

## Workforce Development Challenge

### Round 3

#### Q&A

- 1. My organization is not a 501(c)(3), but we are a not-for-profit school or a municipal school district. Are we eligible to apply?**

The WDC guidelines state that applicants must be a 501(c)(3) organization. Many educational institutions have foundations which, as 501(c)(3)s, can apply for funding. This program encourages partnerships. While industry partners are a requirement, you may also partner with a 501(c)(3) to apply given that the 501(c)(3) has a meaningful role in the proposed project and is not simply a pass-through organization for the grant.

- 2. I didn't complete the Letter of Intent (LOI) by 12/18/20, am I still eligible to submit a full application for funding to the WDC in Round 3.**

No. New for Round 3, all applicants must submit a brief LOI by **December 18, 2020, 4:00 P.M.** If an LOI meets program requirements, an applicant will be invited to briefly discuss their proposal with ESD and WDC Advisory Council members and may proceed to a full application.

The LOI and full application must be submitted electronically online through the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo's Foundation Grant Lifecycle manager. Only applications submitted online through the Foundation will be accepted. Applicants who proceed to the full application without first being approved through the LOI will not be considered for funding.

Visit <https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/wdc-esd/> to submit your application.

- 3. I saw your ad on the NYS contract reporter and I'm hoping I can do business as a potential subcontractor or to offer my products and services in regard to the WDC.** Please track future editions of the NYS Contract Reporter for the selected recipients of funding under the WDC. You are welcome to approach these entities to advise them of your services. However, please note that any such decisions will be solely within the purview of those future grant recipients and not of Empire State Development.
- 4. My organization provides support services to individuals who have developmental and/or intellectual disabilities and their families. Would we be considered to be a part of the targeted Health & Life Sciences industry sector, as stipulated in your guidelines for project eligibility?**

To be considered part of a targeted industry sector for project eligibility, your proposed activities would need to foster workforce development in that field. In the case of Health & Life Sciences, training would need to be focused on preparing the workforce for such fields as nursing, medical services, research and development, etc. In addition, a program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement within the organization is not eligible.

**5. At our skilled facility we offer Certified Nurse Aid training based on NYS DOH regulations and we pay our students and then offer them jobs. Would our program qualify for funding?**

Provided the skill sets offered are in one of the targeted economic sectors (Health & Life Sciences) which includes Certified Nurse Aid training, and your proposal meets all of the other requirements, then yes, the program would be eligible to apply.

However, grant funds cannot be used to pay a student directly for on-the-job training. And, a program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement within the organization is not eligible.

**6. My group is focused on helping people with careers in construction and connecting them with employers. Do construction/trades qualify as a targeted industry sector for funding?**

The WDC guidelines state that proposed projects must focus on workforce development in at least one of the region's target industry sectors—advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, tourism, clean energy, and agriculture; and projects that prepare workers for tech occupations. Construction is not one of the target industry sectors and thus is not eligible for funding. There may be overlap in the skills needed for construction/trades jobs and clean energy jobs (e.g. electrical and HVAC training). Applicants would need demonstrate that the proposed training directly benefits the clean energy sector (a target industry sector) and not general construction. See question 10 for more information on occupational data.

**7. Can a culinary program apply?**

Yes, a culinary program would fall into the tourism target industry sector.

**8. Can we target more than one sector in our application?**

Yes. Applications that provide training programs in more than one target industry sector may be scored more favorably.

**9. Can grant funds be used for direct financial assistance (including financial incentives for participation) to program participants?**

No. Scholarships, financial incentives or financial assistance for program participants is not an allowable expense.

**10. Can grant funds be used to pay a student for an internship or on-the-job training?**

No. Grant funds cannot be used to pay a student directly for an internship or on-the-job training, nor can it be used to pay an employer for internships, on-the-job-training, or for wages for journey workers in apprenticeship programs. One eligibility criterion is that projects must be developed in partnership with industry to maximize job placement following training. The industry partner may be responsible for funding internships or on-the-job training as part of the program.

**11. Are there restrictions on including a credit-bearing curriculum in the program design?**

WDC program funds cannot be used to subsidize existing credit-bearing courses or degrees. Programs should provide additional training opportunities that can result in a certificate or badge but that are not credit-bearing or associated with a degree.

**12. Can the funds be used to cover the cost of “micro-credentialing” for the nontraditional student?**

Yes. Training programs that lead to micro credentials or badges are eligible.

**13. What do you mean by “trainee supports?”**

Trainee supports are activities that will be made available to program participants to reduce barriers to training. Grant funds may be used for trainee supports such as childcare, online programming, public transit passes or other transportation supports, career coaching, and soft skills or success skills. Free or reduced price programming may be an element of your project related to reducing barriers to training, but scholarships or financial assistance directly to program participants is not an eligible expense under the WDC.

**14. Do you have to demonstrate that program participants will be placed in jobs that pay the average regional wage of about \$45,000/year?**

Projects must prepare participants for entry and advancement in the regional target industries (advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, tourism, agriculture, and clean energy; and projects that prepare workers for tech occupations). Within the target industries, there is a preference for projects that prepare participants for high-demand, living wage jobs (i.e. jobs that pay the average regional average of about \$45,000). The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that training will result in in-demand, living wage jobs or will be a stepping stone to in-demand, living wage jobs.

**15. In our community, \$45,000 is higher than our average community wage so it may be challenging for us to prove that participants will be placed in jobs with that starting salary. Should we still apply?**

Yes, your application should demonstrate that your program will place people on a pathway of livable wages. Additionally, your application should demonstrate the living wage average in your community.

**16. Is there a list of higher-wage, in-demand occupations in the target industry sectors that you could provide? Can you provide examples of health and life science careers?**

There are many variables to consider regarding in-demand occupations, and there is no comprehensive list of occupations that we will or will not consider funding. The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that their project will help fill a demand in one of the targeted industry sectors (advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, tourism, clean energy, and agriculture; and projects that prepare workers for tech occupations) and at the same time provide participants with opportunity for a living wage job.

There are several resources that an applicant may want to consider when making a case of their project.

The **New York State Department of Labor** has several resources: Jobs in

Demand Today, WNY (see search tool near the bottom of the page)

<https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/reos.asp>

Short- and Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections

<https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/lspoj.shtm>

These lists must be downloaded. They offer annual job projections through 2024 and wages (entry, average, and experienced) for all occupations in the regional economy.

**Invest Buffalo Niagara** conducted a **Labor Market Assessment** in 2016. The following reports are available for download:

*Who's Our Economy?* (with an overview of the regional economy) and *How Competitive are Payroll Costs?* (with information on wages):

<http://info.buffaloniagara.org/lma>

*Where Are Our Opportunities?* (exploring opportunities related to underemployment, workforce training and credential building):

[http://info.buffaloniagara.org/lma\\_opportunities](http://info.buffaloniagara.org/lma_opportunities)

**17. Is this a reimbursable grant program?**

Grant payments will be structured on a case-by-case basis. From the first round of projects, the typical funding scenario saw a portion (less than 100%) of the grant paid at the time of the contract, with periodic payments throughout the grant period based on progress. The payment structure and schedule will be developed with awardee

input.

**18. How much of the grant can be used for administrative costs?**

The grant cannot be used for general operating expenses, nor can it be used for general staff expenses of the applicant organization related to a capital project. Up to 15% may be used for administrative costs directly related to the new/expanded program or project proposed in the application.

**19. Are there limits to overhead costs?**

There is no limit established for the program, however a review of the budget does account for 10% of the project's review score so applicants are encouraged to be mindful that all costs are directly related to the implementation of a training program.

**20. For capital projects, what do you mean by site control?**

If the applicant does not own the project site, there must be a long-term lease or other evidence that there are rights of ownership that would permit the undertaking of the proposed activity, program or capital project. If the applicant is in the process of acquiring the site, the project may not be ready for funds at this time.

**21. Is a program that provides leadership training eligible?**

A program that provides leadership or managerial training may be eligible provided the training and job placement is in one of the targeted sectors (advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, tourism, clean energy, and agriculture; or it prepares workers for tech occupations). A program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement within the organization is not eligible.

**22. When do you anticipate making grant awards and once awards are announced, how long will it take for a project to be under contract?** We estimate it will take several months to issue grant contracts once awards have been announced, likely in early summer of 2021. Given this timing, a project that starts around September 2021 will be considered a "ready" project. The grant cannot be used for activities that have occurred prior to the start of the grant period.

**23. For capital projects, what is the level of "readiness" that would be needed for a project to be competitive?**

For a capital project to be competitive, there needs to sufficient planning in place such as control of the site, environmental review, permitting, design, local approvals, State Historic Preservation Office review, construction manager/general contractor hired, etc. to demonstrate the project will be implemented within the stated timeline.

**24. Our project would include the renovation of an existing building for training purposes. In addition to uploading supplemental information about our project in the**

**application portal, will there be an opportunity to discuss our projects?**

After the initial online LOI and application review, a pool of applicants will be selected for the interview portion of the application process. During the interviews, you will be able to share additional information about your project.

**25. Can funding for additional years be requested? We are interested in making a case for funding beyond the first year with the goal of phasing in a self-sustaining version of the program over a couple of years, is that something we should plan to build into the present proposal, or will you only consider extension past the first year once you've had the chance to evaluate your one-year funded projects?**

Grants will be provided for up to two years. Extensions on awards will be considered, especially for capital projects, on a case-by-case basis provided substantial progress has been made on the project in the first 24 months. Applicants should clearly and accurately provide a timeline of project activities.

The amount of follow-on funding will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Follow on funding may be awarded **one time** for the same project to grant recipients that 1.) demonstrate progress toward goals; and 2.) can provide a 1:1 match, preferably from an industry partner. In other words, applicants are only eligible to receive funding twice for a particular program or project. An organization that was awarded funding (and follow on funding) may apply for funds in subsequent rounds provided the proposal is for a program completely different from the one they received funding from the WDC for in previous rounds.

**26. Proposal attachments for the WDC program list audited financials. Will you consider our application if we provide organizational financial statements reviewed by our accountant?**

Consistent with ESD requirements to review a potential grantee's financial stability and wherewithal to undertake a proposed program, it is preferred that three years of audited financial statements are submitted. If an applicant is unable to meet this requirement, they may elect to submit alternate documentation, including but not limited to up to three years of the applicant's completed Internal Revenue Service Form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax) and/or internally-prepared financial statements. Nevertheless, the applicant bears the full responsibility to demonstrate its financial stability/wherewithal and it is within ESD sole purview to determine if such alternate documentation is sufficient to meet these objectives."

**27. The grant description states that "instruction and instructional materials" are an eligible use of funds. Does "instruction" mean the cost of the instructor's wage?**

The costs (i.e. salaries) of the actual trainers (or instructors) providing the workforce training in the target field could be fully covered by the grant.

**28. Can you confirm the age group eligible for WDC?**

The program materials define working age population as 16-64. An applicant must demonstrate that they will be producing trained persons that can reasonably be placed or secure full-time, living wage employment in one of the target industries.

**29. Can an organization submit more than one application for separate, independent projects?**

It is up to the applicant to determine how many applications they would like to submit; there is no limit.

**30. By statute, State University of New York (SUNY) member-institutions are recognized as public, non-profit and tax-exempt entities. Does ESD recognize that SUNY member- colleges are recognized as non-profit organizations that are exempt from registration with the NYS Attorney General Charities Registration Bureau?**

The WDC guidelines state that applicants must be a 501(c)(3) organization. Many educational institutions have foundations which, as 501(c)(3)s, can apply for funding. This program encourages partnerships. While industry partners are a requirement, you may also partner with a 501(c)(3) to apply given that the 501(c)(3) has a meaningful role in the proposed project and is not simply a pass-through organization for the grant.

**31. We are proposing to develop training to address three different industry sectors. The proposed plans are somewhat similar yet very distinct. Should we submit three separate proposals (one for each training program) or combine all three in one submission?**

It is up to the organization to decide whether to submit one or more proposals for funding. Please be aware when making your decision that the minimum grant request is \$250,000.

**32. Our project does not focus on training programs, but rather on building the capacity of employers and improving access to apprenticeship opportunities. Is this eligible?**

Your project may be eligible provided that you can demonstrate that the activities will lead to the basic “musts” of the workforce development challenge: to “train populations that are out of the labor force, unemployed, underemployed/working poor, and/or employed workers seeking upskilling, upgrades and/or career advancements”; provide training in key regional economic sectors; and “be developed in partnership with a business or multiple businesses to maximize job placement.”

**33. If we are applying through a foundation that does not have any full-time staff, should we list the staff members and affiliations of those who will administer the grant and proposed program?**

Yes.

**34. We have current employees who could benefit from managerial training, which would put them on a career path for higher wages. Would their salaries for attending training be an ineligible expense?**

A program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement within the organization is not eligible. Further, grant funds cannot be used to pay a student directly for on-the-job training. In this case, using grant funds for current employees' salaries while they are training would be the equivalent of paying students while training, and thus would not be eligible for grant funds.

**35. Our project is aimed at retention – is this an acceptable use of funds?**

No. This program is aimed at training population who are out of the labor force, unemployed, underemployed/working poor, and/or employed workers seeking upskilling, upgrades and/or career advancements. Further, a program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement or retention within the organization is not eligible.

**36. Should salaries be limited in the budget?**

The grant can cover the portion of the salaries that are directly associated with the program.

**37. Are subcontractors an allowable grant expense? If so, can subcontractors be private companies/corporate entities?**

Subcontractors are an allowable expense but the applicant should demonstrate the need for the subcontractor and why it needs to be included as a direct expense. There is no regulation on private companies being subcontractors.

**38. Are we able to self-perform on capital projects?**

Self-performing on capital projects is allowable, but would still be subject to all of the very strict and extensive documentation and reporting requirements for the Office of the NYS Comptroller.

**39. Are there anticipated amounts for individual awards?**

Anticipated grant amounts will be \$250,000 and above.

**40. Our program seeks to prepare opportunities for a wide diversity of positions, and we are meeting some challenges with being able to provide direct O\*Net codes for some of them. What is the best way to approach this question?**

You should provide O\*Net codes to the best of your ability. Given the large number of O\*Net job listings, we hope that applicants will be able to find the appropriate codes for their projects. Searching by "job families" is often helpful as it provides more direct matches to jobs in the target sectors. Since the question is open ended and provides space for a narrative answer, you should use the space allotted to provide examples of job titles the program serves in the target industry sectors. If your program offers training or more general positions rather than those in the target industry sectors,



however, that would be taken into account during the scoring process as the Workforce Development Challenge is really seeking to fund new or expanded programs in the five target industry sectors.

**41. What do you mean by tech occupations?**

Our region uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics' broad list of STEM occupations to define tech occupations [https://www.bls.gov/oes/stem\\_list.xlsx](https://www.bls.gov/oes/stem_list.xlsx). More specifically, a program might be eligible for the Workforce Development Challenge if it prepares workers for entry or advancement in what are defined as (but not limited to) "computer occupations" within this larger STEM occupations list (e.g. computer programmers, software developers, web developers, database administrators, network and computer systems administrators, computer user support specialists, computer network support specialists, etc.).

**42. If our organization applied for the Workforce Development Initiative (through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA)), can we still apply for the Workforce Development Challenge?**

Yes, you can apply for both programs.

**43. Will we be required to report on the number of job interviews granted to our program participants?**

No, this program is focused on the number of people who are trained and placed into living wage jobs.

**44. What are the indirect costs that can be covered?**

Indirect costs that would be used to support the required "trainee supports" component of the grants. Grant funds may be used for trainee supports such as childcare, online programming, public transit passes or other transportation supports, career coaching, and soft skills or success skills. Free or reduced price programming may be an element of your project related to reducing barriers to training, but scholarships or financial assistance directly to program participants is not an eligible expense under the WDC.

**45. Are there character limits in the online application questions?**

Yes. Different questions have different character limits. There are also opportunities to upload additional information.

**46. How long will grantees need to monitor the grant's progress after the grant terms are complete?**

Annual Impact Reports of the project will be due to the Community Foundation for up to two consecutive years following the successful completion of Year-1.

**47. When is the deadline for Round 3 applications?**

The application deadline is at 4:00 pm, local time, on March 5, 2021.

**48. Would you consider funding training for the prison population to re-enter the**

### **workforce with degree-granting credentials?**

Returning citizens are a target population for this workforce training fund and programs that serve them are eligible to apply for funding. However, WDC program funds cannot be used to subsidize existing credit-bearing courses or degrees at higher education institutions. Programs should provide additional training opportunities that can result in a certificate or badge but that are not credit-bearing or associated with a degree.

#### **49. Can funds be used for a full-time case manager to interface with program participants and provide, among other things, counseling and guidance on any training, work-related issues or barriers that arise?**

Yes. Salary for a case manager working with program participants is an allowable expense.

#### **50. While the grant provides for entry level skills training along career pathways, can funds be used to provide skills training to trainees who successfully completed an entry level training program and now are ready to proceed to the next step along their career pathway, leading to a higher wage rate?**

Yes. The grant can fund training for individuals seeking upskilling, upgrades and/or career advancements that will lead to high-demand, higher paying jobs with career advancement potential.

#### **51. How many awards are anticipated in Round 3?**

There is no set limit on the number of Round 3 grants. The number of awards will be based on the quality of applications. A total of \$5.65 million was awarded to 10 grants in the first two rounds. There is \$5.85 million remaining of the \$11.5 million.

#### **52. How do you define the certificate and badge programs? Do these programs need to be transcribed by the registrar?**

Certificates and badges are non-traditional and non-degree job training credentialing programs. Typically, they are industry-specific and are often targeted at mastery of a particularly job-related skill, such as basic foundations that are pre-requisites to taking on a new position or upskilling for promotion to a higher-level skill/position. Successful completion of the training program usually results in the award of a recognized (i.e., across an industry/field) electronic certification or badge that may be included in an online resume. While some colleges and universities have started to formalize such programs onto official student transcripts, because they are non-traditional, this is not required.

#### **53. Do you already need to have certificate and badge programs developed to be competitive? If not, would the grant pay for developing certificate and badge programs?**

It is preferable that applicants largely focus on already-established, industry-recognized credential programs involving certificates and/or badge programs. While it is understood that badging programs continue to evolve (particularly in technology fields), use of WDC

funds to establish new certificate and badge programs would only be approved if there is a clear, documented agreement between a training organization and an industry partner to accept and place training recipients once the certificates/badges are awarded -- and the transferability of the new certificates/badges for subsequently jobs/positions.

**54. Once students are trained and receive a certificate or badge through a WDC-funded program, can students transfer to SUNY to complete an AAS program in Manufacturing?**

Yes, but the WDC cannot cover any costs associating with the AAS program nor can it fund tuition/fees for the students in the SUNY AAS program.

**55. Do you have a list of previously funded applicants for this funding opportunity?**

The award announcements for Rounds 1 and 2 can be found in the following press releases:

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-western-new-york-workforce-development-challenge-awardees>

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-western-new-york-workforce-development-challenge-round-2-awardees>

**56. Where can I find the budget template that will be used in the final application?**

A PDF of the budget template for your reference is posted on our webpage.

<https://esd.ny.gov/western-ny-workforce-development-challenge>

**57. If, for whatever reason, some elements of our project are not eligible, which would reduce the total to below the \$250,000 minimum, would the entire application be disqualified?**

Not necessarily. ESD retains, in its sole discretion as part of the review process, the right to adjust/refine the anticipated sources and uses of ESD funds for a particular application based upon WDC requirements, and adjust a funding recommendation accordingly, if it is determined (in coordination with the applicant) that such changes would still result in a program/project that advances the goals and objectives of the WDC.