**Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund FY’19 RFP**

**Questions & Answers (#5)**

**Updated 4/23/19 - All New Questions & Answers in Green**

**Eligible Lead Applicants and Partner Organizations**

**Q: Can two organizations apply separately as the lead applicant for the same program? For example, two organizations will use the funds to run the same program, but would apply separately for funding.**

**A: Two organizations could apply separately as the lead applicant if the proposals are not dependent upon one another and would have a plan to achieve distinct program outcomes. Each program should be able to stand on its own. For example, if the intent is to run distinct programming to achieve separate outcomes, then both leads would be eligible to apply as such; however, if the two components of a comprehensive program are required for job placement, then an individual participant could only be counted toward a single employment outcome. In that scenario, the partnership should identify a lead organization based on the responsibilities described in Section 2B and utilize the contracted services lines to reflect their program design agreements.**

**Q: Can the employer partners be non-profit such as a fire Department?**

**A: Yes, so long as they fit the specified criteria outlined in the RFP. For more details please see Section 2C.**

Q: This question is in reference to *page 5, bottom box, as PART OF OPTION B- Baseline Partnership Requirements*. If we are training and certifying current incumbent employees in order to have them advance in our company to fill positions in higher demand, would our 2 or more employer training partners that provide certifications for our employees satisfy the *two employer requirement*?

A: No. Option B requires that the selected employer partners have demonstrated vacancies and/or hiring needs for workers in the proposed target occupation and a commitment to identifying and supporting current employees to participate in training and secure advancement (including, but not limited to, wage growth) at the conclusion of the program. In the example scenario, the lead applicant would count as ONE employer partner since they intended to employ successful participants. The other two organizations would be considered training partners since they do not intend to train and advance their own employees. These roles and responsibilities must be made evident in a signed MOA or letter.

Q: Can a partnership submit a proposal that combines option A and option B (in a single proposal)?

A: No, applicants must choose one option – either A or B – for the purposes of this RFP.

Q: If we serve as a lead applicant, may we partner with other lead applicants on their application? (i.e. an area employer wants to apply and we would partner with them to provide certifications)

A: Yes. Organizations that are a lead applicant on one proposal are also eligible to participate as partners on more than one application.

Q: Can one large employer that has multiple departments in different locations and sectors count as more than one employer?

A: We would need to know more about the hiring practices of this employer. For example, if all new hires are conducted by a single HR department, then for the purposes of this RFP, we would consider this organization as a single employer. If each department sets their own hiring standards and practices and conducts their own hiring, then they would be considered multiple employers for the purpose of this RFP.

Q: We are seeking to target CNA positions, and we have a major nursing home chain that has multiple locations in different cities and regions across the state. No single nursing home needs to hire an entire group of CNAs, so we want to train a small number of unemployed workers in multiple locations. We are targeting job vacancies/job openings by the city. Does that satisfy the proposal requirement or it should be a second employer?

A: If each site sets their own hiring standards and practices and conducts their own hiring, then they would be considered multiple employers for the purpose of this RFP; however, if all new hires are conducted by a single (central) HR department, then for the purposes of this RFP, we would consider this organization as a single employer and require the inclusion of at least one other employer partner.

Q: If a company has an active Workforce Training Fund grant under the general program, does this affect the company’s chances of a successful award under the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund?

A: No. Current WTFP grantees are welcome to apply for either Option A or B. Commonwealth Corporation will review each proposal based on the merit of the proposal as outlined in the scoring criteria (page 21). We encourage all applicants to provide us with sufficient information to help us understand what other funding will be available for the same (or related) program over the course of the grant program and how WCTF funds would be used in relation to such funding. Applicants should provide this information in Part 1, Question 6B of their narrative.

Q: There is a reference in the RFP of applying for Option A (i.e. train and place un/underemployed participants) OR Option B (i.e. support the training and advancement of underemployed participants) – is there a possibility of a partnership applying for both options or does it have to be one or the other?

A: Organizations that are a lead applicant on one proposal are also eligible to participate as partners on more than one application; however, a given organization may only serve as the lead applicant on ONE application.

Q: How can we get in touch with our local workforce board to discuss this RFP and other initiatives?

A: In order to facilitate regional alignment and maximization of public resources, applicants must include their local workforce board in a capacity that complements the overall structure and strategy of the proposed program. Workforce board staff have substantial knowledge about business demand for workers in their region. They can also identify opportunities to leverage local publicly-funded workforce system capacity. Many MassHire Workforce Boards have staff with experience in designing and managing strategic sector-based initiatives and in convening and facilitating industry sector partnerships. Applicants can access a list of MassHire Workforce Boards at the following link: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/connect-with-your-local-masshire-workforce-board>

**Budget and Grant Award**

Q: In looking at the budget portion of the RFP, we are curious if we can just submit a portion of the tuition for students to attend a workforce program rather than the detailed budget requested? For example, if we are seeking to make the actual education more affordable for unemployed or underemployed individuals rather than submit costs for recruitment, marketing, etc.

A: All applicants must submit a detailed budget request using the provided forms. The costs listed on the budget narrative should reflect ONLY those expenses for which the lead applicant (and/or sub-contractors) will be seeking reimbursement. Other associated program costs that will be funded from other sources should be listed on the match narrative (at least 30% of grant award required, but does not need to reflect ALL costs necessarily). In the example scenario, an applicant could list tuition and relevant staff time for grant coordination/data entry, etc on the grant budget narrative (5b) and list some recruitment and marketing costs on the match contribution form (5c). Regardless of what’s included on the budget, successful applicants will demonstrate in their proposal that they have the resources and capacity to deliver the program elements included in section 3A or 3B of the RFP.

Q: If the training partner(s) are looking to provide an associate’s degree for a high-demand industry and use portions of the grant to offer greatly reduced tuition for the cohort(s), it is ok for the proposal to have the students take on some financial obligations (e.g. either pay out of pocket or student loans). This will be a small portion of the overall greatly reduced rate of tuition.

A: Applicants may propose to use grant funds to offset student tuition at higher education or training 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. Successful applicants will demonstrate how they have minimized barriers to program access including but not limited to financial burden. Applicants that are planning to ask participants to take on some financial burden should be explicit about their approach in their proposal narrative.

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.

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: In Option B (Training and Advancement), is it possible to partially fund a student for a program if the per student program fees exceed $10,000? In this instance, the student would be subsidized by the employer or would use private funds or loans to meet the balance of tuition.

A: We encourage potential applicants to review the related questions above. As noted in a related question, 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. Successful applicants will demonstrate how they have minimized barriers to program access including but not limited to financial burden. Applicants that are planning to ask participants to take on some financial burden should be explicit about their approach in their proposal narrative.

Potential applicants who are considering utilizing an approach that includes student tuition that would be subsidized by the employer should review page 37 (Part 5c) of the RFP, which provides guidance regarding the 30% match contribution requirement. In this example scenario, the employer subsidies could be considered as match.

Q: Will there be restrictions on who can be paid for services as a part of this grant? For example, if childcare is funded for a student, would payment be required to go to the student or directly to the childcare center?

A: We encourage strategic and creative approaches to supportive services that help ensure the success of participants in the program and employment. We understand that organizations operate with different constraints and policies that shape their budgets and fiscal processes. Those lead applicants who are awarded grants will be required to submit documentation including a detailed budget questionnaire and supportive services policy as part of the contract negotiation and start-up phase. Grantees will receive further guidance on our invoice review and monitoring process in order to ensure shared accountability, transparency, and efficiency in our cost reimbursement payment process. *Please page 37 (Parts 5a, 5b, 5c) of the RFP for additional context and information.*

Q: Under Option B, can we reimburse partner employers if they need to backfill for an employee who attends training?

A: Yes; however, please keep in mind that proposals will be evaluated in part based on budget accuracy and reasonableness. Applicants are encouraged to be specific in detailing their rationale for a program strategy that incorporates reimbursements for employer partners. Also, please keep in mind our cost per advancement benchmark of $10,000 per advancement.

**Funding Priorities / Target Occupation(s)**

Q: Compared to other related RFPs we have seen recently (e.g. Learn-to-Earn) where applicants had to pick ONE occupation to train for, this language: “applicants should identify specific occupation(s) to be targeted and design a training program that prepares individuals for these specific occupations” seems to suggest an applicant can propose to train cohorts of individuals in more than one occupation within an industry sector. Please clarify if this is a correct interpretation.

A: No, we are seeking to fund applications that identify ONE target occupation as more clearly indicated on page 27. The reason we use *“occupation(s)”* is due to the specific exception noted on page 9: “w*e recognize that there are occupations with identical required skills and credentials for entry. Applicants may propose to train individuals for multiple target occupations if the required occupational skills and credentials are the same.*”

Q: On page 12, please explain how retail and entry-level food service occupations fit into the category of “supporting human service workers”.

A: Please strike the sentence that reads: “Jobs within this category include but are not limited to Home Health Aide, Certified Nurse Assistant, retail, early childhood educators, and some entry-level food service occupations” and replace with the following sentence: *“Jobs within this category include but are not limited to home health aide, certified nurse assistant, and early childhood educator.”*

Q: There are quite a few hospitals in MA who have worked to raise their bottom wage to $15/hour. Mandating the incumbent initial wage requirement to less than $15/hour basically penalizes these employers from applying for these funds and creating pipeline opportunities for their employees. If an employer has instituted a $15/hour minimum, is there any flexibility in that criteria for Option B?

A: Yes, we would welcome applications from partnerships seeking to create pipeline opportunities at employers who have already worked to raise their bottom wage to $15/hour. Option B intends to provide funds to prioritize advancement opportunities for entry-level workers, and it is not our intent to exclude employers who are currently striving to achieve similar goals. Applicants for whom this response is applicable should specify the higher minimum in their proposal and keep in mind the outcome target of a $2 hourly wage increase.

Q: Each of the seven regional blueprints identify up to three regional industry/occupational priorities and some also identify several industries and/or occupations that are considered to be “critical but not prioritized.” Are partnerships proposing to implement programs in the latter category eligible for funding?

A: Yes, those industries and/or occupations that are identified as “prioritized” or “critical but not prioritized” WITHIN the region of the lead applicant are eligible for funding. We have outlined criteria for target occupations in order to facilitate statewide alignment with the [Regional Workforce Skills Planning Initiative](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/view-your-regions-blueprint) and the collaborative efforts of Governor Baker’s Workforce Skills Cabinet. The chart included in Appendix A is intended to assist in your planning; however, it is not an exhaustive list of potential target occupations. Please keep in mind that we intend to award ~$2.15M in grants targeting health care occupations, ~$1M in grants targeting IT occupations and ~$1M targeting other occupations that are identified in regional blueprints as “priorities” or “critical but not prioritized.”

Q: If they are included within a given regional blueprint, would proposals seeking to train individuals for IT-related occupations within another sector such as healthcare or educational services be eligible for funding?

A: Yes. Please also keep in mind that applicants may propose to train individuals for multiple target occupations ONLY 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. Similar occupations that require different skills and credentials would not meet the RFP requirements.

Q: Would a project focused on an occupation within the manufacturing sector be eligible under the category for “other regional priorities?”

A: We will not be accepting proposals targeted towards occupations in the manufacturing sector. While vital to our economy, we have decided not to prioritize manufacturing in this grant opportunity due to existing funding of manufacturing workforce development programs through the Advanced Manufacturing Training Program.

**Target Population**

Q: On page 10, please add examples as to an under-employed person working outside the target sector, i.e., would someone working in a healthcare setting but in a DIFFERENT occupation meet this definition?

A: An underemployed individual is defined as an individual who is working outside the target sector and earning less than a self-sustaining wage. For the purposes of this definition, applicants may choose to precisely define the target sector to focus on a subsector of a larger sector. For example, if the larger sector is *Accommodation and Food Services*, you might choose to identify *Accommodation* as the subsector for which you are training individuals. In that case you could make a case that there are underemployed individuals working in a different subsector (*Food Services*) who would be appropriate candidates for your training program. Applicants should clearly identify the proposed target occupation and subsector in Part 2, Q1.

However, please note that the only acceptable employment outcome for OPTION A is a job placement at a new employer. Commonwealth Corporation will not consider wage gains or promotions at the employer at the time of enrollment a successful outcome. Applicants should clearly identify the proposed target population in Part 2, Q2, including the specific criteria they will use to identify an underemployed participant, if they propose to serve this population.

Q: Option A Target Population defines an underemployed individual as someone who works outside the target sector (page 10). We are not clear why someone working in one area of the healthcare sector would automatically be ineligible to be considered as an underemployed individual. For example, if someone is working as a part-time home care worker with infrequent hours and sub-$15 hourly wage, but wants to be trained as a Certified Nursing Assistant to work in a long-term care facility or hospital, why would that person not be identified as an underemployed individual? How is sector being defined? Is homecare one sector and nursing homes another sector?

A: Yes, we will accept proposals seeking to support home care workers who want to be trained and placed in employment as a CNA. We recognize that many human services occupations are vital to a healthy economy and yet may have limited advancement opportunities within a given organization. In these instances, applicants should explain how their recruitment strategy will be effective in enrolling participants who are prepared to leave their current employer.

For context on the “outside the target sector designation,” we have found that participants who are participating in a training and placement program within their sector are less likely to ultimately shift to a new job for a number of reasons; for example, they may decide that it is more expedient to remain at their current employer and utilize newly gained skills to be more effective in their current role. Option A of the WCTF FY’19 RFP seeks to place people as new hires at new employers, so participants who seek to stay at their current employer, while a laudable goal, is not within the scope of this program option.

Q: Are graduating and/or recent high school graduates (including those with GED/HiSET) included within the target population criteria for Option A (i.e. as “unemployed MA residents” for the purposes of eligibility)?

A: Yes, recent and graduating high school students who are seeking permanent employment upon graduation would meet the definition of unemployed.

**Training Program Outcomes**

**Q: How will you evaluate programs that exceed the $10K per employment outcome?**

**A: All** s**ubmitted proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the criteria outlined on page 21 (Section 7). Please keep in mind that proposals will be evaluated in part based on budget accuracy and reasonableness as well as competitive outcomes rates. Applicants are encouraged to be specific in detailing their rationale for a program strategy that exceeds the $10,000 per employment outcome benchmark. There is a specific section to explain this rationale on Part 5a: Budget Form.**

Q: May an application include funding for multiple certificates (e.g. Healthcare) or is it recommended that separate applications be submitted for each certification we look to fund?

A: Yes, applicants should specify in their proposal whether one or more credentials/certificates are required for entry into the target occupation(s) or advancement. They should also explain how they will ensure all program completers obtain requisite credentials/certificates prior to being placed into employment or advancing. The costs and fees associate with each certificate should be outline in the budget narrative form.

**Training /Program Design**

**Q: Would a 6-week, 1-session per week, training program with pre- and post-testing, potentially be reimbursable under Option B? This program would consist of a leadership training with multiple components developed and delivered in partnership with local higher education and training institution to support advancement into several positions along a career ladder.**

**A: There is nothing here that would preclude such a proposal from being eligible to apply for funding. We encourage applicants for Option B to closely review the required program elements on pages 12-14 (Section 3) in addition to the required partners as described in Section 2. Submitted proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the criteria outlined on page 21 (Section 7).**

Q: In the RFP, Option A indicates training should be “cohort-based.” How is “cohort-based job training,” placement and support services being defined? Is there any flexibility in enrolling in a slot basis? In other words, could we propose to serve a total number of clients but in small cohorts enrolled across our yearly scheduled cycles? For example, these participants would be part of a group course with other students in the class who are not paid through the WCTF grant.

A: Yes; however, applicants should be clear on what constitutes a “small cohort” in the context of their specific program. We have found that cohorts consisting of a critical mass of participants who are able to have a shared experience and similar services are most conducive for leveraging the benefits associated with cohort-based programs. Slot-based enrollment is not excluded from funding. Commonwealth Corporation will review each proposal based on the merit of the proposal as outlined in the scoring criteria (page 21). We encourage all applicants to provide us with sufficient information to help us understand what other funding will be available for the same program over the course of the grant program and how WCTF funds would be used in relation to such funding. Applicants should provide this information in Part 1, Question 6B of their narrative.

**Application Package / General and Administrative Requirements**

Q: What are the actual documents we need to fill out to be responsive to the RFP?

A: The documents required for submission are described on pages 18-19 and included as editable Word documents after Section 8 of the RFP. Applicants should delete all preceding pages upon submission. The budget forms are linked to on the website as an editable Excel document. If you have any issues accessing these documents, please contact Anthony Britt at abritt@commcorp.org.

The following attachments must be completed and submitted by all lead applicants:

• Part 1: Application Summary Form

• Part 2: Training Program Application Narrative Form

• Part 3: Training Program Design Description Form

• Part 4: Training Timeline Form

• Part 5a, 5b & 5c: Program Budget, Budget Narrative and Match Narrative Forms

• Part 6: Outcome Chart Form

• Part 7: Sample Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)

• Part 8: Certificate of Good Standing

• Part 9: Certification

Q: Am I able to start an online application and then return to complete and submit it later?

A: The final page of the online submission portal is temporarily inactive and will be live by the week of 4/15; however, please note that you are not able to start an application, pause midway, and return later to finish. The online portal is designed to have you manually enter the information indicted by a “^” on the narrative form (primarily) summary and contact information) and then upload four separate attachments in accordance with guidelines in Section Six and Eight of the RFP.

Q: What is the timeline for submission?

A: Please refer to Section Six (6) on page 18 for the full submission schedule. Applications are due in a digital/electronic format through the [online portal](https://commcorp.tfaforms.net/328763) no later than 11:59 PM on Thursday, May 9, 2019. Please do not send application materials through the mail.

**Miscellaneous**

Q: Will there be future grant opportunities through the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund next year in FY’20?

A: At this time, there is no guarantee of funding for a similar WCTF in FY’20; however, we will add people who sign up here (<https://commcorp.tfaforms.net/328762>) to our distribution list in order to be notified as new opportunities are developed and released.

Q: If possible, can you please indicate how the funds available for healthcare-related applications compare to funds available in prior years?

A: This funding opportunity is the first in a few years through the WCTF to prioritize healthcare-related applications with a specific target funding level.

**Q: Where can I get more info about the WCTF?**

**A: We encourage all interested parties to review the following resources.** <http://commcorp.org/programs/workforce-competitiveness-trust-fund-wctf/>

<http://commcorp.org/programs/wctf-current-grants/>