



WORKFORCE ACCELERATOR FUND

Request for Applications

April 23, 2014

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Table of Contents

Section 1 Overview	3
A. Introduction.....	3
B. Project Goals and Objectives.....	3
C. Project Design.....	5
D. Project Activities.....	7
E. Funding.....	8
F. Eligible Applicants.....	9
G. Oversight & Coordination.....	9
H. Performance.....	9
I. Program Evaluation.....	10
Section 2 Significant Dates	10
Section 3 Proposal Submission Instructions	10
Section 4 Application Requirements, Award and Contracting Process	11
Application Forms.....	13

Section 1 Overview

A. Introduction

The California Workforce Investment Board (State Board) and the Employment Development Department (EDD) are pleased to announce the availability of up to \$2.5 million in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to design, develop, and implement projects that accelerate employment and re-employment strategies for California job seekers. The State Board and EDD will fund projects and partnerships to create and prototype innovative strategies that bridge education and workforce gaps for targeted populations, and initial implementation of promising models and practices in workforce system service delivery infrastructure.

California's Strategic Workforce Development Plan 2013-2017 - *"Shared Strategy for a Shared Prosperity"* (Strategic Plan) prioritizes regional coordination among key partners, sector-based employment strategies, skill attainment through earn and learn and other effective training models (including, but not limited to apprenticeship), and development of career pathways. The State Board is interested in funding applications that further advance the goals of its Strategic Plan and build workforce system infrastructure and capacity through:

- **Collaboration** among partners in the development of service delivery strategies and alignment of resources to better connect disadvantaged and disconnected job seekers to employment.
- **Innovation** that creates new or adapts existing approaches or accelerates application of promising practices in workforce development and skill attainment.
- **System change** that uses these sub-grants to incentivize adoption of proven strategies and innovations that are sustained beyond the grant period.

Through this RFA, the State Board and EDD will create a Workforce Accelerator Fund, which represents a new model of funding innovation and alignment in the workforce system. As with SlingShot, our goal is to fund "ground up" solutions to some of the most vexing challenges that are keeping Californians with barriers to employment from achieving success in jobs and careers. We anticipate that the solutions achieved through this Fund can be used by regions grappling with similar challenges, and will be shared with the SlingShot coalitions and other stakeholders to create lasting change and improvements in the workforce system.

B. Project Goals and Objectives

Despite our state's overall prosperity, too many Californians are in danger of being left behind, not making ends meet and unable to create a middle class life for themselves and their families:

- *Long-Term Unemployed* – An unprecedented number of California workers have been out of work for more than 6 months and are struggling to find new jobs.
- *Returning Veterans* – Too many veterans, after performing essential services with great skill, are challenged in finding civilian jobs that capitalize on the skills they’ve built.
- *Individuals with Disabilities* – The labor force participation rate for Californians with disabilities is only 19% - lower than it was before passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- *Low-Income Workers* – Thousands of Californians are trapped in poverty, often cycling through low wage, dead-end jobs and lacking the education, skills, and supports, needed to move into sustained, higher wage jobs.
- *Disconnected Youth* – Many young people 16-24 are disconnected, neither in school nor work, and are in danger of being left behind.
- *Ex-Offenders* – Realignment has increased the visibility of the need for robust job services for the parole and ex-offender population in California.

These are Californians who face substantial challenges in finding good jobs and supporting themselves and their families in an era with volatile, rapidly evolving labor markets. At the same time in regions across California, employers in key industry sectors are searching for qualified workers for occupations at all skill levels.

Traditional workforce and education strategies have had little impact in helping these workers to build relevant skills and connect to good jobs. Even promising strategies lack the speed, agility, or scale needed to accelerate employment for workers desperately in need of that help. We need to bring the creativity for which California is known to bear and create new strategies that achieve scalable impact with workers who face difficult employment prospects.

The State Board and EDD will invest Workforce Investment Act funds through the Workforce Accelerator Fund, which will make grants to Project Teams that create and prototype innovative strategies to accelerate skill development, employment, and reemployment for one or more of the target populations (long-term unemployed, returning veterans, individuals with disabilities, low-income workers, disconnected youth, and ex-offenders). Innovations that emerge from the prototypes will then be scaled and replicated across the state, infusing new ideas into the “bloodstream” of workforce development.

Project Goals:

- Improve labor market and skills outcomes for the target groups through the development of strategies that fill gaps, accelerate processes, or customize services to ensure greater access to workforce services and employment opportunities.

- Create new modes for service delivery and funding alignment that can be replicated across the State and tailored to regional needs.
- Leverage State investment with commitments from industry, labor, public, and community partners.

The State Board and EDD will fund applications that seek to achieve the project goals outlined above by designing and developing innovations that have the potential to substantially increase the effectiveness, scale, and/or capacity of existing workforce system programs and funding streams that serve the target populations. Successful applications may create new tools, borrow methods from other disciplines, or apply models from other sectors or populations in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Those projects that demonstrate significant impact and potential for replication and/or integration will be shared with partners at both the State and regional levels to infuse innovations and system improvements into the workforce system infrastructure.

C. Project Design

The Workforce Accelerator seeks solutions to specific challenges that inhibit career opportunity and employment success for the targeted populations and that improve access to the workforce development pipeline – education, training, support services, placement, retention, etc. The intent is not simply to create new programs or to expand existing ones. Successful applicants will demonstrate how their projects will direct existing resources and efforts in new, more efficient and effective ways. These efforts should not create or reinforce service delivery silos or funding silos, but rather should result in strategies that take a new or unique approach to addressing workforce pipeline gaps specific to these populations, that can be applied, replicated or scaled to create broader impact and system improvement.

Project Team: Successful applicants will design, develop, or prototype different tools, methods and strategies than workforce stakeholders are presently using. The intent is to use existing resources in new, more efficient, effective ways. As such, each applicant will be required to create a team of partners that offers unique skills and contributions to the project.

Applicants must identify each team member and describe the role of the Project Team and its members in project development, integration of new ways of doing business, and scaling and replication. Team components include:

- **Experts** – Partners who have a deep knowledge of the workforce system, operational and administrative experience, and insight into implementation opportunities and challenges. These partners must include those with expertise and experience working in

or with institutions that the project is directly impacting (e.g. community colleges, K-12 schools, AJCCs [formerly One-Stops], county social services, law enforcement and corrections, etc.) as well as the parts of the workforce or skills development system who represent the “market” for replication, expansion, or integration of the project (e.g. state and local agencies, funders, service delivery providers, career technical education programs, etc.).

- **Innovators** – Partners who bring new perspective and expertise to the project, who have created solutions to challenging problems, and who have cross disciplinary experience. These individuals and organizations may not have workforce development experience per se, but have success in other fields that is instructive to change and innovation in workforce development.
- **Customers** – Partners who represent at least one of the potential “end-use customers” of the project: job seekers or employers. Each project must include either a partner who is currently representing multiple job seekers from the targeted population (e.g. community organizations, advocacy groups, etc.) or multiple employers (e.g. industry associations, chambers of commerce, employer advisory groups), depending on the challenge being addressed and or aspect of the pipeline being targeted. These partners must be able to access and provide direct input from individual jobs seekers from the target groups, or employers who will be utilizing the services.

The “Big Idea” gap or challenge to address: Each project must identify a challenge or gap that if successfully addressed would significantly move the needle on employment for one or more of the targeted groups. This should address a challenge that the workforce system is facing in increasing opportunity, access, effectiveness, and/or scale in addressing the assessment, training, placement, or advancement of the targeted population(s). Some projects may be tailored to meet needs of more than one group, or more than one aspect of the workforce pipeline. For example, projects may choose to focus on:

- Accelerating education, training or retraining of workers in the targeted populations
- Accelerating recognition of existing skills, such as prior learning assessments, and/or utilizing competency-based models that focus on learning rather than on duration of training
- Expanding or creating “earn and learn” models (i.e. quality paid internships, formal apprenticeship or other work-based learning opportunities)
- Improving work-based learning infrastructure that supports employers and/or that increases access and opportunities for working learners
- Creating more robust services by braiding multiple funding sources or utilizing new funding models to increase scale or funding diversity

- Increasing use of training and hiring incentives for targeted populations, including subsidized employment (e.g. leveraging CalWORKs, EDD’s UI Work Sharing, or other resources)
- Improving job matching and assessment strategies to accelerate employment/reemployment
- Improving employer recruitment and hiring strategies to benefit targeted groups
- Streamlining the use of virtual (e.g., via use of technology) with in-person strategies for job seekers and employers

D. Project Activities

The Strategic Plan prioritizes regional coordination among key partners, sector-based employment strategies, skill attainment through earn and learn and other effective training models (including but not limited to apprenticeship), and development of career pathways. In addition, the Strategic Plan emphasizes the coordination and alignment of resources and systems to better serve all California job seekers, including those with significant barriers to employment. This solicitation aims to increase workforce system capacity to serve job seekers in the targeted populations by addressing gaps or capitalizing on opportunities to bridge to priority services, training or education, and ultimately employment in targeted industry sectors.

Under this RFA, the State Board will fund projects that address gaps and increase efficiencies in:

- The service delivery pipeline of the workforce system
- The alignment of funding for the targeted populations

Applicants may address one or both of these gaps in their project, however goals for each should be clearly defined and measurable during the life of the project. These goals may include incremental measures or “traction points” that reflect process, output, or deliverable benchmarks.

In order to address these gaps applicants are encouraged to take an “R & D” approach, borrow strategies from other industries or sectors, and prototype new models. Projects may choose to utilize:

- Tools, models or resources that are already developed but not used in the public workforce system, with the targeted populations, or are not at scale
- Strategies, resources, and lessons from other disciplines, applied to the workforce system and target population(s)
- Brand new ideas that have the opportunity to be “game changers” for the workforce system and target groups

Projects may include design, development, testing, piloting, and /or implementation activities, to be determined by the scope and target of the project and the Project Team partners. All successful applicants will clearly articulate the process for development, documentation of process or product integration, and prospects for implementation at scale. For those projects addressing service delivery directly, job seeker participants must meet WIA eligibility requirements but are not required to be co-enrolled under this grant. Applicants may propose projects that are integrated into existing programs or service delivery infrastructure, however successful grants will show how their activities can be applied more broadly to create population, system, or regional impact.

E. Funding

Funding under this RFA will be provided from Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Statewide Activities funds. The State Board and EDD will award grants solicited through this application process. Funding is available for projects that address the needs of the targeted populations outlined in this solicitation.

Funding Target	Amount Available	Industry Focus
At-Risk/Disadvantaged Youth	\$500,000	Not specified
Returning Veterans	\$500,000	Healthcare
Individuals with Disabilities, Long-Term Unemployed, Re-Entry/Ex-Offenders, Low Income	\$1,500,000	Not specified

Applicants may propose projects that address more than one of these populations, however grantees must be able to document benefits specific to each proposed targeted population. If services are provided directly to job-seeker customers during the course of the grant period, those services may be paid with this grant funding, however it is anticipated that the majority of services will be provided through other funding. Customers are not required to be co-enrolled under this grant.

The State Board and EDD anticipate funding grants ranging from to \$50,000 - \$150,000 for projects of up to 10 months in duration. Successful applicants will demonstrate a dollar for dollar match of cash or in-kind support for their project activities. *Note: The State Board and EDD reserve the option to extend grants up to an additional 24 months*

F. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this solicitation include local Workforce Investment Boards, labor organizations, K-12 education entities, community colleges and adult schools, community-based organizations, business-related non-profit organizations, and workforce intermediaries, any of which may serve as the lead applicant for the required Project Team. A for-profit private business or for-profit consortium of businesses can be a partner on the Project Team but cannot be the lead applicant.

Project Team

Strong partnerships are an essential element of success for this RFA. Applicants must demonstrate integration of activities of all partners in the Project Team, experience in collaborative efforts with diverse stakeholders, and grantees will be required to develop working relationships with both regional and state stakeholders.

G. Oversight & Coordination

State Board Issues and Policies Committee

The Issues and Policies Committee, through its ad hoc working group on the Future of Workforce Development, will serve in an advisory role to the State Board staff and Workforce Accelerator grantees during the term of the grant. The committee will advise on how lessons learned and successful projects coming out of the Workforce Accelerator projects can be addressed through policies, practices, and special initiatives, include SlingShot.

Learning Community

The State Board is committed to implementing continuous improvement, innovation, and system change strategies. This RFA will develop a Learning Community of grantees, staff, partners, and other key system stakeholders. Project teams will access peer and expert technical assistance, share successful program models, and coordinate performance criteria and evaluation activities through the Learning Community.

H. Performance

Applicants are required to propose project performance targets and goals, and metrics and deliverables that fit with identified target populations, and specific project strategies and outcomes will be determined with each grantee.

I. Program Evaluation

The State Board will have the projects independently evaluated for overall effectiveness and produce reports on program activities and outcomes. Grantees will be required to submit reports on project progress and document outcomes, which will be made available to the State Board, EDD, and other stakeholders.

Section 2 Significant Dates

EVENT	DATE*
RFA Release	April 23, 2014
Application Workshop	To be Announced on the State Board Website
RFA Questions Due	May 23, 2014
RFA Answers Released	Weekly on the State Board Website
Applications Due (by 3:00 p.m.)	June 2, 2014
Award Announcement	June 13, 2014

**All dates after the final proposal submission deadline are approximate and may be adjusted as conditions dictate, without addendum to this RFA.*

Section 3 Proposal Submission Instructions

This RFA contains the requirements that applicants must meet in order to submit a responsive proposal. The RFA provides information regarding the format in which proposals must be submitted, the documents to be included, the requirements that must be met to be eligible for consideration, and the applicants' responsibilities.

Application Deadline

The deadline for the **receipt** of applications is, **June 2, 2014, at 3 p.m. Pacific Time. Late applications will not be accepted.**

Application Delivery Method and Addresses

Applications must be submitted **electronically** in Portable Document Format (PDF) to:

[Kelly Luong – kelly.luong@cwib.ca.gov](mailto:kelly.luong@cwib.ca.gov)

Application Questions

Questions regarding the instructions for this RFA may be sent to Kelly Luong, Policy Analyst at kelly.luong@CWIB.ca.gov. Cumulative questions and answers will be posted to the State Board’s website on a weekly basis until the RFA is closed.

Section 4 Application Requirements, Award and Contracting Process

Required Application Content

All applications must adhere to the required format and, in order to be competitive, must include all of the requested information, completed forms, and attachments. **Applications that do not adhere to these requirements will be determined non-responsive and will not be considered for funding.**

Project narrative is limited to 2 pages, 1-inch margins, single-spaced, in a font no less than 12 point. Project Team description is limited to 1 page, 1-inch margins, single-spaced, in a font no less than 12 point. Forms and cover page are not included in the page limits.

All applicants must submit the required forms and attachments. These include:

DOCUMENT NAME/DESCRIPTION	FORM PROVIDED
Cover Page	YES
Project Narrative (See Project Proposal Table)	NO
Project Team Description (See Project Proposal Table)	NO
Form 1: Project Budget	YES
Form 2: Project Overview Matrix	YES

Application Narrative, Evaluation and Recommendation for Funding

The application narrative for each project should address each of the sections outlined in the Project Proposal Table. All applications must include the required forms and cover page. The scoring value of each section of this RFA is included in the Project Proposal Table below.

Project Proposal Table		
Section	Description	Points
Project Narrative & Overview Matrix (2 pages + Matrix Form)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the challenge your project is designed to solve – what you will “move the needle” on. ▪ Define the gap the project will address, and the opportunity for improvement or change, and how this project uniquely addresses this- the “big idea”. ▪ Provide an outline of the project, and the project strategies, outputs and outcomes, and timeline. ▪ Describe the development process and role of the Project Team, and how process or product integration will be documented. ▪ Describe the opportunity for scaling, replication, or application of project successes and lessons. ▪ Complete and attach Project Overview Matrix. 	60
Project Team (1 page)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the individuals and organizations representing each of the Project Team roles (Expert, Innovator, and Customers) and their experience and successes in that capacity. ▪ Describe the function or activities each will provide in the project, including role and commitment to integration, sharing, replication or scaling of successful outcomes. 	30
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Project Budget (Form 1)</i>. Applicants must provide detailed budget information, including 1:1 in-kind or cash match. 	10
Total Possible Points		100

The ranked scores will serve as the primary basis for making recommendations for funding in conjunction with other factors such as geographic distribution of funds, uniqueness, and innovative aspects of the application. Only those applications deemed to be meritorious and in the best interests of the State will be recommended for funding.

Application Forms (Required)

- [Workforce Accelerator Fund Cover Page](#)
- [Form 1: Project Budget](#)
- [Form 2: Project Overview Matrix](#)