

New York City Department of Small Business Services

Concept Report Sector-Focused Career Center July 2, 2007

I. Purpose of the RFP

In December 2006, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced the City's commitment to implement the recommendations from the work completed by the Commission for Economic Opportunity ("CEO"), a public-private initiative charged with devising strategies to increase economic opportunity and reduce poverty within the City of New York. In an effort to narrow the skills gap for low-wage workers, the New York City Department of Small Business Services ("the Agency") has been specifically tapped to lead an effort to develop a Sector-Focused Workforce1 Career Center. The goal of creating this Center is to help prepare low wage workers for jobs in high demand occupations that pay higher wages and have career paths, thereby helping workers move out of poverty.

The Agency plans to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Sector-Focused Workforce1 Career Center ("the Sector Center"). Although the Sector Center may leverage the infrastructure and experiences of the Workforce1 Career Center, it will offer more comprehensive sector focused business and jobseeker services than are currently offered in the existing system. The establishment of a Sector Center will allow for strong, focused relationships with employers and, in turn, career advancement opportunities for jobseekers. The Agency seeks an appropriately qualified vendor to operate the Sector Center

The Sector Center will provide a comprehensive set of intensive services to businesses within a single economic sector. These services will be informed by business needs and can include human resource analyses, training assessments, curriculum development, career ladder development, job matching/interviewing and job placement. The service offering should reflect the needs of the sector whether that is in attracting new workers, training the existing workforce, or advancing incumbent workers. The strategy to work within a sector is designed to improve the sector's competitiveness, expand the number or quality of jobs within the sector, and affect its supply of workers. The Sector Center would serve both business and jobseeker customers as defined by an analysis of sector needs in the local economy. In implementing this approach, the Sector Center would create a systematic change within a sector by changing institutional relationships among businesses, between business and labor, and among business, government and training providers.¹

Specifically, the Sector Center would work with a series of employers who are identified as needing strategic staffing solutions that systematically recruit candidates, assist

¹ Beth Siegel and Peter Kwass. *Jobs and the Urban Poor: Publicly Initiated Sectoral Strategies*. Sommerville, MA: Mount Auburn Associates. 1995, p. 3.

candidates to develop the necessary employment skills, support candidates to succeed on the job and promote advancement—thereby creating a reliable pipeline of skilled workers. This connection between the employment needs of the businesses and the employment preparation ensures the highest return on the workforce investment while also establishing strong employer buy-in. Depending on the sector of focus, this may translate to focusing on training entry workers, advancing incumbent workers to mid-level positions, or simply attracting new workers to an industry that is geographically and organizationally diverse. Target sectors would include: Industrial/Manufacturing, Healthcare and Retail/Hospitality. The RFP will detail any additional sectors that are selected; the proposer would select one of those for the Sector Center proposal.

In order to launch a Sector Center, and to ensure its ongoing success and relevancy, a sectoral strategy requires specialized knowledge about employer and/or business needs within the sector, as well as the solutions needed to fill these identified needs. The active and robust engagement of business sector partners in the conceptualization, design, implementation, evaluation and ongoing performance management is critical to the success of the Sector Center. By focusing on a particular sector, the intent is to foster long lasting relationships with employers and other stakeholders such as community colleges and skills training programs. Forming these cross-functional relationships can assist in creating systemic change in the ways firms recruit, hire and train workers.

II. Project Description

A primary objective for the creation of a Sector Center is to assist unemployed and low-income individuals advance out of poverty and low-wage work. In pursuit of this objective the Sector Center would develop a service delivery model that is industry-focused, demand-driven and business-oriented, providing workforce preparation that is grounded in both the employment needs of businesses, as well as the developmental needs of jobseekers and employees. The use of a sectoral strategy framework in designing the Sector Center would ensure that businesses are invested and active participants in the creation of all aspects of the Center's services including jobseeker assessment and curriculum development, recruitment strategies, retention services and advancement programs. Preparation and training for new and incumbent workers that meets the demands of the industry, stated by the industry, will be critical to the success of this model.

The following are the core objectives of the Sector Center:

- Meet business hiring and training needs within one of the target sectors, for new and incumbent workers;
- Prepare low-wage workers for careers in occupations within an identified growth industry in the New York City economy;
- Creation of clearly accessible career ladders that are supported by preparatory training to enable participants to plan career steps and goals accordingly;
- Increase income for new and incumbent workers through increased wages, work hours, and benefits;
- Increase promotions and job upgrades for new and incumbent workers through targeted training and skill development.

Jobseeker services are expected to include, but are not limited to:

- Employment preparation,
- Job placement,
- Job retention programming,
- Career advancement programming

Sector specific business services are expected to include but are not limited to the creation of the following tools and strategies that contribute to the continued success and growth of the sector:

- Jobseeker recruitment,
- Job candidate matching,
- Job placement,
- Industry specific training,
- Retention and advancement programming

The Sector Center is expected to play a brokering role in bringing together key partners and stakeholders for a particular sector. The success of the Sector Center would depend on the ability of the Sector Center to attract and engage groups of employers in a particular sector. Based on national best practice research, key stakeholders for sectoral initiatives can include trade associations, government partners, industry training providers, and labor unions. These partners can each play a role in bringing a deep set of business relationships to the Sector Center. In bringing together this diverse set of players, sectoral programs are intended to identify and address the needs of particular sectors. These needs may include:

- Organizing and promoting cooperation among firms in the sector;
- Creating employment and training programs to assure an adequate and skilled workforce;
- Setting up marketing programs to help firms access new markets and generate more sales;
- Developing specialized financing to fill capital needs not met by banks and other conventional financing sources;
- Researching and developing new technology or new products;
- Transferring or modernizing technology to assist firms in adopting up-to-date technology;
- Addressing other key competitiveness issues revealed by the industry analysis.

Finally, and in support of this initiative the New York City Workforce Investment Board (“WIB”) and the Agency have engaged consultants to review available local industry and labor market research. The product of this research will guide the Agency and the WIB in selecting the target sectors for the Sector Center that will be defined in the RFP. As previously stated, target sectors will include: Industrial/Manufacturing, Healthcare and Retail/Hospitality. However, the Agency may choose to include additional sectors in the RFP.

III. Planned Method of Evaluating Proposals

The Agency anticipates using the following as criteria for evaluating proposals:

- Demonstrated Quantity and Quality of Successful Relevant Experience
 - Sectoral strategy and economic development experience
 - Strength of industry partnerships/relationships in the target sector proposed
- Demonstrated Level of Organizational Capability
- Quality of Proposed Approach
 - Quality of Service Delivery Model
 - Business partner recruitment and engagement
 - Service and process flow for Center services
 - Jobseeker recruitment
 - Job retention and advancement services
 - Training and skill development
 - Career ladder creation
 - Community and educational partner engagement
 - Quality of Operating Plan
 - Staff design
 - Budget design
 - Technology implementation
 - Performance management

IV. Proposed Term of the Contract

The Agency anticipates that the term of the contract will be 3 years with an option to renew the contract for up to three additional years.

V. Procurement Timeline

The Agency anticipates the following timeline for this procurement:

- Release date of RFP: August 2007
- Proposal due date: September 2007
- Award announcement date: November 2007
- Contract start date: March 2008

VI. Funding Available and Sources of Funding

The Agency anticipates that the three-year operating budget for the Sector Center will not exceed \$6,900,000, plus approximately \$500,000 for start up costs. Funding will come from tax levy allocated specifically for the purpose of supporting the CEO initiatives.

VII. Anticipated Number of Contracts:

The Agency intends to award one contract for the RFP. However, collaborative proposals between two entities demonstrating previous successful collaboration would be considered.

VIII. Proposed Program Model

A. Business Services and Strategies

The assumptions the Agency maintains regarding the program approach are:

- The contractor would deliver business services (analysis, training, placement, retention, advancement) using a demand-driven industry analysis approach to services to employer needs within a specific industry cluster
- The contractor would provide services to businesses within a specific industry cluster. Services will include access to qualified job candidates, candidate matching services, customized job training and recruitment, and post-employment follow-up.
- The contractor would coordinate with New York City Business Solutions, as well as other partners in the industry cluster in order to better serve employers.
- The contractor would provide industry-specific resources and information to the Agency and the New York City Workforce Investment Board (WIB) collected from employer and jobseeker feedback to help the City identify critical labor shortages in New York City.

B. Job Placement and Employment Preparation Services and Strategies

The assumptions the Agency maintains regarding the program approach are:

- The contractor would operate a full-service Career Center, to be open full-time, Monday through Friday with the possibility of offering evening and weekend services if appropriate. The Sector Center would provide the following services: Greeting/Triage/Referrals, Orientation, Resource Room services, Career Advisement/Job Preparation, Job Placement, Retention and Advancement services.
- The contractor would place a strong emphasis on providing Jobseeker Services to individuals that are considered “working poor”; however the Sector Center would serve residents throughout the five boroughs.
- The contractor would orient its jobseeker recruitment and workforce preparation activities toward opportunities in a specific industry cluster.
- The contractor would coordinate job development and job fulfillment activities with other Workforce1 Career Centers and Business Solutions Centers in New York City.
- The contractor would coordinate with other partners in the New York City Workforce Investment system as well as community-based organizations to maximize the services that are available to jobseekers.
- The contractor would offer occupational training as part of the Center offering, which can include funding that is leveraged from other public and private sources.

IX. Site

Proposers would be requested to demonstrate control of the proposed program site pursuant to a letter of commitment for a landlord for a site of appropriate size and use, for

the duration of the contract term. A landlord will be permitted to issue a letter of commitment to more than one proposer for the purposes of the Request for Proposals.

X. Contractor Qualifications & Vendor Performance Reporting Requirements

Contractor Qualifications

The assumptions the Agency maintains regarding the contractor's qualifications are:

- The contractor would maintain in-house expertise on the targeted growth industry. Therefore the contractor would have the capability to develop and foster relationships with the associated business community, as well as effectively and knowledgeably counsel jobseekers on career paths and expectations within the targeted industry.
- The contractor would have successful experience implementing a demand-driven approach to workforce development; preparing, matching and placing qualified job candidates with businesses in the focus industry.
- The contractor would have at least 3 years of successful experience in providing jobseeker services including development of demand driven training, pre-vocational preparation, and work readiness programming that meets the needs of jobseekers and employers.
- The contractor would have the capability to provide outreach and job matching services to the working poor population of New York City.

Performance Reporting Requirements

The contractor would report on employer and jobseeker outcomes as defined by the Agency. Outcomes will include jobseeker placement, retention and advancement indicators; and business recruitment, turnover, and employee engagement indicators. The Agency will provide the selected contractor with data tracking systems which the contractor would be expected to use.

The Sector Center is part of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiative and would be evaluated to determine whether it is meeting its program goals and contributing to increasing the education, training, employment, earnings, and supports available to low-income individuals. The Sector Center operator and any of its subcontractors are required to comply with monitoring, evaluation, and reporting requirements as defined by the Agency and CEO. At a minimum, the Sector Center operator would be required to maintain and submit client-level data (reflecting client and household characteristics, services provided, outcomes, and follow-up). Such data should be submitted on a monthly basis, or other frequency determined by CEO, in an electronic format that can be read by a commonly available commercial spreadsheet program, such as Microsoft Excel. The Sector Center should participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities led by CEO or its designee, such activities may include site visits, surveys, interviews, focus groups, administrative records review, and other data collection and evaluation strategies.

XI. Comments

Please submit any comments on this concept report or the anticipated RFP in writing by August 16, 2007 at 4pm to the attention of:

Sheridan Ameer
Agency Chief Contracting Officer
NYC Department of Small Business Services
110 William Street, 7th Floor
New York, New York 10038
RE: Sector-Focused Center Concept Report