

Last Chance Looms For Workforce Training Grant

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If you could receive thousands of dollars to train your employees just by filling out an application, would you do it? If your answer is "yes", you might want to do it soon. The final deadline for available Workforce Training Funds is targeted for March 25, 2002. After that, these funds may no longer be available.

What is the Workforce Training Fund?

The Workforce Training Fund is a state fund financed entirely by Massachusetts employers, and enacted into law in July, 1998. Its purpose is to provide resources to Massachusetts businesses and workers to train current and newly hired employees and managers.



Program Highlights

- Maximum amount of grant is \$250,000.
- Training grants are awarded to employers, employer organizations, labor organizations and training providers.
- Companies of any size are eligible to apply.
- Training programs must be completed within two years. All trainees must be employed in Massachusetts. (They are not required to live in the state.)
- Grants must be matched dollar-for-dollar by the applicant and its partners, if any. The match can be in cash or in-kind.

What are allowable training costs under a Workforce Training Fund grant?

Allowable training costs include those expenses that will occur during the course of the training grant period. They may include costs for training providers, curriculum development, tuition, and supplies and equipment used for the training. Other training related expenses may be requested through the grant; however, the costs for occupational licensing and costs for equipment that exceed 20% of the total grant are specifically discouraged.

There is no minimum or maximum amount that the program will invest per employee, but applications will be judged on cost effectiveness. Employees' wages are not an allowable training cost under the grant. They may be used to help meet the dollar-for-dollar matching requirement for grant funds.

How will grants be approved?

Grants are awarded by the Division of Employment and Training (DET). Applications are reviewed by the Workforce Training Fund Advisory Panel, a board comprised of leaders from the

business and labor communities. Decisions will be made approximately 60 days after the application deadline.

What type of training is funded?

The preferred types of training are programs which enhance the skills, earning capability, and career development of line employees. Technical training is viewed favorably, such as learning to effectively use Bellhawk systems. Using grant funds for Bellhawk will provide a substantial return on the investment in the system because the training will result in a faster ramp-up time and increased long term performance of system utilization. This benefit is at no out-of-pocket cost to the fund recipient. Training in computer skills, ISO, Kaizen, Continuous Process Improvement, and Performance Management have also been funded. The grants have also been all types of non-technical training, including project management, leadership skills, and customer service training.

How do I know what training my company requires?

The Department of Employment and Training suggests identifying training vendors prior to submitting the grant application. Often, the preferred vendor, will do a needs assessment as a customer courtesy. The needs assessment usually involves interviews with several potential trainees to target the specific learning objectives.

What is the down-side of getting a grant?

The application process can be labor-intensive. The bulk of the administrative work comes at the beginning and end of the grant period. The application requires several pages of narrative describing the company, its training goals, and expected results. Some accounting skill is required to determine the "in-kind" company match, a dollar-for-dollar match in expense categories such as employees wages during training, training coordination, overhead for training facilities, and other related expenses. This all seems well worth the time and effort when the first check shows up in the mail. Then, over the two year grant period, training expenses must be tracked and receipts maintained. Quarterly progress reports are submitted, and then more funds are disbursed. A final report is submitted at the end of the training, at which point a final payment is received by the applicant.

What is the payback on the time and effort of applying for the grant? Firstly, a substantial amount of money for employee development. The amount of funds is determined by such factors as company revenue, number of employees, cost per trainee and in-kind contribution amounts.

Funded companies have experienced results in the areas of reduced scrap and rework, reduced contract review time, improved project management, enhanced employee morale, increased order entry efficiency, and improved productivity.

What should I do next?

Visit the DET website at detma.org/workforce

Download the grant application. (Note: Do not used the Technical Grant. This is for a needs assessment, not training.)

Select an internal company coordinator. This person should be on the management team and have the time for the administrative grant application work.

Contact Helmi Pucino, President of The Pucino Group, at (413) 253-4154 or pucino@mediaone.net, for advise or next steps and help with:

- Identifying your training needs

- Writing a winning grant application
- Determining in-kind contribution guidelines
- Navigating the bureaucratic channels of the DET.
- Get started now. The next and quite possibly final deadline is in February or March 2002. However, it takes time to assess training needs and create a successful application.
- Review the Workforce Training Fund website at www.detma.org/workforce.

About the author of this article

Helmi Pucino is president of The Pucino Group, an organizational consulting firm in Amherst, MA. She has over 20 years of experience in consulting to corporations and government in Continuous Process Improvement and employee training.

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