

STEM Workforce Challenge Grant Program

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Challenge

Nevada's growing STEM industries represent an important source of high-value economic activity and quality jobs for Nevadans. However, at present the state suffers from a critical skills gap in its workforce, and the lack of a strong pipeline system to prepare individuals for careers in the emerging fields. Although this need is being addressed to some degree within the K-12 system, the enhancement of post-secondary education in STEM skills must be encouraged, and the connection between the needs of employers and skills training programs available must also be enhanced. Many of these programs would be designed to serve the training needs of the long-term unemployed, the underemployed, and those in need of cross-training to enter new fields of work. These efforts must include coordination between the GOED, DETR and NSHE to achieve the economic development goals of the state, and provide the skilled workforce necessary for achieving those goals.

Recommendation

To help meet the workforce needs of Nevada's STEM economy, the state should establish a competitive grant program that awards funds to regional consortia working to align postsecondary education and skills training with the workforce demands of the regional economy. By encouraging and funding active collaboration among key stakeholders, including the four community colleges (CSN, TMCC, GBC and WNC), and Nevada State College (NSC); the Governor's Workforce Investment Board (GWIB)'s industry sector councils; and the private sector through the inclusion of a matching funds provision; this program would allow the state to maximize its return on public investment and provide a strong incentive for education and skills training that matches the need of labor markets.

Implementation

The STEM Workforce Challenge Grant Program would provide one-time grants of up to \$175,000 per year for two years (up to \$350,000 total), with a required 1:1 match from the private sector and/or philanthropic organizations (one or more organizations), to support the development and implementation of programming that seeks to meet the skill and competency needs of local or regional STEM industries. The program(s) must demonstrate an ability to be self-sustaining following the conclusion of the grant funding. Successful applications will draw from data, market analysis, and industry intelligence to identify current and projected workforce training challenges that will be responded to by the program implementation, and that the coalition of forces/stakeholders will sustain the program for the long term. Applicants would also be eligible to apply for additional funds to facilitate capital investment in equipment critical

to the proposed program(s). This one-time award would range in value up to \$250,000 and would require at least a 1:1 match from the private sector and/or philanthropic organizations. Decisions on grant awards will be made by an interagency committee composed of representatives from GOED, DETR, NSHE (The Nevada College Collaborative), the proposed STEM Action Council, and the Governor's Office. The committee will use a points system to score each application, with awards going to those applicants with the highest scores. The committee will meet quarterly to evaluate and select successful applications. Unsuccessful applicants (or applications) may re-submit during one future evaluation round of their choosing. No more than seventy-five percent (75%) of the available funding for a biennium may be awarded during any single year; and no more than fifty percent (50%) of annual funding may be awarded during any single award cycle. The annual "award year" will be based on the state fiscal year, July 1 – June 30.

Successful proposals will include:

- A designated lead entity that will head up grant-related activities. Preference will be given to those applications that select as lead a community college, NSC, or a combination thereof; working in concert with an industry-based organization.
- Potential cross-sector collaboration that brings together the applicable colleges, industry sector councils, area firms, and/or an industry based organization(s).
- Evidence of active industry participation and leadership as well as current or planned collaboration among companies in program development and implementation.
- Leveraging of existing or additional state and federal funding.
- Replicable model that allows possible transfer to other regions.
- Well defined metrics and performance management to ensure evidenced based decision-making and accountability.

Funding Recommendation

Funding for the first biennium would be **Three Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$3.5M) Dollars**. Funding levels would be reassessed each biennium.