**Small Business Direct Access (SBDA) Questions and Answers**

**Posted 1.18.2018**

**New questions are in red.**

**Training Type**

**Question:** Does our curriculum, upon which we would base our training, align with the "interpersonal/soft skill" subject matter mentioned in the RFP? We specialize in delivering career readiness instruction, with a focus on developing participants' soft skills. This is accomplished through discussion of workplace culture, unwritten workplace rules, how to communicate effectively with colleagues, and advance in one's career.

Answer: It is not possible to evaluate the proposed curriculum without reading your entire application submission. I would recommend you review section 3 of the RFP. Please remember that one primary criteria we look for is a demonstrated demand where “Successful applicants will identify a region or regions from which they expect to recruit companies to enroll employees in their courses and will demonstrate there is sufficient demand in the identified region to fill the training slots for each proposed course.” Please review question 8 of the narrative format where you are asked to demonstrate this demand.

**Question:** Regarding our application to the Small Business Direct Access Program, will the application and all courses be considered in an "all-or-nothing", or line-item basis?

Answer: The RFP will be considered in its entirety.

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**Question:** May applicants to the Small Business Direct Access Program upload letters of support from area small businesses, along with the required application attachments? If so, in what form and format would Commonwealth Corporation prefer to receive these letters?

Answer: Letters of support are not required. Please see Attachment 2: Application Narrative Form, #8 “demonstrate the demand for the course(s) in this specific geographic region,” outlines how we evaluate support from businesses.

**Budget, Available Funding & Match**

**Question:** Should I enter a line item for each class for each month?  It will be a very long list.  If yes, should it be for the full Grant period of Sept 1, 2018 – Aug 31, 2020?   The list will end up being at least 720 rows long [30 (classes) x 24 (months)]

Answer: Yes. All courses should be listed on the timeline representing each time it is offered. We do not encourage applicants to propose to deliver their entire inventory of courses through this program.

**Question:** We understand that under the Small Business Direct Access Program, we should not be charging employers any additional fees to participate in the proposed courses.  However, are we allowed to charge them a cancelation fee if the individual employee registered does not show up for the program or if they cancel within 48 hours of the class?

Answer: No. Training providers will not be permitted to assess a cancellation fee.

**Question:** Regarding currently approved Express Grant Program courses, will they automatically be rolled over into the new Training Exchange portal? Will we have to re-submit all of our courses?

Answer: The Massachusetts Training Exchange Program is in the design phase. More information will be available as we get closer to the roll out of the Express Program in late fall of 2018.

**Question:**  We appreciate the planned Massachusetts Training Exchange processing all registrations.  Under the program, when would we be notified of registrations for our programs?  Can we require a 7 day notice of any registrations to facilitate completion of assessments and material development?

Answer: Our plan is to build a system that would allow training providers to set some parameters around registration.

**Question:** Say I have 100 slots for Excel 1 and we offer the class 50 times throughout the duration of the grant. That would be 2 people per class to equal the 100 slots. My question is, can we have the availability of 5 slots per class (assuming that not every single class will have 2 grant attendees) and cap out at the 100 slots?

Answer: Trainer providers will need to develop a mechanism for meeting the criteria of the grant and their own needs. We can help you brainstorm some possible options during contracting if awarded.

**Question:** What is meant by **#** of Grant Funded Slots?

Answer: Grant funded slots are the number of slots that will be allocated to the Small Business Direct Access Program. For example, if your course capacity is 10 participants, you may choose to allocate all or portion of these slots to the grant program.

**Question:** What are Total Program Funds Requested?

Answer: Total program funds requested is the total amount of grant funds requested to deliver the proposed training courses to the proposed number of training slots.

**Application Submission**

**Question:** Are training organizations allowed to partner when offering training and can they also partner on the application?

Answer: Multiple training providers can work together but one employer will need to be the lead provider for the training.

**Question:** My organization has multiple sites and we would like to submit a proposal for two of them. Can one organization apply for two sites with two budgets?

Answer: Yes. Applicants may submit multiple proposals. However, applicants are advised that Commonwealth Corporation will be considering geographic distribution as well as diversity in organization type and training topic when making funding decisions.

**Posted 1.8.2018**

**Budget, Available Funding & Match**

**Question:** Are those revisions which change the Express Program from $30,000 to $15,000 per year effective immediately?

Answer:           All businesses that request training funds through either the Express Program or Small Business Direct Access Program are limited to $15,000 in grant funds per calendar year, effective calendar year 2019.

**Question:** If applicant can submit two RFP, can each grant be worth $250,000 or a total of $250,000 per company?

Answer: Applicants may request up to $250,000 per grant.

Question: Can training provider continue with an existing training on the Express Program, where the Commonwealth pays half of the rate; and also with this course, where the Commonwealth pays 100%?

Answer: Yes. If awarded a grant you can continue to offer courses in the Express Program.

Question: Can you inform me of the rules governing the amount paid to the instructor?

Answer: No. The training provider is responsible for determining the amount paid to the instructors.

Question: I understand that the cost per course must not exceed $3,000/participant, and should be consistent with the costs for similar training courses.  Keeping this in mind, are there any limitations regarding what we can pay an instructor per hour?

Answer: No. There are no limitations.

Question: My understanding, based on the RFP, is that grant funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis, with this amount determined by the number of people participating in the training. Is this correct?

Answer: Funds will be disbursed on a cost reimbursement basis, using the cost per training slot agreed upon in the contract. Training providers determine the cost based on overall cost of providing training and will be eligible to receive payment for a participant in a training slot only if the individual participates in at least 50% of the scheduled class hours.

**Application Submission**

Question: The training type for the Small Business Direct Access Program course would be process improvement and quality assurance. Our current Express courses focus on Management/ Supervisory/ Leadership Skills? Does this matter?

Answer: No. The courses you currently offer in the Express Program have no impact on the course you propose to offer in the SBDA program. However, training providers must demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver training to incumbent workers in proposed training type.

Question: If we offer the Direct Access Program though our original course, instead of continuing with the Express Grant that reimburses the company 50% of tuition, what guarantee could you make that this new program will continue for several years?

Answer: We do not guarantee funding outside the approved/current contract period.

**Training Type**

Question: Please provide clarification on Page 6 Section 3A and 3B. The two statements are giving different impressions on whether you can apply for different grants if you wish to do 2 different topics. Our company does training and we are interested in applying for the Non-technical professional skills and the IT & Systems Admin. If we submit 2 separate grants will they both be accepted for review?

Answer: Yes. Applicants must select one type of training they will deliver from the list of topics on page 6 of the RFP. Applicants seeking to offer more than one type of training must submit a separate proposal for each type.