

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Empire State Development and the Ralph C. Wilson Jr., Foundation

The Workforce Development Challenge (WDC) is a \$10 million fund announced by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo as part of the 2017 Buffalo Billion Phase II initiative. In 2019, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation contributed an additional \$1.5 million to the WDC for a total of \$11.5 million to ensure the region's workforce pipeline is being responsive to industry demands and promote and invest in innovative approaches to workforce training for underserved populations. The WDC will help scale up organizations doing high impact, results-oriented workforce training that can demonstrate strong outcomes in training, job placement and retention. The WDC will facilitate partnerships with community and neighborhood-based organizations with proven track records, trust and outstanding abilities for outreach and recruitment. It will also support target sectors ripe for growth in jobs and career ladder opportunities for entry-level and mid-skill workers, while funding best practice models that maximize collaboration between business and workforce trainers.

The WDC was created by **Empire State Development** (ESD) — New York State's chief economic development agency, whose mission is to promote a vigorous and growing economy, encourage the creation of new job and economic opportunities, increase revenues to the State and its municipalities, and achieve stable and diversified local economies. ESD is also the primary administrative agency overseeing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Councils and the Buffalo Billion. **The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**, with a focus on skills training and education leading to sustainable career pathways and good paying careers for young adults and families, is a funding partner. The **Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo** is the WDC's grant administrator.

I. PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In January 2012, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo made a historic commitment to strategically invest one billion dollars in the Buffalo area economy (the "Buffalo Billion") to create new jobs and spur large-scale private investment and increased economic activity. This commitment showed extraordinary recognition of the region's potential and confidence in the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council's (WNY REDC) Strategic Plan, *A Strategy for Prosperity*. Following the announcement of the Buffalo Billion, the WNY REDC developed the Buffalo Billion Investment Development Plan (BBIDP), a detailed market analysis and investment plan based on the strategic framework laid out in *A Strategy for Prosperity*. As detailed in both regional plans, a major enabler for economic development and strategic job growth in Buffalo Niagara is workforce development. Connecting economic development efforts with workforce training will

ensure that employers in growing industries have access to the high-quality, skilled labor needed to fill job openings and be competitive.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating unprecedented economic hardship for residents and businesses across Western New York (WNY). Prior to the pandemic, the WNY region experienced overall job growth and a record-low unemployment rate of roughly 4%. Workforce efforts were focused largely around ensuring the region's workers had the proper skills to meet the needs of growing sectors while attempting to increase participation by the region's historically most underrepresented populations by addressing barriers to economic self-sufficiency. We are now seeing an unemployment rate at 6.5% (September 2020) with many people out of the workforce through furloughs or layoffs. In addition, the pandemic has highlighted the disparities in the workforce. Historically underrepresented populations such as individuals of color, women, and adults with limited education and training have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The unemployment rate is 10.7% in the City of Buffalo where persons of color are concentrated and where a large number of jobs have been lost due to COVID-19. Many will require additional workforce training and reskilling to align their abilities, credentials, and other qualifications with what hiring employers seek.

The principles on which the WDC was designed before the COVID-19 pandemic are still valid: providing opportunities for those with limited education and those who are underemployed, building the capacity of existing workforce trainers and the workforce ecosystem, providing training in key sectors to address looming retirement cliffs, and working with private companies to establish training, skills certifications and industry job ladders for new and existing workers. Round 3 of the WDC will also seek to be responsive to workforce and unemployment needs as identified and exacerbated through the COVID-19 pandemic because despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic, in some target industries and occupations there are hundreds of entry-level job postings and harder to fill positions. The WDC program encourages projects that address new and existing training-industry gaps and strengthens the economy by equipping workers with skills and training for in-demand jobs in target industries. To align with WNY economic recovery efforts the WDC will seek to: provide greater opportunities for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce—providing programs for existing workers to advance and also retraining of the newly unemployed whose businesses may not reopen or who seek more stable employment in a traditional workplace; encourage and develop alternative methods for job training, including using virtual, remote, and inventive training approaches to adapt to new social distancing norms; and promote and embrace a diverse and inclusive culture for workforce across all sectors.

II. PROGRAM GOALS

- To support target industry sectors ripe for growth by expanding the workforce pipeline through meaningful industry partnerships leading to industry-driven training;
- To prepare unemployed and underemployed populations for high-demand, higher paying jobs with career advancement potential;
- To ensure that all workers of all skill levels, socioeconomic groups, racial and ethnic groups, gender identities and expressions, and geographies have opportunities to participate and progress in the labor force;
- To create career ladder opportunities for entry-level and mid-skill workers;
- To provide direct placement into job opportunities through partnerships with industry;
- To be responsive to industry needs and workforce challenges that may be a direct result of our changing economy from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- To increase the capacity of grassroots, community-based organizations with proven track records in results-oriented workforce training; and
- To invest in innovative approaches to workforce training to better serve industry needs; and best practice models that maximize collaboration between industry, employers and workforce trainers.

III. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must:

- Be a not-for-profit corporation with Section 501(c)(3) status as determined by the Internal Revenue Service. A not-for-profit corporation must be registered and up-to-date with filings with the New York State Office of the Attorney General's Charities Bureau;
- Have an established track record of effective training and trusted relationships within communities;
- Be located in or provide services to Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua and/or Allegany counties;
- Demonstrate the development and financial management expertise to successfully develop, design, construct, manage and implement the project. This expertise is demonstrated through previous experience in successfully developing projects similar to the one proposed, either by partners or key staff within the business or organization;
- For capital projects, must demonstrate ownership or site control (i.e., lease or letter of intent to lease) of all real estate considered part of the proposed project.

IV. PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

Projects **must**:

- Foster workforce development in at least one of the region’s following target industry sectors—**advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, tourism and hospitality, clean energy**, and **agriculture**. In addition as the region sees a growing need for investments in the tech sector, and as all aspects of our economy have become more reliant on the sector during the pandemic, projects that prepare workers for **tech occupations**¹ across all industry sectors are also encouraged.
- Be developed in partnership with a business or multiple businesses to maximize industry focused curriculum development and provide direct job placement;
- Train populations that are out of the labor force, unemployed, underemployed/working poor, and/or employed workers seeking upskilling, upgrades and/or career advancements. Preference will be given to those projects that specifically target historically underrepresented people, underemployed populations and employed populations seeking career advancement;
- Prepare participants with entry and advancement in the aforementioned regional target industries with a preference for high-demand, living wage jobs (i.e. jobs that pay the average regional average of about \$45,000 or more) with career advancement;
- Be a new program or project or expansion (increase in participants, services, or outreach) of an existing program or project and be considered a best practice model able to be replicated;
- Include trainee supports—activities that will be made available to program participants to reduce barriers to training. These may include childcare, online programming, public transit passes or other transportation supports, career coaching, soft skills or success skills, free or reduced price programming, etc.

Applicants may find it useful to use the following tools and resources when establishing need and fostering partnerships:

- **NYS Department of Labor Job Zone**

¹ Note: Our region uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ broad list of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations to define **tech occupations** https://www.bls.gov/oes/stem_list.xlsx. More specifically, a program might be eligible for the Workforce Development Challenge if it prepares workers for entry or advancement in what are defined as (but not limited to) “computer occupations” within this larger STEM occupations list (e.g. computer programmers, software developers, web developers, database administrators, network and computer systems administrators, computer user support specialists, computer network support specialists, etc.).

Use this website to identify companies with the most job postings or occupational categories where regional hiring is strongest. Create a free account to access this more detailed job posting data.

<https://labor.ny.gov/jobs/regional.shtm>

- **Numbers in Need in Buffalo Niagara**

Use this online resource to learn understand regional and community needs relating to populations in poverty, including the potential wraparound services that adults may need relating to workforce training and employment. Use the interactive Provider Tool to identify potential partners for the delivery of wraparound services.

<https://numbersinneed.org/>

- **Urban Institute: Where the Low Income Jobs Have Been Lost**

Use this online tool to identify industries and communities where most impacted by job losses related to COVID-19. These are industries and communities where workforce development and reskilling may be most greatly needed.

<https://www.urban.org/features/where-low-income-jobs-are-being-lost-covid-19>

The nature of the program is to catalyze creative approaches to workforce development for long-term impact. As such, it is intended to be flexible and responsive to industry, innovation and ingenuity, rather than following a proscriptive approach. The WDC encourages applicants to provide new and creative proposals that fit within the goals of the program, tailored to neighborhood and population needs and opportunities. Given the complexity of this issue, preference will be given to those projects that employ **multiple workforce development strategies** and may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- on-the-job training
- apprenticeships
- career-focused, targeted educational and/or vocational training that leads to a certificate or other non-degree bearing postsecondary credential
- mentorships
- training and job promotion and recruitment
- job placement and retention
- creating partnerships with industry
- strengthening connections between employers and job seekers
- diversity and inclusion training for industry sector partners including racial equity training

- childcare post placement

V. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Funding will be provided for activities not typically served by other sources of federal, state or local funding such as those available through the Workforce Investment Act.

Funding may be used for a variety of working capital and/or programmatic expenses related to a new program or expansion of an existing program such as:

- curricula development;
- instruction and instructional materials;
- marketing; and/or
- trainee supports, etc.

Funding may also be used for capital improvements provided they are within the following categories and thresholds²:

- purchase and/or installation of machinery and/or equipment used in workforce training;
- purchase and/or installation of furniture and fixtures;
- fit-out and/or in-kind renovation of an existing building in full compliance with local development regulations and not involving a property listed on the State/National Registers of Historic Places;
- new construction or expansion of a building, limited to no more than 4,000 square feet of space, on property already owned or controlled by the applicant, in full compliance with local development regulations, and not involving a property listed on the State/National Registers of Historic Places; and
- soft costs of up to fifteen (15%) of total project cost, and planning and feasibility studies related to a specific capital project.

VI. USE RESTRICTIONS

Funding cannot be used for:

- General operating expenses or general staff expenses of the applicant organization related

² Applications involving capital projects exceeding the above thresholds may be considered, particularly if they already have approvals and/or clearance under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (e.g., supplemental funding for a project already approved through one or more other agencies). It should also be noted that applications involving any type of capital project, regardless of scale, will require additional public reviews and approvals under Empire State Development regulations.

to a capital project;

- An existing program or project that doesn't demonstrate substantial expansion;
- A program that only trains the applicant's existing employees for advancement within the organization;
- Programs that don't extend beyond normal credit-bearing curricula—primarily benefitting matriculating students (for college and university applicants);
- Scholarships for program participants;
- Recapitalization/refinancing;
- Endowments;
- Religious purposes or improvements to structures owned by religious or private membership-based organizations;
- Fundraising;
- Political or lobbying activities;
- Activities that have occurred prior to the start of the grant period.

VII. FUNDING LEVELS, MATCHING REQUIREMENTS AND FOLLOW ON FUNDING

Applicants must request a minimum of \$250,000. There are no matching requirements for this funding, although strong priority will be given to projects that have matching funds from sources beyond public funds (i.e. industry partners).

Follow on funding may be awarded **one time** for the same project to grant recipients that 1.) demonstrate progress toward goals; and 2.) can provide a 1:1 match, preferably from an industry partner. In other words, applicants are only eligible to receive funding twice for a particular program or project. An organization that was awarded funding (and follow on funding) may apply for funds in subsequent rounds provided the proposal is for a program completely different from the one they received funding from the WDC for in previous rounds.

VIII. REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Project concept and readiness to proceed (20%)
- Project budget (10%)
- Project partnerships and innovation (15%)
- Project impact and outcomes in relation to the WDC goals (15%)

- Demonstration of need (15%)
- Organizational track record and capacity (15%)
- Support Services provided (10%)

IX. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

New for Round 3, all applicants must submit a brief Letter of Intent (LOI) by **December 18, 2020, 4:00 P.M.** If an LOI meets program requirements, an applicant will be invited to briefly discuss their proposal with ESD and WDC Advisory Council members and may proceed to a full application.

The LOI and full application must be submitted electronically online through the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo’s Foundation Grant Lifecycle manager. Only applications submitted online through the Foundation will be accepted. Applicants who proceed to the full application without first being approved through the LOI will not be considered for funding.

Visit <https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/wdc-esd/> to submit your application.

Proposal Deadlines and Timeline

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Date</u>
Program guidelines released	November 30, 2020
Virtual public information meeting	December 7, 2020,
Letter of Intent due	December 18, 2020, 4:00 P.M.
Application due	March 5, 2021, 4:00 P.M.
Awards announced	Spring 2021

LOIs and full proposals received after the deadline will not be reviewed. Questions about the WDC can be sent via email to John Risio at John.Risio@esd.ny.gov. Questions regarding the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo’s Foundation online application system should be directed to Alexandra Warner at AlexandraW@cfgb.org.

Grant Period

Grants will be provided for up to two years. Extensions on awards will be considered, especially

for capital projects, on a case-by-case basis provided substantial progress has been made on the project in the first 24 months.

X. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

The Proposal Requirements listed below are for your reference only. Please complete an LOI and Final Application through the online application system <https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/wdc-esd/> in order to be considered for funding through the WDC:

A.) CONTACT INFORMATION

Applicant organization
Contact name
Title
Address
Email
Phone number

B.) PROJECT DETAILS

Project Name

Total Amount Requested through the WDC.

Total Capital Budget

Total Working Capital Budget

Total Project Cost

Geographic Location of the proposed project. Include street address, city and county.

Service Area of the proposed project. Include city and county of the people served by the proposed project.

Is this a new program/project or expansion of an existing one?

Which industries does the program or project target? (select all that apply)

Advanced Manufacturing

Tourism

Health & Life Sciences

Agriculture
Clean Energy
Tech occupations in various industry sectors

What populations does the program or project specifically target and serve?

(Select your highest priority [ONE answer] for each question.)

Employment Status

Out of the labor force
Unemployed
Underemployed (i.e. low-income workers who have more education and training than their current jobs require.)
Working Poor (i.e. people who are working but still in poverty)
Employed workers seeking upskill upgrades/career advancement

Educational attainment level

Less than High School
High school
Some college or a 2-year degree
Bachelor's degree or more

Experience Level

Entry-level, with little or no experience
Entry-level, with some experience
Mid-level

Demographic

Adults (18 years or older)
Minorities (Ethnic/Racial)
Women
Veterans
People with disabilities
Immigrants/refugees
Single-parent households
Ex-offenders

Target population: Describe the populations in terms of employments status, educational attainment level, experience level and demographics the program or project specifically targets and serves; and explain your plan for diversity as it pertains to your specific community.

Detailed project description: Describe the proposed project or program and the actions and activities that will be undertaken to realize it. Include the distinct features

of your project such as capital improvements and the purpose they serve; proposed training programs including curricula details; apprenticeships; soft skills training to support job training; etc.

What specific types of jobs and job titles will the program or project prepare participants for?

*Please refer to O*Net at <https://www.onetonline.org/> and provide O*Net codes for a **maximum of 10 titles** in which the participant will be trained.*

Explain why this is an in-demand job category where training is needed and how your approach is responsive to the needs of industry.

Describe the skills and/or industry-recognized credentials that program participants will earn (e.g. soft skills, technical skills, certificate, other).

Describe supports that are available or will be made available to program participants to reduce barriers to training (provide a brief narrative response to each if applicable):

Childcare

Online programming

Transportation supports

Career coaching

Soft skills or success skills

Free or reduced price programming

How many people are expected to be trained or assisted through this project or program annually?

Explain your outreach and recruitment methods, especially to underserved and historically underrepresented populations, as they relate to the proposed program or project and to your community.

Describe how the project will be sustained financially once the grant period is over.

Project Budget: Using the budget template provided, include a detailed budget with all sources and uses including the request through the WDC; and a budget narrative that explains any matching funds for the project and their status.

Provide a detailed timeline with proposed actions and deliverables.

C.) INNOVATION

Name the private sector company or companies are you partnering with for this initiative. (Note: you will be required to submit a letter from each of the named companies explaining their specific role(s) in the project i.e. financial commitment, curriculum development, instructional, placement and retention, recruitment, etc.)

Are these companies ready to hire trainees who complete the proposed program?
Yes/No.

Summarize the nature of the relationship and how partnering with this/these companies will ensure jobs are filled in the targeted industry.

Describe the ways in which this project takes an **innovative approach** to workforce development and how it is a best-practice model that can be replicated.

D. GOALS AND IMPACT

Project Goals and Impact: Describe the specific outcomes and goals of the project and how you will measure progress made toward these goals. Describe the impact the project will have on both the industry it will assist and the population it will serve.

Describe the actions you will take to ensure that program participants are placed in in-demand, higher-paying jobs. How will you ensure a high job retention rate?

How many people are expected to be placed in in-demand, higher-wage jobs annually as a result of this project or program?

E.) DEMONSTRATION OF NEED

Identify challenges you see in recruiting, preparing, training and/or placing underserved populations in in-demand, higher-paying jobs

Describe the specific need your project is addressing in the community and/or the target population and **explain how your approach, intervention, program or project** will combat these challenges.

Explain the need for funding through the WDC, including why funding is necessary to complete the project why funding for this project cannot be acquired from traditional public funding sources (NYS Department of Labor, Workforce Investment Fund, etc.)

F.) APPLICANT ORGANIZATION

Explain the mission of the application organization

Describe the applicant organization's experience with projects of similar size and scale to the proposed one; and give specific examples of results and successes (people trained, placement and retention levels, anecdotal evidence from employers or trainees, etc.).

Identify who will be involved in developing and implementing the project and their qualifications. Note the number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff members employed by the organization.

Describe any industry and/or community partnerships that have been or will be developed that relate to the program or project.

G.) PROPOSAL ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Letter confirming 501(c)(3) status as determined by the Internal Revenue Service**
- 2. Organizational Chart**
- 3. List of Board Members**
- 4. Resumes of key project personnel**
- 5. Project Budget (use template provided)**
- 6. Three (3) years of most recent audited financial statements**
- 7. Training curriculum (if applicable)**
- 8. Letters from each of the industry partner companies listed in section C. of the application explaining their specific role(s) in the project. i.e. financial commitment, curriculum development, instructional, placement and retention, recruitment, etc.**
- 9. Memoranda of Understanding/Letters of Support (optional)**

Empire State Development reserves the right to request additional information once a proposal has been reviewed.