NCWorks Local Innovation Fund
Grant Guidelines and Application

Contents

Introduction

As the Governor's Workforce Development Board (WDB), the NCWorks Commission recommends policies and strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete and be successful. Led by a business sector chair, the 37-member NCWorks Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. The mission of the NCWorks Commission is to ensure that North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity. This work complements Governor Roy Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce initiative, which is built on three core principles: skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide.

Communities across North Carolina are struggling with training, retaining, and recruiting talent to meet the workforce needs of their local employers. As a result, many employers either cannot grow their business or decide to relocate to another area, leaving communities with smaller economies and people without good jobs. The NCWorks Commission is continuing the Local Innovation Fund, a competitive grant program to identify, design, and implement new strategies, or scale existing models, to solve challenging workforce issues.

Grant Overview

The *NCWorks Local Innovation Fund* will make available a total of $450,000 in funding to local communities to pilot innovative programs or replicate successful program models that address a local or regional workforce issue, with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Communities will assemble a collaborative team to design and implement a set of solutions to a DEI workforce issue. Teams must include the local WDB as the financial administrator, and should include education, workforce, community, labor, and businesses leaders, and must use an equity lens in the design and delivery of the solution. The NCWorks Commission is especially interested in projects that address an underserved or under-resourced community or population currently disconnected from the education and workforce system; bring together diverse community organizations; increase educational attainment and address digital literacy needs, if relevant; and develop talent pipelines for in-demand, high-wage occupations. Successful grant applications must be:

- **Data Informed** – projects must use data and research to identify workforce issues, develop solutions, and track progress.
- **Collaborative** – multiple stakeholder organizations (e.g., workforce programs, educational institutions, civic groups, businesses, non-profits, philanthropic entities, academic organizations) must comprise the grant team and each project participant must commit to bringing their resources and expertise to the project. (**Note**: A local WDB must be one of the project partners and be willing to be the financial administrator for the grant.)
- **Transformational** – the project will materially and demonstrably improve worker access to family-sustaining wage opportunities and the way the education and workforce system operates in the community.

- **Committed to Equity** – the project must develop strategies that will create equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone receiving the targeted support.
- **Sustainable** – project teams must have strategies for continuing the work after the grant period ends.
- **Replicable and Scalable** – the project must be replicable and scalable, and the team will be required to identify the key components necessary for success.

We anticipate projects may focus on populations such as Opportunity Youth — the one-in-seven young people who are disconnected from the economy; or communities that have been cut off from needed resources by geography, lack of transportation, or discrimination; or low-income people that struggle to put food on the table but cannot improve their skills for better jobs because of work and family requirements. If North Carolina is going to be successful, it must help ALL North Carolinians acquire the education and training needed for good jobs.

Grants will be reviewed on the strength and viability of the conceptual framework, substantive involvement of strong partnerships, and indications that projects are transformational and innovative in nature. Projects should also show a commitment to equity, and be data-informed, replicable, and scalable.

Eligible Applicants

Applicants to the *NCWorks Local Innovation Fund* must be partnerships of multiple organizations that will actively support the work of the grant. Each partnership must include at least one local WDB, which will receive the funds for the partnership and be responsible for the appropriate use of the funds. The local WDB must be the lead agency and financial administrator. Below is a list of organizations the partnership may consider including in the project.

- Government Organizations (city/town, county, regional, tribal, etcetera.)
- Education Organizations (K-12, Community Colleges, Universities, etcetera.)
- Community Organizations (local non-profits, youth serving programs, veterans and military organizations, philanthropic organizations, etcetera.)
- Local Businesses

Grants – Up to $225,000 for two years

Grants of up to $225,000 for two years are designed to assist communities that already have a collaborative team, and the local support needed to be successful. Grant teams will also benefit from technical assistance during the grant period.

There is no specified target allocation for the funding of these grants. Individual expenditures must be submitted to the local WDB on a monthly basis for reimbursement. At the end of the grant performance period, these grants will be evaluated by an independent research evaluator and a final report will be developed.

Technical Assistance and Cross – Team Knowledge Sharing

Grant teams will be brought together in person three times during the grant period to learn, share, and advise. All grantees will come together in Summer 2023 for a kick-off meeting. This meeting will include an advisory team of experts in innovation, workforce, collective impact, and

community; members and staff of the NCWorks Commission; and other key education and workforce leaders. Grantee teams will finalize action plans and have opportunities to work with advisory team members to strengthen their work. Grantees will also have the opportunity to share their successes and challenges with other teams. There will be other phone and video meetings with team members and other resources as required.

Technical Assistance will be provided by a single point of contact for all grantees to avoid confusion and duplication, so all participants will receive uniform guidance. The assistance may involve answering questions or concerns about grant activities, providing follow up on information submitted on quarterly reports, brainstorming ideas, and providing resources and best practices during calls or meetings for grant success. Technical assistance also involves problem solving and assistance with grant or budget revisions that may be requested.

Schedule for Grant Applications and Awards

Grant announcement press release	February 13, 2023
Grant application available	February 13, 2023
Webinar on Grant Guidelines	March 1, 2023
Grant questions due	March 10, 2023
Grant responses available online	March 24, 2023
Grant applications due date	April 12, 2023
Grant awards announced	June 14, 2023
Kick-off meeting for grantees	Summer 2023
End-of-grant for implementation grants	Summer 2025

Grant Reporting

Grant recipients will be required to submit status reports and financial updates quarterly during the life of the grant. Reports will cover areas such as solutions implemented, challenges encountered, partnership updates, expenditures, and other subjects. Changes to the report format may be provided after the grant process is underway.

Upon closeout of the grant, the grant awardees must submit a summary of promising practices developed as a result of the project. A narrative on how the project will be sustained locally and could be replicated in other regions, if it was determined it was a success, will be required as well.

Grantee must submit specific and clear outcomes to demonstrate accurate and clear goal completion. Areas must include total participants served, education and training received, credentials received, and employment obtained by participants. All grant participants must be WIOA Adult eligible and enrolled in WIOA Statewide Adult Grants in ncworks.gov. Service codes must be entered in the ncworks.gov system to track services provided and outcomes. Keying instructions will be provided to grantees and can also be found in the ncworks.gov Staff Online Resources.

Resources

WorkforceGPS (https://strategies.workforcegps.org/) provides a library of promising practices and workforce system strategies that can be browsed for resources using the WorkforceGPS by clicking through on the tabs. Items listed with numbers next to them indicate how many resources are tagged with that term.

Application Submission

Submit the completed application with original signatures by **5:00 p.m. April 12, 2023**. Applicants must address all sections. Electronic mail of the application is acceptable with a scanned copy of the signature page. The signature page can be found in Attachment 2.

Submit the Application Package to:

By email:
NCWorks Commission – ncworkscommission@commerce.nc.gov

By mail:
NCWorks Commission
NC Division of Workforce Solutions
4316 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-4316

GRANT APPLICATION
Grant Application Contents

Required Elements
The following elements must be included in the application for consideration. Applications must be submitted by **5:00 p.m. April 12, 2023.** Applications that are missing an element below will not be considered for funding.

- ✓ Signature Page (Attachment 2)
- ✓ Project Narrative
- ✓ Partnership Chart (Attachment 3)
- ✓ Budget Summary(Attachment 4)
- ✓ Budget Narrative
- ✓ Goals, Outcomes, and Measures Narrative (Attachment 5)
- ✓ Letter(s) of Support from Partners

Narrative
Note: The points in parentheses are the weight values given to the questions and will be used by the advisory panel to score the proposal. Please provide a written narrative describing the proposed project that addresses the following areas. Please limit response to 5-7 pages.

1. Local or regional workforce issue (10 points)

   - Describe the local or regional workforce issue this grant will address.
   - Describe how the project is data informed – projects must use local data less than 5 years old and research to identify workforce issues, develop solutions, and track progress and develop talent pipelines for in-demand, high-wage occupations.

2. Address the under-resourced – the NCWorks Local Innovation Fund will be focused on projects that address an under-resourced community or population currently disconnected from the education and workforce system and bring together diverse community organizations. (10 points)

   - Demonstrate the appropriateness of the method to be used to address the issue/opportunity.

3. Transformational – the project will materially and demonstrably improve worker access to family-sustaining wage opportunities and the way the education and workforce system operates in the community. (10 points)

   - Describe how the project will improve worker access to family-sustaining wages.
   - Describe the specific way the education and workforce system operate locally.

4. Sustainable – project teams must have strategies for continuing the work after the grant period ends. (10 points)

   - Describe the specific strategies for ensuring the project is sustainable.

5. Scalable – the project must be replicable, and the team will be required to identify the key components necessary for success. (10 points)

   - Describe how the project may be replicated in another part of the state and list the components another community would need to accomplish for the project to be successful elsewhere.

6. Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – the project must develop strategies that will create equitable opportunities DEI (and outcomes for everyone served. (10 points)

   - Describe how the project will use an equity lens in the design and delivery of the solution to be considered for the grant and create/support equitable opportunities and outcomes.

7. Evidence of multiple and diverse partnerships and collaboration (10 points)

   - Describe the role and contributions of partners in the project.
   - Describe the role that partnerships had in the development of the proposal and the relationship that will exist during the project.
   - Complete Attachment 3 listing all partner organizations and their role (this attachment does not count toward the page limit).

8. Budget and Budget Narrative (10 points) – does not count towards the page limit.
   Provide a line-item budget (Attachment 4) and a narrative with justification for the resources necessary to accomplish the goals and objectives set forth in the scope of work. The narrative should explain all costs associated with the project and should reflect any leveraged resources set forth in the budget and how the planned expenses support the overall goals and activities of the *NCWorks Local Innovation Fund*.

   The "leveraged resources" column should include all leveraged funds that will be used to support the grant. State whether they are in-kind or monetary, and the source of these funds. Examples of these funds would be facilities, in-kind training, and/or professional development. **Note**: The following should be carefully considered before inclusion into the budget:

   - Regarding the use of funds for equipment or equipment-related purposes, if it is necessary to include an expense for equipment, there should be a compelling case for purchase. The cost should be included in "Other Expenses."
   - All accounting records should be maintained in accordance with the NC Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, State Policies, Office of Management and Budget (OMB Circulars, and generally accepted accounting practices).
   - Indicate if additional existing resources may be leveraged from grants or funds. Please include any in-kind contributions. This information must be contained in the narrative and on the budget form.

9. Goals, Outcomes, and Measures (10 points)
   - Provide a summary of each goal of the *NCWorks Local Innovation Fund* grant, showing its relationships to the issues outlined in #1-6.

- Complete the Goals, Outcomes, and Measures form (Attachment 5).
- Include numbers that includes total participants served, training and education received, credentials received, and employment obtained.

10. Future growth-forward thinking initiatives (10 points)

- Provide evidence of industries that clearly demonstrate future growth.
  - Examples may include: Electric Vehicle manufacturing, wireless, broadband, or other clean energy forward thinking projects.

11. Match opportunities – **OPTIONAL** (10 points)

- Additional points may be awarded for proposals that demonstrate and incorporate matching cash funds, or in-kind donations. Please identify the organizations providing matching funds/resources (space, technology, or other resources) in the narrative and in the budget outline. Specify whether the resources are in-kind or monetary and the source of these funds.

Project Evaluations – Grant

All grant recipients must participate in an evaluation, which may include items such as:

- An analysis of the project's challenges, successes, expenditures
- A model for how to replicate or scale successes
- An update on each goal and whether the measures were met, exceeded, or not
- An explanation of successes, failures, and lessons learned

Questions

All questions should be sent to ncworkscommission@commerce.nc.gov by March 10, 2023. A summary of the responses to questions will be available online by March 24, 2023.