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Employment in the New Economy: Supporting Disconnected and Gig Economy Workers

Request for Proposals

Round 1: Applications due April 17, 2023, 12:00 PM EST

Round 2: Applications due September 13, 2023, 12:00 PM EST



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Introduction to the Richard King Mellon Foundation

Since 1947, the [Richard King Mellon Foundation](#) (Foundation) has funded visionaries with bold ideas to advance prosperity in Southwestern Pennsylvania and environmental conservation across the United States. The Foundation's 2020 year-end endowment was \$3.1 billion, and its Trustees in 2020 disbursed \$130 million in grants and program-related investments.

The Foundation has six funding programs: Conservation; Economic Development; Economic Mobility; Health & Well-Being; Organizational Effectiveness; and Social-Impact Investments. All six programs invest in transformative, evidence-informed solutions that align with the Foundation's mission and contribute to positive change.

Economic Development Funding Program

The [Economic Development](#) funding program's vision is for Allegheny and Westmoreland counties to be a region that is an engine for economic growth and vitality; this will occur by investing in the ingenuity and creativity of its population, enhancing individuals' economic prosperity, and strengthening our sense of community. The Foundation endeavors for the region's residents be able to access their most promising and prosperous futures whether in well-established industries or in those that are hallmarks of the new economy, such as the biomanufacturing and life sciences, automation, robotics, advanced manufacturing, machine learning, and other technology-based industries. The Foundation strongly believes that the region's long-term economic prosperity is best achieved by economic growth and by fostering broad participation of all individuals in that growth.

The Foundation organizes its Economic Development program into three investment areas: Talent Development, Employment Opportunities, and Community Building. Each investment area contains priorities that further describe the Foundation's funding interests and the changes that the Foundation hopes to create.

Background

The new economy is marked by continual technological disruption and innovation that is empowering people to transform our world. As technologies change, so do the skill sets that are in high demand as well as the definitions of employment and work. Unfortunately, the region's economic prosperity is hindered by a widening gap in economic opportunities among residents, education systems that are not keeping pace with what the workforce of the future needs to compete in the new economy, and a large number of workers who have

dropped out of the workforce altogether or who hold tenuous contract or gig-based work to make ends meet.

Through this Request for Proposals, the Foundation welcomes creative, collaborative, and innovative proposals for services, products, or technologies that aim to benefit disconnected workers – those who have left the labor force – become gainfully employed in the new economy and gig economy workers—those whose work often provides limited access to traditional employment-related benefits such as internal job ladders, health and pension benefits, or access to on-the-job-training.

Disconnected Workers

Increasing numbers of people are left out of the “formal” economy; recent estimates report that one in three prime working age (25-54) Black men and one in six white men are disconnected from the formal labor force. This is also the case for women, as the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on women’s labor force participation. In 2020, 2 million women left the workforce because of reported challenges in finding stable and quality childcare, wage reductions, inability to work from home, school closures, or lack of benefits. This resulted in \$64.5 billion dollars in lost wages.

Independent, Gig, Contract Workers

Independent, gig, contract work is often considered tenuous and unstable because of the impermanence of “jobs.” Yet, these workers make up a relatively large portion of our workforce: in July 2020, [41 percent of Americans on unemployment insurance](#)—nearly 13 million people—were people who had been “self-employed, independent contractors, gig-economy workers, those with limited recent work history, and those looking for part-time work, among others.” And, a 2021 study by Pew Research Center found that [16% of U.S. adults](#) have ever earned money through an online gig platform, with 31% of current or recent gig workers – representing 3% of U.S. adults overall – say this has been their main job over the past 12 months. The growth of nontraditional work arrangements such as freelance employment and contract employment has brought about concomitant [challenges](#) since the current labor market and workplace is not keeping pace with the shifting nature of this [flexible workforce](#). This places more of the onus on workers to anticipate changes in job requirements. However, there are some positive elements to independent work that could be more deeply supported: freelance type work supports a person-centered economy in which workers have control over the type and flow of tasks.

Request for Proposals

To address the critical challenges facing the Pittsburgh region, the Foundation seeks bold, creative, collaborative, and innovative proposals for initiatives that aim to strengthen the wide range of opportunities for adult residents in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties to succeed in the new economy.

Proposals submitted for this Request for Proposals fit within the [Economic Development](#) program's Employment Opportunities investment area, which focuses on fostering adults' access to opportunities for employment in the new economy, thereby allowing them to gain income and wealth and forge economic independence. Proposals should focus on propelling individuals' movement toward economic independence for those who are transitioning back to employment in new economy jobs or who engage in independent, gig work.

Ideas and approaches could be products, services, or technologies that, for example:

- Support the re-entry of women or vulnerable populations who have left the labor force or who are underemployed into jobs available in the new economy.
- Match disconnected, underemployed, independent, and gig economy workers to flexible education, training, upskilling, and ultimately employment opportunities in new economy jobs that best fit their life goals and needs.
- Help individuals to find and retain meaningful and fulfilling careers in the gig economy (rather than in piecemeal jobs).
- Relieve stressors of gig economy workers by supporting connections to the social safety net, improving financial literacy, lessening social isolation, or cultivating resilience in the face of constant change and uncertainty.

Criteria

Funding Guidelines

The Foundation welcomes proposals from nonprofit organizations and public sector agencies. The Foundation will give priority consideration to creative collaborations, efforts that engage the public and private sectors, or that serve populations that are currently experiencing poverty or that have historically encountered systemic barriers to employment and prosperity.

The Foundation's general eligibility criteria apply to the RFP. Please review our [application FAQ](#). Additional [detailed instructions for how to complete the application can be found in this PDF](#).

Types of Support

Applications should fit under one of the following types of support:

Planning and Innovation grants focus on experimentation and the development of new ideas. Recipients might describe activities such as piloting services or completing a feasibility study. Any evaluation activities should focus on understanding successes, challenges, and future possibilities resulting from the initial project.

Implementation grants are for more developed concepts and services that are currently being conducted and need further infusion of funds to support reaching populations more deeply or with further intentionality. Recipients of this funding often have demonstrated past successes and have capacity to engage in iteration and evaluation.

Scalability grants are focused on projects and ideas that have been tested within one population group or in one geographic area with promising success; they need an infusion of funds to expand the reach of the program to other population groups or geographic areas. This funding supports extending the reach of a promising model or project.

Submitted proposals must clearly describe:

- The problem(s) the proposed effort seeks to address.
- Specific activities that will be undertaken. And, if multiple partners are involved, which entity is undertaking which component of the proposed project.
- Feasible, measurable outcomes, including target metrics that describe the degree of change in behaviors, knowledge, or skills that are expected to

result from the proposed activities. Example outcomes include, but are not limited to:

- Employment, income, or retention rates of hires in new economy jobs that offer family-sustaining earnings.
- Stabilization of employment and earnings for gig and independent workers.
- Increase in the re-entry of women or vulnerable populations who have left the labor force or who are underemployed in new economy jobs.
- How the proposed outcomes align with the Foundation's Economic Development funding program.
- Evaluation methods to track and document change in outputs and outcomes.

Use of Funds and Funding Range

Grant funds awarded through this RFP may be used for a variety of expenses such as program and service delivery, administrative expenses, consultant fees, or evaluation. A limited amount of capital expenditures, such as materials or equipment purchases, that are essential to accomplish the outcomes of the proposal may be included.

The Foundation expects to fund projects in the range of \$200,000 to \$500,000, depending on the complexity of the proposed project, the number of collaborators, and the type of grant (Planning and Innovation, Implementation, or Scalability).

If an application is truly exceptional, the Foundation may consider providing funding above this range. Successful grants may be invited to apply for follow-on funding or additional capacity-building funding opportunities at the conclusion of the grant.

The funded activities must be conducted within 6-18 months.

What the Foundation Will Not Fund

The Foundation will not fund the following items through this RFP:

- Endowments or capital campaigns
- Solely capital expenses, construction projects, or purchases of large equipment
- Advocacy, political causes, or political events
- Existing deficits or retroactive funding
- Event sponsorships
- Match requests for *Build Back Better* grantees or sub-grantees

Application Timeline

Funding is expected to be awarded in two rounds during 2023.

Round 1	
Monday, April 17, 2023. Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications submitted https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID_5499?SA=SNA&FID=35067
Friday, June 30, 2023	Funding Status Notification
Friday, July 14, 2023	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants
Round 2	
Wednesday, Sept. 13, 2023 Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications submitted https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID_5499?SA=SNA&FID=35067
Friday, December 22, 2023	Funding Status Notification
Friday, December 22, 2023	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants

Inquiries

Please contact rkmf@rkmf.org to discuss questions regarding this RFP. Note that we cannot provide substantive input on ideas prior to their submission.