OVERVIEW

Workforce Development Initiative (WDI)

The Workforce Development Initiative (WDI) will invest $175 million throughout New York State for innovative, creative, and regionally customized workforce development projects. Awards under this new CFA will support strategic regional efforts that meet businesses’ short-term workforce needs, address long-term industry needs, improve regional talent pipelines, enhance flexibility and adaptability of local workforce entities, and expand workplace learning opportunities. Focus will be on regionally significant industries in emerging fields with growing demands for jobs, including clean energy, life sciences, computer science, and advanced technologies. Funds will also support efforts to improve the economic security of women, young workers, and other populations that face significant barriers to career advancement.

The workforce CFA will consist of dedicated funding across multiple state agencies and authorities. Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) will play a critical role in recommending projects in accordance with their region’s economic and workforce development plans. Project plans and applications will be accepted on a continual basis beginning on May 8, 2019.
APPLICATION PROCESS

Consolidated Funding Application

As part of Governor Cuomo’s transformative plan to improve the state’s economic development model, a NYS Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) was developed to streamline and expedite the application process for economic development grants. The CFA process fundamentally shifts the way state resources are allocated, ensuring less bureaucracy, greater efficiency, and more community input in fulfilling local economic development needs.

Similarly, with this new workforce development CFA serving as the single point of entry for workforce development funding, applicants will no longer have to navigate separately with each of the multiple agencies and authorities that are providing workforce funds for this initiative. Instead, potential partners in workforce development will be able to participate in one centralized CFA process to access multiple state funding sources through one application, making the process quicker, easier, and more productive.
REGIONAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

The ten Regional Economic Development Councils were established by Governor Cuomo in 2011 to develop long-term strategic plans for economic growth for their regions. As part of their mission, each REDC worked with supporting organizations and private sector partners to develop their region’s economic development strategic plan, which includes a plan to address the workforce development needs of the region. The REDCs have redefined the way New York invests in jobs and economic growth through the formation of a community-based, bottom-up approach designed to meet the needs of each region and have established a competitive process for each region to pursue state resources.

Made up of local experts and stakeholders from business, academia, local government, non-governmental organizations, and the New York State Senate and Assembly, the REDCs are public-private partnerships supported by various state agencies serving each region. Many state legislators and local elected officials serve on the REDCs, providing critical information to help form regional strategies, identifying investment priorities, and encouraging participation in the CFA.

To ensure that each REDC has an effective balance of workforce development advisors, a new committee on workforce development will be created in every region. This committee will include five to seven members and be limited to workforce development experts located in the region in the following fields:

- Economic Development (i.e. industry group, key employer)
- Higher Education
- Local Workforce Investment Boards and Career Center partners;
- Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES); and
• Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) representative from the region

An important component of each REDC strategic plan is a workforce development strategy that addresses local employment and skills gaps and outlines a sector-based approach to addressing the needs of the region. Additionally, to support each REDC, an annual regional workforce plan is developed by the Local Workforce Development Boards in the region in consultation with the NYS Department of Labor. These plans are intended to identify and leverage assets to address workforce issues, support the region’s strategic plan, and identify and address workforce priorities. These plans will help guide the REDCs and their Workforce Development Committees in the evaluation of project applications for WDI.
PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Applications for WDI support will go through a two-phase approval process to quickly identify the appropriate funding options and streamline the allocation of funding.

Phase One

An interested applicant will submit a project plan for their proposal to the REDC in their region. The plan will include:

- An overview of the project specifics, including the workforce problem(s) faced by the region and how this project will address those problems;
- Description of the role of the local and regional partners (i.e. employers, educational and community-based organizations) involved in the project;
- Estimated cost of the project, with leveraged funds identified;
- Performance targets and any other information that describes how the project’s performance will be measured; and
- A description of any public-private partnerships and/or expansions of work-based learning experiences.

Project plans will be reviewed by the REDC Workforce Development Committee to ensure:

- The project is feasible;
- Stakeholders are aligned;
- Funding is identified and available; and
- The project conforms to the workforce plans for the region.

After a thorough review of the plan is complete, the Workforce Development Committee will make their recommendation to the co-chairs of the REDC, who will make the further recommendation regarding advancement of the project to Phase Two.
Phase Two

Once advanced to Phase Two, the applicant will be notified by the Office of Workforce Development and provided with a Phase Two CFA to complete and submit. An interagency committee made up of representatives from Empire State Development, SUNY / CUNY, New York State Department of Labor, along with other state agencies as appropriate, will review and make final approvals.

Self-identified performance measures will be evaluated as part of the Phase Two review. Projects will not advance without agreement on measures, which should include details on how data is gathered and utilized, project outcomes, financial overview of budget vs. actuals, and any additional information necessary to evaluate the measures. For multi-year awards, continuation of project funding may be contingent on meeting performance metrics.

Proposals Affecting Multiple Regions

Proposals for statewide or multi-region projects will be submitted to the Office of Workforce Development, which will forward to the appropriate state agencies and REDCs for Phase 1 and Phase 2 review.

Selection Criteria and Performance

Successful applicants will have a clearly articulated proposal that addresses a workforce problem faced by the region and a comprehensive implementation strategy. In addition, applications for funding will be evaluated based on some or all the following criteria:

- The role of local and regional partners;
- Project cost;
- The extent of leveraged funds;
- Performance targets that are measurable and achievable;
- Transferable nature of the training or accreditation;
• Description of any public/private partnerships and how they will expand workplace learning.

**ELIGIBILITY**

In recognition of the varied workforce development challenges faced across the state, a range of projects will be eligible for funding under the Workforce Development Initiative. REDCs should focus on supporting strategic regional efforts that meet businesses’ near-term workforce needs, address long-term industry needs, enhance flexibility and adaptability of local workforce entities, improve regional talent pipelines, and expand apprenticeships.

Focus will be on regionally significant industries in emerging fields with growing demands for jobs, including those in clean energy, life sciences, computer science, and advanced technologies. Funds will also support efforts to improve the economic security of women, young workers, and other populations that face significant barriers to career advancement. All projects and activities must be consistent with the region’s workforce development plans.

**Examples of potential uses of funds include:**

• Workforce attraction;

• Support for company-based projects;

• Formation of multiple employer consortia – especially in a common sector or industry cluster - that can benefit from shared training and other workforce development activities;

• Direct support of companies in industry sectors targeted by the REDC;

• Funds to support workforce development and innovation in college and university settings;

• Creation of opportunities for populations which traditionally face barriers to career advancement, including women and young workers, ex-offenders,
veterans, immigrants, refugees, and persons with special needs;

- Projects addressing worker dislocation due to foreign competition;
- Projects addressing the opportunities and challenges posed by automation, artificial intelligence and robotics;
- Fees charged by approved training providers;
- Educational activities that are part of job training and workforce preparation initiatives, particularly when focused on key local economic sectors;
- Research on workforce needs, including employer surveys and market studies;
- Development and operation of programs that award recognized credentials to program graduates (e.g., apprenticeships, certifications, etc.); and
- Curriculum development for career- or job-specific purposes.

Generally excluded uses of funds include:

- Broad-based public infrastructure, as distinguished from infrastructure needed to support an otherwise eligible project;
- Speculative real estate development;
- Buy-outs and roll-ups;
- Establishment or development of retail and personal service businesses;
- Establishment or development of gaming businesses; and
- Support for general education unless it is related to a workforce development initiative.
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING OPTIONS

The funding made available for this Initiative consolidates nine separate programs administered by various state agencies and authorities. Awards will generally fall into one of three categories:

Public-Private Partnerships to Advance 21st Century Skills

These programs expand the infrastructure and capacity of SUNY and CUNY to produce skilled talent that meets the needs of regional employers. These resources will provide funding for classroom space, technology and equipment, and industry-engaged curriculum development. These programs will also foster connections with regional employers by building structured work-based learning experiences (i.e. internships; co-op learning; apprenticeships; and direct on-the-job training) in high demand sectors like life sciences, STEM, and advanced manufacturing. Also, of interest is development of "stackable" commonly accepted worker credentials like skill certificates, badges, and ladders. Funds available in this category are provided through SUNY and CUNY and include capital, apprenticeship, customized curriculum, and new job linkage opportunities.

Employer-Driven Skills

These programs expand employer investment in a skilled workforce pipeline. Resources will provide funding for tax credits to train incumbent workers and to recruit and train entry-level workers. Applications will tend to come directly from employers. Funds available in this category are provided by the NYS Department of Labor, the New York State Energy Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) and Empire State Development for employer-driven employee training and internships.
Workforce Solutions

The Workforce Solutions programs provide flexible funding for innovative workforce development projects. Funds will support strategic regional efforts that meet businesses’ near-term workforce needs, address long-term industry needs, improve regional talent pipelines, enhance flexibility and adaptability of local workforce entities, and expand apprenticeships. Focus will be on regionally significant industries in emerging fields with growing demands for jobs. Examples of successful applications could include sector and industry-cluster-based strategies that regionally address a worker shortage or projects that have the potential to rapidly deploy and meet the demonstrated demand for jobs open currently or imminently. Sources of funding from participating agencies and authorities will be matched to proposals, based on the details of the project.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is the Workforce Development Initiative (WDI)?
A. The WDI is a comprehensive workforce development program that, among other things, utilizes the state’s successful Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) to invest in workforce development projects in each region that conform to the strategic plans for each REDC.

Q. How does the WDI differ from other REDC initiatives? Why is it necessary?
A. The WDI is a dedicated, intensive effort to focus specifically on the critical issue of workforce development in a way that complements the purpose and approaches of the REDC’s strategic efforts to advance regional economic growth.

Q. Who will have input into the project selection process?
A. To ensure that each REDC has a good cross-section of workforce development advisors, a committee on workforce development will be created in each region. This committee will be comprised of workforce development experts located in the region in the following fields:
   - Economic Development (i.e. industry group, key employer)
   - Higher Education
   - Local Workforce Investment Boards and Career Center partners;
   - Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES); and
   - Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI) representative from the region

Q. Who is eligible to apply?
A. A variety of projects will be accepted into the program. Each potential source of funds within the CFA has specific criteria, but the REDC will be available to assist in identifying options based on the applicant’s project plan. Eligible applicants will include: educational institutions, private employers, employer consortia, non-profit organizations with a substantial workforce mission, public-private partnerships, and training providers.
Q. What project types are ineligible?
A. Generally excluded uses of funds include:

- Broad-based public infrastructure, as distinguished from infrastructure needed to support an otherwise eligible project;
- Speculative real estate development;
- Buy-outs and roll-ups;
- Establishment or development of retail and personal service businesses;
- Establishment or development of gaming businesses; and
- Support for general education unless it is related to a workforce development initiative.

Q. How do the three categories of programs differ? May a project draw on more than one category?
A. The Public-Private Partnerships at to Advance 21st Century Skills programs will support capital and soft costs at SUNY/CUNY campuses to make their programming more supportive of regional employer needs. The Employer Driven Skills programs are aimed directly at employer needs, for both new and existing workers. The Workforce Solutions programs are aimed at building regional workforce ecosystems, with a focus on collaboration and deep industry engagement.

It is anticipated that most projects will fit into just one category. However, an exceptional, broad-based project that crosses multiple categories would be considered.

Q. Is this funding permanent or one-time only?
A. All state programs are subject to annual appropriations.

Q. Where do I find the REDC strategic plans?
A. Each REDC has a strategic plan that can be found at https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov. Also, Local Workforce Development Boards submit annual regional workforce plans for each REDC which can be found at https://labor.ny.gov/workforcenypartners/lwda/regional-plans.shtm.
Q. What types of projects will be funded?

A. Successful applications for workforce investments will support strategic regional efforts that meet businesses’ short-term workforce needs, improve regional talent pipelines, enhance flexibility and adaptability of local workforce entities, expand apprenticeships and other credentials, and address the long-term needs of expanding industries—with a focus on emerging fields with growing demand for jobs like clean energy, advanced manufacturing, health technology, and computer science. Funds will also support efforts to improve the economic security of women, young workers, and other populations that face significant barriers to career advancement. As described above, proposals must contain defined performance measures, project outcomes, a comprehensive implementation strategy, and demonstrate stakeholder alignment.

Q. When will applications start being accepted?

A. The CFA portal will be open and ready to accept project plans and applications beginning on May 8, 2019.

Q. Who will review the applications and project plans?

A. Projects will go through a two-phase approval process. During Phase One, general project plans will be submitted to the REDC. These project plans will be reviewed by the REDC’s workforce development committee to ensure the project is feasible, stakeholders are aligned, funding is identified and available, and the project conforms to the workforce plans for the region. After a thorough review of the plan, the workforce committee will make their recommendation to the REDC Co-Chairs who will make further recommendations of projects that should advance to Phase Two. During Phase Two the applicant will be required to submit a more comprehensive CFA application. An interagency review team will include representatives from any relevant agencies, including, at a minimum, representatives from Empire State Development, NYS Department of Labor, and SUNY/CUNY. This interagency review team will evaluate, and then make the final approvals based on the criteria listed in the above WDI guidelines.

Q. What is the timeline for project awards?

A. The CFA portal will be open and ready to accept project plans on a continual basis beginning on May 8, 2019. Review will begin immediately and continue until the conclusion of the program.
Q. For what purposes may Workforce Development Initiative funds be used?
A. The WDI will provide an opportunity for a range of workforce development projects and activities to be funded. Projects exhibiting significant impact and creating effective workforce solutions for a region will be given priority. The process and variety of funding sources will allow for a flexible use of the funds. Projects that leverage other public and private funds will get priority consideration.

Q. What State agency is managing the funding?
A. Funding opportunities for the WDI are currently located within multiple agencies/authorities including NYS Department of Labor, Empire State Development, SUNY/CUNY, and NYSERDA. When projects are awarded, those agencies with jurisdiction over the funds will administer the project.

Q. What reporting will be required?
A. Reporting requirements will be comparable to the annual progress report requirements already in place for the REDCs. Reporting should summarize overall strategic focus, specific projects funded, and performance at the project and regional levels. Performance will ideally be measured in employer/employee outcomes as well as inputs.

Q. What technical assistance will be available from the state, for project development and for performance measurement?
A. Common workforce-related datasets will be made available to each REDC to facilitate strategy formation and project development. Technical assistance on development of performance measures will also be available through the ESD Regional Offices.