



# Regional ecosystem innovation for reskilling & upskilling

## *Request for Proposals*

Trellis Foundation advances equitable educational opportunities in Texas by supporting postsecondary programs, practices, and systems that reduce disparities and lead to success for low-income students and students of color. Our approach is highly collaborative and prioritizes catalytic investments, focused on changing or informing change to policy, practice, and systems.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) constitutes the first opportunity in 2021 to apply for funding support from Trellis Foundation. The focus of this RFP is to encourage, expand, and learn about regional collaborative efforts that lead to greater opportunities and outcomes for reskilling and upskilling dislocated workers and students through [postsecondary credentials/degrees with labor market value](#). Additional Texas resources are available online, such as the [Texas Labor Analysis](#) from the Texas Workforce Commission and the [Texas Workforce Analysis](#) from Brookings and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, among others.

As borne out by our collective experience in 2020, the current pandemic has reshaped the personal and public circumstances for education and employment. Current data show that unemployment in Texas is nearly double what it was one year ago, and more than 3.9 million unemployment claims have been filed since March (Source: [Texas Tribune](#)). Likewise, first-year college enrollments were down 13% nationwide this fall (Source: [NSC](#)) – even though we know that a postsecondary credential or degree is the most reliable path to economic mobility and protection against job losses during economic downturns (Source: [Forbes](#)).

Even as hope builds with the approval of a vaccine, the same horizon holds a promise of more precisely aligned systems, more equitable access, and stronger economic outcomes – for Texas and Texans alike.

To that end, Trellis Foundation intends to award 4-6 grants of up to \$250,000 each through this RFP that focus on both short- and long-term efforts to align regional workforce and education systems – specific to employers and working learners looking to upskill or reskill due to COVID-19 and/or in view of potential improvement in long-term economic vitality. This focus was developed in conversation with many collaborators across the state and in recognition of prior grantmaking that taught us the value of collaborative partnerships. We are confident that the collective work of those most invested in a region's success has the greatest potential for sustained success and impact.

### **Regional Ecosystem**

The focus of this RFP requires **collaborative efforts** across a given region or community. Successful proposals will include organizations that represent workforce (such as a Workforce Investment Board, Workforce Development Board, Chamber of Commerce, or Economic Development Corporation), higher education or training providers (such as a community college or nonprofit technical college or university), as well as community-based social service organization(s) that can provide support services for students/working learners or help them connect to additional resources for success. If a region chooses to focus on a specific industry or occupational cluster, it would be advantageous to include major employers as a part of the collaboration. Strong applications will demonstrate how this work



leads to a long-term goal of stackable credentials and degree pathways with on- and off-ramps that lead to increasing levels of opportunity within a career and a path to a family-sustaining wage.

Although it is not required, Trellis Foundation encourages the use of the Collective Impact framework (or a similar framework) to describe the efforts and the roles and responsibilities of the participating organizations. More details about Collective Impact can be found at <http://collectiveimpactforum.org/>.

### **Reskilling/Upskilling – Potential Outcomes**

Trellis Foundation intends to recognize proposals that aim for both short- and long-term impact and that have potential to inform state-wide and national efforts to improve economic strength and social mobility for communities and individuals. The Foundation recognizes that collaboratives may be in different stages of development, and that this may impact the scope and scale of the proposed work, depending on the level of trust and longevity of the partnerships involved. The following list is not exhaustive, nor is it intended to be prescriptive; it merely shows the types of outcomes the Foundation would expect to see relative to the history of the collaborative:

#### ***Emerging Collaborative***

Possible short-term outcomes (year 1):

- dedicated staff time for reconnecting learners to upskill/reskill opportunities and/or partnership development;
- collection and analysis of benchmarks using labor-market data and post-secondary credential/degree attainment;
- identification of education-to-workforce pathways reflecting high-demand, high-wage opportunities within the region;
- identification of barriers to student/working learner success;
- development of appropriate goals and a plan to achieve them;
- execution of MOUs among partners for data tracking and sharing as well as resource development;
- demonstrated commitment to sustain the work beyond the grant timeframe

Possible long-term outcomes (years 2-3+):

- increased enrollment in higher education programs leading to a credential or credentials with labor-market value;
- increased completion of credentials and degrees with labor-market value;
- increased numbers of incumbent workers enrolled in upskilling opportunities;
- increased wages for students/working learners participating in proposed programming;
- positive employer feedback and increased participation in advisory opportunities for relevant programs.

#### ***Advanced Collaborative***

Possible short-term outcomes (year 1-2):

- creation of a pilot or expansion of an existing apprenticeship or other earn-and-learn program;



- development of enhanced educational approaches to improve technical reskilling and upskilling training for those already in the workforce;
- detailed audit of program policies (either at the employer or at the higher education institution) that may be impeding success;
- development of marketing strategies to reach prospective candidates for reskilling/upskilling;
- increased enrollment in higher education programs leading to a credential with market value;
- increased completion of credentials and degrees with labor-market value;
- increased numbers of incumbent workers enrolled in upskilling opportunities;
- increased wages for students/working learners participating in proposed programming;
- positive employer feedback and increased participation in advisory opportunities for relevant programs.

Possible long-term outcomes (year 2-3+):

- expansion of apprenticeship or other earn-and-learn programs across multiple occupations/academic programs;
- development and sharing of regional/community plans detailing the education-to-workforce pathways available to all students, particularly dislocated and incumbent workers, in the top 10 occupations defined by labor-market analysis;
- demonstration of the community's cultural value of the higher education and business/industry partnerships;
- development of an advocacy strategy to inform state and/or federal policy related to reskilling/upskilling partnerships and programs;
- improved student understanding at the K-12 and higher ed levels about their career options and the educational pathways that align with their goals;
- lower unemployment rates;
- higher retention of postsecondary credential/degree holders within the region.

Whether the collaborative is emerging or advanced, we anticipate that the region has already identified the effects of COVID-19 on employment and enrollment, and that the proposed strategies will not only address immediate needs, but also provide details about what longer-term recovery looks like. In other words, how is the community thinking about more equitable and prosperous opportunities and outcomes for all members of the community? The Foundation is committed to prioritizing efforts that reflect a focus on equity; thus, we expect that proposals will be able to articulate goals and collect data that are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status whenever possible. We are also interested in proposed programming that reflects input from those who are the intended beneficiaries. To the extent this is possible, or if it is a strategy that a collaborative intends to use, please be explicit about it in the application.

We anticipate awarding between four and six grants of up to \$250,000 each through this RFP process. The budget template for applicants provides some guidance about the types of activities that might be included in the request. Please note that indirect costs covered by grant funding are limited to 10% of the amount requested.



### **Proposal Solicitation and Review Process**

Trellis Foundation is issuing this RFP through a competitive process and will be solely responsible for making grant award decisions. Grants will be awarded for a grant term of up to three years. Trellis Foundation expects applicants to identify and leverage other funding sources, either in-kind or direct contributions, which will account for at least 20% of the project costs as outlined in the budget.

### **Additional Resources**

The following list is not comprehensive; however, many of these organizations and their publications have informed the Foundation's thinking about this RFP and may serve as helpful examples or resources for proposed work:

- Texas Workforce Commission – [Texas Labor Analysis](#)
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board/Brookings Institution - [Texas Workforce Analysis](#)
- Education Strategy Group (ESG) - [postsecondary credentials/degrees with labor market value](#)
- Perkins Collaborative Resource Network – resources [for building cross-sector partnerships and defining roles](#) for developing career pathways
- JFF – Examples, ideas, and perspectives on [ensuring an equitable recovery](#)
- Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia – resources for identifying skills that connect and build in upskilling efforts - [Occupational Mobility Explorer](#)
- Amazon/Accenture – reflections on the [skills of greatest importance for enabling occupational transitions](#) post-pandemic



## Timeline

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Actions</b>
January 11, 2021	Release of RFP
<b>February 19, 2021</b>	<b>Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. (CST)</b>
February 19 to March 5, 2021	Proposals evaluated by Trellis Fdn review team
<b>March 29, 2021</b>	<b>Final Award Decisions</b>
April 30, 2021	Grant Agreements executed

## Instructions for Proposal Submission

If your program is aligned with the identified goals and meets eligibility requirements, we invite you to submit a proposal using Trellis Foundation's [online grant application site](#).

The first time you visit the online application system, you will **need to create an account**. You can save the application and return to it later by logging in any time before the submission deadline with your email address and password.

## Proposal Requirements

### 1. Background

- Organization background
  - The application will include a demographic survey of staff and leadership at your organization. For purposes of this RFP, while the survey is required, it will not be used as a tool in scoring the applications.
- Statement of need:
  - Include any effects of COVID-19 that the region has identified that relate to the proposed work.
  - Include an assessment of need by sub-populations within the region (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, entry-level workers, Opportunity Youth<sup>1</sup>, justice-impacted adults).
- Ecosystem:
  - Describe the region (geography, population, major business/industries).
  - Provide examples of prior work or other collaborative efforts that can be leveraged -- What technologies, data, and/or technical assistance might complement this project (e.g., GEER funding from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, participation in AdvanceTogether, experience as a Lumina Talent Hub or with the Graduate! Network's Bridging the Talent Gap project, or other initiative)?
- Define the collaborative—Is it emerging or advanced?
  - Which organizations are committed to the proposed work?
  - Who are the identified leaders for this effort, which organizations do they represent, and what are the leadership structures and decision-making processes? Please describe

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<sup>1</sup> "There are currently 4.6 million opportunity youth – defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market – or about one in nine members of this age group in the United States." <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/who-are-opportunity-youth/>



your organization's qualifications to serve in a leadership role for this effort.

- Please describe the extent to which you will be incorporating feedback/representation from the workers you plan to serve. If appropriate, this could include focus groups, employee association membership in the collaborative, etc.

## **2. Project Goals and Outcomes**

- What are the specific short-term goals and intended outcomes that will result from your work?
- What are the specific long-term goals and intended outcomes?
- How will you measure progress toward these goals?
- Please provide details on how you will collect and use disaggregated data (at a minimum disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender) in establishing and tracking outcomes. If you will focus on additional subpopulations, include any target outcomes for those populations as well (e.g., entry-level workers, Opportunity Youth, justice-impacted adults).

## **3. Project Description**

- Request title
- Project summary (very brief description for use in promotional and review material)
- What activities will you undertake to achieve the identified goals and outcomes? Who will carry them out?
- To what extent are planned activities in response to immediate needs arising from COVID-19 disruptions? To what extent are planned activities in response to previously existing and COVID-related long-term needs?
- What do you see as the greatest challenges or threats to the success of the proposed work? How are you planning to address the potential challenges?
- What is the project's potential to drive long-term, systemic change? How do you plan to capture the knowledge gained from the work; who will benefit from learning about your efforts; and how would you share your experiences and knowledge once this work is complete?

## **4. Project Timeline**

- Describe the order of activities and when they will take place.
- Include the points at which you will evaluate progress or outcomes over the course of the grant period.

## **5. Project Budget**

- Use the provided budget template to reflect the full costs of the proposed project.
  - Request amounts may be up to \$250,000.
  - The budget should reflect which costs will be contributed as in-kind or direct support from other sources, as well as the amounts for the line items for which Trellis Foundation funding is being requested.
  - As a reminder, the Foundation expects applicants to identify other funding sources, either in-kind or direct contributions, which will account for at least 20% of the project costs.
  - If you will be incorporating employee voice/perspective in your collaborative, we encourage you to consider designating a stipend for focus group or collaboration



service, as working learners are often unable to commit time beyond their work, study and family obligations.

- The budget template for applicants provides some guidance about the types of activities that might be included in the request.
- Please note that indirect costs covered by grant funding are limited to 10% of the amount requested.

### **Questions**

- Additional information and answers to questions will be provided in a webinar on January 21, 2021, at 11 a.m. (CST). [Register](#) to attend the live discussion; a recording will be provided on this page a few days after.
- A list of [frequently asked questions](#) will be maintained and updated online as well.
- Any additional information about Trellis Foundation can be found at [www.trellisfoundation.org](http://www.trellisfoundation.org).
- Please direct specific questions about this RFP to Jenny Achilles, director of partnerships and programs, at [jenny.achilles@trellisfoundation.org](mailto:jenny.achilles@trellisfoundation.org).