

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 25-25

**BOARD DATE:** January 14, 2025

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**AUTHORIZATION FOR THE COMMISSIONER TO SEEK, ACCEPT AND ADMINISTER  
GRANTS, GIFTS, AND TRUSTS FOR SYSTEM-WIDE PURPOSES**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education hereby authorizes the Commissioner to seek grants, gifts, and/or trusts for system-wide purposes from private foundation(s); provided further that upon securing the necessary commitments for such grants, gifts, and/or trusts the Commissioner must return to the Board before acceptance or administration of the proposed funding.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by the BHE on 1/14/2025.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, § 9(n)

Contact: José Luis Santos, Ph.D., Senior Deputy Commissioner & Special Advisor  
to the Commissioner

## Background

The Board of Higher Education's (Board) enabling legislation includes a provision which allows the Board to grant the Commissioner of Higher Education (Commissioner) the authority, subject to the Board's direction and approval, to "seek, accept and administer grants, gifts and trusts for system-wide purposes from private foundations, corporations, individuals and federal agencies...." *M.G.L. c. 15A, § 9(n)*. Such funds shall be received by the state treasurer on behalf of the Commonwealth and deposited in a separate account and shall be disbursed at the direction of the Board. *See Id.; and 801 CMR 50.0 et seq.*

As set forth below, the Commissioner is seeking the Board's authorization to seek grants and gifts from private foundation(s), within state and federal law, to help advance its priorities, with particular attention to its emerging Innovation Priority.

### **Background and Rationale:**

As discussed during the Board's prior meetings, including the Board's September 16, 2024 retreat, the proposed **Innovation Priority** emphasizes the importance of fostering creativity, adaptability, and forward-thinking solutions-driven approaches to meet the evolving needs of learners, institutions, and the Commonwealth's economy. To advance this strategic priority, the Department of Higher Education (Department) seeks to have the Board authorize the Commissioner to have the capacity to secure external funding that supports transformative initiatives, pilot programs, and scalable solutions.

### **Why This Motion Is Essential:**

1. **Driving Innovation in Higher Education:** Innovation often requires investments beyond the scope of traditional funding mechanisms. Grant funding offers the flexibility to explore, test, and implement new ideas that improve learner outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and workforce readiness.
2. **Building Dedicated Capacity for Strategic Pilots:** To advance the innovation agenda, grants could enable the Department to build and sustain the innovation capacity required to lead and support pilot programs, such as digital learning initiatives, micro-credentialing, and cross-sector partnerships, that align with the Board's vision for innovation. This additional capacity would also enable the Department to prioritize

technology solutions with potential to meet learner and campus needs more effectively.

3. **Leveraging Collaborative Opportunities:** Private grants often prioritize innovative approaches to equity, access, success, and workforce development. By seeking grant funding, the Commissioner can lead the Department in enhancing partnerships with higher education institutions, industry leaders, and community and philanthropic organizations to advance shared goals.

Aligning such grant activities with the Board's Innovation Priority not only ensures that resources would be focused on building innovation capacity and transformative initiatives but also would enable Massachusetts to become a national pioneer as the only public system of higher education to stand up and sustain a dedicated innovation function and remain a national leader in higher education.

#### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommend approving the Commissioner's request for authorization to seek grants, gifts, and/or trusts for system-wide purposes from private foundation(s). Upon securing the necessary commitments for such grants, gifts, and/or trusts the Commissioner must return to the Board before acceptance or administration of the proposed funding.