

USDLA Compass Award for Distance Learning/Community Building and Belonging

Award Description: This prestigious award recognizes outstanding achievement in designing and delivering innovative support services that elevate the online student experience while enhancing student success in persistence and graduation from online programs. It honors institutions, programs, or individuals who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to fostering holistic student well-being, engagement, and success in virtual learning.

Community-Building & Belonging Programs that cultivate meaningful peer connections through virtual clubs, interest-based groups, and inclusive social platforms across an online degree program or institutionally based or within a class for higher education or within an online school, grade level, or class for preschool through 12th grade schools. Example: Online cultural festivals, student-led forums, gamified networking

Rubric:

Criterion	Strong (10)	Medium (5)	Weak (1)
Articulates the innovation	Clearly articulates the innovation, the components involved, the people required for success and resources required for successful implementation.	Provides enough details to understand the basics of the innovation.	Lacks a description of the innovation.
Demonstrated Impact on Student Outcomes	Clearly shows significant positive impact on student persistence, success, or graduation with strong data or examples.	Shows some evidence of positive impact on student outcomes but lacks detailed data or examples	Limited or no evidence of impact on student outcomes.
Scalability and Sustainability	Innovation is clearly scalable across multiple contexts and sustainable long-term with detailed plans.	Innovation shows potential for scalability and sustainability but with limited supporting detail.	Innovation lacks clear scalability or sustainability plan.

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Ability to Serve All Students	Fully inclusive approach addressing all student needs across demographic and academic variables.	Partially inclusive with some attention to the needs of all students in support.	Minimal or no consideration of all students.
Evidence of Student Involvement	Strong, clear examples of student participation in design, delivery, or implementation of the innovation.	Some evidence of student involvement but limited examples or unclear roles.	No evidence or unclear evidence of student involvement.
Originality and Forward-Thinking Approach	Innovation shows a highly original, creative, and forward-thinking approach with potential to influence future practice.	Shows some original or creative elements, with a reasonably forward-thinking approach.	Lacks originality or forward-thinking elements, mostly conventional or derivative of current practices.