New Q & A’s, February 23, 2006

Q: Can one of the current SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships’ lead agencies be a partner agency for the Community Health Worker Partnership?

A: Yes. Current SkillWorks lead agencies are eligible to be partners in a Workforce Partnership for the Community Health Worker Advancement Initiative. However, given the demands on a lead agency, the bidders should demonstrate that such agency has sufficient capacity to manage the demands of a partner role in the CHW partnership.

Q: Can one of the current SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships’ partner agencies be a partner agency for the Community Health Worker Partnership?

A: Yes. Organizations can be partners in more than one SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships at a time.

New Q & A’s, February 6, 2006

Q: Can one of the current SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships’ lead agency be the lead agency for the Community Health Worker Partnership?

A: SkillWorks’ policy is that an organization can be the lead agency on only one Workforce Partnership.

Q: Is a company eligible as an employer partner if its headquarters are located in Boston but the worksite that employs Community Health Workers is not in Boston?

A: No. This program is intended for Community Health Worker employers located in Boston.

Q: Would an incumbent worker who does not meet the grant’s criteria for a CHW, such as a direct care worker, be eligible for services if the training and support resulted in that worker becoming a CHW?

A: While the grant is not directed at providing training for workers such as home health aides, group home counselors, or other entry-level direct care workers who do not meet the
definition of Community Health Workers in the RFP, this is a different take on the question. If an employer makes a commitment to hire a re-trained direct care worker as a Community Health Worker and this new job represents a career advancement in wages, benefits, and/or job stability, then such worker re-training would fit within this grant's goals. SkillWorks would prefer that such worker re-training not be the major focus of the CHW advancement program design.

Q: Can an applicant partner with a for-profit employer?
A: Yes – as long as the firm directly employs Community Health Workers whose jobs meet the criteria in the RFP.

Q: How large should the planning partnership be in comparison to the implementation partnership?
A: This is up to the bidder. For the planning application you are required to have only two partners: employers and workers. One of the criteria on which your proposal will be evaluated is whether the planning partnership has the capacity to carry out the planning process, so it is important that your planning partnership demonstrate that capacity.

If you are able to assemble a partnership for the planning application that will be able to carry out the planning process and the implementation program, then there is no need to add more partners during the planning phase. On the other hand, you may submit a planning application with only some of the partners you hope to engage, and expand your partnership during the planning phase.

New Q & A’s, January 31, 2006

Q: Can an organization participate in more than one proposal?
A: Any organization that applies as the lead in a proposal can only participate in one partnership. Bidders planning to participate as partners may participate in multiple bids.

Q: Is it possible to be awarded a planning grant independent of participation in the implementation grant?
A: No. For purposes of this initiative, the planning and implementation processes are intended to be continuous. However, during the planning grant process the grant recipient will be building its partnership. An organization that is not selected for funding through the planning grant but that has special expertise that will enhance the planning and/or implementation process may, at the discretion of the planning grantee, be invited to join the partnership.

Background Information and Definitions

Q: Are there preliminary evaluations available from Abt Associates on the current grantees?
A: A baseline report will be posted on the website for your review.
Q: Will you post a list of organizations who submit letters of intent on the website?
A: Yes.

Q: How many CHWs are there in Boston? Is it in the 2,000s? Or 20,000s?
A: There is no precise data on the numbers of CHW in Boston or statewide, given the varied occupational titles comprising the field. Peggy Hogarty, of Boston’s Community Health Education Center, estimates 1,500 CHWs in greater Boston.

Q: Does the definition include personal care attendants? We estimate 25,000 personal care attendants in MA. There are as many as 40-50,000, including contract workers under DMH, DPH, etc.
A: Our working definition of CHWs encompasses those who are trying to reach out to and provide health education resources to hard-to-reach, underserved populations. For the most part, we’re not talking about in-home elder care, unless we’re talking about the specific subset that’s working with hard-to-reach elderly population. Please note that the figures quoted in this question do not refer to Community Health Workers, but to home care and residential care workers.

Q: The definition of the CHW in the RFP departs significantly from the definition used in the MA Department of Public Health survey report. Is this intentional? Or will you rewrite? (Pg 5 vs p. 23)
A: The Massachusetts Department of Public Health definition states that Community Health Workers, as distinguished from other health professionals, are hired primarily for their understanding of the populations they serve, and conduct outreach at least 50% of the time performing health education, access to services, informal counseling and social support, and advocacy for individual and community needs. This definition captures the spirit of the occupations targeted by the RFP. SkillWorks recognizes that the “50% of time” condition may be burdensome to document, and will not apply that standard rigidly. We urge bidders to use it as a guideline in selecting job titles to target for this project.

A fuller definition of a Community Health Worker, as presented in the RFP (page 5), is also posted on this website.

Q: My experience with portable credentials is negative. I’ve found that they generally are not very useful, and many employers do not recognize them. Can you speak to how you have incorporated portable credentials into the RFP?
A: We are looking to the grantee to develop a portable credential that is recognized by employers and can substitute for a certain number of years of experience. By “portable credential” we mean an academic certificate that can help an individual make progress towards a postsecondary degree. We believe that this credential can help someone get into the CHW field or advance.
**Program Eligibility and Requirements**

Q: Is this program limited to Boston residents?
A: Pre-employment candidates (job seekers) must be Boston residents. Incumbent workers served by the program are not required to be residents, as employers of community health workers hire from throughout the region.

Q: Can a worker served by the program exit out of community health and enter a career as a pharmaceutical tech or in another health care vocation?
A: Yes. That’s one strategy. The other strategy is to create a career ladder within community health.

Q: In the RFP you say you are looking for two career outcomes—within the CHW field and one in the health care field in general. We think this is important because we don’t think that it should be just an “up and out” career ladder for CHWs. Are you expecting a successful bidder to have strategies for both outcomes?
A: Yes.

Q: What if employers want to include non-CHWs in training and advancement opportunities provided by this program?
A: Generally speaking, this would not be funded under the RFP. We are only interested in advancing community health workers through this grant. If employers would like to extend similar services to other workers, we will not count them towards the program outcomes, and the training could not be paid for by the grant. But the intermediary would be free to offer such services if it finds additional resources to do so.

Q: What if an employer wants to add supervisory training? Would this be considered within the reach of the RFP as currently conceived?
A: Yes. SkillWorks supports providing supervisory training, diversity training, organizational change training, and other resources to help foster an environment that is supportive of advancement for entry-level workers. This would come under the “working with larger systems” strategy.

**Program Emphasis and Expectations**

Q: Should we or can we work with specific subgroups of CHWs?
A: Because CHWs work in such a wide variety of settings, we believe that cohesive partnerships might be built through working, for example, with a group of Community Health Centers. We don’t preclude working with broad-based employers, but our expectation is that it will be easier to work with similar types of employers in each partnership.

Q: Is there an expectation of employer match/contribution?
A: We want strong, proactive employer participation. One of the ways we judge that is whether employers will provide paid release time. Another is looking at whether the employer assigns a
senior-level person to participate. Is there good knowledge throughout the organization/employer of this program? Financial match is another one of the ways that you can demonstrate employer commitment, but we have not mandated a specific level of match.

Q: Do you see more value/weight being given to places that have sustained partnerships with CHWs already? How would you integrate CHWs or CHW leaders as a partner in the proposal?
A: Any partnership must have CHWs themselves as part of the partnership. We know there are unions, associations, and other groups that represent CHWs. If employees are unionized, then the union should be at the table, for example. If the workplace is not unionized, that’s where we will listen to the field and what you tell us about what works and what doesn’t in terms of bringing CHW voice to the table.

Q: How do you expect employers to respond to the requirement for increased wages, up to the Massachusetts Family Economic Self Sufficiency standard (FESS), especially when the wage rate needed to support a 2-parent family with 2 children is over $54,000?
A: We do not expect that within 3 years, CHWs are going to advance to the FESS standard from minimum wage. What we do expect is that you are working on a strategy to link them to a career ladder where the ultimate goal would be to place them in a position where they can earn that wage.

Q: What about helping CHWs access careers outside the health field?
A: SkillWorks has a dual customer focus, which means that we are trying to help both CHWs to advance and help employers to meet their needs for skilled workers. In this case, we are looking for two approaches to CHW advancement – one that creates a career ladder within community health work, and one that facilitates advancement in other medical career paths, including administrative, patient care, technical or other occupations. Using this advancement strategy not only helps community health workers but also addresses the need of health care employers for a diverse, culturally competent workforce. So, no, we are not interested in a strategy that helps CHWs access careers outside the health field.

Q: Is there a slant/bias toward pre-employment candidates vs. incumbent workers?
A: As we heard in our focus groups, recruitment is not as much of a challenge as retention and advancement for CHWs. If we have a bias, it’s toward the incumbent workforce, since that seems to be the bigger challenge. We do think it makes sense to have an integrated strategy to work with people entering the field and then help them advance. It would be highly unlikely that we would fund a proposal that serves ONLY pre-employment candidates.

Q: Can you release your scoring sheets?
A: We have not in the past released our scoring sheets. We would meet with you to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your proposal vis-à-vis other proposals, if you ask for it, but not a specific scoring sheet.

Q: Since CHWs bring linguistic and cultural competence to their work, is one of the funders’ goals to improve this kind of competence at higher levels of health care?
A: Yes. In our focus groups, we found that employers are looking for more culturally competent employees to fill nursing and allied health positions, among others.

Q: Follow-up—is this something you are looking at within the “Return on Investment” Evaluation (ROI) to measure?
A: Yes, certainly the presence of more linguistically/culturally competent workers at higher levels of health care would seem to indicate better quality of care, but this is an untested hypothesis.

**Partnerships**

Q: An awarded grant would involve a fairly complex partnership. What role if any is SkillWorks planning to play in expediting formation of partnerships?
A: One of the reasons we’re asking for a letter of intent is to help in the formation of partnerships. We might suggest that you work with others that submit letters. A diverse partnership supports many points of view, but a large partnership makes it difficult to manage. You might want to think about how you will manage a partnership of a certain size. Will certain parties be service providers in the partnership? This is up to your discretion as you put together your partnership. SkillWorks will also provide TA for the selected grantee through capacity building activities.

Q: If we’re not interested in being the lead but interested in being an employer partner, can we submit a letter of intent stating “employer partner” or “community-based organization” partner.
A: Yes.

Q: At the end, the planning process will result in a partnership with a lead agency and partners. Will there be an opportunity during the planning process to bring in new partners?
A: Yes. That’s part of the purpose of the planning grant. You can figure out who else needs to be at the table during this process and bring in new partners, etc. Even our current grantees are bringing in new partners during implementation.

Q: How do we best indicate interest in certain partners, etc? How do we locate potential partners?
A: You can use the letter of intent process. We can serve as a broker when we receive the letters and help link potential partners. You can also tell us what kinds of partners you are looking for and we can help you locate those. We will also continue to work with the grantee during the planning phase and provide as much TA as possible during the proposal development stages.

Q: How many people are you looking to train over the three years?
A: Most of our SkillWorks workforce partnerships are involved with about 100 new people every year. They continue to work with the 100 from the previous year. That’s on the low end. Some of our partnerships are serving 300 people/year, but they have other funding sources. We are looking for a minimum of 100 people served per year. This would break down to about 100 in the first year, a total of 200 in the second year, and a total of 300 in the third year, assuming carryover from year to year.