**STATE OF MAINE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**RFP SUBMITTED QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SUMMARY**

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| **RFP NUMBER AND TITLE:** | 202407131 Actions to Improve Employer Attraction and Retention of Diverse Talent |
| **RFP ISSUED BY:** | Department of Economic and Community Development |
| **SUBMITTED QUESTIONS DUE DATE:** | August 19, 2024 |
| **QUESTION & ANSWER SUMMARY ISSUED:** | August 26, 2024 |
| **PROPOSAL DUE DATE:** | September 9, 2024 |
| **PROPOSALS DUE TO:** | Proposals@maine.gov |

**Provided below are submitted written questions received and the Department’s answer.**

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| **1** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Does the healthcare industry include behavioral health? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes. |

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| **2** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Can an organization applying for the Scaling Talent Projects category, with a physical address in Maine, and with all work being done and positively impacting Maine and Maine based partners, but has a W9 that is associated with an out of state address apply as a lead organization? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, as long as it is clear that all work is being done in Maine and for the benefit of people and organizations in Maine, out-of-state applicants are eligible to apply. |

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| **3** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Are regional planning commissions eligible applicants under the ‘nonprofit organization’ category? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, regional planning organizations and council of governments are eligible to apply. |

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| **4** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Are community colleges eligible applicants under the ‘other educational institution’ category? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, community colleges are eligible to apply. |

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| **5** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Can two non-related sectors submit a grant together? (i.e., Healthcare & Hospitality) |
| **Answer** |
| Yes. |

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| **6** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Is the defense industry an eligible impacted industry under 2 (h)., Manufacturing? |
| **Answer** |
| The defense industry is eligible insofar as the employers involved in an application fit within one of the listed eligible key industries. Manufacturing would include defense manufacturers in Maine, for example.  |

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| **7** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Does a non-profit 501(c)3 organization have to be part of every proposal, or could it be just one or more employers with a private company focused on the target demographic? |
| **Answer** |
| A nonprofit does not need to be part of every proposal. For the purposes of meeting the eligibility requirement to apply for an Industry Talent Partnership, the requirement to include “at least one organization with a strong history of working with the demographic(s) the application seeks to support” could be met by any type of listed eligible entity, including a private business. |

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| **8** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Could an employer association applicant be in lieu of 1-2 employers? (as long as they have letters of support from 1 or more employer organizations) |
| **Answer** |
| The number of employers considered as part of an application (in addition to the lead applicant if they are an employer themselves) will be based on the number of signed MOUs from different employers. An association would not count as multiple employers on its own, but its member employers can each count separately if they submit MOUs identifying their role in the partnership. General letters of support that do not specify how an employer will engage in the project would not be counted for the purposes of establishing the number of employers in a partnership. |

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| **9** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | Can a governmental (e.g. municipality) or statewide quasi-governmental agency working with employers be a lead applicant? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes. |

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| **10** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | If our organization is the lead applicant on one grant application, are we permitted to join another grant application as a partner organization, provided there is no duplication of funded activities or budget requests between the two applications? Additionally, are there any specific limitations or requirements we should be aware of in this scenario? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, an applicant may only be the lead applicant on one application. They may be included as a partner on a different application, but only as long as there is no overlap in activities. For example, an applicant that submits their own application to perform a training for 40 people may not also sign onto a different application saying they will perform the same training for 20 people—even if they think they will be different individuals. An applicant in that situation is strongly encouraged to instead consolidate all activities into one application with all relevant partners. |

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| **11** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6 | If our organization plans to apply for the grant but does so under a fiscal sponsor, can we still be considered the lead applicant? Are there any additional requirements or considerations we need to consider when applying through a fiscal sponsor? |
| **Answer** |
| For contracting and funding purposes, the fiscal sponsor would need to be the lead applicant named on the application form, while the lead point of contact can be from the organization performing the activities.  |

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| **12** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Pages 6-7 | If an applicant has its headquarters in a non-qualifying county, but has operations in one or more qualifying counties, can they be considered a qualifying employer in the preferred counties?-If a lead applicant has its headquarters in a non-qualifying county, but engages other employers in qualifying counties for an Industry Talent Partnership, can they be considered as being based in and focused on the preferred counties under the stated preference. |
| **Answer** |
| Projects based anywhere in Maine are eligible for this grant. The Department anticipates making twelve (12) awards through this RFA, and of those, one (1) will be given preference for an Industry Talent Partnership based in and focused on one or more of the counties listed on pages 6-7. To receive that preference, the applicant may have a headquarters elsewhere as long as they also have a physical presence in one or more of the listed counties.  |

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| **13** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I; Page 6Part II; Page 8 | Are women (of any racial/ethnic/linguistic background) an eligible covered population for this grant?-Do activities need to focus exclusively on the underrepresented groups listed in this section (racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic minorities), or may proposed activities focus on these groups and others not specifically listed, including people with disabilities or individuals disadvantaged by their socioeconomic or educational background? |
| **Answer** |
| This grant is for activities that will improve equitable access to workforce participation for racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic minorities in Maine, and successful applications will reflect that focus. Women, people with disabilities, or individuals with socioeconomic or educational disadvantages are not themselves categories of focus for this grant. However, activities aimed at improving equitable access to workforce participation for racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic minorities in Maine may include and benefit other groups as well, and that would be expected for any proposed activities that should or must be offered to all employees due to their benefits. For example, this would include activities like creating bridge training programs for employees to advance to higher-level jobs, providing group transportation to the workplace, or providing work readiness training for individuals new to regular employment. |

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| **14** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 8 | Can funds be used for capital costs? I.e., purchasing a piece of equipment(s) used for training purposes that would advance the goal of connecting the target populations with employment opportunities. |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, capital purchases necessary to carry out the proposed activities are an eligible cost. |

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| **15** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 8 | Are grant funds able to serve asylum seekers who do not yet have UScitizenship status?-Are projects aimed at or including racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities in Maine working on H1B, H2B, J1, or other non-immigrant visas eligible under this grant? If not, can non-immigrant visa holders be included if the project also targets immigrant populations? |
| **Answer** |
| This grant opportunity has no special restrictions on participants’ citizenship or visa status. Activities funded by this grant must comply with all state and federal employment laws where applicable, including those regarding citizenship and visa status. A key outcome of this grant should be connecting individuals to employment; therefore, establishing a clear connection between target populations and ability to work as a result of the funded activities will affect application scoring. |

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| **16** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 8 | Can funds from this grant be used to pay wages of participants in a program that is created as a result of this grant? |
| **Answer** |
| Funds may be used to offset program development and training costs, as well as provide participant wraparound supports or stipends to address barriers to participation. Employee wages are not an eligible grant expense and remain the responsibility of employers. |

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| **17** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 8 | Would programs to train diverse talents to start their own business in one of the focus industries be eligible? |
| **Answer** |
| No, this grant opportunity is focused on improving talent attraction and retention at existing employers. Relevant activities for recently created employers can be covered, but assistance and training for starting a business itself is not an allowable expense under this RFA. |

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| **18** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Pages 8-10 | Could funds be used for recruiting fees used to identify and recruit qualified diverse candidates to participate in a proposed training program?-Could an employer use funds for recruiting fees for a partner to source and help them recruit qualified diverse candidates? |
| **Answer** |
| Recruiting fees are allowable expenses.  |

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| **19** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Pages 8-10 | Can funds be used to provide interest free loans for individuals trained through a funded program to purchase the tools and equipment to serve as contractors for employers in a specific sector (i.e., telecommunications fiber installation, heat pump installation, etc.). Loan repayments would be used to seed future loans making the program sustainable over time. |
| **Answer** |
| No, awardees may not loan out or otherwise require repayment of funds given to beneficiaries of the grant. |

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| **20** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 9 | Would a trade association be deemed an “employer” if the association does not directly hire the member’s employees? |
| **Answer** |
| No, “employer” for the purposes of an application means an entity that will employ the participants/beneficiaries of the grant funds. A third-party organization, such as a trade association, may still apply but should do so with at least one committed employer partner. The Department wants to ensure any third-party activities are directly linked with an employer. |

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| **21** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 9 | If a business is using a third-party organization in partnership with the employer for the pilot project, can the third-party organization apply for the grant or must the applicant for the grant be the employer? |
| **Answer** |
| Either entity may be the lead applicant for the grant. If a non-employer is the lead applicant, they must include a signed MOU from the employer(s) they will be working with describing the employer’s involvement. |

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| **22** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 9 | For projects focused on employment access at specific employers, what level of commitment or involvement is expected from the employers? Would letters of intent or MOUS from employers be sufficient to demonstrate this commitment? |
| **Answer** |
| Applicants must include signed MOUs from partner employers for the Department to consider them as full partners on an application. The MOU should specify what the employer will do for the project. For example, an MOU could describe that the employer will send 20 employees over six months to a specific training. General letters of support may also be included in the application to show interest in the project, but they will not be considered as impactful as a specific MOU.  |

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| **23** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 10 | Can you apply for a Scaling Talent Project on an initiative currently funded by another grant? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes, initiatives currently or previously funded by another source can be funded by this grant as long as there is no overlap of funded activities. The grant funds must be used to supplement and cannot supplant existing activities. |

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| **24** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II; Page 10 | Can a successful out-of-state training program that we’d like to introduce to Maine be considered scaling? |
| **Answer** |
| The Scaling Talent Project category is for expanding a set of activities an employer is already doing to more participants, locations, employers, etc. If an entity is engaged in an activity outside of Maine and would like to expand it within Maine, that could be a fit for the Scaling Talent Project category. If it is an activity the applicant or included partners have not done themselves before, it would be a fit for the Pilot Talent Project category. |

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| **25** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part III; Page 13 | Since the application hinges on the resume/experience of specific project team members, how will it be handled if one or more of those team members leave the organization or business they are working for before the grant term ends? |
| **Answer** |
| Once awarded, grantee organizations will be responsible for carrying out their proposed activities. If a key individual leaves the organization, the entity may rehire or otherwise reconfigure the work to ensure it is completed. Applications will be scored based on the qualifications of the project team, but grants will ultimately be made to and the responsibility of the applying organization, not specific individuals. |
| **26** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV; Page 14 | In the case of partnerships, how important is the history of collaboration among the partners? Is there a preference for long-standing partnerships versus newly formed ones for this grant? |
| **Answer** |
| There is no application scoring preference solely for the length of time a partnership has existed. Showing a history of collaboration may be helpful for demonstrating the capacity of a partnership to carry out the proposed activities, where relevant. Applications featuring new partnerships are also welcome and expected as part of this RFA; applicants proposing new partnerships may demonstrate capacity to accomplish the work based on experience with other organizations or similar work in the past. |

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| **27** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Application Form; Section IV: Budget | If the grant request includes training for multiple partners who do not receive funds (just payment), how should this be detailed in the budget worksheet? |
| **Answer** |
| An applicant requesting funds for training provided by a third-party organization would list that amount under the “Contracted Services – Training” line of the proposed budget. If an applicant would perform the training themselves using their own employees, they would include those employee costs in the “Personnel” line. Other expenses associated with the training can be placed in the appropriate line; for example, if an applicant pays a contractor for training but purchases the associated equipment themselves, the applicant would place those equipment-related costs in the “Equipment” line. |

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| **28** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| N/A | Can we get a list of attendees/ prospective applicants to advance collaboration? |
| **Answer** |
| Parties interested in collaborating may contact the RFP Coordinator, who will share the contact information of the individual who posed this question |