**2020-2021 Senator Kenneth J. Donnelly Workforce Success Grants for**

**Expanded Training Capacity & Employment Program Performance RFP**

**Questions & Answers (#5 - Final)**

**8/3/2020 - All New Questions & Answers in Purple**

***All revised language and guidance provided within this document supersedes the language originally published in the RFP.***

**Notice Regarding Timeline for Future Funding Opportunities**

\*\*\*CommCorp acknowledges that conditions are constantly shifting due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and that prospective applicants are doing their best to estimate employer demand and work with their partners to determine feasible timelines while preparing for proposal development.

At this time, award announcements for our FY20 RFP released in late February were posted publicly on July 28, 2020 at the [following link](https://www.mass.gov/news/2m-awarded-to-train-unemployed-or-underemployed-workers-for-in-demand-jobs). Other awards will be announced later this summer. The Learn to Earn RFQ was released on July 23, 2020 and our ESOL-focused RFQ is set to be released within one week.\*\*\*

**Application Package / General and Administrative Requirements**

Q: The formatting on the narrative is somewhat difficult. Do you have any suggestions on how to maintain the lettering/numbering format as narrative is entered? Also, is it ok to remove the full question and just put a brief indicator about the question?

A: Please email [abritt@commcorp.org](mailto:abritt@commcorp.org) if you need a version of the RFP with only the questions included. Applicants are welcome to shrink the questions in order to accommodate their responses in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Part 2 of the RFP; however, responses should be at least 11-point font and fully address the sub-bullets of each question.

Q: Is it OK to obtain electronic signatures and/or typed in signatures (with saving emails approving their being a signatory) onto the MOA?

A: Yes, electronic signatures are okay (e.g. DocuSign) and typed-in signatures are also okay; however, applicants should also include the emails approving their being a signatory. We recognize the challenges of getting handwritten signatures remotely during this time.

Q: We currently have a COG issued to our organization from February 2020. Can you clarify your six-month criteria?

A: Any COG dated February 7, 2020 or later meets our six-month criteria.

Q: Would you please consider giving organizations at least a week to digest new responses to Q&A questions in order to respond thoughtfully?

A: We understand this concern. To clarify, we will continue to respond to and post publicly questions submitted via email up through August 4th; however, it is our goal and expectation that nearly all clarification questions will be included by July 31st with few exceptions posted the following week no later than 8/4. As a reminder, questions strictly about online submission logistics are still welcomed in the final week leading up to the application due date.

**Eligible Lead Applicants and Partner Organizations**

Q: In order to be eligible for this funding opportunity, does the lead applicant organization need to pay into the state unemployment fund?

A: No.

Q: Can two separate entities within a much larger parent organization be considered as two distinct employer partners? (Leadership from each separate entity would sign the MOA or submit letter of support separately.)

A: We would need to know more about the hiring practices of this large 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/entity 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: How can we get in touch with our local workforce board to discuss this RFP and other initiatives?

A: While not a required partner for this RFP, 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>.

Q: Who is eligible to apply to this grant opportunity?

A: The most recent RFP that is performance-based, one-year grants are open to all of the entities you listed below. Section 2A on page 7 outlines the full list of eligible applicants for this RFP, including the following:

* Community-based organizations, including adult basic education providers
* Employers with operations in Massachusetts and that employ Massachusetts residents in the proposed target occupation
* Employer associations
* Higher education institutions
* Labor organizations
* Local workforce development entities
* Local workforce boards
* Nonprofit education, training or other service providers
* One-stop career centers
* Vocational education institutions

Q: If a consortium of organizations such as Workforce Boards apply together can they request a funding level higher than the current $200,000 limit?

A: No, due to the recurring nature of this specific grant program, grant duration, and purpose of funds, we have capped all contracts awarded through this 2020-2021 RFP at $200,000 irrespective of partnership size and composition.

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

**Q: Is there a target wage rate for the cost benefit analysis; if so, what is it?**

**A: Yes, we have set an average target wage floor of $14.25 per hour, as noted on page 4 of the RFP. Please also see Section 3A for additional guidance on target occupations.**

Q: We have developed a new program that will serve as feeder for expansion and stack into an established certificate program. Is it allowable to use funds for this new program in this grant?

A: It depends on the specifics of the program. Through this RFP we are seeking to fund existing job training and placement programs that have an established track record of success placing unemployed participants into in-demand jobs. In the example provided above, funding for the new feeder portion of the program would only be eligible if it results in an unsubsidized, training-related job requiring not less than 30 hours per week for with the same employer (measured at two months retention). We are not interested in funding programs that stop short of job placement outcomes.

Q: Is it possible to partner with an educational institution with a track record of success in training and placement such as a community college to create a new training program for a target occupation or would the occupational training program also need to be an existing program?

A: For this RFP, we are interested in funding existing occupational training and placement programs.

Q: How competitive will this grant opportunity be relative to other related RFP’s and is there an advantage to choosing a certain target occupation that might be a priority over others in the region?

A: We are unable to directly answer this question given that it’s our first year of an explicitly performance-based funding opportunity for unemployed individuals though this RFP. WE suggest reviewing page 19 of the RFP for evaluation criteria as well as your regional blueprint; however, we know that economic conditions have and will continue to shift a lot in the upcoming weeks and months, so applicants are encouraged to consider the regional blueprint as just one input into the process. Please also note that our LTE and ESOL RFQs were pushed back by another month, so you can expect to see those very soon as per our note at the top of this document (note: LTE RFQ was posted 7.23.2020).

Q: The application states you are also allowing applicants to propose program seats across more than one occupational area. Does this mean we could submit an application with seats in training classes for healthcare and IT occupations? For example, an application that would include training to prepare students for jobs as medical administrative assistants, registered behavioral technicians and IT help desk technicians would be acceptable.

A: Yes.

Q: Would you please clarify what is intended by “will support additional seat capacity in ongoing sector-based employment programs that provide training and job placement… and propose to enroll additional …residents in their existing training and placement programs.”  (p.3 of RFP).  Does this mean existing training/employment programs funded by Commonwealth Corporation to the lead applicant or would it include existing training programs at an educational institution that is a partner on the project?

A: These funds are not limited to training/employment programs currently funded by Commonwealth Corporation. We are seeking to expand enrollment in existing training/employment programs, for example, if you typically enroll 30 participants each year, funds could support increasing this by 20 participants, supported by the grant, for a total of 50.

Q: Referring to the requirement that proposed programs show a track record of success: if the applicant seeks to expand training offerings in a high demand occupational field where the applicant does not have previous training experience (i.e., a program that responds to new demands), would the proposed program be considered equally to other applications that show a track record of success?

A: No. We do offer other funding opportunities that aim to build training capacity in the Commonwealth and/or seed new program development. Unlike our cohort-based RFP released in February 2020, we are interested in funding partial cohorts and individual program seats within existing training programs. We are not seeking to fund the development nor implementation of new training programs that do not have a strong track record of success. For example, a CNA training provider proposing to fund a CDL training program would be less compelling than a CDL A training provider proposing to fund additional slots in their CDL A training program or expanding CDL B slots in the same training program.

**Budget and Grant Award / Training Program Outcomes**

**Q: Are we required to have a minimum number of participants that are not grant-funded enrollments? For example, if we have a maximum class size of 15 students, may all 15 be funded by this program?**

**A: No, there is no minimum number of participants that are not grant-funded enrollments. While we will support individual program slots and partial cohorts, we will also fund cohorts that are 100% funded by the grant.**

Q: Are grantees permitted to over enroll above the budgeted enrollment to allow for attrition?

A: No. Due to the performance-based payment structure, grantees would not be permitted to over enroll to allow for attrition. Existing programs with proven track records should use their historical placement rates as a benchmark for their applications. Because the enrollment and placement figures are not decoupled, successful applicants will clearly demonstrate their ability to do a thorough job recruiting and providing supportive services to be successful with their proposed placement goal.

Q: If we add capacity to two existing occupational training programs AND these programs are approved vendors, can we pay for the expanded slots by writing ITA’s under WIOA? In other words, by paying for these slots using our WIOA allocation rather than out of our proposed budget in an application for the Donnelly funds.

A: Yes. We do not intend for the Donnelly grant funds to cover your entire expanded cohort capacity; and as noted on Page 8, Section 3A, we will fund a class that has people from different funding sources. In the example above, WIOA funds could be used in combination with Donnelly funds to expand the overall program capacity; however, please keep in mind, that we would not aim to pay Donnelly grant funds AND WIOA dollars for the same individual. As an example, ITA dollars are eligible as Match, if there is a mixed class with the same instructor. This distinction should be made clear in the proposed program narrative.

Q: I’m seeking clarification on funding duration and amount. On page 15 of the RFP it states: Funding Availability & Grant Award Amount: ~$1.13 million is available for this grant program. Individual grant awards will not exceed $200,000. Contracts will be issued for a period of approximately one year with the option to extend into future years pending consistent service delivery and program performance. I’m seeking clarification on whether this means that the applicant has the option to extend the program performance period beyond 12 months, within the maximum amount of their 2020 grant ward, or whether this means Commonwealth Corporation has the option to extend its award obligation, with additional funding at the contract obligation amount, into additional years.

A: Commonwealth Corporation has the option to extend its award obligation (i.e. contacts) with additional funding or with a no-cost extension into a second year. Given that this is the first year of this specific funding opportunity, we anticipate working closely with all awardees to established shared expectations for outcomes and the performance-based payment structure.

Q: In order to accommodate the inclusion of another two cohorts into our existing program, we would plan for a grant period running from January 2021 through June 2022. The additional 6 months would allow a realistic length of time for us to place the second cohort and have them work for the required 60 days to meet the grant success requirements. Please let us know if this later end date is possible.

A: No, the latest allowable contract end date is December 31, 2021. Please see page 16 for additional details regarding this year’s grant award timeline.

Q: Can placements take place up to 6 months after 12/31/21 (the end date of the contract)?

A: No, due to the unique performance-based funding structure of this funding, all job placement outcomes must occur during the contract period in order to be eligible for payment.

Q: Our program was awarded State funding to invest in equipment and technology over the next year. If awarded funding through this grant program, can we use that grant towards the 30% match contribution requirement? The funding is not from the WCTF.

A: Yes; however, please keep in mind that the recorded match must be for expenses (cash or in-kind) that are incurred during the WCTF grant contract period.

Q: The RFP says that participants must complete 75% of hours for two weeks of training to receive enrollment payment. What happens if a participant completes less than 75% of the first week (for example, 60%), but goes on to complete 90% of the overall training (for example, during an eight-week program, the participant is sick and therefore absent one week). Would the provider still get the first reimbursement?

A: Page 12 of the RFP states that the lead organization will be required to submit standard invoices documenting the number of participants that have reached each milestone. An individual must have attended a minimum of 75% of the scheduled class days for a two-week period in order to qualify the organization for an enrollment payment. In the example above, the provider will receive a reimbursement for this participant once the participant has attended at least 75% for a consecutive, two-week period. We will work with awardees to address attendance disruptions due to illness that may necessitate looking at a rolling period of longer than two weeks to verify enrollment at the 75% threshold.

Q: The participant needs to complete 75% of hours for first two weeks. Is there a minimum number of hours per week for the program?

A: We have not set a minimum number of hours per week for this application process. We anticipate working with awardees to clarify program model expectations and to specify the performance-based payment structure upon grant award.

Q:  In the application the example payout amounts are $3000 for enrollment and $3000 for employment. Are those max amounts for each phase?  If not is there a max amount?

A: The examples provided on page 12 is simply an illustration of the payment structure and does not reflect as maximum for each phase. We have not set a maximum amount for this RFP; however,historically, WCTF grantees have averaged a cost per employment outcome of approximately $7,000 - $8,000. This amount includes all expenses required to obtain an employment outcome, including recruitment, training, support, program design and program management. This amount does not include leveraged resources and funds contributed as match.

Q: Regarding performance-based payments. Are any costs such as admin or indirect costs paid outside the 50% enrollment/50% employment structure or all costs factored into that payment structure?

A: All costs are factored into this two-part payment structure. Please refer to pages 12 and 33 for additional information.

Q: We had a question concerning page 32 in the Training Timeline Form: Could we get clarification on what should be submitted for column 2 "Planned # of Participants Enrolled?" Is this number supposed to represent the planned # of participants enrolled by the training provider for the course?

A: Yes, the second column of this chart should list how many participants would be served by this training program without additional grant-funding. For example, column 2 might list 8 and the 3rd column list 4, which represents the planned number of additional grant-funded participants.

Q: For training start and end dates: If we have rolling enrollments into training that has different options for start dates, and therefore end dates, how should we submit this information?

A: Please approximate how many rolling admissions would typically occur in each month (or quarter) for the second column and include the anticipated number of additional participants trained within a given month (or quarter).

Q: What is the time window that program graduates must be placed into employment?

A: At a minimum, enrollment and employ employment outcomes must be recorded within the contractual grant period in accordance with negotiated reporting dates. While we have not set a maximum time window threshold for this application process, successful applicants should provide indication of how long it typically takes for program participants to graduate and be placed into unsubsidized employment.

Q: Can participants cross fiscal years? (e.g., complete training in May but not be placed/retained until July or August)

A: Yes, so long as outcomes are recorded within the contractual grant period in accordance with negotiated reporting dates.

**Training /Program Design**

Q: I understand that this grant is for funding partial cohorts and individual program seats within existing training programs. If a school district has a track record of success with secondary (Chapter 74) workforce training programs, would expanding those current day programs to include unemployed adults outside of school hours be considered as funding of an existing training program? If so, would Chapter 74 data be used for track record and past performance?

A: Yes.

Q: Would an expansion of our WIOA program which is a training and employment placement program which targets people who are unemployed for training and placement into in-demand jobs to train and place more people under that program but targeted to a particular occupation be appropriate even if we are creating a new training curriculum to address the training needs for that occupation?

A:   We are not seeking to fund new training programs that require new curriculum for a new occupation. We are interested in funding expanded seat capacity in existing training programs that may require curricular modifications or logistical/process improvements in order to maintain and/or build upon the successful track record of the current program. For example, a successful training and placement program for medical assistant positions that proposes to incorporate new remote training modules into its existing curriculum would be eligible for funding; however, if this same applicant proposes to create a new curriculum to train people for positions for a new CNA track, this new occupational track would not be eligible for funding.

**Target Population**

Q: The RFP states we cannot serve “underemployed”, but only “unemployed," however on page 13, section B, it states we must collect "current hourly wage for incumbent workers." Please advise.

A: The inclusion of this language is incorrect. Only individuals who are unemployed can be funded through this grant. Please disregard the data collection requirement for “current hourly wages for incumbent workers.”

Q: The RFP indicates in Section Four B that providers may be asked to record data for non-enrollees on the reason(s) they were not enrolled in the program. Would a poor recruitment interview with program staff be considered a valid reason for choosing another candidate for the limited enrollment slots?

A: Yes.

**Miscellaneous**

Q: My organization is interested in learning more about other funding opportunities offered by Commonwealth Corporation. Where might we find additional information?

A: Commonwealth Corporation posts new funding opportunities on a regular basis throughout the year. We encourage all interested parties to visit our “[Available Funding](http://commcorp.org/available-funding/)” page for up-to-date information on current opportunities. Employers who are interested in incumbent employee training opportunities should refer to our business training grant opportunities here: <http://workforcetrainingfund.org/programs/general-program/guidelines/>.