

**Workforce Innovation Fund
Solicitation for Grant Applications
Frequently Asked Questions for Prospective Applicants**

AWARD INFORMATION

Award Amount

How much money will be awarded?

DOL intends to award up to \$98.5 million in grant funds to approximately 20 to 30 applicants.

What project type I should apply for?

If you are proposing new or emerging structural and/or service delivery reform ideas that have been tried in limited circumstances (if at all) but are supported by strong logic models and/or successful outcomes data, you should apply as Project Type A: New and Untested Ideas.

If you are proposing structural and/or service delivery reform ideas that have been implemented and tested previously, where the testing indicates some potential for success and that more rigorous evaluation is needed, you should apply as Project Type B: Promising Ideas.

If you are proposing structural and/or service delivery projects that a) further develop ideas that are already supported by strong evidence and/or b) take ideas supported by strong evidence to a larger scale, you should apply as Project Type C: Adapting Proven Ideas.

What is the expected date of award notification and receipt of funds?

We expect award notification to be made sometime in Summer 2012. All award notifications will be posted on the ETA Web site, (<http://www.doleta.gov>). Non-selected applicants will be notified by mail. Grant awards must be made by September 30, 2012.

What is the range of grant awards?

Individual grant amounts will range from \$1 million to \$12 million depending on the project type. The grant amounts for Project Type A must range in size from \$1 – 3 million dollars; Project Type B must range in size from \$3 – 6 million dollars; and Project Type C must range in size from \$6 – \$12 million dollars.

Will ETA consider a proposal with a budget outside of the range for the particular program type?

No. Proposals with grant request outside the specified ranges will be considered non-responsive, and such applicants will not be considered for funding.

Period of Performance

What is the period of performance for these grants?

The period of performance for project type B or C will be up to 40 months for technical grant performance, with an additional 12 months available to complete evaluation activities. The grant performance period for project type A will be up to 36 months.

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Will there be an opportunity to request no-cost extensions beyond the approved period of performance?

It is highly unlikely that the period of performance for these grants will be extended. Applicants should plan to fully expend grant funds during the period of performance (including both the period of technical grant performance and any additional period of evaluation activities) while ensuring full transparency and accountability for all expenditures. ETA will closely monitor grantee progress towards stated goals and may choose to terminate grants that are not on pace to complete technical activities by the end of their technical grant performance period or evaluation activities by the end of their evaluation period of performance.

Multiple Applications

Can I apply for more than one grant as the lead applicant?

No. Applicants may submit no more than one application as the lead applicant. Applicants that do submit more than one application as the lead applicant will be deemed non-responsive and none of their lead applications will be considered for funding. Applicants, however, may participate in an unlimited number of applications as a consortium member.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Eligible Institutions

What is an eligible institution?

In order to be eligible for consideration under this solicitation, the lead applicant must be an eligible institution. Eligible institutions are: (i) State Workforce Agencies; (ii) Local Workforce Investment Boards; (iii) entities that are eligible to apply for WIA Section 166 grants; (iv) consortia of State Workforce Agencies; (v) consortia of Local Workforce Investment Boards; and (vi) consortia of entities eligible for WIA Section 166 grants.

Will applications from other organizations be considered?

No. If your organization does not meet the applicant eligibility requirements, we will consider your application non-responsive and it will not be reviewed.

Consortia Applicants

Can my consortium include a mix of organizations that are both State Workforce Agencies and Local Workforce Investment Boards?

No. A Local Workforce Investment Board, acting as the lead applicant for a consortium, may only apply on behalf of a consortium of eligible Local Workforce Investment Boards. Likewise, a State Workforce Agency, acting as the lead applicant for a consortium, may only apply on behalf of a consortium of eligible State Workforce Agencies representing two or more states.

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Can my consortium include WIA Section 166 grantees and State Workforce Agencies or Local Workforce Investment Boards?

Yes. Consortia of State Workforce Agencies and Local Workforce Investment Boards may include WIA Section 166 grantees as consortia members.

Must all members of our consortium be eligible State Workforce Agencies and Local Workforce Investment Boards, Local Workforce Investment Boards, or entities eligible to apply for WIA Section 166 grants?

Yes. An application can only be submitted by a lead State Workforce Agency, Local Workforce Investment Board, or applicants eligible to apply for WIA Section 166 grants on behalf of a consortium of other eligible applicants.

If my consortium includes non eligible members, will our application be considered?

No. A consortium application that does not meet the applicant eligibility requirements of the Solicitation will be deemed non-responsive to the SGA and will not be reviewed.

APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Applications

The SGA indicates that applicants need a DUNS number. Must strategic partners also have a DUNS number?

No. Only the applicant needs a DUNS number. To obtain a DUNS number, access this Web site: <http://www.dunandbradstreet.com> or call 1-866-705-5711.

Are there assigned program officers who will be available to answer questions throughout the application process?

All questions during the application process should be directed to: Ariam Ferro, Grants Management Specialist, Division of Federal Assistance, FAX number (202) 693-2705. (This is not a toll-free number). You must specifically address your FAX to the attention of Ariam Ferro, which should reference SGA/DFA-PY-11-05 and include a contact name, fax and phone number.

UPDATE (January 27, 2012): Faxing questions is acceptable; however, the most expeditious way to contact Mr. Ferro per the Solicitation is via email at ferro.ariam@dol.gov.

Must proposals submitted on-line through Grants.gov be sent from the eligible applicant?

Yes.

Should I model the format of my technical proposal after the five criteria against which the proposal will be scored?

Although we do not have a formal format or layout for technical proposals, applicants should be aware that their applications will be evaluated on the basis of the evaluation criteria found in Parts V(A) of the SGA: (1) Description of the Problem or Issue; (2) Describing Your Project:

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Strategic Approach and Logic Model; (3) Work Plan and Project Management; (4) Strategic Leadership; (5) Performance Accountability Framework: Data Collection, Measurement, and Reporting; and (6) Bonus Points for Consortium Applications. While proposals are scored against the evaluation criteria, these criteria are closely linked to the critical elements found in Section I of the Solicitation and ETA encourages applicants to closely review the critical elements of the Solicitation and incorporate information about how their proposals responds to these elements into their applications.

Content and Form of Application Submission

Is there any page limit to the grant application?

Yes. The technical proposal is limited to 25 double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 inch pages with 12 point text font and 1 inch margins for all grantees except consortia applicants. Consortia applicants' technical proposal is limited to 27 double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 inch pages with 12 point text font and 1 inch margins. Any materials beyond the specified page limit will not be read.

What other documents must be submitted with the technical proposal?

To be considered for funding, your application must include the following required attachments, in addition to the technical proposal:

- (a) You must provide an Abstract, not to exceed three pages, which will serve as a summary of the proposal. The abstract will be shared publicly and must include the following information: 1) applicant's name; 2) a clear designation of the applicant category – individual applicant or consortium applicant; 3) applicant/lead applicant city/state; 4) areas served by the grant; 5) project name; 6) funding level requested, broken out by technical proposal costs and evaluation cost; 7) the project type (A, B, or C); 8) description of the proposed project; 9) description of the proposed evaluation strategy; and 10) public contact information for the grant, which may be an email or website.
- (b) You must provide a one-page graphic of the project's logic model as described in Section V.A.2. Sample logic model graphics can be found here: http://www.doleta.gov/workforce_innovation.
- (c) You must submit a separate evaluation budget narrative and Program Evaluation Plan for an independent third party evaluation of your proposed strategy, as described in section V.B. The program evaluation plan does not count against the technical proposal page limit, but cannot exceed 15 pages. There is no page limit for the evaluation budget narrative.
- (d) Project/Performance Site Location(s) form (available at <http://apply07.grants.gov/apply/FormLinks?family=15>). If using grants.gov for submission, this form must be attached under the required forms section. Please note that this is a

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standard form used for many programs and has a check box for applying as an individual. Disregard this box on the form as individuals are not eligible to apply for this solicitation.

- (e) If you are applying as the legal entity that serves as the fiscal agent for the Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB) in an area where the LWIB is not incorporated, you must provide, as an attachment to your application, a letter from the chair of the Local Workforce Investment Board that affirms that the applicant is the legal entity that serves as the fiscal agent for the LWIB, confirms that the applicant is submitting the application on behalf of the LWIB, and includes the applicant's legal name and Federal Tax Identification Number.
- (f) If you are applying as a consortium applicant, you must provide a consortium agreement as described in section III.A.2.
- (g) If you believe a waiver of WIA or other Federal laws or rules would enhance the innovation(s) described in your application, you should submit a detailed description of the potential waiver request as an attachment. You should also describe any waivers you already have for your formula program and that you wish to incorporate into the grant agreement. If you are a local area and feel your project would benefit from a waiver under WIA Title I and Wagner Peyser, you should consult with the state in the formation of your waiver description, since only states can request WIA Title I and Wagner Peyser waivers. You should also describe waiver requests that you intend to seek for programs under other federal laws. You should not submit a formal waiver request with your application, nor do you need to submit the request for public comment required under WIA Title I and Wagner Peyser. Formal waiver requests will be accepted and reviewed after grant awards have been made.

UPDATE (January 27, 2012): After continued thought and additional questions on this topic, we would like to clarify this point. Per the Solicitation, you MAY submit formal waiver requests with your application, according to individual program requirements. Thus, you will not be penalized for submitting these. However, please keep in mind that they will not be reviewed until after grant awards are made.

- (h) You should submit substantive non-form letters, Memoranda of Understanding, and other documentation from key leaders and partners to demonstrate their support of the proposed activities as described in Section V.1., Criterion 4 – “Strategic Leadership.”

Do the attachments count against my page limit?

No. Required attachments listed in Part III of the SGA do not count against the page limit for the technical proposal.

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Can I submit additional materials such as resumés or general letters of support or commitment?

No. DOL will not accept general letters of support submitted by organizations or individuals that are not partners in the proposed project and that do not directly identify the specific commitment or roles of the project partners. Support letters of this nature will not be considered in the review process. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit on the documents that are required in the SGA.

How should I craft my timeline? For example, should I estimate that projects will start in September 2012?

Because we do not know the exact date these grants will be awarded and executed, applicants are not expected to use specific calendar/date references (i.e., January, March 13, April 2012, etc.) in the timeline of grant activities. Instead, applicants are advised to refer to general time periods (i.e., first 3 months, x number of weeks, first year, second year, etc.).

Program Evaluation Plan

Do I have to submit a full Program Evaluation Plan with my application?

Yes. Every grant application must include a Program Evaluation Plan and a Supplementary Evaluation Budget Narrative for an independent third-party evaluation of your proposed strategy.

Is there a page limit for the Program Evaluation Plan?

Yes. The Program Evaluation Plan does not count against the 25-page limit for the Technical Proposal, but must not exceed 15 pages.

Do the three project types require different evaluation strategies?

Yes. For Project Type A: New and Untested Ideas, your Program Evaluation Plan should consist of at least collection and analysis of process, output, and outcome data, and if feasible within the financial constraints, a rigorous method to evaluate impact.

For Project Type B: Promising Ideas, (i.e. structural and/or service delivery reform proposals that have been implemented and tested previously, and the testing indicates some potential for success and that more rigorous evaluation is needed), your Program Evaluation Plan should be of a higher level of rigor than the evidence cited in the proposal, and should include the most rigorous strategy available to demonstrate impact given the financial constraints; such as a comparison group or random assignment (where applicable).

For Project Type C: Adapting Proven Ideas, your Program Evaluation Plan must consist of the highest level of evaluation rigor that is applicable to the proposed project. For example, the highest level of rigor for a service delivery innovation that is directly focused on participant outcomes is a random assignment study, while the highest level of rigor for a structural innovation may be a quasi-experimental evaluation.

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If my application is selected, will my Program Evaluation Plan be executed as-is?

Selection as a grantee does not mean that the proposed Program Evaluation Plan has been accepted as-is. ETA will work with grantees to modify the evaluation design, as needed, in collaboration with the national evaluation coordinator. If after 45 days ETA concludes that the evaluation design cannot be sufficiently improved to be “strong” based on the factors described in V.B.1.a., the Grant Officer reserves the right to terminate the grant award.

Can the lead applicant or a consortium member also act as the evaluator for the grant?

No. The SGA requires that an independent third party complete the evaluation of your strategy.

Is there a limit on the amount of grant funds that can be spent on evaluation?

Yes. Proposals under Project Type A must limit evaluation costs to no more than 10-20 percent of the total grant award. Evaluation costs for proposals under Project Type B must be no more than 20 percent of the total grant award. Evaluation costs for proposals under Project Type C must be no more than 20 percent of the total.

UPDATE (January 27, 2012): Although the original answer states that evaluation costs for Project Type A are limited to between 10 and 20 percent, there is no expectation that evaluation costs will fall into this specific range. The applicant should adhere to the requirements of the Solicitation, which states a Project Type A proposal must limit evaluation costs to no more than 20 percent of the total grant award.

What is the role of the national evaluation coordinator?

The Workforce Innovation Fund will expand the availability of evidence-based practices in the workforce development field through careful evaluation of each grant investment. The national evaluation coordinator will work with ETA to provide ongoing technical assistance to grantees and the grantees’ third party evaluators to ensure consistent and high quality evaluations across the grants.

Waivers

Where can I find out more information on available administrative flexibility as it pertains to the Workforce Innovation Fund?

Attachment B of the SGA outlines the various Federal program waiver authorities and special rules that applicants may wish to consider as they build their applications.

Does the Workforce Innovation Fund provide for any new waiver authority to existing programs?

No, the Workforce Innovation Fund does not provide any new administrative flexibility. However, applicants are encouraged to make the most of existing flexibility as they prepare their applications.

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How do I apply for a waiver or invoke special rules?

Attachment B outlines the process for applying a waiver or special rules to your application. While the specific requirements vary by Federal program, applicants are requested to include a description of the administrative flexibility they would like to pursue as an attachment to their technical proposal. Although it is not required, you may submit formal waiver requests you're your proposals. Administrative flexibility attachments will not be paneled or scored. Formal requests will only be reviewed after grant award. Successful applicants will be contacted regarding the steps they must take to incorporate any administrative flexibility outlined in their proposal.

Paneling and Review

What is the process for reviewing applications?

Applications will be reviewed according to a two-tier process. In the first tier, a technical review panel will carefully evaluate all responsive technical proposals against the selection criteria discussed in section V.A. of the SGA. Based on technical scores awarded in the first tier, the Grant Officer will identify finalists who will move on to the second tier of the selection process. During the second tier, a separate panel of evaluation experts will review the evaluation proposal using the factors laid out in section V.B.1.a. of the SGA. The panel score for the technical proposal will serve as the primary basis for selection in conjunction with other factors such as project type (A, B, and C) representation, variety of strategies, the evaluation materials review, geographic balance, the availability of funds, and which proposals are most advantageous to the government.

What criteria will be used to evaluate the Program Evaluation Plan?

In reviewing your plan, we will rate your plan as either “strong”, “moderate”, or “weak” based on the extent to which the following factors are fully addressed:

Factor 1 – Your proposed evaluation is of an appropriate level of rigor for your proposed project type (A, B, or C), as described in Section I.D.

Factor 2 – You provide a detailed plan for rigorously evaluating the program, including a complete description of the study methodology and data collection methods. You provide information about control or comparison groups if applicable to the proposed evaluation. If you are proposing a random assignment methodology, you fully explain how the recruitment plan will yield a sufficient number of qualified applicants (both program and controls) to produce valid estimates, how random assignment will be performed, and what procedures will be in place to ensure the fidelity of random assignment (i.e., that all eligible individuals that apply are randomly assigned and that no one who is randomly assigned to the control group receives the services being studied). If you are proposing a comparison group methodology, you fully explain the source of the comparison group and how the comparison group will be drawn from it, including showing that data on both the comparison group and the program participant group will be from compatible sources (e.g., based on the same questionnaire). You also explain how

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you will ensure that the anticipated follow-up data will be successfully collected from participants and the control/comparison group.

Factor 3 – You fully explain how funding the proposed program evaluation will provide knowledge that can be used to enhance the broader workforce system.

Factor 4 – You clearly describe your process for procuring the services of a third-party evaluator, including the levels of capacity and expertise you will require of the selected organization(s) to conduct rigorous evaluations of your proposed strategy.

Evaluation plans will be rated as “strong,” if they fully address the factors above. Evaluation plans will be rated as “moderate,” if the information provided only partially addresses the factors above but has the potential to be improved by minimal technical assistance from DOL. Evaluation plans that do not meet the qualifications for “moderate” or “strong” ratings will be rated as “weak.”

Will ETA review proposal drafts before the deadline?

No.

Will applications be reviewed upon receipt?

No. Technical review panels will convene after the closing date of the SGA.

MISCELLANEOUS

Preparation of a grant application

Is there anywhere I can go for assistance in preparing my application?

ETA encourages new prospective applicants to view the online tutorial, “Grant Applications 101: A Plain English Guide to ETA Competitive Grants,” available through Workforce3One at: http://www.workforce3one.org/page/grants_toolkit.

In addition, ETA encourages prospective applicants to view the online tools available at http://www.doleta.gov/workforce_innovation. The tools include two online tutorials—*Making the Case for What Works: Using Evidence Based Practices to Support Innovation* and *Fully Articulating Your Vision: Using Logic Models to Support Innovation*. Prospective applicants may also view the *Workforce Innovation Fund* webinar.

UPDATE (January 27, 2012): Information previously presented here has been removed, as it led to a document which is no longer available online. Please utilize the remaining online resources listed above.

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FISCAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE

Administrative Costs

Under this SGA, an entity that receives a grant to carry out a project or program may not use more than 10 percent of the amount of the grant to pay administrative costs associated with the program or project. Administrative costs could be direct or indirect costs, and are defined at 20 CFR 667.220. Administrative costs do not need to be identified separately from program costs on the SF-424A Budget Information Form. However, they must be tracked through the grantee's accounting system. To claim any administrative costs that are also indirect costs, the applicant must obtain an Indirect Cost Rate Agreement from its Federal Cognizant agency.