary Plan for Implementation	-The cost of sending transcripts is now borne by high schools and colleges. In the new world of electronic transcripts, this cost will be reduced. In the case of the common course descriptors, NDE is already required to collect this information. The reviewer is correct that the cost of mapping local data to the state standard is not included in this project. -Joe Rowson will continue to serve half time with the P-16 Initiative. In addition, the U of N intends to hire a full time P-16 Coordinator. This project will continue to be supported by the P-16 Initiative.
7: Risk Assessment	-We are aware of the risks that exist with a project like this; however we are also familiar with

	the audience that we will be working with. We have been working with school districts in implementing the new Nebraska Student and Staff Record System and the data model has already been developed for this project. We are familiar with our audience nad comfortable with our approach. -The transcript portion of this project is voluntary. Non-compliance is not an issue. -We believe the n umber fs session is adequate.
8: Financial Analysis and Budget	-The salary is typical of a senior consultant in the Department of Education -We expect that the cost of incorporating the new course descriptors into the student and staff record system will be absorbed by the NDE since this is currently a critical activity of NDE. School districts and postsecondary institutions will assume long-term support of the electronic transcript unless outside funding can be secured.