Merritt College
Title V Proposal - 2022
Aspira Project

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COMPETETIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY (CPP) #1: CREATING A POSITIVE, INCLUSIVE, IDENTITY SAFE CLIMATE

Merritt College's **Aspira Project** will engage faculty and staff in ***professional development*** that improves the effectiveness of teaching and learning with the goal of fostering a positive, inclusive, and identity-safe climate through culturally responsive teaching and student support practices. The professional development component of the Aspira Project meets CPP #1 as it will facilitate an increase in cultural awareness, identity, and sense of belonging through the implementation of evidence-based professional development opportunities designed to build asset-based mindsets for faculty and staff on campus and that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status.

Research has consistently pointed to the most important factor affecting student achievement is the quality of the instruction (*Saroyan & Trigwell,2015). Higher education teachers' professional learning: Process and outcome. Studies in Educational Evaluation, 46, 92-101).* The Aspira Project will enable Merritt College to improve the culture of teaching and learning to ensure students persist in their academic goals including Guided Pathways and transfer to four-year universities. As such, faculty will engage with ESCALA Educational Services to develop a sustainable and continuous faculty development program that provides faculty with the culturally responsive and student-centered pedagogical tools that remediate individual skill deficiencies of underrepresented students and teach effectively to their learning styles while creating a sense of belonging.

ESCALA was created in 2012 by a team of HSI faculty in response to the growing need for educators to understand the factors that cause Hispanic students' disengagement and attrition. ESCALA works with cohort teams of community college and university faculty to help them

become facilitators of active, learner-centered environments through the adoption of student engagement techniques, formative assessment, and evidence-based strategies that are known to better serve Hispanic and other underrepresented students.

Faculty will engage in professional development activities to learn evidence-based approaches around curriculum and degree development, educational pathway, institutional effectiveness. Training will expose them to effective interventions to help students who are adversely affected by COVID-19 utilizing institutional data to identify barriers to student progress and completion.   Post-workshop data shows that educators who have completed ESCALA's Certificate of College Teaching and Learning in HSIs workshop experience a 46% increase in student participation in their courses and a 14% decrease in time spent lecturing. The overwhelming majority (85%) of participants rated increased understanding of cross-cultural student engagement disconnects as their most important learning outcome, and 80% report an excellent understanding of how to create a sense of belonging in their classrooms, and why that is important for minority students *(ESCALA Educational Services, Inc. (2017). The ESCALA Summer Retreat for HSI Faculty: Your path to earning the Certificate in College Teaching & Learning in HSIs).*

Fostering a positive and safe climate for students requires that staff, in addition to faculty, participate in evidence-based professional development opportunities designed to build asset-based mindsets for faculty and staff on campus, that are inclusive regarding race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status *(Kruse, S. D., Rakha, S., & Calderone, S. (2018). Developing cultural competency in higher education: An agenda for practice. Teaching in Higher Education, 23(6), 733-750.)* Staff will enroll in face-to-face training and online modules that focus on providing culturally responsive advising and student affairs practices to increase

the sense of belonging and foster a positive campus racial climate at Merritt College. Participation in professional development programs has been effective at stimulating a greater awareness of the role of identity and culture in advising and retention practices (*Englert-Copeland, J. (2019). Privilege, Bias, and Cultural Competence: An Examination of How Lived Experience Shapes Academic Advising Practices.)* Faculty and staff who participate in the robust professional development program will be able to *(1) foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for underserved students, and (2) implement evidence-based practices for advancing student success for underserved students.*

COMPETETIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY (CPP) #2: INCREASING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, COMPLETION, AND POST-ENROLLMENT SUCCESS

The ***Aspira Project*** will improve the educational pipeline by providing personnel and services that increase access, affordability, completion, and post-enrollment success. Merritt College will employ two *Outreach Specialists* who will coordinate the Dual Enrollment Program activities with local high schools. This program will improve course alignment between high school and college as well as provide professional development for both high school and college faculty, ultimately increasing exposure to higher education, major opportunity pathways, and enrollment in career-aligned majors at Merritt College. Additionally, the Outreach Specialist will provide bilingual and bicultural matriculation guidance and financial aid and literacy education for students and families in the largely first-generation and minority community served by Merritt College. These activities address CPP #2 (b) Increasing the number and proportion of underserved students who enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs, which may include strategies related to college preparation, awareness, application, selection, advising, counseling, and enrollment.

Merritt College's **Aspira Project** will also employ *two bilingual Career and Transfer Advisors* who will guide students through the matriculation process and assist students with access to resources and intervention services that support student success.

Early academic intervention is critical to student success, particularly for low-income and first-generation college students (*Sutton, (2016). Anticipating concerns of the adult learner: accelerated path to a degree and intrusive advising. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 40(5), 456-458.*). Research indicates that colleges can improve the retention of first-year students by increasing their utilization of campus support services (*Zaback, Carlson, Laderman, & Mann (2016). Serving the equity imperative: Intentional action toward greater student success.*). This is particularly true for Hispanic students who may face cultural incongruity at institutions of higher education (*Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera (2016). The reliability and validity of the cultural congruity and university environment scales with Chicana/o community college students. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 40(5), 426-438.*).

The core component of our proposed Integrated Academic Support System is Case Management Advising, which has proven to be effective in improving student outcomes such as retention, graduation, and transfer *(Rogers, Blunt & Trible. (2014). A Real PLUSS: An Intrusive Advising Program for Underprepared Students)*. The integration plan for the **Aspira Project** includes incorporation of academic support services with High-Impact Educational Practices that are embedded into an Integrated Academic Support System to increase student success. Thus, these services will be co-located in the **Aspira Center**, a grant-funded centralized retention hub that will foster an ease of access and greater visibility of services for students. This component of the **Aspira Project** addresses CPP #2 (d) Supporting the development and implementation of

student success programs that integrate multiple comprehensive and evidence-based services or initiatives, such as academic advising, structured/guided pathways, career services, credit-bearing academic undergraduate courses focused on career, and programs to meet basic needs, such as housing, childcare and transportation, student financial aid, and access to technological devices.

The proposed **Aspira Project** strategies (*outreach, onboarding, tutoring, and wrap-around services provided by Advisor Fellows and Career and Transfer Advisors*) also meet the standard of "promising" evidence as indicated by the **_What Works Clearinghouse_** as they "provide coordinated comprehensive student supports to improve credit accumulation and completion of non-degree credentials along career pathways" as indicated by **WWC.** *(Bettinger, E. P., & Baker, R. B. (2014). The effects of student coaching: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student advising. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 36, 3-19).*

II. PROJECT NARRATIVE

A. COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Introduction: Merritt College is a public, two-year community college in Oakland, CA, located in Northern California on the east shore of the San Francisco Bay. The college is one of 116 California Community Colleges. Merritt College is a densely populated and diverse community with an increasingly complex and demanding economy.

Merritt College embraces a vision and values that allow all members of our college community to grow and thrive. The college was founded on the premise that all are welcome to our learning community, and we are first and foremost committed to this. The foundations of our success as a center for learning originate in our diversity, and in our respect for each other,

love of knowledge, education, collaboration, and our commitment to civic engagement and social justice, equity, along with lifelong learning for everyone. All are welcome to join us and grow as we learn and thrive together.

The Service Area of Merritt: Area residents contributed to 55% of the Merritt College student body in Fall 2020, followed by the bordering city of San Leandro with 6%. The remaining student body hailed from outside of Merritt College's immediate service areas, which include Hayward, San Francisco, Berkeley, Richmond, Vallejo, and other cities situated near these urban centers. Merritt College is situated in predominately Latino communities in the East Bay, including the neighborhoods of Fruitvale and along International Blvd extending east into the city of Hayward. Latinos are the fastest growing demographic in K-12 schools in the Oakland and Alameda County area and make up 32% of the total school age population (American Community Survey, 5-year estimates for Alameda County).

Student Profile: The Merritt College student body is rich in diversity. During the fall 2020 term, the largest group in terms of racial and ethnic demographic category of the student population was Hispanic (33%) followed by African American (21%), Asian (17%), and Caucasian (17%). Pacific Islanders, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Multi-racial, and other Non-White categories were also represented (10%). Approximately 83% of Merritt students identify as people of color; therefore, Merritt College is a majority minority institution. The Merritt student body also has a very rich linguistic diversity: over 63% of students speak a language other than English at home or with their families. Among these students, the top three language spoken are Spanish (41%), Chinese (18%) and Arabic (7%).

In Fall 2020, Merritt served 6,261 undergraduate students who enrolled in 11,288 classes. These students generated 1,437 FTE. The student population was comprised of 68% Females and

32% males. While the average student age is 28, learners from 16 to over 90 years old study at Merritt College. From fall 2020 to spring 2021, it is of concern that 35% did not return. Yet another concern is the large segment of students who are part-time at (91%) compared to full-time status.

Over 54% of Merritt students were degree-seeking students and 11% were first time freshman. Approximately 21% of enrolled students declared educational plans that were aligned to transfer to a University of California or a California State University partner. Interestingly, over 74% of enrolled students have earned the equivalent of high school proficiency, GED, or a high school diploma prior to college. However, it is necessary that many academic and student services programs target basic skills development and intrusive support because of the high need for college preparation.

Merritt students are faced with many challenges other than college readiness. Over 78% of Merritt students are categorized as low-income. Many students face housing insecurity, 40% are food insecure, and approximately 3% are homeless. In addition, the availability and cost of affordable childcare and financial stability are constant obstacles to educational success of Hispanic students at Merritt. Also, Merritt College has a high proportion of underserved students, including veterans, students who are in the foster care system, first-generation students, and formerly incarcerated learners just to name a few.

Overview of Merritt College Students Served Fall 2020					
Headcount: 6,261			FTE: 1,437		
Gender	**#**	**%**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**#**	**%**
Male	2,023	32%	African American	1,299	21%
Female	4,238	68%	American Indian	10	<1%
Age			Asian	1,081	17%
Less than 18	742	12%	Caucasian	1,041	17%
19 – 24	2,518	40%	Hispanic	2,057	33%
25 – 49	2,568	41%	Other/No	253	4%

			Response		
50+	433	7%	Pacific Islander	29	<1%
			Two or more races	363	6%
Credit Load			**Student Profile**		
Less than 6	3798	61%	First Generation	3,366	54%
6.0 – 11.9	1898	30%	Receiving Financial Aid (PELL)	1,606	26%
More than 12	567	9%	-		

Faculty Characteristics: In Fall 2020, Merritt employed full-time and temporary/ adjunct faculty; 23% of our faculty are either tenured or on a tenure track. Merritt College faculty is quite diverse in comparison to other faculty bodies in higher education. Nationwide, only 16% of all full-time faculty are persons of color. At Merritt College, the rates are over three times that of the national average: 57% of Merritt College's tenured/tenure-track faculty and 52% of adjunct/temporary faculty are persons of color. Hispanic faculty comprise 14% of tenured/tenure track faculty and 12% of adjunct/temporary faculty. Another key group is Merritt College's executive leadership team, which were 9% Hispanic (*Merritt Institutional Research, 2022*).

Mission, Accreditation, and Governance: Merritt College's mission is to *promote student success, to provide our diverse community with educational opportunities, and to transform lives*. The College achieves its mission through instruction, student support, and learning resources that enable its enrolled students to earn associate degrees and certificates as well as to attain college competency, careers, Transfer to 4-year universities, and acquire skills for lifelong success. Merritt College is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Merritt's mission is in alignment with the state of California Assembly Bill No. 288, which authorizes community college districts to enter into a College and Career Access

Pathways partnership with school districts located within their service areas with the goal of developing seamless pathways from high school to community college for career technical education or preparation for career and transfer, improving high school graduation rates, or helping high school students achieve a four-year degree.

California's educational and workforce needs have been recognized by the Chancellor of the California Community College System who has established a *Vision for Success* with goals for meeting the emerging needs of the state. *The goals include: 1) increasing the number of students who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates; 2) increasing transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions; 3) decreasing the average number of credits accumulated to earn an associate degree 4) increasing the number of students employed in their field of study; and 5) decreasing achievement gaps among underrepresented groups.* The Chancellor's Vision for Success informed the formulation of Merritt College's Strategic Plan and thereby guided the development of the proposed Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) project. The resulting plan will help refine the pipeline into several high demand fields; consequently, it is the project's goal to deploy powerful, career-aligned pathways to support students through the process of earning their associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, and other career-focused credentials so they can ultimately live, work, and contribute to their communities.

Merritt College is poised to provide a strong and positive educational impact to its diverse student population in accordance with the Chancellor's *Vision of Success* and proposes the ***Aspira Project.*** The Project will employ proven strategies to fulfill the goals of the Chancellor's vision and also exemplifies Merritt's commitment to student learning and to assist students of all ages and backgrounds to join and skillfully participate in the workforce of California's tomorrow. The ***Aspira Project*** will bring intentionality, thoughtfulness, and *Cariño*

(Care) to the development of a pathway for Hispanic students that refines the pipeline from secondary education through the community college into a four-year degree and ultimately a career in a high-demand, high-wage field that will progress in alignment with California Assembly Bill No. 288. *Bienviendos a Merritt College y el Proyecto Aspira!*

1. Comprehensive Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses & Significant Problems

Merritt College's Title V Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) outlines the institution's five-year plan for improving student access, success, and achievement at Merritt College. Development of the CDP was led by the college's executive leadership in response to major innovations, improvements, and long-term, sustainable strategic initiatives established by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. Key initiatives contributing to Merritt College's Title V CDP include: 1) the college's comprehensive reimagining and redesign of student placement into college level English and mathematics coursework (AB 705, 2017; 2) Guided Pathways; and 3) the Community College Chancellor's Office Vision for Success.

During the 2017-18 academic year, Merritt College's Integrated Planning Council led efforts for the development of the college's 2018-23 Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP), which resulted in the creation of actionable goals toward transformative improvements and innovation that support achievement and sustainability of its long-term goals and objectives. *The development of the new plan was a participatory process that included all college constituencies.* In addition, a recommendation was made that the planning and drafting phases of the new ISP be completed by a relatively small representative group of the Merritt community. This ISP Taskforce was comprised of representatives from major college constituency groups from Academic Senate, Strategic Planning Committee, Peralta Community College District Faculty Senate, Classified Senate Associated Students of Merritt College (ASMC), and the

Administration. The taskforce met several times throughout the Fall 2017 semester to determine the major components of the plan. Initial work included reviewing the strategic plans from other community colleges across California, the California Community Colleges Vision for Success, and the Research and Planning Group's "Through the Gate" initiative.   The new ISP incorporated Strategic Goals similar to the Core Commitments found in the CCCCO Vision for Success Strategic Plan. The resulted plan aligns vertically with the Peralta Community College District strategic plan and the state Vision for Success and horizontally with Merritt College operational plans.

The development of Merritt *2018-2023 Integrated Strategic Plan included extensive review of*

Strategic Plan Development Process	Constituencies Involved Application Development
Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses ↓ **Problem Identification and Analysis** ↓ **Goals and Objectives for Addressing Problems Identified** ↓ **Researched Solutions for Addressing Problems and Achieving Goals** ↓ **Selection of Proposed New Practices and Strategies to Overcome Problems and Achieve Goals**	• Accreditation Self-Study and Surveys • Merritt Education Master Plan • Merritt Strategic Plan • Merritt Technology Plan • Merritt Faculty and Staff • Administrative Services-Finance/Budget • Partnering four-year colleges • MIS data submissions • Merritt Student and Staff Surveys • Academic Units Program Review • Non-instructional Units Program Review • Peralta District/Office of the Chancellor • Hispanic/Latinx, Chicano/a Ad Hoc/Taskforce Committees

both internal and external data. Data sources included current student demographics, enrollment, and performance data produced by the Merritt College Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the

Peralta Community College District Strategic Plan External Scan, the California Community College Scorecard, the California Community College Chancellor's Office DataMart, the Annual Career and Technical Education Outcomes Survey of students, and the California Community College Launch Board. In addition to these results, the Merritt Title V development team further examined regional and state Labor Market Information (LMI) for occupational growth, and gap analyses for high demand occupations in relation to existing and future academic programming at Merritt College.

Combined, all of these efforts resulted in a college trend analysis as well as a thorough review of strengths and weaknesses in relation to the development of this Title V project and critical needs to address identified gaps. The analysis of college trends revealed the following:

Strengths of Academic Programs
• Merritt College has a commitment to improve access to educational opportunity for Hispanic, low-income and first-generation and underrepresented college students.
• Merritt College has faculty and staff committed to solving the "persistence and completion challenges" with students entering college underprepared.
• Merritt College has diverse and innovative academic certificate, Associate Degree, and Associate's for Transfer Degree (ADT) programs leading to certificate, degree, and transfer opportunities open pathways into careers in high demand fields.
• Many faculty recognize and utilize differences students bring to the classroom with regards to their cultural backgrounds and life experiences.
• Many faculty use several activities designed to have students experience some of the cognitive states described in the theories taught.

Weaknesses and Challenges of Academic Programs
• Poor math and English readiness of incoming high school students.
• Pathways and educational requirements for transition from high school to college, and college to university are not clear.
• High school guidance counselors lack training in the new courses and certificate degrees available.
• Low transfer rates to four-year institutional partners.
• The rate for Hispanics who completed a degree, certificate, or transferred is only 39.9% compared to 45% of all students.
• The 2018 Student Success Score Card, an MIS data dashboard from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, shows that Merritt College students have a persistence rate of 56%, course success rate of 61%, and course retention rate of 76%.
• The six-year transfer rate to a baccalaureate program for Hispanic graduates, is only

20.78% (n=91) out of 438 total who transferred. Hispanic students comprise 33% of the student body.

- There is a lack of resources that help students identify the best path to a career, and the problem is particularly acute for students seeking to transfer to four-year institutions.
- At Merritt College, many students are taking multiple units outside of their degree program and taking more years to complete and/or transfer.
- Merritt College does not have a Hispanic Welcome Center nor a Hispanic Student Orientation.
- Merritt College does not have professional development opportunities to increase culturally responsive and inclusive strategies.
- Merritt College has an overall low transfer rates to 4-year degree programs.
- There is a lack of data on placement rates into the job market.

Strengths of Institutional Management

- Institutional planning processes support data-driven decision-making through effective evaluation processes.
- Qualified, experienced administrators, instructors, professionals, staff; competitive compensation.
- Long-range planning for facilities to meet growing educational demand.
- Commitment to planning and ongoing college-based, system-wide planning processes.
- Strong commitments and partnerships with key community stakeholders including K-12 school districts, city management, local business, and regional college partnerships.
- Committed and visionary leadership from the Chancellor, senior administrators, faculty and staff to the success and institutionalization of the initiatives proposed for this project.
- Merritt College places emphasis on student learning outcomes, broad-based planning, research, outreach to residents in remote areas, and institutional responsibility in serving a rapidly growing Hispanic population.
- According to the goals of the Strategic Plan, Merritt College is committed to increasing student success, bolstering partnerships with California 4-year institutions, and guiding students toward rewarding careers.

Weaknesses and Challenges of Institutional Management

- Inadequate provisions for professional development or institutional support for part-time faculty, especially dual enrollment faculty, resulting in disconnects and lack of engagement in the college culture.
- Inadequate collaboration of the college with the greater community regarding the development and implementation of courses and curricula for new and emerging certificate and degree programs aligned to careers in the regional economy.
- Inadequate support for career exploration and career selection for students.
- Inadequate support for bilingual student services for students that promote retention and completion.
- Lack of professional development on the learning needs and academic experience of Hispanic students.
- Inadequate tracking of employment data for Merritt College graduates.

Strengths of Fiscal Stability

- Merritt College is a low-cost postsecondary institution and offers student-oriented financial aid services to assist students in determining eligibility and accessing federal and state financial aid programs.
- Tradition of conservative fiscal management involving strong compliance and accountability policies and practices; careful monitoring of budgets, energy use, and other resources; and avoidance of deficits; debt loads are modest and manageable.
- Budget planning processes tied to Strategic Planning and ISP goals and objectives.

Weaknesses and Challenges of Fiscal Stability

- Inadequate resources to address curriculum development and infrastructure needs.
- Inadequate level of critical academic support services needed to facilitate career exploration, completion, and transfer.
- Inadequate resources to address student support needs required to facilitate outreach, transfer, and completion. In addition, there are no Spanish-speaking employees in financial aid.

Significant Problems Identified Through the Planning Process	
Significant Problem 1	The college lacks support structures to conduct bilingual *outreach* effectively to the local high school population and community to facilitate matriculation and pursuit of meaningful careers that are economically viable.
Significant Problem 2	The college lacks bilingual support structures to improve *student success* such as integrated student support services, career counseling, and transfer counseling that increase student retention, completion, and job placement rates.
Significant Problem 3	The college lacks clear *pathways to completion* and transfer to help its large numbers of low-income, first-generation students choose between Merritt College's vast array of degree options, making it unclear what courses students need to complete their degree on time and what options exist for transfer.
Significant Problem 4	The college lacks relevant *connections between education and career,* especially high demand, high tech careers resulting from lack of career aligned resources, programming, and facilities.
Significant Problem 5	The college lacks sufficient *professional development* programs that provide faculty with culturally responsive pedagogical strategies for teaching effectively to the Hispanic and low-income students they encounter in their classrooms. The Project must offer faculty and staff year-round training activities, including using student success data and the adoption of new learning systems and methods to improve student learning and student services outcomes.

Proposed Solution: The Project "Career-Aligned Guided Pathways to Career and Transfer"

Merritt College proposes to develop a comprehensive approach to solving these problems through its Title V Activity, Guided Pathways to Career and Transfer, which will increase the number and proportion of academically underprepared Hispanic and low-income students who are exposed to the value and benefit of pursuing higher education, persist in college, and graduate or transfer with the goal of career placement in a high demand field. This activity is designed to support Hispanic and low-income students along the full continuum of the student experience from high school to career placement. By the end of the grant (2027), Merritt College will have significantly raised the percentage of students who 1) receive early exposure to educational and career exploration opportunities, 2) participate in wrap-around services, 3) are supported to be academically successful and retained, 4) graduate with an associate degree and/or a work-ready certificate, 5) transfer to a four year institution with a focus on high-demand careers, and/or 6) place into meaningful careers that support sustainable living and feed regional economic growth.

2. Goals for Academic, Institutional Management, and Fiscal Stability

The purpose of the ***Aspira Project*** is to build institutional capacity to increase the number of Hispanic and low-income students attaining postsecondary degrees and facilitate career opportunities and transfer success along the entire pipeline. We have identified the following *goals that address the institutional gaps* and build capacity to improve student academic success.

Goals	Address Identified CDP Problems
1. Student Success Component	
Goal 1: Student Success Increase Hispanic and low-income retention and graduation rates by implementing Guided Pathways that	Academic Weakness: Academic Under-Preparedness Academic Weakness: Low Retention and Graduation Rates

includes outreach to local high schools, alignment of dual enrollment curriculum, high school concurrent enrollment, establishment of centralized onboarding processes, individualized pathways to graduation, and augmented intervention systems	Management Weakness: Lack of Guided Pathways to Degree Completion and Career Opportunities Management Weakness: Lack of Integration of Student Support Services and Academic Interventions. Fiscal Weakness: "Catch-22" of the development-demand-revenue cycle and consequence of low enrollment in regular courses that curtails funding for student support and curricular changes
2. Transfer Component	
Goal 2: Transfer Increase Hispanic and low-income student transfer rates through enhanced transfer advising systems, augmented intervention processes, and increased collaboration with four-year institutions.	Academic Weakness: Low Transfer Rate to Four-Year Institutions Management Weakness: Lack of Guided Pathways to Degree Completion Management Weakness: Lack of Coordination with Educational Partners
3. Career and Job Placement Component	
Goal 3: Career and Job Placement Develop a system that builds upon career-aligned pathways to provide greater access to high-demand jobs and help students transition from postsecondary education into careers that support sustainable living and feed regional economic growth through career advising.	Management Weakness: Lack of Guided Pathways to Degree Completion and Career Opportunities Management Weakness: Lack of Coordination with Industry Partners Management Weakness: Gap between educational programs and industry demands
4. Professional Development Component	
Goal 4: Professional Development Provide continuous professional development for all personnel associated with the college by offering a year-round calendar of training activities, including using student success data and the adoption of new learning systems and methods to improve student – learning and student services outcomes.	Academic Weakness: Low Completion Rates in Gateway Math and English Courses Academic Weakness: Low Retention and Graduation Rates Management Weakness: Lack of Professional Development on the Learning Needs of Dual Enrollment, Hispanic, and Low-Income Students

3. Measurable Objectives Related to Goals

The following objectives are related to the institutional goals and provide the framework for achieving the Project's intended impact on Merritt College. The table below lists each measurable objective, their relationship to the proposed Project goals and how they address weaknesses identified in the Comprehensive Development Plan. Each objective contains baseline data that will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project in meeting its objectives. The objectives are aligned to the key performance measures established by the US Department of Education for assessing the effectiveness of the Strengthening Institutions Program, are directly related to the problems faced by Merritt College.

Measurable Objectives	Annual Performance Indicators and Timelines	Relationship to CDP Weaknesses
Objective 1: By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Meets CDP Goals - 1, 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, and 3**	**52% increase over baseline of 46%** 2023 Target: 51% 2024 Target: 56% 2025 Target: 60% 2026 Target: 65% 2027 Target: 70%	**Academic Weakness**: 1. Academic under-preparedness 2. Low retention rates 3. Low completion rates in college level English and math **Management Weakness:** 1. Inadequate support for career exploration and career selection for students; 2. Inadequate support for student services for students that promote retention and completion **Fiscal Weakness:** 1. Inadequate support services 2. Inadequate fiscal resources

Objective 2: By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027. **Meets CDP Goals - 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 2, 3, 4, and 5**	**100% increase over baseline of 19%** 2023 Target: 26% 2024 Target: 31% 2025 Target: 35% 2026 Target: 40% 2027 Target: 44%	**Academic Weakness:** 1. Academic Under-Preparedness 2. Inadequate advising and intervention processes 3. Low retention and graduation rates **Management Weakness:** 1. Lack of professional development 2. Lack of degree alignment with regional economy **Fiscal Weakness:** 1. Inadequate support services 2. Inadequate fiscal resources
Objective 3: By September 30, 2027, increase the annual number of Hispanic students who transfer from Merritt to a four-year institution to 395 from a 2020 reporting year of 275. This target is set based on achieving parity with the number of transfers White and Asian students. **Meets CDP Goals – 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**	**44% increase over baseline of 275 students** 2023 Target: 299 2024 Target: 323 2025 Target: 347 2026 Target: 371 2027 Target: 395	**Academic Weakness:** 1. Academic Under-Preparedness 2. Inadequate advising and intervention processes 3. Low retention and graduation rates **Management Weakness:** 1. Lack of professional development 2. Lack of degree alignment with regional economy **Fiscal Weakness:** 1. Inadequate support services 2. Inadequate fiscal resources
Objective 4: By Sept. 30, 2027, a total of 360 faculty, staff and	**360 faculty and staff increase over the baseline**	**Academic Weakness:** 1. Academic Under-Preparedness 2. Inadequate advising and intervention

administrators will have participated in professional development activities with pedagogy that is culturally sensitive and relevant to the learning/working environment. **Meets CDP Goals - 4** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**	of 0 2023 Target: 72 2024 Target: 145 2025 Target: 217 2026 Target: 290 2027 Target: 360	processes 3. Low retention and graduation rates **Management Weakness:** 1. Lack of professional development on the learning needs of Hispanic students **Fiscal Weakness:** 1. Inadequate fiscal resources to address faculty, staff, and student needs
Objective 5: By Sept. 30, 2027, Merritt will increase the sector-specific employment rate for Hispanic and low-income career education students from 76% to 90%.	**_14-percentage point increase over baseline of 76%** 2023 Target: 79% 2024 Target: 82% 2025 Target: 85% 2026 Target: 87% 2027 Target: 90%	**Academic Weakness:** 1. Academic Under-Preparedness 2. Inadequate advising and intervention processes 3. Low retention and graduation rates **Management Weakness:** 1. Lack of professional development 2. Lack of degree alignment with regional economy **Fiscal Weakness:** 1. Inadequate support services 2. Inadequate fiscal resources

4. Institutionalization of New Practices and Improvements

Institutionalization of Grant Practices: Sustainability is an important component of Merritt College's planning for this five-year initiative. Title V funds will represent a resource for strengthening institutional capacity and reaching strategic goals while implementing processes that will last after grant funding expires. Merritt College has developed a system that will ensure the improvements made with the help of this grant are permanent and increase capacity, rather

than simply making short-term changes.

The College is fully prepared to institutionalize and scale up the functions of the grant. Merritt College will help the project personnel adjust, change or revamp each grant component, with consideration for both enhancing student success and scale up the services offered through the *Aspira Project* that contribute to this success.

As the table below demonstrates, the college will progressively increase funds used to pay for the salaries by the end of the five years, these positions will be fully funded by the college. There is also the possibility that part-time positions will be expanded to full-time positions to address the expansion or scaling-up of the *Project* services.

One-time purchases/costs in this grant will include renovations, technology hardware as well as purchasing Financial Literacy modules. Sustainability will be dependent on increases in Merritt College's internal capacity. Strengthening support programs, faculty capacity and data infrastructure will enable Merritt College to better meet the growing needs of its increasingly diverse student body. The components of the *Aspira Project* will have a profound impact on the institution's core practices and processes beyond the grant period. Lastly, Merritt College expects to see increased enrollment and retention because of this project, which will lead to increased revenues based on higher enrollment numbers.

Institutionalization of the *Merritt Project* Personnel						
Position	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Post Grant Institutional Funds**
Project Director	0%	0%	0%	25%	50%	100%
Career/Transfer Advisor	0%	0%	0%	25%	50%	100%
Outreach Specialist	0%	0%	0%	25%	50%	100%
Research Analyst	0%	0%	0%	25%	50%	100%

Title V Post-Grant Cost and Revenue Projection		
Cost Estimate	**Anticipated Revenue (collection of tuition and fees)**	**Net Gain**
$567,710	150 students x $4,212.26/ea. = $631,839	$64,129

Equipment and Technology Maintenance and Upgrade Plan: All equipment purchased with Title V grant funds will be placed on the regular equipment and software maintenance and upgrade schedules. The Institution will receive state funds for capital replacement and maintenance as part of a budget allocation designated annually in the institutional operating budget.

5. Five-Year Plan to Improve Services to Hispanic and Other Low-Income Students

Merritt College has taken on a special responsibility to improve the educational, socioeconomic, and employment status of the service area. Merritt College has been engaged in facilitating the educational and career success of the Hispanic and low-income population that it serves in the region. Utilizing this Title V funding, Merritt College will build upon and improve the work it has been doing for years across the institution and in the community to ensure the region's large Hispanic population has access to, succeeds in, and graduates from the College. Every division of the College is engaged in supporting the population with the services, materials, and resources necessary to achieve the goals and move on to the next stage of life.

Institutional Goals	Current Interventions	Proposed Title V Interventions
Outreach and Entry		
Increased access to higher education through outreach and dual enrollment	• Enrollment Services Coordination • Outreach Presentations • Web-based recruitment • Social Media • Counselor and Counseling Intern visits to High Schools	• Outreach to local partner school districts to propose dual enrollment opportunities • Partnership with UC and CSU for Educational Partnerships

| Hispanic and low-income students prepared to be successful in college	• Learning Communities • Dual Enrollment • Counseling College Success Course • Puente Project • Professional Development	• Outreach to local partner high school districts in dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment projects • Increased participation in dual enrollment courses • First year experience course with financial literacy component for dual enrolled students
Student Pathway Support		
Increased retention rates	• Student Campus Life • Phone Banking • Learning Communities • Puente Project • Undocumented Community Resource Center • CA Promise Program	• Intervention strategies from Student Support Coordinators • Professional development for faculty and staff
Graduation, Transfer, and Job Placement Support		
Increased graduation rates and job placement	• Limited academic tutoring • Limited job search support • Student Ed Plan advising • Financial Aid Application Workshops	• Internship, externships and work-related experiences • Outreach to local partner school districts in dual enrollment • Increased participation in dual enrollment courses • Intervention strategies from Student Support Coordinators • Professional development for faculty and staff
Increased transfer rates to partner institutions	• Transfer institution representative visits with students • Transfer Admission Guarantees with select UC campuses • Associate Degree to Transfer agreement with California State University • 2+2 articulation agreements with CSU System partners	• Outreach to local partner school districts in dual enrollment • Increased participation in dual enrollment courses • Intervention strategies from Student Support Coordinators • Professional development for faculty and staff

B. QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN

The ***Aspira Project*** builds on evidence-based strategies and application of a Strong Theory to create conditions for student success. As such, the Project uses the Program Action Logic Models to articulate operationally the Theory of Change and guide the planning of Project interventions and other activities. The following templates graphically describe the sequence of activities linked to increasing the number of Hispanic and low-income students persisting, completing degrees and moving on to rewarding careers. Informed by a clearly articulated Theory of Change, which details how change in educational practices leads to improved educational outcomes for students, the ***Aspira Project*** team can identify what is to be achieved, how goals will be reached, and how progress will be measured. The following models describe logical linkages between activities, outputs, and intended outcomes for the project.

A key framework that captures the logic and rationale for implementation strategies is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design the Loss and Momentum Framework (*Achieving the Dream (May 2013). Completion by Design Loss and Momentum Framework)*. Completion by Design (CBD) and its framework provides a model pathway to college completion from onboarding to career. The research supporting the framework indicates that if community colleges restructure the student experience and build linkages and interdependence among the systems that touch the lives of the students, they can dramatically and efficiently increase rates of completion, especially for low-income students. CBD's Loss and Momentum Framework indicates that community college students lose momentum at four crucial points: (1) college entry; (2) academic catch-up; (3) selecting and progressing toward a set goal/program of study; and (4) goal completion. It further indicates that community colleges that build linkages between these crucial points and support students with academic support are more likely to

increase persistence and completion rates, especially for Hispanic and low-income students. The following graphic demonstrates how it is designed to provide support for Hispanic and low-income students at the four crucial points.

The proposed **Aspira Project** strategies (*outreach, onboarding, tutoring, and wrap-around services provided by Advisor Fellows and Career and Transfer Advisors*) also meet the standard of "promising" evidence as indicated by the **What Works Clearinghouse** as they "provide coordinated comprehensive student supports to improve credit accumulation and completion of non-degree credentials along career pathways" as indicated by **WWC.** *(Bettinger, E. P., & Baker, R. B. (2014). The effects of student coaching: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student advising. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 36, 3-19).*
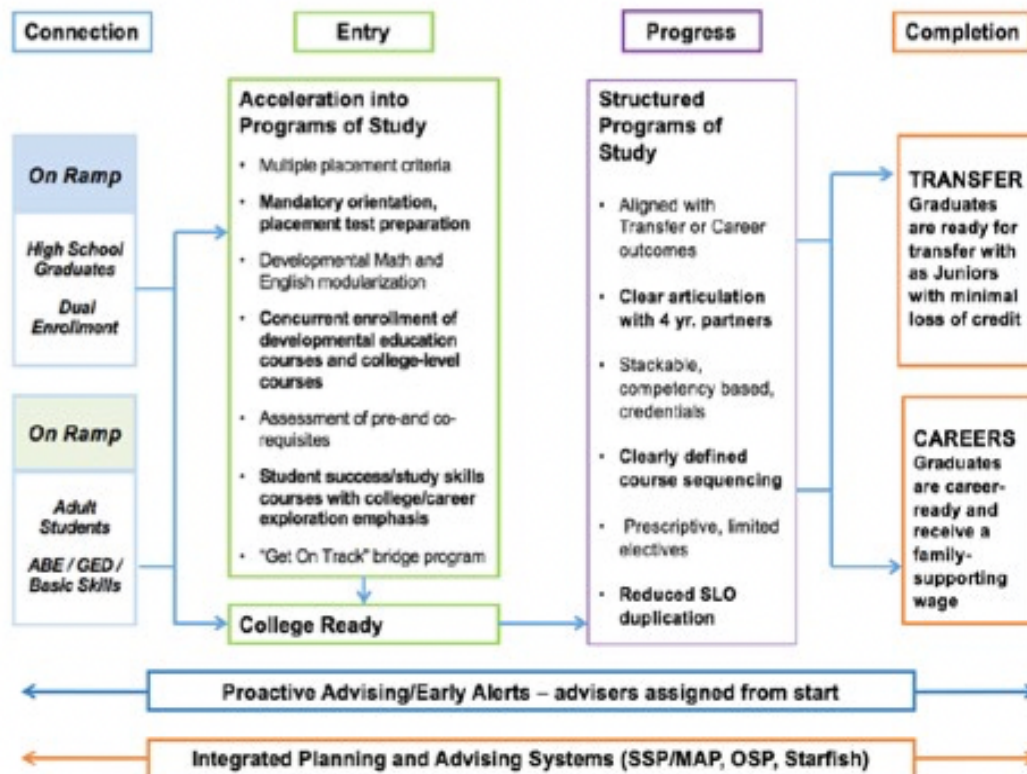
At the initial point of **Connection,** career aligned dual enrollment courses and the **Aspira**

Project will introduce students to opportunities to enhance their academic skill sets and career goals, engage them with outreach personnel, prepare them to engage with campus staff and faculty, identify a career-aligned academic path, and provide the student and family with financial literacy education and matriculation guidance.

At the *Entry* phase of the process the objective is to help students choose and enter a program of study as quickly as possible. Many students seeking degrees drop out after only one or two terms. Colleges, therefore, need to understand how students get from their initial enrollment in the college to the point of passing their first college-level courses in their chosen program of study. The *Aspira Project's* approach will set the stage for students to meet first-year benchmarks by providing robust new student orientation and first year seminar courses. Advisors will work with the student to choose a major, enroll in courses, complete nine credits in the program of study, and complete gateway math and English requirements.

STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTION AND ENTRY				
Activities	**Outputs**	**Short Term**	**Mid Term**	**Long Term**
Connection/Entry K-12 outreach Partnerships with K-12 schools Dual enrollment Financial Literacy Exposure to career opportunities	**Connection/Entry** # of K-12 students engaged # of K-12 families engaged # of school partnerships # of peers participating # of faculty participating # of events and activities # of adult school students engaged	**Connection/Entry** Increased sense of belonging among K-12 students and adult school students Increased career awareness Increased awareness of future educational opportunities Increased awareness of the financial implications of pursuing higher ed.	**Connection/Entry** Dual Enrollment students better prepared for college level rigor Increased number of students prepared to make Pathway decisions Increased number of students participating in financial literacy experiences	**Connection/Entry** Enhanced collaboration with K-12 partners Improved financial literacy Improved student performance in college level courses Improved curricular alignment

At the **Progress** phase, lack of career assessment, educational planning, mentoring and/or counseling may cause our students, even those who successfully enroll in college-level coursework, to falter. They often lack defined educational pathways and career goals. They frequently attempt gateway classes without understanding what is required of them. They regularly struggle alone without seeking or receiving the additional help that is available to them.

At the center of proposed strategies for **Progress**, the *Aspira Project* proposes to enhance advising systems so that student progress monitoring occurs more proactively and systematically and that student supports are strategically deployed to address students' individual needs. The intent of proactive advising is to help students select a program of study to meet their life and career goals with highly structured academic maps that lay out a semester-by-semester plan toward on-time completion.

The *Aspira Project* will design maps to include 15 credits per semester (or 30 per year), indicate milestones and pre-requisite courses, and empower advisors to effectively case manage student academic progress and provide educational, career, financial and personal advising. Academic advising and career counseling are important functions of a college or university. If it is not conducted with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness, the most important function in the college or university — instruction — will fail to achieve its purpose of ensuring that students succeed in navigating the curriculum to completion. The *Aspira Project* will provide academic advising that occurs every term for every student ensuring that students will stay on a guided pathway to success.

The Project will develop and implement a Proactive Advising strategy designed to boost student success. The Proactive Advising efforts will offer students an opportunity to learn the importance of early major exploration, credit accumulation, connections with faculty, tutoring,

mentoring, and the advantages of institutional programs that promote timely completion. The

Aspira Project will ensure that programs are focused and streamlined and that options for more

flexibility and accelerated programs are available for students as well.

STRATEGIES FOR PROGRESS				
Activities	**Outputs**	**Short Term**	**Mid Term**	**Long Term**
Advising Proactive Advising **Academic Maps** Highly-structured academic maps that lay out a semester-by-semester plan toward on-time completion **Tutoring** Tutoring in high need courses **Mentoring** Peer mentoring with students	**Advising** # students exposed to pathways relevant to academic and career goals # students exposed to scheduling strategies to bolster credit accumulation **Academic Maps** # students engaged in relevant career and transfer pathway **Tutoring** # students engaged in tutoring in high need courses **Mentoring** # students engaged in mentoring program	**Advising** Students feel more aware and supported when selecting Guided Pathway Students more aware of strategies to bolster credit accumulation **Academic Maps** Students feel more aware and supported when selecting Guided Pathway **Tutoring** An increase in pass rates for high need courses **Mentoring** An increase in student feelings of sense of belonging and inclusion	**Advising** More students enrolled in 15 credit hours per semester **Academic Maps** More students engaged in Guided pathways More students are engaged in the transfer and/or career placement process **Tutoring** An increase in retention rates for high need courses **Mentoring** An increase in student retention and participation rates	**Advising** Increase in students completing on time Increase in students gaining credentials aligned to their interests, abilities, and career goals **Academic Maps** Better grades, higher pass rates in career and transfer relevant courses **Tutoring** Increase in students completing on time. Better grades, higher pass rates **Mentoring** Increase in students completing on time. Better grades, higher pass rates

At the **Completion** phase, the *Aspira Project* will track rates of completion by program

and determine whether students are able to move successfully to the next level of educational

programming. Students seeking assistance with bilingual career development will be provided

with guidance to determine the career that best suits their interests, determine the best curriculum

to follow, and find out about job opportunities in that area. The bilingual career Counselor will provide access to job opportunities, and access resume building, online job boards, announcements and information about upcoming job-related events. Collaboration with regional industry employers is critical to ensure that the college's programs are aligned with the requirements for success in further education and careers.

STRATEGIES FOR COMPLETION (CAREER AND TRANSFER)				
Activities	**Outputs**	**Short Term**	**Mid Term**	**Long Term**
Transfer and Articulation Career Exploration Career-aligned articulation Career-aligned transfer advising 4-year degree opportunities at Merritt **Job Placement** Resume building Online job boards Job fairs Hiring events	**Transfer & Articulation** # of Students exposed to career and future education opportunities # of Student students being exposed to and motivated to transfer **Job Placement** # of Students exposed to career and future education opportunities # of events # of students served	**Transfer & Articulation** Students feel more aware and supported when deciding to transfer **Job Placement** Students feel more informed and capable when seeking employment	**Transfer & Articulation** Clearly developed pathways for high demand, high wage careers Enhanced articulation of career-aligned pathways **Job Placement** Increased number of students visiting career center	**Transfer & Articulation** Higher transfer rates Expanded 4-year pathway options with partners Increased 4 year degrees among transfer students **Job Placement** Increase in graduates working in high-demand fields Boost to regional economy

To promote consistency and build capacity across multiple sectors, the ***Aspira Project*** will implement a cross-training approach to **Enhancing Professional Learning**. Creating the conditions for teachers to teach well is a crucial factor for greater student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Effective, engaging, and relevant professional development (PD) experiences can help teachers provide all students with experiences that lead to greater learning and achievement. The consensus, articulated by Desimone (2009) and others,

holds that effective PD possesses a robust content focus, features active learning, is collaborative and aligned with relevant curricula and policies, and provides sufficient learning time for participants.

The cornerstone of the Project's approach is the ESCALA professional development series. The model works with cohort teams of faculty to become facilitators of active learning-centered environments through the adoption of student engagement techniques, formative assessment, and evidence-based strategies that help students become better learners. Each year, a faculty and staff cohort will enroll in the ESCALA's nine-month Certificate of College Teaching and Learning workshop. This workshop provides a training mechanism for faculty to design their own action research project and create their own professional development workshops to deliver back to peers on their campus. This ensures that learning on their own campus continues after the

STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT				
Activities	**Outputs**	**Short Term**	**Mid Term**	**Long Term**
Faculty Development Invest in faculty development to promote best practices in pedagogy Invest in faculty development to promote student equity Inclusion of Dual Enrollment counterparts in PD opportunities	**Faculty Development** # of College faculty participants #of Dual Enrollment faculty participants # of professional development opportunities offered	**Faculty Development** Faculty empowered to make changes Collaboration between k-12 and campus increased Increase pedagogical strategies used that foster student sense of belonging	**Faculty Development** Enhanced collaboration among educational professionals in the community Change in campus culture that fosters student sense of belonging	**Faculty Development** Equity focused faculty Refined connection and communication Clear pathway to career and degree attainment Campus culture and classroom instruction fosters educational equity

training ends.

C. ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

The Activity Objectives present our outcomes in attainable and measurable terms that will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project in meeting its objectives, and they are related to the proposed goals to address weaknesses identified in the Comprehensive Development Plan.

Overview of Activity Components, Goals, Objectives, and Problems Addressed			
Component #1	**Student Success**	**Significant Problems**	**CDP Goals**
Activity Goal: Increase Hispanic and low-income retention and graduation rates by developing a centralized retention hub that co-locates onboarding, advising, and tutoring as well as implements Guided Pathways that includes outreach to local high schools, alignment of curriculum establishment of centralized onboarding processes, centralized and augmented intervention systems, individualized pathways to graduation.	**Objective 1:** By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Objective 2:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	• Student Success • Transfer • Professional Development

Component #2	Transfer	Significant Problems	CDP Goals
Activity Goal: Increase Hispanic and low-income student and transfer rates through centralized and enhanced transfer advising systems, centralized and augmented intervention processes, and increased collaboration with four-year institutions.	**Objective 1:** By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Objective 2:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027. **Objective 3:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual number of Hispanic students who transfer from Merritt to a four-year institution to 395 from a 2020 reporting year of 275. This target is set based on achieving parity with the number of transfers White and Asian students.	2, 3, 5	• Student Success • Transfer • Career and Job Placement • Professional Development

Overview of Activity Components, Goals, Objectives, and Problems Addressed cont'd			
Component #3	**Career and Job Placement**	**Significant Problems**	**CDP Goals**
Activity Goal: Develop a system building upon career-aligned pathways to provide greater access to high-demand jobs and help students transition from postsecondary education into careers that support sustainable living and feed regional economic growth.	**Objective 1:** By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Objective 2:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027. **Objective 4:** By Sept. 30, 2027, a total of 360 faculty, staff and administrators will have participated in professional development activities with pedagogy that is culturally sensitive and relevant to the learning/working environment. **Objective 5**: By Sept. 30, 2027, Merritt will increase the sector-specific	2, 4, 5	• Student Success • Transfer • Career and Job Placement • Professional Development

	employment rate for Hispanic and low-income career education students from 76% to 90%.		

Overview of Activity Components, Goals, Objectives, and Problems Addressed cont'd			
Component #4	**Professional Development**	**Significant Problems**	**CDP Goals**
Activity Goal: Provide continuous professional development for all personnel associated with the college by offering a year-round calendar of training activities, including using student success data and the adoption of new learning systems and methods to improve student – learning and student services outcomes.	**Objective 1:** By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Objective 2:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027. **Objective 3:** By September 30, 2027, increase the annual number of Hispanic students who transfer from Merritt to a four-year institution to 395 from a 2020 reporting year of 275. This target is set based on achieving parity with the number of transfers White and Asian students.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	• Student Success • Transfer • Career and Job Placement • Professional Development

	Objective 4: By Sept. 30, 2027, a total of 360 faculty, staff and administrators will have participated in professional development activities with pedagogy that is culturally sensitive and relevant to the learning/working environment.		
	Objective 5: By Sept. 30, 2027, Merritt will increase the sector-specific employment rate for Hispanic and low-income career education students from 76% to 90%.		

D. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND TIMETABLES

The **Aspira Project** represents a comprehensive approach to address the needs of Hispanic and low-income students by refining the pipeline from secondary education to a four-year degree, expanding student support services, and increasing access to four-year programs and careers. The proposed project has identified four strategies that address institutional gaps and improves capacity of Hispanic and low-income students to persist and complete. The strategies described here are based on current literature and best practices at similar institutions and incorporate our knowledge of what works with our students.

Goals and Related Strategies	
Student Success	
Goal 1	*Increase Hispanic and low-income retention and graduation rates by developing a centralized retention hub that implements Guided Pathways and includes outreach to local high schools, alignment of curriculum, establishment of centralized onboarding processes, individualized pathways to graduation, and*

	augmented intervention systems
Related Strategies	**1a.** Hire Outreach Specialist to conduct outreach to local high schools **1b**. Expand Dual Enrollment opportunities for students **1c.** Hire Academic Advisors to assist Hispanic and low-income students access college and community resources **1d.** Augment online new student orientation to include financial literacy **1e.** Develop and align degree programs **1f.** Implement case management advising **1g.** Provide financial literacy training for Hispanic and low-income students in first-year experience courses

Transfer and Graduation	
Goal 2	*Increase Hispanic and low-income student and transfer rates through enhanced transfer advising systems, augmented intervention processes, and increased collaboration with four-year institutions.*
Related Strategies	**2a.** Hire Transfer Advisors to assist Hispanic and low-income students as they navigate the transfer process **2b**. Coordinate with four-year institutions to increase the ease of transfer for students from Merritt. **3c**. Hire a Financial Aid Specialist to assist students as they navigate the financial aspects of transferring from Merritt.
Career and Job Placement	
Goal 3	*Develop a system building upon career-aligned pathways to provide greater access to high-demand jobs and help students transition from postsecondary education into careers that support sustainable living and feed regional economic growth.*
Related Strategies	**3a**. Hire Faculty Lead to facilitate the alignment of career pathways to the curriculum. **3b**. Engage in outreach to regional high demand industries to align career pathways curricula. **3c**. Hire Academic Advisors to help students navigate coursework with the goal of increasing job placement in meaningful careers.
Professional Development	
Goal 4	*Strengthen guided pathways and student support systems through faculty and staff professional development that focuses on Hispanic and low-income student success.*
Related Strategies	**4a.** Provide cultural and equity awareness training for staff and faculty **4b.** Faculty and staff attend HSI conferences to learn best practices Establish a robust work-based learning experience program **4c**. Expand professional development opportunities for dual enrollment instructors

Across the nation, ***dual enrollment*** is growing in popularity as it reduces the cost of college attendance and increases academic and career readiness. Such programs allow students to earn credits free, or at a fraction of the cost that they would otherwise pay, which has a profound impact on students and families. Students exhibit improved educational outcomes such as academic achievement and progress toward a degree. Sometimes students can apply general-education credits toward a degree from a participating four-year institution. Those interested in career and technical training can move directly into the work force after graduation or get a two-year degree much faster. Dual enrollment also helps institutions by strengthening ties between colleges and their local high schools. Professors can shape how students are being prepared for college, while teachers gain professional development opportunities and insights into what is expected of their students after they graduate. For some struggling schools, calling on the expertise of local community colleges and four-year universities has expanded their academic offerings. Additionally, colleges with declining enrollments have found it a valuable outreach tool. The table below describes the proposed implementation strategies.

Student Support Strategies	
Dual Enrollment Program Development: According to a 2012 study by the Community College Research Center, dual enrollment has become a viable and effective method to prepare any student to complete high school and enter college. Merritt is positioned to implement an expanded dual enrollment initiative in conjunction with proven strategies for student success and enhanced transfer capabilities to enhance the institution's capacity to better serve all students.	**Research Evidence:** Dual enrollment programs are an effective method for increasing college attendance as they increase college readiness for participants in both cognitive and non-cognitive domains. These programs positively affect college going behavior through numerous mechanism such affordability and access as well as enhancement of participants college-student role, including who attends college, what skills are required, what college can lead to, and their own self-identification as college students. This effect can be particularly powerful for underserved minority students whose access to college may otherwise be limited.
	Best Practice: Dual enrollment as a form of outreach that consists of postsecondary faculty to secondary faculty exchange facilitates the seamless transition from high school to community college for students. Outreach to increase students' awareness of dual enrollment

	programs benefit students' progress and educational institutions' goals for completion.
First-Year Seminar is designed to help students develop skills for academic success and build a viable learning community. Topics include: career and educational opportunities, financial aid, *financial literacy*, communication skills, problem solving, time management and study skills, goal settings, campus resources and stress management.	***Research Evidence:*** Research on the effects of first-year seminars on community college freshmen indicates that participating students are more likely to complete their first academic year, persist from fall term to fall term, earn a higher cumulative GPA, and earn a higher number of credit hours than students at large.
	Best Practices: University of Texas, El Paso was recognized for promoting Hispanic student success in 2019 by Excelencia in Education. A key component of its approach to students is a first-year seminar designed to engage first-year students intellectually in an academic theme through which they will further develop their knowledge and skills, as well as their engagement with the academic community.
Course Alignment: The Project will provide participating schools with an opportunity to work collaboratively to align secondary and postsecondary coursework. Dual enrollment courses will be designed to prepare students to complete high school and to understand and meet college-level expectations both academically and socially.	**Research Evidence:** Research indicates a positive direct effect of dual enrollment on first-year college GPA, which remained even after controlling for precollege variables. Students who participate in dual enrollment are more academically motivated and engaged than nonparticipants. Higher persistence rates have been found for community college students who participate in dual enrollment.
	Best Practice: One of the programs that the team studied when developing the acceleration math model was the Path2Stats project at Los Medanos College that enables below college-level math students to move through the gateway math sequence in one semester. Path2Stats is a single, 6-unit course that students can complete to move directly to the transfer-level, credit-bearing statistics. Students who enrolled in it were more than four times as likely to complete college-level math as their peers in traditional developmental sequences.

A complementary strategy to improve our student outcomes is the integration of instruction and academic support. A strong link between advising and student support services to academic instruction is important to increase progress and goal attainment. The relationship between academic advisor and students can be the most crucial factor in retention and graduation. The student/advisor relationship is of particular importance to Hispanic students as

research indicates that academic advisors can serve as the cultural connection point to campus resources, which can foster a greater understanding of how to navigate the campus. Advisors who are proactive can serve as the bridge to success for these students who have not been exposed to the culture of higher education and for whom personal relationships with faculty and staff are important. Proactive advising is a high impact practice that promotes student achievement, retention, and graduation, especially for community college students. Moreover, proactive advising practices improve graduation rates and narrow achievement gaps for Hispanic, first-generation college students and underserved students.

Student Support Strategies cont'd	
Case Management Advising: Each student will be assigned an advisor who will case manage their academic progress and provide educational, career, financial and personal advising during their tenure on campus. The advisor serves as a "single point of contact" who will monitor student academic progress and follow-up with student at critical points during the semester to provide guidance and assistance as needed.	**Research Evidence:** Many early academic interventions are critical to student success, particularly for low-income and first-generation college students. Colleges can improve the retention of first-year students by increasing their utilization of campus support services, and this is particularly true for Hispanic students. Case Management Advising has proven to be effective in improving student outcomes. Students who experience comprehensive and structured support services including intrusive advising have higher persistence rates and academic performance in math than non-participants. Rodgers, K., Blunt, S., & Trible, L. (2014). A real PLUSS: An intrusive advising program for underprepared STEM students. *NACADA Journal*, *34*(1), 35-42.
	Best Practice: Among One of the Case Management practices that the team studied was the Beacon Advisement Program at South Texas College that focused on increasing the persistence rates of first-year students. Key program components included mandatory orientation and advising sessions. The College has seen increases in the retention, course grades, and course completion rates of students that participated in the services compared to non-participants.

A "Transfer Culture" promotes, and values transfer as an institutional priority and establishes insight among students that transfer, and completion of a bachelor's degree are

expected and attainable. The essential element of a transfer culture is creating a climate that supports transfer so that students know how to effectively negotiate the transfer process. First-generation students are more likely to experience adjustment difficulties in the transfer process. In many cases, these students have not been exposed to higher education processes and experiences from their family, therefore, they do not have the social and cultural capital to transition with ease. Students from affluent families are more likely to attend college because their parents have had experience with higher education, understand the cultural and economic value of postsecondary degrees, and transmit this knowledge and insight to their children. Conversely, Hispanic and low-income students are more likely to be the first person in their family to attend college and are less likely to possess the "cultural knowledge" essential to navigating the transition to a four-year institution.

Transfer Support Strategies	
Guided Pathways to Transfer: The Project will develop a Guided Pathway to Transfer. The pathway program is a five-year structured sequence of coursework with dual enrollment that begins in the 11th grade and completes in the third year of college with an associate degree and transfer-ready to baccalaureate programs. Transfer Advisors will guide students through the process of transferring from Merritt to four-year institutions.	**Research Evidence:** There is evidence that Guided Pathways for high school students can improve student academic achievement, college enrollment and completion rates. Other studies have shown there is a strong correlation between early program entry and degree completion and transfer.
	Best Practice: Among the programs using the broad field, guided pathway or flexible major programs that the team has studied was the Queensborough Community College program that requires all first-time students to enroll in one of five academic clusters in Teacher Education, business, arts, health, and liberal arts, resulting in retention rate increases of 7% and the three-year graduation rates of 4%.
Articulation with Four-Year Institutions: The Project will develop articulation agreements with the regional postsecondary institution where our students will likely to transfer. The articulation will be designed to relate course content at the community college level to course content and the	**Research Evidence:** Two-year colleges are a great start for students interested in pursuing bachelor's degrees. Significantly greater proportions of students at Hispanic-serving baccalaureate institutions started out at two-year institutions. Hispanic Serving community colleges play an important role in facilitating the baccalaureate degree attainment of Hispanic students.
	Best Practice: We studied the East Los Angeles College's Transfer Committee that was formed to improve

undergraduate requirements of baccalaureate programs. Furthermore, the project will promote a Transfer Culture as an institutional priority to increase the transfer rates of Hispanic and low-income students.	transfer rates. The committee identified the reasons why students were not transferring and to determine how the institution could overcome difficulties to ensure students continue to a baccalaureate institution. Since implementing added resources, making the articulation agreements both accessible and understandable in guiding students toward transfer, the number of students pursuing transfer programs increased. The Project will develop easy-to-follow transfer guides and have them available in print and on the project web page.

Career and Job Placement Strategies	
Alignment with Industry: The Project will develop a Guided Pathway to career and job placement by aligning the curriculum with high demand industries in the region. The Faculty Lead will engage department chairs to collaborate with industry leaders and align curriculum to prepare students for industry.	**Research Evidence:** There is evidence that Guided Pathways with a focus on career outcomes for school students can improve student academic achievement, college enrollment and completion rates. Career placement is increased when students have degrees and certification that prepares them for industry.
	Best Practice: Metro State University in Denver has engaged in an ongoing project to align academic curriculum with high demand industry needs. This effort has improved the institution's capacity to serve students by providing the laboratory resources and academic content to prepare them for the work force (Golich, V. L., Haynes, S., Hillhouse, E., & Pfeifer, D. (2018). Aligning Academic Offerings with Industry Needs and Facility Construction, While Making Space for Relevant Public Private Partnerships (P3s). *Metropolitan Universities*, *29*(2), 135-149.).
Career Focused Advising: The Project will employ academic advisors who will conduct career interest assessments and advising students who seek to enter the workforce upon completion at Merritt as to the correct pathway that will lead students to their desired employment outcome.	**Research Evidence:** Integrating career advising with the academic advising process has been linked to greater linkages with major selection, progress to degree, job placement outcomes (Lynch, J., & Lungrin, T. (2018). Integrating academic and career advising toward student success. *New Directions for Higher Education*, *2018*(184), 69-79.).
	Best Practice: Portland State University has developed an advising model that combines both academic advising and career advising. This model is designed to streamline the major selection to career options for students that increase retention, graduation, and placement.

Another facet of the Aspira approach is faculty professional development that bridges the gap between Dual Enrollment and the college campus. Educational outcomes for Hispanic students are associated with the quality of instruction throughout the educational pipeline. The intent of the Project's cross-training approach is to improve the quality of both instruction and the environment in which it takes place. The hope is to enhance academic preparedness while fostering a college-going culture for the Hispanic, low-income, first-generation population. Hispanic students' perceptions of their learning environment and subsequent academic achievement can be directly connected to the cultural relevancy of the pedagogy in their classrooms. The proposed approach to professional development seeks to improve pedagogy to advance educational outcomes for Hispanic and low-income students.

Professional Development for Faculty and Staff	
Faculty Development: The Project will implement the ESCALA professional development series. The model works with cohort teams of faculty to become facilitators of active learning-centered environments through the adoption of student engagement techniques, formative assessment, and evidence-based strategies that help students become better learners. Each year a cohort of fifteen faculty and staff will enroll in the ESCALA's nine-month Certificate of College Teaching and Learning workshop. This workshop provides a training mechanism for faculty to design their own action research project and create their own professional development workshops to deliver back to peers on their campus. This ensures that learning on their own campus continues after the training ends.	**Research Evidence:** Research studies have pointed to quality of faculty as one of the most key factors affecting student persistence. Community colleges serve a predominately first-generation population, and professional development for faculty facilitates student success at community colleges. The success of students at Hispanic Serving Institutions is directly connected to the role of faculty. Additionally, professional development can improve faculty's performance (Hernandez, J. C. (2019). Leaking pipeline: Issues impacting Latino/a college student retention. *Minority student retention*, 99-122.).
	Best Practice: Among the programs considered in developing the professional development plan was the ESCALA Certificate of College Teaching and Learning workshop at the University of New Mexico-Taos in 2012. Faculty evaluation indicated significant improvement in student outcomes in their courses through application of instructional strategies and effective use of data to inform their teaching practices. STEM faculty have reported that, for the first time, no or very few students failed their courses.

Cross Training Approach: To enhance collaboration between college faculty and dual enrollment instructors, the Project will develop professional development opportunities for new and seasoned instructors. Dual enrollment instructors will collaborate with college instructors to develop interchangeable units, lessons and assignments that fulfill course competencies, and learning objectives.	**Research Evidence:** Strong collaborations enhance instruction for both parties, increase the understanding of what types of teaching and learning are happening in each setting, and assist students in their transition from high school to college. Both high school teachers and college instructors have much to gain from one another via collaborations through concurrent enrollment professional development.
	Best Practice: Northwest Arkansas Community College faculty in the English department conducted a two-week online discussion for concurrent enrollment instructors. Participants reported the experience "elevated the status of high school teachers who often have few opportunities to advance their careers." Others shared the sessions helped further their understanding of the functions of evidence in student writing assignments and group grading.

Timetable: The timeline below outlines the specific management tasks to be completed, including primary participants, methods involved, tangible results and projected time frames. It covers the entire five-year grant period, with information presented by the federal fiscal year.

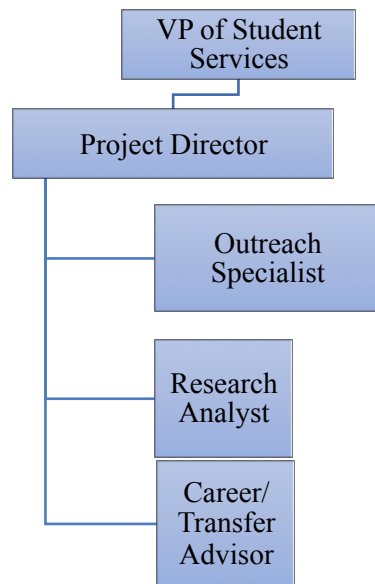| IMPLEMENATION STRATEGIES TIMETABLE (2022 - 2027)			
Tasks and Methods to Achieve Objectives	**Persons(s) Responsible**	**Activity Begins**	**Milestone/ Completion Date**
Appoint Project Director (PD) and Steering Committee members	Merritt President	October 2022	November, 2022 Positions Appointed
Onboard External Evaluator (EE), (FAS), Outreach Specialist (OS), Transfer and Career Advisors (TCA), and Research Analyst (RA)	Human Resources (HR), PD	November 2022	All staff onboarded by February, 2023
Train advisors and student support personnel in case management advising protocols	PD, Faculty	January 2023	Completed March 2023 – *Continuous training* held for new staff
Implement evaluation plan to collect and analyze outcome data	PD, EE Institutional Search (IR)	November 2023	Plan completed by January 2023, ongoing data collection/analysis until 2027
Outreach to industry for purposes of curriculum alignment and increased job placement	PD, Faculty	November 2022	Completed May, 2023 – Updates when necessary

Outreach to four-year institutions for purposes of curriculum alignment that fosters increased transfer rates	PD, Faculty	October 2022	Completed March 2023
Coordinate with regional high schools to implement to implement a robust advising outreach program for Hispanic and low-income students	PD, Outreach Specialist, Faculty, and High School Faculty	February 2022	Robust program established by May, September, 2022 *Continuous activity* and expansion of collaborations
Develop and implement new student orientation and first-year experience (FYE) course with strong financial literacy component	PD, FYE instructor, orientation leaders	February 2022	Robust program established by May, September, 2022 *Continuous activity* and expansion of collaborations
Implement professional development program and create a Community of Best Practices	PD, Faculty, Staff	May 2023	Professional Development occurs *annually* until May, 2027
Recruit faculty and staff for professional development training	PD	January 2023	May 2027, *Continual recruitment*
Conduct annual evaluation and present findings and recommendations to Steering Committee, Transfer Council, Dean of Instruction, faculty, staff, and students	PD, IR, Steering Committee	November 2023	Completed August, 2027 *Annual Meeting*
Conduct end of project evaluation and present findings and recommendations to Steering Committee, Transfer Council, Dean of Instruction, faculty, staff, and students	PD, IR, Steering Committee	October 2026	Results Disseminated by October, 2027

E. QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

Management of the ***Aspira Project*** will include: 1) effective coordination and implementation of activities; 2) accountability, communication, and cooperation across institutional units; and 3) sustainable improvements in how the institution addresses its mission as an evolving two-year community college. The objectives that guide project management are to: (a) ensure consistent adherence to all federal and institutional policies; (b) maintain open communication among/between Title V and Merritt College staff; (c) monitor on a continuous

basis the progress throughout to achieve specific project milestones and objectives on schedule; and (d) provide effective and efficient administration along with evaluation of the project.

Merritt College will provide project oversight primarily through the Vice President of Student Services who will work closely with the Project Director (PD), Activity Director (AD), and all Deans, Directors, and College Round Table and will be shared with the Board of Trustees, allowing for assistance with resolving any issues, barriers, or challenges facing the project. This will effectively ensure institutional support, progress towards completion of activities, and the institutionalization of the Title V project functions once the grant period is over. The Merritt College President has delegated responsibility for the Project to the PD, who will serve as a 1.0 FTE and will be a new hire. Administrative and data collection support will be provided from the grant funded researcher and the Office of Institutional Research. The Organizational Chart below generally depicts reporting lines among Grant Funded personnel.

VP of Student Services

Project Director

Outreach Specialist

Research Analyst

Career/ Transfer Advisor

Management Processes: The Project Director will report directly to the Vice President of Student Services (VPSS), and both will report to the President and the Leadership Team. The President will report to the Chancellor and Board of Trustees but may also have the Program Director provide reports to the Board periodically. This will ensure an appropriate and effective level of reporting and communication on project matters.

Project Management Procedures: A Comprehensive Project Manual will be developed by the Project Director, with support from the VPSS, to specify all standard operating guidelines, policies, procedures, staff responsibilities, lines of authority, job descriptions for staff, and reporting procedures and timelines. All personnel and college administration officials will have access to this manual, which will also be posted online on the college website.

Title V Staff Meetings and Time and Effort Reporting: Bi-weekly meetings between project staff will be scheduled to discuss progress, upcoming deadlines, problems/solutions, and evaluation processes. Additional meetings may be scheduled, as necessary. Time and Effort reports will be filed monthly with the Grants Management office, detailing time, and effort by all full-time and part-time personnel. The time and effort reports will be signed by the Project Director.

Quarterly Activity Progress Reports: Progress reports by the Project Manager, detailing implementation progress, travel, use of consultants, development and piloting of courses and student support systems, formative evaluation issues, unanticipated problems and obstacles encountered, potential solutions, anticipated delays in projected timeline, and requests for assistance, etc., will be prepared and discussed with relevant groups.

Annual Performance Reporting: Annual formative reports will be prepared and submitted to the Title V Program Officer by the Project Director, reviewed by the project's

external evaluator, and distributed to the President, Chancellor and Board of Trustees prior to the finalization for institutional endorsement before submission to the Department of Education.

Fiscal Monthly Expense and Budget Status Reports: Fiscal reports will be generated by the Grants Management Office, in conjunction with the Business Office, and provided to the Vice President of Student Services. Real-time budget access will also be available to the Project Manager.

Accounting of Title V Funds: An external auditor, using procedures established by the State and U.S. government, will audit the project annually and issue a report that will account for all federal funds received and disbursed.

Separation of Funds: Title V funds will be kept separate and restricted for project use only. Separate records of financial transactions will be maintained to ensure that no institutional funds are being supplanted. An external auditor will perform annual audits to verify use of funds.

Personnel: Institutional policies and procedures will be followed when filling Title V positions, including open competition for vacancies, as well as adherence to all required state and federal affirmative action policies. The Title V VPSS and the Human Resources Director will maintain information regarding grant-funded professional project personnel (resumes, job descriptions, other relevant paperwork). Only personnel approved in the budget and the government award notification will be paid through Title V funds. New positions will be advertised widely in publications and local media sources, including the Peralta Community College District (PCCD) Human Resources website. .

Governance/Representation: The Title V program manager and other personnel will meet quarterly with the External Evaluator. They will also serve on appropriate committees and task forces where the projects funded by the grant can be represented.

Dissemination of Project Information: The President, VPSS, and Project Director will make quarterly reports to the Chancellor, Board of Trustees, and more regularly if specific information must be discussed, including when the grant period is over, and the grant is closed.

The Title V project will be administered in compliance with all Title V rules and regulations, as demonstrated by appropriate documentation and reports: Annual Performance Reports, which will be submitted in a timely manner; and expenditures, equipment purchases and hiring, which will all be done according to institutional, state, and Federal guidelines.

Merritt College is an EEO/AA employer, and has extensive experience with the management of Federal grants, specifically Title V. The Title V Director will exercise control over the budget and will have constant access to current statements of expenditures, budget status, and reconciliation with project records.

F. QUALITY OF KEY PERSONNEL

Merritt College proposes key professional personnel for the ***Aspira Project*** who possess experience, qualifications and commitment related to the Project's stated activity objectives. Further, the time commitment of these key personnel is realistic and appropriate to the Project's implementation, management, and liaison tasks. As the following chart shows, the management team for the ***Aspira Project*** includes key personnel - the Project Director - who will ensure that all objectives are met and that the operation of the Project flows smoothly and efficiently. This project management team has experience and training related to the Project and its objectives, including familiarity with sponsored programs and Title V. The full-time assignment of both key personnel is realistic and appropriate for coordinating Project activities and will take advantage of their familiarity with the campus, their placement and roles in the organization and the

aggregate strengths of the entire Title V team.

ASPIRA PROJECT KEY PERSONNEL	
Position/Personnel/Experience	**Responsibilities**
Project Director (1.0 FTE): This position will be a new hire at Merritt. A search and screen will be conducted that will seek a candidate with qualifications that will support a successful project implementation. The minimum qualifications include: 5 years experience managing Title V grants, experience managing large, multi-million dollar and multi-year budgets; experience supervising and managing direct reports, experience developing and implementing new initiatives in higher education, a minimum of 5 years in higher education, and a Master's degree from an accredited institution. The preferred qualifications include: Ph.D. from an accredited institution, 3 years experience implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion projects in higher education; demonstrated leadership experience in higher education.	Oversee, facilitate and coordinate implementation of all project components; direct report to Merritt College Director of HSI Initiatives. Plan, develop and implement program goals and services in accordance with grant requirements; evaluate existing services and student needs by attending campus meetings and offsite workshops and conferences. Coordinate with appropriate units within the college in the development of programs and services to meet the goals of the assigned grant. Plan, negotiate, coordinate, and supervise the functions of the grant and submit reports as requested by funding source and College. Train and evaluate the performance of assigned staff; interview and select employees and recommend termination and disciplinary actions. Prepare annual program budgets and administer and authorize all expenditures. Develop and implement procedures related to the administration of the grant program. Plan and coordinate research necessary to measure program effectiveness. Plan and coordinate staff in-service activities for professional and personal growth. Direct day-to-day tasks to meet project objectives. Guide implementation of the Advising Center. Oversee and monitor the implementation of the Guided Pathways structures, working with academic departments and with Student Success Coordinator. Facilitate creation of comprehensive student success systems (case management advising, new student orientation, supplemental instruction, tutoring, mentoring, career planning, early alert). Coordinate with Career and Transfer Supervise articulation and transfer efforts and liaison with regional four-year colleges and universities. Coordinate faculty professional development program.

The qualifications of the key **personnel** are related to the activity objectives: each has expertise in leading campus-wide initiatives and working with academic departments; developing curriculum, student services, and faculty professional development; and/or

implementing career initiatives. Similarly, the Project will deploy additional professional staff

critical to the implementation of the *Aspira* **Project**:

Additional Staff Supporting *the Aspira* Project
Career & Transfer Advisor – (1.0 FTE): A dedicated career and transfer Advisor doesn't currently exist at the college. The project will hire a new person for the grant-funded position. This position will engage students through advising current Merritt students as to course selection, career exploration, transfer, and job placement. The salary for this position will begin institutionalization starting in year 4.
Outreach Specialist – (1.0 FTE): This position is essential for developing and implementing the outreach to regional secondary institutions for the purpose of fostering increased participation in dual enrollment programs and increase awareness of educational and career opportunities for students. The salary for this position will begin institutionalization starting in year 4.
Research Analyst (.5FTE): A part-time person will be hired to assist with tracking of data pertinent to grant activities. This person is essential for evaluation and assessment of progress of grant activities and will inform data-driven decisions on how to appropriately adjust activities to maximize effectiveness The salary for this position will begin institutionalization starting in year 4.

G. QUALITY OF EVALUATION PLAN

The Project's External Evaluator (consultant) will provide the *Aspira* **Project** management team with general guidance and project insight regularly to assist them with decision-making, identify strengths and weaknesses to gauge success, and increase project effectiveness each semester. The evaluation plan for this Title V project will follow closely established evaluation methodologies. It will employ systematic methods for data collection and analysis, which are part of a rigorous scientific design, are outcomes oriented, and intended to improve the decision-making processes at Merritt College.

The *Aspira Project* will continue to improve Merritt's systemic, operational, and academic capacity to serve Hispanic and low-income underprepared students. Effectively measuring that improvement is critical to Merritt's growth and sustainability. The Title V Project Director will be responsible for the implementation of all project activities as described in the implementation

plan and as outlined in the timeline. The Program Director, the administration, data collection staff, and other key project personnel will collect data on activities and outcomes to ensure goals and objectives are met.

Data will be used to inform the formative evaluation process and the preparation of the project annual report to the Department of Education. This plan will be reviewed by the external evaluator annually to ensure that data collection and analysis processes, as well as conclusions drawn, are reliable and valid. Formative reports will be shared with the President for review and endorsement prior to submission to the Department of Education. These annual formative reports will be reviewed and analyzed to ensure they inform future decisions and course corrections that may be necessary to ensure the objectives and outcomes are met. The most desirable outcome upon completion of the project is that the final summative evaluation will show that proposed interventions were implemented with fidelity, project objectives were achieved, and program elements were successfully institutionalized.

Responsibility for the evaluation process rests with the Project Director and the College President. Under this guidance, the Title V Director will oversee and be responsible for an integrated and comprehensive evaluation process including formative and summative evaluations of activities implementation during each year of the project. The Title V Director, with assistance from the external evaluator, will gather, analyze, and report the qualitative and quantitative data.

Ongoing formative evaluation activities will involve discussions among key project personnel, and reported to the President and the College Round Table allowing for timely adjustments to strategies and schedules, approval for reallocation of resources, and revised managerial decisions that will course-correct and improve all aspects of the project while it is unfolding. Quarterly reports will document progress being made in activity implementation and

the achievement of specific activity objectives. Unexpected and unintended results, with recommendations for how to manage them successfully, will also be documented. Summative evaluation activities will be conducted at the end of each grant year to determine whether the activities have achieved their intended outcomes and produced intended results.

Final Summative Evaluation: This will be completed at the end of the five-year project to assess the impact of each accomplishment on the actual progress toward becoming a more efficient and effective institution in serving and meeting the educational needs of the communities in this region. The final report will address specific outcomes for each activity and will summarize the impact of the project in remedying institutional deficiencies, improving performance measures, and attaining institutional goals.

Evaluation Outcomes and Measures: The project evaluation process is critical for determining how and whether the Title V investment continues to make Merritt College more capable and effective at meeting key project goals, and in documenting improvements on project performance measures. Evaluation outcomes, which determine overall project impact, and performance indicators, which represent specific metrics on the attainment of activity objectives, define the project's success while providing rigor and accountability for the evaluation and management of the project. In addition, several broader and more contextual aspects of the project's impact will also be analyzed, including: 1) project management and coordination effectiveness; 2) the relationship of the project and its individual objectives and activities to the current structures within the institution; and 3) the degree to which Merritt can quantify with certainty that the impact produced was as a result of actions taken, and that these same actions will continue to provide for success in the future. A summary, listing each of the objectives with

its corresponding activities, indicators, and person responsible for data collection and analysis follows.

Standard data elements from the Peoplesoft system and the Data Coordinator will be used to generate useful metrics that will guide and enable changes to strategies to support better outcomes.

Objectives	Performance Indicators	Data Sources, Data Analysis, Persons Responsible and Timeline
Objective 1: By September 30, 2027, achieve a 24-percentage point (52%) increase in the Hispanic freshman retention rate to 70% over 2020 baseline of 46%. Reaching this goal will achieve parity with transfer-directed students with respect to fall-to-spring retention. **Meets CDP Goals - 1, 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, and 3**	**52% increase over baseline of 46%** 2023 Target: 51% 2024 Target: 56% 2025 Target: 60% 2026 Target: 65% 2027 Target: 70%	**Data Sources:** 1. Annual data on retention specific to Hispanic freshmen **Data Analysis:** Compare the retention data for Hispanic freshmen to annual targeted goals (*Quantitative Analysis*). **Persons Responsible:** Activity Director, Institutional Research **Timeline:** Annual

Objectives	Performance Indicators	Data Sources, Data Analysis, Persons Responsible and Timeline
Objective 2: By September 30, 2027, increase the annual rate of degree or certificate completion among Hispanic students by 100% from 22% in 2019-2020 to 44% in 2026-2027. **Meets CDP Goals - 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 2, 3, 4, and 5**	**100% increase over baseline of 19%** 2023 Target: 26% 2024 Target: 31% 2025 Target: 35% 2026 Target: 40% 2027 Target: 44%	**Data Sources:** 1. Annual data on completion and credentials earned by Hispanic students. **Data Analysis:** Compare the completion data and number of credentials earned annual targeted goals (*Quantitative Analysis*). **Persons Responsible:** Project Director, Institutional Research **Timeline:** Annual
Objective 3: By September 30, 2027, increase the annual number of Hispanic students who transfer from Merritt to a four-year institution to 395 from a 2020 reporting year of 275. This target is set based on achieving parity with the number of transfers White and Asian students. **Meets CDP Goals – 2, 3** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**	**44% increase over baseline of 275 students** 2023 Target: 299 2024 Target: 323 2025 Target: 347 2026 Target: 371 2027 Target: 395	**Data Sources:** Annual data on Hispanic and Low-income transfer rates **Data Analysis Techniques:** 1. Compare the annual transfer rates to baseline data and annual targeted goals (*Quantitative Analysis*). 2. Compare transfer rates between Hispanic and other students (*Quantitative Analysis*). **Persons Responsible:** Project Director and Institutional Research **Timeline:** Annual
Objective 4: By Sept. 30, 2027, a total of 360 faculty, staff and	**360 faculty and staff increase over the**	**Data Source:** Annual data on faculty development activities/workshops, 'sign-up' sheets and number of

Objectives	Performance Indicators	Data Sources, Data Analysis, Persons Responsible and Timeline
administrators will have participated in professional development activities with pedagogy that is culturally sensitive and relevant to the learning/working environment. **Meets CDP Goals - 4** **Addresses Significant Problems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5**	**baseline of 0** 2023 Target: 72 2024 Target: 145 2025 Target: 217 2026 Target: 290 2027 Target: 360	workshops delivered. **Persons Responsible:** Project Director, Activity Director **Timeline:** Annual
Objective 5: By Sept. 30, 2027, Merritt will increase the sector-specific employment rate for Hispanic and low-income career education students from 76% to 90%.	**14-percentage point increase over baseline of 76%** 2023 Target: 79% 2024 Target: 82% 2025 Target: 85% 2026 Target: 87% 2027 Target: 90%	**Data Sources:** Annual data on Hispanic and Low-income employment rates **Data Analysis Techniques:** 1. Compare the annual employment rates to baseline data and annual targeted goals *(Quantitative Analysis)*. 2. Compare employment rates between Hispanic and other students *(Quantitative Analysis)*. **Persons Responsible:** Project Director and Institutional Research **Timeline:** Annual

Formative Evaluation Processes: Formative evaluation procedures will follow the structure provided in the activity narrative: 1) Objectives/Performance Indicators are tied to specific activities and timelines; 2) the Project Director will evaluate progress on a monthly basis; meet with the team to assess progress, problems or obstacles; and make informed changes that are more likely to meet project goals; 3) Periodic meetings among the *Aspira Project* personnel will provide analysis on data and therefore ensure progress; 4) The President and his Leadership Team will discuss progress and data elements quarterly, or more often if necessary,

and examine the project's contribution to Merritt College's strategic priorities; and 5) the Management Team will generate data, findings and recommendations that will aid the development of quarterly progress reports that will inform internal decision-making.

Summative Evaluation: The ***Aspira Project*** Director will be responsible for the Annual and Final Performance Reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. In Year 1, the Project Director, supported by program personnel and the external evaluator, will review, and validate the baseline and comparison data. Using formative evaluation data, the ***Aspira Project*** Director will draft annual internal reports, and with the support and input from project staff and the external evaluator, will finalize reports. Each report will address progress toward meeting project goals/objectives.

External Evaluation: Due to the scope of the activities and the high priority placed on achieving project objectives, Merritt College will retain *David Trujillo and Associates*, an external evaluator who are experienced and who demonstrates the necessary ability and qualifications for: 1) external evaluation, statistical analysis and research design; 2) evaluating Title V and other institution development projects; 3) working with HSIs and their unique circumstances; and 4) supporting student success and retention initiatives. Periodic review of project data and progress by the external evaluator will assist the crucial formative evaluation process and provide quality control. The external evaluator will also assist the Title V Director and key personnel regarding: 1) the progress the project is making toward meeting its individual and collective objectives; 2) noting significant barriers to achievement of project objectives; 3) recommendations for overcoming those barriers; and 4) characterizing unanticipated benefits and problems associated with the project. During semi-annual visits to campus, the external evaluator will assist the Title V Project Director and key personnel with linking internal and external

evaluation processes; and will gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data on each objective and conduct a comprehensive summative evaluation at the end of each project year. As with the internal evaluation, the external examination will assess the extent to which the project has achieved its specific objectives in a timely manner, the ability of each activity to impact the overarching goals, and the degree to which they lead to institutional self-sufficiency, and the potential for institutionalization of successful activities. The external evaluator will write and provide bi-annual reports to the Project Director.

H. BUDGET

The *Aspira Project* is ambitious yet attainable, comprehensive yet targeted, and above all sustainable. The costs detailed in the attached budget narrative are necessary to achieve our intended outcomes and reasonable in relation to the project's objectives and scope. The proposed Title V investment of **$2,980,033** will have a profound and sweeping impact on Merritt College by assisting the college with developing and implementing the Career-aligned Guided Pathways model to reduce student cost and time to graduation, including 1) outreach with local and regional secondary schools, 2) alignment of existing associated courses and degree plans to give students flexibility to move between majors without accumulating excessive credits; 2) integrating academic support systems with case management advising to keep students on track to graduation and transfer, including proactive caseload management to help struggling students**;** 3) alignment of coursework and degree pathways with high-demand industries; 4) increasing collaboration with four-year partner institutions to increase transfer rates; 5) increasing the rate of job placement for graduates into high-demand industries; and 6) frequent professional development opportunities that will increase the quality of pedagogy and awareness of the learning needs of Hispanic and low-income students.

Personnel: Systemic improvements will lead to student retention and completion gains that will yield the revenues necessary to sustain personnel who will be essential to the ongoing implementation of Guided Pathways. The majority (**$2,107,417**) of the *Aspira Project* budget will fund salaries and fringe benefits of the personnel described in the Management Plan above who will ensure the *Aspira Project* boosts Merritt College's efforts to increase student enrollment, retention, success, and persistence to graduation and/or transfer, and job placement. Institutionalization of staff begins in Year four of the project at 25%, with 50% of the Project Director, Outreach Specialist, Career and Transfer Advisor, and Research Analyst salary and fringe sustained by Merritt by the fifth year of the project. Merritt College is prepared to fully institutionalize the staff positions at 100% by the end of the grant.

Travel: The *Aspira Project* travel budget of **$180,000** will allow Merritt faculty and staff to learn from other community colleges and universities that have implemented Guided Pathways, and it will allow us to share best practices and lessons learned from our implementation of the model over the next five years. Travel to HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities) and AHSIE for grant-related activities is also included in the cost of this category.

Equipment: To meet the grant objectives, Merritt will require additional Smart Classrooms that will use Smart Boards and Smart Stations. These purchases will occur each year of the grant, and upgrades will occur in years 4 and 5. The total request for equipment is **$55,000.**

Supplies: Supplies (office supplies, marketing materials, and computers) for the outreach and retention efforts for the *Aspira Project* -funded staff and training materials for professional development events) constitute **$110,000** of the total request but are essential to the success of

this project. Merritt will need to upgrade computers with equipment and software that meets current industry standards. The costs include all computer components including necessary wiring, software, cable connections, accessories, environmental fees, and sale taxes for purchase and installation during year one of the project. The college has also estimated costs for annual upgrades, maintenance, and repairs for the duration of the project, years 2 through 5. Upon completion of the grant, Merritt College will assume responsibility for maintenance and upgrades of the equipment. Advising and course scheduling, and financial literacy software and server hardware purchases to enable software features represent the second-largest project investment. These technologies will serve as the "backbone" of Guided Pathways implementation, providing platforms for the college to provide vastly improved enrollment and advising experiences for students that place constant emphasis on pathways to careers and transfer.

Contractual: Merritt College will contract with ESCALA Educational Services Incorporated to implement a five-year professional development process. It will entail annual Faculty Retreats that consist of two-day interactive workshops for faculty featuring demonstrations of culturally responsive teaching and education on how cultural context impacts teaching and learning interactions. These retreats will be held on campus each summer at the cost of $25,000 per year for a total request of **$100,000**.

Construction: Renovation of an existing classroom building will be done to make sufficient room for the *Aspira Center*, the centralized retention hub that includes offices for advisors and space for tutor and mentoring programs as well as other related grant personnel. This renovation will enable the institution to implement a centralized advising model that will help all students onboard and retain. This expenditure will occur in years 1 and 2. The cost

estimate for this portion of the project is **$327,616,** and has been provided by Merritt College's

Director of Planning and Construction.

    Other: These costs include $15,000 annually to fund comprehensive external evaluation

of the project during the grant for a total request of **$75,000**.