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THEC Awards \$600,000 to Tennessee Communities to Support Adults in Postsecondary Attainment

NASHVILLE – *October 8* – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has awarded \$600,000 in Reconnect Community grants to three Tennessee regions to establish community centers that will serve the needs of adults interested in completing a postsecondary credential. These centers, Tennessee Reconnect Communities (TRCs), will engage higher education institutions, local government, local employers, community organizations, and adult learners alike. The centers will provide adults with free advising, career counseling, support, a personalized path to and through college, and connect the said stakeholders in larger statewide degree-attainment efforts.

“In Tennessee, we have realized that communities are where the success of Drive to 55 will be decided,” said Jessica Gibson, Assistant Executive Director at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. “By localizing the Drive to 55, communities will be engaged in assisting and supporting their residents and neighbors in the pursuit of postsecondary completion.”

This initiative is based on The Graduate! Network’s (TGN) proven model for improving outcomes for adult learners. TGN is a non-profit organization whose work is based on collective impact strategies and bringing together entities from different sectors to innovate ways to increase college attainment among adults. The partnership between Tennessee and TGN will provide communities with training, guidance, support, and information to develop sustainable and locally-focused Drive to 55 efforts for adults. Each Reconnect Community grantee will adapt this service model to their local context, unique strengths, community partnerships and collaborations. This will result in a community-based effort of service delivery to adults that is unique to each community’s needs and characteristics.

“One of the first – and most difficult – steps for an adult going back to college is reaching out to someone for information and help,” said THEC Interim Executive Director Russ Deaton. “The Tennessee Reconnect Community centers will provide adults an opportunity to talk to advisors who can point them toward an institution that best fits their needs and guide them through the process of returning to higher education.”

The Tennessee Reconnect Community grant awarded three grants to regions across the state; grant amounts include start-up funds of \$200,000 per community and include technical assistance provided through The Graduate! Network. Implementation will begin November 2015 and the community centers will launch in March 2016. In mid-2016, THEC will choose a second cohort of five communities to launch services in late 2016.

The Tennessee Reconnect Community grants were chosen through a competitive application process. The grant program is administered by THEC and subgrants are funded by the State of Tennessee, with technical assistance funded by Lumina Foundation.

List of Funded Communities:

- Middle TN
 - Lead Organization: Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Counties Served: Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Maury, Montgomery, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson

- Upper Cumberland
 - Lead Organization: Highlands Economic Partnership
 - Counties Served: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren, White

- Southwest TN
 - Lead Organization: Southwest Tennessee Development District
 - Counties Served: Chester, Decatur, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McNairy, Carroll, Crockett, Gibson, Tipton, Wayne

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The Commission coordinates two systems of higher education, the University of Tennessee institutions governed by the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and the state universities, community colleges, and technology centers governed by the Tennessee Board

of Regents. There are nine public universities, two special purpose institutes, 13 community colleges, and 27 colleges of applied technology in Tennessee that educate nearly 250,000 students.