

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS AND INTEREST

New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development

The New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development (Workforce Consortium) is seeking an external evaluation organization to participate in and contribute to a proposal to the Federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS); Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for a **Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant**. The selected evaluation organization would assist in the development of a proposal for a **Career Advancement Initiative Model Demonstration Project** to be submitted by and led by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) of the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The proposal must be submitted to RSA on April 7, 2021. The external evaluation organization selected would **not** be compensated for their work on the proposal but would be included in the proposal as the project evaluator. The proposed budget for the grant, if awarded by RSA, would include appropriate funding for a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation, as per RSA requirements.

The Workforce Consortium will be playing a lead role in the proposed effort, as the primary partner of DVRS. Individual community colleges, under the leadership of the Workforce Consortium, will serve as pilot sites in the proposal. The external evaluation organization would be a subcontractor to the Workforce Consortium if the grant is funded by RSA. The Workforce Consortium brings together the state's 18 community colleges to design and deliver innovative workforce development initiatives and to build career pathways for all New Jerseyans. New Jersey's 18 community colleges are committed to create an aligned workforce development ecosystem focused on ensuring all residents have the skills and pathways that lead to jobs and careers that drive economic growth.

More information on the Workforce Consortium can be found at: <https://njworkforce.org/>

New Jersey's proposal to RSA would focus on building collaboration among system partners in developing or scaling out career pathway programs to help vocational rehabilitation (VR) eligible individuals improve and maximize competitive integrated employment outcomes and economic self-sufficiency. A description of the proposal program model is included in this document.

Interested organizations should send a letter of interest to the Workforce Consortium by **5pm on Friday, March 19th** to Megan Swieconeck at mswieconeck@njccc.org.

Letters should not exceed one page in length and should include the following information:

1. Capacity of the organization to perform a five-year, rigorous evaluation,
2. Experience conducting evaluations of programs that serve individuals with intellectual and development disabilities,
3. Experience conducting evaluations of community college programs,
4. Experience in designing and implementing an evaluation of a multi-site complex initiative, and
5. Any significant or unique expertise, experience or qualifications.

The letter can include attachments, including links to online resources, examples of past evaluation reports, and other information that the respondent believes would be helpful.

Overview: Career Advancement Initiative Model Demonstration 5 Year Grant for VR Agencies

Grant Opportunity: The Federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS); Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) recently announced a Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant opportunity for a Career Advancement Initiative Model Demonstration Project for state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. The grant focuses on collaboration among system partners in developing or scaling out career pathway programs to help VR eligible individuals improve and maximize competitive integrated employment outcomes and economic self-sufficiency through the attainment of industry recognized credentials, college degrees, and work-based experiences. The application is due April 7, 2021 and if selected, grant activities would begin in October 2021.

Intent of Application:

The New Jersey Division of Vocational and Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) is looking to establish a coordinated approach to ensure that VR eligible individuals are able to benefit from county college career pathway programs statewide. DVRS anticipates applying for this grant in partnership with key stakeholders in this area, including, but not limited to the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development and the NJ Department of Developmental Disabilities. The partnership activities will be driven by the following goals:

- Goal 1. Establish a Career Pathways Partnership for Employment Accessibility (CPPEA) that will apply a coordinated approach among system partners (e.g. state, system support and provider agencies, colleges, consumers and employers) to strengthen existing career pathway programs at NJ county colleges.
 - Goal 2. Utilize the CPPEA to engage in readiness activities (i.e. outreach, training, assessment) to prepare and support VR eligible consumers, state agencies, community colleges, employers and other critical system partners in fully implementing a strong, coordinated and sustainable career pathway model.
 - Goal 3. Utilize the CPPEA to develop and implement an action plan to engage county and state government offices as well as state institutions of higher education in becoming model employers for people with disabilities and committed employer partners.
 - Goal 4. Implement and conduct a multi-site mixed method evaluation of a career pathway model at four pilot sites throughout the state that will help the partnership monitor implementation activities, understand the relationship between program activities and outcomes and compare outcomes of VR eligible participants to comparable VR eligible non-participants.
 - Goal 5. Utilize the CPPEA to implement program recruitment and outreach services for VR eligible individuals and employers, pre-enrollment services, benefits counseling, career pathway pilot navigation support teams and placement service for internships, pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships and competitive integrated employment.
 - Goal 6. Support VR participants in maintaining competitive integrated employment and attaining industry recognized credentials and degrees to support marketability and ongoing career advancement.
 - Goal 7. Develop and implement a sustainability plan as a coordinated system to maintain partnership and outcomes for VR participants after the grant period.
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Example Key Partnership Outcomes of Interest

Implementation Outcomes

- Effectiveness in serving VR participants and employers
- Effectiveness in implementing recruitment and pre-enrollment services for consumers
- Effectiveness in teamwork and coordination among system partner participating in the Navigation Support Teams
- Effectiveness in supporting county college program implementation
- Participant completion of relevant work experience

Academic and Skill Outcomes

- Measurable skill gain
- Credential attainment
- Degree attainment

Employment Outcomes

- Employment second quarter after exit and fourth quarter after exit
- Median earnings at placement and second quarter after exit
- Reduction in reliance on social security benefits