



## FY15 Competitive Education Grant Program Guidelines

**Purpose:** The purpose of the 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. Strategies and uses of funds expected to be supported under this program include proposals that:

- Develop regional programs to increase educational achievement as reflected by degree completion in GED attainment and post-secondary higher education.
- Support for existing private sector companies through industry-led workforce training or retraining of current and prospective workers for targeted employment opportunities.
- 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). 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.).

### Other Program Guidelines/Requirements:

- **Operating budget and other supporting detail** - All requests should include an operating budget to show how program and facility operations will be funded. Requests for equipment and/or construction should include a general operating budget showing funding sources and expenditures, construction estimates from an A&E firm, and a detailed list of any requested equipment. Requests for operational funding should include a detailed annual operating budget that shows specifically how operational funding from the Commission will be used (contact TICR staff for examples). Request for operational funds must also demonstrate how operations

are to be sustained beyond a start-up period of no more than 3-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 be for 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 up to \$3 million available for Competitive Education projects in FY15. While there is no stated minimum or maximum grant amount, the normal competitive education grant awards in recent years have ranged from \$20,000 to \$785,000; with an average grant award amount of approximately \$200,000. The number of awards and grant award amounts are subject to the quality and quantity of proposals received and other applicable considerations.

**Cost Sharing Requirement:** This program requires 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.

**Application Deadline:** On-line applications must be submitted, and required hard copies postmarked, by the **March 25, 2015** application deadline.

**Start Date:** It is anticipated that the Commission will make final funding decisions at its May 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Proposals should therefore plan for projects to start no earlier than **June 1, 2015**.