

## Early-Phase Competition Absolute Priority 4 (SEL)

Oregon Research Institute

S411C230011

### EmpowerU: Promoting Health-Related SEL Skills Development in High-Needs Populations

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**Applicant Name:** Oregon Research Institute

**Project Title:** EmpowerU: Promoting Health-Related SEL Skills Development in High-Needs Populations

**Type of Grant Requested:** (select one)  Early-Phase  Mid-Phase  Expansion

**Absolute Priorities the Project Addresses:** (select all that apply)

Absolute Priority 1-- Demonstrate a Rationale (Early), Moderate (Mid), Strong (Expansion)

Absolute Priority 4-- Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

**Competitive Preference Priorities the Project Addresses:** (select all that apply)

Competitive Preference Priority 1— Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners

**Total number of students to be served by the project:** 543 students

**Grade level(s) to be served by the project:** 9-12

**Definition of high-need students:** Students identified with disabilities; living in low-income households, educated in traditionally underserved rural or alternative education settings; members of traditionally underrepresented racial, ethnic, or gender groups.

**Brief description of project activities:** Project activities include: (a) developing three new health literacy modules (i.e., rural health literacy, stigma, and mental health literacy) and adapting existing EmpowerU content and measures; (b) transferring curriculum assets to T-BIDS, an online platform that will allow for seamless school integration and sustainability; (c) iteratively pilot-testing the revised program, evaluation measures, and platform for feasibility, acceptability, and further refinement; and (d) evaluating EmpowerU on student outcomes through a wait-list randomized controlled trial.

**Summary of project objectives and expected outcomes:** EmpowerU will be developed and evaluated in four distinct phases to allow for iterative development and refinement. Phases include a series of focus groups with key stakeholders, the development of three new health literacy content modules, two iterative pilot studies, and a wait-list randomized controlled trial to determine program effects on high-needs secondary students. Expected outcomes include improved student health literacy, self-determination, general health stigma, and transition preparedness.

**Summary of how the project is innovative:** Although the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of all persons to be well prepared to locate, understand, and use information and services to make informed health-related decisions, education around these skills continues to be overlooked. EmpowerU seeks to improve outcomes by providing key skills to adolescent populations most at risk (i.e., economically and underperforming high-needs rural, suburban, and urban high school youths), and prevent poor health behaviors and social, emotional, educational, and transitional, and financial outcomes in high-needs populations.

**Other studies related to the proposed project:** EmpowerU builds on a decade of research investigating the health literacy of high-needs students served in public and alternative high school settings, and is grounded in the How People Learn framework, Universal Design for Learning principles, and digital pedagogy. The proposed curriculum will extend HealthyU, an evidence supported, web-based curriculum designed to promote health literacy in 9-12 grade students with high incidence disabilities. To date, four initial studies have been conducted with the HealthyU curriculum demonstrating medium to large effects.

**Proposed implementation sites:** Lincoln Public Schools (NE); ESU 4 (rural Nebraska – 10 districts); ESU 6 (rural Nebraska – 16 districts); ESU 10 (rural Nebraska – 33 districts); McAdams Academy (alternative school, Wichita, KS); Hanny Arram Center for Success (alternative school, rural NE).

**Organizations partnering with this project:** Oregon Research Institute; Influent Innovation; Abt