



Office of Sponsored Research and Programs

Annual Report FY 2024-2025



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FUNDING AT A GLANCE



Dear Roadrunner Family,

It is my pleasure to share the Office of Sponsored Research and Programs' Annual Report highlighting the remarkable achievements of our faculty, staff, and project teams during the 2024-2025 academic year.

MSU Denver continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to innovation, scholarship, workforce development, and community impact through sponsored research and programming. This year, our principal investigators and project teams secured more than **\$15.5 million in external funding**, a testament to their dedication, expertise, and unwavering pursuit of excellence. I extend my sincere congratulations and gratitude to everyone whose efforts contributed to this outstanding accomplishment.

The projects highlighted throughout this report reflect the breadth and significance of the work being conducted across our institution. From advancing family literacy and developing Colorado's future social work workforce, to improving communication outcomes following brain injuries, cultivating leadership in dietetics and nutrition, and expanding cybersecurity apprenticeship opportunities, our faculty and staff continue to address pressing societal needs through research, innovation, and service. These initiatives, supported by both public and private funding agencies, demonstrate the transformative impact of MSU Denver's scholarship and engagement.

As our institution navigates an evolving higher education and research landscape, we remain focused on strengthening internal support structures, expanding educational and collaborative opportunities, and fostering an environment where groundbreaking ideas can thrive. Our faculty and staff are generating solutions that advance scientific discovery, address workforce demands, and create meaningful change locally and globally. Their work enriches our students' educational experiences while contributing to the greater good.

The Office of Sponsored Research and Programs is honored to support these efforts and remains committed to advancing the mission, vision, and strategic goals of MSU Denver. Our collective success reflects the excellence of our academic programs, the dedication of our faculty researchers, the expertise of our professional staff, and the enthusiasm of our students, who gain invaluable real-world experiences through these initiatives.

I invite you to explore this report and celebrate the accomplishments of your fellow Roadrunners. Thank you for your continued commitment to excellence, innovation, and service. Together, we will continue to grow, inspire, and make a lasting impact.

Sincerest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laneika K. Musalini". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Laneika K. Musalini, Ed.D.

Executive Director

Office of Sponsored Research and Programs



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Pamela Bentley

Pamela Bentley serves as the Director of TRIO High School Upward Bound at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver), where she has been a dedicated member of the university community since January 2025.

Pamela earned her bachelor's degree in Business Administration, with minors in Marketing and Finance, and later received her master's degree in Counseling from Xavier University of Louisiana. Her educational background, combined with her passion for student success, has equipped her with a unique perspective on supporting students as they navigate their academic and personal journeys.

As a first-generation college student herself, Pamela experienced firsthand the impact and opportunities that TRIO programs can provide. Her personal experience gives her a deep understanding of the challenges first-generation students may face and, more importantly, the support and resources it can take to help them succeed. She is passionate about creating opportunities for students to recognize their potential, pursue higher education, and achieve their goals.

Outside of her professional work, Pamela enjoys spending quality time with her family, traveling, exploring new places, and trying new foods. These experiences allow her to continue learning, creating meaningful memories, and embracing new perspectives.

GRANT:

TRIO High School Upward Bound & Denver's Office of Children's Affairs 21st Century College Readiness Center

TRIO High School Upward Bound received \$467,222 for Year 3 funding of a 5-year \$1.85 million award. Over the last 50 years the High School Upward Bound has served first generation, low income students in five target area high schools all within a ten-mile radius of the university. MSU Denver has proven to be one of the most qualified and effective applicants over the last 4 decades to deliver Upward Bound (UB) services. Throughout the last grant cycle, the MSU Denver UB program has had excellent outcomes such as; Over 90% of participants graduated from high school with a diploma and completed a rigorous program of study. More than 60% of its participants had a grade point average of 2.5 or higher, 56% of seniors achieved a proficient level on standardized tests, and 100% of participants continued in school for the next academic term.

Bentley also received \$86,000 in additional funds for a total award of \$344,250 from City & County of Denver, Office of Children's Affairs, on behalf of the Center for Urban Education (CUE) for the 21st Century College Readiness Center (21st CCLC), Comprehensive Out-of-School Time (OST) Services (Multi-year grant). In the academic year, the CUE operates the 21st CCLC, an afterschool program in one public school in Denver: Cole Arts and Science Academy (K-5). The summer component of the CUE serves high school students that attends any DPS high school. In previous program years, the program served over 200 students. The program provides partner schools with a rich array of academic and afterschool enrichment learning opportunities and resources that incorporate social, emotional, and academic learning.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Bridgette Coble

Dr. Coble earned her Doctorate in Higher Education from the University of Denver and her Master of Science degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Colorado State University. Although she regards herself primarily as a career services professional, the breadth of her work includes corporate human resources, higher education career services and diversity, equity and inclusion strategies and programs. Her research and publications are centered on race, mentoring and higher education administration. She has mentored high school students through the Sachs Foundation Elevated Mentoring program for the last 3 years and has worked at MSU Denver for 21 years. Dr. Coble enjoys volunteering in her community and finding opportunities to enjoy live music.

GRANT:

Grow with Google Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Career Readiness Program

As a previous grant recipient of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Grow with Google HSI Career Readiness Program award, C2Hub was invited to apply for additional funding to help students continue to build skills and connect with resources and programs to prepare them for future careers. Bridgette Coble, Ph.D., Director of Career Engagement in the Classroom to Career Hub, was awarded \$12,761 in additional funding to support this effort.

The award supported the continuation of a student employee career readiness program grounded in skill development and aligned with core competencies outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). The award also provided MSU Denver students with funds to purchase professional clothing at a JCPenney Suit-Up shopping event and supported professional development programming. Student Employee Appreciation Week activities were also funded with this award. Dr. Coble and the C2Hub were thrilled that over 1,000 unique students participated in these programs, with many taking engaging in multiple events. Students reported that they appreciated the support in considering how they might apply their college degree to their future career and expressed appreciation for the assistance with the purchase of professional attire.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Sonia Falcón



CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Abbie Kell

Sonia Falcón, Assistant Dean of Students & Student Care Center Director, grew up in New Mexico and earned her MSW from the University of Washington. Sonia spent 15 years in the Seattle area, working with youth, young adults, and families in juvenile justice, mental health, and higher ed settings. She relocated to Denver in 2018, joined the SCC team in 2021, and is thrilled to return to supporting students throughout their educational journey!

Leading the day-to-day work of the grant is Abbie Kell, Associate Director of Basic Needs and Housing Supports at the SCC. A self-described part-time overthinker and full-time social worker, she has been at the university since 2022. Abbie earned her Master of Social Work from the University of Denver in 2018 and oversees a full-time staff member and MSW intern supporting SNAP outreach and basic needs services at MSU Denver. Abbie has built her career around helping people navigate systems that were not always designed with them in mind and has a particular talent for translating bureaucratic chaos into language that makes sense to students and staff. Whether she is helping a student navigate a SNAP application, talking with a campus partner about housing insecurity, or training a department on basic needs, she enjoys finding ways to make complicated systems feel a little more approachable and human.



GRANT:
Hunger Free Colorado SNAP Outreach subaward

The Student Care Center (SCC) was awarded \$80,000 from Hunger Free Colorado to provide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) education, outreach and serve as an access point for SNAP applications for MSU Denver students. This funding helps reduce food insecurity by making it easier for students to understand their eligibility, navigate the application process, and connect with additional basic needs resources.

The grant has strengthened the Student Care Center's broader approach to basic needs of support by using SNAP access as an early point of connection with students experiencing financial challenges. Conversations about food access and financial constraints often create opportunities to identify other barriers before they become crises and connect students with resources related to housing, transportation, financial assistance, and other basic needs. SNAP is often the first conversation that opens the door to a much broader discussion about what a student needs to stay enrolled and thrive.

The Student Care Center's goal is to connect 350 students annually for SNAP application assistance. They reach students through a variety of strategies, including tabling orientation, Welcome Week, and campus events. The SCC team partners with departments across the university to share information through social media, newsletters, and email. Our office offers weekly office hours where students can walk in with questions about SNAP or other basic needs.

The support from Hunger Free Colorado also helps sustain dedicated staffing for SNAP outreach and application assistance. This allows the Student Care Center to maintain consistent capacity to support students while strengthening awareness of SNAP and other resources across campus.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Caitlin G. Fine

Dr. Fine is an Associate Professor of Elementary Education and Literacy and the Director and Founder of the Dynamic Languageing Collaborative. For more on the Collaborative, please visit, <https://www.msudenver.edu/education/office-of-education-solutions/dynamic-languageing-collaborative/>

A former science and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) teacher at a bilingual elementary school in Arlington, VA, Dr. Fine earned her doctorate from the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research focuses on exploring how the codesign of translanguaging pedagogies shifts educators' language ideologies and supports educators to interpret students' ideas through dignity-oriented and linguistically sustaining lenses. In her free time, Dr. Fine likes to spend time with her family - trail running, paddleboarding, and camping.



GRANT:
Building an Open Educational Resources (OER) Video Collection for Pre-service and In-service Teachers

Professor Caitlin G Fine, Ph.D., was awarded \$49,058 from the Colorado Department of Higher Education Open Educational Resources (OER) Grant Program for the project titled Building an OER video collection for pre-service and in-service teachers that highlights translanguaging possibilities in K-12 science learning environments.

The project was a collaboration with Denver Public Schools (DPS) to create a collection of OER videos that demonstrate translanguaging pedagogies in linguistically diverse K-12 science contexts. Translanguaging refers to the natural, dynamic languageing practices of multilingual individuals. Translanguaging pedagogies are instructional strategies teachers employ to center translanguaging as a normal learning practice in the classroom. The OER video collection provides a free, multimodal resource so pre-service and in-service teachers can explore and unpack translanguaging pedagogies to collectively see, hear, and reflect on these practices as they plan how to integrate translanguaging into their own science lessons. The video collection is now integrated across MSU Denver science methods courses for students seeking degrees and initial CO teaching licenses in Elementary Education and Science Education. Furthermore, videos have been featured in professional learning workshops for over 100 K-12 in-service teachers across DPS, with more workshops planned for Fall 2026. You can access the full Translanguaging Video Collection at: <https://www.youtube.com/@DynamicLangCoDesignCollab>



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Robb Gallegos

Robb holds degrees from the University of Evansville as well as MSU Denver. He has been with MSU Denver's Family Literacy Program for 10 years. Robb serves on the Adams County Workforce Development Board and is excited about building workforce and postsecondary pathways into the Adult Education Component of the Family Literacy Program.

GRANT:

Statewide Family Engagement Center

Robb Gallegos was awarded \$90,000 total for a three-year period beginning October 2024 through September 2027 from National Center for Families Learning for a Statewide Family Engagement Center grant (SFEC).

The Family Literacy Program uses the Statewide Family Engagement Center in partnership with Westminster Public Schools to implement the National Center for Families Learning four-component model for family engagement. Together, children's education, adult education, parent workshops, and parent and children together time (PACT) make up a multi-generational system that leads to improved K-12 success and whole-family outcomes.

GRANT:

Expansion of GED Preparation in Commerce City

Robb Gallegos was awarded a \$100,000 contract from the City of Commerce City to help bolster the expansion of General Educational Development (GED) Preparation services in that area. This award comes from federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The contract runs from July 2025 through December 2026 and is managed by Commerce City's Economic Revitalization team.

In Commerce City, there are currently four cohorts of GED classes offered in English and Spanish running at three different schedules. Despite the very recent expansion into this area, the program has already seen six graduates by May 2026 from this group with another twelve flagged as potential graduates by the program's first graduation in late June 2026.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Kathy Hardin

Kathy Hardin, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, has been with MSU Denver since 2022 in Speech, Language, Hearing Sciences and has recently transitioned to the Director of Interprofessional Education in the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS). She received her master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology from CU Boulder and her Ph.D. in Clinical Science from the University of Colorado School of Medicine (Anschutz). Dr. Hardin is proud to serve the State of Colorado in statute as a Governor appointee to the Brain Injury Trust Fund Board. She is also the proud mother of a current Roadrunner!



GRANT:
Mindsources Brain Injury Community Grant

Dr. Kathy Hardin, Professor of Speech, Language, Hearing Sciences (SLHS), received a \$10,000 grant from the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) for the “MINDSOURCE Brain Injury Community Grant.” This capacity-building grant supported partnership development between MSU Denver’s College of Health and Human Sciences and the Brain Injury Association of Colorado (BIAC). BIAC serves a significantly under-resourced population, with most clients earning less than \$12,000 annually, and supports Valor on the Fox, a first-ever-of-its-kind residential housing facility for people with brain injury and housing instability in east Denver. The project had two primary aims: 1) develop and implement brain injury communication partner training for BIAC staff to better serve Coloradans with brain injury; and 2) develop and implement no-cost, responsive programming with Dr. Andrea Borrego (CJC) to support Valor on the Fox residents.

Communication Partner Training is the most effective strategy to communicate with people living with brain injury, but it’s rarely used in the US. Using implementation science, the CHHS faculty gathered an international team from Denver, Sydney, and London to develop and pilot partner training for BIAC staff across Colorado. The team paired virtual training with onsite mentorship provided by MS SLP graduate student clinicians. Simple catch phrases, such as “conversation is like passing a ball” or “paddling a canoe” helped staff remember and apply these principles. Both qualitative and quantitative data reflected strong project success. One favorite quote was:

“If this is not available free to members of the community, it absolutely should be. I work extensively with caregivers and family members of survivors, and they would benefit immensely from it.” The team is currently working on securing follow-up funding for a statewide rollout.

Colorado residents were scammed out of \$243M in 2024, and the State ranks 4th in the nation for imposter scams. Coloradans living with brain injury are at even higher risk of being scammed, due to the nature of their injuries. For the second project, faculty and students from SLHS and CJC developed and implemented anti-scam programming for Valor on the Fox residents. Discussions and role plays helped residents develop skills to better protect themselves against key imposter techniques: Impersonation, Urgency, and Emotional Manipulation. Nearly all attendees reported having already been victimized. This work helped to destigmatize the embarrassment of being scammed and connect residents with resources to begin to reclaim lost property, and the team plans to continue this anti-scam programming moving forward.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Cindy Heiss

Dr. Cindy Heiss is a Professor in the Nutrition Department, having been on faculty 2008 to 2013, then rejoining the faculty in 2022. She received her Ph.D. in Nutrition from Texas Woman's University. Her research has focused on obesity and blood glucose control, but she has maintained a line of scholarship in teaching throughout her 30-year academic career. She has close to 50 publications in peer-reviewed journals and has served as PI on four federal grants. A dedicated teacher, her efforts have been recognized with awards at the College, University, and State levels. Having taught at universities across the country, she feels fortunate to have been able to return to MSU Denver to work with outstanding students, staff, and faculty.



Office of Sponsored Research and Programs

GRANT:

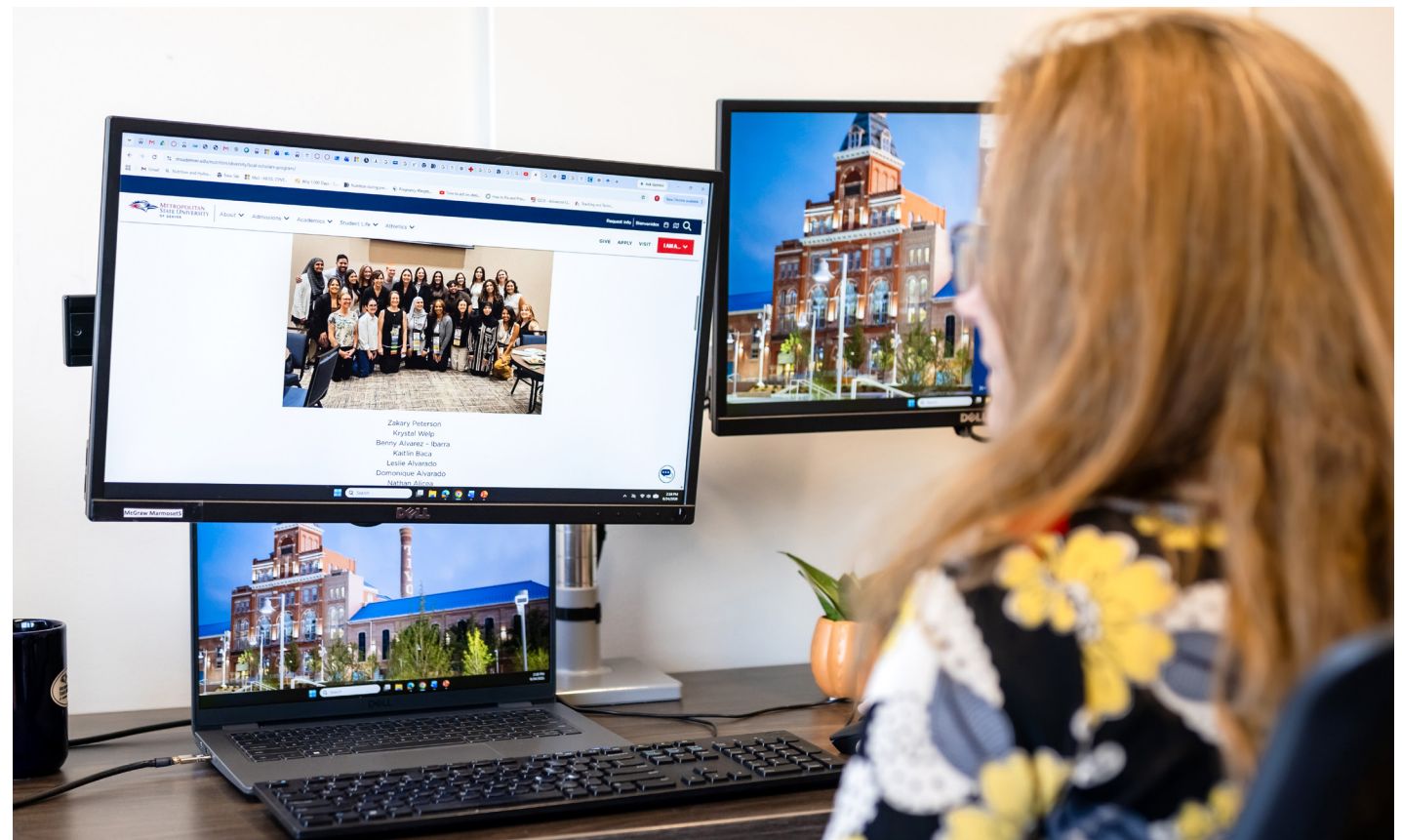
A BCAL Scholars Program To Develop Future Leaders And Role Models In Nutrition And Dietetics

Dr. Cindy Heiss, Ph.D., RD, CDCES, BC-ADM, was awarded a \$1.2 million, four-year grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) program. MSU Denver serves as the lead institution in this collaborative initiative with the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at Cal Poly Pomona.

The grant supports the Becoming Culturally Aware Leaders (BCAL) Scholars Program, which provides \$5,000 scholarships to 20 students each year, 10 at MSU Denver and 10 at Cal Poly Pomona, along with development in culturally responsive leadership, mentoring, and advocacy. A distinctive feature is the emphasis on storytelling to strengthening connection, cultural awareness, leadership, mentoring, and advocacy.

Scholars complete a summer Foundations Mini-Course and fall orientation, followed by six seminars throughout the academic year. Scholars are paired with dietetics professionals for mentoring and later gain experience serving as mentors themselves. They also complete a leadership or advocacy project, participate in a book club, and attend both national and state professional conferences.

Early outcomes from the program's first cohort are highly encouraging, with Scholars reporting greater confidence, enthusiasm for the dietetics profession, and appreciation for diverse cultures.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Megan Lazorski

Dr. Lazorski joined Metropolitan State University of Denver in 2017 as a tenure-track professor of inorganic chemistry. She earned her B.A. in chemistry and studio art from the College of Wooster, her Ph.D. in Chemistry from Colorado State University, and completed postdoctoral research at North Carolina State University. In 2019, she became the first MSU Denver faculty member to hold an official Joint Appointment at the National Laboratory of the Rockies, and in 2022 she founded the MSU Denver Postbaccalaureate Bridge Programs. Her career reflects a deep commitment to teaching, mentorship, research, strategic partnerships, and expanding participation in STEM. Once a whitewater rafting guide in Maine and a competitive roller derby player for nearly a decade, Megan now enjoys mountain biking, gardening, art, and time outdoors with her partner, animals, and friends.

GRANT:

American Chemical Society (ACS) Baccaureate Student Support

Dr. Megan Lazorski was awarded \$25k (supplementing prior awards totaling \$2.7 million) to support the mission of the American Chemical Society Post-Baccalaureate Bridge Program (ACS-BP) she founded and developed with the Postbacc Bridge Program Board of Directors (PB-BOD). A credentialed post-baccalaureate bridge experience in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, the program is an official part of the nationwide ACS Bridge Project. Aligned with the national standard, the ACS-BP provides students an alternative pathway to graduate programs in the chemical and/or biochemical sciences through coursework, hands-on research, networking, and financial support. These funds, a subaward on the ACS's NSF-INCLUDES award, enabled full or partial coverage of students' relocation costs, health insurance, housing, and cost-of-living stipends for the 2024-2025 academic year.



GRANT:

National Laboratory of the Rockies (NLR) Subcontract

Dr. Lazorski was also awarded \$70,927 (of the \$239,210 total award) from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) via the National Laboratory of the Rockies (NLR) to create and implement pilot-scale collaborative workforce development programs connecting R1 institutions, access-focused institutions, and the National Laboratory system: specifically, the ACS-BP, summer internships at NLR, and the Chemical Industry, National, and Government Laboratory Post-Baccalaureate Bridge Program (ING-BP). The ING-BP is the first of its kind to specifically target the c.a. 60% of chemistry BA/BS graduates who want a smooth transition to the chemical/biochemical workforce. These funds supported PB-BOD faculty while designing 19 new courses comprising the two certificate programs, mentor training, programmatic evaluation, and implementation with the inaugural post-bacc cohort. The funding also provided stipends for four summer interns and one post-bacc student engaged in hands-on research with scientists in the Hydrogen Materials Advanced Research Consortium (HyMARC); the interns contributed to at least two peer-reviewed publications (Crystal Growth and Design and ChemCatChem), and the post-bacc presented a research poster at Colorado State University on 7/31/2025.

GRANT:

DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) Subaward with the Colorado School of Mines

Dr. Lazorski received a sub-award of \$84,085 from the DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) through a collaborative grant with the Colorado School of Mines to: (1) implement program-level research evaluating post-baccalaureate bridge program outcomes and (2) fund an additional laboratory-based research project. MSU Denver faculty administered and evaluated survey data from the inaugural post-bacc cohort. Moreover, one post-bacc student was funded through this award to perform hands-on research developing materials with optimized heat-transport properties for hydrogen recovery systems. The student presented research posters at Colorado State University (7/31/2025) and the Colorado School of Mines (12/11/2025).





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Richard Mac Namee

Richard C. Mac Namee, MCGI, FInstLM, CPP, CISSP, is Director of The Cybersecurity Center at MSU Denver, Principal Investigator for CENTURION, an entrepreneur, and an accomplished business leader whose career has spanned Special Operations, national security, cybersecurity, academia, and the private sector. As a senior British Army officer and Special Operations Commander, he commanded forces on operations in Northern Ireland, mainland UK and in Afghanistan, that General Stanley McChrystal subsequently identified as instrumental to the success of the wider campaign. Following his operational career, Mac Namee was recruited by Ambassador Ryan Crocker and former senior CIA officer Jim Olson to join The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, where, as a Senior Professor of the Practice, he taught courses in counterterrorism, intelligence, and cybersecurity. He subsequently applied that same operational and leadership experience to entrepreneurship, building and leading successful businesses and cybersecurity initiatives. This combination of operational command, academic expertise, and demonstrated business experience underpins his work at MSU Denver and his approach to CENTURION: creating programs that move cybersecurity education beyond the classroom and give students the opportunity to develop professional capability by addressing real-world problems.



GRANT:
CENTURION

Richard Mac Namee, Director of The Cybersecurity Center at Metropolitan State University of Denver, was awarded a total of \$750,000 (\$246,029.85 07/01/25-06/30/26) from the Colorado Department of Law to develop and operate CENTURION, an innovative cybersecurity workforce-development program that gives students and apprentices the opportunity to apply their academic learning in real-world environments. CENTURION was designed to bridge the gap between cybersecurity education and employment by providing students with supervised, hands-on experience while simultaneously extending cybersecurity capabilities to organizations that may otherwise struggle to access them.

Since its inception, CENTURION 1.0 has demonstrated that students can make a meaningful contribution to operational cybersecurity when provided with the appropriate technology, training, structure, and expert supervision. The program has created opportunities for students to develop practical experience in security monitoring and operations while establishing a model that connects higher education, workforce development, and community cybersecurity. With the grant-funded phase approaching completion, this experience is now informing the development of CENTURION 2.0: an expanded and sustainable model that will build upon the lessons of CENTURION 1.0, introduce enhanced technical and service capabilities, and further develop pathways through which students and apprentices can gain the experience required to transition successfully into the cybersecurity workforce.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Andrea Maestrejuan

Andrea's academic path reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the project. She earned her B.S. in Biological Sciences at UC Irvine and Ph.D. in History from UCLA. She has been at MSU Denver since 2009, joining the tenure-track History faculty in 2011. Her teaching and research interests bridge the history of science and technology, environmental history, modern German and European history, the Holocaust, and historical memory. When not crunching numbers and figuring out the stories the numbers tell, she would rather be digging in the dirt, riding her bike, or traveling the world to enjoy the diversity of the human experience.

GRANT:

Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA) - Morocco

Professor Andrea Maestrejuan, Ph.D., was awarded \$113,069 from the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (GPA) Program, sponsored by the U. S. Department of Education.

Dr. Andrea Maestrejuan and Dr. Akbarali Thobhani, led a Fulbright-Hays GPA seminar designed to deepen educators' knowledge of Morocco, with an emphasis on global environmental challenges, environmental history, comparative environmental policy, and sustainable development. During the intensive four-week program, participants combined academic lectures and Moroccan Arabic language instruction with field-based learning throughout the country. They engaged directly with university faculty, government officials, researchers, nonprofit and community leaders, and environmental practitioners working on issues including water scarcity, renewable energy, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, and environmental justice. Participants developed and refined curriculum projects, collected extensive teaching resources, and gained concrete case studies from visits to renewable-energy facilities, water-management projects, agricultural cooperatives, conservation initiatives, and community-based sustainability organizations. They have begun sharing what they learned through classroom instruction, conference presentations, workshops, and public talks. Just as importantly, sustained engagement with Moroccan educators, students, communities, and cultural institutions strengthened participants' intercultural understanding and their ability to place environmental challenges within their historical, cultural, geographic, and political contexts. The project's benefits will extend beyond the seminar participants to the MSU Denver campus and local communities.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Emily Matuszewicz

Emily Matuszewicz, DC, is Executive Director of the Gina & Frank Day Health Institute at Metropolitan State University of Denver, where she leads interdisciplinary initiatives and grant-funded programs that prepare students for healthcare careers and strengthen Colorado's health workforce. Drawing on more than 25 years as a healthcare practitioner, educator, and higher education leader, she brings a design-thinking approach to creating educational experiences and environments that help students explore and build meaningful career pathways. Central to this work is the talented Day Health Institute team, whose expertise, creativity, and commitment bring these initiatives to life and make their impact possible. Matuszewicz has also worked closely with architectural and facilities teams in the planning and design of MSU Denver's new health education Tower, helping translate a vision for hands-on, interdisciplinary health education into the building's spaces and design.



GRANT:

HSI Education: Mental Health Service Professional Grant Program

Emily Matuszewicz, DC, received a five-year, \$4,526,721 award from the U.S. Department of Education's Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program for I'M HEALTHY: Innovative Model of Higher Education and Learning Communities Teaming Up for Healthy Youth. Through the Gina & Frank Day Health Institute, the program prepares students for careers providing mental and behavioral health services to children and youth while addressing Colorado's shortage of school-based mental health professionals. Students receive financial support, individualized guidance, mentorship, and hands-on experience in high-need schools. Many come from communities similar to those they will serve, bringing valuable lived experience and connection to their work. In 2025, the program served 58 MSU Denver students.

GRANT:

Colorado Mental and Behavioral Health Workforce Pathways Expansion

Matuszewicz also received \$700,000 from the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration to strengthen pathways into mental and behavioral health careers from high school through professional licensure. The initiative includes MSU Denver's Peer Health Educator program, which prepares undergraduates to provide evidence-based health education in underserved high schools, as well as partnerships with Colorado Mountain College and Pueblo Community College that support students pursuing behavioral health credentials in rural communities. The grant also supports career exploration, graduate clinical training, and early-career professionals working toward licensure, creating an interconnected pipeline to strengthen Colorado's behavioral health workforce.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Peggy O'Neill-Jones



CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Keith Patterson

Dr. Peggy O'Neill-Jones is a professor emerita of journalism and media production. She started her career at MSU Denver in 1990 as an assistant professor and was department chair from 1993 to 2004. In 2004, the Library of Congress awarded MSU Denver a \$2 million grant to help K-20 educators use its digital primary sources to support critical thinking and inquiry-based learning.

With Peggy's leadership, the TPS-Colorado program expanded from serving Colorado Teaching with Primary Resources (TPS)-Colorado program to reaching 14 western states. The program also received an additional grant to create and manage the TPS Teachers Network. Peggy retired from MSU Denver in 2026 to write a book using her primary-source research skills, but she stays in touch with the TPS grant and presents on occasion.

Keith Patterson currently serves as the Director of the Teaching with Primary Resources Western Region (TPSWR) and has been with the project for almost 20 years. A frequent conference presenter and guest lecturer, Patterson leads professional development in primary source pedagogy, curriculum design, and online learning to expand regional partnerships and drive program impact. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the National TPS Program.

GRANT:

Teaching with Primary Resources Western Region (TPSWR) & TPS Teachers Network

Professor Peggy O'Neill-Jones and Keith Patterson secured \$1,476,642 in grant funding from the Library of Congress, comprising \$1,157,321 for the Teaching with Primary Sources Western Region (TPSWR) program and \$319,320 to develop and manage the TPS Teachers Network.

Housed at Metropolitan State University of Denver since 2004, the TPSWR is one of six regional centers funded by the Library of Congress. The program is dedicated to developing instructional tools and integrating digitized primary sources from the Library's collections into high-quality educational programming. The TPSWR achieves its impact primarily by administering subgrants to educational organizations across 12 Western states. These subaward projects leverage the Library's vast holdings to enhance instruction across varied learning environments, empowering educators and learners to foster critical thinking, historical inquiry, and disciplinary literacy in diverse populations.

In parallel, the team continues to design and manage the TPS Teachers Network which is the primary professional online learning community for the national TPS program. Over the past year, the Network scaled its reach to over 17,000 registered users who connect, collaborate, and exchange teaching and learning resources nationwide.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Emily Ragan

Dr. Emily Ragan is a Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and the 2026 First-year Student Success Faculty Fellow. She has worked at MSU Denver since 2013 and has been involved in developing and teaching general chemistry and biochemistry courses using OER. Her teaching areas have focused on active learning strategies, including course-based undergraduate research experiences, to increase student engagement and support learning outcomes. She delivered an MSU Denver TEDx Talk on learning and OER in 2019 and was awarded the 2026 OER Legacy Award from Governor Polis for her work advancing OER. MSU Denver students have saved up to \$10 million dollars due to OER use over the past eight years.

GRANT:

Open Roadrunners: Open Educational Resources Incentives and Developing Zero Textbook Cost Degrees

Open Educational Resources (OER) are openly licensed educational materials, free for students to use and for faculty to adjust and adapt for their courses. A team of faculty led by Professor Emily Ragan, Ph.D., Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, was awarded \$100,439 from the Colorado Department of Higher Education for the project Open Roadrunners Year 7: Developing Zero Textbook Cost Degrees in 2025-26. Other MSU Denver faculty co-PIs on this grant are Jonathan Dyhr, Department of Biology; Brian Healy and Eric James, Department of Communication Studies; Ann Obermann, Department of Social Work; and Jangwoo Jo, Kiyan Shafieizadeh, Xiaolong Shao, Smita Singh and Katherine Strain from the School of Hospitality. This project expanded OER adoption, adaption and creation in the Departments of Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Communication Studies, and Social Work, as well as in the School of Hospitality, with the goal of creating zero textbook cost pathways through the degree offered by these departments.

In addition to receiving grant funding, several projects supported by this grant received award recognition at the May 2026 State of Colorado OER Conference, including the Department of Communication Studies for their progress toward a zero textbook cost pathway through a B.A. degree and the School of Hospitality for their contributions to workforce development. A Social Work team was recognized for their development of a new OER textbook and OER workbook for social work courses through a collaborative authorship process that brought together faculty, a librarian, an instructional designer, and a student contributor.

Professors Ragan, Dyhr, and Healy were also awarded \$40,582 for MSU Denver Open Roadrunners: Open Educational Resource (OER) incentives for widespread OER adoption in 2025-26. These funds supported faculty participation in OER training activities, including two semester-long OER faculty learning communities, a facilitated online OER course, and faculty OER reviews. Additionally, 12 faculty adopted OER in a course for the first time, providing thoughtfully selected course materials to students at no cost.

This was MSU Denver's seventh year of OER program support from the Colorado Department of Education, a collective investment of \$610,000, that has led to an MSU Denver student savings of up to \$10 million dollars through Spring 2026. MSU Denver students are also more successful in OER courses, earning more grades of A and fewer grades of C and D. Future grants will lead to additional faculty trainings and student savings and success.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Jessica Retrum

Before joining MSU Denver in 2013, Dr. Retrum was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Colorado Denver (2010–2012). She earned her Ph.D. in Social Work with a concentration in Health and Aging from the University of Denver in 2010, her MSSW in Health from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1997, where she completed a competitive fellowship with the VA’s Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), and her BSW from Illinois State University in 1996. Dr. Retrum’s scholarship and leadership focus on student success, behavioral health workforce development, aging and caregiving, palliative and end-of-life care, interprofessional education, and community-engaged partnerships. She is committed to advancing accessible educational pathways that prepare the next generation of health professionals while strengthening Colorado’s workforce and improving community well-being.



GRANT:
CO BHA & MSU Denver Collaborative: Addressing Colorado’s Behavioral Health Needs & Workforce Vacancies

Jess Retrum, Ph.D., MSSW, serves as Interim Dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences at Metropolitan State University of Denver. As Professor and Chair of the Department of Social Work, she successfully led the initiative to acquire a two-year, \$1.5 million award from the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration for the project, CO BHA & MSU Denver Collaborative: Addressing Colorado’s Behavioral Health Needs & Workforce Vacancies. Developed in partnership with faculty, staff, and behavioral health organizations across Colorado, the initiative addresses critical workforce shortages through innovative education-to-employment pathways. More than 20 faculty and staff from the Department of Social Work contributed to the project’s design and implementation.

The initiative focuses on expanding Colorado’s behavioral health workforce through apprenticeship-based pathways for Master of Social Work students and post-graduate licensure fellowship programming. Its two primary objectives are to pilot employment-based educational pathways for students and increase successful licensure attainment for graduates. Through partnerships with employers, workforce agencies, and community organizations, the program creates low- or no-cost “earn while you learn” opportunities that strengthen the behavioral health workforce while expanding access to culturally responsive care. The project also emphasizes workforce retention through mentorship, clinical supervision, and integrated professional development. Early accomplishments included securing federal recognition of social work as an apprenticeable occupation, state approval through the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, and launching Colorado’s first social work apprenticeship cohort in Fall 2026.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Shalini Sirivasan

Shalini Srinivasan received her B.S. and M.S. in Chemistry from Purdue University, an M.S. in Forensic Science from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a Ph.D. in Chemical Education from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. She is interested in assessment and evaluation, instrument/test development, measurement of affective variables (including but not limited to self-efficacy, mindset, anxiety) and their role in student performance and retention in STEM. She enjoys reformer Pilates, cooking (time permitting), scenic drives, hiking, watching psychological thrillers, and RuPaul's Drag Race.



GRANT:
Faculty Applied Clean Energy Sciences (FACES)

Shalini Srinivasan, Ph.D., was awarded \$692,578 from the National Lab of the Rockies (NLR) with the Department of Energy as the Prime Sponsor, for program evaluation of the Faculty Applied Clean Energy Sciences (FACES) program at NLR.

The FACES program aims to empower faculty from minority serving institutions to enhance their research skills and expertise in clean energy science and to promote diversity, inclusivity, and energy equity in the workforce. NLR hosted up to twenty-two (22) faculty participants for a ten (10)-week paid summer research experience. The program offered an immersive and intensive eight (8)-week on-site experience at NLR, supplemented by a two (2)-week virtual program. The virtual program equipped the faculty to develop a Customized Learning Solution (CLS), based on NLR research, to share with their classes at MSU Denver.

Data was not collected from faculty and research mentors primarily using surveys at three points: (onboarding, mid-program, and a post-program exit). The implementation and efficacy of the Customized Learning Solution was also gathered in written narrative from an MSU Denver faculty member. The analysis revealed the challenges reported by respondents included discomfort in discussing concerns with mentors, and preliminary lack of structure and expectations in program and mentoring experiences. The program was regarded as a success in a) facilitating collaborations and expanding professional networks for faculty with limited institutional resources, with roughly 50% of respondents reporting continued collaborative research (with their FACES mentor) at their home institutions, b) increasing institutional support for faculty who participated in and completed the FACES program at a National Lab, c) providing a supportive program environment via research groups and connections with other professors/researchers in the area, d) being equitable, inclusive, and respectful of multiple identities and intersectional experiences.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Katie Taft

Katie Taft spent the early years of her career as a studio artist working predominantly in photography and textiles, showing nationally. She has taught K-12 students in both formal and community-based settings for over 20 years and has been leading the education programs at the Center for Visual Art since 2018.

GRANT:

Art + Action Lab at the Center for Visual Arts, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Grants for Arts Programs

MSU Denver's Center for Visual Art (CVA), Art Education Manager Katie Taft was awarded \$20,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts to fund the Art + Action Lab Teaching Apprentice and professional development lab program. Art + Action Lab trains preservice teachers in curriculum building and best practices, preparing them for jobs in schools and arts institutions.

For over 30 years, the Center for Visual Art has contributed to MSU Denver's status as a higher education art program that maintains accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. CVA's annual exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and tours spark dialogue about critical issues of our day. We are a workforce development space with a staff of four full-time professionals and up to 15 student staff. CVA is developing the next generation of museum professionals entering the workforce with a priority to diversify the industry through our focus on students from historically underserved groups.

Since 2012, CVA's Teaching Apprentice program, the education arm of our workforce development program, has been training teachers, advancing their skills in designing curriculum and implementing best teaching practices. Teaching Apprentices teach a variety of skills for K-12 students all housed under the title of The Art + Action Lab making them more effective and competitive for employment after graduation.

The Art + Action Lab Teen Internship offers high school students an introduction to creative careers. Up to 45 teens participate annually to explore creative industries — creating work to share with the public, meeting with creative professionals to understand the mechanics of the industry and developing soft skills and networks to help them succeed. The Art + Action Lab furthers CVA's mission of diversifying the pipeline of creative professionals in creative industries by including high school students as a vital part of our programming.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Kate Trujillo



CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Lara Bruce

Kate Trujillo, Ph.D., LCSW is a Professor in the Department of Social Work and Principal Investigator of the CCWSC. Her career in social work is dedicated to child welfare with a focus on healing trauma, prevention, and workforce development. Through innovative research, teaching, creative programs, and strong community collaborations, Dr. Trujillo supports social workers to facilitate healing, finding hope, and building healthy relationships. Her research is focused on children from vulnerable populations who have been displaced, disrupted, maltreated, or who have otherwise experienced trauma. Dr. Trujillo holds an MSW and a Ph.D. in Social Work, both from the University of Denver.

Lara Bruce, MSW, is the Project Director for the Colorado Child Welfare Scholars Consortium (CCWSC), housed in the Social Work Department. In this capacity, she is responsible for the day-to-day management of this statewide child welfare recruitment and retention effort. Lara supports both bachelors- and master's-level social work students throughout the life cycle of their educational experience, from recruitment to post-graduation employment and educational support. This grant-funded position allows Lara to work with students, staff, and faculty within MSU Denver and the additional four university partners who make up the Consortium. She also supports the involvement and participation of our industry partners in county departments of human services throughout Colorado. Lara is an affiliate faculty in the social work department and serves as Co-Speaker of the MSU Denver Staff Senate.

Metropolitan State University of Denver

GRANT:

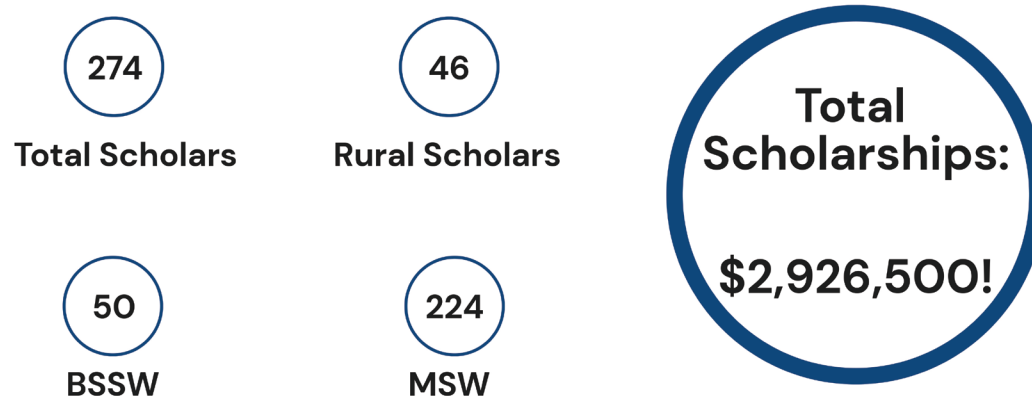
Colorado Child Welfare Scholar's Consortium (CCWSC)

Professor and PI, Kate Trujillo, Ph.D., LCSW, and Project Director, Lara Bruce, MSW, received over \$1 million in funding from the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and the University of Louisville for the Colorado Child Welfare Scholar's Consortium (CCWSC).

MSU Denver has hosted the Colorado Child Welfare Scholar's Consortium since July of 2021. Consisting of five universities (MSU Denver, DU, UCCS, CMU, and CSU-Pueblo), the Colorado Department of Human Services and many of Colorado's counties, the CCWSC has provided scholarships to social work professionals committed to Colorado children and families. MSU Denver has successfully managed the program, increased the number of scholars awarded annually, hosted a national conference, received additional funding for innovation, and recently was awarded another 5-year contract to continue the program. With an annual budget of over 1.2 million dollars, the CCWSC continues to invest in professional development of the Coloradans who have committed to caring for the most vulnerable. There are opportunities for people anywhere on this pathway, bachelor's students, master's students, alumni, and internship instructors alike.

By the Numbers

Since becoming a Consortium in July 2021 (5 years!), we have had:





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Adriann Wycoff

Dr. Adriann Wycoff is a Professor of Chicana/o Studies and the Co-Founder and Director of the Family Literacy Program. She holds a B.A. in Spanish from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an M.A. and Ph.D., also in Spanish, from Northwestern University.

As the first in her family to earn a four-year degree, Adriann was drawn to MSU Denver—then Metropolitan State College of Denver—in 1994 in large part because of the institution's commitment to nontraditional students, including adult learners and students from underrepresented groups. She enjoys spending her free time with her husband, daughter and five-year-old grandson as well as with the family pets. Unsurprisingly, as a literacy advocate, she also very much enjoys reading.

GRANT:

Parents as Teachers (PAT) / Tony Grampsas Youth Services (TGYS)

Dr. Wycoff was awarded a \$28,000 contract from the State of Colorado as a subrecipient of the Tony Grampsas Youth Services (TGYS) grant program administered by Parent Possible, the organization which oversees home visitation programs in Colorado.

TGYS helps support the Parents as Teachers (PAT) home visitation component of the Family Literacy Program, which annually serves approximately 50 families with children from birth to kindergarten entry. PAT provides twice-monthly educational home visits and monthly Group Connection meetings for the entire family.

PAT is predicated on the belief that the early years of a child's life are critical for optimal development and provide the foundation for success in school and in life. Another core PAT principle is that parents and caregivers are their children's first and most influential teachers.





PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Adriann Wycoff



CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Robb Gallegos

Dr. Adriann Wycoff is a Professor of Chicana/o Studies and the Co-Founder and Director of the Family Literacy Program. She holds a B.A. in Spanish from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an M.A. and Ph.D., also in Spanish, from Northwestern University.

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Robb holds degrees from the University of Evansville as well as MSU Denver. He has been with MSU Denver's Family Literacy Program for 10 years. Robb serves on the Adams County Workforce Development Board and is excited about building workforce and postsecondary pathways into the Adult Education Component of the Family Literacy Program.

GRANT:

Adult Education and Literacy Act (AELA) Program

Dr. Adriann Wycoff and Robb Gallegos of the Family Literacy Program were awarded \$542,727 per year for four years starting with the 25/26 Program Year under the Adult Education and Literacy Act (AELA). AELA is a Colorado State grant managed by Colorado Department of Education's Office of Adult Education Initiatives.

The AELA grant supports the Family Literacy Program's courses in English as a Second Language and General Educational Development (GED) Preparation offered in English and Spanish as well as workshops in Family Literacy, Digital Literacy (ESL), and Workforce Readiness. This award enabled the Adult Education component of the Family Literacy Program to grow from six to thirteen members.

The program increased the number of community numbers served from 256 to 367 in Westminster, Commerce City, and beyond in the first year of the award and expanded from eight cohorts to eighteen. The Program anticipates a Measurable Skills Gain rate of 55% for the ESL component, which is 11% greater than the state goal. On the GED side, the program anticipates serving between 20 and 30 GED graduates.

GRANT:

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) Program

Dr. Adriann Wycoff and Robb Gallegos of the Family Literacy Program were awarded \$204,543 per year for four years starting with the 24/25 Program Year under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). AEFLA is a federal grant that flows through the Colorado Department of Education's Office of Adult Education Initiatives.

AEFLA funding is the foundation for the English as a Second Language (ESL) component of the Family Literacy Program's Adult Education endeavors. In the 24/25 program year, the ESL program exceeded the state goal for student-level gains by 8% and by 11% in the current program year. 168 learners were served in the 24/25 program year and increased to 210 in the 25/26 program year. This year also saw the addition of evening classes for the first time as well as the incorporation of a new ESL Coordinator position.



New Grants and Contracts FY 2024–2025

\$15,571,761

Federal Government

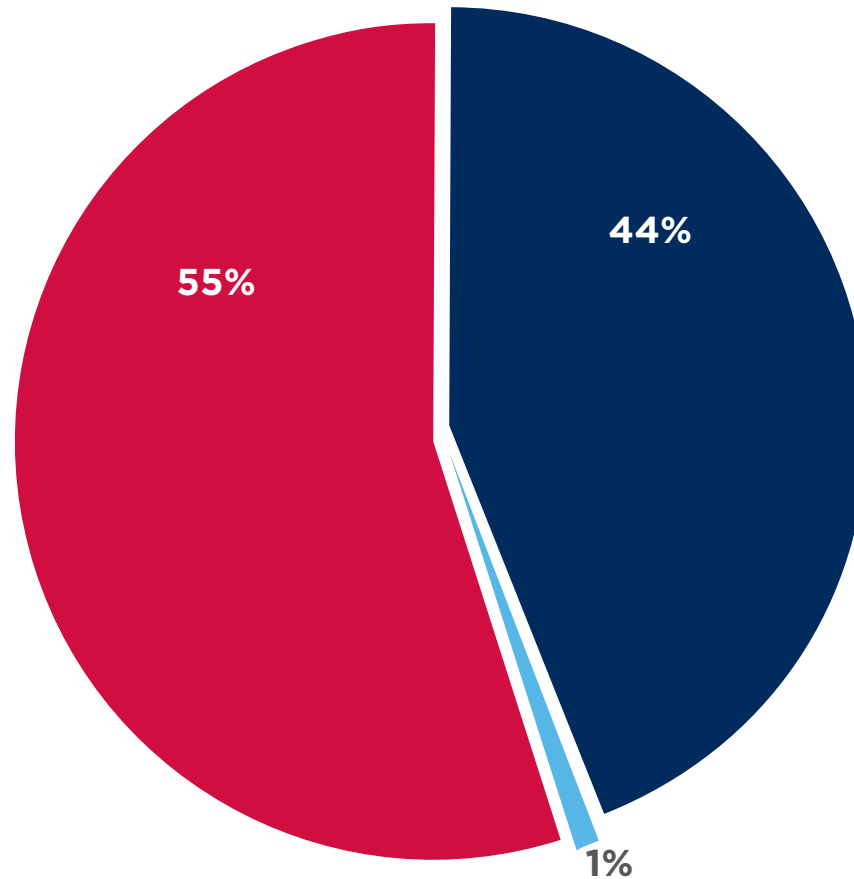
\$8,565,602

U.S. Department of Education	\$4,639,790
Library of Congress	\$1,467,642
U.S. Department of Agriculture	\$1,279,365
U.S. Department of Energy	\$783,505
U.S. Department of Defense	\$341,300
National Science Foundation	\$25,000
National Endowment for the Arts	\$20,000

State and Local Government

\$6,869,116

State of Colorado Behavioral Health Administration	\$2,547,311
Colorado Department of Higher Education	\$2,239,434
Colorado Department of Human Services	\$1,089,160
Colorado Department of Education	\$747,271
City & County of Denver	\$112,000
Colorado Department of Transportation	\$63,000
Other State Funding	\$70,941



Nonprofit Organizations & Foundations

\$137,043

National Center for Families Learning	\$90,000
ParentPossible	\$28,000
Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking	\$19,043



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