

Digital Literacy Grant Round 5 Bidders Conference

Questions & Answers

Questions Open: February 27, 2024

Questions End: March 15, 2024

Questions and Answers and Open Discussion – Please note that all questions and answers have been paraphrased.

Grant Questions

- **Q:** Can you tell me more about pre and post assessments?
A: Assessments will be provided to participants before and after training. The assessments will evaluate two objectives: 1) did the participant learn the intended objectives of the training; and 2) was the course organized and provided in a way that best taught the objectives. For example, was the instructor knowledgeable and was the course length appropriate?
- **Q:** Can you please provide the pre and post evaluation/assessment forms/questions that will be provided to assess skill gains and program efficacy? We want to make sure our programming is aligned.
A: The pre and post assessment documents will be provided after grant awards. However, in the past, the assessments were quantitative, meaning we want to see participant progress from the first day until the end. For example, if there is a participant on day one who has never sat at a computer before, by the time they complete the program they should be able to perform basic functions (i.e., turn on the computer, type and save files, print documents, and send/receive emails).
- **Q:** Are you transparent with who is on the review team and how can someone find out who was a reviewer?
A: While the Commonwealth values transparency as a steward of federal and state funds, we do not release the names of the individuals on the review team. These individuals are selected from Commonwealth employees who have expertise in the work covered by the specific grant opportunity.
- **Q:** Can we use grant funds to hire vendors to provide digital literacy training?
A: Yes, however, the core of this grant is to support agencies embedded in the community to build the community's infrastructure for offering digital literacy training. We want to see funds being used to build programs that can continue beyond the grant period. Those goals may not be as evident in the proposals if you are hiring a vendor to offer digital literacy training.
- **Q:** Is there an anticipated level of service, i.e., number of individuals that must be served?

A: No, there are numerous factors that may affect the number of individuals served, such as size of the organization, population density of the community, and need in the community. Proposals will be reviewed based on their own merit; a portion of the merit review is based on the thoroughness of the recruitment plan.

- **Q:** We already offer digital literacy classes online. Could we use this curriculum if we brought it into an in-person space with an instructor to answer questions?

A: Yes, that design would be responsive to the grant proposals.

- **Q:** You mentioned that this grant is not geared toward online learning, but we are in a very rural area where transportation is an issue. Could we start the individual in-person until they are comfortable on the computer and then finish the training online so that transportation is not an additional barrier?

A: Research shows a correlation between lack of broadband access and the number of homes without a computer. It may not be feasible for these individuals to complete the training on-line due to a lack of a home computer or broadband access. If, however, your project meets all required parameters of in-person classes, there is nothing barring the program from going above and beyond to also offer on-line classes for those individuals who could successfully complete the training in this manner. Additionally, grant funds could be used for transportation assistance.

- **Q:** Are there required monthly meetings for grantees?

A: There will be required regularly scheduled meetings for grantees. A meeting schedule will be created upon award and a notification will be sent to grantees. Grantees may substitute a staff person if the designee is not available.

- **Q:** If we are a prior grant awardee, what does it mean to continue or expand? Must we continue with the same grant partners, or can we embark on a new project with new partners?

A: As a prior grant awardee, you may continue with new partners if you lost a current partner, however, if you completely change the scope of your project, you will be considered a new grantee, and fall under Option 1.

- **Q:** Is there an advantage to continue work on an existing project from a prior round?

A: This is entirely up to your organization. You may start a new project, or you may continue from where your earlier project left off. Both opportunities will award applicants up to \$100,000.

- **Q:** To meet the needs of constituents, may participants use personal devices, such as tablets or phones, in non-traditional locations such as a Senior Center? Would that qualify?

A: Yes, as long as participants have access to technology, and someone is available a minimum of 15 hours a week to assist them with any needs.

- **Q:** Regarding the 2-to-3-month launch starting in July, we will sustain our programs in between the grants. Therefore, can we begin to use the funds immediately in July, or must we launch first before we use those funds for sessions and classes?

A: You can begin to use the funds immediately and are not required to launch first.
- **Q:** We are starting our sessions in July, so may we use any of the anticipated funds for advertising that occurs prior to July 1?

A: No, pre-award costs are unallowable. All expenditures must fall within the specified period of performance for this grant, July 1, 2024, through April 30, 2026. If you are applying for Opportunity 2, you may use prior award funds to advertise your project that will begin July 1, 2024.
- **Q:** Are we able to use the funds to sub-grant out? If so, is there a limit of the budget that we can use to do this? We are a non-profit and would like to use our community partners.

A: You must use proper subcontractor protocol. There are no budgetary constraints limits to sub-grant.
- **Q:** As a Round 4 funded program, can expanding your program include adding another county to your program?

A: Absolutely, you can do that. You are not changing the scope of your program; you are expanding it.
- **Q:** If we are awarded as a new applicant, are we eligible for future rounds of funding?

A: This is dependent on the terms of the Notice of Grant Availability that is released at that time.
- **Q:** What do you mean, Round 5? This is my first grant for Digital Literacy.

A: This is the 5th round of this grant that has been funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We have had four previous rounds beginning in 2022.
- **Q:** Can I start with ten students as a pilot program and then expand it to an Independent Living Center to include more students after the year 2026?

A: The period of performance for this grant is July 1, 2024, through April 30, 2026. Your proposal should include information on sustainability beyond the end date of the grant. Your budget and justification must specifically show a detailed plan of all expenses throughout the grant.
- **Q:** If a Deaf-Blind person wants to learn Digital Literacy, can I request additional funding for a TACTIC interpreter and special equipment to instruct that person?

A: You may hire the appropriate staff needed to serve participants. All costs associated with your proposal must be included in your budget and described in your budget justification.

- **Q:** What and where do I get the local workboard notification form completed and signed for my local area?
A: The local workforce board notification template is included with the NGA package as Appendix G. Applicants must send an email to their Local Workforce Development Board to notify them of the intent to apply. To locate your local office, refer to the following link: [Local Workforce Development Boards \(pa.gov\)](http://pa.gov)
- **Q:** Does the grant require cohort-based learning?
A: No, cohort-based learning is not a requirement of this grant, but many of the more successful grantees from previous rounds have implemented this type of learning environment.
- **Q:** When an applicant wants to apply for a grant that covers multiple workforce development areas, do they only need to notify the local board covering where they are located, or do they need to notify all of the boards in the service area? Example: A Pittsburgh-based applicant that wants to operate a program that covers Pittsburgh, Allegheny County and some other surrounding counties.
A: The application process only requires notifying the local board in the area where you are located.

Budget Form/Budget Justification Questions

- **Q:** The budget justification requests a detailed breakout of quantity, cost, and narrative, what does this mean?
A: Please see the Budget Justification instructions that are part of the Grant Financial Reporting Package (Budget Form & Justification) posted on the L&I website with the Notice of Grant Availability.
- **Q:** Can you please explain the procurement process?
A: Because this grant is funded with federal WIOA dollars it is important to follow the federal guidance and your organization's policies, whichever is stricter. For purchases under \$5,000 (micro-purchases), please be sure to strive for equitable distribution. Items purchased between \$5,000 and \$250,000 (small purchases) must have quotes. Additionally, equipment purchases where the per unit acquisition cost is \$5,000 or more, will need prior Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) approval.
- **Q:** Are indirect costs allowable?
A: Yes, L&I will evaluate the amount of funds spent on indirect costs. Submit your indirect cost proposals and/or approved indirect cost rates with your application.
- **Q:** What do you mean by matching funds?

A: Matching funds are funds that you may receive from your own organization, another business/organization or a sponsor. Matching (or leveraged funds) are not required for this grant.

- **Q:** Is there a difference between leveraged and matching funds?

A: There is a difference, but how each one is reflected in the applicant's project, budget, and narrative will not differ. A leveraged resource is currently existing non-grant funds or resources that assist the grantee to carry out the initiatives described in the grant proposal. For example, if the grantee already has a computer lab, they could leverage this resource to provide digital literacy training. Matching funds is funding the grantee receives from their own organization, another business/organization, or a sponsor. Matching funds may prove a certain amount of funding equal to a percentage of the grant total. For example, another community agency may support the project with \$15,000 if the project is awarded. Either way, if you choose to include matched and/or leveraged resources, they must be reflected under the leveraged portion of the budget. Additionally, please discuss the matched and/or leveraged resource in the project narrative as this will demonstrate the partnership and commitment of the community to the project, which will assist to illustrate why your organization is the best organization to provide digital literacy services.

- **Q:** If spending will be frontloaded to start a program, can it all be submitted at once, or do the invoices need to be proportioned in equal amounts and submitted monthly for reimbursement?

A: L&I requires monthly submission of receipts and invoices by the designated submission date (the 5th of the following month). Expenses should be submitted for reimbursement as they are incurred. Do not hold onto invoices or receipts.

- **Q:** Are staff eligible expenses?

A: Yes, if staff are listed in the budget as an expense of the project, then their salary and benefits costs are reimbursable, as well as other associated costs, such as mileage.

- **Q:** Our accounting and finance team would like to determine the most efficient way to budget all anticipated administrative and program costs to this grant. Since a portion of all administrative and indirect costs are assigned to our active grants on a monthly basis, would it be possible for us to submit one budget line for those estimated costs instead of breaking them out on the budget line by line and staff by staff? We do not have an audited indirect rate; however, we do allocate administrative and indirect costs to each grant based on a direct labor hour allocation basis.

A: This is acceptable as long as the monthly billing is based on the percentage of direct staff hours devoted to the Digital Literacy grant relative to total staff hours. This methodology should be clearly identified in the Cost Allocation Plan which should be submitted as documentation in support of the budget. The budgeted amount should be an estimate of the applicable percentage for the grant and should be listed separately as administrative and program costs.

Eligibility Questions

- **Q:** Are colleges and universities considered eligible applicants to apply for this grant?
A: Eligible applicants include local workforce development boards, public libraries, library systems and district library centers, non-profit agencies (community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, etc.), or small businesses.
- **Q:** Is a non-profit eligible to apply to this grant?
A: Yes
- **Q:** Is a non-profit post-secondary institution eligible to apply to this grant?
A: Yes.

Computer Lab Questions

- **Q:** If our lab is mobile, can we move it to multiple locations?
A: Yes, that is an innovative way to address the goals of this grant opportunity. In your project narrative, please be sure to highlight the communities that will be served as this service delivery method could greatly broaden the geographical area.
- **Q:** Does the computer lab have to consist of fixed workstations, or can we purchase laptops that residents can check out and use in a designated space that will be open 15 hours a week?
A: You may purchase laptops for the participants to use, they do not have to be at a fixed workstation.
- **Q:** May we use mobile labs in a dedicated space?
A: Yes, this is permissible.
- **Q:** Can a computer lab be staffed by individuals who are not working on the grant?
A: Yes, this is acceptable. The grant requires labs to be staffed with no consideration for how staff are paid.
- **Q:** Are grantees limited to using only one technology laboratory? If one has a program that meets the other criteria, is it limited to only one lab as a partner, and may a lab be a government agency?
A: You may have more than one technology laboratory, as long as it is staffed for the required minimum of 15 hours per week. The hours may be split among multiple labs. You may use a government location, for example, a PA CareerLink®.
- **Q:** Are there requirements to hold classes at PA CareerLink® locations?
A: No, you may hold classes at any location where high-speed internet access is available.

- **Q:** Is there a required number of class hours per week?
A: The computer labs must be staffed for a minimum of 15 hours per week. This does not have to be classes, but only made available for participants to utilize the labs and have someone there who can assist them.

Application Questions

- **Q:** Is there a recommended minimum character count for our application responses?
A: There is no minimum character count for the responses to your questions, however, there are page count maximums as noted in the Application Package Submission Instructions section.
- **Q:** Who should the letters of support be addressed to?
A: Letters of support should be addressed to the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA). Submit all letters with your application package.
- **Q:** Is the amount of the award for the entire grant period of performance, or is it an annual award?
A: The amount of the award is for the entire 22-month period of performance, July 1, 2024, to April 30, 2026.
- **Q:** What is the length of one round of funding?
A: Round 5 is for 22 months, July 1, 2024, through April 30, 2026. Rounds 1, 2 and 3 are now closed, and Round 4 is near closure.
- **Q:** In the Evaluation Criteria table, under Stakeholder Engagement, it states that applicants must "Describes the adequacy of the key personnel on the grant to foster collaboration and implement job quality improvement strategies to meet or contribute toward meeting current and anticipated regional labor market needs." Can you provide further context regarding what is meant by "job quality improvement strategies"?
A: Job quality improvement strategies are those that improve the working conditions that help ensure family-sustaining employment. Providing digital literacy training helps qualify individuals for this type of employment. Given the purpose of this grant opportunity this is not a major requirement for this programming and/or may not be applicable to your project.
- **Q:** Under Grant Opportunity Goals, it states "Allow access and connections to employment with family-sustaining wages." Does this goal imply that grant recipients should be actually placing participants in employment positions? Or does this simply mean that curriculum should be oriented towards building participants' skills to eventually gain employment independently?

A: No, there are no job placement requirements for this grant. Essentially, if someone has never used a computer or smartphone before, they should be able to perform basic tasks by the time they complete the program. Examples of basic tasks include developing typing skills, creating a resume/cover letter and knowing how to save them electronically, online searching and applying to jobs, sending and receiving emails, setting up and connecting to a Zoom call.

- **Q:** Under Grant Opportunity Goals, it states "Increase communities' infrastructure for providing foundational digital literacy skills, which may include mobile classrooms." Does infrastructure imply physical infrastructure only or does sustainable programming, for example, also count as infrastructure?

A: Sustainable programming is also considered infrastructure. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our grantees had to make drastic adjustments to their operations, some of which included having virtual meetings and creating mobile classrooms. We would hope that once the grant has ended, the organizations would be able to use collaborative efforts to sustain the program to continue offering digital literacy programs for residents who need it the most.

- **Q:** Do you have a list of Targeted Industry Clusters and their corresponding Sub-Clusters?

A: For the purposes of this grant this information is not required.

- **Q:** Under performance outcomes, can you tell us what you mean by "Targeted participants"? Can we enroll anyone who would benefit from our training?

A: Yes, you can enroll any individuals who will benefit from your training. Targeted enrollment means you see a high need for digital literacy training with a specific population and you plan to target recruitment efforts towards that population.