

Mentor-Connect Provides “Every Opportunity” to Craft Successful ATE Grant Proposals

Having a one-on-one mentor for his [Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\)](#) grant proposal team for nine months was the most beneficial aspect of [Mentor-Connect](#) to Ryan Bradshaw, chair of Business Education & Technology Department at [Johnston Community College](#) in Smithfield, NC.

The team’s Mentor-Connect mentor was Pam Silvers, co-principal investigator of Mentor-Connect.

“Pam is the type of mentor who’s not afraid to tell you the truth. She will tell you if your approach is not good, and she actually will probe you with questions to lead you down a pathway toward the answers that she thinks you need to have,” Bradshaw said. In addition to asking challenging questions, Silvers suggested subject-matter experts the team could talk to and offered feedback on multiple drafts as they refined their proposal.

“They’re not going to do the proposal for you, but they are going to give you every opportunity to do it right,” Bradshaw said of Mentor-Connect’s mentors.

To learn more about how Mentor-Connect helps community college educators prepare competitive ATE grant proposals see the *NSF ATE Program Opportunities & Mentor-Connect Orientation Webinar* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vbpxN2PyAo>

This 90-minute webinar offers an overview of the ATE program’s grant proposal process and funding tracks; Mentor-Connect’s structure and resources; tips for grant funding success; and instructions for Mentor-Connect’s application.

[Applications](#) for Mentor-Connect’s 2024 cohort are due Friday, November 10.

Unique Aspects of Mentor-Connect

Bradshaw said, “Mentor-Connect is really kind of a unique experience because you’re working on a difficult project that takes leadership, collaboration. It takes dedication, time commitments, and organization. So, there are a lot of moving facets within this project. You’ve got to have a good combination of support from the top, people who are doing it [the proposal development work] who are highly motivated and want to work through it, and an organization like Mentor-Connect that will support you.”

Participating in Mentor-Connect cohort mentoring in 2023 that began with an in-person meeting of mentors and mentees from around the nation was an all-new professional development experience for Bradshaw and David Oliver, networking technology instructor and co-principal investigator of the cybersecurity proposal. However, it was a helpful refresher for Daphne T. Lewis, Johnston’s grant writer and manager, and Brian Worley, associate vice president of Business, Industry, Logistics & Transportation who had previously benefitted from assistance in preparing proposals that have been funded by the NSF ATE Program.

Both Lewis and Worley had roles in Johnston's first ATE grant for the [Bio Blend](#) project, which received Mentor-Connect [New to ATE Mentoring](#), and a second ATE grant for [Bio Blend 2.0](#), which received [Mentor-Connect Moving-Up](#) mentoring.

Expansion of Mentor-Connect

In 2023 Mentor-Connect added assistance to educators who have not previously had ATE grants even if their two-year college has received recent ATE grants. Because their colleges have had ATE grants, these educators receive guidance for submitting proposals to the ATE Projects track, rather than the Small Projects for Institutions New to the ATE program.

During the past decade Mentor-Connect has helped 234 community college teams prepare competitive proposals for the [Small Projects for Institutions New to the ATE program](#) track.

Mentor-Connect is an ATE project that is a partnership between the [South Carolina Advanced Technological Education Center](#) at [Florence-Darlington Technical College](#) and the [American Association of Community Colleges](#).

Value-Add of NSF ATE Grants

Lewis said she, Worley, and others at the college are motivated to invest time in ATE grant proposals because of the "value-add that NSF provides to our students and our programs."

Unlike some other funders, she said, NSF is "very supportive of you learning while you're working on the project. We're actually learning as we go, and then we're applying what we learn and making our project better."

Lewis also praised Mentor-Connect, and the networking it fosters, for helping Johnston strengthen both its proposals and funded programs by learning and collaborating with individuals and organizations that Mentor-Connect mentors introduced to the project teams.

"We are striving to do great things," she said, explaining the importance of ATE grants for students.

"The value-add we saw with the Bio Blend and the 2.0, we were able to blend two curricula and provide a certificate and training that our local industry wanted, and we were able to provide some internships," she said. Most of the two dozen students who went through the Bio Blend program obtained jobs in biotechnology. Bio Blend 2.0, which started in 2022, is attracting interest from students on the autism spectrum who are among the underserved populations on which this project focuses.