



## MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

### Winter 2023 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals

*Issue Date: December 4, 2023*

## **Employment Advancement Right Now EARN Maryland**

### **NOTICE**

A Prospective Applicant that has received this document from the EARN Maryland Website or that has received this document from a source other than the EARN Maryland Website and that wishes to assure receipt of any changes or additional materials related to this Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals should go to <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/earn/> and subscribe to the EARN Maryland mailing list.

**Minority Business Enterprises Are Encouraged to Respond to this Solicitation.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) Maryland is the State's nationally recognized workforce solution. EARN Maryland is an industry-led initiative meant to ensure that employers have the talent they need to compete and grow, while preparing Marylanders for meaningful careers. The program encourages collaboration, funding Strategic Industry Partnerships comprised of employers, non-profits, higher education, local workforce investment boards, Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors, and local governments. Partnerships provide in-demand, relevant training to Maryland's workforce based upon industry identified needs.

EARN Maryland builds upon the Moore-Miller administration's priorities of connecting Marylanders to jobs while increasing the State's economic competitiveness. Generally, EARN Maryland is designed to:

- Address business workforce needs by focusing on industry sector strategies that seek long-term solutions to sustained skills gaps and personnel shortages;
- Address the needs of workers by creating formal career paths to good jobs, and sustaining or growing middle class jobs;
- Encourage mobility for Maryland's most hard-to-serve jobseekers through targeted job readiness training; and
- Foster better coordination between the public, private, and non-profit sectors and the workforce, economic development, and education partners around the State.

**STATE OF MARYLAND**

**Maryland Department of Labor**

**KEY INFORMATION SUMMARY SHEET**

**Solicitation for Grant Proposals:** Employment Advancement Right Now

**Solicitation Issue Date:** **Monday, December 4, 2023 at 4 p.m.**

**Solicitation Issuing Office:** Maryland Department of Labor

**Grant Officer:** Mary Keller  
Special Grants Administrator  
1100 North Eutaw Street, Room 108  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
**E-mail:** [mary.keller@maryland.gov](mailto:mary.keller@maryland.gov)

**Proposals are to be sent to:** Via e-mail to Mary Keller at the email above.

**Submission of Questions:** All questions pertaining to this Solicitation should be submitted via email to [mary.keller@maryland.gov](mailto:mary.keller@maryland.gov) by **Thursday, January 18, 2024**. All questions will be answered in a timely manner, and relevant questions will be posted to the EARN Maryland website at <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/earn/>.

**Closing Date and Time:** **Friday, March 15th at 11:59 p.m.**

**Grant Duration:** July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026

**Pre-Proposal Conference:** A virtual Pre-Proposal conference will be held on **Thursday, December 14th at 1:00 p.m.** For call-in information, please contact Mary Keller at the email above.

**PROSPECTIVE APPLICANT FEEDBACK FORM**

To help us improve the quality of EARN Maryland Solicitations, and to make our process more responsive and business friendly, please provide comments and suggestions regarding this Solicitation. Please return your comments with your response. If you have chosen not to respond to this Solicitation, please email this completed form to the attention of the Grant Officer (see Key Information Summary Sheet on previous page for contact information).

**Title: Winter 2023 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals**

1. If you have chosen not to respond to this solicitation, please indicate the reason(s) below:
  - Other commitments preclude our participation at this time
  - Specifications are too restrictive (Explain in REMARKS section)
  - The scope of work is beyond our present capacity
  - Doing business with the State is simply too complicated. (Explain in REMARKS section)
  - We cannot be competitive. (Explain in REMARKS section)
  - Time allotted for completion of the Proposal is insufficient
  - Other

2. Please expand upon any of the reasons checked above.

REMARKS:

Organization Name:	
Date:	
Contact Person:	
Phone Number:	
E-mail Address:	

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**To view and download all required appendices, please visit [www.earn.maryland.gov](http://www.earn.maryland.gov).**

## **SECTION 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

**1.1.1** The Maryland Department of Labor (Labor) is issuing this Solicitation for Grant Proposals from qualified organizations to implement Workforce Training Plans that meet employers' workforce needs, advance the skills of Maryland workers, grow the State's economy, and increase sustainable employment for working families.

**1.1.2** This Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals targets all industries.

### **1.2 Abbreviations and Definitions**

For purposes of this Solicitation for Grant Proposals, the following abbreviations or terms have the meanings indicated below:

- 1.2.1 Barriers to Employment** - Hinder an individual's ability to participate in the labor force. Examples of barriers to employment include lack of reliable transportation, homelessness, limited work history, and criminal justice involvement.
- 1.2.2 Certificate of Good Standing (also known as a "Certificate of Status" or "COGS")** – 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 that the entity is delinquent in tax payments. Government entities and community colleges are ineligible to obtain a COGS.
- 1.2.3 Credential** – A recognized educational diploma, certificate or degree, occupational license, apprenticeship certificate, industry-recognized credential, or award for skills attainment and completion, issued by an approved training provider in the State or third-party credential provider.
- 1.2.4 Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) Maryland** – A nationally-recognized, state-funded, competitive workforce and economic development grant program and the funding source for this Solicitation.
- 1.2.5 Essential Skills** – Also known as soft skills, these are the skills one needs for learning, work, and life. Examples of essential skills include, but are not limited to, skills related to professionalism, problem-solving, timeliness, interpersonal communication, and customer service.
- 1.2.6 Family Sustaining Wage** – Income that reflects Maryland Living Wage standards, but also takes into consideration household factors such as number of people in the home, number of wage earners, number and ages of children, and domicile location within the State, and involves employment that will be ongoing, not short term.

- 1.2.7 Fiscal Agent** – Individual within the Lead Applicant organization who is responsible for performing all financial management duties of the grant and accepts responsibility for the proper use of grant funds, managing and documenting grant expenditures (including disbursement to Subrecipients), and submitting financial reports for the grant.
- 1.2.8 Grant Officer** – The State representative who will manage the resulting grant awards. The Department may change the Grant Officer at any time by written notice to the Lead Applicant.
- 1.2.9 High-Demand Occupation** – An occupation that has a significant presence within the target industry, is in demand by employers, and *pays or leads to* payment of a family-sustaining wage.
- 1.2.10 Identifiable Skill** – The attainment of proficiency in a specific work-related skill that is likely to lead to future job advancement and improvement in an individual’s earning potential.
- 1.2.11 Implementation Grant (IG)** – Funding to implement a Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan.
- 1.2.12 Incumbent Worker** – For the purposes of the EARN Maryland Program, this is an individual employed in the target industry.
- 1.2.13 Job Readiness Training** – Training for the purpose of assisting and supporting low- and no-skilled workers in overcoming individual barriers to employment and developing the skills required by industry necessary to maintain employment and to qualify for skills training opportunities. Job readiness training may include development of professional skills, such as communication and problem-solving, time management, occupational skills development, GED® preparation, literacy advancement, and financial stability services, including financial coaching and credit counseling.
- 1.2.14 Job Skills Training** – Job skills training is defined as vocational training that results in an identifiable job skill or credential. An identifiable skill is the obtainment of proficiency in/of a specific work-related skill that is likely to lead to future job advancement and improvement in an individual’s earning potential. Proficiency can be defined by industry standards or a target industry’s own statement of proficiency with justification.
- 1.2.15 Job Placement** – Employment that is at least 30 hours or more per week, with wages greater than or equal to Maryland’s minimum wage per hour, and is unsubsidized.
- 1.2.16 Lead Applicant** – The entity designated by the Partnership to serve as the Fiscal Agent for the partnership for the purposes of the Implementation Grant. The Lead Applicant will also be responsible for managing the grant and all aspects of implementing the Workforce Training Plan.
- 1.2.17 Local Workforce Development Board** – A Local Workforce Development Board sets policy for the local workforce system in one of thirteen Local Workforce Development Areas (“LWDAs”) certified by the Governor of the State of Maryland. The Board coordinates workforce activities to address employer needs, increase employment, retention and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skills attainment by participants, and, as a result, improve the quality of the workforce and enhance the productivity of the State.

**1.2.18 Participant Management** – This is the recruitment to placement framework, including participant pipeline development, recruitment and screening, career coaching, case management, wrap around services, and job placement.

**1.2.19 Pre-Apprenticeship** – Pre-Apprenticeship programs provide instruction and training to increase math, literacy, and other vocational and pre-vocational skills needed to gain entry into a Registered Apprenticeship program. Implementing Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship models that are aligned with the needs of key industry sectors creates opportunities for students, job seekers, and workers along the talent pipeline. To meet the official definition of Pre-Apprenticeship, a program must have a documented partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship to ensure Pre-Apprenticeship graduates are able to successfully enroll in a Registered Apprenticeship program upon completion. Pre-Apprenticeship programs generally consist of the following:

- Training and curriculum that aligns with the skill needs of employers in the local economy;
- Access to educational and career counseling and other supportive services, directly or indirectly;
- Hands-on, meaningful learning activities that are connected to education and training activities, such as exploring career options, and understanding how the skills acquired through coursework can be applied toward a future career;
- Opportunities to attain at least one industry-recognized credential; and
- A partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program that assists in placing individuals who complete the Pre-Apprenticeship program into a Registered Apprenticeship program.

**1.2.20 Project Activities** – Project Activities include 1) Grant Management, 2) Workforce Training Plan Implementation, 3) Participant Management, and 4) Partnership Management. (See Section 3.1.5.)

**1.2.21 Registered Apprenticeship** – Registered Apprenticeship is a proven model of job preparation that combines paid On-The-Job Learning (OJL) with Related Instruction to progressively increase workers’ skill levels and wages. Registered Apprenticeship is a business-driven model that provides an effective way for employers to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled workers. It allows employers to develop and apply industry standards to training programs, thereby increasing productivity and the quality of the workforce. As an “earn and learn” strategy, Registered Apprenticeship offers job seekers immediate employment opportunities that provide sustainable wages and advancement along a career pathway. Graduates of Registered Apprenticeship programs receive nationally recognized, portable credentials, and their training may be applied towards further post-secondary education. All Registered Apprenticeship programs consist of the following five core components:

- **Business Involvement** – Businesses are the foundation of every Registered Apprenticeship program. The skills needed for workforce success, provided through business input, form the core of the model. Businesses must play an active role in building Registered Apprenticeship programs and are involved in every step of their design and execution.
- **OJL** – Every Registered Apprenticeship program includes structured OJL. Companies hire Apprentices and provide hands-on training from an experienced mentor. This training is developed by mapping the skills and knowledge that the Apprentice must learn over the course



of the program to become fully proficient at the job. In Maryland, OJL must consist of no less than 2,000 hours of full-time, W-2 paid employment per year of the Apprenticeship and must take place at the work site under the direction of a highly skilled journeyworker.

- **Related Instruction (classroom style training)** – Apprentices receive Related Instruction or classroom style training that complements the OJL. This instruction helps refine the technical and academic skills that apply to the job. Related Instruction may be provided by a community college, technical school or college, an Apprenticeship training school, nonprofit, community-based organization, industry, labor organization, business association, or by the business itself. The instruction may be provided at the school, online, or at the work site. Registered Apprenticeships must include at least 144 hours of Related Instruction per year of the Apprenticeship.
- **Rewards for Skill Gains** – Apprentices receive increases in pay as their skills and knowledge increase. Progressive wage gains reward and motivate Apprentices as they advance through training and become more productive and skilled at their job.
- **National Occupational Credential** – Every graduate of a Registered Apprenticeship program receives a nationally recognized credential, referred to as a Certificate of Completion. This portable credential signifies that the apprentice is fully qualified to successfully perform an occupation. Many Registered Apprenticeship programs, particularly in high-growth industries such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and transportation, also offer interim credentials as Apprentices master skills as part of their career pathway.

#### **1.2.22 School-to-Apprenticeship Registered Apprenticeship (STA RA) for High School**

**Youth:** STA RA is a program within RA that allows 16-17 year olds to participate while still in high school and continue after graduation with full credit given for the high school portion. STA RA apprentices receive Related Instruction as defined in the RA Sponsor’s “Standards of Apprenticeship” and all are registered with the Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program. STA RA is considered the gold standard of apprenticeship for youth in Maryland. It requires the most of employers, students and schools. For those that can meet the standard, it yields the most promising results.

**1.2.23 Region** – Under EARN Maryland, the definition of “region” is flexible. It can be determined by industry labor markets that are already known or understood, rough concentrations of populations, commuter patterns or industry hubs. A region can cut across Local Workforce Development Areas (“LWDAs”) and geo-political boundaries (city, county, regional). Pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the State designated regions for workforce development. Five regions have been designated. They are the:

- **Central Region** consisting of Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Cecil, Harford, Anne Arundel, Carroll, and Howard Counties;
- **Western Region** consisting of Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties;
- **Eastern Shore Region** consisting of Queen Anne’s, Kent, Dorchester, Worcester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Caroline Counties;
- **Southern Maryland Region** consisting of Calvert, Charles and St. Mary’s Counties; and
- **Capital Region** consisting of Frederick, Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties.

While not required, applicants are encouraged to utilize regional designs when necessary and appropriate.

**1.2.24 Solicitation for Grant Proposals (Solicitation)** – This Solicitation for Implementation Grant

Proposals under the EARN Maryland Program.

**1.2.25 Strategic Industry Partnership or “Partnership”** – A collaboration that brings together a regional group that may include employers, nonprofits, community-based organizations, two and four year institutions of higher education, local workforce boards, local governments, regional or local economic development entities, local departments of social services, labor unions, K-12 Programs, industry associations, philanthropic organizations, other training providers and other relevant partners to identify common workforce needs for high-demand occupations within a target industry and develop and implement industry strategies to meet these common workforce needs and shortages.

**1.2.26 Subrecipient** – Any person or entity that will receive EARN Maryland funding through the Lead Applicant and is not a direct employee of the Lead Applicant, is a subrecipient. Subrecipients must be members of the Strategic Industry Partnership and are accountable to the Lead Applicant for use of the funds provided. Entities that receive EARN Maryland funding EXCLUSIVELY for the purposes of providing general supplies (i.e., pens, paper), travel and/or one-time facility rental are not Subrecipients.

**1.2.27 Supportive Services** - Supportive services provide financial assistance to participants who would not otherwise be able to participate in a program. Grantees may offer supportive services to eligible participants to assist with transportation, uniforms, tools, work or training equipment, child or dependent care, stipends, graduation fees, union fees, and/or clothing for interviews or job fairs. Other supportive services may be allowable with Labor’s prior approval.

**1.2.28 Workforce Training Plan (WTP)** – Plan prepared by the Strategic Industry Partnership to address skills shortages identified by the industry partners and which outlines recruitment, training and placement strategies. The plan may also include job readiness training, other career preparation and/or industry identified essential workplace skills.

### 1.3 Number and Amount of Grant Awards

**1.3.1** There is no set limit on the number of Implementation Grants that will be funded.

**1.3.2** Labor’s determination of award amounts will depend on several factors including but not limited to:

- the number and strength of proposals received,
- the amount of funding deemed reasonable for individual plans, and
- the funds available at the time of award.

**1.3.3** Funding requests should not exceed \$150,000 over the grant period.

### 1.4 Grant Duration

**1.4.1** The grant period lasts for *up to* two years from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026. Applicants can request shorter grant periods and may write a budget that reflects a time period shorter than two years. The Department strongly recommends that plans contain training that will commence within the first year of funding.

**1.4.2** Grant funding is subject to the release of associated State appropriation by the Budget Committees.

## 1.5 Grant Officer

The sole point of contact in the State for purposes of this Solicitation for management of all grants awarded is the Grant Officer at the address listed below:

Mary Keller  
Special Grants Administrator  
1100 North Eutaw Street, Room 108  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
E-mail: [mary.keller@maryland.gov](mailto:mary.keller@maryland.gov)

The Department may change the Grant Officer at any time by written notice.

## 1.6 Proposals Due (Closing) Date and Time

Proposals, in the number and form set forth in Section 4, “Proposal Submission Format” must be received at the address listed on the Key Information Summary Sheet, **no later than 11:59 p.m.** local time on **Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024**, in order to be considered. Submissions received after this date and time will not be considered.

## 1.7 Grant Award Basis

Final approval for each grant awarded shall be determined by the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Labor, based on the recommendations of the Review Committee, and taking into account other factors, such as geographic distribution and industry diversity. (See Section 5, “Grant Evaluation and Selection”)

## 1.8 Funding Authority

Funds for this initiative have been allocated in the FY 2025 state budget and is being administered pursuant to the Maryland Annotated Code (2013), “Labor & Employment,” §11-701 *et. seq.*

# **SECTION 2 – ELIGIBILITY**

## 2.1 Purpose and Goals of EARN Maryland

**2.1.1** The purpose of the EARN Maryland Program is to create industry-led partnerships, to advance the skills of the State’s workforce, grow the State’s economy, and increase sustainable employment for working families. It is a competitive workforce and economic development grant program that is both industry-led and regional in focus.

It is flexible and innovative, designed to ensure that Maryland employers have the talent they need to compete and grow while providing targeted education and skills training to Maryland workers. This includes both career advancement strategies for incumbent workers and support for individuals with specific barriers to employment.

**2.1.2** The EARN Maryland Program is specifically designed to fulfill the following goals:

- Address business workforce needs by focusing on industry sector strategies that seek long-term

solutions to sustained skills gaps and personnel shortages;

- Address the needs of workers by creating formal career paths to good jobs, and sustaining or growing middle class jobs;
- Encourage mobility for Maryland’s most hard-to-serve jobseekers through targeted job readiness training; and
- Foster better coordination among the public and private sectors and workforce, economic development, and education partners around the State.

**2.1.3** To achieve these goals, EARN Maryland requires the formation of Strategic Industry Partnerships. These are regional collaborations of stakeholders led by industry (groups of employers in the same industry) that also must include at least two of any of the following kinds of organizations (also known as Diverse Entities for the purposes of this Solicitation): Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors, nonprofits, community-based organizations, two and four year institutions of higher education, local workforce boards, local governments, regional or local economic development entities, local departments of social services, labor unions, K-12 Programs, industry associations, philanthropic organizations, other training providers and other relevant partners.

The purpose of these partnerships is to create and implement strategic plans that meet employers’ workforce needs, advance the skills of Maryland workers, grow the State’s economy, and increase sustainable employment for working families.

## **2.2 Purpose of Implementation Grants**

**2.2.1** EARN Maryland funding for Implementation Grants will be awarded to support regional Strategic Industry Partnerships in implementing Workforce Training Plans designed to address industry workforce skills gaps and employ or advance workers. These plans will:

- Support Strategic Industry Partnerships in a target industry to include multiple employers and a diverse array of other partners;
- Be driven by industry leaders, identify critical skill gaps and other workforce needs and develop industry-led strategies to meet those workforce needs, particularly in high-demand occupations;
- Provide industry-led, responsive and innovative training programs aimed at improving employment opportunities at all skill levels including, but not limited to, job readiness, barrier-removal or academic remediation strategies and/or career advancement for incumbent workers;
- As needed, develop any other human resource or management strategies that are responsive to industry partnerships’ critical occupations and skills shortages.

**2.2.2** Implementation Grant Proposals should seek to create Workforce Training Plans that support most, if not all, of the following goals:

- Move no-skilled or low-skilled workers into better jobs utilizing a blend of relevant occupational training, job readiness, barrier-removal and/or academic remediation strategies;
- Include career advancement strategies, particularly for incumbent workers;
- Remain sustainable in the absence of State funding;
- Maximize collaboration through direct financial or in-kind contributions by members of the target industry; and,
- Include braiding of other public or philanthropic funding streams or in-kind support.

## 2.3 Eligible Applicants

- 2.3.1 The Lead Applicant may be any of the following:
- Employer
  - Nonprofit organization
  - Registered Apprenticeship Sponsor
  - Two or four-year institution of higher education
  - Local Workforce Board
  - Industry association
  - Labor union
  - Local government
  - Local or regional economic development entity
  - Other relevant partner entities at Labor’s discretion
- 2.3.2 The Lead Applicant must be the Fiscal Agent for this Grant.
- 2.3.3 If the Lead Applicant 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 Strategic Industry Partnership that includes out-of-state partners will have to show the benefit to Maryland students, workers and prospective workers as well as Maryland's employers and economy.
- 2.3.4 An eligible Strategic Industry Partnership must include at least five employers and representatives from two diverse entities, listed in **Section 1.2.25**. Each entity must be identified in the Strategic Industry Partnership Membership List on the **Cover Page of the Narrative (Appendix A)**. If the Lead Applicant represents multiple employers, for instance, an industry association or Registered Apprenticeship Sponsor, five employers must be identified, and submit Letters of Support.
- 2.3.5 An entity may be a member of more than one Strategic Industry Partnership.

## 2.4 Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan Expenses – Eligible and Ineligible

- 2.4.1 All expenses requested to be paid for with EARN Maryland grant funds must be expenses of the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan and its implementation. The need for, and reasonableness, of all costs must be fully justified and explained in the Budget Summary and Narrative Form (**Appendix D**).
- 2.4.2 Eligible expenses may include reasonable project management costs. All proposed project management expenses must be fully explained and justified in the Budget Summary and Narrative Form (**Appendix D**).
- 2.4.3 The following are costs that shall not be covered by EARN Maryland funds:
- Building construction
  - Website development or maintenance. (Development of web content may be allowed in certain circumstances.)
- 2.4.4 Costs that are not allowable from EARN Maryland funds may be allocated as direct support or in-kind donation of a Strategic Industry Partnership member.

## 2.5 Training Activities and Training Providers

- 2.5.1 If a Workforce Training Plan submitted by March 15, 2024, includes proposed training that clearly requires approval or certification from any state or national entity, such as training that will result in a national certificate or college credit, proof of approval will be required by the proposal submission deadline of March 15, 2024.
- 2.5.2 In cases where such approvals are required and have not been obtained prior to the March 15, 2024, deadline, the Lead Applicant must provide documentation that the application for approval has been made and a schedule showing the process and dates for approval.
- 2.5.3 In the event that, subsequent to proposal submission, it is determined that approval is required by the Maryland Higher Education Commission or any other regulatory entity, Labor will work with such Strategic Industry Partnerships and the regulatory entity on a case-by-case basis to address the approval process.
- 2.5.4 Lead Applicants that have determined that training is exempt from approval or certification must identify the basis for such exemption.
- 2.5.5 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. Essential Skills training is included in job readiness training. Support services such as childcare, transportation, or case management may be included in job readiness training if they alleviate or address a barrier for participants. 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 as important for the long-term success of the participants in preparing for a specific occupation.
- 2.5.6 Prior to disbursement of grant funds, Labor reserves the right to request additional information about any Faculty or Training Provider.
- 2.5.7 Training providers that receive grant funds are Subrecipients and must comply with the requirements in **Section 3.3**.

## 2.6 Grant Rounds

- 2.6.1 This is the ninth Solicitation for grant proposals under the EARN Maryland Program.
- 2.6.2 Eight competitive rounds have been completed. These are the Fall 2013 Solicitation for Planning Grant Proposals, the Winter 2014 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals, the Fall 2014 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals, the Winter 2017 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals, the Summer 2017 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals, the Spring 2018 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals, the Summer 2020 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals – Clean Energy Workforce Account, and the Winter 2021 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals.
- 2.6.3 This document is the Winter 2023 Solicitation for Implementation Grant Proposals.

- 2.6.4 This competitive round is open to all Strategic Industry Partnerships that were not awarded EARN Maryland Implementation Grant Funds in previous rounds. Organizations who received funding in past rounds may apply with a new Strategic Industry Partnership.
- 2.6.5 Strategic Industry Partnerships funded in previous rounds will have an opportunity to apply for additional EARN Maryland funding through a separate process.

**2.7 Implementation Grant Timeline**

Implementation Grant Solicitation released	December 4, 2023
Deadline for Submission of Proposals in Response to this Solicitation	March 15, 2024
Review of Proposals	March - May 2024
Award of Implementation Grants	May 2024
Funding Period	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026

**SECTION 3 – SCOPE OF WORK**

**3.1 Implementation Grant Requirements**

- 3.1.1 The development of the Strategic Industry Partnership Workforce Training Plan must be “industry-led.” This means true business focus and leadership in determining training needs and developing curriculum. Additionally, employer partners must demonstrate a willingness to participate in training, where applicable, and the placement of successful candidates. Labor will require evidence that multiple employers were active participants in developing the Workforce Training Plan. For examples of industry-led partnerships currently funded through EARN, please visit <http://www.dllr.state.md.us/earn/earngrantpartners.shtml>.
- 3.1.2 Partnerships must designate a Lead Applicant that will serve as the Fiscal Agent for the Partnership for the purposes of the Implementation Grant. The Lead Applicant will also be responsible for managing the Grant and implementing the Workforce Training Plan.
- 3.1.3 An eligible Strategic Industry Partnership must have at least five employers from the target industry and representatives from two diverse entities, listed in **Section 1.2.25**. Partnerships are encouraged to include more than five employer partners. If the Lead Applicant represents multiple employers, for instance, an industry association or Registered Apprenticeship Sponsor, five employers must be identified, and submit Letters of Support.
- 3.1.4 The Workforce Training Plan must be both data-driven and experience-driven:

- 3.1.4.1** Data-based evidence of shortages in skilled employment within the target industry over a sustained period of time or as projected, based upon planned large-scale programs or large-scale industry changes and identification of specific high-demand occupations or sets of occupations at different skill and salary levels within the identified target industry. Prospective grantees may consider using labor market information available from the Maryland Department of Labor at <https://www.dllr.state.md.us/lmi/>. Free resources from the Department include industry and occupational projections, a hot jobs tool, and a review of growth industries by local workforce development area
- 3.1.4.2** Real experiences from target industry employers regarding actual and projected gaps in skills training and job readiness. In development of the plan, prospective grantees should focus on ways to obtain input from a broad base of employers in their target industry and region in order to define common workforce needs. Some industries may have more internal data whereas other industries may rely more heavily on the experience of industry partners.
- 3.1.4.3** Both qualitative and quantitative measures are important. Strategic Industry Partnerships should take into account both qualitative data provided by the target industry through varied collection methods (interviews, surveys, focus groups, roundtable discussions, etc.) and quantitative labor market and industry-specific data. Consideration may be given to such issues as understanding high demand occupations in industry, projected job growth by occupation, analysis of gaps between supply and demand of employees, understanding the root causes of these gaps, and characterizing the needed skills to close any gaps.
- 3.1.5** Each Strategic Industry Partnership must develop a Project Management model that encompasses all Project Activities.

  - 3.1.5.1 Grant Management and Workforce Training Plan Implementation** includes direct grant management (preparing invoices, maintaining financial records, fiscal reporting, outcome reporting, etc.) and training plan implementation (curriculum tracking and development, trainer selection, all logistics related to training module implementation). **This person must be an employee or contractor of the Lead Applicant.**
  - 3.1.5.2 Participant Management** encompasses the recruitment to placement framework, including participant pipeline development, recruitment and screening of potential trainees, case management/wrap-around services and/or career coaching, and job placement or advancement strategies.
  - 3.1.5.3 Partnership Management** encompasses coordination and accountability among the partners, eliciting employer feedback regarding the success of training graduates and any training or screening redesign. The entity or individual performing this function should have credibility with industry and allow industry partners to set their own agenda. They will also have the trust of a diverse set of partners and the ability to balance diverse interests.
  - 3.1.5.4** Managing the work of a Partnership will require work and some person or persons must be accountable for that work if a Partnership is to succeed. Labor recognizes that every Strategic Industry Partnership is different. For some Partnerships, one individual may perform all of these functions; and in another, the Lead Applicant may divide responsibility.



### 3.1.6 Parameters of the Target Industry

**3.1.6.1** A Target Industry is a group of employers closely linked by a common product or service, workforce skills, similar technologies, supply chains or other economic ties.

**3.1.6.2** Under EARN Maryland, the definition of “region” is flexible. It can be determined by industry Labor markets that are already known or understood, rough concentrations of populations, commuter patterns or industry hubs. It can be across Local Workforce Development Areas and geo-political boundaries, and even incorporate multiple economic development areas (city, county, regional).

### 3.1.7 Parameters of a Strategic Industry Partnership

**3.1.7.1** A Strategic Industry Partnership is a collaboration that brings together a regional group of some combination of employers, Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors, nonprofits, community-based organizations, two and four year institutions of higher education, local workforce boards, local governments, regional or local economic development entities, local departments of social services, Labor unions, K-12 Programs, industry associations, philanthropic organizations, other training providers and other relevant partners.

**3.1.7.2** Strategic Industry Partnerships may coalesce in any number of ways. For example, they may start with a group of employers in an existing target industry who are currently working together to alleviate shortages of skilled employees. Other partnerships may be the result of labor market data analysis by a regional workforce board or an education stakeholder group looking to identify target industries with workforce training needs; nonprofits and local departments of social services who band together to improve the lives of residents through skills training and seek employers with common training needs; or a regional economic development specialist who recognizes a common need in an industry within a region and begins the process of collaboration.

**3.1.7.3** These partnerships are “strategic” because: they are carefully built to include all necessary partners before training is designed; they cut across traditional workforce, education, and social services system silos; they consider the economic realities of a regional industry in assessing skills gaps and training needs; and they are broader than the development of customized training for one employer.

**3.1.7.4** It is strongly recommended that applicants include the Local Workforce Development Board in the region they are targeting as a member of their Strategic Industry Partnership.

### 3.1.8 Leveraged Resources – Strategic Industry Partnerships **must** leverage additional resources for the implementation of the Workforce Training Plan.

**3.1.8.1** While there is no percentage match required, Labor will give preference in the evaluation process to Strategic Industry Partnerships that maximize the potential of the collaboration through **direct financial or in-kind contributions** by members of the target industry. Contributions from non-industry Strategic Industry Partnership members are also encouraged.

**3.1.8.2** Leveraged resources may also include braided funding from other public, private, or philanthropic sources.

**3.1.9** EARN seeks to meet industry workforce needs. Therefore, training plans that target unemployed or underemployed workers are expected to have the explicit goal of training a workforce for existent, or soon-to-be-existent, positions. *Successful plans lead directly to employment, credential or certification attainment, and/or advancement.* To that end, it is important that a Strategic Industry Partnership's Workforce Training Plan include a means for employers to connect with, recruit, and/or interview training participants for job opportunities.

**3.1.10** For Incumbent Workers, it is expected that industry will provide evidence of career advancement in the form of title promotion, wage increases, or similar evidence.

## **3.2 Requirements of Strategic Industry Partnership Members**

**3.2.1** Employer and industry partners of the Strategic Industry Partnership are encouraged to make specific commitments to support the partnership and implementation of the Workforce Training Plan. Commitments may include financial and in-kind contributions including, but not limited to, providing staff time, faculty or subject matter experts, facilities, data analysis, on-the-job training, supplies, etc. Commitments should also include interviewing successful training participants and the placement of participants into jobs.

**3.2.2** Other Strategic Industry Partnership members are also encouraged to make specific commitments to support the Partnership and implementation of the Workforce Training Plan.

**3.2.3** All Strategic Industry Partnership Members, including the Lead Applicant, must submit Letters of Commitment that clearly state what they will contribute to the Project (in-kind and/or financial resources) and how they will participate in the implementation of the Workforce Training Plan and/or other Partnership activities. Letters of Commitment should be included in Appendix B and should be provided by every member of the SIP.

**3.2.4** The providers of job readiness and essential skills training must be a member of the Strategic Industry Partnership.

**3.2.5** All Strategic Industry Partnership members should be aware of the goals, outcomes, and responsibilities set forth in their Proposal. Strategic Industry Partnerships are encouraged to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) setting forth the roles, financial commitment and expectations of each of the partners for better management of the grant and in order to set up a mechanism for addressing any conflicts that may arise, ownership of any items purchased or developed with grant funding, dissolution of the consortium and any other pertinent issues. Strategic Industry Partnerships selected for Implementation Grant Funding may be required to enter into such an MOU as part of their Grant Agreement. Please include any existing MOUs in Appendix B.

**3.2.6** Intellectual property developed as a result of the grant award is to remain in the public domain to the extent practicable and consistent with the law. Labor encourages that any processes that may be developed through an EARN Maryland-funded Strategic Industry Partnership would be transferable to other industry partners in general and specifically to other EARN Maryland grant recipients in order to further the goals of the EARN Maryland Program.

### 3.3 Requirements of Lead Applicants and any Subrecipient

- 3.3.1** The Lead Applicant must provide the following specific information and documentation for their organization:
- Certificate of Good Standing (where applicable);
  - The most recent two years’ Audited, Reviewed or Compiled Financial Statements. If the Lead Applicant is a community college or state agency, a web link to audited financials may be provided in lieu of a hard copy;
  - A Federal Tax ID Number; and
  - If your organization is tax exempt pursuant to I.R.C. 501(c), a copy of official notice of tax-exempt status from the IRS.
- 3.3.2** A subrecipient is any person or entity that will receive EARN Maryland funding through the Lead Applicant, and is not a direct employee of the Lead Applicant. Subrecipients must be members of the Strategic Industry Partnership and are accountable to the Lead Applicant for use of the funds provided. Entities that receive EARN Maryland funding EXCLUSIVELY for the purposes of providing general supplies (i.e., pens, paper), travel and/or one-time facility rental are not subrecipients.
- 3.3.3** Lead Applicants must provide the following specific information and documentation to Labor *for each subrecipient*:
- Total EARN Maryland funding projected to be allocated to the Subrecipient;
  - Statement of the role or function of the Subrecipient;
  - Certificate of Good Standing (where applicable); and
  - A Federal Tax ID Number.
- If the Lead Applicant or any Subrecipient are government entities or otherwise are not subject to obtaining a Certificate of Good Standing, please note that in the Proposal.*
- 3.3.4** The Lead Applicant and any subrecipient must be in good standing with the Maryland Department of Labor’s Division of Unemployment Insurance.
- 3.3.5** Should the Lead Applicant select a subrecipient after Awards have been made, a Project Modification must be submitted to Labor for approval. Disbursement of funds may be delayed or adjusted if this approval process is not observed.

### 3.4 Grant Administration and Reporting

- 3.4.1** Partnership goals, training outcomes, and financial expenditures, including leveraged resources, will be assessed quarterly throughout the life of the Grant. Grantee progress will be measured against outcomes and goals defined by the Grantee in this Implementation Grant Proposal and agreed upon in any subsequent grant agreement prior to the disbursement of funds.
- 3.4.2** All Grantees will be required to track and report the following:
- Industry “Return on Investment” metrics
  - Demographic data on individuals participating in any training, including but not limited to:
    - Sex

- Race
  - Income
  - National Origin
  - County of Residence
  - Educational Attainment
  - Training Participant employment and wage status, including:
    - Employment status upon both entry and exit from EARN-funded training
    - Hourly wage rate upon both entry and exit from EARN-funded training
- 3.4.3** Training Participant Outcomes including certification, credential or identifiable skill attainment. A general format for reporting these outcomes can be found at <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/earn>. Partnerships must design their own internal data collection mechanisms and protocols.
- 3.4.4** At the time of award, the final budget will be negotiated between the Lead Applicant and EARN Maryland program staff. These negotiations will include a schedule of quarterly projected expenditures that complements implementation of the Workforce Training Plan and related Project Activities as outlined in a Project Schedule to be developed between the Lead Applicant and EARN Maryland program staff.
- 3.4.5** Grant funding will be disbursed according to the Approved Budget once Labor receives a proper invoice. Any unused funds must be returned to Labor with the final financial report.
- 3.4.5** EARN Maryland program staff will be closely engaged with all Strategic Industry Partnerships that receive EARN Maryland funding, providing plan-specific support and technical assistance. This support includes but is not limited to site visits and regular meetings between Lead Applicants, partners, and staff responsible for implementing the Workforce Training Plan. Grant Advisors will work with Partnerships to highlight accomplishments of training programs and implement technical assistance plans for outcomes that are not reached.
- 3.4.6** Fiscal oversight will consist of submission of quarterly and fiscal year end expenditure reports, request for proof of expenditures, and periodic on-site fiscal monitoring of EARN Maryland funds expended by the Lead Applicant and its subrecipient and any vendors.
- 3.4.7** A final report will consist of a narrative summary of the effectiveness of funded training, related Strategic Industry Partnership activities, a report on quantitative outcomes, and a final expenditure report. This report will compare projected outcomes to actual program impact and, where applicable, include a rationale for the failure to meet any projected goals. The final report will also include any completed studies, surveys, reports, or other work products, if applicable.
- 3.4.8** Labor reserves the right to revoke Implementation 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 Implementation Grant are not met.
- 3.4.9** The receipt of an EARN Maryland grant is not meant as an endorsement of a recipient. Use of the receipt of an EARN Maryland grant for marketing or promotional purposes unrelated to recruitment of individuals to be served under the grant is prohibited and may result in the loss of current funding or refusal for future funding.
- 3.4.10** As a condition of grant funding, all Strategic Industry Partnership Members must be willing to

participate in any third-party evaluation commissioned by Labor. Participation may include providing data and/or participating in surveys and interviews. Evaluation is meant to measure and ensure program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

## **SECTION 4 – PROPOSAL FORMAT**

### **4.1 Grant Submission Requirements**

Proposals *must* contain the following documents, with signatures where indicated. Proposals that do not have all of these documents with signatures where required will not be reviewed.

#### **4.1.1 Letter of Application**

- A letter of application signed by an individual who is authorized to commit the applicants to the requirements stated in this Solicitation

#### **4.1.2 Application (Appendix A)**

- Cover Page (Section 1)
- Executive Summary (Section 2)
- Narrative (Section 3)
- Assurances (Section 4)

#### **4.1.3 Strategic Industry Partnership Submission Requirements (Appendix B)**

- Letter of Commitment from EVERY member of the SIP
- Signed W9 Form from the Lead Applicant
- Certificate of Good Standing- required for Lead Applicant AND any subrecipient

#### **4.1.4 The most recent two years' Audited, Reviewed, or Complied Financial Statements for the Lead Applicant (Appendix C)**

#### **4.1.5 Budget (Appendix D)**

### **4.2 Grant Submission Format**

**4.2.1** Completed applications should be submitted via email to Mary Keller at [mary.keller@maryland.gov](mailto:mary.keller@maryland.gov). Submissions should be combined into one PDF in the order listed section 4.1. In addition to being included in the PDF, Appendix D should also be included as a standalone Excel Sheet (.xlsx). Each submission should have two attachments.

**4.2.2** Appendix A should not exceed 35 pages in length.

## **SECTION 5 – GRANT EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

### **5.1 Grant Evaluation**

- 5.1.1** All proposals will undergo an initial screening to ensure that submission requirements were met, and all required sections were included. Proposals that do not meet the initial screening requirements will not be read.
- 5.1.2** Proposals will be evaluated by a Review Committee established by Labor. The Review Committee will be composed of representatives from Labor, other State agencies, Philanthropy organizations, as well as several other organizations.
- 5.1.3** If necessary, an oral presentation of the proposal may be required.
- 5.1.4** Final approval for awards will be determined by the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Labor, based on the recommendations of the Review Committee and taking into account other factors, such as geographic distribution and industry diversity.
- 5.1.5** Labor may require that proposals be combined for the purposes of implementation funding.
- 5.1.6** Upon request, Labor will provide feedback on proposals that do not receive funding.
- 5.1.7** Preference will be given to plans that demonstrate:
- Maximum collaboration through direct financial or in-kind contributions by members of the target industry;
  - Braiding of other public or philanthropic funding streams or in-kind support; and
  - Provide clear and direct pathways to good jobs, particularly for Maryland’s most hard-to-serve jobseekers.

**\*\*END OF DOCUMENT\*\***