



2007

Request for Proposals

Supporting Regional Funding Collaboratives
for Workforce Development

May 2007

National Fund for Workforce Solutions

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I. Overview

Since 2004, three national foundations have jointly invested \$2 million in piloting and testing promising workforce partnership initiatives. Workforce partnerships—sometimes called workforce intermediaries—are organizations that connect employer demand and worker interest, multiple funding streams, and partner organization.

Based on the lessons and experiences of this pilot, the Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Hitachi foundations joined forces to create the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. The fund will support regional funding collaboratives across the nation. These collaboratives will strengthen and expand workforce partnerships by: leveraging local investments; building capacity; improving career advancement opportunities for low-income individuals and employers; and advocating for policies that sustain effective workforce partnerships.

Over the next five years, the NFWS will support 30 to 40 existing and new funding collaboratives that support workforce partnerships in the following ways:

- *Strong and committed local leadership* comprised of the local funding community that invests in workforce development and local business, government, and workforce development institutions;
- *A dual customer, workforce partnership* model that addresses the needs of both employers and community residents;
- *A strategy to promote career advancement* for low-skilled workers through workforce partnerships that connect to workforce development pipelines;
- *Engaged and committed employer involvement* in the design and implementation of sectoral workforce partnerships and in adopting effective employer practices;
- *An ongoing local funding stream* that supports workforce partnerships with a range of strategies; and
- *The potential to influence state and regional policy* through the expansion of resources and the improvement of the efficiency of the workforce development system, leading to better outcomes at lower costs.

This RFP invites proposals from local or regional funding collaboratives that support—or are ready to support—workforce partnerships that improve career advancement opportunities for low-skilled individuals and address employers needs for a skilled workforce. Only collaboratives invited by NFWS are eligible to apply for grants through this solicitation.

In 2007, NFWS will fund up to six new funding collaboratives that demonstrate an active program and strategy for supporting workforce partnerships. A separate proposal process to support the development of new collaboratives will be forthcoming in 2007. Over the next several years, the NFWS intends to release a series of RFPs for regional, rural, and developmental funding collaboratives to support workforce partnerships.

Proposals must be submitted to Jobs for the Future by Friday, June 15, 5:00 pm EDT.

II. Background Statement

There is a crisis emerging in America. . . . The future worker shortage in the United States, lack of worker skills, increasing wage gaps, disjointed public programs, and absent business participation all contribute to the crisis. But most importantly, it is the failure of our nation to recognize and respond to these challenges that present the greatest risk.—Keeping America in Business, The 102nd American Assembly, 2003

Workforce skills matter more in an increasingly global and competitive economic environment. Yet over a third of the U.S. workforce lacks the skills needed to succeed in this environment. America's long-term prosperity also depends on the strength of its workforce. Some sectors and communities already confront skill shortages, unfilled jobs, low productivity, threats to regional competitiveness, and increasing disparities between those with and without education and skills.

Few communities are prepared to meet these challenges. The need for skilled workers and job advancement opportunities has outstripped the capacity of the existing public workforce system, which is under-funded, fragmented, and constrained in its focus.

Workforce partnerships have shown promise in addressing these challenges. They differ from traditional workforce development programs in several important ways. In general, they have a dual customer orientation, engage employers and other partners in identifying workforce needs, align funding from various sources, and provide or broker services that address the needs. Their solutions extend beyond training or education programs into the ways in which services are provided, and programmatic improvements to systems or policies.

At their core, workforce partnerships are results-driven and entrepreneurial, and they tend to elicit trust and engagement from both employers and workers.

This approach is attracting increased attention, and the number of workforce partnerships is on the rise. Even so, workforce partnerships still tend to be small, undercapitalized, and limited in their capacity to serve the growing demand of workers and employers who could potentially benefit from their services.

III. The National Fund for Workforce Solutions

The Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Hitachi Foundation have created the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, a limited partnership with a projected lifespan of at least five years (2007-2012). The formation of the NFWS is the first step toward creating a national funding collaborative that will ultimately disburse \$30 to 50 million to strengthen and expand workforce partnerships through direct support of local and regional collaboratives, technical assistance to programs and collaboratives, research and evaluation, and policy advocacy.

The fund will support local and regional funding collaboratives that strengthen and expand workforce partnerships serving business' needs for a qualified and competitive workforce as well as job-seekers and workers looking to advance their careers.

Vision, Mission, and Strategy

The NFWS aims to link national and local foundations, businesses, and public funders to build the capacity of workforce partnerships, support evaluation and research, and spread the adoption of the evolving model. The goal of all these efforts is to improve employment, training, and labor market outcomes for low-income individuals as well as to meet the needs of employers.

Investment Strategy

The NWFP seeks to build on the unique mix of vision, capacity, expertise, and work underway in workforce partnerships across the country. NFWS activities will include:

- **Grant Making:** The NWFP will make grants to local and regional workforce funding collaboratives. The NFWS and its funding will assist in the development and facilitation of local, blended-funding streams for workforce collaboratives.
- **Technical Assistance:** The NFWS will provide technical assistance to sites with ongoing collaborative efforts. It will also link a variety of collaboratives through the creation of a national “learning community” that will pollinate practices and policies across regions.
- **Evaluation and Assessment:** The NFWS will evaluate the outcomes and impact of its investment strategy, as well as the impact of the workforce collaboratives it supports, on businesses, workers, and regional workforce systems.
- **Dissemination and Communication:** The NFWS will disseminate lessons and best practices to the broader field of workforce development through the creation of tools and innovative learning platforms. It will also develop a communication strategy to promote workforce collaborative approaches among a variety of nonprofit, public sector, business, labor union, and constituent audiences.
- **Policy Advocacy and Research:** The NFWS will support and assist collaborative efforts at the local and state levels to inform policymakers of the value of workforce partnerships and to advocate for state and federal policies that support effective workforce partnerships and improvements to education and workforce systems. The NFWS will also support policy advocacy and research at the national level.

Projected Outcomes

Between 2007 and 2012, the fund seeks measurable outcomes for individuals, businesses, and the workforce and education systems.

- *For Individuals: Helping to prepare low-skilled individuals for better work and careers.*

The NFWS will enable 50,000 or more individuals to be placed into jobs and/or advance in their careers. The NFWS will focus on career paths that can enable individuals currently unemployed or underemployed to attain family-supporting wages.

- *For Businesses: Helping to improve employers' ability to attract, retain, and advance low-skilled workers; helping to provide a platform to engage employers in shaping the workforce development system; and advising employers of practices and policies that improve the success of their low-skilled workforce.*

The NFWS will facilitate the provision of services to more than 1,000 businesses to better recruit, retain, and advance employees into family-supporting jobs, resulting in reduced turnover, increased productivity, and increased internal worker advancement. The NFWS will facilitate fully engaging

employers in the effective design of workforce partnership services and in shaping state and regional alignment of workforce policy and programs.

- *For Systems: Helping to align programs and funding sources to address barriers and regulatory constraints that impede worker advancement within the workforce development system.*

The NFWS will serve local collaboratives in more than 30 regions across the country. The fund will facilitate the expansion of resources and improve the efficiency of the workforce development system, leading to better outcomes at lower costs—and improved funding sustainability.

IV. 2007 Grants to Local and Regional Funding Collaboratives

In 2007 the NFWS intends to fund up to six new local and regional funding collaboratives. NFWS will support the strengthening of existing workforce funding collaboratives or will assist new funding collaboratives that are ready to launch a workforce partnership initiative within the first year grant period, building on planning and development efforts already underway.

The NFWS will make grants of approximately \$150,000 per year for three years (total average grant of \$450,000) to local and regional collaboratives, with an option to renew for up to two additional years if sufficient progress is evident. These amounts are averages and may vary considerably. Grant amounts to individual sites will be negotiated with each site based on the proposal's scope of work and budget request.

Collaboratives invited to request grant funds from NFWS are expected to address the following elements in their proposals:

1. *An organized funding collaborative* that may vary in organizational features but will show a defined funding mechanism, a decision-making process, a method for identifying funding priorities and supporting the core functions of workforce partnerships, and a clearly defined membership.

Selection Criteria: Proposals should identify the members, leadership structure, and lead organization of the funding collaborative, including how the collaborative will be staffed. Proposals must describe how the collaborative will obtain commitments of flexible local funds to launch a local initiative within the first year of the grant. Collaboratives must also describe how they will identify sustained local funding over at least a three-year timeframe in order to leverage NFWS grants.

2. *A stakeholder consultation group or process* that engages leadership members from funders, businesses, educational institutions, workforce development organizations, and the population to be served. Collaboratives must show strong employer engagement in the form of funding, leadership, and/or active involvement in sectoral workforce partnerships supported by the collaborative.

Collaboratives should demonstrate that the key sector/industry organizations and representative employers and labor organizations are actively engaged in the leadership consultation group and have made commitments for ongoing participation.

Selection Criteria: Collaboratives should identify the members of its stakeholder consultation group and describe how it represents civic leadership that includes key stakeholders in the workforce development community (public and private funders, educators, community organizations, government, labor, and business). Indicate how the leadership consultation group is sufficient for supporting workforce partnerships and capable of leading local systems change in the alignment of workforce development institutions with demonstrated employer and employee needs.

3. *Significant local investment* in the collaborative, with at least 80 percent of funding to come from local investment. Local funding may include commitments from private and corporate foundations, community foundations, public funds, and employer funding through contributions from industry-based organizations, corporate contributions, or funding derived from payments for services. Local funding sources may include set-asides from public funding sources to align their services and programs with workforce partnerships. Applicants must explain how *all* sources of funding contribute to the operation of the collaborative and achieving strategic goals.

Selection Criteria: Funding must be available to support the core functions of workforce partnerships (aggregating need, aligning funding, organizing resources, brokering or providing services), as well as for related activities that strengthen and expand them. NFWS grants will not exceed 20 percent of the total budget of workforce funding collaboratives.

Collaboratives must document cash pledges, or must have commitments from funders to seek approval of cash pledges through their internal processes within six months of being selected for NFWS investment.

4. *Defined challenges and strategies*, including

- a description of the specific workforce development challenges and opportunities in your labor market for the group of employers and workers you will serve
- the overall vision and specific goals that will guide your efforts
- basis for choosing the industry sectors or occupational clusters for workforce partnership investment
- the strategies and scale of project activities you will pursue to achieve those goals and
- an outline for a budget on how resources will be allocated to achieve your intended changes for low-income workers, employers, and the workforce development system.

Selection Criteria: Collaboratives must define and clearly articulate the challenges and opportunities in their labor market and how—through their civic leadership and their planned grant-making—they will address these challenges and opportunities with support from the NFWS. The plan should include goals for improving outcomes for lower-income people and employers, and for systemic improvements. The effort's theory of change should be clear, and should clearly connect to strategies and activities to

- seed the development of new workforce partnerships,
- expand, strengthen and sustain successful ones,
- promote and sustain employer engagement in workforce development of lower-skilled adults,
- build the capacity of the collaborative, of workforce partnerships, and of the workforce system's local infrastructure,
- have an impact on state and regional policies that affect advancement opportunities for low-income individuals.

The budget and narrative should define how resources will be allocated in the project toward achievement of these ends.

5. *Workforce Partnerships* comprised of employers and organizations that have the expertise and capacity to address the hiring, retention, and advancement challenges of low-skilled individuals and their employers. The NFWS is interested in workforce partnerships with an industry sector or occupational cluster focus.

Selection Criteria: Collaboratives should describe their relationships with existing workforce partnerships, if there are any, as well as their plan to develop new ones. The NFWS is interested in strengthening and expanding industry-sector or occupational-cluster focused workforce partnerships that include employer partners and that organize resources that facilitate the advancement of low-skilled individuals to family-sustaining incomes.

6. *An evaluation process*, metrics for local success, and participation in the national NFWS evaluation. The collaborative must have the capacity to gather the information needed to evaluate its strategic outcomes as well as outcomes of the workforce partnerships it supports. Collaboratives should establish benchmarks and outcome measures for their overall initiative and for their workforce partnerships.

Selection Criteria: Collaboratives should describe their benchmarks and outcome goals, anticipated data collection procedures and methods of analysis. If existing collaboratives have formal evaluations, these should be referenced and the methodologies briefly described. Where collaboratives do not have evaluations in place, the collaborative should explain how it intends to institute such practices as part of the NFWS grant.

7. One or more *local technical assistance/research partners*.

Selection Criteria: Proposals should identify staff or contracted administrative and strategic consulting support for the collaborative, as well as strategies to provide technical assistance to strengthen workforce partnerships and other grantees. Technical assistance should be specific to the funding collaborative's strategic plan and enhance the effectiveness of the collaborative to achieve its goals for workforce partnerships and the workforce system.

VIII. Application Guidelines

Applications will be accepted only from teams of funders/organizations/employers with a designated lead partner and fiscal agent that have been invited by NFWS. Collaborative partners can include, but are not limited to, state agencies, workforce investment boards, community college associations, nonprofit organizations, business groups, and associations. Teams must include partners empowered to make funding decisions and policy changes. There are no restrictions on who can lead the collaborative.

Proposals should be **no longer than 10—12 pages in 12 point font**. Appendices (not counted in the page total) to the proposal should clearly relate to the proposal content and clarity (a list of members in the collaborative or workforce partnership, for example). Do not include marketing materials or public relations information. Electronic submissions of proposals is encouraged.

Proposals are due to Jobs for the Future, attention Geri Scott, no later than Friday, June 15, 5:00 pm EDT.

The application for funding from the NFWS should include the following:

- **Name, Address, and Contact** of lead organization making the grant application that will be the fiscal agent for the collaborative.
- **Name(s), Address(s) and Contact(s)** of major collaborative participants.
- **Funding Collaborative:** Describe the funding collaborative membership and structure, and how it relates to the steering committee if that is a separate body. In particular, describe capacity of the lead institution to convene the steering committee and manage an initiative, how funds will be managed, how grant award decisions will be made, and how the collaborative plans to staff its work.
- **Civic Leadership:** Identify the initiative steering committee's membership. Detail organizations involved, structure, how its membership reflects the local civic leadership and relevance to workforce development in the area, and the roles and responsibilities of the steering committee. Describe the relationship between the funding collaborative and the steering committee.
- **Challenges and Strategies:** Briefly describe the workforce development challenges and opportunities in your labor market and for the group of employers and workers you will serve. Include policy, practice and capacity barriers to strengthening, expanding, and sustaining industry-sector or occupational cluster workforce partnerships.

Describe any current support for industry sector or occupational cluster workforce partnerships in the region from the funding collaborative or other sources. Describe the basis on which you will choose the industry sectors or occupational clusters for workforce partnership investment.

Describe the overall vision and specific goals that will guide your efforts, the strategies and scale of project activities you will pursue to achieve those goals, and an outline for a budget on how resources will be allocated to achieve your intended changes for low-income workers, employers, and the workforce development system.

Provide a timeline for the collaborative's workforce partnership initiative that includes key milestones for 2007, 2008, 2009, and for the long-term initiative.

- **Current and Projected Budget:** Provide detailed one-year and three-year budgets and narrative for the collaborative, describing the total budget, the amount of NFWS funds requested up to \$150,000/year or 20% of the local co-investment, their proposed use, the amount and sources of local investment and how it will be used. Provide a brief description of budgetary controls and grant allocation procedures you expect to apply. Provide documentation of local investment, through MOU's or grant award letters to the collaborative, or letters of intent from prospective funding partners.
- **Key Results and Evaluation:** For both the collaborative and workforce partnerships supported by the collaborative, describe the key outcomes that are expected to be achieved for individuals, businesses, and system impact. Describe how the collaborative will conduct a local evaluation, including methodology, criteria, and benchmarks for the NWFP project.
- **Data Infrastructure:** Describe your existing data collection and management capacity or your plans for a new data infrastructure. What are the major gaps or problems in the capacity of the region's data system to manage performance and conduct evaluations of longitudinal programs with multiple funding sources, service providers, and services?
- **Technical Assistance Needs:** Describe any areas in which technical assistance support from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions would be helpful, or topics for which you would like the Fund to provide guidance.

VIII. Application Process & Timeline

DATE	EVENT	COMMENTS
MAY 1, 2007	RFP emailed to invited sites	
MAY 8, 2007	Letter of Intent to Submit a proposal. Send to: Geri Scott, gscott@jff.org	Sites that submit a letter of intent will be eligible for technical assistance in the development of their proposals.
MAY 1 to June 15, 2007	TA to interested sites	Responses to frequently asked questions will be posted on the JFF website at www.jff.org Bidders should check the website regularly.
FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 2007	PROPOSALS DUE BY 5:00 PM TO: Geri Scott at gscott@jff.org <i>(Please note: incomplete or late proposals will not be accepted.)</i>	Submit proposals via email or mail a single copy to Geri Scott Jobs for the Future 88 Broad Street Boston, MA 02110
JUNE 18 through JULY 16	Site visits to finalists	Members of the collaborative must be available for site visits.
JULY 20, 2007	Notification to awardees by email	
JULY 20—AUGUST 31, 2007	Negotiate Memoranda of Agreements with local funder collaboratives	
JULY 2007—JUNE 2008	Grant recipients implement local plans	
DECEMBER 30, 2007 MARCH 31, 2008	Grant recipients submit quarterly progress reports	
SEPTEMBER 30, 2008	Grant recipients submit report on first-year accomplishments	
JUNE 1, 2008	Grant recipients submit applications for second-year funding	Grant awards will be for three years. Each year's renewal grant will be contingent upon satisfactory progress implementing strategic plan.

National Fund for Workforce Solutions **Collaborative Partners**

Lead Organization

NAME OF ORGANIZATION _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CONTACT PERSON

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Collaborative Partners

NAME OF ORGANIZATION _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CONTACT PERSON

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

NAME OF ORGANIZATION _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CONTACT PERSON

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

NAME OF ORGANIZATION _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CONTACT PERSON

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Appendix A

Potential Metrics for Site Success

Funded sites will have their own specific evaluation plans and resources. The NFWS, in cooperation with funded sites, will design an evaluation framework for all sites and support a national evaluation that draws upon data and outcome information from local sites. It is anticipated that the analysis and data collection will focus on metrics for the following outcomes:

Collaborative Outcomes

- Create strong sectoral or occupational workforce partnerships
- Identify best practices model, and/or promote its broader adoption
- Demonstrate active and sustained employer (and labor organization) involvement and support for the collaborative
- Improved alignment of education, training, and support services systems
- Increased, sustainable resources for the advancement of low-skilled individuals
- Increased research capacity to track workforce development outcomes across programs and over time
- Greater support from employers for the education and training of entry-level workers
- Alignment of workforce and economic development strategies

Workforce Partnership Outcomes

- Increased skills in new worker entrants and incumbent workers
- Improved entry-level incumbent worker retention and wage advancement
- Increased wage rates for entry level positions, wage advancement, access to benefits, career advancement for incumbent lower wage workers
- Improved employer human resource practices, including employer involvement and support for training low-skilled workers.
- Improved public systems that provide services to workers and employers in targeted industries and/or occupations

Appendix B

Workforce Partnerships Guidelines

The key functions of sectoral workforce partnerships are:

- *Organize resources from multiple institutions* and funding streams to support and sustain workforce advancement;
- *Pursue a dual customer approach*, serving businesses looking for qualified workers and job seekers and incumbent workers looking to advance their careers;
- *Provide or broker services*—education, training, asset development, and support services—that help workers gain access to the initial rungs of the ladder to economic opportunity and advancement;
- *Serve a variety of workers*, but recognizing and addressing the special needs of lower-skilled, lower-wage workers and job seekers;
- *Reduce turnover* and increasing economic mobility of workers;
- *Test and adapt innovative approaches* to workforce problems;
- *Catalyze improvements* in public systems and business employment practices.

Workforce partnerships engage businesses in the structure of the partnership as a formal part of decision-making and ongoing governance. They also specify benefits and outcomes for individuals, employers, and the systems that affect employers and low-skilled adults.

The following table identifies some key differences between traditional workforce programs and workforce partnerships.

Traditional Approach	Workforce Partnerships
Focuses on increasing worker skills and job placement	Focuses on solving problems faced by workers and businesses
Transactional services	Relational and engaging
Works within existing funding systems and business practices	Works to change funding systems and business practices to enable a full array of solutions
Sharp boundaries around fixed organizational roles and practices	Catalyzes flexible partnerships to solve problems and enhance value
Short-term focus on service delivery to customer	Long-term orientation on impact and outcomes for partners, individuals, and systems.