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## **EARN Pre-Proposal Conference Questions and Answers**

**Question:** Can a single employer apply?

**Answer:** No, a single employer may not apply. A Strategic Industry Partnership (SIP) must include at least five employer partners and two diverse entities.

**Question:** What is meant by the "same" industry? For example, would five employers all categorized under "trades" meet the requirement, or does it need to be more specific, like all in "HVAC" or "Electrical"?

**Answer:** The Workforce Training Plan should include occupational training that will prepare participants for open roles within the employer partner organizations. For example, if training prepares participants for a wide array of roles in the trades, the employers can represent different trades. However, if the training focuses specifically on HVAC, then all employer partners should have hiring needs around HVAC roles.

**Question:** How many people do we need to serve, and is there a minimum or maximum requirement?

**Answer:** MD Labor does not impose a minimum or maximum number of individuals served per award.

**Question:** Are we eligible to apply if we are part of a SIP as one of the employer partners?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Do SIP members all need to be Maryland based?

**Answer:** No. However, 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 employers and the state's economy.

**Question:** Are ENOUGH communities identified by zipcode or other geographic marker?

**Answer:** Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households (ENOUGH) communities have at least one U.S. Census tract where more than 30% of children are living in poverty and must be served by a community school with a concentration of poverty level of at least 80%. An interactive map and list of eligible communities can be found here: <https://bit.ly/ENOUGHMap>.

**Question:** Can we submit more than one proposal, as long as each one targets a different industry?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** In our IT training program, it can take up to six months for participants to secure employment. As a result, individuals trained in the later stages of the grant period may not obtain employment until after the grant period ends. Is there a way to work around this timing issue or account for these delayed employment outcomes in our reporting?

**Answer:** Yes. Grantees submit final reports six months after grant activity ends.

**Question:** Do we have to pick only one industry?

**Answer:** Yes. Each Workforce Training Plan (proposal) must specify a target industry.

**Question:** Is there a participant age requirement?

**Answer:** No. There is no age requirement. However, the primary focus of EARN is on short-term training opportunities that provide an immediate benefit to jobseekers and employers. Applicants should prioritize the training of individuals that leads to full-time, unsubsidized employment.

**Question:** So there should be at least eight members of the SIP, with all seven, except the lead, providing a letter of commitment?

**Answer:** While there is a single lead applicant for each SIP, SIPs must include at least five employer partners and two diverse entities. Each SIP must include at least seven partner organizations. A letter of commitment from every member of the SIP must be included with the proposal.

**Question:** Is it permissible for there to be overlap between SIP and subrecipient roles?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Can we apply for funding for training programs we're currently running, or does it need to be a new program?

**Answer:** Yes, you can apply to fund existing training programs. It does not need to be a new program.

**Question:** If we are already a subrecipient for an existing EARN grant in a particular industry field, may we apply for a new grant in that same field as a lead applicant? We understand that existing EARN grantees cannot apply for a grant in the same field as their current grants---but weren't sure if that prohibition applies to lead applicants only.

**Answer:** Yes, a subrecipient on a current EARN grant can apply as a Lead Applicant for a new Strategic Industry Partnership.

**Question:** Equipment has previously been excluded in grant proposals for EARN. Is that still the case or may we request funding for equipment?

**Answer:** Equipment is an allowable expense. The equipment cost should be reasonable and justified.

**Question:** Can this be used for workforce pipeline development programs that may not directly lead to employment but will build the future pipeline?

**Answer:** Successful Workforce Training Plans lead *directly to employment, credential or certification attainment, and advancement for Maryland workers*. Workforce pipeline development programs that do not lead to employment do not meet the requirements of the program.

**Question:** Can our organization apply for both a Tier I and Tier II grant, under appropriate conditions?

**Answer:** Yes. If an organization is applying for a Tier I and Tier II grant, these must be submitted as separate proposals.

**Question:** Can this be used to train or upskill participants in using AI tools to be potentially employed at local employer partners?

**Answer:** Successful Workforce Training Plans lead *directly to employment, credential or certification attainment, and advancement for Maryland workers*. Upskilling current workers is allowable but if training is provided for individuals that are unemployed, the expectation is that they obtain employment post-training.

**Question:** Construction of a building is not allowed. Could we request funds to renovate space to create a training kitchen?

**Answer:** Renovating a space may be an allowable expense depending on the situation. However, the need for, and reasonableness, of all costs must be fully justified and explained in the Budget Summary and Narrative Form. Moreover, costs must be tied directly to the success of the Workforce Training Plan. In addition, MD Labor strongly recommends that training begins within the first three months of funding.

**Question:** Would internships be considered employment in context to this grant?

**Answer:** No. Job placement is defined as 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.

**Question:** Do you have sample commitment letters or other templates that you can share?

**Answer:** MD Labor is unable to share templates. Please see Section 3.2 of the Summer 2025 Solicitation for more information on commitment letters.

**Question:** What if the starting wage for an apprentice is lower than the median wage for the target region but the journeyman pay is above. Is this allowed?

**Answer:** Tier II training leads directly to placement or advancement into roles that provide wages at or above the median wage for the target region. Because Registered Apprenticeship programs are multiple years in length, the strategy described would fall into the Tier I category.

**Question:** Can past performance be referenced in the proposal in order to demonstrate capacity and impact?

**Answer:** Yes. Applicants should include information on past performance in Question 9 of the application.

**Question:** Are EARN award recipients responsible for finding program participants or is there a state network we can use to find participants like the community quarterbacks?

**Answer:** Yes, Strategic Industry Partnerships are responsible for recruitment, screening, and assessment of participants. MD Labor encourages Strategic Industry Partnerships to develop a recruitment strategy to ensure the target groups identified for training are reached, including which organizations within the SIP are responsible for recruitment.

**Question:** Do you need evidence of market research?

**Answer:** Yes. Workforce Training Plans must be data-driven. Question 3E requires applicants to list all data sources that were used to support the development of the Workforce Training Plan.

**Question:** If we are the subrecipient, how do we determine the employers?

**Answer:** The Lead Applicant is responsible for Partnership Management, which includes coordination among partners, including employer partners.

**Question:** Is this a reimbursable grant process?

**Answer:** A first quarter disbursement of up to 15% of the grant award may be requested by the grantee. After the initial disbursement, MD Labor will disburse funds on a quarterly basis pursuant to the grant agreement and based on projected expenditures and performance of the grantee, as determined by MD Labor.

**Question:** Could funding be requested to support/supplement an ongoing program? In other words, could we present an ongoing program in its entirety and focus the funding request/need statement around specific budget line items where additional funding is needed?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Are Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors considered Tier I or Tier II?

**Answer:** This is dependent on the training program and end wage. If the end wage six months after the grant period ends is at or above the median wage for the region, the applicant may apply for Tier II funds. However, participants trained through the Workforce Training Plan must be placed into roles at or above the median wage by the end of the grant period.

**Question:** In preparation of our SIP, we had all seven partners sign one letter of commitment. Is this acceptable?

**Answer:** MD Labor strongly recommends each member of the SIP submit a letter of commitment. Letters of commitment should not be form letters and must detail each organization's specific commitment to the Workforce Training Plan.

