

Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant Bidders Conference

Friday, January 22, 2021

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

If your questions have not been answered after reviewing the responses below, please send them to the Grants Services Resource Account at: RA-LI-BWDA-GS@pa.gov .

- **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 may be aware of a certain population in your community such as seniors, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, etc., and propose to target your recruitment towards them.
- **Q:** The budget justification says we need a detailed breakout of quantity, cost and narrative, what does that mean? **A:** You will need to breakout the costs to show quantity, per unit cost and total. For example, if you are proposing to purchase 10 computers, and they are \$1,000 each, then you will want to show $10 * \$1,000 = 10,000$. Same idea with staffing, if someone makes \$30/hour and they will work 10 hours on this grant then you want to show the salary, time, and total expected expenditures.
- **Q:** Can you please talk about the procurement process? **A:** Yes, since this grant will be funded with federal WIOA dollars it is important to follow the federal guidance and your organization’s policies, whichever is stricter. For any purchase under \$3,000 (micro-purchases; please be sure to strive for equitable distribution. Items purchased between \$3,000 and \$150,000 (small-purchases) must have quotes). Additionally, any purchases for equipment where the per unit acquisition cost is \$5,000 or more needs approval of the procurement by BWDA staff before purchase.
- **Q:** How will I know if my county has reached its maximum number of awards? Is there a way to find this out before I submit my proposal? **A:** Unfortunately, there isn’t a way for you to know before you submit your proposal. L&I will accept all proposals up to the deadline and track them based on date and time received. Proposals will be reviewed in that order. It is important to note that even if a proposal from your county is received before your proposal it does not mean it will be awarded. Only proposals scoring more than 85 points will be awarded.
- **Q:** If my county has reached its maximum number of awards before my application is considered, can my application be applied to a neighboring county? **A:** Applicants will only be considered for the county in which they are being submitted. However, if your company has a presence in multiple counties, you can submit a proposal for different communities representing different counties. Please note that if your company is awarded for one of the counties, PA reserves the right to select

other companies who would serve another community before yours in order to diversity the award funds.

- **Q:** Can colleges and universities apply for this funding? **A:** Eligible entities to apply include local workforce development boards, small business, and non-profits. Therefore, if your organization meets one of those criteria, then you can apply.
- **Q:** Can any non-profit apply? **A:** Yes
- **Q:** Can you tell me more about the pre and post assessments? **A:** Yes, the evaluations will be provided to each participant before and after training. The assessments are geared to evaluating two things, 1) did the individual 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, was the course length appropriate, etc.
- **Q:** Is there a minimal capacity threshold in the labs? **A:** No, the goal of this grant is to fund entities that are embedded in the community which means that small organizations that may only offer 5 or 10 spots are just as likely to be funded as agencies that can hold 20-30 spots. Each project will be based on its own merit to serve the individuals in the community.
- **Q:** We offer workforce programs and have already converted our programming to online platforms. Given the pandemic will L&I entertain online digital literacy courses? **A:** This grant is geared to individuals that have no or very limited digital literacy skills. Therefore, L&I is looking for these courses to be offered in person. L&I did a lot of research prior to this grant and found there is a high correlation between lack of broadband and lack of a home computer. Therefore, the individuals we are targeting for this opportunity would not necessarily benefit from online courses. Additionally, while we will be sure to follow ALL of the Governor's pandemic mitigation measures, these grants will not be awarded until July with expected training starts not to begin until October. Therefore, we are hopeful we will be in a different environment at that time where we can safely offer these courses in-person. If any changes need to be made regarding the starting timeline, we will evaluate this and communicate with awarded grantees.
- **Q:** Regarding the inter-agency merit review teams, what is the make-up of the teams? How are you ensuring diversity representation on teams? How are you ensuring the projects are focusing on racial equity? **A:** L&I strives for and utilizes best practices to promote equity. Additionally, we follow all of the state's grant and procurement rules. We also adhere to the principals in PASmart which promotes equity in its programming.
- **Q:** Are you transparent with who is on the review team and how can someone find out who was a reviewer? **A:** As stewards of federal and state funds, the commonwealth values transparency. Most of the work we do falls under the Right to Know law. Individuals with questions regarding the granting process can submit Right to Know requests through that mechanism.

- **Q:** Is WIOA eligibility required for this grant? **A:** Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act one of the allowable activities the state can support is the decreasing of barriers for individuals in order to access the One Stop delivery system. This grant is being offered to decrease barriers so that job seekers can engage in more in-depth service delivery activities at the PA Careerlink® centers either in person or virtually. It is important to note these classes are just the beginning of an individual's journey to employment and applicants are encouraged to connect these individuals to the PA CareerLink® for all applicable services. Additionally, applicants should work with the PA CareerLink® centers to receive referrals to their program.
- **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. Please be sure to highlight in your proposal the communities that will be served as this service delivery method could broaden the geographical area greatly.
- **Q:** Can we use these funds to hire vendors to provide these services? **A:** Technically, 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 that companies are using these funds 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 these services.
- **Q:** If we are from Westmoreland and Fayette, should we submit one or two proposals? **A:** We would recommend submitting two proposals so that you have as much funding as possible to support your program and because we have asked applicants to illustrate the need of each community. The needs of the communities in Westmoreland and Fayette may be different. The proposals will be more reflective of each community's need if they are broken out.
- **Q:** Can we select the target population? **A:** Yes. Your proposal should be data-driven so you should illustrate in the proposal why you have selected the target population and why there is a need in the community you are planning to serve. However, proposals should remain open to all individuals especially to ensure that all performance numbers can be met.
- **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 under each proposal (the size of the organization, the population density of the community, the need in the community, etc.), therefore all proposals will be reviewed based on their own merit. However, a portion of the merit review is based on the applicant's recruitment plan. Therefore, we will be evaluating the likelihood of the applicant to get their proposed number of individuals into their training program.
- **Q:** Are indirect costs allowable? **A:** Yes, L&I will be evaluating the amount of funds spent on indirect costs and may request to see indirect cost proposals and/or approved indirect cost rates.
- **Q:** Is there a difference between leveraged and match? **A:** Definition-wise there is a difference but how it will be reflected in the applicant's project, budget or narrative, will not really differ. A leveraged resource is a resource that is already existing. For example, if the entity already has a

computer lab, then they would be leveraging this resource to provide the training. A match really refers to providing a certain level funding equal to a percentage of the grant total. For example, another community agency may be willing to support the project with \$15K if the project is awarded, thus matching the project by 33%. Either way, the match and leveraged resources should be reflected under the leveraged portion of the budget. However, discussing the match in the proposal may demonstrate the partnership and commitment of the community to the project which can help illustrate why your organization is the best organization to provide these services.

- **Q:** Is it really first come first serve? Is there a benefit to submitting your application prior to the deadline? **A:** Yes, L&I will not accept proposals after the due date as listed in the NGA. However, all proposals will be date and time stamped upon receipt. Review of the proposals will begin with the first proposal received until the 100 awards have been satisfied. County maximums will also be in effect.
- **Q:** Will Allegheny only receive one award? **A:** Allegheny may receive one award or none. This project has a rural focus. Urban areas typically have infrastructure in place that is not equated in rural areas. Therefore, these grants have been strategically targeted to rural areas.
- **Q:** Will L&I pre-approve our assessment? **A:** L&I will provide the assessment to each awardee. Awardees will have the opportunity to submit modification requests if necessary.
- **Q:** How can you break out these four classes when you need all of them to be a successful job seeker? **A:** Yes, these courses were designed based on what an individual may need for a successful job search. However, to be mindful of the skills and abilities of the individuals who may participate in these courses, it is necessary to design trainings that can be grasped and retained. Training providers may do this in various ways hence the built-in flexibility. Training should be based on the needs of the community.
- **Q:** Did you say you are going to award 100 proposals because the map shows more than 100 possible applications? **A:** The awards will be capped at 100 with the county max's in place. The map was specifically designed to support applicants to the fullest of our ability. For example, if no one submits an application in a county with a 1 award max, it doesn't decrease L&I's ability to award 100 programs rather it increases our ability to provide another area with a successful award.
- **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:** Will you accept multi-county proposals? **A:** The application must be clear as to which county the project serves. That is not say that an applicant can't submit the application for one county but also serve another county in addition to the primary county. The narrative must speak to the specific needs of the community to be served, which may not be clearly articulated with a multi-county scope.

- **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:** There is research that shows where broadband access is lacking there is an increase of homes without home computers. It may not be feasible for these individuals to complete the training due to lack of a home device or internet. As long as your project meets all of the required parameters of offering the in-person classes, there is nothing barring the program from going above and beyond and also offering on-line classes for those individuals who could successfully complete the training in this manner. Additionally, grant funds could be used for transportation assistance.