KnowledgeWorks Foundation  
Request for Qualifications (RFQ): 000102  
Title: Evaluation of Nevada Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Implementation  
JUNE 2022

Introduction
KnowledgeWorks, in partnership with the Nevada Department of Education is engaged in state-level implementation support of personalized, competency-based learning. As part of this work, KnowledgeWorks embeds research, data analysis, and continuous quality improvement offerings to support and augment our state, district, and school work by enabling ongoing engagement, evaluation, and feedback loops with key stakeholders so that data is both actionable in real-time and provides information on student and systems impact. In particular, we’re looking to ascertain impact on and outcomes for marginalized and resilient learners. To this end, KnowledgeWorks is seeking a qualified research partner to help lead the data collection and analysis activities that will help us answer key questions and support our partners’ continuous learning and improvement as they implement personalized, competency-based learning across the state.

Organization
KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what’s next. For more than 20 years, we’ve been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we’re creating the future of learning, together.

Background
While versions of personalized learning and competency-based learning have been around since the turn of the century, putting these approaches together at a system level has been in practice for less than a decade. The modern resurgence in popularity for these approaches comes as a response to the urgent need to improve students’ postsecondary and career readiness, foster deeper learning and more equitable learning outcomes for each student, produce future-focused education systems, and respond to the disruptions in education caused by the pandemic.

In 2014, KnowledgeWorks released the District Conditions for Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning, based on interviews with close to 30 leaders in the field. The District Conditions began to lay a blueprint for personalized, competency-based learning, an intentional and explicit combination of the two approaches. Starting with the district as the unit of change, KnowledgeWorks continued to build a systems-level approach in which policy conditions, vision-setting and supports at the state level complement multi-district initiatives.

KnowledgeWorks is engaged in state-level implementation support of personalized, competency-based learning in Arizona, Ohio, North Dakota, South Carolina, and is now in the early stages of engaging with
Nevada. The state-level implementation support in Nevada builds from work initiated in 2020 when the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), with support from KnowledgeWorks, convened the Blue Ribbon Commission for a Globally Prepared Nevada—a group of leaders from across the state working to re-imagine an education system that is future-ready, resilient, equitable and student-centered.

To support the growth of personalized, competency-based learning in Nevada and systemic change across the state, KnowledgeWorks has partnered with NDE to create the Nevada Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Network. The Nevada Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Network will implement personalized, competency-based learning by:

- Transforming leadership and policy systems at the state-level to support the growth and sustainability of high-quality personalized, competency-based learning; and
- Creating a system of professional development designed to provide multiple entry points to meet the unique needs of schools and districts.

The work in Nevada is built on a personalized, competency-based learning foundation that includes:

- **Prioritizing an equitable system of learning** for each learner, with an emphasis on the most marginalized and resilient learners
- **Recognizing that a volatile present calls for a strategic use of foresight** and future-oriented solutions
- **Advancing policies to assist learning communities and states** to meet the current uncertainties by building resiliency and flexibility into the system
- Creating a broader, **more well-rounded view of student achievement** that focuses on academic rigor and skills, as well as addresses future-ready skills, student agency and whole child indicators
- **Forging strong partnerships** with state, community, district, school and classroom leaders, and customizing timing order and types of support to meet their needs and interests
- **Assessing impact** throughout the engagement and using both formative and summative data to improve outcomes or make course corrections as necessary
- **Building the capacity of educators and leaders** to sustain long-term progress toward the vision

See the “Layered and Customized Supports” section below for more information about the types of foundational supports that KnowledgeWorks is providing to NDE to build the foundation for personalized, competency-based learning.

**Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Defined**

Nevada has a commitment to personalized, competency-based learning transformation at a systems level. In order to specify both what personalized, competency-based learning “looks like” and how it moves from the classroom to the system, the framework below first outlines what the approach looks like.
like in the learning environment, followed by a set of systems-level commitments and aspirations to ensure equitable and sustainable personalized, competency-based learning.

In a personalized, competency-based learning environment:

1. Students daily make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge and how they will demonstrate their learning.

2. Assessment is a meaningful, positive and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant and actionable evidence.

3. Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.

4. Students progress based on evidence of mastery or competency, not seat time.

5. Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.

6. Strategies to ensure equity are embedded in the culture, structure and pedagogy of schools and education systems.

7. Rigorous, common expectations for learning are explicit, transparent, measurable and transferable.

To scale personalized, competency-based learning, leaders must focus structures and policy on a critical set of system-level commitments. These system commitments serve as a set of aspirational goals while also focusing on key areas to continually assess and improve:

- Equity in outcomes
- Shared vision and culture
- Agency and shared accountability

Equity in Outcomes
A system commitment to equity in outcomes illuminates opportunity gaps and disparities in outcomes, engages historically underserved communities to design solutions that improve outcomes across all levels of the system and guarantees access to targeted supports that accelerate and deepen learning, ensuring that each student graduates future-ready.

Shared Vision and Culture
A system commitment to a shared vision calls for meaningful involvement by families, students, professional educators and community members in the creation of a learning community’s vision and the work to sustain the culture. Core elements of the culture are defined together, including supporting positive risk-taking, adopting an anti-racist and equity-oriented stance and emphasizing empathy and a

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growth mindset. Each member of the learning community can articulate the elements of the vision and its intention, how the culture supports achieving the vision and their role in holding themselves and each other accountable for equitable outcomes.

**Agency and Shared Accountability**

A system commitment to agency and shared accountability occurs when leaders, educators, learners, families and community members have active and meaningful roles in ensuring equitable outcomes for learners. A focus on transparency in decision-making, resource-sharing and data is a critical first step on the way to achieving true agency and shared accountability. Shared accountability also implies there is some form of accountability to stakeholders, transparency in quality assurance and shifts in traditional power dynamics with clear mechanisms for collaborative decision making. Agency implies that all members of the learning community believe and value their individual and collective capacity and have the tools to demonstrate resilience and overcome challenges in pursuit of community goals.

**What is personalized, competency-based learning?**

At the system level, personalized, competency-based learning is when members of a learning community work together to create engaging educational experiences that are customized to each learner’s strengths, needs and interests. Students have voice and ownership over how, what, when and where they learn and connections to community and real-world experiences are a priority. In a personalized, competency-based learning environment, students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing that does not result in tracking or other forms of ability grouping. The systems-level focus on the learner’s experience and readiness ensures each learner has equitable opportunities to acquire the future-ready skills, knowledge and dispositions so they graduate ready for what’s next.

**Layered and Customized Supports**

At the district-level, the use of the *District Conditions for Scaling Personalized Learning, District Conditions Navigation Tool*, opportunity analysis and tiered systems of support build the capacity of district and school leaders and educators. Simultaneously, at the state-level, the *State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning*, state opportunity analysis and strategic foresight tools create an aligned, sustainable competency-based system that supports all students in meeting their goals.

**District-Level Supports**

**Individual District Supports**

KnowledgeWorks’ *District Conditions for Scale* establishes the fundamental building blocks on which a high-performing personalized, competency-based learning system is based. Combined with the meta themes, a set of ideas that stretch across the conditions and serve as the connective tissue tying the conditions together, these serve as the basis for KnowledgeWorks’ partnerships with learning communities. The data generated from this tool is presented in a district opportunity analysis that helps districts prioritize conditions and visualize data to make sense of it while sharing it with stakeholders inside and outside the district. Use of this tool year over year provides data to assess implementation by a district while enabling a reprioritization of goals as the data dictates. Finally, KnowledgeWorks uses tiered systems of support, a framework for content aligned to the *District Conditions for Scaling Personalized Learning*, as a professional learning continuum.
District Network Supports
In each state, KnowledgeWorks builds intentional networks designed to sustain the work beyond any single policy, leader or grant so that the positive effects of student-centered learning are embedded seamlessly into the system. The networks and supports are different in each state but may include elements of: design teams consisting of district and school leaders; convenings to learn and collaborate with other districts as they progress in their unique implementation journeys; use of the opportunity analyses to deliver professional development and technical assistance; and sharing student-centered best practices focused on systemic implementation, growth and accountability. An education fellowship approach (made up of key school and district leaders) to support additional professional and leadership development and a data fellowship approach (made up of representatives from each of the participating districts) to support local ownership of data and establishment of a culture of continuous quality improvement is in early stages in some of the states and may also be an element in Nevada. These fellows build the capacity of local leaders to lead implementation and serve as embedded coaches in their districts between convenings.

State-Level Supports

Policy Supports
KnowledgeWorks supports state policymakers to advance aligned policies that encourage the growth and scale of personalized, competency-based learning. The team leverages key insights from policy audits, convenings and the work with districts in the individual and networked supports to create alignment and feedback loops with state policymakers. This alignment in turn builds greater capacity within state departments of education to support and scale student-centered practices to support the whole child.

Policy change requires shared ownership from a diverse group of stakeholders. To that end, KnowledgeWorks strives to create and facilitate a state-level learning community consisting of educators, educator preparation program faculty, business leaders, community members and state and local policymakers to help a state identify policies to support the intentional, stakeholder-driven growth of personalized, competency-based learning practices. Through facilitated convenings, KnowledgeWorks helps states to achieve the following goals:

- Refine a shared, strategic vision with a focus on changes to help each student succeed
- Clarify existing policies districts can leverage immediately to advance change
- Explore policy barriers and system misalignment that impede implementation

This work is informed by KnowledgeWorks’ evidence-based State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning which details policy actions across 12 policy conditions organized into four strategy areas which include Building Capacity, Empowering Student Learning, Cultivating Systems Change and Ensuring Quality. In partnership with state policy makers and advocacy organizations, KnowledgeWorks completes an extensive review of the state’s current policy system and in-depth interviews with state and local experts to create an opportunity analysis report. The report celebrates the state’s current accomplishments and provides a set of recommendations for each policy condition to help take critical next steps for enabling the growth of personalized, competency-based learning models. The releases of the reports are accompanied by convenings, referenced above, to leverage the tool and prioritize critical
next steps based on stakeholder input.

An opportunity analysis was completed in Nevada in January 2022.

**Strategic Foresight Support**

Since 2006, KnowledgeWorks has been creating triennial forecasts on the future of learning, looking into critical education issues and suggesting ways of translating insights about the future into action today. KnowledgeWorks helps education leaders, influencers and innovators make sense of change, stretch their imaginations about future possibilities and take informed action today.

KnowledgeWorks draws upon its strategic foresight publications to help education and community leaders, innovators and changemakers explore the future of learning through customized engagements. These engagements range from half-day to multi-day workshops to immersive experiences that invite stakeholders travel to the future to interactive keynotes that raise people’s awareness of changes on the horizon.

Engaging with strategic foresight work has:

- Helped schools and school districts develop new insights about how best to support learners
- Influenced states’ visions for learning, along with their strategic priorities
- Helped other education organizations, including service centers, associations, foundations, postsecondary education institutions and museums, hone their strategic focus, explore innovation and deepen their understanding of the issues they will need to manage as future possibilities unfold

KnowledgeWorks engages state-level learning communities in the development of a shared, common vision for the future of learning that anchors, and helps provide a roadmap for, state partners’ implementation of personalized, competency-based learning.

**Project Overview**

KnowledgeWorks embeds research, data analysis, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) offerings to support and augment our state, district, and school work by enabling ongoing engagement, evaluation, and feedback loops with key stakeholders so that data is actionable in real-time and serves as a tool in continuous learning and improvement. KnowledgeWorks works to evaluate and document progress towards systemic change and student-level impact through a State Impact Assessment (SIA) process that incorporates both formative and summative evaluation activities as well as CQI capacity building. At its most basic, our SIA approach asks: What was done (and where)? How was it done (and how well)? What impact did it have (and for whom)?

KnowledgeWorks seeks a qualified research partner to help answer the following broad research questions (**understanding that the final specific research questions are to be determined between the research partner and KnowledgeWorks**):

**Implementation**

What is the progress of implementation of personalized, competency-based learning practices in
participating districts/schools? To what extent have the early stages of personalized, competency-based learning implementation been undertaken meaningfully and/or with depth? What opportunities and challenges are emerging at the district, school, and classroom levels during the shift to personalized, competency-based learning?

**Policy**
What shifts in policy, structures, and/or organization in support of personalized, competency-based learning implementation are occurring within districts, schools, and at the state level? What opportunities, challenges, and/or needs are being surfaced through these shifts? What resource and policy supports do state, district and school leaders and staff need to achieve progress in implementation of personalized, competency-based learning?

**Outcomes**
How does the shift toward personalized, competency-based learning impact student-level outcomes and whole child development, including but not necessarily limited to:

- Student and educator agency
- Sense of wellbeing
- Supportive relationships
- Positive and equitable learning environments
- Competency-based education system
- Deeper learning
- Equity of learning
- Career readiness skills
- Post-secondary outcomes

To be determined with the research partner, but data collection is likely to entail some combination of the following:

- **Survey Administration and Analysis:** district-level biannual personalized, competency-based learning implementation surveys of students and school staff for formative and summative assessment (aligned to the outcome areas listed above; note: the district-level survey instrument is developed, but is open to being refined with the research partner); state-level engagement survey of diverse, cross-state stakeholders

- **Interviews/Focus Groups:** with superintendents, principals, district design teams, teachers, students, and parents; formative assessment aligned to *District Conditions for Scale*

- **Classroom Walkthroughs/Observations:** walkthroughs of classrooms in schools where district design teams are support educator professional development around personalized, competency-based learning practices; formative assessment aligned to *District Conditions for Scale*

- **Convening content and artifact capture:** biannual convenings of state-level and district-level network participants to share learning, progress, and best practices.
**A Partnership Approach**

KnowledgeWorks approaches our engagement with an external researcher as a partner in ongoing efforts to improve outcomes for learners, especially our most marginalized and resilient youth. We have data access and practice and policy expertise; you have expertise that complements and deepens ours.

We will work more as partners than grantor and grantee. Meaning, KnowledgeWorks staff will be available to serve as interview sources and set context, help open doors, provide data and artifacts, review instruments and discuss ideas. We are eager to learn about the process and new ways of asking and answering questions as we are in getting to “the” answer. We seek partnership in building the capacity of our learning communities to drive their own continuous quality improvement via the use of data. Our writers are eager for stories to help tell and our communications team can support design and dissemination.

The ideal applicant would find this approach aligned, appealing and mutually beneficial.

**A Commitment to Data Equity**

At KnowledgeWorks, we define equity as achieved when each individual has full access to available opportunities, plus the support needed to be successful on their own terms. We recognize the central role that equity plays in personalized, competency-based learning environments. We believe that data and research have a key role to play in these pursuits by:

- Surfacing where the inequities lie and for which groups of learners;
- Monitoring and tracking progress towards equity; and
- Providing actionable information and latest research to improve services and build skills in real time.

The ideal applicant shares this commitment and will foreground an evaluation approach that allows for disaggregation by demographics, especially race/ethnicity, inclusion of stakeholders in the assessment processes and data interpretation and introduce additional data equity methods as we seek to explore how efforts towards implementing personalized, competency-based learning advances equitable outcomes through systemic improvement.

**Expected Activities**

Activities within this scope of work would likely include the following elements and activities:

- Reaching out to and negotiating participation agreements, data-sharing agreements and IRB approvals, as necessary, with KnowledgeWorks support
- Integrating feedback on study design from KnowledgeWorks staff and partners
- Collecting quantitative data and analyzing
- Collecting qualitative data, coding and analyzing
- Conducting case studies of high-implementer districts or schools (“micro studies”)
- Producing periodic, short memos on interim findings and sharing with partners
• Support KnowledgeWorks staff’s CQI capacity building efforts

• Assisting in dissemination and sharing results via public-facing reports, webinars, presentation at conferences, or other means

**How to Submit Qualifications**

By 11:59pm ET on July 24, 2022, please upload materials via:
https://knowledgeworks.egnyte.com/ul/treeQwI0Ej

Filenames must include the RFQ number and your organization’s name. Please review the following expectations, project details, and directions to submit your organization’s qualifications for consideration.

**Budget**

Expected budget not to exceed $425,000.00

**Project Period**

August 29, 2022 – September 30, 2024

**Application Materials**

Submit the following materials, separate documents preferred:

1. Cover page that contains the following information:
   a. Organization’s legal name and address
   b. List the RFQ number as: 000102
   c. Contact information (name, title, mailing address, email address, phone number) for:
      • The main contact for your proposal
      • The main contact for delivering the scope of work
      • The main contact for securing the contract

2. Evaluation Proposal to include (but not limited to):
   a. Evaluation plan/approach (possible research questions, methodology, activities, workplan, etc.)
   b. Timeline and deliverables
   c. Management and staffing plan
   d. Communication/dissemination plan

3. Additional narrative of no more than 1,250 words, answering the questions below

4. Staff expertise/experience—please include résumés/CVs for each person listed in the management and staffing plan

5. Budget and budget narrative using the provided templates; allowable budget categories may include:
a. Personnel (include title, rate and number of hours. Note: PI should not have less than 10% of the total hours on the project)
b. Fringe benefits
c. Consultant and other contractual items
d. Travel
e. Materials, supplies and technology
f. Other direct expenses
g. Indirect costs, overhead allowable up to 10%

Questions to Answer in Narrative:

1. Some of the core data collection activities for this work may include administering surveys to students and school staff, conducting interviews/focus group discussions, and conducting classroom walkthroughs/observations—important activities that require buy-in from school and district staff. How would you approach building relationships and/or engaging with key school and district stakeholders to garner willing participation and support for these key activities?

2. What experience/expertise does your organization have regarding supporting district and/or school stakeholders to use data to support continuous quality improvement (CQI)? Please highlight any examples of how your team may have facilitated prior CQI capacity building work with partners?

3. What expertise/credentials does your organization possess that prepares you to execute the project as described above? Please highlight the extent to which your team has conducted similar analyses and worked in relevant partnerships with another research-oriented entity and partners at multiple levels in the education system.

4. How do your team members’ racial/ethnic/cultural/socioeconomic/linguistic/disability backgrounds or other positionality factors (e.g., role, training, academic discipline) influence the methods you will employ, the lenses you bring to interpret data and how you communicate it to various partners and stakeholders?

Submission Timeline

- RFQ distributed June 15, 2022
- Applicant submitted questions answered on a rolling basis but no later than July 15, 2022
- Proposals due July 24, 2022 by 11:59pm ET
- Requests for written clarification sent week of July 25, 2022 (as necessary)
- Decision communicated by August 12, 2022
- Contract finalization by August 26, 2022 (estimated date)
Work commences August 29, 2022 (estimated date)

Scoring Criteria
Submissions will be scored only if they include all necessary components, as detailed under Application Materials section, and the submitted budget does not exceed the maximum allowance. Submissions that meet these requirements will then be assessed by an impartial evaluation committee based on the included RFQ scoring rubric.

Questions
We ask that you do not directly contact any employee of KnowledgeWorks about this RFQ during the solicitation and review process. Applicants must submit any questions about this RFQ and scope of work no later than July 13, 2022 to KWOpportunities@knowledgeworks.org. Submitted questions will be answered on a rolling basis but no later than July 15, 2022, via an FAQ document, which can be found here.

Additional Background Materials

Frameworks

- District Conditions for Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning  
  [https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/district-conditions-scale-personalized-learning/](https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/district-conditions-scale-personalized-learning/)

- State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning  

- Student-Level Impact Areas – Construct Overview  
  [https://knowledgeworks.egnyte.com/dl/1GvLV4EMA0](https://knowledgeworks.egnyte.com/dl/1GvLV4EMA0)

Context

These documents are included to give a sense of breadth and depth of the work and can be used to provide some baseline and background understanding.

- Nevada Statewide Personalized, Competency Based Learning Proposal:  
  [https://knowledgeworks.egnyte.com/dl/QeN6Rw2sVB](https://knowledgeworks.egnyte.com/dl/QeN6Rw2sVB)

- Nevada State Opportunity Analysis (based on State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning)  
  [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n5sFhppfo3k47xvJru5a1k4xl_mDwsom/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n5sFhppfo3k47xvJru5a1k4xl_mDwsom/view)

- From State Commitment to District Implementation: Approaches and Strategies for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning  


• Blue Ribbon Commission for a Globally Prepared Nevada: Recommendations to Create Personalized Pathways for Learning
  https://doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedovgov/content/News__Media/Press_Releases/2021_Documents/BlueRibbonCommissionRecommendations.pdf