

# Request for Ideas: Career Readiness for All Ages

## Overview & Purpose

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The Richard King Mellon Foundation requests ideas for funding consideration that are aligned with the newly launched 2021-2030 Strategic Plan for Economic Development and Economic Mobility.

Through this Request for Ideas, the Foundation seeks to seed new ideas and scale promising ones that aim to provide residents of all ages in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties with opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the new economy—an economy marked by continual technological disruption and innovation that is empowering people to transform our world. As technologies change, so do the skill sets that are in high demand. Looking to the future, the Foundation imagines opportunities for the region’s residents to become prosperous through work in well-established industries and in those that are hallmarks of the new economy, such as automation, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and other technology-based industries.

Our aspiration is that people of all ages in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties will be able to access their most promising and prosperous futures. We strongly believe that the region’s long-term economic prosperity is best achieved by economic growth and fostering broad participation of all individuals in that growth. Currently, children in lower income households have less access to opportunities that contribute to economic mobility in adulthood. Moreover, the region’s economic prosperity is hindered by a widening gap in economic opportunity and by education systems that are not keeping pace with the needs of the workforce of the future.

To address this need, The Richard King Mellon Foundation seeks bold ideas that enable residents to benefit from integrated education and workforce development systems; build 21st century skills; complete applied, work-based learning; and develop their own career pathways. Ideas should align with at least one of the investment areas described in the table columns below. These priorities and outcomes are excerpts from the Foundation’s Economic Development and Economic Mobility Funding Programs.

**Table 1.**

<b>Funding Program</b>	Economic Mobility for Children and Youth (serving ages 0-24; prioritizing those experiencing poverty)	Economic Development (serving ages 25+)
<b>Investment Area</b>	Future of Work	Talent Development
<b>Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of career-readiness skills</li> <li>• Relevant, applied work experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce development systems</li> <li>• Career pathways</li> <li>• 21st century skills</li> </ul>
<b>Investment Area Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and emotional skills</li> <li>• Knowledge of industries and job opportunities</li> <li>• Participation in internships, project-based learning, and other career exploration activities</li> <li>• Employment and earnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in 21st century skills</li> <li>• Participation in and strength of industry-based partnerships</li> <li>• Participation in on-the-job and work-based learning opportunities</li> <li>• Development of career pipelines and pathways</li> <li>• Navigation and awareness of career opportunities</li> <li>• Employment and retention in quality jobs, earnings, and wealth</li> </ul>

Additional information about each of the investment areas is below.

**Future of Work** (from the Economic Mobility Funding Program)

Ideas in this investment area should aim to provide children and youth with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a future economy shaped by rapid technological disruption. Children and youth need soft and hard skills, as well as relevant work experiences to be ready for the future of work.

**Talent Development** (from the Economic Development Funding Program)

Ideas in this investment area should aim to support the education, training, and development of the adult talent pool in the region so that individuals have the skills and training necessary to succeed in an increasingly evolving labor market and can map their own career futures.

Examples of Ideas that will be considered include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Individuals with transferable **career readiness skills** (i.e., social and emotional skills) and **21st century skills** (e.g., critical thinking, communication, collaboration, workplace competencies) will have the ability to navigate an evolving labor market, improve their employment status and wages, and enhance their resilience to industry-specific shocks. For our region's talent to be successful in the new economy, they must be equipped with these skills. Ideas could focus on education and training opportunities that convey skills and are performance-based, rather than solely knowledge or content-based. This could include novel approaches to deploying instructional methods that are hands-on and practical in which a variety of delivery models are employed such as on-line as well as brick-and-mortar programming; and in which work-based learning and on-the-job opportunities are embedded within programming.
- **Relevant, applied work experiences** that provide on-the-job experiences for young people, such as pre-apprenticeships, internships, or apprenticeships are particularly effective for people most in need of opportunities. This is especially the case for at-risk youth living in poverty who could benefit from greater awareness of and connection to career opportunities. Work-based experiences also contribute to youth social development and improve mental health outcomes. Ideas could include applied work experiences that help youth gain critical academic skills and receive a combination of industry-based training and classroom instruction needed to move into employment.
- A **workforce development system** is an employment and skills-driven education and training system that prepares workers for the jobs of today and imparts the skills needed to adapt to the labor market of the future. Ideas should employ a systems approach to workforce development, focusing on sector-based partnerships and collaborations around high priority industries in the new economy.
- Ideas could also include novel ways to build and support **career pathways** and pipelines to employment that are person-centered and accommodate the wide variation in the ways people can sequence their education and careers. This could include efforts that enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certification and obtain employment within an occupational area; flexible, stackable, and micro-credentialing efforts that provide sustainable pathways for youth and adults to improve their life chances; upskilling incumbent workers; reskilling transitioning or vulnerable workers into viable and high-quality new economy jobs; or efforts that raise individuals' awareness about career opportunities.

## Guidelines

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The Richard King Mellon Foundation invites nonprofit and public sector organizations to submit bold and novel ideas to the Career Readiness for All Ages RFI. The Foundation expects \$250,000 will be available per idea. However, if an idea is truly exceptional, the Foundation may consider providing more than \$250,000.

Ideas that are considered for potential funding must have the following characteristics:

- Aligned with at least one Priority, as detailed in Table 1.
- Currently in one of the two following Stages:
  - Planning and Innovation: These submissions are focused on experimentation and the development of new ideas. Recipients might describe activities such as piloting minimally viable products/services or completing a feasibility study. Any evaluation activities should focus on understanding successes, challenges, and future possibilities resulting from the initial project.
  - Scaling-Up: Expanding the reach of a promising model or project with a track record of successful implementation.
- Activities described can be executed in 6-18 months.

The Foundation will give priority consideration to collaborations that serve populations that are currently experiencing poverty or have historically encountered systemic barriers to education, employment, and prosperity.

## **RFI Submission Requirements**

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The Foundation will accept ideas via our RFI Submission Form found at <https://www.rkmf.org/pages/apply>.

Respondents are asked to provide contact information and other basic project details, alongside an Executive Summary and a Logic Model.

The Executive Summary should include the following information:

- The Priority or Priorities where the project aims to positively impact outcomes (see Table 1)
- Explanation of challenge or need that the project will address
- Description of the population that will be served
- Overview of proposed activities
- Intended impact

The Logic Model should be completed using the template provided in the RFI Submission Form.

## **Review Process and Timeline**

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RFI Submissions will be reviewed and select respondents will be invited to submit a full proposal for funding consideration.

Due to the anticipated interest in this RFI, Submissions will be reviewed, invited for full proposal, and awarded in two rounds. RFI Submissions received prior to February 26 will be considered in Round 1. Submissions received after February 26 and before the due date of July 16 will be reviewed in Round 2.

The full timeline associated with each round is described in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

<b>Round 1</b> January–June 2021	January 27	RFI open for submissions
	February 26	RFI Submissions due
	March 12	Select respondents invited to submit full proposals
	April 12	Full proposals due
	June	Awards finalized and announced

<b>Round 2</b> February–December 2021	February 27	RFI open for submissions
	July 16	RFI Submissions due
	August 20	Select respondents invited to submit full proposals
	October 1	Full proposals due
	December	Awards finalized and announced

### **What We Will Not Fund**

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The Foundation will not consider funding any of the following items through this RFI process:

- Endowments or capital campaigns
- Advocacy, political causes or events
- Existing deficits or retroactive funding
- Event sponsorships

### **Questions**

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If you have any questions, contact us at [rkmf@rkmf.org](mailto:rkmf@rkmf.org). Please note that we cannot provide input on ideas prior to their submission.