

# Public Funds for Is Your Company

C. Michael Ferraro



# Training: Getting Its Share?

Public funds for worker training at the federal, state and local government levels will total more than \$25 billion in 2007. Many of these funds are available either through federal appropriations or through the federal or state grants process. Because a wide variety of organizations have access to these funds, learning executives should consider them as possible resources for building their firm's training and development programs.

It makes sense for these leaders to learn what types of worker-training programs are available, how to access these funds, the next steps required and critical deadlines. Some of these programs already are in the process of ramping up for this year.

It's also important to know how public funds for training are allocated to states through the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, as well as through federal programs in education, health and human services, and economic development agencies.

## **The Federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998**

WIA was designed to coordinate and streamline the large number of worker-training programs the federal government allocates to states and, in turn, to local governments to administer. It also established state and local workforce investment boards (WIBs) to help the coordination of all these worker-training programs through policies and program accountability measures. In addition, the legislation created the nation's One-Stop Career Centers, where all these programs are to be made available to individuals and businesses.

The biggest dynamic the legislation was supposed to change was to better involve and engage the local business communities and economic developers. The plan was to use these business/economic resources to help target training for local residents in the skills local employers most needed.

WIA is roughly a \$4 billion program. By law, 85 percent of these training funds need to be allocated to local WIBs. Depending on the state, they get between \$1 million and \$25 million of WIA funding. Most other federal programs reside in social services and education, where each state decides how those resources are allocated to local governments.

But as more economic competitive programs are approved by Congress, more and more of them include a worker training component. More local board allocations are getting and staying in the \$10 million range, either through WIA appropriations or through grants for which the local boards are eligible.

## **Local WIBs**

One way to get access to workers trained with the skills your company needs is to reach out to the local WIB. It selects the programs and determines the program requirements for the use of its federally allocated WIA funds. By serving on a local WIB, or on one of its committees, you could help select which programs and skills training are needed most in your community or your organization.

Local boards are required to try to coordinate all the federal worker-training programs that come to local government. Some states allocate most of their federal training programs to local boards that decide how the funds are spent, but most states have not yet made that change. Check with your local WIB staff to find out what resources are available.

## **Federal Grant Opportunities**

It's also worthwhile to look into specific grant opportunities to which you might have access. Grants come and go throughout the year, and you should keep apprised when they are available and how you can participate. Also keep in mind that in most cases, public funds don't come directly to the business but to a public institution in partnership with a business. Carefully reviewing the grant application is an important part of this process. Ensuring the training provided by the public institution or nonprofit meets your needs is your responsibility — the business' active participation is key and required in the grant application in most cases.

The U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) has done an excellent job over the past few years of engaging the business community in its grant-proposal process. The department strongly feels the business community is its No. 1 customer in regard to these grants, and it is doing things to ensure the grants it offers require that engagement.

Figure 1: Top 2006 WIA Training Funds Allocations

1. California	\$580,395,465
2. Texas	\$343,909,607
3. New York	\$327,868,514
4. Illinois	\$212,397,796
5. Ohio	\$205,570,905
6. Florida	\$178,544,643
7. Michigan	\$177,801,449
8. Pennsylvania	\$158,925,173
9. North Carolina	\$138,075,382

After successes with its H1B Visa job-training programs and the High-Growth Job Training Initiatives, the DOL continues to invest in partnerships with business, education and economic development to ensure participants in the training programs are in a better position to pursue a successful career.

Along with administering WIA funds and the employment service program, DOL is planning two big initiatives for 2007 that have been successful in connecting businesses with the publicly funded workforce system. The first is the Community-Based Job Training Grants (CBJTG) initiative. The goal and intent of WIA was to have all those responsible for preparing and training current and future workers come together with businesses and economic developers to educate and train a workforce to meet the needs of the 21st-century workplace.

So, DOL decided to add incentives through grants to bring together school districts, community colleges, the public workforce system (WIBs), businesses and economic development agencies to create systems that prepare workers to serve area enterprises.

The first round of CBJTG funding was disbursed in 2005. Seventy grants — between \$800,000 and \$2.3 million — were awarded, for a total of \$125 million. Not all the results are in, but local community colleges that participated and received these funds seemed excited with the opportunity they received.

The second round, awarded in 2006, went to 72 community colleges in roughly the same

amounts, again totaling \$125 million.

The current DOL budget includes another \$150 million in these grants, and there is great opportunity there to partner with a local community college and apply. Information and a sign-up to receive e-mail alerts about the program are available on the DOL Web site ([www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov)).

The newest and the most innovative approach to DOL workforce-training grants is its Workforce Innovation for Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grants. Similar to CBJTG, they require participation from multiple partners in the community but also encourage regions from multiple states to apply.

Each region is eligible for up to \$15 million in worker training. In the first round of these grants, \$260 million was awarded to 26 regions. The second round of WIRED grants has been announced, and \$65 million is available for awarding in 2007.

There are many more grants available for training workers. The Department of Veterans Affairs, for example, has many programs designed to get veterans back to work and offers training to qualified veterans. Another is the Prisoner Reentry worker-training program.

It is important to have a strategy that alerts you to these and other federal grant opportunities. Some of them will fit into your training plan, others will not. But one theme continues to be key: the need for active business participation in the grant process.

## Grants at the State Level

More worker-training grants are being offered at the state level, as state legislative assemblies and governors are becoming more proactive in appropriating state general funds for worker-training grants and incentive-training grants that encourage businesses to set up shop in their states. And it is usually easier to find and apply for state grants. Check with your state's economic development agency to see if it is using state funds for worker-training grant programs. States that already support this effort include Texas, Florida and Pennsylvania.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) administers The Skills Development Fund program to assist businesses by financing the design and implementation of worker-training projects. The grants are designed to meet the workforce needs of businesses and are customizable.

In 2007, Texas will spend \$25 million of this program's funds to support these customized job-training projects. Grants for a single business might be limited to \$500,000.

According to the TWC Web site, businesses

and trade unions must partner with an eligible applicant to be considered for the Skills Development Fund grants. Eligible applicants are public community or technical colleges, the Texas Engineering Extension Service or a community-based organization working in partnership with one of these institutions.

In Florida, the Quick Response Training Program is designed as an incentive for businesses to build or expand in the state. Program requirements and applications can be found at the Workforce Florida Web site (<http://www.workforceflorida.com>).

In Pennsylvania, the Industry Partnership Training Program funds from \$5,000 to \$150,000 for training within the nine state-identified industry clusters. The clusters are aligned with the guidelines of the program on the Pennsylvania Workforce site (<http://www.paworkforce.state.pa.us>).

### Influencing Grant Opportunities

Even if your firm is not in need of or eligible for public funds for workforce training, it likely is in

a position to advocate to members of the state legislature for allocating more worker-training funds. Because these are state general fund dollars, businesses that have a large state presence can have significant influence on public funds and how much go into worker training.

Navigating the publicly funded workforce system can be difficult in the beginning, but once you become aware and involved, you can more easily assess and access appropriate grant opportunities. Involvement in the local WIB gives you a seat at the table with other business leaders who make policy decisions on how the allocated funds are spent. The same holds true for state agencies involved with worker-training efforts.

Keep in mind that many of the publicly funded worker-training programs are appropriated by the federal government, so it is a good idea to keep an eye on the appropriations committees as they discuss, debate and decide on these budgets. It's the best way to be sure the community and your business are able to get their fair share. ■

*C. Michael Ferraro is president and CEO of Training Solutions Inc., as well as a former member of the Virginia State Workforce Board and its executive committee. He can be reached at [editor@clomedia.com](mailto:editor@clomedia.com).*

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trained about 350 doctors and affiliated providers."

Anecdotal evidence for Gentle Dental University also has been positive, Winningham said. "I had one provider who told me a story about wanting to learn about a new dentistry product while he literally had the patient in the chair," she said. "He went on to Gentle Dental University's dental resource center, took an eight-minute e-learning module and then used this new adhesive product. He later said, 'I'll never forget it now — that's the best way to learn. It's like having a salesperson in the office to train me when I want them.'"

Winningham said many more learning programs will be delivered via technical platforms mainly because of the widely scattered audience.

"We're trying to be very learner-centered and on-demand," she said. "We have been working to build our technical infrastructure to support the e-learning initiatives. Our main goal was to leverage that technology to train a geographically dispersed workforce."

These virtual courses will continue to be offered in brief modules because, as Winningham puts it, "The mind can only absorb what the butt can endure."

Additionally, new programs will cover learner-driven subject matter. "Based on the clinical needs assessments, we're looking at the top four topics that we needed to focus on,"

Winningham said. "Planning ahead for 2007, we're now focusing on a topic per quarter. All of our doctors are invited to the exact same training, so they'll have an educational platform to work from."

These initiatives are crucial for InterDent because, ultimately, the company is only as good as its employees and dental affiliates, Winningham said.

"We want to have the best dentists and the best affiliated providers for our patients because it's really all about them," she said. "There is no other major dental management provider in the country that's offering the kind of learning and technology we are. The more education our affiliated providers have, the better service they provide to patients. That contributes to our bottom line too."

The senior leaders at InterDent, including Rouman, also see it that way.

"We don't look to Maureen to justify the expense of an educational program," Rouman said. "We expect that the strategy of delivering this education will produce a positive benefit for the company. Her job is not one of justifying every dollar spent — it's one of executing a high-quality program to satisfy what's obviously been a pent-up demand both in our offices and our affiliated providers. It's really a strategic initiative, as opposed to a cost-justification situation. That's truly our view of this." ■

— Brian Stummerfield, [bstummerfield@clomedia.com](mailto:bstummerfield@clomedia.com)