**Learn to Earn Initiative RFQ**

**Questions & Answers (#7 - FINAL)**

**Updated 10/5/17 - All New Questions & Answers in Red**

**Application Package**

**Q: In Attachment 3, Column 3, we need more clarification on “Need for a Program Intervention?” (Wouldn’t the answer be “Yes” for all of them?)**

**A: In column 3, applicants are asked to indicate whether members of their proposed target population would need additional preparation or assistance in order to meet the requirements of the target occupation. There are instances where the answer might be “no,” for example, if members of the target population are unlikely to have dependent children, an emphasis on flexible work hours might be unnecessary. In another case, working with individuals who have a criminal record might not apply to a proposed partnership.**

**Q: Can we combine an implementation budget within the program design budget?**

**A: No. Applicants are required to submit the provided excel document, which consists of ONLY templates for a Program Design Budget of up to $25,000 and 30% match contribution.**

Q: Which members of a partnership need to submit a Certificate of Good Standing?

A: The Lead Applicant is the only partnership member that is required to submit a Certificate of Good Standing.

**Eligible Lead Applicants & Partners**

Q: Can we submit our own proposal for a new program we want to launch if we're already listed as partners on another submission?

A: Yes.

Q: For our application, the lead applicant would provide participants with general workforce readiness training and case management and partner with another community-based organization to provide hard-skill training. Would this be eligible for this RFP?

A: Yes. All organization types listed on page 10 of the RFQ are eligible to apply as the lead applicant. Please keep in mind that all partnerships are required to include two Massachusetts employer partners and must ensure they have all the partners needed to reach and support their target population in securing employment for their target occupation.

Q: We are trying to figure out which type of applicant we are. Our organization will be the lead for our grant proposal and our role will be to coordinate the partners (community partners, educational partners and our employer partners). Although we are an employer, it is our hospital employers who will be the true “employer partners” with us convening the group and coordinating the work. Therefore, we are not sure how to identify ourselves as lead grantees, since we are not responsible for the actual employment of graduates, but will help that happen among our hospital employers. Is it still accurate for us to apply to be lead grantees as an “employer?”

A: Yes, your organization should check off “employer” as your applicant type on the Project Profile (page 18). Since your intention is to place program participants at other employer sites, you are still required to include at least two formal “employer partners” who can demonstrate sufficient demand and articulate the technical, soft skill, and work readiness requirements for entry-level employment in the target occupation. These employer partners must indicate their commitment to participating in program design through a signed memorandum of agreement or letter of commitment. Please see Section 2D on page 10 of the RFQ for additional guidance.

Q: Are the state's community colleges eligible to apply as lead applicants?

A: Yes. All organizations listed on page 10 of the RFQ are eligible to apply as the lead applicant. Community Colleges are considered higher education institutions and are therefore included on this list. Please also note that community colleges, public vocational technical high schools, and public state universities serving as the lead applicant do not need to submit a Certificate of Good Standing. Organizations in this category should upload a brief document stating this exemption.

Q:           Could temp agencies be considered an employer partner?

A:           No, a temp agency may not be considered as one of the two required employer partners; however, lead applicants may include temp agencies as an additional partner. In this case, the applicant must explain the role of the temp agency in supporting participants’ transition to permanent, payroll employment with an employer in the target industry.

Q: Can a partner listed on my proposal also partner with another lead applicant on a separate proposal?

A: Yes.

Q: Does having a current grant from CommCorp preclude us from being considered for a Learn to Earn award?

A: No, having a current CommCorp grant does not preclude you from being considered for a Learn to Earn award. Current grantees ARE eligible to apply as a lead applicant and/or as a partner organization on another application.

Q: Is an organization serving as the lead applicant allowed to provide services such as those described in Section 2E and listed as categories on the Partnership Qualifications Chart (Attachment 4)?

A: Yes, in addition to submitting the application and meeting the qualifications outlined in Section 2C, lead applicants may fulfill additional partnership roles. Accordingly, lead applicants may be listed in multiple categories on the Partnership Qualifications Chart (Attachment 4). Please see page 28 of the RFQ for additional instructions regarding required partnership qualifications.

Q: Would a state agency be eligible to apply as the lead agency of a partnership project?

A: No, state agencies are not eligible lead applicants. Please see Section 2B (page 10) of the RFQ for the full list of organizations that are eligible to submit an application. We encourage partnerships to work with local offices of state agencies in developing their application. Additionally, we will support grantees in developing such relationships as appropriate during the Program Design Phase.

Q: I noticed that employers may be accepted as lead applicants. If this is the case, are we still required to include 2 employers in our project?

A: Yes, employers are eligible lead applicants. Partnerships with an employer as the lead applicant must include at least one additional employer partner (for a total of two Massachusetts businesses who intended to employ Massachusetts residents). Please see Section 2D (page 10) of the RFQ for additional guidance about employer partners.

Q: We have several separate employers within our corporate network structure, might these separate affiliates be counted as multiple employers rather than just one employer?

A: If each affiliate sets their own hiring standards and practices and conducts their own hiring, then they would be considered multiple employers for the purpose of this RFQ. However, if all new hires are conducted by a single HR department, then for the purposes of this RFQ, we would consider this organization as a single employer.

**Target Occupation**

Q: When considering the living wage for the candidates who get employed, would a full-time job with benefits (e.g. health insurance and earned time off) have different value than a job that pays a higher wage with no benefits?

A: There are no specific point values associated with the job status, wage, or benefits; however, applicants are required to provide evidence that their program will be designed to place participants in jobs in which the combination of wages, employer-supported benefits and upward mobility pathways are likely to support the goals of reduced reliance on public benefits, increased earned income, and economic stability. Please see Section 1D on page 7-8 of the RFQ for additional guidance.

Q: Would a single CNA+ training cross-training participants for employment as CNAs, HHAs, and/or PCTs (allowing for more flexible career pathways) meet the grant criteria?

A: Applicants may propose to train individuals for multiple target occupations if the required occupational skills and credentials are identical and can be prepared for by participating in a cohort all going through the SAME training program. Since the requirements for the occupations listed in your example would likely require the same skills and credentials, it would meet the requirements of the RFQ.

Q: Do the two (or more) employer partners need to provide all jobs or can other employers, not specifically engage in a LTE partnership, provide employment for the participants in this program?

A: Applicants who are selected as LTE grantees will be expected by the end of the Program Design Phase to have a sufficient number of employer partners with sufficient vacancies to ensure employment for their proposed number of program graduates. Upon moving on to the Implementation Phase, it will be acceptable to place graduates in the target occupation with employers who are not formal members of the partnership.

Q: Would a proposal that focuses on one industry sector, but has several training routes leading to various occupations be acceptable? For example, a potential proposal focusing on the healthcare sector that targeted multiple occupations (CNA, pharmacy techs, medical admin assistant). Or do all the participants need to go through the same training in a cohort?

A: No. An applicant is required to identify a specific occupation to be targeted and commit to designing or enhancing a training program that prepares individuals for the specific occupation. We recognize that there are occupations with identical required skills and credentials for entry. In this case, applicants may propose to train individuals for multiple target occupations if the required occupational skills and credentials are identical and can be prepared for by participating in a cohort all going through the same training program. Since the occupations listed in your example all require different skills and credentials it would not meet the requirements of the RFQ.

Q. I noticed that the expected outcome is that a minimum of 70% of program participants will be employed at the end of the grant period. Is there a minimum salary requirement?

A: No, we have not set a minimum salary requirement for proposed occupations; however, applicants are required to provide evidence that the proposed programs will place participants in jobs in which the combination of wages, employer-supported benefits, and upward mobility pathways are likely to support the goals of reduced reliance of public benefits, increased earned income, and economic stability. Please see Section 1D (page 7-8) for additional guidance about target occupations.

**Target Population**

Q: In completing the grid on target population "characteristics" such as sole family provider/ # children, etc- we can describe the typical candidate that we are trying to reach and make some generalizations, but we obviously won't have actual data for all. I assume this is ok. What is more confusing is the same questions (characteristics / requirements) under column 2- job-- which is unrelated to family questions/status, etc. I assume we will put employment characteristics such as salary ranges for entry level roles for which we will be training and possibly outline some potential career paths? This does not answer the question exactly as written, but makes sense. Do you agree? Is there any other advice you might offer in filling in this grid to ensure that we are providing what you are trying to get at?

A: That is correct. The Program Design Gap Analysis Chart (Attachment 3) provides an opportunity to describe the typical candidate you are seeking to reach. In the employment characteristics and requirements column, you should describe the target occupation in a way that allows you to demonstrate whether there is a fit or mismatch with your target population. For example, if your target population is single mothers who are receiving SNAP benefits and your target occupation does not provide flexible hours, you might indicate a need for a program intervention in addition to describing potential pathways to a higher wage and employer benefits.

Q: Is there a minimum requirement for the number of individuals served through Learn to Earn?

A: No, we have not set a minimum for the number of individuals served through Learn to Earn. During the Program Design Phase, Commonwealth Corporation will work with each selected partnership to develop an implementation budget based on a proposed number of individuals served. Please keep in mind that we have established a projected placement rate of 70% of enrollees as well as a planned maximum investment target of $15,000 per employment outcome, which includes the number of participants who are placed in an unsubsidized job measured at 30 days retention. The cost per employment outcome is likely to vary across programs depending on the intensiveness of each program, especially relative to the planned level of coaching, education and training, job development and job placement activity, including planned investments in subsidized employment. Please see Sections 1F and 1G on pages 8-9 of the RFQ for additional guidance.

Q: In the definition of the Target Population, under barriers to employment: how is “limited educational attainment” defined? Is just a HS diploma considered limited?

A: A high school diploma is likely to meet the standard of limited educational attainment; however, applicants will need to assess the readiness of their target population in the context of the requirements of their target occupation. Please see the Program Design Gap Analysis Chart on page 22 of the RFQ for additional instructions regarding barriers to employment.

**Training / Program Design**

**Q: Does the term “support” include the provision of direct financial assistance for childcare if necessary?**

**A: Yes. CommCorp will work with selected partnerships during the Program Design Phase to determine what combination of supportive services makes sense in the context of the proposed target occupation and population.**

**Q: What is meant by develop and test models to serve participants “in the context of their family/household?”**

**A: One of the goals of Learn to Earn is to improve participants’ and their families’ economic stability. Given the range of public benefits programs listed on page 7 of the RFQ, it is likely that participants will be receiving assistance to support their families, including children. The support services needed to reduce barriers to employment and economic stability might include but are not limited to building capacity to develop social networks, making connections to services related to child health and education, financial literacy skills, asset building, and managing public benefits (e.g. housing, childcare, TANF, SNAP, transportation, etc.).**

Q: I worry that requiring that all placements be full-time right off the bat might shut down our learners' prospects at becoming employed in the target occupation through Learn to Earn. Are you open to a temp-to-perm approach?

A: We do not specify that all placements must be full-time. Yes, we are open to a temp-to-permanent program design strategy. In this case, the applicant must explain how the strategy will support participants’ transition to permanent, payroll employment with an employer in the target industry and provide information about the typical duration of temp employment before conversion to payroll employment. In addition, the applicant must commit to using the Program Design Phase to develop a strategy and resources for supporting participants over the period of beginning employment as a temporary employee and moving into payroll employment.

Q: Do we need to demonstrate that when a participant completes the program we design they will be able to immediately be off of all state benefits they were previously receiving? Is it sufficient to demonstrate that a participant has a career trajectory that will enable them to climb the career ladder and eventually come off of state benefits?

A: No, participants who complete a program funded through LTE do not need to be completely off of public assistance upon program completion; however, applicants are required to provide evidence that their program will be designed to place participants in jobs in which the combination of wages, employer-supported benefits and upward mobility pathways are likely to support the goals of reduced reliance on public benefits, increased earned income, and economic stability.

Q: Would a 2-semester Certificate program be considered to be of appropriate length?

A: We are looking for applicants to make a compelling case for why the components of their proposed program, such as the length of training, are an appropriate fit for their target population in the context of their earnings needs and occupational requirements. We will work with selected grantees to refine aspects such as program length to be sufficient to have participants placed and retained in unsubsidized employment within the target occupation.

Q: Our organization is seeking to modify one of our existing job training and placement programs to create a new career pathway. Is this approach an appropriate fit for the Learn to Earn Initiative?

A: Yes, organizations seeking to modify the design of an existing job training and placement program are may apply. Please keep in mind that you must clearly describe how you propose to build upon your existing program through engaging with CommCorp during the three-month Program Design Phase and include the appropriate program elements outlined on pages 2 and 7 of the RFQ.

**Budget and Grant Award**

**Q: Is some level of tuition assistance to a higher education institution for a selected student an appropriate budget line item for Learn to Earn?**

**A: Yes, grantees may use implementation funds to off-set student tuition at higher education institutions; however, we do expect that organizations will work with institutional partners to design and implement a robust strategy to ensure that participants seek to access financial aid if they are eligible.**

**Q: If a lead applicant has several service providers recruiting students for the program, but the number of students associated with a specific service provider is unknown until the admission process for each class cohort is completed, is it acceptable to put in a lump sum for support services to be distributed as appropriate or should the applicant list a line-item for each service provider that can be divided differently if one service provider is realizing a higher number of participating individuals than originally anticipated?**

**A: Payment for direct services including recruitment and support services is not an eligible use of Program Design funds. We will work with selected partnerships during the Program Design Phase to develop an appropriate Program Implementation Phase budget in accordance with the budget template format and guidelines.**

**Q: The Learn to Earn RFQ describes a "Benefit Innovation Fund." Please describe how a program would access the fund, how it can be used, and whether it can be used during training and job search, post placement, or both. For example, one of the barriers participants often face is the need for childcare to enable them to attend training. Could this fund be used to underwrite childcare during training and job search? If it were used in this way, would the amount spent count toward the cost of training?**

**A: The Benefit Innovation Fund will become available to selected grantees during the Program Implementation Phase. During the Program Design Phase, the Interagency Workgroup will work with selected grantees to determine the most appropriate use of grant funds for supporting the target population to obtain employment in the target occupation.**

**Q: During the Program Implementation Phase, would the cost of an internship supervisor’s time be an eligible line item on the match contribution form?**

**A: Yes. We will work with selected partnerships during the Program Design Phase to develop an appropriate Program Implementation Phase budget and 30% match contribution, in accordance with the budget template format and guidelines.**

Q: Will program evaluation will be considered an "allowable cost" during the implementation period?

A: Yes. During the Program Design Phase, Commonwealth Corporation will work with each selected partnership to develop a reasonable implementation budget based on the proposed number of individuals served.

Q: Do we need to submit a budget that includes both the $25,000 for Program Design Phase and the $330,000 for the 2-year program budget?

A: The RFQ requires that applicants submit ONLY a budget for the 3-month Program Design Phase (along with a 30% Match Contribution Form). Applicants may request up to $25,000. During the Program Design Phase, CommCorp will work with selected grantees to create a 2-year Program Implementation budget that will total $305,000 plus the balance of any unspent program design funds. Overall, grantees will receive no more than $330,000 total.

Q: Is the use of grant funds for credit-based tuition and fees allowable?

A: Yes, credit-based tuition and fees are an allowable use of grant funds during the Implementation Phase.

Q: Would a proposal using grant funds for credit-based tuition costs (for which participants may be able to access financial aid) be viewed negatively (i.e., does CommCorp consider its funds to be "of last resort?”).

A: We would not view such a use of grant funds negatively; however, we do expect that organizations will work with institutional partners to design and implement a robust strategy to ensure that participants seek to access financial aid if they are eligible.

Q: I’m writing to request clarification regarding Matching Fund requirements.

Page 9 of the RFQ it states:

H. Matching Funds: Partnerships will be required to provide a 30% match of total awarded funds both during the Program Design and Implementation Phases. Program Design Match may be cash or in-kind and include:

• Staff time to engage in program design

• Rent and associated operating costs not charged to the grant

• Other expenses related to designing a cohort-based coaching, training and placement program.

It is not clear what the Implementation Phase match requirements are, whether cash or in-kind match are also acceptable, or whether match must be all cash. Can you clarify what an acceptable match is during the Implementation Phase?

A: Match during the Implementation Phase may also be cash or in-kind. Acceptable examples of Implementation Phase match includes, but is not limited to, staff time and travel expenses, space rental, instructor time, participant tuition/fees, and support services, etc. Grantees will be provided with a Match Contribution Template during the Program Design Phase.

Q: Does the 30% match apply equally to the program design phase portion of the budget as it would to implementation or can it be documented in the aggregate?

A: Partnerships are required to submit a program design budget of up to $25,000 and include a match contribution totaling at least 30% of the requested grant amount. For example, if you request $25,000, the match contribution must be at least $7,500. We will work with grantees during the Program Design Phase to ensure they submit a Program Implementation budget with a match contribution that reflects at least 30% of the overall grant award.

**Administrative Requirements**

**Q: Where is the location for the Program Design Phase meetings?**

**A: We anticipate that the initial meeting of all selected grantees will take place in Boston. We will work with each partnership to confirm the location of subsequent group meetings.**

Q: Are all invoices paid at the end of the grant or will contractors and program designers be able to submit for work after completion and get paid through the grant?

A: Selected grantees will submit a single request for reimbursement (i.e. LTE Program Design Phase Invoice) at the conclusion of the Program Design Phase. This invoice must include all expenses incurred during those three months, and grantees can expect payment within 30 days of their submission. CommCorp will send payment directly to the lead grantee. During the Program Implementation Phase, grantees will be expected to submit invoices for reimbursement on a monthly schedule. Lead grantees will need to work with sub-contractors and partners to coordinate a consistent billing cycle.

**Other**

Q: Will there be a future Learn to Earn Grant Opportunity next year in FY’19?

A: At this time, there is no guarantee of funding for a similar Learn to Earn Initiative RFQ in FY’19.

Q: Is the Learn to Earn Initiative part of a Federal program?

A: No, this grant program is not part of a Federal program; it is funded through the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF) and Learn to Earn Initiative (LTE) line items in the Fiscal Year 2018 State Budget (line items 7002-1075 and 7002-1080). Massachusetts Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Karen Polito created the Learn to Earn Initiative in their FY18 Budget proposal, seeking to support individuals who are receiving assistance from public benefit programs in gaining and retaining employment in occupations for which employers have persistent demand.