



# 2019 Delta Workforce Grant Program (DWP): Request for Proposals (RFP) for Project Grants

---

## Executive Summary

**RFP release date:** July 1, 2019

**Proposal due date:** August 30, 2019

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is publishing this Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit applications for grants under the 2019 Delta Workforce Grant Program (DWP).

The goal of the program is to target federal resources towards communities in the Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt regions particularly hard hit by industrial downsizing and closures following the recession.

DWP supports projects and initiatives that create a more vibrant economic future for the Delta region by aligning workforce and economic development strategies, enhancing job training and re-employment opportunities, creating a sustainable talent pipeline, establishing or enhancing regionally significant public-private partnerships, and supporting enhanced workforce productivity through investments in innovative programming.

This RFP is organized to provide a general overview of the DWP program as well as the specific requirements needed to complete a grant application. Additional background information on DWP is available at <https://www.dra.gov/workforce>.

# Table of Contents

<b>A. DRA OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>B. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW .....	3
2. 2019 DWP GRANTS.....	4
3. 2019 DWP PRIORITIES, OBJECTIVES, AND FUNDING PRINCIPLES .....	5
I. <i>Background on DRA’s Strategic Investment Goals</i> .....	5
II. <i>DWP Investment Priorities</i> .....	5
III. <i>DWP Objectives</i> .....	6
IV. <i>2019 DWP Funding Principles</i> .....	7
<b>C. AWARD INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1. AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING .....	8
2. PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE .....	8
<b>D. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1. DOCUMENTATION OF ECONOMIC IMPACT .....	8
2. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS .....	9
3. COST SHARING OR MATCHING.....	10
4. PROJECT TEAM COMPOSITION .....	10
<b>E. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1. REQUEST AN APPLICATION .....	11
2. CONTENT AND FORM OF THE DWP APPLICATION.....	11
3. SUBMISSION DATES AND TIMES .....	11
<i>2019 Delta Workforce Grant Program</i> .....	11
<i>Technical Assistance</i> .....	12
4. APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS.....	12
<b>F. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>G. AWARD ADMINISTRATION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>H. DRA CONTACT INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>I. GENERAL DISCLOSURES.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## **A. DRA OVERVIEW**

DRA is a regional economic development agency representing a partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Established by an act of Congress through the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000 7 U.S.C. § 2009aa1-13, DRA makes strategic investments of federal appropriations into the physical and human infrastructure of Delta communities. DRA is composed of the governors of the eight Delta states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the President and approved by the Senate. Local participation is also provided through 45 multi-county local development districts. DRA serves the 10-million people residing in the 252 counties and parishes that include parts of the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee<sup>1</sup>.

## **B. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

### **1. Program Overview**

DWP is an initiative targeting resources to help communities and regions that have been disproportionately affected by industrial downsizing and closures following the recession. DWP supports efforts to develop and sustain a more prosperous economic future for Delta communities by aligning workforce and economic development strategies, enhancing job training and re-employment opportunities, creating a sustainable talent pipeline, establishing or enhancing regionally significant industry sectors or clusters, and supporting regional competitiveness through investments in innovative programming.

In order for Delta communities to improve their posture in a 21st century economy and diversify the local and regional economy, DWP prioritizes targeting federal resources to projects and activities that:

- Develop or enhance cross-sector collaboration by aligning economic development, workforce training, education, and other strategies to advance regional economic development priorities and initiatives;
- Deliver specific workforce services meeting identified local or regional needs, including the development or expansion of apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training models, and other work-based learning approaches;
- Provide workforce training programs meeting the challenges of sustainable employment opportunities in existing or emerging local or regionally-significant industry sectors; and
- Support the acquisition or development of equipment or curriculum ensuring the delivery of quality, innovative training and workforce services.

---

<sup>1</sup> An interactive map of the DRA region can be found [here](#).

DWP seeks to align and leverage complementary federal, state, local, and other economic development resources through a competitive grant process to organizations and partnerships located within or serving the Delta region. By aligning or leveraging funding and assistance from multiple sources (federal, state, local, non-profit, private, etc.), DWP solicits and prioritizes the selection of projects and initiatives integrating strategic economic development partners and resources supporting the alleviation of previously-identified workforce development and job-training needs and deficiencies.

## **2. 2019 DWP Grants**

The 2019 DWP competitive grant competition will be structured as follows:

<b>Funding Cycle Opens:</b>	<b>July 1, 2019</b>
<b>Notice of Intent to Apply Deadline:</b>	<b>August 16, 2019</b>
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	<b>August 30, 2019</b>

Applications received during the 2019 DWP funding cycle will be reviewed and scored. Top-scoring projects will be selected for funding. Applications not selected for funding during this cycle will be returned to the applicant and can be revised and resubmitted for consideration in the next cycle, pending availability of funding.

All applications submitted in the next funding cycle will be reviewed and scored, including new applications and any resubmitted applications from the 2019 DWP cycle. Top-scoring applications will be selected for funding.

Applicants are encouraged to contact DRA program staff for additional information about the 2019 DWP application submission requirements as well as for assistance in developing their applications. Direct all technical questions about the RFP to [workforce@dra.gov](mailto:workforce@dra.gov) with the subject line: RFP. Include contact name, applicant organization, and phone number in the body of your email.

Prior to submission of the application, applicants must submit a Notice of Intent to Apply no later than August 16, 2019 at 11:59pm CT. A Notice of Intent to Apply can be submitted through the DWP Program Portal available at: <https://workforce.dra.gov/>.

In addition to the requirements described in this RFP and online at <https://www.dra.gov/workforce>, all applications must also meet the general requirements for DRA funding and be consistent with [DRA's Regional Development Plan III \(RDP3\)](#).

### 3. 2019 DWP Priorities, Objectives, and Funding Principles

This section provides information describing the 2019 DWP priorities, objectives, and funding principles. Potential applicants should review this information thoroughly before submitting a project proposal.

#### I. Background on DRA's Strategic Investment Goals

As described in the agency's strategic plan, *Moving the Delta Forward*, DRA has identified three investment goals to advance its vision and mission and to guide its work. These goals reflect a consensus among local, state, and federal partners on the most critical investment opportunities in the Mississippi River Delta region. While each of these goals provides an individual approach to advancing the Delta economy, these avenues are often complementary and cumulative, with progress in one goal area leading to advancement in another. All applications must address one or more of these goals:

- **Goal 1 - Improved Workforce Competitiveness:** Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce.
- **Goal 2 - Strengthened Infrastructure:** Strengthen the Delta's physical, digital, and capital connections to the global economy.
- **Goal 3 - Increased Community Capacity:** Facilitate local capacity building within Delta communities, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

#### II. DWP Investment Priorities

The 2019 DWP Investment Priorities build upon DRA's Strategic Investment Goals and are summarized and described below. Ultimately, the focus of DWP is on investments that are regional, industry-driven, and transformational to help revitalize rural communities and spur economic development in the eight-state Delta region. In general, investments shall be focused on four key priorities:

- **Supporting Industry-Led Workforce Training**
- **Building Collaborative Talent Pipelines**
- **Developing or Enhancing Industry Clusters**
- **Accelerating Regional Economic Development**

Projects that do not fit this list of investment priorities will still be considered for funding, but all applications will be scored on their ability to address one or more of these priority areas.

Below are some examples of project activities that target each DWP investment priority. Applications that address these activities should consider the following guidance:

**Support Industry-Led Workforce Training.** Projects should be designed to create opportunities aimed at meeting the ongoing and changing needs of existing employers within a regionally-significant industry sector or supporting a single firm in a locally-significant industry cluster.

**Building Collaborative Talent Pipelines.** Projects should be designed such that the workforce training programs meet the current and future needs of the local and regional employment base. Applications should address how collaborative partnerships between K-12 academic institutions, training providers, and employers are being developed to ensure the viability of the program well beyond the scope of the grant opportunity and funding availability.

**Developing or Enhancing Industry Clusters.** Industry clusters are groups of inter-related industries that drive wealth and job creation in a region. Creating workforce training programs that build upon and support the development of new or expansion of existing industry clusters is critical to improving the competitiveness of a region's basic economic sectors. Projects should identify these clusters and how their programmatic approach addresses the workforce needs of these regional economic drivers and increases their overall competitiveness.

**Accelerating Regional Economic Development.** Projects should be designed to respond to current data on regional economic trends and how the prescribed approach advances economic development within the region. Investments are made with the intent of generating measurable economic and social return as well as a financial return for the region. Projects should leverage local, regional, or state economic development priorities and recent data-driven studies or economic analysis reports as the basis for the proposed workforce development program.

### III. 2019 DWP Objectives

The primary objective of the 2019 DWP grants is to invest in economic and workforce development projects and activities that will produce one, or any combination, of the following outcomes:

- **Job Creation** – Create jobs in new and/or existing industries;
- **Workforce Training for High Demand Careers** – Provide industry-led skills training and workforce services, including paid work-based learning opportunities, resulting in industry-recognized credentials for high-quality, in-demand jobs; and
- **Capital Investment** – Attract new sources of job-creating investment (both public and private).

Applicants are encouraged to leverage a variety of resources from multiple sources, including public and private, in order to enhance the ability of rural communities and regions to successfully address these DWP objectives.

#### **IV. 2019 DWP Funding Principles**

In order to maximize the impact of DRA investments in the development of a competitive workforce, DRA will give preference to proposals under this RFP that successfully address the following factors:

- **Include Assessment and Planning** – Communities receiving funding for activities should have a well-articulated analysis of why and how the local/regional economy has been negatively impacted by local economic restructuring and demonstrate how the proposed effort adds value to a larger, more long-term vision and economic development plan being implemented in the region. The project concept should build upon existing regional or state economic and workforce development plans or strategies.
- **Targeted Economic Expansion** – Applicants must have assessed their assets and opportunities and formulated a plan that focuses on advancing the economy (i.e. sector-based strategies, cluster development, etc.) and identifies both short-term (1-2 years) and long-term (3-4 years and beyond) anticipated outcomes.
- **Collaborative** – DWP funds are intended to help leverage program funds from multiple sources (both public and private). Project proposals should have multiple stakeholders engaged in project implementation from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, and from multiple disciplines; there should be evidence of strong input and engagement of the broader community and industry leaders in planning and project design.
- **Evidence of Leverage** – Investments should demonstrate community and regional commitment to the proposed project by combining DRA resources with other public, private, and philanthropic resources.
- **Outcome-driven** – Applicants should define specific outcome measures, demonstrate how the project is designed to achieve those outcomes, and commit to capturing and sharing those measures over the life of the investment. Anticipated outcomes for both the short- and long-term should be clearly articulated.
- **Regional Focus** – Targeted areas should be regional, defined minimally as a single community, with potential investment amounts scaled upward as the size and complexity of the region increases to include multi-county and multi-state areas.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to incorporate the 2019 DWP Investment Priorities, Objectives, and Funding Principles innovatively and vigorously to their proposed projects.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to contact DRA program staff for specific guidance pertaining to the eligible use of DWP funds.

## C. AWARD INFORMATION

### 1. Availability of Funding

2019 DWP grant funds are available as follows:

- DRA is making **\$1.5 Million** available for DWP project grants.
  - On average, DRA expects to make individual grant awards ranging between \$25,000—\$150,000 for each project it awards within the congressionally defined Delta region. Specific award guidelines may vary by type of project. Applications for larger dollar requests will be considered.
  - DRA reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with the applications that have been selected to receive awards, which may include requesting that the applicant remove or adjust certain proposed costs.
  - Projects must serve and benefit a portion of the Delta region as defined by the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000, as amended. The Delta region includes certain counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, and Tennessee. If projects extend beyond the DRA region, only that portion that is within the region is eligible for DRA funding. A map of the Delta region is available online at <https://dra.gov/about-dra/map-room/>.
  - DRA may also choose to make awards via cooperative agreements.

DRA will not be held responsible for proposal or application preparation costs. Publication of this RFP does not obligate DRA to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or to obligate all or any part of available funds.

### 2. Period of Performance

Applicants can determine the required time period necessary to meet the objective of their project. The period of performance for awards under this program may be up to two years (24 months) if warranted by the size and scope of the project.

## D. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

### 1. Documentation of Economic Impact

Eligible DWP projects must be located within the Delta region as defined by the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000, as amended, and be targeted towards communities or regions that have



been recently impacted, or can reasonably demonstrate that they will be impacted in the near future, by the loss of employment in a regionally-significant industry sector, or identify opportunities for improving the competitiveness of a regionally-significant industry sector through enhanced workforce training and skills development.

Complete applications for a DWP grant must provide appropriate third-party economic and demographic statistics for the applicable community or region in order to document the extent to which contractions in a regionally-significant industry sector have negatively impacted the community or region, or identify evidence-based opportunities to support existing business(es) or industry clusters. The applicant will need to cite the data source used to demonstrate impact. Economic indicators, labor market analyses, official announcements made by local and regional industries and firms, demographic, industry data, and peer reviewed scholarly articles and publications are strong sources of data to demonstrate these impacts. Applicants are encouraged to provide data (median income, unemployment rates, etc.) from federal sources that may include, but are not limited to, the following sources:

- U.S. Department of Commerce
  - Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA): <http://www.bea.gov/>
  - U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS): <https://www.census.gov/program-surveys/acs/>
  - U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA): <https://www.eda.gov>
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS): <http://www.bls.gov/>
- Federal Reserve Bank
  - St. Louis: <https://www.stlouisfed.org/>
  - Atlanta: <https://www.frbatlanta.org/>
  - Dallas: <https://www.dallasfed.org/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - Economic Research Service (ERS): <https://www.ers.usda.gov>

## 2. Eligible Applicants

Eligible DRA applicants are:

- Counties/parishes, cities, or other political subdivisions of a state, including a special purpose district of a state or local government engaged in economic or community development activities, or a consortium of political subdivisions;
- Regional Development Organizations;
- Workforce Investment Boards;
- Institutions of higher education or a consortium of institutions of higher education; and
- Public or private non-profit organizations or associations.

In addition, DRA has additional geographic eligibility requirements. To be eligible for DRA funding, applicants must propose to serve and benefit a portion of the Delta region as defined by the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000, as amended. A map and a description of the DRA region can be found online at: <https://dra.gov/about-dra/map-room/>.

### **3. Cost Sharing or Matching**

Under the 2019 DWP program, applicants must demonstrate at least a 15% matching share from non-DRA sources that is identified and forthcoming to the project. Matching sources may be non-federal, other federal<sup>2</sup>, or a combination of sources. Applications that demonstrate leveraged resources (cash and/or in-kind) from private entities/employers are highly encouraged.

### **4. Project Team Composition**

Per the priorities and funding principles described previously, applicants are expected to assemble new or existing partnerships of community and economic development stakeholders to serve as members of a project team, which may include partners that are not eligible for DRA funding but are integral to a proposed project's success.

For purposes of application eligibility, it is not a requirement for each member of a project team to be located in the Delta region; however, proposed projects must accrue benefits to communities located within the DRA footprint. Any eligible member of a given project team may serve as the primary/lead applicant, and recipient, of DWP grant awards.

Overall project team membership can comprise of, but is not limited to, the following types of organizations:

- Industry and trade associations, local and regional business owners, and other representatives from the private sector;
- Economic development organizations;
- Local governments;
- Planning organizations and development districts;
- Labor unions and labor-management apprenticeship programs;
- State and local workforce organizations;
- Institutions of higher education, including (but not limited to) community colleges and other job training and adult education providers;

---

<sup>2</sup> In general, DRA is able to accept other federal dollars as a matching contribution. However, some federal sources and some specific projects may have limitations on the use of other and/or total federal funding. Prospective applicants are encouraged to consult with DRA program staff prior to submission if planning to use other federal funds as a matching share.

- Not-for-profit and community-based organizations that provide supportive services and human services providers; and
- Chambers of commerce.

## **E. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **1. Request an Application**

The electronic DWP application will be available on July 1, 2019. Applicants may access the application electronically at: <https://workforce.dra.gov>.

### **2. Content and Form of the DWP Application**

The 2019 DWP grant applications follow DRA's standard application policies and procedures.

Application narratives are limited to the applicant's responses to the questions within the electronic application. The type of information requested by DRA includes:

- Project description;
- Measurable outcomes;
- Project management (i.e. work plan);
- Project rationale;
- Evidence of local/regional demand; and
- Local and regional collaboration.

In addition, a detailed project budget and narrative is required.

Supportive documents and completion of federal forms will be required after the application has been selected for funding.

Additional DWP project application requirements and guidance are described in detail at the DRA Delta Workforce Program home page (<https://www.dra.gov/workforce>) and program portal (<https://workforce.dra.gov>).

### **3. Submission Dates and Times**

The submission dates and times for the 2019 DWP grant competition are as follows:

#### **2019 Delta Workforce Grant Program**

Total Program Funding: \$1,500,000

Award Ceiling: \$150,000

Award Floor: \$25,000

Notice of Intent to Apply Deadline: August 16, 2019  
Grant Application Deadline: August 30, 2019  
Award Announcements: September 2019

Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to contact DRA staff ([workforce@dra.gov](mailto:workforce@dra.gov)) and their Local Development District (<http://dra.gov/funding-programs/local-development-districts/>) for additional information about the 2019 DWP application submission requirements as well as for assistance in completing applications.

In addition to the requirements described in this RFP and online at <https://www.dra.gov/workforce>, all applications must meet the general requirements for DRA funding and be consistent with DRA's strategic plan, [Moving the Delta Forward: Delta Regional Development Plan III](#).

#### **Technical Assistance**

Successful applicants will receive up to 50 hours of intensive technical assistance from select partners and DRA staff to ensure development and/or long-term sustainability of successful grantee programs. The technical assistance provides grantees with targeted technical assistance focusing on the implementation of their proposed workforce development programs.

## **4. Application Submission Instructions**

2019 DWP Notice of Intent to Apply and project applications (and related attachments) can be submitted electronically via the DWP Program Portal available at: <https://workforce.dra.gov>.

**NOTE:** This online application portal has been established for 2019 DWP project **applications** only.

**Prior to submission of the application, every application should contact the state designee and alternate(s) to ensure that the proposals are in alignment with their state economic and workforce development priorities.**

**Neither fax nor email transmissions of applications will be accepted.**

After an application is submitted, it undergoes a validation process during which the application may be accepted or rejected due to errors, incomplete information, or ineligible applicant and/or service area. Be advised that it may take several days for the validation process to be completed and that the process may not begin until after the application deadline. Applications found to be missing required information or to contain critical errors will not be reviewed or evaluated.

## **F. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

The 2019 DWP applications will first go through an internal review by DRA staff to determine consistency with program intent and completeness. The initial review will ensure the project scope is strategic and compatible with existing state, regional, and/or local economic development plans and strategies.

Applications passing the internal review will then be distributed for an external review process where reviewers will score applications based on the criteria outlined in this document. External reviewers will consider the extent to which the project supports DRA's strategic investment goals, investment priorities, and the extent to which the project targets in-demand jobs and relevant skills development, competencies, and labor supply in a locally or regionally significant industry sector or cluster.

DRA reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with applicants that have been selected to receive awards, which may include requesting that the applicant remove or adjust certain proposed costs. Additionally, DRA may request that the applicant modify objectives or work plans and provide supplemental information pertaining to any aspect of the application. DRA also reserves the right to reject an application where information is uncovered that raises a reasonable doubt as to the applicant's ability to successfully fulfill the objectives and requirements of the grant award.

DRA, under its complete and sole discretion, may select for award some, all, or none of the applications received under this competitive solicitation. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be made by DRA's Federal Co-Chairman. The award decision made by DRA's Federal Co-Chairman is final.

## **G. AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

Administration of DRA awards are subject to the same regulations, restrictions, and requirements as other federal awards. These include, but are not limited to, administrative requirements and cost principles, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), past performance and non-compliance, environmental and historic preservation, and the Americans with Disabilities ACT (ADA) requirements.

Grants involving construction will require the use of a basic agency to administer the funds, and grantees will be subject to the reporting requirement of the agency. Partnerships submitting applications involving construction, renovation, restoration, and other similar activities are strongly encouraged to contact DRA program staff for guidance.

## **H. DRA CONTACT INFORMATION**

DRA strongly encourages interested applicants to contact DRA staff and their respective Local Development District(s) with any questions they have about the DWP Program in general, as well as with any specific questions they have about the use of agency funds to support projects in the communities and regions. Applicants with additional questions may submit these to [workforce@dra.gov](mailto:workforce@dra.gov).

## **I. GENERAL DISCLOSURES**

The 2019 DWP program awards will be made only to the extent that funds are available. Publication of this RFP does not obligate DRA to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or to obligate all or any part of available funds. Applicants intending to contract with a specific individual, consulting group, or organization with DRA funding must have a competitive procurement policy in place.

This RFP does not commit DRA to award a contract, or to procure, or to contract for services or supplies. Notwithstanding any other provisions of the RFP, DRA reserves the right to award grants, cooperative agreements or contracts to communities or regions that best meet the requirements of the RFP, and not necessarily to the lowest cost proposers. DRA solely reserves the right to accept or reject any or all responses received as a result of this request; to negotiate with all qualified sources; or to cancel in part or in its entirety this RFP if it is in the interests of the DRA to do so.

Please note that DRA will not reimburse for any other costs associated with the preparation of a response to this RFP. Any DRA contracts awarded to work directly with consultants or consulting organizations will likely be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT or a cooperative agreement. Consultants and consultant teams that are legally barred from receiving federal contracts or contract payments will not be considered for work with communities or regions under this RFP.