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### **THEC Awards \$1,125,000 to Tennessee Communities to Develop Local Networks That Support Adult Learners**

**NASHVILLE** – *May 11* – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has awarded \$1,125,000 in Reconnect Community grants to five Tennessee regions to establish community programs that will serve the needs of adults interested in completing a postsecondary credential.

These Tennessee Reconnect Communities (TRCs) will join the three existing programs which launched earlier this year serving the regions of Middle Tennessee, Upper Cumberland, and the Southwest Tennessee region. Together, these eight centers will provide adults across Tennessee with free advising, career counseling, and a personalized path to and through college. The TRCs' collective impact strategies engage higher education institutions, local government, local employers, community organizations, and adult learners alike.

“Through launching the first three Tennessee Reconnect Communities, we have realized how crucial locally-based collaboratives are in achieving the Drive to 55,” said Jessica Gibson, assistant executive director at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. “Our mission is to make these personalized advising services available to any adult Tennessean who wants to return to school to pursue a credential or degree.”

This initiative is based on The Graduate! Network's (TGN) proven model for improving outcomes for adult learners. TGN is a non-profit organization whose work is based on collective impact strategies and bringing together entities from

different sectors to innovate ways to increase college attainment among adults. The partnership between Tennessee and TGN provides the communities with training, guidance, support, and information to develop sustainable and locally-focused Drive to 55 efforts for adults. Each TRC grantee will adapt this service model to their local context, unique strengths, community partnerships, and collaborations. As seen with the current TRCs, this will result in a community-based effort of service delivery to adults that is unique to each community's needs and characteristics.

"There has never been a better time for adults in Tennessee to complete a certificate or degree," said THEC Interim Executive Director Russ Deaton. "The Tennessee Reconnect Communities are one facet of programs that will provide adults the support they need to guide them through the process of returning to higher education."

The most recent round of TRC grants was awarded to five regions across the state; grant amounts include start-up funds of \$225,000 per community and include technical assistance provided through The Graduate! Network. Implementation will begin June 2016 and the community programs will launch in November 2016.

The grants were awarded through a competitive application process. The TRC grant program is administered by THEC and subgrants are funded by the State of Tennessee with technical assistance funded by Lumina Foundation.

### **List of Funded Communities:**

- Northwest TN
  - Lead Organization: Obion County Chamber of Commerce
  - Counties Served: Dyer, Lake, Lauderdale, Obion
  
- Southwest TN
  - Lead Organization: Leadership Memphis
  - Counties Served: Shelby
  
- South Central TN
  - Lead Organization: South Central Tennessee Workforce Alliance
  - Counties Served: Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Giles, Grundy, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marshall, Moore

- Northeast TN
  - Lead Organization: Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc.
  - Counties Served: Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Jefferson, Sevier, Union
  
- East TN
  - Lead Organization: Alliance for Business & Training
  - Counties Served: Carter, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, Washington

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*The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The Commission develops, implements, and evaluates postsecondary education policies and programs in Tennessee while coordinating the state's systems of higher education. There are nine public universities, two special purpose institutes, 13 community colleges, and 27 colleges of applied technology in Tennessee that educate nearly 250,000 students.*