

Colorado SECTRS Initiative: Solicitation for Grant Applications

Executive Summary

The nature of work is changing and increasingly complex skills are required in most if not all industry sectors.¹ For those sectors to remain competitive, they must be able to access a highly skilled workforce. In Colorado, many industries have had to rely on the in-migration of skills and talent from outside the state. If this continues, the state risks leaving large numbers of Coloradans behind.

In response to this challenge, Colorado's Governor Bill Ritter, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC), and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) recognize that a skilled workforce is the single most important driver in determining the state's future competitiveness. Regions that understand how to leverage their human capital investments to strengthen their unique regional industry base and provide more opportunities for individual economic advancement will thrive. Toward that goal, the CWDC believes that state support of sector initiatives will be a powerful way to meet the needs of Colorado's industries and workers.

The CWDC and the CDLE announce the **SECTRS (Strategies to Enhance Colorado's Talent through Regional Solutions) Initiative**, which will offer 24-month grants to industry-led regional partnerships that meet the criteria outlined in the Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA). The SGA defines sector initiatives, offers an understanding of the national and state context for sector initiatives, and provides guidelines for application.

What are Sector Initiatives?

Sector initiatives are industry-specific, regional partnerships that address employers' needs for skilled workers, and workers' needs for good jobs. Sector initiatives focus intensively on the workforce needs of a specific industry over a sustained period, often concentrating on specific occupations, and always engaging multiple employers to analyze industry needs and design customized solutions.

Sector strategies are industry-specific, regional approaches that address skill gaps by:²

- ◆ Addressing the needs of **employers** by focusing intensively on the skill needs of a specific industry sector over a sustained period, often concentrating on a specific occupation or set of occupations within that industry;
- ◆ Addressing the needs of **workers** by creating formal career paths to good jobs, reducing barriers to employment, and sustaining or increasing middle-class jobs;
- ◆ Bolstering **regional economic competitiveness** by engaging economic development experts in workforce issues and aligning education, economic, and workforce development planning;
- ◆ **Engaging a broader array of key stakeholders** in regional economic strategizing through partnerships organized by workforce intermediaries; and

¹ "The State of Colorado's Talent Development: Competing in the 21st Century Economy," prepared for the Colorado Workforce Development Council by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, 2007.

² "Accelerating State Adoption of Sector Strategies," National Governors Association, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, and National Network of Sector Partners, March 2006.

- ◆ Promoting **systemic change** that supports innovation and achieves ongoing benefits for the industry, workers, and community.

Why Sector Strategies in Colorado?

Throughout the country, statewide strategies that support regionally-based, industry-driven sector initiatives are increasingly at the center of state workforce and economic development policies. As a member of a National Governors Association Policy Academy on State Sector Strategies, Colorado is recognized for its potential to use the sector model to support regional, skills-based economic competitiveness. Colorado joins over a dozen states that support regional sector initiatives.

For Colorado, pursuing sector strategies in a coordinated, strategic way will:³

1. **Help the state and its businesses stay strong and diverse.** Colorado has a strong economy in which there are very significant workforce opportunities and needs in industries ranging from hospitality and tourism to health care to energy to high-tech employment. The economy is strong and growing, and there are ample opportunities across a wide spectrum of industries for CSIs to connect employment opportunities with industry needs.
2. **Build a Gold Collar and STEM-ready workforce that is essential to sustaining the state economy.** Colorado is a leader in the high-tech economy. Continued strength in this area will depend on regions' ability to grow and sustain a "gold collar" workforce, or highly-educated employees that support the existence and growth of technology sectors in their capacity as high-level technicians. Gold Collar employees do not necessarily require 4-year college degrees, but they do require significant post-secondary education. CSIs can potentially play a critical role in filling the pipeline to high-tech industries with skilled workers.
3. **Help fill the gap left by the 1.2 million 65+ workers estimated to retire in the next two decades.** The graying of Colorado's population over the coming decades will be a tsunami-like demographic force that will create a large retiree-replacement workforce demand that can only be met if regions plan for changes now. CSIs can identify impacts and solutions related to this shift by bringing together employers within the same industry, who are likely worried about the same challenges but unable to address them alone.
4. **Offer a "Grow Our Own" solution to the Colorado Paradox.** The Colorado Paradox is the state's documented challenge of a highly educated (and imported from other states and countries) adult workforce juxtaposed with the realities of poor in-state high school graduation rates and low post-secondary education completion rates. CSIs are a promising model to directly address the needs of regional industry for skilled labor while designing solutions that recruit, retain and support local workers to meet those needs.

³ Adapted from "The State of Colorado's Talent Development: Competing in the 21st Century Economy," prepared for the Colorado Workforce Development Council by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, May, 2007.

Colorado SECTRS Initiatives

A successful SECTRS Initiative will incorporate most of the following strategies:

- **Be a regional, industry-based partnership** including workforce development, employers, educators, training providers, economic development, and other groups that convene to analyze and solve industry-specific workforce problems;
- **Be driven by employers** in the focus industry and region;
- **Be convened and facilitated by a Workforce Region** or Sub-Region or a convener designated by the Workforce Region, in which case the region will remain the fiscal agent. In either case, the designated organization must have deep industry knowledge and established relationships with necessary partners;
- **Define their regional scope** based on labor market analysis, not a political or artificial boundary. Regional scope must include at least two Workforce Development regions or sub-regions;
- **Conduct the necessary labor market analysis** that uncovers the root cause of the identified or set of identified workforce problems within the industry of focus;
- **Include attention to the development** of career pathways and lattices as part of efforts to understand and encourage workforce advancement within and across jobs and industries at correlating skill and wage levels;
- **Attract and leverage a variety of financial** and in-kind resources to carry out the strategies of the SECTRS Initiative's short-, medium-, and long-term goals;
- **Develop goals, a work plan, and target outcomes** based on a clear talent development problem statement that the SECTRS Initiative seeks to address;
- **Participate in shared learning opportunities** with other SECTRS Initiatives and in evaluation activities, including quarterly reports to the CWDC/CDLE;
- **Use the www.e-Colorado.org workforce portal** as a central site for shared learning and posting of documents;
- **Participate in the use of targeted online education and training courses** that will be available through the State's Online Innovation 4 Talent Development Initiative, or develop and utilize other technology-based learning;
- **Access online student tutoring** and student scholarships available for incumbent workers, career changers, unemployed, underemployed and veterans;
- **Use the e-Portfolio at www.e-colorado.org** to record competency and skill attainment, educational and professional certificates, resumes, assessments, etc.;
- **Participate in a local or State approved Work Ready Certificate Initiative;** and
- **Develop and/or utilize employer credentialed programs.**

Eligible Applicants

The eligible applicant is a Workforce Development Region or Sub-Region. A single Region or Sub-Region shall submit the full application on behalf of a partnership composed of at least two Workforce Development Regions or sub-regions. A Region or sub-region may designate another organization with the responsibilities of SECTRS Initiative convener, but shall remain the fiscal agent and shall be responsible for reporting activities and progress of the SECTRS Initiative to the CDLE and CWDC. In this case, the application must be jointly submitted by the Region and designated convener.

Available Awards

All SECTRS Initiative grants will be awarded on a competitive basis. Workforce Regions or sub-regions engaged in multiple applications with different Regions may be eligible to receive more than one grant. The amounts of grants will vary, and should be requested by applicants based on their goals and work plan. Grants to a two-region application will not exceed \$300,000. Multiple region applications may be funded up to \$500,000. Additional funds may be made available after the first year depending on grant performance and funding availability. Partnerships must demonstrate in their applications a viable and long-term (recommended 3-year) plan for sustainability beyond the life of the grant funds.

Bidder's Conference and Technical Assistance

A virtual Bidders Conference will be held on www.e-Colorado.org on **September 25, 2008 from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.** The bidder's conference will feature an international expert speaker on sector strategies and will offer a unique virtual learning experience in which to ask questions about this funding opportunity. The first hour of the bidder's conference will be a training opportunity for workforce board members and other partners. We encourage applicants and their partners to attend. **Details on how to join the bidder's conference will be available on www.e-Colorado.org.** Further information on joining the bidder's conference will be available on www.e-colorado.org in the "SECTRS Initiative" Team Room. If you are unable to join, the bidder's conference will be recorded and made available on www.e-colorado.org.

Customized technical assistance will be available to prospective applicants as they develop their applications. The Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, a national leader in the workforce development and sector strategy fields, will be reviewing short concept papers from prospective applicants and providing written feedback to identify areas for improvement.

Timeline for Grant Applications and Awards

Application Guidelines Available	September 5, 2008
Application Period	September 5 – November 10, 2008
Staff Trainings on Sector Strategies (<i>two sessions</i>)	September 12 and September 15, 2008
Bidder's Conference	September 25, 2008, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.
Concept Papers due for Technical Assistance (<i>optional</i>)	October 3, 2008, 5:00 p.m.
Technical Assistance Feedback Period Closes	October 17, 2008
Full Application Submission Deadline	November 10, 2008 – 5:00 p.m.
Award Notification	December 15, 2008
Project Start Date – Dispersal of Grants	January 2, 2008
Mandatory Colorado Sector Academy	January 2009
Regional Launch Meetings	February 2009
Quarterly Reports Due	30 days after the end of each Quarter
Grants Must Be Expended By	December 31, 2010
Final Report	January 31, 2011