

# SkillWorks Phase II Workforce Partnerships RFP

## Questions & Answers

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### *Geography*

Q	Is the grant only available to organizations serving residents or employers in the City of Boston or the greater Boston Area?
A	Both the Boston Foundation and the city of Boston are core SkillWorks Funders with an interest in serving Boston residents and employers. However, SkillWorks is a funding collaborative and we recognize that the labor market is larger than the city of Boston, so we have the flexibility to serve individuals and businesses outside of Boston. We are loosely targeting a geographic area inside Route 128. Across all funded programs, we are aiming to serve a population that is made up of at least fifty percent Boston residents. We are, however, open to considering proposals for projects that would serve fewer than 50% Boston residents if the proposal is highly innovative in terms of the strength of its partnership and nature of the interventions, and likely to achieve substantial outcomes. It is our main objective that participants of SkillWorks partnerships overall be at least 50% Boston residents, which can be achieved if some projects serve fewer than 50% Boston residents when others have more.
Q	What constitutes a “Boston employer”? Must the firm have its headquarters in Boston?
A	SkillWorks would consider any firm that has a location and employees in Boston to be a Boston employer, regardless of where its headquarters is located.

*Partnership Structure*

Q	If the organization has the capacity to offer all the components of a career-advancement program does it have to partner with another organization to be eligible for the grant?
A	There must be an employer in the program and the program must be able to facilitate or improve access to a post-secondary credential for lower skilled adults and out of school youth. If one organization can meet both of those requirements they can apply as a single organization.
Q	Is the grant only applicable to pre-employment populations or is it also available to organizations serving incumbent employees seeking to advance?
A	SkillWorks is interested in serving both pre-employment participants and incumbent workers with a focus on career advancement strategies that help participants make progress toward family self-sustaining wages. The workforce partnership should define what population it will be serving based on the needs of the target industry or occupation and what the partnership's advancement strategy is. Partnerships can make a case for serving either or both of these populations.
Q	Is there a limit to the number of proposals an organization can submit or be involved in?
A	Organizations may choose to partner in more than one proposal. However, it has been our experience that because these partnerships are complex and require enormous responsibility on the part of the lead agency, organizations proposing to be the lead should in most cases submit only one application. SkillWorks may be open to considering proposals from organizations that are currently serving in a lead agency capacity, depending on the agency's demonstrated capacity and staffing to manage an additional workforce partnership.
Q	Is there a limit to the number of partner organizations a grant proposal can include?
A	The workforce partnership should think about how many core partners will be involved in the management and governance of the partnership and should limit the number of core partners to a manageable size. They may consider having additional partners involved only in the implementation of the project or as training or educational subcontractors who are not involved in project management.
Q	Must the applicant identify in the pre-application process who all their partners will be?
A	We expect that your partners may change between the pre-application and full application stage, and you do not have to have all partners identified at the pre-application stage.

Q	If we don't know all of our partners and we get the grant, can we RFP to choose a partner?
A	You may use an RFP process to select a partner for the proposal but in the pre-application, the lead agency must list the criteria it will use in selecting partners.
Q	My partnership is currently in formation. What do I need to have ready to submit a pre-application?
A	Partnerships should have a good sense of the industry and target population, a basic service strategy, and a good idea of what the needs are (from the point of view of both employee/worker and employer).
Q	How many partners is the right number?
A	There's no magic number of partners. We are looking for a strong lead agency/fiscal agent to lead the project and really be accountable. This may be a non profit, employer, community college, WIB, industry association, etc. Employers are mandatory partners, and post-secondary institutions are highly encouraged.
Q	What is the "significant role" expected for post-secondary education providers if they are not required partners?
A	Depending on the goals and target population that the workforce partnership is serving the relationship with the postsecondary institution may be consultative, advisory, or program design. For example a community college partner may not be involved in partnership governance or management but may be have an advisory role in providing information about what skills and competencies are needed to pass the college placement test/developmental education courses.  SkillWorks does expect that college or other post-secondary institutions would be involved in program design and alignment where partnerships are addressing gaps in the pre-college pipeline, including development of strategies to create greater access to course material, such as changes to curriculum, teaching methods, or course location.

*Funding/Budget/Administrative Questions*

Q	If we have an existing program funded by another source can we apply for additional funding?
A	Yes, but please note that SkillWorks is interested in providing additional services for current participants or helping to provide services to a greater number of participants.

Q	Will an organization be penalized for requesting a grant that is the maximum amount or is there a minimum request suggested? In other words can a grant request be too large or too small?
A	In phase I SkillWorks had a one-size-fits-all grant-making approach and awarded the same amount to all workforce partnerships. In phase II SkillWorks intends to make available up to \$1.5 million over 5 years to each partnership. Applicants have the discretion to apply for different amounts in different years to ramp up and scale down their program as needed. SkillWorks is interested in programs that can reach a significant scale and impact. We are open to receiving grants for less than the full amount available and are interested in hearing from applicants how they will use SkillWorks funds to have an impact on participant progress and systems change that in the long run will provide opportunities for larger groups of low-wage/low-skill adults within the targeted industry sectors/occupational clusters.
Q	What are allowable expenditures under the SkillWorks grant?
A	The SkillWorks grant is an extremely flexible source of funding. Therefore, we expect that you will leverage other sources to help pay for things like training and educational expenditures that are easier to obtain funding for. The SkillWorks grant cannot be used to support capital expenditures or improvements.
Q	Are there any restrictions about who needs to provide the cash match?
A	No, but we are very interested in seeing at least some employer cash match on the table.
Q	Will SkillWorks award planning grants?
A	SkillWorks may choose to award planning grants at the discretion of the Funders.
Q	What do you mean by the first three months as a planning period? Can I plan for longer than 3 months?
A	We expect all grantees to need start-up time to hire staff, get programs running, pull together recruitment and training plans, etc. to make sure the program is ready operationally for implementation. We expect that you will budget accordingly. The planning period also provides an opportunity for funders to provide technical assistance AND to make sure that everything is going all right before implementation (and implementation funding) begins.
Q	How many full applications does SkillWorks expect to invite?
A	Depending on the number and quality of pre-applications that SkillWorks receives, and in recognition of the time and effort it requires to develop a full application, we expect to invite up to eight full applications and fund up to four.

Q	Are there certain industries that SkillWorks is targeting in this round of applications?
A	While the SkillWorks funders have not identified any particular industries for funding, the general principle is to support partnerships addressing important industries to the metro Boston economy that also provide advancement opportunities for low-wage, low-skilled workers within the timeframe of the initiative. In addition, industry employers should demonstrate a commitment to working with partners to increase opportunities for their entry-level employees and/or community residents to access career pathways, training and advancement.

*Education and Training*

Q	I heard you mention GED and high school diplomas as acceptable credentials. Are adult diplomas also acceptable?
A	Yes. In general, we are interested in helping participants access post-secondary credentials, so if you can show that the adult diploma will help participants move toward post-secondary education that would be the key.
Q	What does contextualized education entail?
A	Contextualized education integrates industry or occupational content or job-related skills into basic skills or ESOL instruction. Contextualized basic skills programs should focus more directly on job-related content, build on learners' job-related knowledge and motivations, and teach the strategies they need to apply basic skills to the tasks they face on their current or may face in future jobs. A good contextualized curriculum strengthens the underlying basic skills needed for work or other life roles and also helps workers achieve transferable skills they can apply to a number of job situations and in future training and educational opportunities. For a good summary on the differences between decontextualized and contextualized workplace/basic skills learning, please see <a href="http://www.ncsall.net/?id=629">http://www.ncsall.net/?id=629</a> .
Q	Must community colleges be involved in delivering occupational training?
A	SkillWorks is interested in post-secondary credentials that include community college or other academic certificate or degree, a recognized industry credential, and/or a recognized union credential. SkillWorks is very interested in workforce partnerships developing models that make these credentials more accessible to lower-skilled working adults through distance learning, “chunking” modular courses, work-based learning, or other innovative strategies.  SkillWorks is offering a workshop on some of these strategies for increasing successful transitions to post-secondary education and access to post-secondary credentials on July 31, 2008, location TBD. Please check back on <a href="http://www.skill-works.org">www.skill-works.org</a> for details.

Q	Are employers required to provide release time for employee training?
A	Release time is not a required component, but it is strongly encouraged. Release time counts toward a partnership's 50% match requirement as an in-kind contribution.

*Scale*

Q	Is there a certain scale of change that SkillWorks is interested in achieving?
A	<p>Throughout the entire initiative, over the five years, SkillWorks is hoping to reach approximately 2,000 people. The average scale of each partnership grant, then, is to reach 100 people per year over 5 years. However, SkillWorks funders are open to looking at both smaller and larger projects, based on the size of the award and the depth of the intervention with the participants. Overall, SkillWorks is interested in the quality of the intervention and the actual number of participants making progress toward educational and career advancement rather than just the total number of participants enrolled in services.</p> <p>SkillWorks also expects that the changes partnerships work to accomplish in employer/industry and educational practices will create advancement opportunities for employees beyond targeted program participants.</p>

*Evaluation and Reporting Requirements*

Q	What kind of reporting requirements will you have? Can you tell me more about the evaluation?
A	<p>Most likely SkillWorks will require grantees to input data into a common database on an ongoing real-time basis; reports will be pulled quarterly, at which time a narrative and financial report will also be requested. Grantees will apply for re-funding each year and be asked to demonstrate progress toward goals. SkillWorks will try to report to individual funders on behalf of all grantees in order to minimize burden. However, SkillWorks is part of a national initiative that has its own reporting requirements, and there may be some additional reporting that partnerships may have to work on together with SkillWorks to report to the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.</p> <p>The evaluation will draw quarterly data from the database but will also require qualitative information/interviews with staff, partners, and employers, etc. SkillWorks will retain an outside evaluator which will meet with each partnership at the beginning of their grant to help articulate a theory of change by which the partnership will then be measured in the evaluation. There will be a short set of common indicators that all partnerships will report (placements, wages, promotions, skill attainments), and some measures will be customized to each partnership.</p>

*Resources available to help with planning*

Q	Is there data available for applicants to refer to on successful career advancement models from Phase I partnerships?
A	There is a lot of information available on the SkillWorks website, including three years of evaluation reports; profiles on each workforce partnership, and a catalog of promising practices. Please see <a href="http://www.skill-works.org">www.skill-works.org</a> .
Q	Who were the Phase I grantees?
A	Please refer to the SkillWorks website at <a href="http://www.skill-works.org">www.skill-works.org</a> for a list of grantees, descriptions, and contact information.
Q	Will there be technical assistance available during the application process?
A	No formal technical assistance will be offered during the pre-application stage; applicants should check the SkillWorks website at <a href="http://www.skill-works.org">www.skill-works.org</a> frequently for updates to this FAQ, which will be the primary form of technical assistance during the pre-application process. Once applicants are invited to submit a full application, SkillWorks will schedule meetings with each applicant partnership to discuss any questions they might have.
Q	Where can I find job vacancy and growth information?
A	Please see the website for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, which has a section on labor market and economic data. <a href="http://lmi2.detma.org/Lmi/LMIDataProg.asp">http://lmi2.detma.org/Lmi/LMIDataProg.asp</a>