

## **Abstract**

### **Workforce Innovation Fund Application**

**Applicant Name:** Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

**Applicant Category:** Individual State

**Lead Applicant City/State:** Springfield/Illinois

**Areas Served:** Statewide

**Project Name:** Illinois Pathways Initiative: Moving Regional Sector Partnerships to Scale in Manufacturing

**Funding Level Requested:** \$11,399,985 technical costs

\$ 600,000 evaluation costs

**Project Type:** C

#### **Description of Proposed Project:**

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) will work together to scale up and sustain regional sector partnerships to address the growing skilled worker shortages in manufacturing.

These state agency partners will implement innovative economic development, workforce development and education policies and systems to scale up proven models of regional public-private sector partnerships and make these partnerships an integral part of the public workforce investment system. The project will focus on the manufacturing sector as the test case.

Illinois will use an evidence-based regional partnership model that includes key features of leading national models that have been proven to meet employer needs as well as expand opportunities for the most vulnerable populations served through the public workforce investment system including low-income adults and long-term unemployed workers. These proven models have four key features: (1) a strong sector expertise and focus, (2) clearly defined career pathways with bridge programs for low-skilled workers, (3) flexible and integrated public-private delivery systems with expanded work-based learning opportunities that braid together multiple federal and state funding streams, and (4) individualized transition and support services.

This collaborative interagency effort will build on the Illinois Pathways Initiative---a public-private P-20 education and workforce initiative to meet employer needs and expand career opportunities in nine STEM-related sectors including manufacturing. This initiative is led by a public-private governance body in cooperation with the Illinois Business Roundtable and is coordinated and managed through the Illinois Pathways Interagency Committee (IPIC) consisting of all state economic development, workforce development and education agencies. This initiative is establishing statewide public-private partnerships, called Learning Exchanges, for all nine sectors including manufacturing. The Manufacturing Learning Exchange will fully engage industry associations, employers, unions, and economic development, education and workforce partners to build more effective career pathways for workers to fill critical skilled jobs throughout the state. This effort also will build on the Illinois Shifting Gears and Accelerating

Opportunities initiatives that have established state policies and bridge program models for expanding opportunities to low-skilled workers.

The state agency partners will focus on four major strategies for supporting regional partnerships: (1) using the Manufacturing Learning Exchange to engage partners and provide technical assistance and ongoing support, (2) implementing state policies and providing guidance on how to braid public and private funding, (3) enhancing state labor market and management information systems to support partnerships and their integrated public-private delivery systems, and (4) expanding and integrating performance management and evaluation systems that can support continuous improvement and also provide assurance to state and regional stakeholders that these partnerships are providing a return on investment.

These four strategies will be used to scale up 6-8 regional manufacturing partnerships that face the largest shortages and have the strongest commitments from public and private partners to implement and evaluate the regional partnership model in reducing these critical shortages. These partnerships will be asked to “regionalize” the statewide model and reach aggressive goals to: (1) reduce the time needed to fill critical job openings with qualified workers, and (2) improve worker access to employment and earnings opportunities in these critical jobs, especially low-skilled workers including low-income and unemployed and dislocated workers. The project will seek to achieve high levels of performance for both employers and workers across all regions throughout the state.

**Description of Proposed Evaluation Strategy:**

The project evaluation plan involves three major components: (1) implementation or process evaluation determining whether state policies and systems and regional models were consistently implemented, (2) outcome evaluation describing whether these efforts were associated with improvements in performance over baseline after two years of implementation, and (3) impact evaluation describing whether these regional models actually had positive net impacts for employers and workers using a quasi-experimental design based on comparison groups that is both appropriate and feasible for a large-scale structural innovation.

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