



**EARN Maryland FAQs
October – November, 2013**

– Stakeholder Q & A–

November 8 Update

If the review committee finds two or more PG proposals covering the same region and target industry, (a) will the review committee recommend the groups work together under the PG phase or just under the Implementation phase; if under the PG phase, (b) will the applications be considered individually or as a single application (with two or more parts?); OR (c) will the two planning groups be allowed to re-submit a combined proposal?

- DLLR does anticipate asking some PG Applicant Groups to combine and collaborate. How that collaboration is encouraged, structured and/or funded will depend on the circumstances and will be determined on case-by-case basis.

I noticed in a recent FAQ that you are seeking organizational, rather than individual, resumes. What if I already assembled different individual resumes for members of my partnership? Will our proposal still be considered?

- Yes. We recognize that there are many different types of partner entities with varying levels of sophistication. The objective behind this requirement, the identification of the particular roles that member partners are meant to serve and their capacity for doing so, will be met whether organizational or individual resumes are provided.

If an Applicant Group receives a Planning Grant, is that group guaranteed, or at least more likely, to receive an Implementation Grant?

- DLLR determined that a two-stage process would be the best way to arrive at the most effective and efficient ultimate product: the Workforce Training Plan (WTP). Planning Grants and the planning phase are meant to foster early collaboration between potential partners, allow time for partnerships to grow and evolve, and to provide modest seed funding to facilitate this process.

- The Planning Grant *is not* the end of the line. At the implementation phase, PG recipients will be evaluated along with all other applicants – including those that did not apply for, or applied for but did not receive a Planning Grant – in a competitive manner.
- As such, PG Awardees are encouraged to use planning funds for their intended purposes: to create a dynamic planning process that encourages the expansion of the partnership to include more employers and other partners, as is relevant; to continue to amass information about the critical workforce needs of the employer group; and, within that dynamic and evolving process, to develop flexible and efficient training and other solutions responsive to the employer partners.

November 5 Update

Grant Submission Format:

It's not entirely clear where the appendices are to start and what counts as an appendix in the final document. Can you clarify?

- The order of items in the Grant Submission should be as follows:
 - 1) 1-page **Cover Page** (Solicitation Sec. 4.1.1) (Template at Appendix A)
 - 2) **Letter of Application** (Sec. 4.1.2)
 - 3) The following items, combined, 1) may not exceed 20 pages, 2) should be submitted in the order listed here, and 3) must conform to the specifications described in Sec. 4.2 of the PG Solicitation:
 - a. **Table of Contents** (Sec. 4.1.3)
 - b. **Executive Summary** (Sec. 4.1.4) (max 1-page)
 - c. **Proposal Narrative** document (Sec. 4.1.5) (See Appendix B for detailed description of required information)
 - 4) **PG Project Management Plan** (Sec. 4.2.6.1) (Template at Appendix D)
 - 5) **SIP Membership List** (Sec. 4.2.6.2) (Template at Appendix E)
 - 6) **Letters of Intent** from each member of the PG Applicant Group (as described in Appendix B(1)(a)(iii))
 - 7) **Budget Narrative** (Sec. 4.1.7) (Template at Appendix F)
 - 8) **Budget Form** (Sec. 4.1.7) (Template at Appendix G)
 - 9) **Assurances Page** (Sec. 4.1.8) (Template at Appendix H)
 - 10) **Fiscal Agent Form** (Sec. 4.1.9) (Template at Appendix I)
 - 11) **Certificate of Good Standing** from Lead Applicant (Sec. 4.1.10)

The items in point 3 above, combined, may not exceed 20 pages. All other required items are not included in the portion of the Submission subject to a page limitation.

- For your convenience, the Appendices to the Solicitation for Planning Grant Proposals are now available in Word format on the EARN Maryland website's main page: www.earn.maryland.gov. Applicants are free to use their own forms if they so choose, so long as all of the specified information is provided.

- *This checklist is also available in PDF form at <http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/earn/earnpgchecklist.pdf>.*

Questions about Certificate of Good Standing:

What is the Certificate of Good Standing and where does one get it?

- A Certificate of Good Standing (also known as a “Certificate of Status” or “COGS”) is an official document from the State Department of Assessments and Taxation that indicates the status of the entity as of the date on the certificate. If an entity is in good standing, it means the entity is properly registered with the Department, all documents and fees required to be submitted to the Department have been received, and that no other State agency has notified the Department the entity is delinquent in tax payments.
- Government entities cannot obtain a Certificate of Good Standing. If the Lead Applicant is a government entity, please explain that this is the reason a COGS has not been submitted in Section 4.1.10 of the Grant Submission Requirements (Planning Grant Solicitation, p. 13).
- To obtain a Certificate of Good Standing, please go to the following website: https://sdatcert1.resiusa.org/certificate_net/.
- For additional questions, please call the Charter Information line at the MD Department of Assessments and Taxation 410-767-1330.

Questions about Resumes (Appendix E):

What does DLLR want us to include in “resumes for members” referenced in Appendix E? We have a large emerging SIP – 20 entity representatives, thus far. The solicitation requests resumes for members. This would be a LOT of resumes! Given the quantity, could we submit information in some more truncated format, such as biographies for each member?

- DLLR is NOT requesting resumes of individual staff. The organizational resumes should include a brief description of each organization in the Planning Grant Applicant Group, and should be printed on that organization’s letterhead (i.e. Mission Statement, organizational goals).

The mileage rate cited in the solicitation is less than the latest federally approved rate. Why is this the case?

- The mileage reimbursement rate provided in Sec. 2.3.1 of the PG Solicitation is the rate set by the Maryland Department of Budget and Management (see

<http://dbm.maryland.gov/agencies/Documents/FleetManagementServices/POVReimburseRates.pdf>.

November 1 Update

Connecting with Industry Members, Partners, and potential Partners:

Give us some idea of how to identify pertinent industries to begin a partnership?

Will the sectors be posted?

How or will there be publication of those partnerships in the Industry applications?

Are there plans to convene industry leaders shopping for partners?

My client may be interested in joining an existing healthcare or retail application for the Planning Grant. Can you refer us to any interested party?

- DLLR is developing a web portal, EARN MD CONNECT, to facilitate connecting and communicating between and among potential Strategic Industry Partners. We expect that EARN MD CONNECT will be ready to launch in the coming weeks. This portal will be useful to entities looking to find potential partners, to join emerging partnerships, and to established SIPs seeking additional partners as they apply for implementation funding in 2014. Eventually the portal will also be used as a platform for established SIPs to collaborate and share lessons learned and best practices.
- In the interim, we encourage you to utilize your existing networks and connections. The EARN Maryland statute defines a strategic industry partnership as a “collaboration that brings together a regional group that may include employers, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, community colleges, local boards, local governments or other relevant partners.” Here are some links to other potential resources for identifying partners in your region or industry:

Maryland Higher Education Commission

http://www.mhec.state.md.us/highered/colleges_universities/

Maryland Association of Community Colleges

<http://www.mdacc.org/>

Maryland Workforce Investment Boards

<http://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/jtpa.shtml#lwibs>

Maryland Economic Development Association

<http://www.medamd.com/>

Maryland Department of Business & Economic Development

<http://www.dbed.maryland.gov/Pages/index.html>

Maryland Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.mdchamber.org/>

Governor's Workforce Investment Board

<http://www.gwib.maryland.gov/>

If my client employer is unable to join a sector partnership for the Planning Grant, can the company still apply for the Implementation Grant?

- Yes.

Are there any financial incentives that employers can qualify for under the Implementation Grant that can be utilized for existing or new training?

- There are no specific financial incentives. The Implementation Grant funding will pay for incumbent worker and new worker training that is responsive to a targeted regional industry's skilled workforce needs.

Job Readiness Training:

There are two references to job readiness training in the solicitation. In the first you have information about what constitutes job readiness, but include transportation and childcare. What type of training do these fall into? Secondly, the term "specific job readiness" is used further on in the packet. If specific means preparation in the way of bringing a worker up to a specific standard, would computer skills be allowable? What about math for manufacturing (i.e., basic educational improvement)?

- Job Readiness training refers to training for low- and no-skilled workers and can constitute any type of training that helps prepare these individuals for occupations defined to be high priority in an industry because of existing or projected shortages. Support services such as childcare or transportation may be included in job readiness training if they present a barrier for trainees. All types of training – such as computer skills, language skills, math for manufacturing, basic educational improvement – are included as long as these skills are identified by the Partnership as important for the long-term success of the trainees in preparing for a specific occupation.

What types of data do you envision when you are asking for validation from employers?

- Partnerships need to tell their industry's story and use whatever data AND industry experience is relevant to that story. Both are important. Some industries may have plenty of internal data. Other industries may rely more heavily on the experience of industry partners. This in itself is important data collection and can be in the form of surveys, focus groups, group meetings, etc.

Support for individuals with specific barriers to employment: how is this defined? How do individual barriers differ from structural barriers?

- Individual barriers are barriers that low- and no-skilled workers face in seeking or developing the skills necessary to maintain employment and/or qualify for skills training opportunities. Structural barriers are barriers that any prospective employee may face in obtaining employment in a particular industry (i.e., insurance coverage for on-the-job training in some industries).

Can we be assured that the geographic distribution of the grants will be equitable?

- Yes.

Will one letter of intent signed by all SI Partners suffice?

- Appendix B requires Letters of Intent from each member of the PG Applicant Group. Each member of the Applicant Group must submit a separate letter.

Can the Convener on one grant be either Lead Applicant or Convener on another?

- Yes, however if the Convener is part of more than one Planning Grant Applicant Group, it must clearly explain its capacity to take on more than one such role.

I'm a representative from Women in Transition. We are a nonprofit that supports young women transitioning out of foster care. We hold economic development training for young women over the summer and a transitional planning class during the year. I wanted to know if we qualified for this grant. Here is the link to our site www.womentransition.org.

- If your organization specializes in training low- and no-skilled workers, then it may very well be able to partner with a Planning Grant Applicant Group that is submitting a Planning Grant Proposal. No training organization, on its own, can submit a Planning Grant Proposal. One key requirement is that each Planning Grant Applicant Group that submits a proposal must include at least two employers from the same industry and region and two other diverse organizations. A complete list of such organizations is found on page 5 of the Solicitation for Planning Grant Proposals. DLLR considers the Planning Grant Applicant Groups to be budding or emerging SIPs.

Can you add partners between the Planning Grant and Implementation Grant phases?

- Yes, absolutely. DLLR expects that the Planning Grant Applicant Group will grow into a robust Strategic Industry Partnership by adding partners.

Will Applicants need to submit a detailed budget for the Planning Grant?

- Yes. The budget submission requirements are explained, and sample templates are provided, in Appendix F (Budget Narrative) and Appendix G (Budget Form) of the PG Solicitation. The detailed budget will need to complement the Planning Grant Management Plan (PG Solicitation, Appendix D) and must comply with the Expenses provisions in Section 2.3 of the PG Solicitation.

Will DLLR make adjustments to requested amounts submitted in the Implementation Grant?

- It is possible that DLLR will revise the award level, based upon the number of prospective grant awards, the types of training awarded and the regional and industry diversity of the awards.

Can one company fill both roles as industry and partner?

- Yes. A company that is an industry member would be one of the two employer partners required. There would still be a need for two other diverse partner entities.

Is the DLLR EARN MD website the best place to obtain information and critical data needed to assist in preparing the Proposal?

- It is the best place for information about the EARN MD program. Data to support your Proposal may come from a variety of sources.

Target Populations:

Will any special consideration be given to proposals that target training for hard-to-serve populations? Please reiterate the target populations, characteristics and any hierarchy of those most important to serve? Will there be a focus on ethnic and diversity sponsoring amongst specific employers (i.e., specific target groups to train)? How will this be fostered?

- For the Implementation Grant, enhanced consideration will be given to those proposals that aim at moving no-skilled or low-skilled workers into better jobs through job readiness, barrier-removal or academic remediation strategies (see Appendix C (2)(a)(i)). While not an enhanced consideration of the PG solicitation, it is certainly important to consider this general target population, and the many diverse populations of jobseekers it includes, in your planning phase if your SIP may incorporate this type of training.
- Another enhanced consideration for the Implementation Grant is the braiding of other public or philanthropic funding streams or in-kind support (see Appendix C (2)(a)(v)).

To the extent these other funding sources target certain populations, it is worth contemplating such populations in the Planning Grant phase.

- For those SIP Workforce Training Plans that include a training component for low and no-skilled workers, they should include input from partners who work with and/or can recruit from this group.

Does the Applicant or Convener have to be a Maryland-based company? If yes, does a presence in MD qualify?

- If the Lead Applicant or Convener is not Maryland-based or does not have a strong presence in Maryland, the proposal must justify this entity's choice for that role. In general, a SIP that includes out-of-state partners will have to show the benefit to Maryland students, workers and prospective workers as well as Maryland's economy.

I would like to know what the application process is for this program. How do I as a potential employee sign up for training? And is this for all residents in the state of Maryland. I am a current resident of Prince George's County.

- The EARN MD program has just launched and over the course of the next year, industry partnerships will be developing training responsive to industry's critical skills needs. Once training has been developed, EARN MD will determine the best platform to announce training opportunities. Please check our website regularly.

Is it allowable, without any negative impact on the evaluation of the proposal, for a single organization to submit multiple proposals for Planning Grant funding if each proposal (1) targets a different industry sector and (2) partners can be identified within each industry sector to support two separate proposals?

- Yes. The organization will need to provide evidence that it has the capacity to support two or more Planning Grant processes.

Can DLLR describe what will be covered at the January 2014 Conference?

- The January conference will most likely be a 1.5 day event. The first day will provide technical assistance and support to the Planning Grant Applicant Groups that should be helpful in the design of the Strategic Industry Workforce Training Plans. There will be a number of experts to share lessons learned and strategies developed by other states with successful industry-sector partnership initiative. It will be a hands-on, how-to agenda. The second half-day morning will include the Pre-Proposal Conference for the Implementation Grant Solicitation. An agenda for the January conference will be sent out at least two weeks prior to the conference. A date will be announced in the coming weeks.

We will be developing technology applications to be used as part of the partnership. Will these new products be the property of the State of Maryland?

- This will be addressed in the Implementation Grant Solicitation.

Are administrative expenses for the Lead Applicant an allowable use of Planning Grant funds?

- Yes, they are an allowable use. Like all other expenses in the PG budget, they need to be included and properly justified. For example, if an administrative staff person will be devoting 20% of his/her time to the PG Proposal, please specify percentage time, expense and total salary. Please review Section 2.3 and Appendices D, F, and G of the PG Solicitation for more information.

We are focusing on an industry with clear subsectors. While the services offered by each subsector are complementary and there are strong economic ties between the subsectors, the workforce skills required by each subsector are different. As a result, creating worker trainings for each subsector would require different groups of employers. Would you recommend that we form an industry partnership with subgroups, or submit separate proposals for each subsector?

- Based on this very limited information, one Planning Grant proposal for the industry to sort out the needs of each subsector would be sensible.

Training:

How do you envision training dollars will be used (e.g., for class instruction or pay reimbursement to employers providing on-the-job training or early matching during training period)? Can grant dollars be used for tuition or stipend for training? Will alternative budget and cost models be considered – other than salary, i.e. fixed fee, fixed price, deliverable based, hourly rate, fixed hourly rate, consulting or participation fees?

- EARN is not proscriptive, but it is strict. The sole driver determining how EARN dollars can be used is the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan. This plan will spell out in detail what positions the industry members of the partnerships need to fill; what skills and qualities (e.g. work ethic skills) the industry partners need in the employees who will fill those positions; who will be recruited to fill those positions; what skills that group of recruits has and what they lack; and what training and/or other interventions are necessary to insure the success of those recruits in partner companies who want to hire them. Therefore, class instruction, pay reimbursement for on-the-job-training, early matching, tuition or stipends for training all could be good uses of EARN

funds as could many other possible uses. However -- and this is essential for EARN -- any use would need to be justified with rigor in the Strategic Industry Partnership Plan.

Does all training identified within an industry sector partnership and used to train job seekers need to be MHEC-approved prior to use in the implementation phase of the grant?

- If a Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan submitted by March 31, 2014 includes proposed training that requires approval or certification from any state or national entity, proof of approval will be required. In some cases, this may include MHEC approval. Additional guidance will be provided in the Implementation Grant Solicitation on this question. Even with additional guidance, it will be incumbent on Implementation Grant Applicants to identify the need for and obtain any specific approval for the training they propose.

It seems like primary target of EARN is for low-income/low-skill workers, and cyber security (or other high tech) doesn't seem to obviously fit in that camp. Am I wrong about this? Should we focus on the more "accessible" portions of cyber security work, such as cyber analysts instead of engineers?

- The short answer is no, the primary target of EARN MD is not solely the training of no- and low-skilled workers (although that does become one of many priorities at the Implementation Grant Solicitation stage). The EARN MD program seeks to develop and support industry-driven plans to provide prospective employees the skills that individual industry sectors demand. This will vary from sector to sector.
- All potential industry partners should determine their industry's critical workforce and skills shortages. In the case of cyber security, if those needs are both engineers and cyber-analysts, consider developing a multi-level training approach. If the industry's primary need is engineers, however, a potential partnership is still encouraged to apply, as each proposal will be evaluated comprehensively based on a variety of factors.

October 28 Update

Do Educational Institutions count as the two additional partners in a partnership?

- EARN would prefer that there be two different types of organizations that represent the minimum of two diverse organizations in the Planning Grant Applicant Group. There must be a substantive case made about why two like organizations are in the initial PG Applicant Group.

Are there philanthropic organizations that support workforce training and education?

- Yes, there are. Many foundations have programs targeted to workforce development. Also, industry members sometimes have their own foundations if they are large enough. In addition, local philanthropies that target community reinvestment and revitalization or economic development may be interested in the innovative model of Strategic Industry Partnerships.

We are located on the State border, so many employers are either in PA, WV, DE, VA, DC as well as MD. Can out of state employers be part of our team? They employ our students who are trained in MD much as MD businesses do?

- Yes. However, an SIP that includes out-of-state partners (as with an SIP of only in-state partners) will have to show the benefit to Maryland students, workers, and prospective workers and to Maryland's economy.

Why would industry partner with a nonprofit if only the convener will be awarded the \$25K grant?

- The Planning Grant Applicant Group must include at least two diverse partner organizations that are not industry members. In other words, industry must collaborate with at least two other types of organizations (for example, maybe a nonprofit training group and a Community College) in order to apply for Planning Grant funding. The actual use of the PG funds will be determined by the Lead Applicant and Convener to implement a well-thought out planning process. To that end, PG funds will be used to support and advance the planning process.

When making IG awards, will there be a preference given to Planning Grant awardees?

- No. All IG proposals, which will primarily consist of the SIP Workforce Training Plans, will have to respond to the same IG Solicitation requirements.

What will be the minimum and maximum IG award amount?

- DLLR’s determination of IG Award amounts will depend upon several factors, including, but not limited to: the number and strength of IG Applications received, the amount of funding required for individual WTPs, and the funds available at the time of Award determination.

How many years for use of IG awards?

- The Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan (WTP) that the Implementation Grant will fund may be implemented over, *at most*, a three year period. However, there must be justification for this type of extended timeframe. The IG Solicitation will require SIPs to ensure that at least some of the training and outcomes related to the WTP are implemented in the first year or two of the plan.

Page 7 of the application lists the eligibility entities who can serve as Lead Applicant. “Local government” is listed as an eligible agency. Would the Department consider a local school district to fall under the “local government” heading?

- No, based upon the statute, a local school district may be a partner in a Strategic Industry Partnership, but it cannot be a Lead Applicant.

For grant proposal budgets and mileage calculations, do you know the date, location and length (all day or half day) of the mandatory January conference?

- We expect to provide this information prior to the November 12.

Is the convener an individual or an organization?

- The Convener may be an individual or an organization. The key is that the Convener be an individual or entity that has credibility with industry and the trust of a diverse set of program partners and the ability to allow industry to chart its course and at the same time, balance the interests of all potential partners. The Convener should also be able to take on the project management functions of the SIP.

I am writing to request clarification of the following statement in Section 3.1 Background and Purpose, 4th bullet: Foster better coordination between the public and private sectors and the workforce, economic development and education partners around the State.

The word “between” suggests two groups – “between A and B”. So here A is “public and private sectors” and B is “workforce, economic development and education partners.”

However, in my mind, the partners named in B are already in the public and private sector (group A), so I don't understand where better coordination is being sought.

- One of the purposes of EARN MD is to foster better coordination among all of the partners involved in workforce development, including organizations in the private, public and nonprofit sectors.

I have a client in DE that is using a Delaware training grant and have chosen our services to provide the training. 30% of the employees must reside in DE, but there aren't many other restrictions. The client pays for our service up front, and upon filling out the application and processing, they look to be reimbursed a certain %. Is the MD program similar?

- The IG solicitation will provide additional guidance regarding use of training funds.

Our understanding is that the intent of EARN is to have the solutions be created by industry. Is the intent that the funding be shared by the industry participants?

- In the Planning Grant and the Implementation Grant, enhanced consideration will be given to those proposals that include maximum collaboration through direct financial or in-kind contributions by members of the target industry. Such proposals will be in a stronger position to be awarded EARN MD funding in the PG and IG phases.

On page 23 of the Solicitation, Appendix E, what do you mean by "affiliation?"

- "Affiliation" means the organization represented.

How much can you share about the expected reporting requirements under the implementation grant? What level of reporting will be required beyond standard worker training outputs/outcomes, such as the number of participants, graduates, placements, retention rate, and wage levels?

- The Implementation Grant Solicitation will provide additional guidance regarding outcomes and reporting requirements.

I understand the planning grant application is looking for some evidence of a workforce shortage. Do I understand correctly that all types of data are acceptable - quantitative and qualitative data from both inside firms (like us) and from outside studies?

- Yes. DLLR would like to see a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The data should originate from industry members as well as external sources.

It seems like primary target of EARN is for low-income/low-skill workers, and cybersecurity (or other high tech) doesn't seem to obviously fit in that camp. Am I wrong about this? Should we focus on the more "accessible" portions of cybersecurity work, such as cyber analysts instead of engineers?

- The short answer is NO, the primary target is not solely the training of no and low-skilled workers although that does become one of many priorities at the Implementation Grant Solicitation stage. The **Planning Grant Solicitation** does not include enhanced consideration for low- and no-skilled worker populations. At the **Implementation Grant** stage, there will be such an enhanced consideration. However there are many other enhanced considerations at the IG Stage including “A career advancement component for incumbent workers.” (See Appendix C(2)(a)(i)-(v).) **DLLR is seeking Strategic Industry Partnerships that develop Workforce Training Plans which can be multi-tiered.** If you review Appendix C(3) “*Characteristics of a Strong Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan,*” DLLR emphasizes the following characteristics: a) a variety of skills training for multiple occupations at multiple skills levels, b) career advancement strategies for incumbent workers, c) training and essential workplace skills [*this can be for incumbent workers*], and d) job readiness training to support low or no skilled jobseekers to overcome individual employment barriers. Each of these characteristics will be evaluated in the Implementation Grant Proposal.

October 23 Update

(Questions Received at Oct. 18 Pre-Proposal Conference)

One of the objectives of the EARN Maryland program is employment advancement – who will determine advancement? Will that be left up to the proposer to decide?

- Since training programs will be employer-driven, industry should determine the specific career paths and advancement opportunities. The statute lists some outcome measures that can serve as markers for advancement: wage promotion, a title promotion, credentials. This list is not exhaustive.

If we are a recruiter with partners across several industries, can we apply as one group or would each industry group have to apply separately?

- The recruiting organization would have to become a participant in each industry-specific partnership in order to play a role.

How can we have a Workforce Training Plan ready by November 12, 2013 if we are still gathering partners?

- November 12, 2013 is the deadline for the *Planning Grant (PG) Proposal*. At this time, the Applicant Group must include at least two employers and two other diverse organizations in its partnership. The SIP Workforce Training Plan is not due until March 31, 2014. At that point, your partnership must be more extensive, including additional members from your target industry.

Is the list in Planning Grant Solicitation (2.1.1 – “Lead Applicant”) an all-inclusive list?

- Yes.

Should the Convener be from the target industry?

- It is not required that the Convener be from the target industry. However, in order to be effective, the Convener should have credibility with industry and a diverse set of partners. The ideal Convener will have the credibility and objectivity to let industry partners set their own agenda and chart the course for the partnership, while balancing the interests of all potential partners.

Should we identify just one Convener, or can we have co-Conveners?

- DLLR has specified the requirement of one Convener because that role has worked well in other States in assembling and managing the Partnership. However, if a Lead Applicant believes that a Co-Convener role would work well for its specific Partnership and members, DLLR will accept this as long as Lead Applicant explains why two Conveners, rather than one, is essential to the Partnership and the planning process.

Is it DLLR’s intent to spend the entire \$4.5 million on Planning Grants or will some amount be held back for Implementation Grants?

- Planning Grants will be capped at \$25,000. The bulk of the \$4.5 million EARN Maryland allocation will be awarded for Implementation Grants.

What is the difference between a Planning Grant and an Implementation Grant?

- In short, the Planning Grant provides modest funding for budding Strategic Industry Partnerships to undertake a collaborative and well-thought-out planning process over a three month period that will lead to development of a Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan. The Implementation Grant funds the implementation of the SIP Workforce Training Plans. (IG Solicitation to be released in mid-January; Preview of IG Solicitation is in Appendix C of Planning Grant Solicitation.)

Should Partnerships be limited to one industry?

- Yes.

Are for-profit workforce companies able to partner?

- Yes.

Will reviewers give feedback to applicants of rejected Planning Grant proposals?

- Yes.

Can a copy of the PowerPoint presentation be made available?

- Yes, it is available at: <http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/earn/earnprebidconf.pdf>, and can be accessed via the EARN Maryland page at www.earn.maryland.gov.

Once the Planning Grant Proposals are submitted, will there be efforts to combine “like approaches” when feasible?

- Yes. DLLR will review all Planning Grant proposals to determine where like industry and regions may be able to combine.

Do partners need to be exclusive to one proposal/Partnership?

- No. Partners may participate in more than one proposal and/or Partnership.

What will be the timetable for Implementation Grants?

- The IG Grant Solicitation will be released in mid- January. Strategic Industry Workforce Training Plans, the response to the IG Solicitation, will be due by March 31, 2014.

Will proposals that create opportunities for employment but are not typical training be considered (e.g., transportation, recruiting tools)?

- Yes.

How detailed should the SIP Workforce Training Plan be in regards to specific curriculum components for the training topics identified?

- The Implementation Grant Solicitation will require some specifics regarding curriculum.

October 18 Update

1. How will EARN MD FY 14 funding be awarded?

In FY 14, there will be a two-phase competitive process: **Planning Grants** and **Implementation Grants***

- **Planning Grant**: Modest funds will be awarded to Planning Grant Applicant Groups to:
 - a) Bring together a strong Partnership of industry and other diverse organization members -- an emerging Strategic Industry Partnership;
 - b) Identify an industry's high-priority skills and workforce needs based on data and employers' experiences; and
 - c) Develop accurate skills training and applied education solutions to address the workforce needs as defined by the industry – Strategic Industry Partnership (SIP) Workforce Training Plans.
- **Implementation Grant**: Funds will be awarded to Strategic Industry Partnerships to implement SIP Workforce Training Plans.

*Planning and Implementation Grant Solicitations will be competitive, open solicitation processes.

2. Do Planning Grant (PG) Awardees automatically receive Implementation Grant (IG) Funds?

- No. PG awardees will have to apply for IG Funds through the competitive IG Solicitation process.
- The final Work Product of the Planning Grant – the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan – should conform to the Solicitation requirements for the Implementation Grant.

3. When will the Implementation Grant Solicitation be released?

- A full Solicitation for Implementation Grants for Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plans will be issued in early 2014. That Solicitation will be open to all Applicants, including those who did not apply for and those that applied for but did not receive EARN Maryland Planning Grants.

- The IG Solicitation will further detail the requirements of the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan.
- Implementation Grant Proposals will be submitted by March 31, 2014, with Implementation Grants awarded in May, 2014.

Planning Grants

4. What are the Key Elements of a Planning Grant Proposal?

Planning Grant proposals must identify the following:

- PG Applicant Group = at least two employers and two diverse partner entities/organizations at application submittal
- Lead Applicant (also Fiscal Agent for PG)
- Convener
- Target Industry
- Regional focus (preliminary)

5. Who can the Lead Applicant be?

- Employers
- Nonprofits
- Two and four-year institutions of higher education
- Local Workforce Boards
- Industry Associations
- Labor Unions
- Local Governments
- Local and regional economic development entities

The Lead Applicant must be the Fiscal Agent for the Planning Grant.

6. Who are the diverse Partner Organizations that make up the PG Applicant Group?

- Partners can be any of the Lead Applicant organizations (see Q. 4) plus philanthropic organizations, community-based organizations, K-12 programs, other training providers and relevant partners.

- As the PG Applicant Group begins to drill down and identify its industry's critical workforce needs – current and emerging – this group will enlist other potential partners to help develop responsive skills training and applied education and recruitment of the right trainees.

7. What is the Role of the Convener?

- An individual who or organization that starts the dialogue by assembling a shared set of facts about potential target industries and skills gaps and reaches out to potential partners.
- Has credibility with industry and the trust of a diverse set of program partners – and can chart an objective course that balances the interests of all partners.
- Plays a critical project management role, including managing activities, logistics, outreach, coordination and drafting.
- The Lead Applicant may or may not be the Convener.

8. What are the Enhanced Considerations of the PG Process?

- Demonstrated capacity to collaborate.
- Demonstration of well-thought out, industry-driven planning process.
- SIPs that maximize potential of collaboration through direct financial or in-kind industry support.

9. How Much Funding will be awarded to Each Planning Grantee?

- No limit on the number of Planning Grants has been set, but the award amount is capped at \$25,000 per grant.
- Planning Grants will be provided in a lump sum at the time of the award. Any unused funds must be returned to DLLR with the final financial report.
- The number of Planning Grants awarded will be determined by the competitive process and the available funding.

10. Who can be part of a Strategic Industry Partnership?

A Strategic Industry Partnership (“SIP”) is a regional group of some combination of:

- Employers in a target industry
- Nonprofits
- Community-based organizations
- Two and four-year institutions of higher education
- K-12 programs
- Local workforce boards
- Industry associations
- Local governments
- Local or regional economic development agencies
- Labor unions
- Philanthropic organizations
- Other training providers
- Other relevant partners

11. How much detail about the partnership itself is required for a Planning Grant application?

- The application will require identification of **at least two employers** in the designated target industry, **plus at least two other diverse partner entities**. This Applicant Group must jointly agree on and designate one Lead Applicant who will also be the Fiscal Agent for the partnership for the purposes of the Planning Grant.

12. To what degree do partnerships have to be formed at the Planning Grant stage?

- The Strategic Industry Partnership does not have to be fully formed when the Planning Grant application is submitted. One goal of the planning process will be to recruit additional members and expand the partnership.

13. Can there be across-sector Strategic Industry Partnerships?

- The SIPs focus must be on a target industry. A target industry is defined as a group of employers closely linked by a common product or service, workforce skills, similar technologies, supply chains or other economic ties.

14. Can industry associations play a role in a Strategic Industry Partnership?

- Yes. An industry association can play a critical role, especially if it has strong ties to industry members. For example, as the single entity with enough credibility to bring employers to the table, an industry association could be the Convener of the Strategic Industry Partnership

15. Do the employers that are invited into an industry-led partnership have to be located in Maryland?

- No. However, the partnership must describe how that Strategic Industry Partnership will benefit Maryland workers and the State's economy.

16. Does every proposal have to have a low or no-skilled training component?

- This is not required for Planning Grant Applicants given that partnerships are just beginning to form. However, there will be enhanced consideration given to Implementation Grant Proposals that include job readiness and/or skills training for low and no-skilled workers.

17. Can there be a Planning Grant proposal that is just about incumbent workers?

- Yes. However, there will be enhanced consideration given to Implementation Grant Proposals that include job readiness and/or skills training for low and no-skilled workers.

18. Can a region cross state lines?

- Yes, but the training provided must ultimately benefit Maryland workers and/or show an impact on Maryland's economy.

19. Can a plan have only private training providers?

- Yes

20. Do we have to have a Convener?

- Yes. A Convener is a requirement element for all Planning Grant Proposals. At a minimum, the Convener plays a critical project manager role. A preferred Convener also has credibility with industry and the other potential strategic partners.

21. Can my organization be part of more than Planning Grant Applicant Group?

- Yes. An entity may be a member of more than one Planning Grant Applicant Group, and ultimately, more than one Strategic Industry Partnership in a region or regions

22. What's the difference between a Planning Grant Applicant Group and a Strategic Industry Partnership (SIP)?

- A PG Applicant Group is, at a minimum, comprised of two employers and two other types of organizations as described in the PG Solicitation. SIPs are essentially mature PG Applicant Groups. They include a robust group of employers from the target industry and other partners that will be needed to implement the SIP Workforce Training Plan.

23. Is the proposal due date a "rolling" award date?

- No. All Planning Grant proposals are due by November 12, 2013.

Funding

24. Are "matching funds" considered in prioritizing Planning Grant applications?

- Yes. Planning Grant applications will be given enhanced consideration if they can show direct or in-kind contributions by members of the target industry.
- While "matching funds" from other organizations are not an enhanced consideration of the PG, "braiding of other public or philanthropic funding streams or in-kind support" will be an enhanced consideration of the Implementation Grant. (Appendix C of PG Solicitation.)

25. Are resources, such as staff time, equipment and meeting space, considered in-kind contributions?

- Yes.

26. How may Planning Grant funds be used?

- The expected outcome of a Planning Grant is a well-developed Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan. Planning Grant funds are meant to be used in the furtherance of that goal. Eligible expenses may include such items as staff time or consultant services for meeting logistics and facilitation of communication between members of the emerging SIP, travel to the mandatory grantee conference in late January, and drafting of the SIP Workforce Training Plan.

27. May Planning Grant funds be used for advertising or marketing?

- No. Advertising and marketing costs fall outside of the permissible uses of Planning Grant funds.

28. What will the maximum Planning Grant award be? How many Planning Grants do you expect to award?

- While no limit on the number of Planning Grants funded has been set, the award amount is capped at \$25,000 per grant. The number of grants awarded will be determined by the competitive process and the available funding.

29. If awarded Planning Grant funds may be used for consultants, may those consultants be from out of state?

- Yes.

30. What if a Planning Grant doesn't result in a Training Plan?

- If the Strategic Industry Partnership determines in its planning phase that there is insufficient labor market need, the Partnership may choose not to proceed with a SIP Workforce Training Plan. In this event, the Applicant must still provide a final report documenting the planning process, data and experience collection and how the decision was arrived at not to pursue Implementation Grant funding.
- In these instances, DLLR reserves the right to require the Applicant to return that portion of the Planning Grant award that was not expended during the planning process, with expenditure documentation.

31. Under what circumstances will grant funds be returned?

- DLLR will expect all unused grant funds to be returned. If a planning process does not result in a training plan, DLLR reserves the right to require the return of unused grant funds. Likewise, DLLR reserves the right to revoke Planning Grant funding from the recipient entity of any grant and require the return of unspent funds if the goals and timelines consistent with the approved Planning Grant are not met.

32. What is the funding cap for Implementation Grants?

- DLLR is still taking a close look at that question and will provide guidance in the Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals in January 2014.

33. Can government agencies apply for the funds?

- Yes.

34. If we are awarded Planning Grant funds, when is the money disbursed?

- The funding will be disbursed on January 2, 2014.

35. What kind of reporting will we have to submit to show how we have used the money?

- A budget narrative and a completed budget form will be required. Final PG fiscal reporting will also be due by March 31, 2014. Fiscal Oversight will consist of an examination of expenditures as compared to the approved grant budget and the budget narrative provided with the final report. Monthly status reports will be required of Lead Applicants during the three-month planning process.

36. For the Implementation Grants, how long will a SIP have to use the grant funding?

- The timeframe for expending implementation funds will vary depending on the goals of the SIP. DLLR recognizes that some training programs may require multi-year coursework and on-the-job programming. We do expect to provide an outside limit on the timeframes for fund expenditures. This requirement will be provided in the Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals in January 2014.

37. For the Implementation Grants, how long will the SIP have to generate outcomes?

- The timeframes for reporting training and placement outcomes will vary depending on the goals of the SIP. DLLR will require interim reporting of outcomes as appropriate. The specifics of this requirement will be provided in the Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals in January 2014.

38. May Applicants apply for implementation funds at the time the Planning Grant Solicitation is released?

- No. Implementation funds will be awarded separately in response to the Solicitation for Implementation Grant Applications which will be released in January 2014.

39. What sorts of outcomes are expected and how are they measured?

- For the Planning Grants, the outcome measure will be the quality of the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan.

- For Implementation Grants, the outcome measures will include the metrics outlined in the enabling statute: number of participants in the SIP Workforce Training Plan who have obtained a credential or identifiable skill, a new employment position, a title promotion, or a wage promotion. DLLR will be developing additional outcome measures to assess industry return on investment and the impact of the partnership model.