

TRAINS RFP BIDDERS CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 6, 2002

QUESTIONS & ANSWERES

Question #1 Who are the members of the proposal evaluation committee?

Evaluation committee will be the chairman of the NM TRAINS Board.
All members of the Board of Directors will be on the selection committee.

Question #2 What are the 14 communities targeted?

Not pertinent to RFP at this time.

Question #3 Is NM TRAINS using any specific definition of "employability" skills?

NM TRAINS refers to these as soft skills or life skills, however every individual and community has their own needs. NM TRAINS has not defined these needs. Hopefully the employability skills will be identified by community through the awardees of the RFP. NM TRAINS does not have a specific list of needs. Just keep in mind this RFP deals with Call Centers so the employability needs are going to be geared towards those needs, rather than that of a miner or a truck driver.

Question #4 How set are the budget ranges for each category? Is there flexibility within the total amount?

What TRAINS did in establishing those ranges was to look at the total Grant and what we felt would be appropriate within those ranges for what TRAINS has for the entire project. The ranges are certainly not set in concrete within the proposals. You can make adjustments up or down depending upon what you believe. If you believe a larger amount needs to be in one area and a smaller amount in another, and you can support that in the proposal, the board is certainly willing to look at that. Once again let me reiterate that we are looking for creative ways to do these things.

Now I can't tell you what the committee will say when they look at it, due to the fact that our budget was taken from the U.S. DOL and consequently we have some limitation on how much we can deviate on the Federally approved budget.

What we are saying is that you could exceed the budget on any particular category and you would still be considered for the RFP, but it would not be to your benefit to have an excessively high budget on any one item.

Question #5 Who is the designated/target population?

Dislocated workers as defined by the Federal Government. One deviation would be that TRAINS has included within our target population new entries within the workforce, which is defined as those 19 years or older going into first full time career employment.

They must qualify as a dislocated worker as specified and defined by the Federal Government Department of U.S. Labor ruling. Also a welfare worker that qualifies under WIA would qualify for the Trains Project

U.S. DOL web worksite has the listing posted,

<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/training/index.htm>

Question #6 When do you expect work to begin? What's the process after the January 22, 2002 notification?

We are looking at 30 days to begin some components of delivery, after the notification has been given. We realize it will take some time to gear up for everything, but we want delivery of some of the services within 30 days.

A lot will depend on what we end up negotiating as to how, when, and where services are to be delivered.

Each category within the RFP has dates associated with completion.

Question #7 Are the three target companies ready to commit or do we need to contact each separately?

They are part of the project and we have been working with the companies for a number of years so they are involved in this project already.

Each company is ready to go, they have already assigned people to work with us and to make sure that what ever we do is integrated within their operation.

Can you tell us those contact names, or can we call those individuals within these companies?

No, we do not feel that would be appropriate at this time, nor is it necessary.

Question #8 Thus far, how do you find your particular population (dislocated workers, etc.) responding to the concept of online/e-learning?

We have yet to start delivering online e-learning, so as yet we don't know. We have experimented with using online assessment tools and the response has been good and a willingness to use them has been good.

Question #9 Will the proposal review panel includes a potential recipient/trainee or even a current rural call center recent employee/trainee?

No

Question #10 There is reference in the RFP to eligibility requirements. What are those criteria?

They are the U.S. DOL definitions for a dislocated worker plus new entries into the labor force.

Question #11 What information (if pertinent) do you have about the empty call center in Clovis, NM? Will it be included in the project?

It Will not be included in the RFP. However if we can attract a call center to go to Clovis, NM then it could become part of the project expansion and continuation.

Question #12 Please explain the various numbers used to describe target populations in the various sites in the RFP.

They are all different because of the size of the call center operation, and the size of community.

I guess it is the intake and assessment numbers verses the training numbers with the assumption that 1/2 of them would be filtered out?

This is targeted to specific call centers. In some cases you may find 90% of the people are suited to that particular call center, but then again it is dependent on the type of call center and the skill level needed. For example, if you had a call center for computer troubleshooting, you would need your workers to have technical knowledge, therefore they would need specific technical training. On the flip side you may get a call center that just takes orders so they would need little or no specialized training.

Question #13 Has the database been developed yet? Is that something the bidder must consider, or is the bidder responsible only for data gathering?

We are working with the new Workforce Connection, it is the Geo Systems solution that the NM Department of Labor has implemented for the WIA program. That is why we work closely with the WIA programs and the local boards, so we can piggy back on their database for the data gathering of participants.

However, there will probably be a need to do additional data gathering to insure we are catching everybody when we are working with the call centers.

So a formal database system will probably need to be developed by you. It would primarily be for you, to make sure you got everybody, as opposed to developing the primary database management system for the whole project.

The official database is created.

Question #14 In the intake and assessment section, it mentions “materials and procedures developed during a pilot project” What materials and procedures? Will they be disseminated to the bidders?

The processes and procedures would not be distributed to the bidders, but rather to the awardees.

Question #15 How will individuals have access to on-line training materials?

Once the portal is developed it will be web based, web enabled, password protected and assigned to participants of the program. Many of the online materials we anticipate using will be licensed to TRAINS just for the participants use.

The portal will be owned by NM TRAINS and can reside where appropriate.

We do not want to build any curriculum of our own, because we feel the time period to that is too long. TRAINS will acquire assessment and training programs already created rather than trying to create them.

Question #16 The schedule appears fairly aggressive within the existing time limits specified.

1) How do you expect the community assessment to inform the intake and assessment, and curriculum design?

The intake and assessment format has already developed by TRAINS, and the policy and procedures for statewide implementation.

Training and assessment tools will be purchased not created, and much of that work has been done early on with the smaller grant, and TRAINS will pass that information on to the awardees.

2) How does the curriculum design, completed in 45 days become implemented in 45 days? Is this from the contract signing?

If as a result a particular community will take longer to complete any of these components, then we will deal with that on a individual case basis.

Assessment tools should be specified then by NM TRAINS, or do you want the awardees to specify the assessment tools, do you want them part of the RFP?

We are constantly evaluating assessment tools. TRAINS already has assessment tools and licenses, that will be available to carry on through this grant, however in each case it appears that each call center has different issues concerning assessment. We anticipate that TRAINS will probably already have something in place to meet the needs of the call center that will be available for you to use. However, we want you to think outside the box so if you have an alternative please do not be afraid to include your ideas. Again, we do not want to inhibit your creativity in the solution.

I can tell you the assessment tools we have been working with:

Work keys General Assessment tool - we have done a complete study on it, although we are not completely sold on it, we do have licenses for it.

Selection Advantage - We have a great many licenses for Selection Advantage which is a inbound call center assessment tool.

P3 - we are currently experimenting with a product called P3, which is a collections call center tool.

If it will help, I will briefly tell you what those 3 call centers do that the RFP demonstration calls for:

Stream International, in Silver City – Is a 3rd party call center that provides technical support and customer service for folks like Hewlett Packard and Gateway.

The Connection - Is a 3rd party call center, also customer service orientated, they have 3 sites, Grants, Las Vegas and Carlsbad sites.

Penncro Associates Inc. - is an outbound collections call center in Taos. They have customers like Sprint, Sears and Citicorp, and they do past due balance collections.

Question #17 When and how does the 20% designated for urban come into play?

We don't know yet. Our primary focus is in the rural areas, we see the 20% being overflow from what is going on in the rural areas. That could be from things like assessments and training in those areas. We may have a targeted area that happens from dislocated workers.

Question #18 Is the NM TRAINS consortium open to having one call center training program throughout NM for consistency and marketing?

NM TRAINS consortium would love to see that happen, but appears not to be practical as there is no consensus among the call centers.

Question #19 Under curriculum design it says there must be a “willingness and ability of the local call centers to deploy and implement the chosen curriculum” and “can and will be integrated into internal training ”What does all this mean exactly? Obviously there has to be involvement and buy in of the employers. What does this mean beyond that?

Again, what we believe is that we already have the buy in of the employers. As to proceeding with this, obviously the details to what they are buying into has to be defined, but the intent is for the employers to work with us on the assessment tools and the employability skills training, as well as helping the people complete their individual learning maps. Again with each employer it is going to be different, due to the labor pool they have. It is important that we are together on the assessment and employability skills and the minimum levels of employment are well understood.

Question #20 Are training funds part of the Grant or will these funds be coming from WIA?

Both

If WIA funds are required are the local boards aware of the project?

The online education funds will come from the TRAINS Grant. The remedial funds will come from WIA Intensive Services. We are negotiating with the boards right now to coordinate participant inclusion in such training programs under WIA. WIA may also pay for advanced training under the participants Individual Training Account. So in general the training funds are WIA the education funds are TRAINS consortium

The WIA does not fund those 19 years or older going into first full time career employment how are you going to handle that?

We are negotiating with them on that right now. What is not covered by WIA will probably be covered by Trains.

To clarify, you are using education and training in different ways.

The WIA program has a Intensive Services Funds for remedial training. Where we can use those WIA funds for remedial training, we will do that, and when we can't TRAINS will end up covering the cost.

But again, the basic training that you are calling for in the project will be covered by the project?

Again, each call center currently runs its own call center training. The training that we are looking at is the training that prepares the people to go to work at the call center. So in some cases it will be remedial in other cases it may be just employability skills training. This is the key component to us and that is what will be covered by the project.

For clarity, I see the call centers doing there own internal training, so when you are hired you go through their training program, then we have another level that seems to be below that which is a bit more generalized call center training, that would include customer service and stuff like that, but not necessarily specific to the call center, then we have employability skills, then below that we have remedial.

We are not anticipating a generalized call center training as a component, it is more employability skills. If a participant comes through the door

our assessment will tell us if they are ready to go to work or not. If they are ready to go to work at the call center then they would get employability training, this would be life skills and other soft skills training. Then they would go into the call center's training program.

Then you have the individual who gets screened out of the assessment by being too weak in a specific area. We determine that some form of remedial training is needed to raise his job skills levels enough to qualify them for employment. Once employed we continue to support their education through their Individual Learning Map.

Would this come out of the job coaching and mentoring budget or out of the training budget?

I don't know, you tell me. So I guess, however you feel you can deliver this best.

So once they get into the call center that's when the coaching and mentoring begins?

Actually, no, it starts right at the beginning. Once you have been assessed and determined to be a candidate for a call center job, then we are going to stick with you to get you either into a job right or into remedial training.

So if someone is assessed they need remedial training then they would be assigned a mentor or a coach at that time.

Yes, to get them through remedial training. Then from remedial training, into life skills or the workforce skills training or employability training and then into the call center job.

Question #21 What is the average turnover rate in call centers and what are some of the contributing factors to the turnover rate?

It depends. Each community has its own peculiarities that impact retentions. There are always issues with a call center whether it be management, adjusting to the community, or the community adjusting to the call center. Then finding that medium that works for everybody. On top of that we still deal with the normal barriers that people in this economic category have, childcare, transportation and other cultural influences. Those are all issues that we have to deal with.

Whether these are the issues that are driving the turnover rate or not, they are things that we have to find out on a case-by-case basis. What is the average turnover rate in call centers nationwide? It is 40 to about 45 percent. If we can get it down to 25 to 30 percent in our communities we will be doing well.

Question #22 What marketing strategies are used to attract new Technical Jobs to the State and what are some of those jobs?

Well let me tell you what our experience has been in what we have been calling Rural Payday, which was our efforts on attracting call centers to rural areas. Primarily we have brought communities together from around the State that felt they had a interest in this industry and spent some time trying to analyze the info-structure and the workforce and put together the package, and then put together a marketing program. Rural Payday went and worked call center tradeshows and then made contacts with the company owners and the CEO's to see if we could attract them to the State. That process is still going on right now and within the organization that we call Rural Payday. We now have identified a second target which we now are calling technology based towns. We are looking how to take those skills sets we've now got in some of our communities around the State and turn that into some additional jobs that maybe higher up the call center ladder or in a related field where they can build on those skill sets. So we are now trying to identify those targets and develop a marketing plan that we can put together in that regard. I would be re-miss if I didn't say that we are working hand and glove with the new administration coming in Santa Fe with the new Economic Departments marketing program. I met yesterday with one of the State's new recruiters and talked a little bit about the targets and how we can put marketing plan together. So we have a very aggressive program in trying to attract the jobs to the State, and one of the programs that this gives us the opportunity to do is make that better hand shake between attracting the better jobs to the State and providing them the skill of workers that they need.

We are looking at developing a list of jobs for the other 40% and then clearing that with the U.S. DOL and to make certain they are in agreement with that.

Open Forum Questions:

How can the NM Call Center Alliance help NM TRAINS at this time?

Actually there are many ways the NMCA can help us, and we will have to sit down and further define their role.

Is there any chance that the RFP dead line can be extended? Because some of the larger institutions in the State, they pretty much shut down from Dec. 20th through Jan 2nd, so that getting signatures on a proposal even if it is done, is very difficult with people being off of work.

If you run into that type of crisis you need to let us know. In general I would doubt that we would extend the dead line only because our grant period is tight. The whole project is due for completion September 30th 2004, so we have essentially a year and 9 months to get it done.

I will raise the issue with the Board of Directors next week.

Can you review the intake process of applicant?

We have defined the intake process. However what we anticipate is that the intake process will take place at the One Stop Centers, where we will have collocation capabilities. People will be screened by the One Stop individual, then reviewed by our intake person to see whether or not they qualify. If they qualify, they enroll in the TRAINS program. The intake person would then assign them a coach or mentor, the coach or mentor would then meet with the individual to layout a plan, they would receive there assessment, review the assessment, decide if they need remedial training or not, if not get them through the employability skills and then out to the call centers for interviews and training. The coach or mentor would follow that individual on a close basis until they are settled.

The RFP says that you could extend the plan for State Wide Expansion, what funding are we seeing for that?

The remainder of the funding that we have for the Grant.

Is this a renewable Grant?

It is not designed to go back and look at additional funding for this industry. We would like to see it become self-sustaining and therefore be able to continue with many of the services offered. We expect to seek additional funding for similar services in other job categories.