

## **APPENDIX B: Employer Innovation Fund Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **1. What is the purpose of the Iowa Employer Innovation Fund?**

The purpose of the fund is expanding opportunities for more Iowans to earn for-credit and non-credit postsecondary credentials leading to high-demand jobs and encouraging Iowa employers, community leaders and others to collaborate to support regional workforce talent development. Future Ready Iowa establishes the goal of 70 percent of Iowans in the workforce having education or training beyond high school by the year 2025, but also seeks to strengthen the talent pipeline longer term. Iowa's current attainment level is around 60 percent. To help change this, the fund will award competitive grants to support regional initiatives that accelerate credential attainment. Iowa Workforce Development is seeking collaborative applications that propose new, cutting-edge ideas as well as proven strategies.

### **2. What for-credit and non-credit post-secondary credentials qualify?**

Qualifying credentials include post-secondary certificates, diplomas or two- and four-year degrees leading to high-demand jobs. Education or training programs do not have to be Pell Grant eligible to qualify for the Employer Innovation Fund. They can be shorter than 15 weeks.

### **3. Who will decide which applications receive funding?**

Iowa Workforce Development will identify an application panel to review and score proposals.

### **4. What will Iowa Workforce Development take into account when determining grant awards?**

Iowa Workforce Development will evaluate applications based on a number of criteria including but not limited to the scoring guidance referenced in the to the scoring rubric.

A. The proposal's connection to high-demand jobs from the State Workforce Board list, regional community college lists, locally identified high-demand jobs supported by regional or statewide data, innovative measures, geographic diversity and equity.

B. Whether the proposal increases the number of Iowans receiving financial aid to earn for-credit credentials from the Future Ready Iowa Last-dollar Scholarship or Future Ready Iowa Grant programs; or support for related expenses such as books, equipment, transportation, child care, and other wrap-around

assistance to help new high school graduates and adult learners complete education or training for high-demand jobs.

C. Whether the proposal includes performance-based bonuses paid when high school students earn national industry-recognized credentials aligned with high-demand jobs that meet regional workforce needs.

D. Whether the proposal expands internships leading to high-demand jobs.

E. Whether the proposal offers innovative ways of expanding opportunities to earn for-credit and non-credit credentials for education or training leading to high-demand jobs.

F. Whether the proposal addresses areas of workforce need throughout the region.

G. Whether the plan includes community engagement by including community partners or incorporating existing community programs.

H. The number of participants the project will serve and the cost per participant.

**5. Will work-based learning be an allowable use of the Iowa Employer Innovation Fund?**

The purpose of the Employer Innovation Fund is to expand opportunities for Iowans to earn for-credit and non-credit post-secondary credentials preparing them for high-demand jobs. If a work-based learning initiative including a Quality Pre-Apprenticeship and is part of an innovative, creative proposal that directly impacts the goal of earning credentials of value, among other factors, it may be considered.

**6. Are applicants required to identify specific project goal(s), such as how many participants, employers, etc.?**

Yes, all applications must include performance measures that logically connect a project's goal(s) with proposed activities and demonstrate an overall theory of change. Performance measures should include to the extent possible whether the expected results were achieved.

**7. If an application is not selected in the first round, will it automatically be considered in the next round or must it be resubmitted?**

Iowa Workforce Development plans to announce additional application rounds for the Employer Innovation Fund, if funding is available after the first review process. Submitted applications that are not selected will not be automatically considered during future rounds. Iowa Workforce Development encourages applicants to re-apply once future rounds are announced.

**8. How will Iowa Workforce Development ensure Employer Innovation Funds are used as intended?**

IWD will review programmatic and financial reports to evaluate grant progress. In addition, IWD may provide ongoing technical assistance to grantees, may schedule site visits and may coordinate in-person or desk reviews as needed.

**9. How does the match work?**

The Employer Innovation Fund provides a state match for regional investments of private dollars. What this means is that the fund is intended to serve as a match for money raised privately as part of the application process. Applicants can request approval for an amount up to the amount of money they have secured for the project. The private funds must be expensed first, matching state dollars may be drawn down once all private funds are expended. Applicants need to plan to expend all private funds first. If more funds are requested than are available, funds will be awarded proportionately to eligible proposals to provide the greatest amount of support across all eligible applicants.

**10. What are allowable expenses?**

The fund can be used to support for-credit and non-credit credential attainment, along with wrap-around support, such as child care, transportation, books, equipment, fees or other innovative ideas and proposals that help lowans complete education or training beyond high school leading to high- demand jobs. It cannot be used for administrative expenses of operating the program or implementing the project.

**11. Who can apply?**

Eligible applicants include employers, employer consortiums, community organizations and other entities. If the applicant is not an employer, the organization(s) must be aligned with one or more employers and demonstrate this via an employer commitment letter in the proposal.

**12. Are Registered Apprenticeships eligible to receive Employer Innovation Funds?**

Registered apprenticeships are a critical part of Future Ready Iowa and funding to support development and ongoing costs for these programs is available through 15b, 15c and other available funding sources. Registered Apprenticeship Programs may submit proposals to address barriers that prevent individuals from participating in and completing Registered Apprenticeship Programs. Examples include, transportation, childcare, equipment and books.

**13. When is the application due?**

February 12, 2021.

**14. When will awardees be notified?**

Not later than Friday, Feb 19, 2021.

**15. What is the project timeline for expending the funds?**

Successful applicants must provide proof to Iowa Workforce that privately raised funds have been expended in full, at which time, then matching funds may be drawn down. Awardees must be able to draw down state funds by June 30, 2021. All matching funds must be utilized within 12 months of receipt and any unexpended matching dollars must be returned to Iowa Workforce Development thereafter.

**16. Is there a maximum award?**

\$50,000.

**17. Will all applications be awarded?**

Submission of an application does not guarantee an award.