

Area 14 Workforce Development Board

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QUEST Round One NDWG

Area 14 Policy 14.23-01

Effective: 2/7/2024

Revised:



Workforce Development Area 14
Athens, Meigs & Perry Counties

A proud partner of the American Job Center Network

I. Purpose

To define participant eligibility, allowable services, and other policy parameters to implement and deliver QUEST 1 grant services. This policy will apply to all participants seeking to utilize QUEST 1 funding. Program Operators in Area 14 will adhere to all applicable federal and state guidance with regards WIOAPL 23-01, as well as the terms set forth in this policy when determining the eligibility and enrollment of participants.

II. Effective

Immediately

III. Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has had substantial impacts on the health and prosperity of the nation, its people, and its businesses. Populations experiencing especially harmful impacts include women, immigrants, lower-wage workers, people of color, people with disabilities, individuals who were formerly incarcerated, and other workers from historically marginalized communities. Individuals living in rural communities that lack broadband connectivity were also vulnerable because many were unable to work, attend school or training, or access tele-health services remotely from their homes, and were therefore limited in their ability to maintain social distancing.

Recovery from the pandemic requires strength and resilience in industries critical to our economy's stability and growth, such as the broadband and telecommunications industries. Efforts to expand high-speed connectivity into rural communities will require substantial increases in the number of workers available with the skills to construct cell phone towers, install utility lines and fiber-optic wires, and deploy and manage wireless networks.

To address the current shortage of workers in telecommunications and broadband employment, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) applied for and received a \$9 million discretionary QUEST National Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG).

This time-limited grant will be used to:

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- Launch regional industry sector partnerships known as Nodes under the leadership of a four-year university to implement training programs that develop broadband and 5G skills; to recruit potential trainees and workers into broadband career pathways; and to provide workforce development services to eligible individuals seeking entry into broadband occupations.
- Provide training that builds the skilled workforce in professions that can impact the availability of high-speed internet connectivity in rural communities.
- Develop and implement a statewide outreach campaign to educate students, job seekers, and the public about the high-quality jobs available in the broadband and telecommunication industries.
- Ensure the timely delivery of appropriate, necessary career, training, and supportive services to eligible participants, including individuals from historically marginalized populations and workers who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Assist broadband employers in recruiting and hiring the workforce needed to build a best-in-class broadband network and to ensure statewide access to high-speed internet connectivity.

IV. Eligibility Requirements

The QUEST grant is a national Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker grant, issued to participating local areas, under the authority of the WIOA subgrant agreement between ODFJS and each local area. Area 14 will implement the grant-funded services and activities in accordance with the terms and conditions of the WIOA subgrant agreement, along with requirements found in WIOAPL 23-01.

A. Regional Sector Strategies

Area 14 has been designated as the lead agency for the Southeast regional broadband sector, or Node. Area 14 will partner with a four-year university, community college, and one community action agency to provide QUEST-funded services.

B. Eligible Participants

The goal of Ohio's QUEST DWG is to enable individuals who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the social and economic inequities that the pandemic exacerbated, to enter, return to, or advance in high-quality jobs in the broadband industry. The activities of the QUEST DWG will yield improved individual and community resilience to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and enhance the ability of broadband providers to expand high-speed connectivity statewide.

Local areas shall ensure that individuals served under the QUEST grant have met all eligibility criteria, including those in 20 C.F.R. § 687.170 and WIOAPL 15-02.1 (Adult and Dislocated Worker Eligibility).

Individuals eligible to receive QUEST grant services must be one of the following:

- 1.A dislocated worker;
- 2.An individual temporarily or permanently laid off as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic;

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3.A long-term unemployed individual; or

4.A self-employed individual who became unemployed or significantly underemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attachments A & B of WIOAPL 23-01 provide further definitions and should be referenced by program staff, when determining participant eligibility.

Determination of Appropriateness for Training Services

Program staff must determine the appropriateness of a participant to pursue training services. It is important that program staff gather enough information to justify the need for training services. The participant case record must contain a determination of need for training services through the following determination process.

Pursuant to section 134(c)(3)(A) of the WIOA, training services may be provided to adults, dislocated workers or youth who after an interview, evaluation, or assessment and career planning, have been determined by OhioMeansJobs staff or OhioMeansJobs center partner staff to be:

- Unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency or wages comparable to or higher than wages from previous employment through career services.
- In need of training services to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency or wages comparable to or higher than wages from previous employment; and
- Have the skills and qualifications to successfully participate in the selected program of training services.

The process to obtain this information shall be a combination of standardized tests, interviews, inventory of applicants' fields of interests, skills assessments, career exploration, available labor market data, other data which may have been collected through the provision of a career service, or any other means that provide Program Operator staff the insight into the appropriateness of training services.

C. Allowable Services and Activities

In planning and implementing services under the QUEST grant, Area 14 WDB will assist participants alleviate the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through:

- Career, training, and supportive services for eligible participants, aimed at increasing the number of qualified professionals in fields that can impact the lack of broadband connectivity in rural communities;
- Providing a full array of workforce services to eligible participants; and
- Increasing engagement with and support for broadband employers, to expand the number of workers entering careers in the broadband industry.

Career Services

Area 14 WDB will provide basic and individualized career services such as job search assistance, initial and specialized assessments of skill levels, career planning, and prevocational services as outlined in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policy Letter (WIOAPL) No. 15-08.1, Career Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers.

Training

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This grant is aimed at providing eligible individuals with the skills needed to succeed in broadband and 5G careers. QUEST funding shall be limited to the approved training programs, as advised by state guidance. These options were identified by the Ohio Broadband & 5G Sector Partnership. QUEST dollars may also be used for training in other occupations, if the case record shows that it leads to employment by a broadband or 5G employer and the activity is approved by the ODJFS project manager for QUEST. An example might be on-the-job training or Registered Apprenticeship carried out by a local telecommunications contractor.

QUEST participants may be co-enrolled in, and receive braided funding from, other workforce programs such as the Dislocated Worker program. Long-term training may be supplemented with WIOA formula funds if the individual is eligible for WIOA formula funding, and the training extends beyond the QUEST grant period. Participants enrolling in other funding, such as WIOA, must follow all federal, state and local guidance when being enrolled by program staff.

Supportive Services

Grant-funded supportive services such as transportation, childcare, and housing assistance may be provided to grant participants in need of such services.

Area 14 WDB will ensure services provided will increase the likelihood of participants from historically marginalized populations can successfully complete training. Participants may be provided with extensive help with barrier removal and financial support at levels not required by other population groups who are unaffected by cultural biases.

Other Allowable Services and Activities

Services and activities may be delivered under the local area's existing policies applicable to dislocated workers, or the local workforce development board may opt to implement new or revised policies specific to the QUEST grant.

D. Unallowable Services and Activities

QUEST funds may not be used to pay for incentive payments to participants.

E. Subrecipients and Contractors

Area 14 may enter into subrecipient agreements or contracts with public entities, not-for-profit organizations, and private-for-profit entities. The determination of subrecipient or contractor status must be based on the considerations in 2 C.F.R. § 200.331.

Competitive procurement of a provider that meets the definition of a subrecipient is not required but is recommended when feasible, to increase the likelihood of obtaining the highest quality of services at the lowest cost.

When contractors are competitively selected, this must be done in accordance with federal, state, and local procurement rules. For-profit contractors and subrecipients may keep the profits earned from performance of grant activities. The amount of profit must be negotiated as a separate element of the overall price of the services, with consideration given to the complexity, risk, past performance, and industry profit rates in the surrounding geographical area for similar work.

V. Reporting Requirements

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Area 14 WDB will report participants served under the QUEST grant in the state's designated case management reporting system under the special grant office created for the grant. Within 30 days of its occurrence, each participant enrollment, service, and activity must be entered into the case management reporting system special grant office section.

The outcomes of participants in the QUEST grant will not affect Area 14 WDB's WIOA performance measures, unless participants are co-enrolled in local WIOA formula-funded programs.

Area 14 WDB will request cash draws and report expenditures and other financial information using the State's designated financial reporting system, including the client tracking detail for participant-level direct service costs.

VII. Monitoring

The Area 14 Workforce Development Board will conduct oversight of the implementation of QUEST grant funded adult and dislocated worker training programs to ensure that participants enrolled in the programs are eligible, that eligibility has been properly documented and services were provided consistent with applicable policies. Program Operators are required to make available to the board and/or contracted monitors all relevant participant files, documents and paperwork resolution process.

VI. Reference

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policy Letter No. 23-01

[Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act §§ 134 and 170, Pub. L. 113-128.](#)

[USDOL, Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 2-22: QUEST Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grants Funding Announcement \(July 5, 2022\).](#)

2 C.F.R. § 200.331.

20 C.F.R. § 683.215.

20 C.F.R. § 687.170.

[ODJFS, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policy Letter No. 15-02.1, Adult and Dislocated Worker Eligibility \(October 1, 2020\).](#)

[ODJFS, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policy Letter No. 15-08.1, Career Services for Adults and Dislocated Workers \(June 6, 2017\).](#)

[The Ohio Broadband Strategy](#)

[Strengthening Ohio's Broadband and 5G Workforce](#)

WIOAPL 23-01 Attachments:

[WIOAPL 23-01 ATTACH A.pdf \(ohio.gov\)](#)

[WIOAPL 23-01 ATTACH B.pdf \(ohio.gov\)](#)