

Mass Workforce Issuance

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☐ Policy ☒ Information

To: Chief Elected Officials
Workforce Board Chairs
Workforce Board Directors
Title I Administrators
Career Center Directors
Title I Fiscal Officers
DCS Operations Managers

cc: WIOA State Partners

From: Alice Sweeney, Director
Department of Career Services

Date: December 19, 2017

Subject: **Upcoming changes to Direct Access Program and Express Program of the Workforce Training Fund**

Purpose: To notify Local Workforce Development Boards, One-Stop Career Center Operators and other local workforce partners of upcoming changes to programs and systems of the Workforce Training Fund that will be included in a Request for Proposals (RFP) expected to be released by Commonwealth Corporation on Tuesday, December 19, 2017.

Background: The Workforce Training Fund is a state fund financed entirely by Massachusetts employers, and enacted into law in July 1998. Its purpose is to provide resources to Massachusetts businesses and workers to train current and newly hired employees. The mission of the Fund is to provide businesses with the resources to invest in the Massachusetts workforce and improve employee skills, and to maintain the economic strength and viability of the Commonwealth's businesses.

On Tuesday, December 19, 2017, Commonwealth Corporation will be issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking applications from training providers to offer grant-funded training slots to payroll employees of eligible small businesses (100 employees or fewer) in Massachusetts that contribute to the Workforce Training Fund. This program, formerly named the "Direct Access Program," will be relabeled as the "Small Business Direct Access Program." The RFP will include the following information about a series of upcoming changes affecting both this program and the Express Program of the Workforce Training Fund:

Over the past several years, Commonwealth Corporation has been engaged in reviewing and redesigning Workforce Training Fund grant programs, application systems and grant management processes to provide businesses with a more streamlined, customer-focused experience. This year, based on customer feedback, we have been working on an initiative to improve Massachusetts' businesses' use-of and access-to the Express and Direct Access Programs. As a result, in FY19 we will be launching comprehensively redesigned Express and Direct Access Programs that will offer all Massachusetts businesses, regardless of size, with the opportunity to receive Workforce Training Fund grant support when they enroll their employees in publicly available training courses. The redesign will include the following changes to systems and programs:

- *Rename the Direct Access Program the Small Business Direct Access Program and limit eligibility to companies with 100 or fewer employees in Massachusetts*
- *Expand eligibility for Express Program grants to businesses of any size*
- *Replace both the use of TrainingPro for the Express Program (training directory and grant application) and the Direct Access Program's existing enrollment system with a single integrated interface to request grant resources for either program.*
- *The new system will also include an on-line training marketplace called the Massachusetts Training Exchange that will provide both businesses and training providers with a 21st century user experience.*
- *When the Massachusetts Training Exchange is fully functional, businesses will be able to search for courses by topic, compare prices, see more detailed information about course content, and access user-reviews of training providers.*
- *Training providers will be able to post course outlines, competency objectives, sample materials and instructor profiles. They will also be able to deliver online courses in the new platform.*
- *The new system will also incorporate direct payments to providers including both grantee contributions, if applicable, and payment of grant funds.*
- *Businesses of any size will be able to determine eligibility, enroll in training courses, and request applicable grant funds through the training Massachusetts Training Exchange.*
- *Revised grant limitations including:*
 - *Eligible businesses may access up to \$15,000 in grant funds per calendar year through the Massachusetts Training Exchange, whether via Express Program funds, Small Business Direct Access funds, or a combination of the two.*
 - *Eligible businesses may access up to \$3,000 in grant funding per person, per course for all grant-funded training via the Massachusetts Training Exchange.*

Effective: Small Business Direct Access Program RFP Release: 12/19/2017
Training funded via the Small Business Direct Access Program RFP is expected to take place during the following period: September 2018 - August 2020.

Beta testing of the Massachusetts Training Exchange is expected to take place during Q1 & Q2 of FY 2019. Following beta testing, effective dates and more specific information about changes to the Express Program are expected to be determined. At any time interested parties can visit www.WorkforceTrainingFund.org for announcements and effective program requirements. www.WorkforceTrainingFund.org will be updated as more information becomes available.

Inquiries: Please send questions related to this issuance to either Rebekah Lashman at RLashman@commcorp.org or at (617) 717-6917