CONTENTS OF THE PROPOSAL: NEW INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

I. Descriptive Information

-Name of Institution Proposing the Program: Mid-Plains Community College (MPCC)

-Name of Proposed Program: Cybersecurity Program

-Degrees/Credentials to Be Awarded:

- Cybersecurity Certificate

Other Programs Offered in This Field by the Institution:

MPCC currently offers Information Technology coursework and related technical programming that would support and complement the proposed Cybersecurity Program.

CIP Code: 43.0404 – Cybersecurity Defense Strategy/Policy

Administrative Units for the Program: Business, Humanities, and Social Sciences Division

Proposed Delivery Sites and Types of Delivery

The proposed courses and program offerings are intended to support in-person, online, and hybrid delivery formats to increase student access across the MPCC service area.

Date Approved by Governing Board: November 19, 2026

Proposed Date of Implementation: Fall 2027

Description, Credit Hours, and Purpose of the Proposed Program

Mid-Plains Community College proposes the development and implementation of a Cybersecurity Program designed to address growing workforce demand in cybersecurity and information security-related fields. The proposed program would provide students with applied, workforce-aligned training in cybersecurity fundamentals, network security, automation, systems protection, and threat analysis.

The proposed certificate option would consist of approximately 24 credit hours and include coursework such as:

- Network and Information Security Basics
- Scripting for Automation and Security
- Building Secure Environments
- Network Attacks, Intrusions, and Penetration Testing
- Information Systems, Forensics, and Legal Topics
- Securing and Monitoring IoT Networks

- Security Capstone or Internship

The program is intended to prepare students for entry-level careers in cybersecurity and related fields while also supporting transfer opportunities and future workforce advancement.

II. Review Criteria

A. Centrality to Role and Mission

The proposed Cybersecurity Program aligns directly with Mid-Plains Community College's mission of providing workforce-responsive education and career-ready training opportunities that support regional economic and workforce needs. Cybersecurity continues to be one of the fastest-growing career fields nationally and regionally, with increasing demand across healthcare, agriculture, energy, government, education, and private industry sectors.

The proposed program supports MPCC's commitment to workforce development by preparing students for high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations. The program would also expand technical education opportunities for students throughout the MPCC service area and strengthen the college's ability to respond to evolving workforce needs.

The program also supports MPCC's ongoing efforts to expand technology-focused programming and modernize career pathway opportunities for rural students and adult learners.

B. Evidence of Need and Demand

1. Need for the Program

National Need:
The need for cybersecurity professionals continues to increase at the regional, state, national, and global levels. The global cybersecurity market is projected to grow from 194 billion dollars in 2024 to 563 billion dollars by 2032. In addition, cybercrime costs are projected to exceed 10 trillion dollars annually.

Employers continue to report significant shortages in qualified cybersecurity professionals. Research cited within the proposal identifies nearly two million unfilled cybersecurity positions worldwide, with approximately 500,000 open positions within the United States alone.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 33% growth for information security analysts between 2023 and 2033, demonstrating continued long-term workforce demand.

The proposed program would help address workforce shortages by preparing students for careers such as:

- Cybersecurity Analyst
- Information Security Technician
- Network Security Specialist
- Incident Response Specialist

Local Need:

The need for cybersecurity education in western Nebraska is driven by persistent workforce shortages, increasing digitization of infrastructure, and expanding rural broadband connectivity. Regional labor data from the Nebraska Department of Labor indicates that the Mid-Plains region, which includes North Platte, McCook, and Ogallala, continues to experience extremely tight labor conditions with unemployment rates near 2–3% and employer-reported difficulty filling positions across most industries. Employers consistently identify a lack of applicants with technical and digital skill sets as a primary barrier to workforce growth, reinforcing the need for programs that build foundational IT and cybersecurity competencies (Nebraska Department of Labor).

Statewide workforce analyses further show that rural Nebraska continues to experience structural labor shortages and an aging workforce, creating long-term gaps in replacement workers across key industries. These shortages are particularly impactful in rural communities such as Broken Bow, Imperial, and Valentine, where smaller labor pools limit employer access to specialized technical talent (Nebraska Legislative Research Office).

Ongoing broadband expansion efforts across rural Nebraska are increasing both connectivity and cybersecurity exposure for essential services. As schools, healthcare systems, local governments, and agricultural operations become more digitally integrated, the need for trained professionals who can secure and manage these systems continues to grow (Nebraska Examiner).

Nebraska community colleges currently offer either a cybersecurity certificate, demonstrating strong statewide alignment with industry expectations and reinforcing the need for MPCC to expand offerings to remain competitive and responsive to workforce demands. The Cybersecurity program would create opportunities for partnerships and transfer pathways with Nebraska four-year institutions that offer cybersecurity bachelor’s degree programs. This expansion would strengthen MPCC’s capacity to serve both traditional students and adult learners seeking career advancement or retraining in high-demand, technology-focused fields.

2. Demand for the Program

Demand for cybersecurity education is supported by both regional employer need and statewide digital workforce gaps. Across western Nebraska communities including North Platte, McCook, Broken Bow, Ogallala, Imperial, and Valentine, employers are

increasingly dependent on digital systems for operations, logistics, healthcare delivery, education, and agriculture. As these systems expand, demand grows for employees trained in cybersecurity fundamentals, risk mitigation, and network protection.

Nebraska continues to align with national trends showing high demand for cybersecurity professionals. The Nebraska Department of Labor and workforce development studies indicate that employers across all sectors are increasing reliance on technology infrastructure while struggling to recruit qualified IT and cybersecurity staff, particularly in rural regions where talent pipelines are limited (Nebraska Department of Labor).

This demand is reinforced by ongoing statewide broadband investment and modernization efforts, which are expected to increase the number of connected systems requiring protection. As rural Nebraska continues to digitize public services and private industry operations, cybersecurity skill sets are becoming essential across multiple occupational pathways rather than confined to specialized IT roles (Nebraska Examiner; Benton Institute for Broadband & Society).

Anticipated Enrollment and Cost of Program:
The demand for cybersecurity education continues to grow due to expanding workforce opportunities, strong salary potential within the field, and increasing regional awareness of technology-driven career pathways. Entry-level cybersecurity positions are identified within the proposal as averaging between $65,000 and $100,000 annually, reflecting a strong return on investment for students pursuing this field of study (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Yet, cybersecurity faculty positions at small, rural community colleges typically range from approximately $60,000 to $83,000 depending on experience, credentials, contract length, and institutional role responsibilities. This salary differential between industry and academia contributes to the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty.

The Cybersecurity program anticipates the potential to recruit at least 12 students annually into the initial certificate pathway, with additional growth expected as program visibility increases across the MPCC service area. The availability of online, hybrid, and in-person delivery models is intended to expand access for students throughout the region, including rural communities where transportation and scheduling barriers may otherwise limit participation in technical programs. This flexible delivery structure will support enrollment growth and improve retention by accommodating diverse learners.

Student demand is expected to increase due to growing awareness of cybersecurity careers, expanded remote work opportunities, and clearly defined transfer pathways into four-year cybersecurity degree programs. National workforce projections indicate that information security analyst roles are expected to grow by approximately 33% from 2023 to 2033, significantly outpacing the average for all occupations and reinforcing long-term demand for cybersecurity education pathways (U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics). Regional labor conditions in rural Nebraska further support this need, as employers across the Mid-Plains area continue to report persistent difficulty filling technical positions amid broader workforce shortages (Nebraska Department of Labor; Nebraska Legislative Research Office).

C. Adequacy of Resources

Mid-Plains Community College maintains an established equipment planning process designed to ensure that instructional programs remain current, responsive to industry standards, and financially sustainable over time. This process supports the ongoing development, renewal, and modernization of instructional equipment and infrastructure, allowing new and existing programs to adapt to evolving workforce demands, including those in cybersecurity.

The proposed cybersecurity program aligns with Career and Technical Education (CTE) program requirements under Perkins V. The Cybersecurity program would be eligible for support through federal and state Perkins funding. These funds may be utilized in accordance with allowable uses to support program implementation, including instructional equipment, curriculum development, industry-recognized certifications, and other program improvement needs.

1. Faculty and Staff Resources

The proposal identifies the need for approximately two to four course developers and a combination of full-time and adjunct faculty support depending on the final program structure selected.

The proposal estimates:

- Approximately 1 course designer was hired for certificate development
- 1 full-time faculty member will be considered if enrollment demands and additional adjunct instructors to deliver coursework

The proposal estimates annual instructional costs at approximately $30,000 for ongoing program delivery.

2. Physical Facilities

The proposed program is expected to utilize existing MPCC classroom spaces, technology resources, and instructional infrastructure to support instruction.

The proposal does not currently identify a need for major facility renovations or construction.

3. Instructional Equipment and Informational Resources

The proposal indicates that courses may utilize existing virtual lab environments, simulation tools, and MPCC learning management systems.

No major hardware or software purchases are currently anticipated unless identified during final development.

Instructional resources would include:

- Computers and instructional technology
- Learning management system access
- Virtual labs and simulation software
- Telecommunications and network connectivity

4. Budget Projections

The proposal estimates the following development costs:

- Approximately $21,000 to develop seven cybersecurity courses for a certificate pathway

Annual instructional delivery costs are estimated at approximately $30,000. The proposal estimates potential annual certificate revenue of approximately $31,104 based on 12 students completing a 24-credit certificate.

Additional enrollment growth and future program expansion could further offset instructional and development costs over time.

D. Avoidance of Unnecessary Duplication

The proposal acknowledges that all Nebraska community colleges currently offer some form of cybersecurity programming, including:

- Metropolitan Community College
- Northeast Community College
- Southeast Community College
- Central Community College
- Western Nebraska Community College

Rather than duplicating existing offerings, the Cybersecurity Certificate provides an accessible entry point into the marketing field and creates a pathway for students seeking to gain workforce-ready skills in a short timeframe. The certificate supports career advancement for incumbent workers, skill development for small business owners, and continued education in business-related disciplines. Its flexible delivery format expands access for students throughout western Nebraska while addressing regional workforce needs.

E. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education

The proposed Cybersecurity Program supports statewide goals related to workforce development, career readiness, student access, and responsiveness to industry needs.

The program aligns with statewide priorities by:

- Expanding access to high-demand technical education opportunities
- Supporting workforce preparation in a high-skill, high-wage field
- Increasing opportunities for rural and place-bound students
- Supporting collaboration with business and industry
- Enhancing career pathway and transfer opportunities
- Utilizing instructional technology and flexible delivery methods

The proposed program supports statewide efforts to strengthen Nebraska's workforce pipeline in areas experiencing significant labor shortages. Online and hybrid delivery will expand equitable access across MPCC's rural service area while improving instructional flexibility and efficient use of institutional resources.

Resources:

Nebraska Department of Labor. "Press Release: Mid-Plains Labor Availability Report Findings." *Nebraska Department of Labor*, https://dol.nebraska.gov/PressRelease/Details/316. Accessed 4 June 2026.

Nebraska Examiner. "A BEAD on Nebraska Broadband: State Reopens Provider Applications with Over $300M Still in Limbo." *Nebraska Examiner*, 22 May 2026, https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2026/05/22/a-bead-on-nebraska-broadband-state-reopens-provider-applications-with-over-300m-still-in-limbo/.

Nebraska Legislative Research Office. Nebraska Workforce and Labor Availability Report (Mid-Plains Region). State of Nebraska, https://govdocs.nebraska.gov/epubs/U2720/B084-2020.pdf. Accessed 4 June 2026.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Information Security Analysts: Occupational Outlook Handbook." U.S. Department of Labor, https://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/information-security-analysts.htm. Accessed 4 June 2026