

ARRA RFP Bidders' Conference

May 5, 2009 – 1 to 3 p.m., Wamsutta Club, New Bedford

Introduction: This RFP was issued by the Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board (GNBWIB) in response to the enactment of the 2009 federal stimulus law that is pumping millions of dollars into youth programs across the country. These funds are to be utilized over a two-year period, with the lion's share to be spent down this summer, if possible.

Typically, Workforce Investment Act proposals must meet a plethora of very specific criteria; in addition, contractors are responsible for achieving a number of outcomes.

However, through The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funding, changes in requirements include extending the age of eligible youth to 24 and reducing the number of outcomes required to one – job readiness. Interested parties are encouraged to incorporate significant job readiness skills into their programs, to include a range of 21st century skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking, team work, financial literacy, technological literacy, global awareness, etc.), and an awareness and practice of “green” techniques, methodologies, strategies, and job activities. Programs that are flexible in terms of the youth and the age groups they serve are strongly encouraged.

Bidders are reminded that ARRA funds are designated for the hardest to serve youth in our community. They will have to meet an income requirement and at least one other barrier.

This RFP may be extended until May 15 because it was posted later than anticipated. Please check the website for updates.

Please note that the RFR that has been circulating for some time is primarily designed to identify job slots for youth under ARRA. The RFP is targeted more to programming that includes, work and learning.

Question: When will the youth be able to start working?

Answer: We will not be able to refer youth prior to June-. We will post updates on the website at www.gnbwib.org

Question: Is there a ceiling for wages?

Answer: Bidders may propose up to \$12 for out-of-school youth, but they are cautioned to align compensation with going rates in the local economy for like occupations, and we would suggest that most youth will fall into the minimum wage category. In no event may an individual be compensated less than the current Massachusetts minimum wage rate of \$8 per hour.

Question: Is there an agreed-upon cost per slot?

Answer: CFO Steve Grant suggested that \$2,000 per individual – outside of wages – would be considered relatively high. The readers will evaluate all proposals, weigh all costs and what those costs bring to the program.

Question: If a program offers training in addition to a job opportunity, shouldn't consideration be given to the increased costs associated with training when evaluating the cost per slot?

Answer: In the proposal evaluation process, consideration will be given to the costs associated with the training aspects of programs. The readers will determine if the cost per slot variations is reasonable.

Question: Is there a minimum number of youth that may be served in a given program?

Answer: No.

Question: If a program knows of youth that would fit the program well, may that program be assured that the youth will be enrolled?

Answer: All youth must be determined eligible through the framework provider, New Directions Southcoast, Inc. New Directions makes the referrals to programs. However, if there are youth that may be eligible and are interested in participating in a given program, New Directions has requested that the preference and/or contact information be noted on the application. New Directions cannot guarantee that all requests will be honored, but the staff will do its best to accommodate requests.

Question: What are the criteria for eligibility determination?

Answer: The federal requirements include income eligibility AND one other barrier, such as court involved/offender, homeless/runaway, learning disability, pregnant or teen parent. In-school youth with IEPs are considered a "family of one" under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA); therefore, gross family income is not considered for students with an Individual Education Plan.

Question: Is compensation for supervisory personnel included in stimulus funding?

Answer: Stimulus dollars are available to pay for supervisory personnel. The hiring of supervisory personnel is the responsibility of program providers. Programs will be reimbursed for their compensation.

Question: How many supervisors are permissible?

Answer: A minimum of one supervisor for up to 10 youth is required.

Question: How much money is available for programs?

Answer: Based on the number of RFRs received thus far, and based on approximately 460 youth participants, preliminary estimates are pegged at around \$250,000 for program funding. There are some unknowns. For example, it is unlikely that all slots revealed through the RFR process will be

suitable positions for at-risk youth. A number of employers require driver's licenses, which many of the youth lack. Other employer criteria and requirements will also impact the final number of youth placed via the RFR process. The Youth Council will be meeting to discuss slots versus programs shortly, being mindful that the focus of the legislation is jobs for youth, but training opportunities have a value-added component that potentially elevates the skill set of youth. On another note, it would be helpful for the Youth Council to have a concept of what we will be receiving for the regular WIA programming, as that information would assist the Youth Council and WIB in determining final participant goals. That number is not yet known.

Question: How many young people will be served under ARRA?

Answer: Approximately 460. That number is over and above the youth served through the regular WIA programs.

Question: Must all youth work, or can they simply have training?

Answer: The purpose of the funding is to match youth with paying jobs; therefore, training alone will not suffice.

Question: Is there a minimum number of hours per week that must be worked?

Answer: No.

Question: May transportation costs be included?

Answer: The budget contains \$9,000 for transportation, which generally takes the form of bus passes. New Directions purchases the passes in bulk and will assist in ascertaining need once eligibility determination and placement decisions are finalized. However, it is recognized that many youth will work at multiple job sites that are inaccessible by public transportation. Other youth may be placed in suburban and rural areas with no bus service. If transportation is an issue, bidders might consider looking at economical modes of transport for their programs. They might also entertain opening up a dialogue with some local transit providers to see if there are options with such companies as Tremblay or Reliable. One vendor is exploring bicycles.

Question: Is a community service component of value?

Answer: Yes. Service learning and community service are considered very important and should fit in well with 21st century skills aspects.

Question: How is a "job" defined?

Answer: The Youth Council will seek to develop language on what actually constitutes a job. However, any situation in which a youth is acquiring job skills, providing a service or product, and being appropriately compensated would be a fundamental definition. The Work-Based Learning Plan provides a number of foundation skills required for successful job performance. This tool is a required goal-setting and assessment tool under this RFP and supplies some guidance.

Question: How much of the time may be dedicated to training?

Answer: That is up to the discretion of the program provider. However, it is important to remember that the purpose of the stimulus funding is to provide work opportunities for at-risk youth. On-the-job training is a good option as well.

Question: If supplies must be purchased for the programs, is there a threshold for allowable costs?

Answer: The Youth Council will set a threshold. Bidders are reminded that items purchased with federal funds may have to be returned upon program completion.

Question: Is there more information available on 21st Century Skills?

Answer: Yes, the website is noted in the RFP. Interested parties can look up www.21stcenturyskills.org for more detailed information.

Question: If a program operates on the Cape but includes youth from Wareham and Marion, should a proposal be submitted?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Are organizational collaborations viewed favorably for programming purposes?

Answer: Generally, yes. The GNBWIB seeks innovative programming that meets the requirements of ARRA and engages youth in employment. If partnerships enhance that experience, they are encouraged.

NOTE: Gloria Williams of YouthBuild suggested providing water bottles to all participating youth for use over the course of the summer programs and jobs. This would be a “green” approach to ensuring adequate hydration, and it would present an opportunity to promote the programs and the WIB. She also suggested t-shirts. The WIB has some marketing dollars and will explore these options.