



MEDIA RELEASE

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IMAGE: MCC leaders pose with Grid United representatives and the Custer County Community Advisory Committee

MCC awarded \$50,000 grant to aid in new Accelerating Credentials Initiative

MILES CITY, MONTANA: The Montana Community Foundation's (MCF) Community Investment Program (CIP) has announced the latest grant recipients in its fifth round of funding, distributing more than \$310,000 across Rosebud, Custer, and Fallon Counties, as well as the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

This latest round of grants awarded through MCF supports a wide range of projects that reflect local priorities – from expanding workforce training programs to upgrading search and rescue equipment to revitalizing community spaces. Each grant was recommended by a Community Advisory Committee made up of local residents.

Miles Community College (MCC) was among the recipients in Custer County, receiving a \$50,000 grant for its Accelerating Credentials Initiative. This new program will equip high school students with credentials in healthcare, transportation, and career readiness.

"With the generous support of the CIP grant, MCC is able to break down barriers to career education in rural Montana by providing accessible pathways for students to earn industry-recognized credentials," said Erin Niedege, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Educational Support Services.

MCC launched its Accelerating Credentials pilot program in spring 2025 in partnership with Custer County District High School (CCDHS) in Miles City. The first cohort of CCDHS seniors completed the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training and earned their credentials before their own high school graduation. These students received their CDL training certificates in person during the MCC Commencement Ceremony in early May.

To prepare for the workforce, CCDHS CDL students, along with other students in the CCDHS Pathways Program, also took COLS 111, *Career Development and Interpersonal Skills*. This one-credit course focuses on career development, communication, teamwork, professionalism, and other durable workforce skills.

The Accelerating Credentials program has plans to expand from fall 2025 through summer 2026 to include Baker and Forsyth High Schools. Participants can enroll in CDL or Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) programs during the school year and summer, completing credentials by graduation.

"The Accelerating Credentials Initiative not only addresses critical workforce shortages but also fosters economic growth and opportunities for families across eastern Montana," stated Niedege.

The developer of North Plains Connector, Grid United (GU), an independent transmission company that builds high voltage electric transmission lines, established the CIP at MCC. North Plains Connector is a 420-mile transmission line spanning three rural counties in Montana: Rosebud, Custer, and Fallon that will connect the electric power grids between eastern Montana and western North Dakota. Since its inception in 2023, more than \$1.28 million (\$1,283,052) has been granted through CIP.

MCC was the recipient of a \$34,500 CIP grant in 2023 to support its Opportunity Realized Program, which was piloted in the spring of the same year. This program, aimed at providing job-ready skills to high school students through the free, one-credit COLS 111 course, has grown from two high school partners to more than 30 across Montana in the last two years.

This course (COLS 111) will continue to be offered in conjunction with the Accelerating Credentials program, working together to prepare high school students for success after graduation.

For more information regarding the MCC Accelerating Credentials Initiative, contact Erin Niedege at 406-874-6211 or niedgee@milescc.edu.

About North Plains Connector: North Plains Connector is a 420-mile and up to 500 kilovolt high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line connecting the U.S. eastern

and western electric grids in Montana and North Dakota. North Plains Connector will be open to all sources of electrical power generation and will be able to transport power in either direction along the line. For more information, visit www.northplainsconnector.com.

About Grid United: Grid United is an independent transmission company aiming to modernize the electric power grid to create a more resilient and efficient electric system for the benefit of all consumers. For more information, visit www.gridunited.com.

About the Montana Community Foundation: The Montana Community Foundation's mission is to cultivate a culture of giving so Montana communities can flourish. Founded in 1988, MCF manages more than \$188.5 million in assets and administers more than 1,470 philanthropic funds and planned gifts. Since its founding, MCF has reinvested more than \$100 million in Montana through scholarships, grants, and programs. Learn more at www.mtcf.org.

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