

Community Development Block Grant - Public Services Funding Program Policy Principles for FY 2023

MISSION

At OWD, our purpose as an innovative public agency is to promote economic self-sufficiency to ensure the full participation of all Boston residents in the city's economic vitality and future. It is also our purpose to be an advocate, clearinghouse, and laboratory for "best practices" in literacy, beginning at birth; lifelong learning; job training/placement; and support services so Bostonians may fulfill their educational and employment aspirations.

OVERVIEW

In February 2022, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD) intends to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for FY 2023 Community Development Grant (CDBG) Public Services funding. Each year, the City of Boston receives CDBG funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the Mayor's Office of Housing (formerly the Department of Neighborhood Development - DND). The funds are primarily used for affordable housing and economic development activities. However, up to 15% of the funds can be used for "public services" related to economic development. As the City's workforce development agency, OWD manages this portion of the funding on behalf of the Mayor's Office of Housing.

The public services component of the CDBG is intended to provide services for low-income individuals and families with the goal of moving them out of poverty towards economic security. Toward this end, CDBG funds support a range of services, from after-school academics to counseling services for adults with barriers to employment. For the upcoming FY 2023, OWD proposes to continue to prioritize programs and services aimed at employing people in career sectors that provide them with long-term economic stability. Employment programs, when combined with post-secondary education and critical wrap-around support services, are capable of promoting sustained, significant change in the lives of low-income people.

This document offers policy principles highlighting program and service priorities for FY 2023, including the extent and kinds of impact the CDBG funds will have on its participants. The policy principles will guide the development of the upcoming RFP. It also offers some suggestions on building career pathways around AA and certificate-level academic programs as a promising avenue towards family financial sustainability and stability.

GOAL

The goal of Boston's CDBG Public Services funding is to ensure that low-income Boston residents are connected to a continuum of education, workforce development, and economic security programs to increase their capacity to obtain career-oriented employment leading to economic stability.

Historically, we have funded several programs centered on adult basic education (ABE) among the funded programs for CDBG-PS during each funding cycle. CDBG funding has been used to supplement the funding from the Commonwealth's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the main source of substantial funding for adult basic education in the state. We will continue to set aside a portion of the CDBG allocation in FY2023 for ABE-centered programs that are integrated with occupational skills training or that have articulated connections to occupational and/or post-secondary opportunities.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The policy principles address the need to promote economic stability and mobility, as well as the need to develop a talent pipeline for employers.

- Investment in programs that place individuals on a continuum of quality education, training, workforce development, and economic security. This continuum is defined as high school diplomas/Hi-Set attainment, matriculation into post-secondary education or industry-recognized training programs, placement into jobs with demonstrated career paths, and/or access to income maximization programs¹ that stabilize individuals and families with barriers.
- The use of career pathways models that provide a clear sequence and connection between education and training programs and jobs that allow participants to progress from one level to the next to improve their career prospects.
- The use of work-based training that provides maximum opportunities for participants to gain employment skills that meet employer needs.
- The inclusion of bridge programs designed to accelerate credentials and skill building, such as use of contextualized and integrated curriculum and instruction.
- A high degree of coordination of wrap-around support services which address a wide range of individual and family needs. These can include but are not limited to financial literacy, ESOL/ABE, immigration, income maximization, mental health, childcare, transportation, and individual case management all with the goal of helping participants obtain and retain jobs and/or achieve economic security.
- Investment in comprehensive assessment processes that value a high degree of customer involvement and customization in program choice.
- The use of partnerships and collaborations are strongly encouraged to ensure that there are no gaps in a continuum of programs and supportive services to address a wide range of needs, including educational, training, and employment services, provision of case management programs, provision of economic security services, and/or job placement and retention services.
- Preference will be given to programs offering an employment, education, and economic security continuum with an integrated approach, where individuals can take advantage of multiple services to help them become economically self-sufficient.

¹ *Income maximization is defined as any public or private benefits that are not earned through wages from employment. These can include but are not limited to SNAP, TAFDC, EITC, SSI, SSDI, alimony, child support, unemployment insurance, pension/retirement, disability benefits...etc.*

- The integration of digital literacy and soft skills training into instructional and work readiness activities.
- OWD proposes to continue its investment of a percentage of CDBG resources in the Adult Literacy Initiative, a partnership with the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

CAREER PATHWAYS FOR NON-BA WORKERS

For many years, the road to family-sustaining wages and a stable, productive career has been envisioned as attending and completing a baccalaureate degree in a four-year college. This is understandable, given the many studies that have shown that those holding a B.A. have a significant advantage in both wages at their entry into the labor force and life-long earnings. However, as workforce development professionals can attest, there are many obstacles to attaining a B.A. for low-income workers. The sheer cost of gaining the degree can be prohibitive, especially when one considers the hours of lost wages and the extended time when expenses are multiplied, and income is reduced or eliminated. While we will fund programs targeting four-year study programs if they are successful and provide adequate supports, in many cases we think career pathways based on shorter-term, targeted programming can hold more likelihood of success for many low-income workers. We believe that in some cases, strategies that require less than a B.A. can be the most suitable pathways for students with low incomes to family-sustaining, satisfying careers.

While some of the conditions to further career pathway opportunities for non-BA workers are best addressed through systemic and institutional change, OWD encourages and values measures by CDBG awardees to incorporate some of the following promising elements in their non-BA programs and to define and add their own innovative elements and practices. Some of these elements are similar to those in our identified policies and practices; many hold even truer for the shorter non-BA pathways. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Bidders are encouraged to incorporate other evidence-based program elements and practices that increase the competitiveness of non-BA based career paths in the job market.

Promising Elements for Successful Associate's and Certificate Programs

- Understand that Non-BA workers as a sector are more racially and culturally diverse than workers holding BAs. As a group, they hold more potential to bring those qualities to businesses.
- A disproportionate percentage of non-BA workers are immigrants, and immigrants continue to drive the Commonwealth's labor force growth. Arming these workers with in-demand skills and competencies aligns an important sector of the regional labor force with the labor demand in Greater Boston.
- Focus on high-yield industry sectors. Health care/Social Assistance; Professional and Technical Services and Computer/Math occupations comprise the areas with the largest number of jobs in the region. (These sectors are not meant to be exclusive. Feel free to make your own case for labor demand in other sectors and/or occupations).
- Work with companies to define job requirements in terms of actual skills and competencies and certificates/credentials –both at the entry points and to advance

- Apply employer feedback to curriculum, teaching and organization of program
- Develop strategies for broad student support during training – childcare, meeting basic expenses, budgeting and financial management, food and nutrition, tutoring
- Collaborate on all aspects of the program. Nurture relationships in the outreach, assessment, curriculum development, instruction job development/retention and career development phases of programming to enhance student chances for successful skill development and obtaining industry-recognized certificates and credentials.
- Integrate digital literacy into instruction, including instruction in common software sets like Microsoft Office and in specialized software that is fundamental to targeted occupations. Comparisons of job requirements indicate more parity between non-BA and BA workers in the areas of “soft” skills and vocational skills aside from software, as non-BA workers often have less familiarity with software programs that are foundational for some occupations.
- Utilize flexible training and service models, such as instructional or support services delivered in hybrid, remote or blended learning settings.

SIZE AND GRANT PERIOD

To optimize our grant dollars, OWD intends to award grants in the amount ranging from \$35,000 - \$100,000 to successful applicants per year. This may result in significantly fewer grants distributed than at present. Grants are awarded based on a two year funding period; the second year is a refunding year for programs that meet or exceed standards in the first year of funding the RFP for CDBG-PS. We strongly encourage proposals from organizations that experience managing federal grants with extensive reporting requirements.

TARGET POPULATIONS

- Low-income persons living in Boston, including youth, adults, and seniors, defined by HUD as individuals with incomes at or below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI).
- Preference will be given to re-entry or court-involved individuals; out-of-school youth; seniors; persons with disabilities; homeless individuals; documented immigrants; English Language Learners; dislocated workers; long-term underemployed or unemployed individuals.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

OWD intends to demonstrate the impact of CDBG funds by having a set of standardized outcome indicators and metrics to measure the effectiveness of CDBG programs.

- Placement and retention into jobs.
- Placement into post-secondary education and skills training leading to jobs.
- Increased income from access to cash-equivalent benefits, wage from employment and other financial empowerment metrics.