



**Upskill Western Piedmont**, an initiative of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WPWDB), offers competitive training grants to businesses in addressing employees' skill gaps, improving employee retention, helping stabilize the business, and increasing the competitiveness of the employee and business. Through this effort, businesses:

- Improve Productivity and Increase Competitiveness**
- Retain Key Talent and Expertise**
- Reduce Employee Turnover**

Grants of up to \$10,000 may be awarded to eligible businesses in the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board service region for training of their current workforce in areas including, but not limited to:

- Technical Training
- Certifications
- Leadership Development
- Soft Skills
- Professional Development

Funding is available for up to 12 months from the time of the award notification. Businesses may reapply in subsequent years. A lifetime maximum of \$60,000 may be awarded to any individual business.

**Focus and Priority will be given for the following areas:**

1. Business and Employee development
  - Deployment of new technologies
  - Retention or diversification of business to strengthen competitive position
  - Advancing employee skills to foster career pathway
  - Retain critical talent
  - Process improvement to business operations
  - Averting layoffs
2. High Growth and In-demand Industry Sectors
  - Advance Manufacturing
  - Health Care and Allied Health
  - Biotechnology
  - Pharmaceutical
  - Information Technology
  - Hospitality
  - Professional or Business Services

## **Eligibility Requirements**

### **Business:**

- Be a North Carolina for-profit or not-for-profit
- Have operation(s) located in the Western Piedmont WDB service area
- Has operated in the Western Piedmont WDB service area for the last 12 months
- Has an employer-employee relationship with at least 5 employees
- Be current on all federal, state, and local tax obligations
- Meet non-federal share requirements

### **Trainees:**

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be a current employee of the business
- Have established/documented employment with employer for 6 months or more prior to application
- Be a citizen of the United States or a non-citizen whose status permits employment in the United States

## **Training Providers and Delivery Methods**

Businesses select their training provider of choice. WPWDB may provide training provider recommendations and resources for business to evaluate.

Delivery methods may include classroom instruction (onsite or at provider's location) and web-based learning. Business and training provider will determine best training delivery method.

## **Application Process**

Interested business must complete and submit the Upskill Western Piedmont Pre-Award Questionnaire prior to receiving the Application.

Completed Application must be submitted to the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board for consideration.

Notification of decision will be sent to applicant within 14 days of the application submission date. If approved for training, WPWDB will work with the business to complete all required documentation.



## **Reimbursement Process**

Business will submit invoice to WPWDB for review and processing. Reimbursements are processed and issued on a monthly invoicing cycle (*See Financial Calendar*). Grant must be used within 12 months from the date of the Contract Date.

For more information, visit [www.westernpiedmontworks.org](http://www.westernpiedmontworks.org) or contact Matthew Xiong, Business Services Consultant at 828-485-4215 or [matthew.xiong@wpcog.org](mailto:matthew.xiong@wpcog.org)

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHY WOULD AN EMPLOYER UTILIZE THIS GRANT?**

An employer can utilize this competitive training solution when employees have identified skills gaps that need to be addressed through training, thus enhancing the employee's continued employability. Businesses that acknowledge the need for employees' training to increase their competitiveness, efficiency, and/or stabilization should apply for this grant.

### **WHAT DOES "IN A RELATIONSHIP THAT MEETS THE FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT (FLSA) REQUIREMENTS FOR AN EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE" MEAN?**

The FLSA defines "employ" as the work that the employer directs or allows to take place. Workers who are economically dependent on the business of the employer and will receive a W-2 for tax filing purposes have an employer-employee relationship.

An individual that does not meet the employer-employee relationship are;

- Those who will receive a 1099 for tax filing purposes or
- Those who are placed through a temporary agency.

### **WHICH EMPLOYEES WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE UPSKILL WESTERN PIEDMONT TRAINING GRANT?**

This grant is beneficial to employees who have identified skills gaps, where eligible training addresses these gaps, improves employee retention, helps stabilize the business, and will increase the competitiveness of the employee and employer. These employees either:

- Need to upgrade skills and knowledge to retain their current job; OR
- Need to gain new skills and knowledge so they qualify for a different job with their employer.

### **ARE BUSINESSES THAT HAVE PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED THE INCUMBENT WORKER GRANT THROUGH THE STATE OF NC STILL ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR FUNDING THROUGH THIS GRANT?**

YES! Businesses that have already met the maximum lifetime limit of \$60,000 through the previous versions of the state-sponsored Incumbent Worker Grant are eligible to apply for funding through Upskill Western Piedmont and start with a balance of zero.

## **WHAT BUSINESSES ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?**

The following businesses are not eligible to apply for funds under this program:

- A business that is currently receiving training funds, either directly or indirectly, from North Carolina state government (unless those training funds do not duplicate the training efforts outlined in this grant application).
  - This includes trainings that are offered at no cost through the Small Business, Technology Development Center or the NC Community College's Customized Training program.
- A business that has received funds either directly or indirectly from North Carolina state government under any previous training initiative, and the terms of the agreement for training have not been met
  - A Workforce Development Board or its administrative entity
  - A labor union
  - A government entity

## **CAN A BUSINESS APPLY FOR A GRANT THAT WILL SERVE DIFFERENT, MULTIPLE BUSINESSES WITH COMMON TRAINING NEEDS?**

Yes, unique businesses can partner and apply for a collaborative training grant, and in fact it is encouraged if it helps an industry sector. The proposal for the common request must:

- Train employees of at least two different businesses, with one of those businesses designated as the Lead Applicant;
- Include employees of the Lead Applicant in the training;
- Include training descriptions and outcomes that address the employees from all businesses impacted by the proposed common training
- Include information on each business that will be part of the training. The application has a specific section for this information

## **WHAT IF WE DON'T USE ALL THE FUNDING AWARDED TO OUR BUSINESS?**

If a company is awarded funding from the Upskill Western Piedmont training grant but is unable to use any of the funds in 12 months they forfeit the full grant amount, then that grant amount will not count against the total lifetime limit for that company.

## **WHAT IS THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE?**

The non-federal share provided by an employer participating in the program may include the amount of the wages paid by the employer to a worker while the worker is attending a training program. The employer may provide the share in cash or in kind, fairly evaluated. Examples of the non-federal share are trainees' wages, on-site facility usage, trainees' travel, food, and/or lodging.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A BUSINESS IS AWARDED THE GRANT?**

1. A contract is established between WPWDB and the awarded business within a month following the review committee's decision.
  - a. The contract requires information about the employees to be trained to verify eligibility, so businesses should be prepared to provide this information upon notification of award.
2. WPWDB holds the funds for the training until the training is completed.
  - a. Training must be completed, and a final report submitted within 12 months from the date of the contract between the business and WPWDB.
3. After completion of the training, the business will submit a reimbursement request to WPWDB with their invoice and proof of payment to the training provider.
4. Note: If there is an extenuating circumstance that leads to a need to request a change to the approved training, the business must contact the BSR to discuss the best alternatives. Changes in the training(s) will not necessitate a new application but the business will need to complete an amended training form and submit to the BSR as soon as possible. If necessary, the BSR may convene the grant review committee to review these changes as it relates to the purpose of this grant, including the trainees' originally identified skills gaps. The training will still need to be completed within the one-year timeframe.