

# Request for Ideas: Employment Opportunities in the Innovation Economy

## 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.

Through this Request for Ideas, the Foundation seeks to seed new ideas that aim to provide residents in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties 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.

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. Unfortunately, currently 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 and innovative approaches that aim to strengthen the wide range of opportunities for residents to build businesses, gain economic independence, and prepare for jobs of the future. Ideas should align with at least one of the priority areas described in the table below. These priorities and outcomes are excerpts from the Foundation's Economic Development Funding Program.

**Table 1.**

<b>Economic Opportunities in Innovation Economy Priorities</b>	
<b>Business &amp; Job Creation</b>	Development of businesses and quality jobs that provide family sustaining wages and are career enhancing
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	Small-businesses and the ecosystem that enables these efforts to thrive
<b>Economic Independence &amp; Empowerment</b>	Varied conceptualizations of work, jobs, and occupations including independent, nontraditional, or contract work in the gig economy

Proposed Ideas should focus on fostering individuals’ equitable opportunities for employment, gaining income and wealth, and forging toward economic independence. Examples of Ideas that will be considered include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Business and job creation** in the new innovation economy offer family sustaining wages, are career enhancing for individuals, and support individuals in obtaining and succeeding in occupations of the future. Ideas could aim to connect underemployed or unemployed with job opportunities in high priority occupations in innovation economy fields or to incubate new businesses.
- Rates of **entrepreneurship** have been declining in the United States since the 1970s. Although the region has made recent strides in building its entrepreneur ecosystem, more work remains to encourage small businesses and entrepreneurship. Ideas in this priority area could aim to further build the entrepreneurship ecosystem and support efforts for underrepresented groups to jumpstart or grow entrepreneurship efforts.
- **Economic independence and empowerment** can be fostered by supporting individuals’ nontraditional, independent employment avenues and careers as freelancers and contractors, or in the gig economy. Ideas could aim to grow young talent to become leaders in the new innovation economy or address inequities and challenges facing workers in these fields. Ideas could also consider adaptations that are needed as we move toward remote work in the COVID economy or toward ways to “work” that have not yet been invented.

## Guidelines

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The Richard King Mellon Foundation invites nonprofit and public sector organizations to submit bold and novel ideas to the Employment Opportunities in the Innovation Economy 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.
- In the Planning and Innovation Stage. 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.
- 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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Complete The Foundation will accept ideas via our RFI Submission Form found at [www.rkmf.org/pages/apply](http://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**

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**

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.