



**Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES**

Minnesota *FastTRAC*
*Training, Resources And Credentialing
for Pathways to Sustainable Employment*



General Information

Grant Competition Deadline 5 p.m. August 26, 2008

Background and Need: Minnesota's economy faces an interrelated set of challenges: employers in many of the state's critical industries confront skilled labor shortages while thousands of Minnesotans are stuck in low-paying jobs, uncertain of how long these jobs will last, and unable to access basic education, training or postsecondary credentials needed to advance in the labor market and earn family-supporting wages.

It is projected that current workers will make up 65 percent of the Minnesota labor force of 2025. By these projections, the growing segments of the state labor force between 2005 and 2025 will be individuals 25-44 years old and those over 55 years old. According to data compiled by the Working Poor Families Project based on the 2005 American Community Survey, there are over 692,000 Minnesotans between the ages of 25 and 54 who have a high school diploma/GED or less education. This is a cohort of workers who are a readily-available human resource for Minnesota employers provided they can get additional basic skills and required technical skills. It is critical to the state's economy to take immediate and decisive action to address the "talent development" issues relative to the low-wage, low-skilled workforce.

In 2007, the Governor's Workforce Development Council received a planning grant from The Joyce Foundation to work with Minnesota state agencies and their partners to strengthen policies that enable low-wage and low-skilled adult workers to advance in education and training systems, to acquire postsecondary credentials, and to compete in the labor market. As part of the planning grant, the partners studied the state-level policy, programs, administration and budget issues confronting the delivering of education and training services directly focused on low-wage and low-skilled workers.

The planning efforts led to a commitment by the state's workforce development partners to build on their foundation and collaborations and form more sustainable partnerships that will help remove barriers before low-wage and low-skilled adult workers in Minnesota's labor market. The "state's workforce development partners" refers to state agencies that provide adult education, training and employment services, businesses, as well as nonprofits that work with low-skilled and low-wage adult workers. The partners committed themselves to work together toward this common effort through an initiative called Minnesota FastTRAC: Training, Resources and Credentialing.

In 2008, two lead agencies for the initiative—the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system Office of the Chancellor (OOC) and the Minnesota Department of Education Adult Basic Education (ABE)—applied for and received an implementation grant from The Joyce Foundation to launch Minnesota FastTRAC. In addition to OOC and ABE, FastTRAC also has the financial and institutional commitment of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

FastTRAC Goal and Strategies: The implementation grant will focus efforts around the identification of major system and policy changes that are necessary to:

Create a state-level “stackable credentials” education and training framework for low-wage, low-skilled adults that integrates ABE, non-credit occupational training, and for-credit postsecondary degree and certificate programs that currently lack coordination and resource sharing. A stackable credentials framework works through career pathway models built around occupations and within industries with high unmet needs for skills. Once built, the stackable credential framework will better align existing systems and reduce barriers that arise because of the current lack of systematic and systemic coordination and resource sharing.

At least three key strategies are necessary to develop a stackable credentials framework:

1. Identify and provide low-income adults with the **student support services** they need to transition across education and training programs and achieve stable employment and family supporting wages.
2. Create **bridge curricula** that provide seamless transitions between ABE, non-credit occupation training and for-credit postsecondary certificate and degree programs.
3. Build a state-level **integrated data capability** to follow participant progress and outcomes across education and employment programs.

The FastTRAC initiative will work with 5-6 ongoing education and work transition programs called *incubators*. Each incubator will receive supplemental funding (i.e. a grant) and assistance to identify its stackable credential model and test system and policy alternatives surrounding student support services and/or bridge curricula. A total of \$270,000 will be available to support incubators during the grant term--November 1, 2008 to May 31, 2009.

Successful testing of changes at the local and regional level, and in key industries/sectors, will lead to specific recommendations to better align resources and policies across relevant agencies/systems and move toward creating a state level stackable credentials framework.

FastTRAC Governance and Oversight. The FastTRAC Systems Team will oversee the selection of FastTRAC programs/incubators. The Systems Team will comprise leaders from state agencies providing public employment services, as well as leaders from public and nonprofit local organizations that provide basic education and skills training to low-skilled and low-wage adult workers, and individuals who influence policy makers in education and workforce development. The Systems Team is expected to prepare findings and recommendations for building a stackable credentials framework to the Governor and state workforce development policy makers no later than July 2009.

Minnesota FastTRAC is related to several initiatives in Minnesota that are critical to overcoming skilled labor shortages and gathering compelling qualitative and quantitative evidence in support of Minnesota FastTRAC to pursue the policy and system change proposed above. These initiatives and other information on FastTRAC are described in “FastTRAC Proposal Revision Memo” and other documents under the “Resources Available Online” link given below.

FastTRAC Package of Documents, available online at www.cte.mnscu.edu

“General Information”
“Acronyms and Definitions”
“Instructions for Grant Applicants”
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Acronyms and Definitions

Adult—The focus population for Minnesota FastTRAC is Minnesotans aged 24-55 who are unemployed or underemployed, low-income/wages, lacking the basic and technical skills for competitive employment, native and non-native English speakers.

ABE—Adult Basic Education

Basic skills—For adult learners who need goal-specific elementary- or secondary-level basic skills such as work-related math, functional literacy (e.g., banking skills), reading, or writing assistance.

Bridge curricula—The primary objective of these efforts is create the conditions necessary for developing better articulation processes between the institutions responsible for providing ABE services, noncredit training, and for-credit programming, all resulting in a reduction of developmental and remedial course work allowing the low-wage and low-skilled adult student to begin college coursework as quickly as possible. Bridge curricula reduce or eliminate programmatic gaps between systems and their curriculum.

Career pathways—Refers to a “roadmap” of education and skills training which leads to credentials at the initial level of employment and at every major level of career advancement, subsequently. The credentials are recognized and valued by industries and employers.

DEED—Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Incubators—Existing education and training programs around the state that will serve as local partners, working to identify and overcome policy barriers and operationalize FastTRAC on the ground. Programs participating as Minnesota FastTRAC incubators will exhibit at least some of the stackable credential programming characteristics (given below).

Low-skilled—Workers who lack basic education and technical skills, preventing them from obtaining higher paying, family supporting wage jobs.

Low-wage—Definitions of the low-wage labor market fall into two basic groups. Job-based definitions identify a set of jobs characterized by low wages, few benefits, and little upward mobility. Worker-based definitions are typically based on a worker's absolute or relative hourly wage, earnings (wages times hours worked), or educational level (source: *The Low-Wage Labor Market: Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Self-Sufficiency Defining and Characterizing the Low-Wage Labor Market*, Jared Bernstein and Heidi Hartmann).

According to [Expect More: Common Sense Policy for Working Families](#) from the Jobs Now Coalition, a job paying less than \$12.24 an hour does not meet their basic needs (based on what each worker in a two-worker family of four must earn).

OOC—Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system Office of the Chancellor.

Stackable credentials—Refers to a series of certificates that would “stack” on top of one another to promote advancement along career pathways.

Stackable credentials framework—Enables the acquisition, recognition and portability of stackable credentials across ABE services, noncredit training, and for-credit postsecondary degree and certificate programs. A state-level framework for stackable credentials builds on both the occupational and basic skills credentials that have been developed outside of the traditional education systems, as well as those that have traditionally existed in adult basic education, technical colleges and community

colleges. The stackable credentials framework will create and sustain program models that include the following characteristics.

- (i) Fast-track programming—faster attainment of skills and credentials through thoughtful instructional processes and content that lead to sustainable wages in high occupations.
- (ii) Multi-level, industry-recognized certificates—collaboratively developed, valued credentials created by business and workforce education and training system for in-demand, skilled jobs.
- (iii) Articulated content and curriculum—contextualized and competency-based curriculum that is designed to blend both core academic and technical skills.
- (iv) Flexible entry points—modularized curriculum developed into sets of courses with discrete employment outcomes. Students enter and exit a degree or certificate program at specific points in their educational cycle rather than completing the entire program at once.
- (v) Support for academic and personal needs specific to working adults—provides the “wrap around” student services that enhance student planning and informed decision making and increase student success in achieving both academic and employment goals.
- (vi) Regional demand-driven job needs—credentials and curricula bridges are based on labor market analysis of employer demand and research on the skill sets businesses require for various jobs/occupations within particular industries.

Student support services—“Wrap around” student services that enhance student planning and informed decision making and increase student success in achieving both academic and employment goals. As part of their mission, Minnesota’s postsecondary institutions, particularly two-year public colleges, serve a wide variety of students, including low-income adult students. However, these institutions do not have in place systematic and differentiated strategies for any one population group, including low-income adult students. Further, low-income adult students typically have access only to broad support services provided to all students. The absence of differentiated student support services contributes to the fact that many low-income adult students do not successfully transition into and complete postsecondary programs. FastTRAC incubators dedicate funding for services like career and academic counseling, peer mentoring, tutoring, and transportation and child care assistance for low-income adult students, many of whom are full-time workers, a population for whom these supports are acute.

Systems Team—This is the leadership team for Minnesota FastTRAC, comprised of representatives from entities that deliver public employment services (Workforce Service Areas/Workforce Centers and community-based organizations) and that provide basic education and skills training (Adult Basic Education providers, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and community-based organizations). The Systems Team will coordinate the implementation of an overarching, integrated policy-level response based on the work of the incubators. The Systems Team will prepare findings and recommendations for building a stackable credentials framework to the Governor and state workforce development policy makers no later than July 2009. The Systems Team will work with FastTRAC incubators to:

- (i) identify policy alternatives for testing by incubators, specifically which programs to include as incubators and which policy alternatives to test;
- (ii) transform lessons from incubators and related work into legislative and agency policy recommendations that are critical to building a stackable credentials framework; and
- (iii) advocate for and lead implementation of policy changes.

WIA--Workforce Investment Act.

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Instructions For Grant Applicants

Grant Competition Deadline 5 p.m. August 26, 2008

Purpose. Pre-applications are requested from ongoing education and work transition programs to help build a statewide stackable credentials education and training framework that integrates Adult Basic Education (ABE), non-credit occupational training, and for-credit postsecondary degree and certificate programs for low-wage and low-skilled adults. The Minnesota FastTRAC initiative will work with 5-6 education and transition programs called “incubators”. Each incubator will test one or more state-level policy changes at the local and regional level, and in specific key industries and sectors. Minnesota FastTRAC incubators will set the stage for a wider and larger scale effort at system-level policy changes, particularly in the area of bridge curricula and student support services, all leading to a longer term goal of implementing a statewide stackable credential framework. See “General Information”, “Acronyms and Definitions” for further details.

Funds Available. A total of \$270,000 is available for grants to 5-6 incubator programs, up to \$54,000 each. FastTRAC is supported by The Joyce Foundation, the OOC, MDE-ABE, as well as the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Eligible Applicants. The Minnesota Department of Education-Adult Basic Education (MDE-ABE) and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities-Office of the Chancellor (OOC) are soliciting pre-applications from organizations that may include, but are not limited to: community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, postsecondary institutions, workforce service areas, and adult basic education programs. **This funding is not available for start-up programs.** Only ongoing programs, with a minimum 12 months history of serving low-wage and low-skilled adult workers are eligible. Only programs that collaborate across some or all of the following stakeholder systems are eligible: education, training, social service and employer. In general, FastTRAC is seeking to help those select programs that are able to refine their good work by integrating bridge curricula and student support services with the expectation that there will be an increase in the likelihood that low-skilled and low-wage workers will advance toward their employment and education goals.

Grant Term. The grant term will be Nov. 1, 2008, through May 31, 2009. Given the short timeline, FastTRAC incubator programs are expected to quickly launch their activities and draw lessons from them by the end of the grant term.

Grant Competition Deadline. Pre-applications must be in electronic form and emailed to mary.schmidt@state.mn.us by 5 p.m. on August. 26, 2008. Faxed or mailed pre-applications will not be accepted or reviewed. The “Pre-application Template” is available online at www.cte.mnscu.edu.

Grant Competition Process. Pre-applications received on time and in accordance with grant guidelines will be reviewed in accordance with the criteria given below. Applicants will be notified on September 11/12, 2008, of the pre-application competition outcome.

Those pre-applications that meet the Essential Criteria given below will be required to attend a Policy Academy in Roseville on Sept. 23, 2008, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The purpose of the Policy Academy will be to allow potential incubator programs to present their proposed incubator project (roughly 30 minutes for each program to present and answer questions) and explain how it can help transcend policy barriers that inhibit a functional and statewide stackable credentials framework. Those programs that meet Essential Criteria will be invited to complete a

Full Application (to be distributed at the Policy Academy); the Full Application will be due Oct. 17, 2008.

If your program is selected as a FastTRAC incubator program, you can expect the support of Barry Shaffer, State Adult Basic Education Director, and Pradeep Kotamraju, System Director for Perkins Federal Grant at the Office of the Chancellor. They are responsible on behalf of the State of Minnesota for achieving FastTRAC objectives under The Joyce Foundation grant and for supporting the FastTRAC teams in completing their charge. You can also expect technical support from The Joyce Foundation.

Pre-application Format. Download the pre-application at www.cte.mnscu.edu under “News and Announcements”.

- Incomplete applications may not be reviewed or may result in loss of points.
- The minimum font size is 11 point.
- Questions regarding the pre-application guidelines or FastTRAC may be directed to mary.schmidt@state.mn.us. **Questions must be received by 5 p.m. on August 22, 2008.** All questions and answers will be posted at the www.cte.mnscu.edu website.

Pre-Application Essential Criteria. FastTRAC incubator programs must meet the following criteria (See “Acronyms and Definitions” and “Pre-application Template”):

- Start-up programs are not eligible. The program for which you are requesting funds must **currently be active** and have minimum 12 months history of serving adult workers/students. Line 8 of pre-application
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have success in serving adult workers/students **age 25-55**. Line 49
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have success in serving adult workers/students who are **low income**. Line 51
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have success in serving adult workers/students who are **low skill**. Line 50
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have success in helping adult workers **transition** into/between education and employment for the purpose of achieving higher skilled/better paying occupations. Line 8, 9 and 10.
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have a history of either bridge curricula or student supports as **core features**. Line 9 or 10
 - Applicant has identified barriers and proposed how to **overcome one or more barriers** with FastTRAC assistance in either bridge curricula or student supports areas. Line 9 or 10
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must have or be working toward effective **collaboration** across business, educators, Adult Basic Education and social service providers. Line 32 and 44
 - Program for which you are requesting funds must be in an industry and occupations with **high demand for workers**. Line 41
- For programs with bridge and articulated curriculum(a) as a core feature (Line 9):
- Curriculum(a) is available or under development. Line 13
 - Program creates non-credit to for-credit links or “are still working on this”. Line 19

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Minnesota FastTRAC: A Proposal to the Joyce Foundation for Shifting Gears Implementation Grant Funding, April 14, 2008.

Minnesota FastTRAC Proposal Revision memo, May 14, 2008.

“Financial Aid, Tuition Assistance, and Low Income Workers”, by Kira Dahlk, Nov. 2007.

<http://www.northseattle.edu/programs/ibest/> - “Washington's community and technical colleges are committed to ‘Creating Opportunities for Washington's Future’ by raising the knowledge and skills of the state's residents. To support that commitment, the system's colleges are involved in local and national programs designed to promote and achieve educational attainment for all residents across the state.”

http://www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=14&id=123&Itemid=48 – “Career Pathways transforms Oregon's education system to focus on helping Oregonians attain degrees, certificates, and credentials that lead to demand occupations, increased wage gain, and lifelong learning.”