Next Generation Learning Challenges is designed to address the barriers to educational innovation and to tap the potential of technology. NGLC seeks to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States, particularly among low-income individuals, through the applied use of technology. EDUCAUSE, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, manages the higher education initiatives of NGLC.

The NGLC partners created the Breakthrough Models Incubator to bring leadership teams of forward-thinking colleges and universities together for an opportunity to explore the latest innovations in higher education business and learning models. The Incubator teams join the community of innovators, which includes the NGLC Wave IIIb grantees and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Breakthrough Delivery Models grantees, who are designing and implementing new, technology-enabled learning and business models in higher education.

**What is competency-based education?**
Competency-based education (CBE) models, which reward students for the skills they acquire rather than the time they spend in class, combined with new technology to deliver and assess learning, represent a potent mechanism that can trigger broad, fundamental transformation of systems, policies, structures, practices, and the student learning experience. CBE, by focusing both the business model and learning model on outputs rather than inputs, holds unique promise as a tool to break the “iron triangle” and expand access, affordability, and quality degrees for more students.

**Why should we focus on this approach now?**
It is an opportune time to develop competency-based education programs. Institutions like the University of Wisconsin and Northern Arizona University are in the arena offering degrees that are based on directly assessing what students know and can do, rather than awarding degrees based on seat time. Vendors and institutions are working together to develop next generation technology support for institutions and students engaged in CBE. The Department of Education is also using its authority to open experimental sites for CBE as well.

NGLC decided to focus the Incubator on catalyzing development of new CBE programs in order to expand student opportunities for high quality degrees in flexible settings in 2014 and will continue to expand this effort in 2015. By selecting institutions ready to commit to CBE and engaging them in the national conversation around accreditation,
the role of faculty, business models, and the development of IT solutions for competency-based models, we seek to advance the field and promote student success.

The Vision for Success

Outcomes that define success for the Incubator include:

- an expanded field of institutions launching technology-enabled, CBE business and learning models collaborating with each other to advance their common needs,
- creative, performance-focused business models that are institutionally sustainable and that enable, the redesigned learning models’ prospects of succeeding and expanding,
- strategic use of information technology, including analytics and performance management systems, to provide continuous quality improvement and customized supports and to optimize retention and completion efforts,
- development and dissemination of documentation on best practices supporting the transition to CBE,
- a constructive, informed dialogue with accreditors and other agencies resulting in clarity for regulators and flexibility for innovators,
- degree programs signaling an institution-wide commitment to CBE progression rather than a seat-time/credit hours progression through the program of study,
- embedded assessment within the curriculum and summative assessments that demonstrate both depth and breadth of learning,
- learning science research to develop effective, targeted, and personalized learning environments,
- blended learning and/or supported online learning environments to increase effectiveness while improving affordability, particularly for underserved learners who benefit from combinations that provide interpersonal interaction with flexibility, and
- strategies to bridge the gaps between high school and college and accelerate high school students’ progression toward high-quality postsecondary degrees.

Program Description

The Incubator will facilitate and support institutions through a structured, co-created exploration and design process that will help cross-functional institutional teams create viable plans ready for launch by January 2016.
The Incubator will provide content, community, and coaching over the course of 12 months. The Incubator timeline includes three phases.

- **Phase 1** (March-July 2015) requires completion of the pre-convening module on student needs.

- **Phase 2** (July-January 2016) involves participating in the cohort convening, engaging with thought leaders on the content domains listed below, working with team members and a team coach to create a launch-ready plan, and collaborating with other Incubator teams on issues of mutual interest including the Cohort’s commonly developed resource for the field.

- **Phase 3** (January 2016-January 2017) includes implementation of institution’s plan, submission of a milestone report at 12 months to bring forward successes and lessons learned for the field, and continued connection with the field of innovators through participation at events.

**Content: The Domains**

The Incubator will provide content and context on the domains below by inviting leaders to share knowledge, research and experiences that will spark group discussions via online connections. Topics include:

- the business models that will support a competency-based learning model, including questions such as whether to offer Title IV financial aid and how to model costs and forecast revenues to ensure sustainability,

- the CBE learning model including instructional design, curriculum, and assessment,

- the role of faculty and their part in the change management process, focusing on how to redefine faculty roles and communicate successfully with both faculty and accreditors about the reframing of those roles,

- the best way to engage with accreditors, building on the latest actions within the regional and national accrediting bodies,

- the role of technology in a CBE model, and

- the best strategies for marketing innovative offerings.

**Community: The Leadership Circle of Higher Education Innovators**

The Incubator provides institutional leadership teams with a unique opportunity to
connect, leverage skills, and network. Selected teams will come together for the in-person convening at the Washington D.C. Fairmont Hotel (July 28-31) to learn and apply their learning to their emerging plan.

With the guidance and support of EDUCAUSE/Next Generation Learning Challenges, the 2015 BMI cohort will collectively develop a resource that is valuable to Incubator teams and also is available under a Creative Commons Attribution license to all institutions. As an example, the 2013 Cohort sparked development of a webinar and accompanying template that helps institutions shift their perspective on finance from budgeting to investing to secure specific returns.

Institutions may develop other intellectual property in the course of participating in the Incubator. With respect to the development of other intellectual property directly attributable to participation in the Incubator, NGLC asks that institutions consider licensing any other models, tools, and materials directly developed as a result of participation in the Incubator under a Creative Commons Attribution license. This helps us advance our goal of accelerating the adoption of promising new models and technology, which boost completion rates, improve affordability, and increase access, particularly for underserved learner populations. Intellectual property developed by an institution previously or separately from its Incubator participation remains with the institution.

**Coaching: The Independent, Challenging Mentor/Sounding Board**

Institutional teams selected for the Incubator will work closely with the Director of Postsecondary Model Development and Adoption as well as a seasoned organizational development coach to develop plans mindful of the change management issues inherent in launching an innovative new model. Regular check-in calls help teams stay on track, maintain focus and draw on resources that can strengthen their model plans.

**Questions about BMI 2015?**

Register here to join us on January 6 at 1:00 pm EST for a pre-application webinar, where we will answer your questions, or contact Director of Postsecondary Model Development and Adoption Holly Morris (hmorris@educause.edu).

Public Agenda, through the Lumina Foundation, is offering institutions further along in their work on competency-based education an opportunity to work collaboratively to advance the field through the Competency Based Education Network. If your institution is just beginning its exploration of CBE, you may want to consider the CAEL Jumpstart program.
Ready to Apply?

Access the application materials here. For additional information about Next Generation Learning Challenges, please visit our website.