FY2018 Competitive Education Grant Program Guidelines

Purpose: The purpose of the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission's "Competitive" Education grant program is to fund initiatives designed to assist residents of the tobacco region to obtain levels of education previously not promoted, or available, in the region. The Commission views education and training as prerequisites for citizen participation in the highly competitive global economy and in a networked society; and as essential for advancing productivity, innovation and entrepreneurship, where knowledge workers are vital to the process of transforming the region. The program focuses on ways to increase the education and skill levels of the region's labor pools, as a method to attract and retain employers in the modern commercial job market.

Program Objectives and Funding Strategies: Objectives for this funding are to enhance workforce readiness through support for proven and/or innovative programs, and to focus on "gaps" between education supply and occupational demand with emphasis on post-secondary STEM-H and advanced manufacturing career skills. Strategies and uses of funds expected to be supported under this program include (but are not limited to) proposals that:

- Develop or expand regional programs to increase educational achievement as reflected by degree or credential completion in GED attainment, work-readiness certification and post-secondary higher education;
- Initiate training programs and facilities that result in industry-led national certifications for high demand careers, as defined in partnership with regional businesses and industries, including STEM-H;
- Support existing private sector companies through industry-led workforce training or retraining of current and prospective workers for targeted high-demand employment opportunities, including work-based opportunities such as registered apprenticeships and on-the-job training programs;
- Assist communities and institutions in development of new employment training opportunities including physical improvements, construction, or equipping of education facilities for development of distance learning centers and/or on-site education programs that were previously unavailable to residents of the region.

Priorities: Priority consideration will be given to proposals that 1) Advance STEM-H and/or Advanced Manufacturing workforce training; and 2) Provide training in conjunction with a private company's commitment to create new jobs and/or fill existing job openings where there are direct articulated employment linkages between program graduates and employers. Please note that student financial aid, which is funded through other Commission programs, is not a funding priority in Competitive Education.

Outcome Measures: Applicants are required to align curricula to meet nationally-recognized academic or workforce credentials (degrees, certifications, etc.). Primary outcome measures for this program include the number of students served by the project including those employed, trained, or granted workforce or academic credentials; as well as the quality of the jobs expected to be created or filled (e.g. projected wages or salaries, type of work involved, skills required, etc.).

Application Deadline: On-line applications must be submitted through the Commission's application portal by the Thursday, March 1, 2018 application deadline.

Other Program Guidelines/Requirements:

- **Operating budget and other supporting detail** - All requests, whether for capital assets or operational funds, should include sufficient supporting detail on grant-funded project costs, as well as an operating budget to show how the proposed program and facility operations will be funded (including tuition revenue) when fully operational, as indicated in the next two bullets.
- **Requests for equipment and/or construction** should include detailed construction estimates from an A&E firm, and/or a detailed list with costs of any requested equipment, as well as a proposed operating budget showing funding sources and expenditures for the requested facility when it is fully operational.
- **Requests for operational funding** should include a detailed annual operating budget for the requested educational program (with revenues, including tuition, and expenditures) that shows specifically how operational funding from the Commission and other sources will be used when the program is fully operational. Request for operational funds must also demonstrate how operations are to be sustained beyond a start-up period of no more than three years (the maximum time period typically allowed for support from Commission funds).
- **Distance to similar offerings**– Applicants are required to determine the distances to other locations where similar programs are offered and to document the capacity of those programs to serve residents of the Commission's service area.
- **Private employer reviews-** Applications are required to include at least two written reviews from private sector employers in your service area that address the value proposition in the training for which Commission funds would be used. The preference is for letters that identify specific numbers and types of positions needed currently or expected to be filled in the near future, as opposed to being generic letters of support.
- **Multiple & Multi-faceted proposals** – Multiple proposal submissions and proposals that involve multiple programs (e.g. two or more specific career paths such as welding vs. machining) must provide a priority ranking of the specific career pathways, so that the Commission may focus its primary consideration on the applicant's stated #1 priority.
- **Million dollar-plus projects** - All projects that will involve current and future requests to the Commission that in aggregate will total more than $1 million must provide evidence of the commitment of at least 50% of the funds needed to construct the anticipated multi-million dollar facility, and a projected timeline for construction.

Value of Awards: The Commission has $2.5 million available for Competitive Education projects in FY18. While there is no stated minimum or maximum grant amount, competitive education grant awards in FY17 ranged from $81k to $361k, with a median grant award amount of $175k. The number of awards and grant award amounts are subject to the quality and quantity of proposals received and other applicable considerations. Requests that seek a majority of available funds will receive lower funding consideration.

Loans for projects: Applicants should be aware that any project which, when in full operation, will generate revenues such as user fees or other income, will be reviewed for eligibility for a loan (rather than a grant) to be funded by the Commission in partnership with the Virginia Resources Authority. For more information on TRRC-funded loans, please see our website and contact Commission staff.

Cost Sharing Requirement: All Commission grants require at least dollar-for-dollar match on the funding request to the Commission. Applicants must demonstrate how they will provide non-Commission matching funds of at least 50% of the total cost of the project. No more than 25% of the required matching funds may be in-kind project contributions.

Start Date: It is anticipated that the Commission will make final funding decisions at its May 2018 meeting. Proposals should therefore plan for projects to start no earlier than **June 1, 2018**.

Evaluation Criteria: Proposals will be scored on the ability to demonstrate the following attributes:

Technical Merit

- The significance and strategic fit of the project to the community, demonstrated by assessment of needs or opportunities; evidence of community support; thorough approach and planning of the proposal, readiness for immediate implementation, qualified and committed leadership
- The soundness of the proposal's budget; leveraging of the Commission's funds with other appropriate sources of funds
- Sustainability of the program beyond the term of the grant funding
- The ability to clearly demonstrate or evaluate the proposal's effectiveness

Education Potential

- Number of students/citizens receiving a widely recognized academic/workforce credential (certificate/degree).
- Targets educational and career pathways that support tobacco region employers.
- Salaries of potential jobs and evidence of current job openings in region.
- Provides access to program or facilities not previously available in tobacco region service area.

Significance to Commission's Mission

- Strategic fit with the Commission's Strategic Plan and Education Program Guidelines.
- Regional cooperation and/or financial collaboration for this project (multiple localities)

For additional information on funding priorities and administration of TRRC grants, please refer to the Commission's Strategic Plan and the document "Funding Policies for Grant Awards: Information for Applicants and Grantees" on the Commission's website www.revitalizeva.org