



**Request for Proposals:
Capacity Building**

July 23, 2008

Due: September 5, 2008

SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce
c/o The Boston Foundation
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INTRODUCTION

The SkillWorks Initiative is looking for a consultant or consultant team to coordinate the capacity building component of the Initiative. SkillWorks is a nationally recognized initiative led by local and national foundations, the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to address the skills gap that leaves too many job seekers and workers in poverty while employers are unable to meet their needs for a skilled workforce. Launched in 2003, SkillWorks seeks to increase the opportunities of low-income workers to access jobs with potential for advancement and family-supporting wages. SkillWorks is now announcing Phase Two. Over the next five years, SkillWorks will continue to invest in three inter-dependent strategies: workforce partnerships, capacity building, and policy advocacy.

The primary goal of the capacity building component is to enhance and strengthen the ability of the workforce partnerships to achieve their intended outcomes. Section I of this RFP provides additional background regarding the requirements of workforce partnerships and the desired focus of capacity building services. Section II outlines the specific scope of services for the capacity building consultant. **Proposals submitted in response to this RFP are due on September 5, 2008.**

SkillWorks is a public-private collaborative of Boston and national foundations, which together with the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts form the SkillWorks Funders Group. The members of the Funders Group currently include: the Boston Foundation, the Clowes Fund, Inc., the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Boston's Neighborhood Jobs Trust, Microsoft Corporation, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the State Street Foundation and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley.

Initiative Components

- *Workforce Partnerships:* SkillWorks Workforce Partnerships are entrepreneurial industry sector and/or occupational partnerships made up of employers; workers; and education, training and support service providers to help low-income individuals make progress toward economic self-sufficiency. Workforce partnerships are expected to aggregate employer needs, organize resources, align funding, and provide or broker career advancement services for low-skilled adults and out-of-school youth.
- *Capacity Building:* Through its capacity building component, SkillWorks invests in professional development for partnership staff involved in workforce partnership programs and organizational development for workforce partnership members. The purpose of capacity building activities is to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff to manage partnerships; implement promising practices; develop new programs and services; and advocate for policies and practices to sustain improvements in the ability of the workforce development system to serve employers and low-skilled adults.

- *Public Policy Advocacy:* SkillWorks public policy advocacy efforts are designed to sustain improvements in the workforce development system's ability to help low-skilled adults achieve family supporting incomes and to help employers improve their hiring, training, retaining, and advancing of low-skilled workers.

Evaluation

SkillWorks will invest in a comprehensive evaluation of the process and outcomes of the Initiative. The evaluation documents successful practices, barriers that impede systems reforms, and the overall impact of this significant investment in building economic opportunity for metropolitan Boston. SkillWorks' evaluation also includes an analysis of the effectiveness of the Capacity Building components of the initiative.

SECTION I: Workforce Partnerships

In the five years since its launch, SkillWorks has learned a great deal about the strategies and interventions needed from the workforce development system to address the needs of its two customers, unemployed/low-wage workers and employers. These lessons, which are reflected in SkillWorks priorities in Phase II, include:

- mid-skilled jobs that pay family sustaining wages require a post secondary credential;
- low-skilled adults require several years of coordinated support to prepare for these jobs; and;
- employers must be involved in providing that support in order for low-skilled adults to sustain their long-term preparation for high-demand, high wage jobs.

These lessons, as well as lessons regarding the necessary capacity and characteristics of workforce partnerships, are reflected in a new request for proposals (RFP) SkillWorks issued for Workforce Partnerships on June 3, 2008. Through that RFP, SkillWorks intends to make investments of \$1,500,000 over up to five years to support the work of 3 – 4 workforce partnerships. Partnerships work in strategically selected industries that have anticipated employment growth and/or labor market shortages and offer advancement opportunities for SkillWorks' target population.

The capacity building consultant chosen through this RFP will be expected to work with each workforce partnership to identify areas for needed capacity building and technical assistance.

Expected activities of the workforce partnerships include:

- Aggregate the needs of employers within an industry sector or occupational cluster who are experiencing difficulty filling mid-skill level jobs.
- Organize the resources to provide coordinated services needed to facilitate advancement along a career pathway for low-skilled adults and to assist employers in improving their success in hiring, training, retaining, and advancing low-skilled workers.

- Align funding from multiple sources, including this SkillWorks grant, adult literacy and other public funds, financial aid, philanthropy and employers to address the multi-faceted workforce development needs of employers and low-skilled adults.
- Provide or broker services to low-skilled adults and employers over the long-term needed to address their needs.

Expected outcomes for workforce partnerships include:

- Advancement towards family sustaining wages in mid-skill level jobs for low-skilled adults.
- Improvements in employers' success hiring, training, retaining, and advancing low-skilled adults to mid-skill jobs that pay family sustaining wages.
- Improvements to the organization and practice of the workforce development system that sustain successes in meeting the needs of employers and low-skilled adults.

Management and Structure: Workforce Partnerships may be led by any organization with the knowledge and management capacity to carry out these functions, including but not limited to employers, organized labor, community colleges, industry associations, workforce investment boards, community based organizations, or faith based organizations. At a minimum, the Workforce Partnership must include at least one employer and one organization with experience in providing workforce development services for low-skilled adults and with the expertise and capacity to help employers address the hiring, training, retention and advancement challenges of their low-skilled workforce. Workforce Partnerships are encouraged to engage post-secondary institutions in significant roles.

Expected Competencies: Workforce Partnerships must have a deep understanding of the industry in which they are working, as well as familiarity with the practices and standards of the specific employers with which they are working. Workforce Partnerships must also have a deep understanding of the issues that present challenges to career advancement for low-skilled adults, as well as familiarity with the resources and best practices of the workforce development system to address those challenges.

Expected Funding: Workforce Partnerships are expected to develop multiple and diverse funding sources to reduce their dependence on a single revenue stream and increase their potential for long-term sustainability. In addition to sources available through this Initiative, Workforce Partnerships should demonstrate employer support through financial and non-financial contributions, and should identify how they will leverage other funding sources to deliver services to low-skilled adults and employers, including financial aid and training funded by other public sources such as adult literacy or WIA. Workforce Partnerships are required to provide and document at least a 50% match to the requested SkillWorks grant, including cash and in-kind contributions.

Additional expectations of workforce partnerships can be found in the Workforce Partnerships Request for Proposals on the SkillWorks website, www.skill-works.org.

Capacity Building

In Phase II SkillWorks will continue its capacity building efforts to improve the ability of the workforce partnerships to achieve their goals and to contribute to the overall goals of the SkillWorks Initiative. An additional goal for capacity building is to have an impact on the capacity of the workforce development field more broadly, when feasible and appropriate. Specific mechanisms for impact on the field are described below.

During the development of the Phase II RFP for workforce partnerships, the SkillWorks funders have reflected on the appropriate focus and structure for the capacity building component. They have also identified six areas that reflect the characteristics of effective partnerships which capacity building services should be designed to support and enhance. These include:

- **Strategy:** An effective Partnership must have a clearly defined strategy that aligns the needs of the population to be served, the opportunities within the industry and the design of services. This strategic approach needs to be grounded in an understanding of best practices in sector strategies, and a deep knowledge of the industry and the targeted participants/workers.
- **Leadership:** Effective leaders are needed to carry out the strategy, to direct others to carry out activities that support the organization's objectives, and to sustain the Partnership.
- **External Relationships:** One of the key jobs of the leadership of each partnership is to build and maintain strong relationships with the range of external actors, most notably employers and service providers. This requires a set of capacities around outreach, governance, and managing relationships.
- **Internal Management:** An effective partnership must have the management systems in place that enable it to exercise appropriate financial controls, to recruit, train, and supervise qualified staff, and to keep managers informed about operations on a timely basis.
- **Service Delivery:** An effective partnership must develop the appropriate mix of services to achieve its programmatic objectives, and to procure or directly deliver these services efficiently, at a high level of quality, and in an integrated fashion.
- **Performance measurement:** The success of any organization is ultimately determined by its ability to achieve established objectives. An effective partnership must be equipped to accurately measure its performance, both to keep key stakeholders informed and to identify any need for strategic and tactical corrections. This requires developing metrics that relate logically to objectives, and establishing information systems that provide performance data accurately and in a timely manner.

In addition, the SkillWorks funders have identified specific content areas that have been a necessary focus for capacity building during Phase I. Some of these issues should be addressed at the beginning of the Phase II grant period (which begins January 2009), to ensure a baseline of knowledge among all new partnerships. These content areas include:

- Sector strategies overview – best practices, roles of lead agency and employers
- Evaluation and data management

- SkillWorks reporting requirements
- Business planning and strategic program design
- Sustainability planning
- Career coaching
- Partnership management
- Project management

Section II: Capacity Building Services

SkillWorks seeks a consultant or consultant team to provide capacity building services as part of the initiative's overall capacity building effort. The consultant or consultant team chosen will report to the SkillWorks director and will work in collaboration with the SkillWorks staff to coordinate all aspects of the capacity building component of the SkillWorks initiative. The consultant will also be required to meet on a quarterly basis with the Workforce Partnerships Committee of the SkillWorks Funders Group.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for the capacity building consultant or team include the following:

- Improved ability of workforce partnerships funded through SkillWorks to design and implement their proposed strategies in order to achieve the intended outcomes of the partnership, and to assess those strategies and make strategic modifications as necessary;
- The development of a learning community among all partnerships and their member organizations that provides a source for support, advice and resources;
- Creation of a body of resources, available and searchable on-line, that can be used by the workforce partnerships and the broader workforce community, in the design and implementation of effective initiatives;
- Effective data collection systems maintained by the lead agency of each partnership that meet the requirements of the SkillWorks Funders Group and that can be used for the effective evaluation of the Initiative.

Scope of Services

The capacity building consultant or team will be expected to conduct a variety of training, consulting and coordination activities to achieve the outcomes described above. Specific required activities include:

- 1) Coordination and delivery of direct services to partnership members:
 - Structured learning opportunities for partnership member organizations, which may include training by outside experts, peer-to-peer sharing of best practices and informal peer networking for organizations involved in SkillWorks funded partnerships. These learning opportunities should also be open, when practical, to participants from other workforce development organizations.

- Individualized technical assistance to grantees. This may be in the form of executive coaching, best practices research and resource materials, consultation to the full partnership and/or individual members focused on developing strategies to overcome implementation challenges, and other individualized assistance as needs are identified.

2) Assessment of each workforce partnership and identification of specific areas for technical assistance for each partnership.

3) The development of a training series for all new partnerships at the outset of the grant, to begin in the first quarter of 2009. Key topics to be covered include best practices of sectoral programs; partnership management and evaluation management/data collection.

4) Documentation and facilitation of cross-partnership sharing of best practices and resources.

5) Collaboration with the SkillWorks evaluators to identify areas of needed technical assistance and to ensure the implementation of effective data collection systems.

Capacity building services should be designed for all members of the partnership, including employer members, and not solely focused on lead agency staff.

The Overall Capacity Building Component

The services sought through this RFP are part of Skillworks overall capacity building effort, which will include additional activities that will be handled in-house by SkillWorks staff. The capacity building consultant will be expected to coordinate their activities with those of the SkillWorks staff.

In-house capacity building efforts by SkillWorks staff will include:

- Facilitation of one-to-one peer exchanges to share best practices and learnings among SkillWorks partnerships and between SkillWorks partnerships and other sectoral partnerships.
- Administration of capacity-building “mini-grants” which will be made available to purchase the services of experts in the field for specific projects related to increasing partnership capacity to achieve its outcomes, scale, and/or sustainability. The capacity building consultant will be involved in determining the scope of work for consultants hired through mini-grants and offer guidance throughout the course of each project.
- Communications with other workforce development funders and intermediaries, such as the Commonwealth Corporation and the Commonwealth Workforce Coalition (a project of CEDAC), to coordinate trainings and share resources.
- Providing opportunities for partnership staff to obtain continuing education credits or certification for participation in capacity building activities, through collaboration with newly developed workforce development programs at the University of Massachusetts-Boston and Northeastern University.

- Maintenance of a SkillWorks website to share best practices and resources.

Qualifications and Capacity

The capacity building consultant or consultant team must possess subject matter expertise in areas such as:

- Sectoral partnerships
- Career advancement strategies
- Sector workforce development strategies
- Career advancement strategies
- Employer and/or private sector engagement
- Community engagement and collaboration
- Post-secondary programs and reforms to facilitate access by working adults
- Coordination and collaboration with post-secondary institutions
- State and local workforce development policy
- Program evaluation and strategic analysis
- Workforce intermediary functions
- Funding collaboratives
- Partnership development and governance
- Labor market research
- Workforce development systems improvement
- Experience providing technical assistance to a wide variety of organizations including large and small non-profits, educational institutions and/or employers;
- Ability to offer workshops on a range of topics, either through the use of in-house trainers and curricula or through the engagement of outside resources. Topics may include sector strategy program development, resource development, organizational development, communications, data management and outcome measurement
- Capacity to assemble and share existing research on best practices in the field
- Experience with qualitative and quantitative evaluations and data collection methods

RFP Response: Deadline September 5, 2008

Interested consultants/consultant teams should submit a proposal by September 5, 2008 describing their approach to the design and delivery of capacity building services for the SkillWorks Initiative. Proposals of up to 10 pages should include the following:

- A description of relevant experience, including subject matter expertise and experience in the design and delivery of capacity building services;
- Discussion of your approach to the assessment of the capacity building service needs of each partnership;
- Discussion of your approach to the requested capacity building services. Given the information in section I above about anticipated gaps in capacity/knowledge, and assuming that there will be four partnerships, what approach will you take to delivering training and providing capacity building services to individual partnerships? In your discussion please address the following:
 - the amount of contact you anticipate;
 - amount/content of cross-partnership interaction;

- your view of the most effective mix of training and coaching;
 - models you find most effective for providing technical assistance;
 - the degree to and methods by which you would engage employers, partnership staff and providers that are part of the partnership;
 - your team's content expertise and areas where you might contract out for specific services;
 - the scope and sequence of topics for the introductory training series described in the RFP.
- Discussion of how you will work to coordinate your services with the work of SkillWorks staff to ensure the coherence of all SkillWorks capacity building efforts.

Proposal attachments should include:

- A first year work plan tied to the capacity building services described in your proposal, with a timeline and key deliverables;
- A one-year budget linked to the components and deliverables of your proposed scope of work. Budgets should not exceed \$100,000 and should include the costs of design and delivery, travel, and consultants/trainers who may subcontract for particular planned deliverables. Daily and/or hourly rates of consultants, associates and subcontractors should be specified. Final contracts will be developed for one-year, with a yearly option to renew upon satisfactory completion of contract deliverables.
- Three references and 1 – 2 documents produced by the consultant or team members (e.g. research reports, training curricula, assessment tools).

Finalists will be invited in for interviews with SkillWorks funders and staff. We expect to have negotiated a contract and to have our capacity building consultant or consultant team in place by October 31, 2008, to allow time to plan and prepare for services which will begin at the start of the workforce partnerships grant period, including the introductory training session to begin in the first quarter of 2009. If possible, we would also like the capacity building consultant to participate in the proposal review process in the fall of 2008 to provide feedback regarding the potential technical assistance needs and challenges of each applicant.

Please submit your proposal by email to lohsze.leung@tbf.org and mail a hard copy to Loh-Sze Leung, SkillWorks Project Director, c/o The Boston Foundation, 75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116