

THE NEW YORK
COMMUNITY TRUST



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New York City Workforce Development Fund Call for Letters of Interest

The New York City Workforce Development Fund (The Fund) in The New York Community Trust was established in 2001 as a regional funder collaborative to promote a more effective workforce system in New York City. The Fund is guided by an Executive Committee of 14 contributing foundations and corporate philanthropies that pool resources, set priorities, and make joint decisions to support projects.

Since 2001, The Fund has raised more than \$15.5 million from contributing members and inspired more than \$33 million in aligned funding from other funders. The Fund hosts quarterly meetings to share information about issues in the workforce development field and has supported sector partnerships, policy advocacy, and capacity-building projects. The Fund also has worked with the City of New York to expand industry-driven strategies such as the New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH) and the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline.

In 2017, The Fund commissioned a four-year strategic review of all public and philanthropically funded workforce initiatives. The resulting [Workforce Agenda for New York City](#) report provided the field with a set of pragmatic recommendations to strengthen the city's workforce sector. The report also triggered The Fund's first strategic planning process, which led it to focus its grant-making in 2020 on three goals:

1. Address systemic or structural barriers that affect low-income workers;
2. Increase the career success of community college students; and
3. Reorient the workforce system to the modern economy.

Against this backdrop, The Fund invites Letters of Interest from nonprofit organizations requesting support for projects that meet the Fund's 2020 strategic goals. In response to the current COVID-19 crisis, The Fund will also consider submissions from organizations and intermediaries that serve low-wage workers affected by the crisis, including restaurant, retail, app-based and other service workers.

Address systemic or structural barriers that affect low-income New Yorkers

Similar to other social service sectors, the workforce development sector is challenged to meet the needs of marginalized New Yorkers who struggle with unemployment, underemployment, poor work conditions, unfair wages, and weak labor protections. These populations include (but are not limited to) home health aides, people with disabilities, app-based workers, the formerly incarcerated, and those employed in the food sector. The economic crisis created by COVID-19 has only compounded these challenges.

Competitive submissions to this category should seek to:

1. Promote partnerships with New York City government to address system-level issues;
2. Help align the needs of marginalized New Yorkers—including those most affected by the COVID-19 crisis—with existing or emerging policy advocacy agendas;
3. Support workers in sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis, including the restaurant, retail, hospitality, app-based, and human services industries;
4. Strengthen the information infrastructure of workforce development organizations;
5. Improve data collection; and/or
6. Improve practice in the workforce development sector through research.

Promote career success for City University of New York Community College students

Recent analysis of New York State earnings data reveals that City University of New York (CUNY) graduates struggle to earn a living wage; 50 percent of CUNY graduates earn less than \$34,000 a year after graduation. This reflects a failure and missed opportunity for students to access the fundamental promise of higher education: that a college degree ensures the opportunity to achieve financial independence.

The causes of this missed opportunity are numerous. They include an above average and unsustainable staff/student ratio of 2,500 to 1 in CUNY's Career Services Offices; a dearth of social capital and professional connections among CUNY students; limited capacity of community colleges to engage the business community and the difficulties employers face establishing recruiting relationships with campuses; and, inadequate connection between classroom learning and industry practice. This last cause is particularly problematic in workforce-focused associate degree programs. These associate degree programs, by definition, ought to be grounded by labor market information and incorporate the practical training required for a graduate to enter the workforce immediately after completion. However, for many of CUNY's programs, this is not the case.

Competitive submissions to this category should seek to:

1. Improve the career outcomes of degree- or non-degree workforce education programs;
2. Increase linkages between degree- and non-degree workforce education programs;
3. Increase partnerships and coordination among community colleges and nonprofits to design or replicate workforce development programs with strong career outcomes;
4. Improve alignment between CUNY degree requirements, course content, and employer needs using nationally recognized standards (such as the NACE career competencies);
5. Expand the capacity of CUNY's two-year colleges to promote career success through increased work-based learning experiences (i.e., internships, apprenticeships, employer-designed projects and competitions, etc.), career advising, use of career preparation digital tools, and faculty engagement; and/or
6. Foster innovative partnerships among nonprofit organizations, colleges, faculty, and/or employers that significantly improve the employability of students.

Reorient the workforce development sector to the modern economy

Engaging with the business community continues to be a significant struggle for the workforce development field. At the same time, New York City's complex and fragmented workforce system is a challenge for businesses to navigate. Too many New Yorkers are stuck in low-wage, low-quality jobs. There are few channels for businesses to communicate their needs to city agencies and the vast network of provider organizations, and few channels to tackle job quality issues with employers. Funding streams often incentivize moving participants into entry-level jobs, rather than pathways to higher-paying jobs and longer-term career progression. Despite general consensus that the field must develop upskilling pathways and training programs must prioritize skill-building for the emerging labor market, efforts to carve out a role for the business community, labor unions, and the CUNY system have been limited. The underrepresentation of marginalized communities—including communities of color—in industries such as tech and healthcare has not been addressed at scale, and few workforce organizations are positioned to confront these inequities with their employer partners.

Competitive submissions to this category should seek to:

1. Incorporate strong business engagement;
2. Strengthen pathways to living-wage jobs and career advancement for current workers—particularly in industries experiencing significant transformation—either through direct service models or through advocacy;
3. Connect low-income New Yorkers to careers by addressing barriers to employment and advancement, especially efforts that enhance equity by increasing representation in specific industries or by specific underrepresented populations;
4. Offer technical assistance and/or training to strengthen nonprofit capacity to engage employers or deploy sector-based training;
5. Connect multiple community-based organizations to employers, including small and mid-sized businesses; and/or
6. Promote replication of successful business engagement models, including the development of learning communities or collaboratives.

Submission Guidelines, Evaluation and Notification of Awards

Applicants may submit one Letter of Interest and must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (or have a 501(c)(3) as a funds administrator), a City University of New York Community College, or a division of the City University of New York central office.

Grant awards will range from \$50,000 to \$250,000 for a 12- to 24-month period.

Letters of Interest should include the following:

1. A three-page narrative (in 12 pt. font) that describes:
 - a. Organization(s) involved;
 - b. Summary of lead organization's mission, history, and record of accomplishment in delivering workforce development programming or advocacy;
 - c. Description of the proposed project and an explanation of how it aligns with The Fund's priorities;
 - d. Project goals and the activities required to reach these goals; and
 - e. A plan for measuring and evaluating outcomes.

2. Project budget listing expenses and sources of revenue, including foundation, government, and corporate funders—please specify the amount of each grant award and if the award is committed or pending.

Applicants may begin uploading Letters of Interest for The Fund's first strategy, *addressing systemic barriers that affect low-income New Yorkers*, to the Trust's portal (<https://www.nycommunitytrust.org/information-for/for-nonprofits/request-for-proposals>) on May 14, 2020. The deadline for submissions for the first strategy is May 29, 2020 at 5:00 pm.

Applicants may begin uploading Letters of Interest for The Fund's second and third strategies, *increasing the career success of community college students and reorienting the workforce system to the modern economy*, to the Trust's portal (<https://www.nycommunitytrust.org/information-for/for-nonprofits/request-for-proposals>) on September 1, 2020. The deadline for submissions for the second and third strategies will be September 29, 2020 at 5:00 pm.

Applicants will be notified by email if the submission is of interest to The Fund and may be asked to provide additional information. Site visits and follow-up phone calls for clarification may also be necessary. Grant decisions for the first strategy will be announced in July 2020; grant decisions for the second and third strategies will be announced in December 2020.

This is a competitive opportunity and not all qualifying or meritorious proposals will be funded. Letters of Inquiry will be evaluated by The Fund's Executive Committee. The Fund strongly encourages partnerships that might include workforce organizations, community colleges, research organizations, city agencies, and/or employers. We strongly encourage organizations serving underrepresented communities to apply.

Please direct all questions about this solicitation to Judith M. Smith, consultant for The New York City Workforce Development Fund, at nycworkforcefunders@gmail.com.

The New York City Workforce Development Fund Executive Committee

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