



Ohio to Work Connectors Grant
Program Guidelines FY '26 & FY '27

Application Period: September 15 – November 7, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.

Overview:

This Ohio to Work Connectors Grant program builds on the successful Ohio to Work program administered by JobsOhio and the State of Ohio during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this grant is to establish a statewide network of community-based organizations to serve as job coaches for any Ohioan needing assistance getting a job. This grant program will award one (1) regional hub partnership in each JobsOhio region (Figure 1), creating a statewide network of partnerships that will act as primary workforce connector hubs. The purpose of these hubs is to meet urgent workforce development and job creation needs by connecting any Ohioan seeking a job to a hiring employer. Grantees will be expected to serve all Ohioans whether they are recent college graduates, looking to re-enter the workforce, or facing other barriers to employment. Awarded partnerships, referred to as Regional Hub Partnerships, will be expected and required to collaborate with employers from multiple industries. Key functions of the Regional Hub Partnership awardees will include:

- Serving as the intake point for jobseeker referrals received through the state's digital portal.
- Triaging individuals and connecting them with community-based organization (CBO) partners for tailored job coaching, training, and placement services throughout the JobsOhio geographic region.
- Coordinating closely with the Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS), JobsOhio, JobsOhio Network Partners, OhioMeansJobs Centers, the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT), and local Workforce Development Boards.

The awarded Regional Hub Partnership in each JobsOhio region will be required to designate a point person to coordinate with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and devote at least 1 FTE to this project.

Eligible Applicants per Region:

- Existing or new partnerships including at least:
 - 5+ employer partners from at least 3 industry clusters
 - 3+ education or training providers
 - 3+ community-based organizations
 - A local workforce development board
 - A Career-Technical Planning District
 - County Department of Job and Family Services

Regional Hub Partnerships awarded through this grant will not be precluded from applying for the Department of Development's Industry Sector Partnership Grant Program.

Total Funding Available:

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) may award up to \$5,000,000 in fiscal year 2026, to be used over a two-year period. Funding will be released quarterly based on performance and matching

requirements being met or advanced. Each applicant may apply for up to \$357,000 per year to serve their region.

Application Due Date:

To be considered, all applications must be submitted to the ODHE RFP Portal by 3:00 p.m. on Friday, November 7, 2025. Late and incomplete applications will not be considered.

Parties interested in submitting an application must create an account in the ODHE RFP Portal at rfp.ohiohighered.gov. Once logged into the portal, parties can view the RFP and all related documentation including the questions and their responses related to the RFP. The RFP Portal also has a [link to register](#) for a webinar for questions about the program, to be held on October 20, 2025, 11:30 a.m.

All application materials can be downloaded from ODHE's RFP Portal at rfp.ohiohighered.gov. Once a respondent has completed an application, the documents must be uploaded and submitted through the RFP Portal in PDF format. No other file formats will be accepted through the portal. No hard copies or emailed applications will be accepted.

The cost of preparation and submission of the proposal are solely the responsibility of the respondent.

Required Activities:

Each regional hub's strategy should be business-led and locally driven. Partnerships are required to meet the activities outlined below by the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation supporting the urgent workforce development and job creation needs of the state. These include but are not limited to:

- Creating and managing a network of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to offer career coaching, job training, and job placement services to job seekers. The network of CBOs must serve the entire JobsOhio region and have strategies to support job seekers whether they reside in urban, suburban, or rural areas.
- Connecting job seekers with a job coach in their region.
- Managing a network of employers representing a variety of industries to hire job seekers and inform training to be promoted through the partnership and its coaches.

In addition to the required activities outlined above, grant funding can be used toward the below activities with written approval from ODHE.

- Outreach efforts to increase awareness of the CBO network.
- Marketing the regional consortium and associated education and career opportunities.
- Other activities approved by ODHE supporting urgent workforce development and job creation needs of the state.

Lead Applicant and Fiscal Agent:

Each multi-partner consortium submitting an application will identify a lead applicant and fiscal agent for the Regional Hub Partnership. The lead applicant may be any member of the consortium. The lead applicant may also serve as the fiscal agent for the partnership or may identify a member of the consortium or third-party to serve as the fiscal agent. The fiscal agent will serve as the recipient of grant funds on behalf of the partnership. A lead applicant cannot submit more than a single application. Applications must be submitted via the ODHE RFP Portal.

Award Amounts and Required Matching Funds:

Up to \$5,000,000 will be available for use over fiscal years 2026 and 2027. Eligible applicants may apply for up to \$357K in funds to be used for grant-eligible project costs to support the plan outlined in the application.

This grant program requires a dollar-for-dollar match from the lead applicant or its partner organizations. The Regional Hub Partnership's raised funds may come from other grant programs that are not administered by the State of Ohio, as well as from businesses, community organizations, foundations, memberships, or other funding sources outside of the lead applicant or fiscal agent. This grant program requires matching funds derived from other sources to be utilized to provide direct support for the grantees' deliverables. Documentation of required matching funds will be required for ODHE to release funds.

Eligible Matching Funds:

Matching funds may not be counted as match for multiple grants. Only matching funds received after November 7, 2025, will be eligible. Proof of matching funds may be submitted to ODHE on a regular basis and can include:

- Cash funds raised.
 - The partnership will provide a commitment letter, email, grant agreement, membership roster, or any other document from the donor indicating the funding amount and that the funds are designated for the partnership, along with a cleared check or accounting record confirming receipt of the cash funds.
- Salary costs of employees directly contributing to the deliverables of the awarded partnership.

The following do not qualify as matching funds:

- Funds counted as match under any other program or agreement.

Cost Limitations:

A maximum of 50% of the total grant awards can be allocated towards administrative costs, which includes salary and fringe for partnership staff. The Ohio to Work Connector Grant does not restrict the manner in which matching funds derived from other sources are utilized.

Award Period:

The award period for this grant begins on the award date and runs for 24 months. All matching fund documentation must be submitted to ODHE (odhefiscalreports@highered.ohio.gov) in order to receive grant funds. Grant funds remaining unspent by the end of the award period will be returned to ODHE.

Reporting Requirements:

Awarded partnerships will be required to report to ODHE on a quarterly basis for each individual served on the program on services provided and metrics, which may include, but is not limited to, the following metrics. Lead applicants and fiscal agents are responsible for coordinating collection of all the following information on behalf of all participating CBOs, and working with ODHE to report on other information as requested.

- Financial reporting and match, as outlined in Eligible Matching Funds section and award agreements
- Establish network of CBOs
 - Provide name of each CBO and Executive Director, and administrative contact
- Services provided by the participating CBOs.
 - Career coaching
 - Number of individuals served
 - Types of services provided
 - Must have onsite individual case files
 - Job Training
 - Type of training provided
 - Technical training placements
 - Institutions – training provides
 - List type of training
 - Certificates earned
 - Job Placement
 - Business name
 - Occupation/position
 - Use Standard Occupational Code (SOC) if available
- Lead applicant activities
 - Number of referrals across CBOs
 - Maintain individual files on site.
 - Initial services provided
 - Job placement if completed by awardee
 - Maintain records of all outreach activities

Application Summary and Rubric

Applicants are required to provide complete and qualifying responses submitted to the ODHE RFP Portal, to answer the following criteria for their application to be considered. Failure to provide sufficient or qualifying responses to any of the listed components will result in disqualification, and the application will not proceed to scoring.

Criteria	Points
1. Describe the lead applicant and fiscal agent's track record of fiscal responsibility and stewardship.	N/A
2. Provide a list detailing the Regional Hub members as required in the "Eligible applicants per region" section.	N/A
3. Describe how your partnership will coordinate Community Based Organizations in the region to provide prompt and effective services to job seekers received through the State of Ohio's digital portal and as outlined in the "Required Activities" section. Services should include at minimum: job coaching, training, and placement. Applicant should have distinct strategies for serving populations in the Urban, Suburban, and Rural areas of the region. Applicant should include a preliminary list of no more than 10 CBO partners.	20
4. Please demonstrate how your partnership exhibits leadership within your region and outline the key structural traits that contribute to your success. In your response, address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Industry Leadership: Provide examples of how your partnership has led or influenced industry advancements, initiatives, or collaborative efforts. Highlight specific projects or actions that demonstrate your leadership role within the sector. Detail any awards, recognitions, or partnerships that underscore your organization's contribution to shaping the future of the industry. b. Regional Leadership: Provide examples of how your partnership has led or influenced collaborative workforce development efforts throughout the JobsOhio geographic region. c. Partnership Structure: Describe the structure of your partnership, including the roles of key partners, leadership responsibilities, and the decision-making process. Explain how this structure promotes collaboration and drives industry impact. 	20
5. Identify how the partnership will align existing programs and activities that are currently operating independently to the benefit of Ohioans received through the State's digital portal.	10
6. Describe your partnership's plan to increase employment and economic advancement opportunities for populations with barriers to employment. Also describe the partnerships plan to reach individuals not traditionally served by Ohio's workforce system (i.e. recent high school or college graduates, retirees, individuals looking to re-enter the workforce).	20
7. Attach a proposed budget using attached template and provide a narrative for proposed expenditures.	10

8. Attach letters of commitment from employers. <i>Each letter must clearly outline the partner's role in the project and specify the measurable contributions they will provide. Letters should include 1. a brief description of the organization's relationship to the partnership, 2. a statement of commitment to actively participate in the project, and 3. quantifiable metrics such as number of participants to be hired, financial contributions, etc. Each letter must be dated September 15, 2025, or later, and should not be included in response to any other question in the application. Letters that contain specific metrics will be given higher consideration during scoring.</i>	10
9. Attach letters of support from education and/or training entities, Workforce Development Boards, OhioMeansJobs Centers, local economic development organizations, social service agencies, community organizations, institutions of higher education, Ohio Technical Centers, and/or K-12 Business Advisory Councils (Ohio Revised Code 3313.82). <i>Each letter must clearly outline the partner's role in the project and specify the measurable contributions they will provide. Letters should include 1. a brief description of the organization's relationship to the partnership, 2. a statement of commitment to actively participate in the project, and 3. quantifiable metrics such as number of participants to be hired, financial contributions, or number of credentials to be offered. Each letter must be dated September 15, 2025, or later, and should not be included in response to any other question in the application. Letters that contain specific metrics will be given higher consideration during scoring.</i>	10
Total	100

Legal Notices:

The applicant understands that if its application is accepted by the State, the applicant shall enter into an agreement with the State governing the use of the awarded funds. The applicant agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations in the conduct of the work hereunder.

The State reserves the right to fund any application in full or in part, to request additional information to assist in the review process, to require new applications from interested parties, to reject any or all applications responding to this announcement, or to reissue the announcement if it is determined that it is in the best interest of the State of Ohio. Issuing this announcement does not bind the State to making any awards. The State reserves the right to adjust the dates for this announcement for whatever reasons are deemed appropriate. The State reserves the right to waive any non substantive infractions made by an applicant, provided that the applicant cures such infraction upon request.

All costs incurred in preparation of an application shall be borne by the applicant. Application preparation costs are not recoverable under an award. The State of Ohio shall not contribute in any way to recovering the costs of application preparation.

The funding decisions are final. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application(s) at the conclusion of the review process.

The applicant understands that the information provided herein is intended solely to assist the applicant in submittal preparation. To the best of the State's knowledge, the information provided is accurate. However, the State does not warrant such accuracy, and any errors or omissions subsequently determined will not be construed as a basis for invalidating this solicitation. Interested parties bear the sole responsibility of obtaining the necessary information to submit a qualifying Application. The State retains the right to modify or withdraw this solicitation at any time. By submitting an application, applicants expressly agree to these terms.

Trade Secrets:

All Applicants are strongly discouraged from including in an application any information that the Applicant considers to be a "trade secret," as that term is defined in Section 1333.61(D) of the Ohio Revised Code.

1. To determine what qualifies as trade secret information, refer to the definition of "trade secret" in the Ohio Revised Code at 1333.61(D), which is reproduced below for reference:

"(D) 'Trade Secret' means information, including the whole or any portion or phase of any scientific or technical information, design, process, procedure, formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or improvement, or any business information or plans, financial information, or listing of names, addresses, or telephone numbers that satisfies both of the following:

- (1) It derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use.
 - (2) It is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy."
2. If any information in the application is to be treated as a trade secret, the application must:
 - a. Identify each and every occurrence of the information within the application with an asterisk before and after each line containing trade secret information and underline the trade secret information itself.
 - b. Identify that the application contains trade secret information in the cover letter; and
 - c. Include a summary page immediately after the cover letter that lists each page in the application that includes trade secret information and the number of occurrences of trade secret information on that page.
3. The Ohio Department of Higher Education requires non-disclosure agreements from all non Department of Higher Education persons who may have access to applications containing trade secret information, including evaluators.
4. If the Applicant claims that a record is not subject to disclosure under the Ohio Public Records law based on trade secret, it will bear costs of defending this claim.

Figure 1

