



**Request for Letters of Interest  
For the position of Manufacturing Sector Intermediary within Workforce Connect**

Issue Date: September 13, 2018

DUE DATE: October 4, 2018 at 10 AM EST

**Background**

Cuyahoga County is working hard to close the gap between the need for skilled talent and the need for family-sustaining jobs and careers. Workforce Connect has been created to complement the good work already underway to impact the County's long term growth and vitality. Based on successful models implemented in other major U.S. metro areas, Workforce Connect is an important building block in Cuyahoga County's overall workforce development ecosystem that will help support employers in finding the right skilled talent by creating business-led sector intermediaries. Sector intermediaries will be leaders in coordinating systemic change and in making the workforce ecosystem more efficient and effective through the creation of sector partnerships. Workforce Connect will focus initially on manufacturing and then quickly expand to healthcare and IT over the next three years.

Workforce Connect has evolved from a group of community leaders who, in January 2016, came together to begin a discussion on how to transform Cuyahoga County's workforce system. This group is dubbed the Cuyahoga County Workforce Funders Group (the "Funders Group") and is comprised of top leadership from Cuyahoga County, City of Cleveland, Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board, Team NEO, Greater Cleveland Partnership, Cleveland Foundation, Gund Foundation, Deaconess Foundation, United Way and the Fund for Our Economic Future. The group engaged national expert consultants who conducted research that led to the report "Developing Sector Partnerships in Cuyahoga County: Findings and Recommendations" which can be found [here](#).

The report concludes that sector partnerships have been demonstrated nationally as effective vehicles for creating reliable talent pipelines that address the workforce needs of employers and reduce barriers to employment and career advancement for job seekers. A sector partnership is a dynamic collaboration of a regional group of employers who convene regularly with relevant providers of education, training, and other support services, and with the support of an intermediary, focus on strategies for responding to their common workforce issues and needs. Business-led sector partnerships in Cuyahoga County will create the infrastructure for workforce development activities that will support the alignment of effort and investment; maximize the impact of the available public and private resources; provide clear and accessible avenues for the involvement of all partners and stakeholders; and ensure that workforce initiatives address industry needs in a targeted and strategic manner.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Request for Letters of Interest is to identify organizations that would like to be considered as candidates for the position of the manufacturing sector intermediary. The manufacturing sector intermediary will bring employers and workforce development organizations together to jointly develop solutions for short- and long-term talent needs. The sector intermediary will manage, support and facilitate the partnership by fulfilling the following functions:

- a) Engaging and convening employers and other partners and stakeholders;
- b) Developing and sharing data and expertise;
- c) Coordinating resource development and alignment;
- d) Coordinating communication both internally and externally about the partnership;
- e) Linking the partnership's activities to initiatives and resources of the broader workforce system, including the public system;
- f) Managing projects, staff/contractors and budgets related to the partnership's activities

A successful Intermediary will exhibit a set of behaviors and characteristics that are commensurate with those exhibited by Intermediaries in other successful partnerships throughout the country; see Exhibit A for details. Exhibit A also includes an overview of the criteria for industry readiness and for effective partnerships.

The Funders Group has decided to begin with the manufacturing sector; healthcare and IT will follow. The Funders Group has committed to provide three-year funding totaling \$2,500,000 for the development of and integrated reporting & support for three business-led sector partnerships (one for each sector). Sharing the Intermediary role across more than one organization is acceptable, however one entity will need to identify itself as the lead implementer in the proposal. To be eligible to receive funding, the lead implementer must be either a non-profit or public entity or on track to becoming one. This Request for Letters of Interest is focused exclusively on the manufacturing sector.

## **Response**

If you are interested in the role of manufacturing intermediary, please provide a Letter of Interest. Your LOI should reference the elements in Exhibit A and should address the following:

1. Why is your organization interested in becoming the sector intermediary for manufacturing? Include in your response a comment on the success you hope to achieve as Intermediary.
2. What is your experience collaborating with influential and credible employer leaders that have a desire to address the industry's workforce challenges?
3. What is your experience collaborating with entities within the workforce development system such as providers of education and training (including those that serve Job seekers)?
4. What is your familiarity with the manufacturing industry's operational and labor market realities, challenges, and barriers? Please reference data from the report entitled "Aligning Opportunities" written by Team NEO which can be found [here](#).
5. What is your understanding of and experience with the challenges faced by job seekers and incumbent workers, many of whom are disadvantaged, to accessing employment and career advancement?
6. Provide a brief overview of your organization as well as any other organizations with whom you are co-applying. Clearly identify the organization designated as the lead implementer and confirm its status as either a non-profit or public sector entity.
7. Provide name, title and contact information (address, phone, and e-mail) for the individual who will act as the principal contact for the organization.

The Funders Group will review all LOIs and subsequently invite Requests for Proposals in the fall 2018. Letters of Interest for the manufacturing sector intermediary position are due on October 4, 2018 by 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.

A phone conference call on September 20 from 2-3 pm EST will be conducted to review the LOI expectations, address any LOI clarifications required, and to answer any questions regarding the Team NEO "Aligning Opportunities" report. You can submit questions in advance of the phone conference to Carolyn Cleveland at [workforceconnect@thefundneo.org](mailto:workforceconnect@thefundneo.org); questions are requested by end of day September 18. Your questions will be compiled and addressed both during the September 20 phone conference and via the Workforce Connect website. Dial-in will be 877-885-3221; passcode: 9127135.

Letters of Interest should not exceed 5 pages (8 ½" x 11"). Respondents must provide 2 copies their Letters of Interest. The first is an electronic pdf copy sent via email to:

Deborah Vespy, Chair, Workforce Funders Group  
Attn: Carolyn Cleveland  
Fund for our Economic Future  
[workforceconnect@thefundneo.org](mailto:workforceconnect@thefundneo.org)

Respondents should mail a second copy of their Letter of Interest to:

Deborah Vespy, Chair, Workforce Funders Group  
Attn: Carolyn Cleveland  
Fund for our Economic Future  
4415 Euclid Ave #203  
Cleveland, OH 44103

In summary please make note of these key dates:

- September 20 2-3 pm EST phone conference to address your questions, open to the public. Dial-in will be 877-885-3221; passcode: 9127135
- October 4 @ 10 am EST Letter of Interest due
- Fall 2018 Distribution of Manufacturing Sector Intermediary RFP

## Exhibit A: Elements of Capacity for Sector Intermediaries

Below is an excerpt from the document “Developing Sector Partnerships in Cuyahoga County: Findings and Recommendations.” The behaviors, characteristics, and attributes below constitute best practice. Your LOI response should in particular reflect the “Elements of Capacity for Sector Partnership Intermediaries” (third column).

Industry Readiness for Sector Partnership Development	Elements of Effectiveness for Sector Partnerships	Elements of Capacity for Sector Partnership Intermediaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <u>Influential and credible employer leaders</u> that support sector strategies;</li> <li>b) <u>Consensus on the industry’s workforce challenges and skills gap</u>, and a commitment to address them collaboratively;</li> <li>c) <u>Well-defined career pathways</u> and career maps in the industry;</li> <li>d) <u>Meaningful job-related proficiencies and credentials</u> (up to and including postsecondary degrees), effective systems for assessing and verifying qualifications for use in hiring and/or promotion, and the commitment of employers to consistently engage with these systems as part of hiring and promotion;</li> <li>e) <u>Education and training providers</u>: Adequate and accessible sources of high quality employment-related education and industry-specific job skills training;</li> <li>f) <u>Track record of collaboration</u> among employers on workforce and/or other issues of mutual concern.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <u>Active employer leadership</u> with regard to the partnership’s vision, strategic direction, program design, and financial sustainability;</li> <li>b) <u>Return on investment</u>: Clear articulation of the value-added to employers and return on investment (ROI) that drives employer engagement and support;</li> <li>c) <u>Dual customer approach</u> (i.e., for the benefit of employers and workers/job seekers) with the long-range goal of regional prosperity;</li> <li>d) <u>Family-sustaining careers and pathways</u>: Commitment to creating and sustaining accessible career pathways, and a related commitment to address issues of job quality;</li> <li>e) <u>Data management capacity</u>: Commitment and capacity to collect, compile, and synthesize labor market data for use in program planning and evaluation, partner recruitment, and advocacy;</li> <li>f) <u>Productive links to the broader workforce system</u> to enhance services and leverage resources as well as links to other systems including but not limited to career and technical education; K-12 education; 2-year and 4-year colleges; community-based training providers; labor-management partnerships; human services providers and funders; and other relevant partners;</li> <li>g) <u>Diverse revenues</u> to sustain partnership programs and operations;</li> <li>h) <u>System change</u>: An understanding of the systemic issues that impact the industry, and the commitment and capacity to promote systems change, both public policy and stakeholder practice;</li> <li>i) <u>Diverse and aligned partners</u> engaged in the full range of funding, programming, advocacy, and outreach, and a committed to aligning effort and investment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <u>Employer relationships</u>: Strong relationships with key employer leaders in the sector;</li> <li>b) <u>Industry knowledge</u>: Familiarity with the target industry’s operational and labor market realities, challenges, and barriers;</li> <li>c) <u>Understanding workers’ barriers</u>: Familiarity with the challenges faced by job seekers and incumbent workers, many of whom are disadvantaged, to accessing employment and career advancement, and the proven responses to these challenges;</li> <li>d) <u>Knowledge of the public workforce and human service systems</u>, including federal, state, and local policies, requirements, administrative entities, and funding streams supporting workforce development and support services, and the processes and relationships necessary to access those resources;</li> <li>e) <u>Strong relationships with</u> a diverse range of workforce training providers and other potential partners;</li> <li>f) <u>Track record of partnership management and capacity</u>, including convening and managing sector partnerships or other collaboratives, and aligning investment and effort within such partnerships;</li> <li>g) <u>Management excellence</u>: Capacity and track record of effective and entrepreneurial project and organizational management, communications, budgeting, and revenue development.</li> </ul>