CONNECT》》US

PROPOSAL

Postsecondary Attainment Asset Mapping

Submitted by: KConnect / ConnectUS

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Cover Letter

To: James Hissong, Director of Grants and Strategic Partnerships
Kent Intermediate School District
Educational Service Center
2930 Knapp St. NE Grand Rapids, MI 49525

December 12, 2025

Dear Mr. Hissong,

On behalf of KConnect and its consulting arm, ConnectUS, we are pleased to submit this proposal for the Kent County Postsecondary Attainment Asset Mapping Project. KConnect is a Kent County–based collective impact organization focused on ensuring that children and families have a clear path to economic prosperity. As the county's backbone organization for systems change, we have deep local relationships, a strong infrastructure for collecting and working with data, and experience fostering collaboration among the K-12, higher education, business, and nonprofit sectors. ConnectUS adds expertise in project management, facilitation, strategy development, and messaging.

We understand that Kent ISD, along with Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) and the Kent County Reconnect Collaborative, seeks a partner to inventory and map programs and services that contribute to postsecondary attainment. We view this project—determining what resources exist, where gaps remain, and where targeted investments can address disparities—as an important building block of our county's efforts to help young people and adults on their path from enrollment in postsecondary education to career success.

Our approach to this project combines a rigorous methodology for collecting and analyzing information, an inclusive process to ensure that partners and community members are meaningfully involved at every step, and a commitment to making data understandable and actionable for a broad range of users. Together, KConnect and ConnectUS bring the community connections, insight into local dynamics, and technical know-how needed to deliver a clear and comprehensive picture of the ecosystem supporting postsecondary attainment in Kent County.

Enclosed you will find a proposal narrative describing our organization (including key staff who will lead this project), our proposed methodology and work plan, and a detailed project budget totaling $81,000. (While this figure reflects our best estimate of the resources needed to carry out the full scope of work, we are open to discussing adjustments or phasing to suit Kent ISD's budget and priorities.) All forms and affidavits required in the RFP will be completed and submitted with the final package.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal and for your leadership in creating postsecondary opportunities in Kent County. We look forward to the possibility of partnering with Kent ISD to develop asset maps that reflect our community's strengths and help increase postsecondary access and success and economic mobility for all residents.

Sincerely,

Salvador Lopez
President & CEO, KConnect

Mark Woltman
Managing Director, ConnectUS

KConnect is a Kent County–based, 501(c)(3) collective impact organization that brings together public and private partners in service of a shared vision: a future where every child and family have the opportunities and support they need to thrive, no matter their starting point. KConnect connects people, organizations, and data to make lasting systemic change.

ConnectUS is KConnect's consulting arm. ConnectUS staff work with organizations and collaboratives to facilitate productive conversations, manage projects efficiently, develop plans that lead to measurable outcomes, and translate complex data into practical strategies and compelling messages.

Methodology

We propose a four-phase methodology that we will apply consistently to all three components of the scope of work, with specific strategies tailored to school districts, colleges and universities, and credentialing and certificate providers. The four phases are as follows:

Phase 1: Design
We will collaborate with Kent ISD, GRCC, and the Kent County Reconnect Collaborative to finalize definitions of key terms, confirm goals, and agree on the project's governance. We will take stock of existing datasets, dashboards, and program inventories, then design common data collection templates that specify the information to be collected for each component (e.g., program name, provider, target population, location, cost, schedule, and supports). We will also establish an explicit equity framework with highlighting key subgroups so that the final maps shed light on disparities and unmet needs.

Phase 2: Data Collection & Verification
We will collect data using the standardized templates developed in Phase 1, as well as surveys, document reviews, and interviews with program and institutional leads. For Component 1, we will partner with school districts, public school academies, and community-based organizations to identify and describe district- and school-based initiatives to promote access to postsecondary education. For Component 2, we will engage institutions of higher education and community-based partners to inventory college and university programs that support access, transition, retention, and completion. For Component 3, we will work with credentialing and training providers to identify programs that confer credentials recognized by the Kent County Reconnect Collaborative.

Phase 3: Analysis & Synthesis

We will break down the programs identified in Phase 2 by geography, population, and program type in order to uncover areas of strengths, as well as gaps in, and duplication of, services. We will pay particular attention to transition points, such as the move from high school to postsecondary education and from short-term training to employment, and assess how well existing programs support learners making those transitions. We will also crosswalk the information collected in Phase 2 with community data to pinpoint areas where resources are scarce relative to need.

Phase 4: Mapping & Reporting

We will develop clear, user-friendly products that organize and visualize the data, including web-ready interactive maps and dashboards and written summaries for each component. We will conduct validation sessions with partners to refine the findings and help them plan how they will use these new tools in their work.

Community Engagement & Communication

Meaningful engagement with partners and community members will be central to this project. We will establish a small steering group comprised of Kent ISD, GRCC, and representatives from districts, institutions of higher education, workforce development sector, and community-based organizations. This group will meet regularly to review progress, resolve issues, and reach consensus on key decisions.

For each component of the project, we will hold working sessions with representatives of the relevant sector (K–12, higher education, credential providers) to co-design data collection templates, surveys, and interview protocols; review preliminary maps; and ensure that the final products are accurate and helpful. We will also organize focus groups or listening sessions with students, adult learners, and residents—particularly from communities that have experienced barriers to postsecondary success—offering stipends and other forms of support as appropriate to reduce barriers to participation.

Communication with partners will include regular email updates, brief progress memos, and presentations at existing meetings when possible. At the end of the project, we will provide a concise slide deck and set of talking points that Kent ISD and the Reconnect Collaborative can use to share results.

Work Plan & Timeline

We anticipate completing the project within approximately nine to ten months following contract execution. Below is a sample timeline. We will establish a final schedule in partnership with Kent ISD and its partners.

- **Months 1–2:** Launch project, design data collection instruments and protocols,
- finalize work plan, confirm datasets and contact lists.
- **Months 2–5:** Establish partnerships with districts, institutions of higher education, credentialing and training providers, and community-based organizations; conduct surveys, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews.
- **Months 5–7:** Consolidate, analyze, and synthesize data; create draft maps and findings.
- **Months 7–8:** Hold validation sessions with partners; refine maps and recommendations.
- **Months 8–9:** Finalize documentation; create slide deck and talking points; hand off datasets, maps, and dashboards; provide presentations to stakeholders and end users.

Data Organization & Presentation

Overall Approach

We will develop a comprehensive, mixed-methods asset map that integrates quantitative survey data, qualitative insights, and geospatial information. All data will be cleaned, coded, and organized in a structured, FERPA-compliant environment. The final asset map will be interactive, easy to navigate, and designed for long-term community use.

Data Organization & Management

- All data will be stored on a secure, access-restricted server in alignment with FERPA.
- Surveys will be administered using Qualtrics, with structured datasets exported for analysis.
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and coded using standard qualitative analysis techniques.
- Identifiable student information will never be displayed and will be securely destroyed one year after the end of the project.
- We will create a central database that allows users to export datasets in standard formats such as Google Sheets, Excel, and CSV.
- Each entry in the database will include metadata describing the source, the date of collection, and any known data limitations.

Analysis Tools
- Quantitative analysis: Conducted using Qualtrics, Excel/Google Sheets, and statistical tools built into Tableau or Power BI.
- Qualitative analysis: Thematic coding to surface patterns across student, educator, and partner experiences.
- Geospatial analysis: Standardized program information will be used to support mapping in Google and KUMU platforms.

Analysis Tools

1. Network Mapping (KUMU or similar)
- Shows relationships among programs, organizations, and systems that support college access.
- Highlights structural gaps, pathways, and opportunities for coordination.

2. Geographic Mapping (Google Platforms)
- Google MyMaps for location-based mapping of programs, service areas, and access points.
- Integrated filters for geography, sector, population served, eligibility, and program characteristics.

3. Dashboards (Tableau or Power BI)
- Interactive dashboards visualizing asset distribution, access patterns, program utilization, and geographic or demographic gaps.
- Designed for district leaders, community partners, and long-term decision-making.

Usability, Documentation & Sustainability
- Mapping and dashboard design emphasizes clarity, accessibility, and user-friendliness.
- Users can filter data by geography, population served, program type, and sector.
- Documentation package will include definitions of key terms, descriptions of data fields, a data dictionary, metadata standards, and guidance for updating and maintaining the asset map over time.

Final Outputs
- A comprehensive, interactive college access asset map
- Exportable datasets (Google Sheets, Excel, CSV)
- KUMU network maps
- Tableau or Power BI dashboards
- A documentation package supporting long-term use and maintenance

Organizational Experience

For more than a decade, KConnect has been convening partners from different sectors in Kent County and using shared data to drive systemic change. We have led or supported initiatives related to postsecondary access and attainment, housing stability, early childhood, and workforce development. The team assigned to this project will have more than 40 years of combined experience conducting community-based research, analyzing and visualizing data, and facilitating collaboration among a range of stakeholders.

Project Budget

The following line-item budget reflects the personnel, outreach, travel, and technology needed to complete the three components of the Postsecondary Attainment Asset Mapping Project. The total project cost is $81,000. **Our current estimate is approximately $30,000 for Component 1, $30,000 for Component 2, and $21,000 for Component 3.** We will work with Kent ISD to make a final determination regarding the allocation of resources.

Category	Description	Amount
Personnel – Project Director	Overall project leadership, design of methodology, partner engagement, and oversight of data analysis.	$16,000
Personnel – Senior Data Analyst	Quantitative and qualitative data collection design, integration of datasets, and analytic modeling.	$20,000
Personnel – GIS & Visualization Specialist	Development of asset maps, dashboards, and data visualization products.	$13,000
Personnel – Asset Mapping Facilitator	Design and facilitation of asset-mapping and synthesis of insights.	$14,250
Personnel – Project Coordinator	Day-to-day coordination, scheduling, documentation, and communication with partners.	$12,000
Participant and Community Engagement Costs & Logistics	Stipends, food, materials, and venue costs for focus groups, listening sessions, and partner meetings.	$3,250
Data, Software, and Materials	Specialized data access (if needed), mapping and visualization tools, printing, and project materials.	$2,500

Total		**$81,000**

This budget assumes that Kent ISD and partners will provide access to relevant administrative data at no cost and that we will make use of existing software licenses when feasible. We will discuss any potential changes to the scope of work or budget with Kent ISD before moving forward.

Project Team Leadership

Salvador López, President & CEO, KConnect – Project Executive Sponsor

As President and Chief Executive Officer of KConnect, Salvador leads a collective impact network focused on creating opportunities for children and families in Kent County. His work centers on designing and facilitating place-based, cross-sector collaborations that address racial and economic disparities in education and community well-being.

Salvador is recognized for his ability to translate complex data into clear stories that motivate action and for building authentic relationships with leaders in the worlds of education, philanthropy, government, business, and community-based organizations. For this project, Salvador will provide executive-level sponsorship, ensure the work complements broader county strategies, and engage senior leaders to promote the adoption and use of the asset map.

Mark Woltman, ConnectUS Managing Director – Project Director

As Managing Director of ConnectUS and Vice President of Strategy and Learning for KConnect, Mark works closely with partners to gather and learn from data, uncover inequities, and develop strategies to bring about systemic change. His experience includes major community studies and reports on topics such as housing stability, early childhood, economic security, and postsecondary outcomes. He has facilitated cross-sector workgroups, supported the design of data dashboards and community briefs, and helped partners interpret findings to improve policies and practices. For this project, Mark will be responsible for overall project design, supervision of analytic work, quality assurance, and delivery of final products.

Lauren Conrad, Lead Senior Consultant, ConnectUS – Lead Consultant

Lauren brings extensive experience helping public and nonprofit clients with strategic planning, human-centered design, and facilitation. She is skilled at designing and leading collaborative workshops, turning data into useful insights, and developing practical plans to act on those insights. For this project, Lauren will be the primary point of contact for day-to-day logistics, lead stakeholder engagement activities to ensure that the work remains grounded in the needs and perspectives of Kent County partners and community members, and translate findings into clear, user-friendly tools, reports, and recommendations.