

PA Fund for Workforce Solutions Announces RFP for Industry Partnerships in State

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions (PFWS) has grant money available for successful Industry Partnerships in the commonwealth and is currently accepting requests for proposals (RFPs).

Susan Crandall, Director of Workforce Innovation for Keystone Research Center, announced the funding opportunity on behalf of PFWS.

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions is a project of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (www.nfwsolutions.org), which strives to improve employment, training, and labor market outcomes for lower-skilled individuals. The PFWS builds on the commonwealth's ongoing workforce transformation by providing opportunities for lower-skilled individuals to access and advance within Industry Partnerships.

PFWS' new grant program is aimed at expanding opportunities available through the Industry Partnerships to low-income workers. Grants are available for successful Industry Partnerships that want to include low-income workers in their strategy or increase their ability to serve those workers. Successful partnerships that face funding gaps due to recessionary budget cutbacks are also eligible.

The grants are also designed to help Industry Partnerships that want to compete for federal economic recovery act dollars intended to train low-income workers for jobs in "green" industries or in health care.

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions (PFWS) has supported pilot projects linked to existing state Industry Partnerships in the metals industry, the healthcare field, and in the advanced manufacturing sector. These projects have enhanced opportunities for low-income workers to attain good jobs by removing obstacles to advancement opportunities, improving the quality of education or training, and developing organizational practices that promote upward mobility and retention.

Applicants should submit proposals by the first deadline: Monday, April 6, 2009 at 5:00 p.m. This allows PFWS to make decisions on planning grants early enough to help Industry Partnerships compete for the economic recovery funds. Subject to the availability of funds, a second, May 15, 2009 deadline may be established. This deadline would permit decisions on grants early enough to help Industry Partnerships leverage state dollars in the 2009-10 fiscal year.

Proposals should be e-mailed to Herrera@keystoneresearch.org. Please include the phone number, mailing address, and e-mail information for the primary project contact. Also indicate whether you are applying for a planning, capacity building, or implementation grant.

A bidders' telephone conference call will be held on Monday, March 30, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. Bidders should dial 800-373-0950 and use pass code 60782. Any questions should be directed to Susan Crandall at Crandall@keystoneresearch.org or 717-829-5825.

The Request for Proposals follows:

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions Request for Proposals March 2009

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions (PFWS), funded by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (www.nfwsolutions.org) with matching funds from Pennsylvania foundations and the commonwealth, currently links four regional initiatives (in Erie, South Central PA, Southwest PA, and Southeast PA) to form one statewide collaborative. The goal of the fund is to help workers access and advance in family-supporting careers through Industry Partnerships. Pilot projects, which are linked to existing state Industry Partnerships, are underway in the metals industry, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. An additional cross-sector Industry Partnership (known as the "labor-management clearinghouse") is under development in the building and construction, building services, hospitality, and utility industries.

PFWS grants will focus on efforts to advance lower-skilled incumbent workers along career ladders, as well as on projects that build pipelines into new career ladder opportunities for unemployed and marginally employed workers. The overarching goal is to address the critical hiring needs of employers, while moving lower-skilled workers into jobs that have the potential to pay family-sustaining wages.

The Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions also emphasizes systems change through changing employer practices to improve job quality and advancement opportunities, improving policies, and building capacity. PFWS is especially critical during this economic downturn, given that when lower-skilled workers are dislocated, they have even greater challenges accessing and advancing in family-sustaining jobs. A major focus of the current grant making strategy is to enable Industry Partnerships to leverage federal and state dollars targeted at the unemployed and underemployed.

Grant making Strategy

The overarching goal of grants available through this RFP is to increase the number of Pennsylvania Industry Partnerships that, in conjunction with meeting employer needs, provide opportunities for employment and career advancement for lower-skilled workers. The PFWS seeks to do that in three ways:

- By providing small (up to \$6,000 each) planning grants that Industry Partnerships can use to develop larger implementation proposals that would be submitted for federal economic

recovery act funds, for state Industry Partnership grants, and/or for other federal, state, local, and philanthropic resources. Planning grant money may be used to research the labor market and policies, access technical assistance, convene meetings with key stakeholders, and to write grants. (With regard to state IP grants, the state currently allows to 25% of funds to be targeted at new-hire entry-level workers, but these funds have been undersubscribed in the past. Given the recent increase in the number of dislocated and other jobless workers, in Fiscal Year 2009-10 the commonwealth may allow more than 25% of funds for projects that place new hires.)

- By supporting up to three capacity building grants (up to \$25,000 each) that enable IPs (or groups of IPs) and/or their partners to improve their ability to manage and implement high-quality projects that help low-income workers get and keep family sustaining jobs and/or advance along a career path into such jobs.
- By supporting up to two supplemental implementation grants (up to \$30,000) to help sustain IP projects that help low-income workers get and keep family sustaining jobs and/or advance along a career path into such jobs.

Planning grants will have priority because of their ability to leverage other funding to support PFWs goals.

We anticipate that the grant awards may include:

1. Planning grants to Industry Partnerships who want to target monies from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) toward training, placing, and/or advancing lower-skilled workers into jobs in the energy efficiency, renewable energy, utilities infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, and health care sectors.
2. Planning or pilot implementation grants to Industry Partnerships that hope to expand their state-supported grant projects to include entry-level workers, for example through pre-employment assessment and training programs that lead to placement of lower-skilled workers in high-priority occupations or by augmenting on-the-Job (OJT) training funds with customized workplace services (e.g., peer mentors and career coaching) directed toward entry level, lower-skilled workers.
3. Capacity building grants that are designed to help Industry Partnerships increase their skills and capabilities to lead activities focused on lower-skilled workers (e.g., training, peer learning or the development/adaption of tools for measuring the impact of interventions on outcomes for employers and workers). Grants may be given to an individual Industry Partnership or to groups of IPs, who might come from a single region or one targeted industry sector.
4. Implementation grants that fill critical funding gaps for Industry Partnerships who already have high-quality programs that serve lower-skilled populations but that have experienced decreases in funding due to the recession and/or cutbacks in state funding.

Proposals that only deliver off-the-shelf pre-employment training to low-income workers and do not include any industry-specific customization, redesign of pre-employment screening, services, and placement, or linkages with post-employment employer practices will not be funded.

Eligible Entities

The target of PFWS grants are Industry Partnerships that currently or in the past have received funding from the Job Ready PA Industry Partnership and Incumbent Worker Training Grant programs. Proposals from other entities may be considered if they can demonstrate that they fit the state’s definition of Industry Partnerships but have operated in the past without IP or IWT grants. Proposals from entirely new Industry Partnerships—without a track record or demonstrated ability to bring employers together to assess and meet workforce needs—are unlikely to be funded. The lead applicant must have experience working in the targeted industry cluster and have demonstrated capacity to coordinate and lead all aspects of the project. If the lead applicant is not the current Industry Partnership coordinator or the Local Workforce Investment Board, a letter of support from these entities must be provided to ensure a coordinated effort.

Target Workers

The PFWS aims to support adult lower-skilled, low-wage workers. This target population is typically characterized by one or more of the following characteristics:

- An educational attainment of, at most, a high school diploma or GED;
- A work history comprised solely of entry-level positions;
- Multiple spells of unemployment or part-time employment when full-time work is desired;
- Basic or below basic literacy skills as defined by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy 2003;
- Poor “soft skills” in communication and decision-making

Priority Regions

Priority regions include those currently participating in the *Pennsylvania Fund for Workforce Solutions* because regional philanthropy (i.e., foundations and United Ways) has committed resources and leadership to helping low-income workers advance through Industry Partnerships. These regions have been determination based on the funding areas supported by the philanthropic entities that contribute to the fund.

- South Central PA
- Northwest PA
- Southwest PA
- Southeast PA

Industry Partnerships from regions other than those listed above may be considered for an award amount if a project is significantly innovative and has a high potential for replication in other areas of the state. Industry Partnerships from other regions may increase their prospects for funding if they can (a) match PFWS funds with local philanthropic dollars; and (b) obtain a support letter from local funders with a commitment to a dialogue with the PFWS to explore bringing the region into the collaborative. Funding decisions are at the discretion of the PFWS management committee, which includes representatives of the four regions and of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

What We Fund

The PFWS funds Industry Partnership activities focused on improving opportunities for lower-skilled workers, provided that those activities are undertaken based on employer needs. Based on their deep knowledge of employers in an industry sector, target populations, and the workforce system itself, Industry Partnerships should identify institutional practices, regulatory constraints, and other conditions that create barriers to hiring, training, retaining, and advancing low-skilled adults in an industry or occupation. To address specific barriers, Industry Partnerships should develop services that demonstrate practical, replicable solutions to problems of access, quality of education or training services, and workplace supervision and organizational practices that lead to turnover and limit upward mobility.

High performing Industry Partnerships endeavor to change the policies and practices of employers, educational institutions, training and literacy providers, as well as the non-profit providers of case management, workplace mentoring, and other support services. PFWS seeks to provide funding especially for those areas difficult to fund through federal and state funding sources. This includes capacity building, and project management for IP efforts to support “deep employer organizational change” that improves jobs and upward mobility for low-income workers for multiple firms in an industry cluster.

PFWS Industry Partnership funding is intended to help *participants* in the following ways:

- Make education and training programs and services accessible to low-income individuals and low-skilled working adults;
- Provide job readiness, adult basic education (ABE) and life skills training that prepares low-income individuals for industry specific occupational training;
- Provide education and training that is contextualized to the industry and cognizant of employer needs and skill standards;
- Provide assessment tools that gauge work readiness;
- Facilitate attainment of a GED or high school diploma and of a postsecondary and/or industry-recognized credentials;
- Clearly link increases in skills, competencies, and credentials to increases in income; and
- Provide a holistic approach to career advancement that integrates wraparound supports, such as peer mentoring, career coaching, case management services, access to support services,

financial literacy and asset development services, digital/computer literacy, and job search and placement assistance.

Industry Partnerships are encouraged to introduce models that *accelerate adult learning and the attainment of postsecondary credentials, such as:*

- Competency-based curricula tied to employer needs and industry skill standards in a given industry sector;
- Delivery of those curricula through modular, sequential courses offering manageable “stepping stone” increments of skill-building;
- Flexible course formats offering training at times and places and by means convenient for both unemployed and working learners and for employers;
- Academic credit for work-based learning and credit for life experience;
- Easy course credit portability across programs and institutions, for seamless progression along a career path curriculum supported by multiple training providers; and
- Road maps showing the connections among education and training programs, jobs at different skill levels in a given sector, and routes of career progression through skill-building.

Consistent with the state’s Industry Partnership strategy, the expanded work must be *built on the workforce needs of employers. Industry Partnerships are encouraged to focus on changing workplace practices that will benefit both employers and employees:*

- Help employers identify and adopt practices that encourage retention and improved performance of their low-skilled workers, such as more effective screening, best-practice job orientations (e.g., at the workplace or that include an incumbent worker in the interview team), workplace mentors, and supportive supervision;
- Map internal and external career advancement pathways from low-skilled to mid-skilled jobs;
- Identify and analyze specific employer challenges in preparing their low-skilled workers to fill mid-skill level jobs for which employers are experiencing labor shortages;
- Translate employer competency requirements into curricula and program designs that develop appropriate skills among low-skilled workers and job seekers;
- Facilitate employer and incumbent worker involvement in program and curriculum development, the assessment and selection of trainees, and program oversight and continuous improvement;
- Provide appropriate, culturally competent training for employers’ entry-level workers, supervisors, and managers;
- Facilitate access for managers that want to improve organizational practices to other managers that already have effective practices and can serve as peer mentors;

- Facilitate access to social services, support systems, and expertise in human resources practices that contribute to the successful hiring, retention, and advancement of low-income workers.

Industry Partnerships can and should provide economic benefit to companies as well as to the low-income job and skill seeker. In return, employers that participate in Industry Partnerships are expected to make commitments to:

- Provide career advancement opportunities for low-skilled workers who participate in skill- and wage-advancement plans for mid-skill-level jobs;
- Adopt human resource practices that support the retention and advancement of their entry-level workers; Provide increased pay for increased skill, and offer health care and other benefits;
- Provide release time for their employees to attend training; and
- Actively participate in the partnership to support the expansion of the partnership's work related to lower-skilled workers.

Application Process and Timeline

Please respond to these questions by Monday, April 6th if you wish to be considered for PFWS funding. Responses must be **no longer than five pages**, and should be emailed to Maria Herrera at Herrera@keystoneresearch.org. Grant finalists will be asked to supply additional information subsequent to that date.

A bidder's conference call will be held on Monday, March 30 at 3:30 p.m. Please call conference line # 800 373 0950. The pass code is 607821.

The first deadline for proposals is Monday, April 6, 2009. This is timed with the goal of making decisions on planning grants soon enough to help Industry Partnerships compete for economic recovery act funds.

Subject to the availability of funds, the second deadline will be May 15, 2009. This is timed with the goal of making decisions on grants soon enough to help IPs leverage state dollars in 2009-10 for projects that benefit low-income workers.

Contact Information

Please include the phone number, mailing address, and email information for the primary project contact. Also indicate whether you are applying for a **planning, capacity building, or an implementation** grant.

Application Content (five pages maximum)

Partnership Overview

1. Briefly describe the mission of the Industry Partnership
2. What are the current goals and objectives of the Partnership?
3. What are the primary activities and interventions of the Partnership?
4. Describe your current strategy for engaging and involving employers.
5. What are the main accomplishments of your partnership to date?
(The IP Annual Report or other existing summaries of IP mission, goals, activities, and accomplishments may be included as an Attachment. This does not count towards the five-page limit.)

Project Overview

1. Describe why the Industry Partnership intends to pursue strategies designed to provide opportunities for a lower-skilled population. If the project is part of a larger effort to seek additional federal and/or state stimulus funds, or other key funding sources, please describe.
2. Has the Partnership focused to-date on serving lower-skilled employees? If so, please describe.
3. What workforce challenges are employers encountering in recruiting or retaining entry-level workers?
4. Provide a brief summary of the advancement opportunities within the industry and the accessibility of jobs paying family sustaining wages.

Target Population

1. Will the Partnership target pre-employed participants, incumbent workers, or both?
2. What challenges will the target population face in accessing jobs that pay family sustaining jobs in this sector?

Strategy Overview

1. If you are applying for a planning grant, please (a) detail your qualifications for securing additional federal, state, or other funds. Also, please (b) outline the additional information you will seek to gather, (c) how you will collect this information, and (d) the employer and other stakeholder engagement during the planning. The questions below can also be used as a guide: please provide information related to these questions that you already have as well as how you plan to collect additional information. The final deliverable required at the end of planning grants is a proposal for additional funds from the federal government, state, or other source.

2. If you are applying for a capacity-building grant, please describe how the existing capacity-gap limits your ability to engage low-skilled workers, and how you plan to build this capacity. (If you are applying for a capacity-building grant, you may skip question 4 below.)

For all three types of grants:

1. Where do you see the gaps or disconnects in the workforce development system, in business practices (e.g., inadequate training, screening mechanisms) or in related support systems (e.g., transportation, child care) that limit accessibility or career advancement options for low-skilled adults in this industry?
2. How will the Partnership align resources, including new partners and educational providers, to address these gaps and/or disconnects?
3. What types of services or interventions does the partnership anticipate providing for employers and workers throughout the project?
4. What are the anticipated outcomes as a result of the grant?
5. Please provide a rough estimate of costs for carrying out the strategy. (If your concept is chosen for further consideration, we will request a detailed budget.)

Please note that PFWS will not pay for the operating functions of industry partnerships as state funding is available for these purposes, but will pay for other core costs directly associated with extending the work of IPs to our target population. Budgets for planning grants should include funds for travel for key personnel to one statewide meeting (probably near Harrisburg. Budgets for implementation grants should include funds for travel to two statewide meetings.

Attachment

Please include an active employer membership list as the sole attachment to your response. You do not need to count this within the five-page limit.

Appendix A: Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Employer Commitment Requirements

All funded projects (including planning grants that then successfully apply for federal, state, or other funds, using a proposal based on the planning grant) must demonstrate an openness to technical assistance (made available at the discretion of PFWS), an ability to collect data on project activities, and that employers are committed to helping low-income workers succeed in jobs accessible to the target population.

Employer Commitment

Developing employer-driven initiatives is a central tenet of PFWS. Applicants for implementation and capacity building grants will be required to document employer commitment through detailed letters of support, and demonstrate employer willingness to recruit and advance lower-skilled workers. The final decision-making process may include site visits/interviews in which employers are asked to participate.

Technical Assistance Requirements

For implementation and capacity building grants, and for planning grants that successfully win implementation funds from other sources, the PFWS collaborative will work with Partnerships to determine if an awardee needs technical assistance in order to effectively implement its proposal. Any Technical Assistance providers must be approved by PFWS. The initial award of the grant, as well as subsequent payment – may be dependent on the acceptance of – and cooperation with – the technical assistance provider. Technical assistance funds may be allocated as part of the grant award.

Evaluation Requirements

A comprehensive evaluation of the process and outcomes of the grant (whether funded by this RFP or, as in most cases, other funds) will identify successful strategies as well as areas for improvement during program implementation. As a partner in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, PFWS grantees will also participate in the multi-year evaluation of that national initiative to strengthen and expand workforce partnerships. Implementation grantees will be expected to collect and track individual participant data and outcomes as part of the local and national evaluations over a multiyear period and to cooperate with the evaluators in documenting all aspects of their workforce partnerships and programs. Examples of what IPs will be expected to track include: (1) Demographics (age, race, education, recent wages, benefits, etc.); (2) Participation (receipt of services such as soft skills training, apprenticeship, ESL, etc.); and (3) Outcomes (service completion, placement, wage gains, retention,

promotion, etc.) Local evaluators will also conduct semi-annual site visits to document and understand the strategies being implemented by Industry Partnerships.

Appendix B: RESOURCES

For definitions of green jobs, see

[Green Jobs: A Pathway Forward for the Middle Class](#)

For guidelines on how to design workforce projects related to clean energy and green jobs, see

<http://www.greenforall.org/files/green-jobs-act.pdf>

For more information about Pennsylvania's recovery efforts, see

[Pennsylvania Recovery Efforts](#)