



PHILADELPHIA  
**WORKS** INC.

Building a Skilled and Thriving Workforce

## Vocational Skills Training 2019 Request for Proposals

### Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

#### *Is contextualized literacy necessary for my program?*

As detailed in the RFP, quality contextualized literacy must be robust and embedded into the training. To be considered, literacy services should not be subcontracted to a provider for only a few days, but should be fully integrated into the program.

The Office of Adult Education is aware of the mandatory contextualized literacy RFP requirement and are available as a resource to help organizations that do not have the capacity to fulfill this requirement partner with qualified vendors. The Office of Adult Education will also support the Vocational Skills Training review process review the proposal for strong literacy components.

#### *What is considered an Industry Specific Credential?*

There are many industry recognized credentials that are not specific to gainful employment in certain fields, so the primary credential offered should not be a general one (i.e. OSHA, SERV Safe or a general customer service credential). All programs must be approved by the Department of Human Services and they have an increased interest in more robust credentials required for entry into industries.

Offering career specific industry recognized credentials also allows flexibility in the EARN program where participants with limited training time may still be permitted to enroll because of the credentialing outcome.

If you are unsure if the credential you propose to offer would meet the requirements for consideration, please send an email with your inquiry to: [vstraining@philaworks.org](mailto:vstraining@philaworks.org).

#### *Is there a list of good or bad credentials?*

There isn't a list, but a good guide is to use the High Priorities Occupations (HPO) list for Philadelphia. Industry recognized credentials related to HPO have an increased chance of consideration.

#### *Is OSHA certification an appropriate credential or should something more specific be offered such as OSHA-10 or OSHA-30?*

OSHA is considered general and should not be the sole credential earned in the program. OSHA can be stacked with another related industry recognized credential, but should not be offered as a standalone certification.

### ***What is the process to become a State approved program?***

Philadelphia Works submits programs that have passed the Vocational Skills Training review process to the State for approval. Proposals are read and scored by both internal and external partners.

The timeframe for State approval has been approximately two weeks. The State may request additional information during their review to ensure they have enough information to make a decision. It is possible for a program to be denied by the State, but to date this has not occurred.

### ***What is the role of PA CareerLink®?***

A great relationship between the VST providers and CareerLink® is very important. Clear communication with the Centers is required. Most providers do very well building relationships with Center staff, but Philadelphia Works plays an active role in establishing the relationship with PA CareerLink® early in the process.

Because all participants must be enrolled with PA CareerLink® to attend training, a good relationship with the Centers is important for recruitment, information sharing, addressing customer issues, and other support.

PA CareerLink® provides primary case management services to customers. These Workforce Advisors remain at PA CareerLink® Centers so training and other participant issues must be reported to the Workforce Advisors for resolution.

### ***What is the deadline for proposal submissions?***

RFPs will be accepted and processed throughout the program year, funding permitting, so there is no deadline for submissions.

Philadelphia Works' ability to respond to RFPs will depend on the frequency and volume of submissions. Ideally, a response should be received within four weeks after submission. Philadelphia Works will contact respondents that may be affected by delayed response and propose a new estimated timeline.

Philadelphia Works will update our website to announce when proposals are not being accepted for any reason, such as changes in investment priorities or funding. Please check frequently as these "holds" may be temporary.

### ***What is the proposal format?***

Formatting is extremely important for your proposal submissions to make the review process more streamlined. Proposals that are too large to submit electronically should be revised to reduce their size.

Your proposal submission should include a .pdf document with the full proposal. Budgets should be submitted using the Philadelphia Works Excel template and can be submitted as a separate attachment.

*Proposals submitted with multiple attachments not specified above will be initially rejected and respondents will be asked to resubmit.*

*For Philadelphia Works to approve training programs, what list should providers reference for current trending careers? Are there programs that you are missing, things that you want but are not seeing? If you are developing a program or have a menu of programs that you may write a proposal based upon, where do you go?*

Training programs need to lead to credentials and employment in High Priority Occupations. This list can be found on the Philadelphia Works website. The HPO is a good point of reference for developing training or new and innovative programming.

*Is there an area Philadelphia Works is looking to improve this year?*

Employer partnerships that lead to better employment outcomes.

This RFP requests information regarding providers' relationships with employers to identify hiring needs in the City and in industries to justify program investments. Vocational Skills Training contracts do not contain job placement performance outcomes, but we are interested in gainful employment for program participants. The decision to run additional cohorts of an approved training is partially based on employment outcomes. PA CareerLink® and training providers jointly support participants' employment goals with job opportunities they develop.

*How extensive is your list of participants from the employer's perspective? How many employers do you typically have in certain industries, like food service?*

PA CareerLink® Centers have employer relationships through business services and job development efforts. It is very difficult to measure employer relationships in any given industry, especially because some of the relationships overlap.

*How formal of a relationship are you looking for? Are you looking for written contracts?*

Letters of support from employers are fine to submit, however, we would also like to see what type of relationships providers have that will benefit overall programming.

Examples of beneficial relationships are employers that are willing to interview or hire the participants at the end of training, or employers that support curriculum design and help develop or vet training.

Philadelphia Works will not distinctly define relationships or partnerships but we are interested in those that are more employment specific. It should be evident that students are able to take advantage of your employer relationships to support placement and PA CareerLink®

Philadelphia Works is also building sector based relationships where there is higher customer interest, with the potential to reach out to providers to leverage their employer relationships to see there is opportunity to expand program offerings.

For example, some industries in which we offer training have job opportunities that require one to three years of experience. Training graduates may not meet this requirement, so if there is a partnership with an employer willing to give graduates an opportunity with potential workforce dollars to support, we can strengthen our support to customers, trainers and employers.

### ***Who is permitted to enroll in training?***

Same as last year, programs will be open to all PA CareerLink® customers enrolled in EARN and WIOA. There is no need to focus on just one population type. If filling classes proves difficult with PA CareerLink® customers alone, providers that maintain waiting lists can coordinate with Philadelphia Works and PA CareerLink® to do targeted recruitment for WIOA eligible participants, giving them an opportunity to register and enroll in training.

### ***How should budgets be submitted?***

Budgets must be submitted using the Philadelphia Works template which can be found on our website in Excel format. If you have questions they will be discussed during budget review and appropriate technical assistance will be provided. The Philadelphia Works Finance team will take over once the initial budget is approved.

### ***What is the funding cap for proposed training?***

Philadelphia Works is not capping funding, but it should be noted that the process is competitive. If two proposals of equal quality are received and one is cheaper than the other, we will go with the cheaper proposal. Philadelphia Works may approve multiple proposals per topic area. High need in certain industries that have multiple quality submissions may result in training contracts with multiple providers.

### ***Can budgets be negotiated if they are considered too high?***

Yes. If you are unsure what a reasonable budget would be, please email [vstraining@philaworks.org](mailto:vstraining@philaworks.org). Philadelphia Works will provide feedback and guide you to a more appropriate amount per person for the program being offered. We are also open to receiving proposed budgets prior to the full submission.

### ***Is there a general cost per student that you are targeting?***

There is not. We have an idea of what we are looking for, but we don't want to specify a cost per. Realizing there are differences based on industry and credentials offered. For some programs, we may be willing to go a little bit higher than other programs. If you have an idea for something, let us know what credential is being proposed, industry of training, and estimated cost per person and we will give appropriate guidance.

### ***If a provider is proposing expansion or continuation of a program that has been run in the past and there is cost per outcome and performance data, is that helpful to Philadelphia Works?***

Yes, that is very helpful.

### ***Is there a sense of the total funding available?***

We have a general strategy for investing training dollars but there is flexibility. If spending is less in other investments, more funding may be made available for training. At the same time, other priorities can potentially decrease training dollars so this number can change. Currently Philadelphia Works has a generous amount of money allocated for training.

***Do you have an overall target number of people that you are trying to reach through this initiative?***

We would like for EARN and WIOA to enroll approximately 400 PA CareerLink® participants each by the end of the year. Respondents should propose the appropriate number of cohorts to successfully run training and we will negotiate depending on organization capacity, program topic, industry need, and funding.

***Can you talk about partnerships that you are open to, in terms of Adult Education Support, contextualized literacy, or other bridge programs that might serve as important stepping stones for providers that are funded?***

Philadelphia Works is open to training providers partnering with literacy providers as sub-contractors, so an agreement or draft agreement submitted with your proposal will let us know that that contextualized literacy component will be in place.

We don't want to see proposals where an organization that specializes in case management subcontracts the whole training program to a different training provider. We are looking for the training provider to be the main contract with necessary support through sub-contracts if there is limited or no capacity.

If you need to subcontract for a case manager or literacy provider that is fine provided that too much of the contract isn't outsourced. We have received proposals that were not able to move forward because the bulk of the proposed training was sub-contracted.

If you propose an additional relationship that we are not interested in funding does not mean that we will not accept or fund your program. You would be informed that we are not interested in funding that portion of the proposal, but would strive to fund the program otherwise.

***Would you consider a partnership where the providers serving as the entity that provides contextualized literacy but subcontracts the vocational skills?***

We want to see the vocational skills provider as the main training provider. If you have specific questions related to this, please contact [vstraining@philaworks.org](mailto:vstraining@philaworks.org).

***In the RFP, it is mentioned that the opportunity is for established programs and not for startups. Does this refer to a new company starting a training program only?***

This basically means that we are not interested in funding the development of a training program. We want this to be something that you are doing already and have experience with that you are proposing prior to submission. We will not be awarding seed money or development money to get the curriculum written.

***What if it's a training program that you already do, have the capacity to do and have the equipment for but you need to ramp up and hire staff?***

That is allowed. We will look at staffing very closely along with the budget to determine the amount of staff that is needed and why based on the customers that you will serve. Additionally, if there is a need for additional equipment, please communicate this us. There are times where Philadelphia Works will pay a fair share of certain costs. These discussions will take place during budget review and negotiation,

but we don't invest substantial amounts of money on equipment for programs that may not continue to be funded because their duration has ended.

Please see the Philadelphia Works Equipment Policy in the RFP. According to funding guidelines we must own certain equipment purchases, especially computers. If we need to purchase items, there is a specific way it must be ordered, and it is maintained as the property of Philadelphia Works to be returned to us at the completion of the contract.

***Could an established provider with a history of providing training in workforce development services without funding to continue the program apply for funds to restart these services?***

Yes, the same conditions apply for the RFP process.

***Can a sample RFP submission be made available?***

No, there is too much variance across proposals and if we provided a sample we would be sharing provider specific information we are unable share.

***If it's a successful workforce training program that exists in another state but not currently in Pennsylvania is that allowed?***

Yes, that is fine. We partnered with a similar provider in 2018.

***Is there a timeline on implementation?***

It is recommended to submit soon to get up and running or consider a January start for your program. Note it is not best to start programs around the holidays (i.e. November and December holidays).

***In the Narrative Section, there is a question about prior external evaluations of similar programs, is there an example of the kind of thing you are looking for there?***

No, there isn't a specific example since we have received this information in many ways. It must be a third-party evaluation that can speak to and document performance outcomes. This allows us to see the program outcomes and evaluate prior work with the populations we are interested in serving since we may be unfamiliar with your program. Though we don't specify what the review needs to be, it cannot be an internal review.

***Is the CareerLink® a part of the evaluation or is there a plan for them because they kind of know about their customers? Are they involved at all?***

Yes, information from them is taken into consideration. We have shied away from having them evaluating proposals because we want to avoid bias.

We will review PA CareerLink® information and look at labor market information to confirm there are openings within the proposed training industry. We then follow up with a similar assessment to make sure we have people who are interested.

If a provider submits performance information on PA CareerLink® customers that looks vastly different from our internal results, this is taken into consideration during the approval process and appropriate discussions will take place.

*In Attachment 3 of the Vocational Skills Training RFP, is this asking for letters of reference from relevant previous partnerships or specifically for an evaluation from a related Philadelphia agency?*

Any third-party evaluation of relevant program operations that meets the requirements outlined in the RFP will suffice, and does not have to be Philadelphia specific.