

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

STEP Grant Process: Criteria for Determining Awards

**Prepared by the Division of Business Partnerships for presentation to the
Alaska Workforce Investment Board May 9-10, 2012 Meeting**

The STEP competitive grant process begins with the Division of Business Partnerships determining the yearly STEP allocation for competitive solicitation based on the annual authorized budget, and the Department identifying STEP priorities. The Division first sets aside funding for required matches, such as the Work Services/Senior Community Service Employment Program, allocations for the Alaska Workforce Investment Board operations, UI tax collection costs, allocations for a line item budget relating to administering and managing the STEP, and designated awards to the Employment Security Division for providing STEP employment and training services through the Alaska Job Center Network. The remaining funds are allocated for distribution through a competitive process, which entails posting a solicitation for a Request for Grant Applications (RGA).

Division staff drafts an RGA that describes the purpose and requirements of the STEP as identified in the STEP statutes (AS.23.15.620 – 23.15.660) and STEP regulations (8 AAC 87.030 – 87.990), along with instructions for completing and submitting an application. Evaluation criteria are identified in the RGA per the STEP statutes and regulations. The STEP RGA published in November 2011, states, in part, evaluation criteria taken from the statutes and regulations as follows:

- Applications will be evaluated as to how well the projects meet the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's workforce training priorities, as approved by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB), which are based on annual projections of occupational and industrial workforce demand and other relevant information.
- To be eligible for a STEP grant, the applicant must offer training or employment assistance services that meet the requirements of STEP and be a governmental agency, a private business, an employer, or an organization exempt from taxation under 26 U.S.C. 501 (c)(3) (Internal Revenue Code). Applicants must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Department and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) that: the applicant's accounting system is organized and maintained in accordance with 8 AAC 87.70(a), promotes efficiency, ensures compliance with program requirements and can be reviewed at the Department's direction with not more than a reasonable amount of effort and expense; and the applicant will use the grant funds only as allowed under the STEP statutes, AS 23.15.260 – 23.15.660.
- Projects should be consistent with the purpose of STEP, which is to enhance the quality of in-state job training and employment assistance and to make in-state job

training and employment assistance more easily available to employers, employees, and future employees.

- Training should align with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board's priority industries: Health Care, Construction, Information Technology, Education, Natural Resource Development, Transportation, Hospitality and Tourism, and, Seafood Harvesting and Processing.
- Applications will be assessed and evaluated on their merit and suitability for a STEP grant according to the following criteria:
 - Does the proposed training meet the purpose of STEP?
 - Is the proposed training in a priority area for STEP?
 - Is there a need for the type of training proposed?
 - Is there a strong linkage to employment following the training?
 - Will the training enhance participant skills to enable them to obtain or retain employment?
 - Is the amount of funds requested reasonable?

Each section of the grant application will be assessed on how well the information provided meets, does not meet, or exceeds these evaluation criteria.

Upon approval by Department leadership, the RGA is posted on the Alaska Public Notice web site and on the Division's electronic grants administration web site, EGrAMS. The Division notifies current and past grant recipients about the RGA and provides the web address for the public notice and EGrAMS. The Department publishes a press release regarding availability of funds for competitive solicitation. The RGA is typically open for submission of applications up to six weeks. At the conclusion of the solicitation, staff reviews the applications received by the submission deadline; applications are determined responsive (or not) to the submission requirements of the RGA. The responsive applications are reviewed and assessed by a panel of qualified and knowledgeable individuals, and according to STEP regulations, must consist of a simple majority of Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) members or their designees. Division staff receives a list of eligible board members from the AWIB Executive Director.

The committee meets in-person three to four weeks after the solicitation closes. During the interim, committee members individually evaluate each proposal using EGrAMs, on its merit and suitability for a STEP award prompted by the question stated on previous page from the RGA.

During the review committee in-person meeting, members discuss the merits of proposals and make specific recommendations for award or denial of award, and make any requests for additional information or suggestions for proposals, to include project activities, number to be served, budget, training timelines and schedules, and reasonableness of costs. The

committee members do not score the applications; rather make a recommendation for or against an award.

Division staff compiles an overview of the committee's recommendations, and considers prior grantee performance history if applicable. The Commissioner reviews the recommendations and may approve, deny, or overturn the committee's recommendations, and has authority to fund applications that did not receive a favorable recommendation from the committee or staff. Final approval of all awards is made by the Commissioner.

Any appeals of the awards or denial of awards are resolved by the Commissioner in accordance with the procedures detailed in 8 AAC 87.210.

After approval by the Commissioner, the Division completes the following actions:

- Notices of award or denial of award are sent to each applicant.
- Negotiations begin with each successful applicant, if necessary.
- Grant agreements are prepared in EGrAMS.
- The approval process is completed in EGrAMS.
- Grant agreements are electronically signed in EGrAMS.
- Forms and other documents are sent to the grantee (reimbursement requests, Progress Reports, etc.).
- New grantees are provided with forms to sign up for the Management Information Systems (MIS) training; the MIS is the Division's performance tracking system and is required of each successful STEP grantee to use.
- Staff provides technical assistance and guidance to new grantees.
- Monitoring site visits are scheduled to ensure proper implementation of the STEP, both programmatically and fiscally.
- Training activities are completed for the period of performance in a state fiscal year, and the grants are formally closed by June 30.

STATE OF ALASKA

Department of Labor and Workforce Development

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 111149
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-1149

PHONE: (907) 465-2700
FAX: (907) 465-2784

April 13, 2012

Ms. Kimberly Vitelli
Division of Workforce System Support
Employment and Training Administration
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW, Room S-4231
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Ms. Vitelli,

This letter respectfully requests an extension to Alaska's existing Workforce Investment Act Title I/Wagner-Peyser state stand-alone plan and Workforce Investment Act waivers, as listed below, to September 16, 2012.

This also advises that the state will use the additional time afforded until September 16, 2012, to develop an Integrated Workforce Plan, as defined in U.S. DOL, Employment and Training Administration's March 27, 2012 Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 21-11.

Alaska last completed a comprehensive planning process in 2007. Since then, the state made numerous modifications to the existing plan that reflect incremental changes. Alaska understands that developing an Integrated Workforce Plan is critical for cross-program strategic planning efforts, which will address the governor's vision, provide for greater business, industry, and community involvement, and respond to a strengthened state workforce investment board.

Along with the plan extension, the state requests extension of the following Workforce Investment Act waivers:

- A waiver (WIA regulations at 20 CFR 661.300(f)) that allows the state board to carry out the roles of a local board;
- A waiver that grants authority to transfer up to 50 percent of funds between Adult and Dislocated Worker programs;
- A waiver to the requirement that employer contribute at least 50 percent for customized training;
- A waiver to increase employer reimbursement for on-the-job-training (OJT), allowing employer reimbursement for WIA participants in OJT according to the size of the business;
- A waiver accounting for seasonal employment in performance measures to address the challenge of serving seasonal workers;

Ms. Kimberly Vitelli

April 13, 2012

Page 2

- A waiver extending the time limit on the period of initial eligibility for training providers on the Eligible Training Provider List;
- A waiver allowing flexibility in provision of training services to youth by waiving prohibition for youth to receive Individual Training Accounts, especially out-of-school youth who need specialized training to meet career goals; and
- A waiver to maintain the common measures and approved negotiated performance goals for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs.

Please contact the Division of Business Partnerships' Director, Corine Geldhof at (907) 465-5937, or via e-mail, corine.geldhof@alaska.gov, should you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,



David G. Stone

Acting Commissioner

cc: Ingrid Nyberg, Federal Project Officer, Region 6 Office of the Employment & Training Administration, USDOL
Corine Geldhof, Director, Division of Business Partnerships, AK-DOLWD
Paul Dick, Director, Employment Security Division, AK-DOLWD
Jeff Selvey, Executive Director, Alaska Workforce Investment Board

The Workforce Investment Act Title 1B & the Wagner-Peyser Integrated Workforce Plan, Program Years 2012-2016

May				June				July				August				September											
DBP	5/7-5/11	Kick Off	Structure, Format & Table of Contents	5/21 -5/25	Waiver Request	Waiver Request Online Notice	6/11-6/13	6/18-6/22	6/23-6/29	7/2-7/6	Youth Activities	7/9-7/13	7/16-7/20	Operating Systems & Policies	7/23-7/27	7/30-8/3	State Strategies Public Comments Adult DW & Youth Summary	8/6-8/10	Sec.III Plan Assurances	8/20-8/24	Draft Complete	8/27-8/31	Director Review	9/3-9/7		9/14	Submit Plan
AWIB		Kick Off	Overview Workforce System			Governor's Vision		Engaging Employers	Desired Outcomes					Agricultural Outreach			State Strategies		Sec.III Plan Assurances				Director Review				
ESD		Kick Off							SCSEP			TAA		Agricultural Outreach Operating Systems & Policies	Engaging Employers	ES Summary		Sec.III Plan Assurances				Director Review					
R&A																		Economic Info Analysis				Director Review					Post On Web
Commissioner's Office			Kick Off																					Review & Signature			

**Outline of Requirements 2012 State Workforce Plans: Employment and Training Administration
Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 21-11, Issued March 27, 2012**

Section I: State Integrated Workforce Plan

- Governor's Vision
- Economic & Workforce Information Analysis
- State Strategies
 - Partnerships
 - Leveraging Resources
 - Policy Alignment
 - Cross program alignment (improving partnerships with TANF, UI/Reemployment Services, Registered Apprenticeship, Summer youth employment programs, OJTs, TAA, Rapid Response and other programs to maximize efficiency and support
 - Alignment with state and regional economic development
 - Dual customer focus
 - Use of evidence- based practice
 - Credential attainment
 - Administrative flexibility
- Engaging employers
 - Outreach
 - Supporting business sector engagement goals
 - Training for business service representatives, rapid response coordinators, and other staff that work directly with employers
 - Improve partnerships and linkages
 - Expand services and resources provided to businesses and employers to include OJT, customized training, tool-kits, lay-off aversion strategies, data visualization and other materials
- Desired Outcomes

Section II: State Operational Plan

- Overview of Workforce System: Organization, State Board, Local Areas
- Operating Systems and Policies Supporting the State's Strategies
- Services to State Target Populations
- Wagner – Peyser Agricultural Outreach
- WIA Waiver Requests
- Trade Adjustment Assistance
- SCSEP (optional: stand-alone document or submitted with this integrated workforce plan)
- WIA Single – Area States Only – Additional WIA Title I Requirements
 - Any comments from the public comment period that represent disagreement with the Plan.
 - The entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds, as determined by the governor, if different from that for the state.
 - The type and availability of WIA title I Youth activities, including an identification of successful providers of such activities.

Section III: Integrated Workforce Plan Assurances and Attachments

- Planning Process and Public Comment
- Required Policies and Procedures
- Administration of Funds
- Eligibility
- Personnel and Representation