



**Request for Proposals (RFP) for  
Employment Advancement Retention Network (EARN)  
Northern Tier Workforce Development Area  
For the Period of July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026**

<b>RFP SUMMARY:</b> The Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) developed to address the specific needs of welfare recipients and low-income individuals with multiple barriers to obtaining employment. The program is designed to assist clients who are receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in their transition from welfare to the workforce. It provides case management, job placement and job search services needed by recipients to enable them to move rapidly from welfare to work and lead to full-time employment at a self-sustaining wage.	
<b>RFP Issue Date</b>	January 12, 2024
<b>Letter of Intent Due Date</b>	February 7, 2024 Email to <a href="mailto:info@northerntier.org">info@northerntier.org</a> Subject line: RFP Letter of Intent
<b>Proposal Due Date</b>	February 21, 2024
<b>Deadline for Questions</b>	The deadline for questions is February 9, 2024, at 4:00 P.M. EST. Questions and/or inquiries must be submitted in writing to <a href="mailto:info@northerntier.org">info@northerntier.org</a> with subject line: RFP Questions. All questions and responses will be posted to <a href="http://www.northerntier.org">www.northerntier.org</a> .
<b>Proposal Submission Process</b>	Proposals can be submitted:  Online via OneDrive: <a href="#">Northern Tier RFP</a>  Mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered proposals will not be accepted.
<b>RFP Website</b>	<a href="http://www.northerntier.org">www.northerntier.org</a>
<b>RFP Official Contact</b>	Melissa Fleming, Workforce Director, Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission (NTRPDC)/Northern Tier Workforce Development Board, (570) 265-1524, <a href="mailto:fleming@northerntier.org">fleming@northerntier.org</a>

# Table of Contents

- 1.The Opportunity ..... 4**
  - 1.1 Summary ..... 4
  - 1.2 Background..... 4
  - 1.3 Outcome Goals..... 6
  - 1.4 Award Terms ..... 6
- 2.Scope of Work..... 7**
  - 2.1 Services to be Provided..... 7
    - Eligibility EARN ..... 8
    - EARN Services ..... 8
    - LMC..... 9
    - Direct Service Team..... 10
    - Wages and Fair Labor Standards ..... 10
    - Participant Wage Accounting Requirements ..... 10
    - PA CareerLink® Sites ..... 10
    - Service Requirements..... 10
    - General Requirements ..... 11
    - Role of Northern Tier Workforce Development Board..... 13
  - 2.2 Performance Metrics and Contract Management ..... 14
    - Performance Metrics ..... 14
    - Service Delivery Standards ..... 16
    - Contract Performance Monitoring ..... 17
    - Collaboration and Course Corrections ..... 17
    - Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS)..... 17
    - Records and Documentation..... 18
- 3.Submission Instructions ..... 19**
  - 3.1 Proposal Content ..... 19
  - 3.2 Submission Instructions ..... 19
- 4.How We Choose..... 21**
  - 4.1 Minimum Qualifications..... 21
    - Evaluation Criteria..... 21

4.2 Selection Process, Award, and Protest Procedures .....	22
Selection Schedule.....	22
Selection Award Process .....	22
Award Decision .....	23
Protest and Appeals Process.....	23
<b>5.Terms and Conditions .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Monitoring .....	23
Overview of Administrative Requirements.....	24

# 1. The Opportunity

## 1.1 Summary

The Northern Tier Workforce Development Board (NTWDB) is seeking innovative proposals for the delivery of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Employment Advancement Retention Network (EARN) programs in the Northern Tier region.

This comprehensive program is designed to address the specific needs of participants receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing a wide range of services that promote personal growth and transition from welfare to the workforce. The program is based on a human-centered design and includes a combination of case management, coaching, licensed counseling and peer to peer experiences.

Services should be customer-focused and include access to education and training opportunities that move participants to economic stability. The provider must work with participants to develop individual employment plans working on barrier remediation to overcome obstacles to obtaining and retaining employment.

The NTWDB wants to secure providers that will assist the Northern Tier in reaching the following goals:

- Develop innovative strategies to assist these populations in successfully entering the workforce through career development activities.
- Provide support services as needed to help individuals overcome barriers in preparation for the workforce and during retention phases to ensure individuals are able to retain employment.
- Develop a high-level work plan outlining the key phases, activities, and milestones for program participants.
- Monitor and report on progress toward the completion of key milestones, making necessary adjustments as needed to ensure timely and successful program execution.

## 1.2 Background

### Northern Tier Workforce Development Area Overview

The Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission (NTRPDC) is a local development district that includes community, economic and workforce development programs and serves as the fiscal agent for WIOA Title I and DHS EARN programs in the Northern Tier region. Designated as the WDB, NTRPDC has been the lead organization for workforce development planning and service delivery that meets the workforce needs of individuals and businesses. The NTWDB is responsible for oversight and implementation of workforce development initiatives in the Northern Tier region through the PA CareerLink® delivery system.

The NTWDB is comprised of private-sector business, social service, education, labor, economic development, and community-based organization representatives. The purpose of the NTWDB is to provide strategic oversight, direction, and focus to employment and training services provided to residents and businesses of the 5 counties that comprise the Northern Tier Workforce Development Area (NTWDA) which includes Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga and Wyoming Counties

## **Stevens Amendment**

The NTWDB complies with the Stevens Amendment, an appropriations provision that requires grantees of the Department of Labor (DOL), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education to disclose for a grant program the percent of the costs financed with federal funds. For the NTWDB's Stevens Amendment information, please click [here](#).

## **EARN Overview**

The NTWDB is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for residents in the Northern Tier by promoting economic development and providing resources and support for workforce readiness. Under the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Employment and Advancement Retention Network (EARN) program, resources are provided to deliver comprehensive employment and training services to individuals receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance or through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to transition from welfare to the workforce at family sustaining wages.

Preparing individuals for success may be accomplished by identifying barriers and developing plans of action to overcome obstacles to employment through individualized case management, skill development and support services. The ability to implement non-traditional, innovative services is needed in this highly rural area. Methods for providing service must include both virtual and in-person models to serve participants.

## **EARN Program Needs Statement**

The NTWDB has identified a critical need to engage participants and enhance EARN programs in order assist individuals in improving personal growth, promote a smooth transition to the workforce and achieve long-term economic success. Our current programs have demonstrated positive outcomes; yet we aim to continue and expand these programs to a more customer-centric, adaptive model focused on addressing the individual needs of our target population.

Our target population consists of eligible participants receiving TANF (cash assistance) or SNAP (food stamps) who need support and resources to improve employment success. These individuals face barriers to employment, such as a lack of relevant skills, work history, transportation, childcare, etc. The program must address the diverse needs of this population, providing solutions and support that encourage their success.

Our goal is to significantly improve the employability of our participants by emphasizing career pathway education and increasing work-based learning opportunities for our participants so they can successfully transition to meaningful employment. We strive to improve employment viability through the enhancement of support systems during the retention phase of the program. In doing so, we seek to increase readiness of the participants to gain employment in careers in which they are prepared for and increase the longevity of their employment by improving retention methods.

### 1.3 Outcome Goals

The following outcome goals are designed to define success for this RFP, focusing on the measurable effects of the contracted activities while providing a clear framework for provider selection, performance tracking, and contract structure.

#### EARN Primary Indicators of Performance

- Placement in Employment
- Retention in Employment
- Credential Attainment

#### Secondary Indicators of Performance

- Family assessment and IEP Completion
- Mental Health Assessment
- Referrals to external support services
- Access to Social Service Professional

### 1.4 Award Terms

#### Availability of Funds

Funding levels will be unavailable at the issuance of this RFP. Funding is contingent upon the availability of funds and State and Federal authorization in the Northern Tier Workforce Development Area. Funding is not guaranteed until the fiscal agent receives the EARN funds. The NTWDB reserves the right to withdraw or reduce the amount of an award or to cancel any contract or agreement resulting from this procurement if adequate funding is not received from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Resources or other funding sources or due to legislative changes. For proposal planning purposes, the funding levels for the 2023-2024 program year are included below.

Program Year (PY) 2023 funding by county:

County	EARN Allocation	SNAP Allocation	Total funds
Bradford	\$104,706	\$5,214	\$109,920
Sullivan	\$15,865	\$791	\$16,656
Susquehanna	\$72,977	\$3,634	\$76,611
Tioga	\$72,977	\$3,634	\$76,611
Wyoming	\$50,767	\$2,528	\$53,295
<b>Total EARN/SNAP funds</b>	<b>\$317,292</b>	<b>\$15,801</b>	<b>\$333,093</b>

## **Performance Period**

This RFP will be issued for a two (2) year cycle commencing on July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2026. Under this solicitation, NTWDB reserves the right to renew contractors for additional years based upon receipt of EARN funds allocation, achievement of performance indicators, cost-effectiveness, fiscal integrity, and compliance with monitoring requirements for EARN regulations.

## **Contract Award**

Please be advised that the level of funding available is subject to change. All funding is contingent upon the availability of state and federal funds and the continued authorization EARN activities in the NTWDA. While the successful bidder will be procured for a two-year cycle, appropriation of funds will be distributed on an annual basis.

The proposals submitted in response to this solicitation are not a legally binding document. However, the contents of the proposal of the successful bidder will become contractual obligations and failure to accept these obligations in a contractual agreement may result in the cancellation of the award. Staff will negotiate and execute contracts with the bidder approved for funding. These discussions will take place after final funding approval and may include such items as budget, cost, program design, service levels, location, target population, projections, and clarifications.

## **Program Cost Reimbursement**

Payment related to any agreement resulting from this RFP will be made on a cost-reimbursement basis. This means your organization must have the financial capacity to pay all costs upfront. NTWDB/NTRPDC will require an invoice, proof of expenses, and required documentation to process a reimbursement. NTWDB/NTRPDC will only reimburse the provider for actual expenses incurred during the effective dates of the contract. The reimbursement timeline will be finalized during the contract negotiation. Allowable costs will be determined by all applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

## **2. Scope of Work**

The NTWDB is seeking proposals for comprehensive programs designed to serve EARN and SNAP eligible participants as it relates to employment and training needs and connecting opportunities to participants. The selected provider will be responsible for implementing a program that addresses the workforce needs of Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga and Wyoming County residents, with a focus on fostering innovative solutions and encouraging collaboration throughout the project. The Scope of Work for this RFP outlines the services, tasks, and requirements expected of the selected provider. It is designed to be connected to the project's goals, clearly organized, and realistic in its expectations while encouraging innovation and collaboration.

### **2.1 Services to be Provided**

Services are designed to support the development of evidence-based programs and other activities that enhance the choices available to TANF and SNAP clients including career exploration and guidance, continued support for educational attainment, progression through career pathways,

emphasis on work-based learning, opportunities for skill training and in-demand industries and occupations leading to unsubsidized employment.

The selected provider will be responsible for delivering the following services and primary tasks to ensure a comprehensive and effective workforce development program for EARN participants in the Northern Tier.

### **Eligibility EARN**

The County Assistance Office (CAO) determines eligibility for the EARN program and refer clients to EARN based on CAO policy and procedures. CAO staff complete the Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) with hourly requirements based on household composition of the participant.

Individuals receiving TANF, Extended Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (ETANF) and ineligible for or declining Diversion may be referred to the EARN program. Individuals who are ineligible for or decline Diversion may be referred to EARN as a SNAP E&T participant if they are receiving SNAP benefits.

Reverse referrals may be initiated by the EARN service provider instead of the CAO. The provider must use the Reverse Referral Form (PA 1951) to give the local CAO the information necessary to determine if the referral for a specific program or service is allowable or appropriate.

### **EARN Services**

Providers will be responsible for needs assessment, short term training, job search, job placement, job retention and must provide on-going case management services during the pre and post placement phase.

Federal and State laws require that participants take part in specific activities for a set number of hours each week. Clients are required to participate the number of hours as mandated by their Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) and must sign in daily on weekly timesheets. As a result, attendance must be strictly monitored. The service provider ensures the clients will participate in the EARN Program for at least all of the hours as determined by the CAO. A service plan is developed to address the needs of the clients and the household and will contain all recommended services, activities, supports and address all barriers and concerns.

When a client is enrolled, the provider will conduct a case review to become familiar with the client's background and current situation and complete the EARN Full Family and Mental Health Assessment Form within the required time period. The contractor will review the information below with the client:

- Family and social history
- Medical information, including physician, clinic, and hospital records;
- Work History;
- Information regarding services the participant is receiving from other agencies/providers; and
- Case Narratives
- Job Readiness Assessment
- Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR)



- Information regarding the client's current and past participation in Employment & Training programs;
- Educational activities and the outcomes of those experiences;
- Need for technology to support remote participation
- Any other pertinent information.

The EARN service provider will use the comprehensive household assessment to coordinate with the participant and create a service plan. The IEP is a living document that follows the participant throughout their enrollment. The IEP is a comprehensive plan used to describe goals and objectives, promote strategies to address participant barriers, measure goals and milestones.

As part of ongoing services to the participant the EARN providers will:

- Maintain on-going contact with the participant
- Identify and refer participant and/or their family to appropriate local community resources
- Advocate for the participant and their family when connecting to local community resources
- Provide access to a social service professional to provide a safe space to discuss sensitive topics such as mental, social, physical, emotional or behavioral health aspects
- Provide activities that lead to acquiring work readiness skills
- Provide or refer participants to formal credentialing programs or trainings
- Facilitate transfer of participants to other DHS employment and training programs such as KEYS
- Place participants in unsubsidized employment
- Provide wrap around services
- Assist and incentivize participants who obtain employment to achieve satisfactory performance, retain employment and increase earnings over time.

Contractors must ensure that all program participants are registered in the PA CareerLink® system in order to receive the full benefit of services and/or activities provided at the PA CareerLink®. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry along with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services has established a collaborative effort to integrate EARN and WIOA services.

### **Local Management Committee (LMC)**

The Northern Tier Local Management Committee (LMC) is a subcommittee of the Northern Tier Workforce Development Board (NTWDB). The LMC provides a forum for various partner organizations to connect and determine how to best leverage and combine resources available to serve our most vulnerable citizens in their journey to self-sufficiency. Committee members include, but are not limited to, county assistance office representatives, community agencies, charities, non-profit organizations and training providers.

Those enrolled in TANF and SNAP programs often face significant barriers to economic independence such as, transportation, food insecurity, education, housing, domestic violence, substance abuse and adequate childcare. The LMC provides a platform for various agencies to come together to address these barriers by maximizing current services and resources to make appropriate referrals and streamline services.

Service providers are expected to attend and report out at all LMC meetings.

## **Direct Service Team**

The Direct Service Team (DST) meetings are held on a more frequent basis than the LMC and are designed to discuss client specific issues as part of ongoing communication between the local CAO and the service provider.

Service providers and CAOs meet in their respective counties to discuss significant or multiple barriered clients to jointly determine the correct referral or course of action for the participant. These meetings are to be frequent and ongoing. Topics to be covered in DST meetings include, but are not limited to client outreach, enrollments, plans, activities, hours, incentives, barriers, incentives and termination.

## **Wages and Fair Labor Standards**

Individuals participating in work-based learning opportunities must be compensated in accordance with applicable laws, but not less than the higher of the rate specified in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 or the applicable State minimum wage law and all statutory deductions, for those wages are to be deducted.

## **Participant Wage Accounting Requirements**

The NTWDB requires all participant wages and statutory deductions for those wages to be paid directly by the program provider. Documentation of payment(s) and corresponding timesheets must be submitted to NTRPDC.

## **PA CareerLink® Sites**

The EARN provider is not required to be co-located at the PA CareerLink® comprehensive sites, however they are encouraged to do so if space is available. The EARN provider is expected to have a relationship with PA CareerLink® partner staff to ensure an accurate understanding of services available. All EARN clients are required to register with the PA CareerLink®.

Comprehensive sites:

PA CareerLink® Tioga – 56 Plaza Lane, Wellsboro, PA 16901

PA CareerLink® Bradford/Sullivan – 312 Main Street, Towanda, PA 18848

All affiliate sites fall under the Bradford/Sullivan umbrella and services must be provided in Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming counties. Providers may bid to provide services in one or multiple designated affiliate areas.

## **Service Requirements**

### **Communication and Collaboration**

- Establish and maintain open communication channels with the LMC, NTWDB and the respective PA CareerLink® and/or affiliate sites throughout the program duration.
- Collaborate with local employers and educational institutions to facilitate relevant work experience and learning opportunities for participants.
- It is expected that the service provider will collaborate with other workforce and community agencies in the area in order to streamline service and implement a referral system that ensure

participants receive the most benefit from the resources available. Track and report progress using quantifiable performance metrics aligned with the program's outcome goals.

- Provide regular updates, quarterly evaluations, and progress reports to LMC, the NTWDB and NTRPDC.
- It is expected the service provider will collaborate with others providing workforce services in the area in order to streamline service and implement a referral system that ensure participants receive the most benefit from the resources available. This includes partners such as PA CareerLink® , workforce, economic development and education.

#### Performance Metrics and Continuous Improvement

- Track and report progress using quantifiable performance metrics aligned with the program's outcome goals.
- Provide regular updates, quarterly evaluations, and progress reports to the NTWDB and respective LMC.
- Submit a final report at the end of the program with recommendations for future improvements, using performance data to inform suggested changes.

#### Service Delivery

- Ensure the program addresses all specified program elements and incorporates evidence-based strategies that lead to improved participant outcomes.
- Complete comprehensive household assessments and Individualized Employment Plan (IEP) to address participant challenges
- Referrals to external support services, including social service professionals

#### High-Level Work Plan and Performance Schedule

- Develop a high-level work plan outlining the key phases, activities, and milestones for the program.
- Provide a performance schedule that includes deliverable due dates, important dates, and key milestones related to the program's implementation and evaluation.
- Monitor and report on progress toward the completion of key milestones, making necessary adjustments as needed to ensure timely and successful program execution.

### **General Requirements**

#### Legal Requirements

- Compliance with local, state, and federal regulations including the DHS requirements, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws.
- Adherence to all applicable licensing, permitting, and reporting requirements for workforce development services.
- Implementation of policies and procedures that ensure the protection of client confidentiality and privacy in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other relevant privacy laws.

## Staffing and Organizational Requirements

- The staffing model should include a diverse team of professionals with experience in workforce development, including career preparation, case management, and business services
- Supervision and management of staff should ensure accountability, adherence to service standards, and continuous professional development.
- Pre-employment screening, including background checks and reference verification, must be conducted for all new hires.
- Staff training will encompass orientation, ongoing professional development, and updates on workforce development policies and best practices.
- Credentials and licensure for staff should be maintained as required by local, state, or federal regulations, or as necessary for the provision of specific services.

## Data and Technology Requirements

- Provision of computer hardware and software necessary for the efficient operation of service delivery.
- Access to e-mail and internet capabilities for staff to facilitate communication, research, and resource sharing.
- Implementation of systems to assess client satisfaction, including regular surveys, feedback forms, and other customer experience measurement tools.
- Program evaluation should be conducted to measure outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and inform future service strategies.
- Records, data collection, and reporting must be maintained in compliance with local, state, and federal requirements, as well as NTWDB guidelines and performance metrics.

## Financial and Compliance Requirements

- Insurance requirements must be met, including general liability, workers' compensation, and any other applicable coverage.
- Financial control procedures should be in place to ensure the appropriate use of funds, prevent fraud, and maintain financial accountability.
- Financial status reports must be submitted as requested to the NTWDB, detailing expenditures, budget adjustments, and any other relevant financial information.
- Audited financial statements should be provided as requested by the NTWDB.
- All reporting required by the NTWDB will be submitted in a timely manner. Failure to do so will result in corrective action plans and technical assistance to rectify lapse in timely reporting.

## Budget Requirements

- Adherence to cost standards and guidelines established by the NTWDB and relevant funding agencies.
- Identification of program funding sources, including federal, state, local, and private grants, as well as any in-kind contributions or other financial support.
- Proration of costs, as necessary, to allocate expenses fairly among multiple funding sources or partners.
- Compliance with third-party reimbursement policies, if applicable, ensuring accurate billing and payment processes.

- Incorporation of flat fees, fee-for-service revenues, and other funding mechanisms, as appropriate, to support program sustainability and cost-effectiveness.
- Submission of sub-consultant cost schedules, if applicable, detailing the expenses associated with any subcontracted services or partnerships.

### **Role of Northern Tier Workforce Development Board**

The Northern Tier Workforce Development Board is responsible for overseeing and implementing workforce development initiatives in the Northern Tier region. This section outlines the role of the NTWDB in providing this service or program and supporting the chosen provider(s), including administrative and technical support, information access, and other responsibilities the NTWDB plans to retain for which the provider will not be responsible.

#### **Administrative Support**

- **Contract Management:** The NTWDB will manage the contractual relationship with the selected provider, ensuring compliance with all terms and conditions, monitoring performance, and processing invoices for payment.
- **Reporting and Accountability:** The NTWDB will relay performance metrics and reporting requirements mandated by DHS and any additional reporting to the LMC or WDB to ensure the provider's alignment with the objectives of the RFP. The NTWDB will also provide oversight, conduct monitoring, and address any performance issues.

#### **Technical Support**

- **Guidance on Workforce Development Policies and Regulations:** The NTWDB will provide information and guidance on federal, state, and local workforce development policies, regulations, and best practices to help the provider navigate the complexities of the workforce system.
- **Data and Labor Market Information:** The NTWDB will provide access to relevant labor market information, workforce data, and other resources that can inform the vendor's service delivery and strategic planning.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** The NTWDB will offer training and capacity-building opportunities to enhance the vendor's ability to deliver high-quality workforce development services.

#### **Information Access**

- **Information Sharing:** The NTWDB will facilitate access to pertinent information, such as program guidelines, funding sources, and relevant stakeholders, to support the participants understanding of the local workforce ecosystem.
- **Communication Channels:** The NTWDB will maintain open lines of communication with the provider such as updates on policy changes, funding opportunities, and industry trends that may impact service delivery.

#### **Responsibilities Retained by the Northern Tier Workforce Development Board**

- **Strategic Planning and Prioritization:** The NTWDB will be responsible for establishing the strategic direction of workforce development initiatives in the region, including setting priorities, identifying target industries, and allocating resources.

- Policy Development and Advocacy: The NTWDB will advocate for effective workforce development policies and practices, engaging in policy discussions at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Building: The NTWDB will continue to engage stakeholders across the region, fostering collaboration and partnerships to support the overall workforce development ecosystem.

The NTWDB plays a critical role in providing administrative and technical support, information access, and strategic direction to the selected provider for the provision of EARN services. By partnering with the NTWDB, the provider will benefit from the Board's expertise, resources, and commitment to building a skilled workforce that meets the needs of the local economy.

## 2.2 Performance Metrics and Contract Management

### Performance Metrics

Performance outcomes will be used to assess the effectiveness of services provided by the contractor. EARN performance outcomes for the PY 2023-2024 are outlined below. Failure to meet the threshold/goal for each of the categories will result in a corrective action plan. Providers must track all participant activity in CWDS.

Outcome	TANF Outcome Description	TANF Goal	Measurement
Secondary Equivalent and Credentialing	A participant must receive a diploma or certification that will provide the participant with an industry-recognized certificate or certification (as defined in Section III(H)(a - c)) and marketable skill directly related to their employment goals listed in their AMR and IEP.	50% of all participants in an activity that results in the achievement of a credential.	Number of credential activities closed where credential earned during program year / number of credential activities closed during the program year.
Successful Referral to Educational Programming	Grantee shall coordinate educational activities with ELECT service providers and the KEYS program	90% of those terminated from EARN with Project Termination Code X go onto enroll with ELECT or KEYS	Number of individuals who have a referral (regardless of outcome) to ELECT, SNAP 50/50, TANF KEYS or SNAP KEYS within 90 days following Project Termination X in program

	programs where appropriate; providing supports to ensure successful transfer, referral, and enrollment to the receiving program (as defined in Section III(H)(d)).	program within 90 days.	year /number of individuals with project term code X in program year.
Employment with hourly wage (\$2 hour above minimum wage)	Grantee shall place participants in unsubsidized employment, for an average of 20 hours in a consecutive four-week period, with a wage at least two dollars above the higher of the federal or state minimum wage as of July 1 of the program year.	65% of all enrolled participants who become employed achieve Employment with hourly wage.	Number of cases where individual employed with hourly wage during program year / number of cases with active unsubsidized employment during program year.
Retention (six- and twelve-month benchmarks)	Retention begins when an individual has TANF or ETANF close due to earned income from employment and is placed in CWDS extended hold. The Grantee shall provide documentation of the participant's retention semi-annually (six and twelve months)	70% of all enrolled participants who met the employment reporting measure at six-months will achieve the benchmark  50% of all enrolled participants who met the employment reporting measure at twelve-months will achieve the benchmark	Count of individuals enrolled in retention, who achieved the employment reporting measure at or prior to retention, achieve 183 or 365 days in retention; divided by all individuals who achieved retention and employment reporting measure who had retention either between 0-183 days or 183-365 days. (Only individuals who could cross the day count threshold in the PY would be counted.)

## Service Delivery Standards

Providers are expected to meet the service delivery standards listed below. Close adherence to these service standards will ensure assurance, align with EARN program design and drive successful program participant outcomes.

Outcome	TANF Outcome Description	TANF Goal	Measurement
Assessment and IEP	Grantee shall conduct and complete a comprehensive household assessment (Section III.B.) as well as complete and document a detailed IEP (Section III.C.) that includes plans to address participant challenges (barriers) and agreed upon plan for resolution within 14 business days of a participant's enrollment.	90% of all participants enrolled with the Grantee for whom an assessment is required.	Count of individuals who have assessment activity complete, with IEP showing updated or new barrier and goal, with assessment activity end & participant signature date occurring less than or equal to 14 business days from the case begin date divided by all newly enrolled individuals in program year.
Referrals to External Support Services	Grantee shall complete a referral to a community-based organization to help assist the individual, family, or both within 14 business days of discovering the need	90% of all enrolled participants for whom a need has been identified.	Count of new IEP Barriers that have referral made to an outside agency within 14 business days of IEP Barrier being opened divided by all IEP Barriers with a referral made to an outside agency. (Only IEP Barriers with an associated referral will be evaluated.)
Social Service Professional	Grantee shall have a network of professionals as required by Section III. D so that eligible participants have a one-on-one meeting within 28	80% of all enrolled participants for whom a meeting is required will have an introductory one-on- one meeting with the licensed professional within	LC/SW services that are opened within 28 business days or fewer business days after enrollment.



	business following the date of enrollment.	28 business days following the date of enrollment.	
--	--	--	--

**Contract Performance Monitoring**

- The provider must regularly track, and monitor data related to participation and outcomes, using observations and evaluation to ensure continuous program improvement. Such efforts must be supported by strong internal systems and applications. The provider is required to provide NTRPDC with timely reports and supporting documentation that clearly demonstrate program enrollment, participation, activity compliance, progress, outputs and outcomes. NTRPDC will work with the provider to understand reporting requirements and program exiting procedures, and to determine the appropriate template for reporting outcomes and performance. Reporting frequency and content are subject to change at the discretion of NTRPDC. Possible areas of reporting include but are not limited to:
  - Referrals and enrollments
  - Activities occurring in the PA CareerLink®
  - Activities and services clients are engaged in
  - Participant and employer stories; included successes and major challenges
  - Barriers to employment faced by clients
  - Efforts to remediate barriers to employment, including related results
  - Credentials attained, including credentialing program characteristics
  - Job placements and retentions
  - Client wages and benefits
  - Incentives issued to clients
  - Business engagement efforts
  - Partner referrals
  - Customer satisfaction rates

**Collaboration and Course Corrections**

- The NTWDB will actively collaborate with the provider to address challenges and design course corrections throughout the contract's duration.
- The NTWDB may schedule regular meetings, site visits, or conference calls with the selected provider to discuss progress, challenges, and potential adjustments to the scope of work or service delivery approach.
- The selected provider is expected to be proactive in identifying challenges and proposing solutions, working closely with the NTWDB to ensure the successful implementation of the contract's goals.

**Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS)**

The provider will be required to utilize the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS) as the information system of record for all participant and employer communication, service provision and other program activity and must ensure that all data is entered accurately and in a timely manner,

adhering to all applicable data rules, regulations, and entry time requirements. Staff must be fully competent in utilizing CWDS and providing basic guidance regarding CWDS to other service providers within the NTWDA network, including querying and producing reports from CWDS regarding the Program. NTWDB will utilize data from CWDS, as well as data collected from other sources, to share with the LMC, NTWDB and determine program compliance and evaluate performance of the provider.

The provider will follow guidelines for proper use of CWDS provided by NTWDB and maintain internal protocols for uniformed and detailed case notes to ensure clear and consistent tracking and documentation of progress throughout the program. The provider will participate in data quality, validation and compliance activities required by the DHS and NTWDB, as well as regular meetings and review of performance reports, and other written reports when requested.

The provider will identify staff members whose work requires access to CWDS and submit applications for CWDS access per local protocols, subject to approval by NTWDB. Appropriate staff members to receive CWDS access include case managers, career advisors, employment specialists, job developers, and other staff members who have regular contact with participants or whose work requires monitoring and oversight of participant data maintained in CWDS. CWDS account credentials and login information may not be shared between staff members or other individuals. The provider must submit notification if any staff member with CWDS access is terminated, voluntarily or involuntarily, within 24 hours of termination.

Use of a private, secondary database must be approved by NTWDB prior to use.

## **Records and Documentation**

The provider must retain, secure, and ensure the accuracy of all program files and records, whether related to clients, employers, or general operations, in compliance with related federal and state regulations, and NTWDB record retention requirements. The provider must allow the NTWDB and representatives of other regulatory authority's access to all records, program materials, staff and participants related to this Agreement.

The provider is responsible for maintaining and securing participant case files at all times, as well as ensuring privacy and protection of all personal information collected from participants per applicable laws, regulations and NTWDB policies. Accurate documentation showing evidence of time spent in activities and work are critical to meeting performance. Case files are the property of the NTWDB and must contain a variety of documentation including but not limited to:

- Identification and contact information
- Release of Information Form
- Assessment information and service plans
- Attendance forms, time sheets and excused absences
- Client contacts and updates
- Job search logs, time and attendance sheets
- Employment Verification Forms (EVF) and paystubs
- Verification of retention
- Other relevant forms and information

The provider will participate in regular data and document validation requests initiated by the NTWDB, responding to such requests in a timely manner, according to the deadlines defined by the NTWDB. To effectively respond to data and document validation requests by the NTWDB, the provider must have

ready access to client data and documentation, and the capacity to send client data and documentation to NTWDB electronically and securely. When transmitting client data and documentation to NTWDB in response to such requests, the provider will utilize a secure online application, as determined by NTWDB and follow all related privacy rules and regulations.

### **3. Submission Instructions**

#### **3.1 Proposal Content**

To ensure a complete and comprehensive proposal, proposers must submit an application form, any additional attachments as needed, and complete all forms found in the Appendix. Incomplete proposals may be considered non-responsive and may be disqualified from the evaluation process.

A. Northern Tier Workforce Development Board RFP Application: The main narrative of the proposal should not exceed 12 pages excluding cover letter, table of contents, and attachments.

B. List of persons who will execute the program and manage the funded activities

C. The Organization's latest IRS Form W-9 (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification)

D. Supplemental Information to Support the Program Narrative (limit 5 pages)

Proposers must submit any additional attachments as required and stated in the RFP Application, which may include organizational charts, information on staff who will be responsible for required letters of support or references, sample reports, workplans, or other documents that demonstrate the proposer's ability to effectively track and report on performance metrics.

E. Budget Form

F. Appendix Forms (Proposers must complete all forms found in the Appendix)

#### **3.2 Submission Instructions**

To ensure a fair and transparent process, all proposers must adhere to the submission guidelines outlined below. Failure to comply with these instructions may result in disqualification.

A. How to Submit

- Proposals must be submitted electronically to the Northern Tier Workforce Development Board via OneDrive at [Northern Tier RFP](#)

B. Helpful Tips for Developing a Successful Proposal

- Clearly demonstrate your understanding of the scope of services and requirements outlined in the RFP.
- Provide detailed information on your organization's experience, qualifications, and capacity to deliver the required services.
- Offer innovative solutions and strategies to address the needs of the Northern Tier Workforce Development Area.
- Be concise, well-organized, and ensure your proposal is free of grammatical errors.

### C. Maximum Page Counts

- The main narrative of the proposal should not exceed 12 pages, excluding cover letter, table of contents, and attachments.

### D. Modifications of Submissions

- Any changes to the submitted proposal must be made in writing and submitted before the RFP deadline.
- Modifications must clearly indicate the changes made and reference the specific section(s) being modified.

### E. Procedures for Submitting Questions

- Proposers may submit questions regarding the RFP via email to [info@northerntier.org](mailto:info@northerntier.org).
- All questions must be submitted no later than COB 2/9/2024.
- Answers to submitted questions will be compiled and shared with all proposers via email or posted on the NTRPDC website at [www.northerntier.org](http://www.northerntier.org)

Adherence to these submission instructions is crucial to ensuring a fair and efficient procurement process. By carefully following these guidelines, proposers can increase their chances of submitting a successful proposal and avoid potential disqualification.

## 4. How We Choose

### 4.1 Minimum Qualifications

Eligible lead applicants include non-profit and for-profit providers, private sector entities, educational institutions, governmental agencies, community-based providers, and other entities operating in accordance with federal, state, and local law, and in business for at least three years. Applicants must be an incorporated organization. Eligible lead applicants must be in good standing with the federal government, registered in the System for Award Management, not debarred, and have proof of insurance and FIEN/EIN number. Providers currently barred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from participation in this transaction by a Federal, State, City, or County department/agency, a quasi-governmental agency, or Northern Tier Workforce Development Board (NTWDB) are ineligible to apply.

Applicant Competency – All applicants must have the technical competence, knowledge and expertise, management and administrative capabilities and capacity, professional staff, financial resources and stability, and administrative and fiscal systems to carry out the work described in this RFP. Applicants must meet high standards of public service and fiduciary responsibility. NTWDB requires assurance that the selected applicant's performance of the terms and conditions of any agreement resulting from this RFP be undertaken in accordance with the highest level of integrity and business ethics.

#### Evaluation Criteria

A NTWDB review team will independently evaluate each proposal. Selection will be made based on the criteria listed below. A proposal must receive a minimum total score of 65% to be considered for funding.

<b>EVALUATION CRITERIA</b>	<b>% ALLOCATION</b>
<b><u>Experience and Technical Competence</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrated expertise in developing and implementing programs services for Adults, Dislocated workers and business services , specifically under WIOA guidelines. (10%)</li><li>• Provider's historical success rate in serving the target population. (5%)</li><li>• Relevant experience working with the target population and qualifications and expertise of key staff members and their roles in the proposed program (5%)</li></ul>	20%
<b><u>Quality of Program Design</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehensive and well-structured program plan that addresses all required components (15%)</li><li>• Proposal includes innovative and non-traditional service delivery methods. (15%)</li></ul>	40%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective internal controls or processes to meet program requirements (5%)</li> <li>• Extent to which proposed performance exceeds performance standards (5%)</li> </ul>	
<p><b><u>Demonstrated Performance History and Ability to Meet Goals</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proven record of accomplishment of success in implementing similar programs. (10%)</li> <li>• Evidence of achieving desired outcomes, such as job placement and enrollment in skilled training programs. (5%)</li> <li>• Demonstrated capacity to internally monitor ongoing performance (5%)</li> </ul>	20%
<p><b><u>Costs, Budget Justification, and Leverage of Funds</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the Proposal’s line-item budget and/or budget narrative. (10%)</li> <li>• Review of the cost effectiveness of the proposed budget. (5%)</li> <li>• Capacity to manage and safeguard federal and state funds from fraud, waste and abuse (5%)</li> </ul>	20%

## 4.2 Selection Process, Award, and Protest Procedures

### Selection Schedule (subject to change)

Schedule	
Event	Date(s)
RFP issue date	January 12, 2024
Deadline for questions	February 9, 2024
<b>Proposals due</b>	<b>February 21, 2024</b>
Anticipated contract award date	June 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2024
Anticipated contract execution date	July 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2024

### Selection and Award Process

The actual amount of awards will be based on proposed budgets, availability of funds, and standards for use of public funds (all costs must be reasonable and necessary to carry out the planned functions, allowable, and allocable to the proper grant/cost categories). NTWDB is unable to define with certainty the funding allocation that will be made available for any agreement resulting from this RFP. NTWDB reserves the right to vary or change the terms of any contract executed as a result of this RFP, including

funding levels, the scope of work, performance standards, and shortening or extending the contract period, as it deems necessary and in the best interests of NTWDB. The proposal most advantageous to NTWDB in terms of quality and cost will be recommended for funding.

The proposals submitted in response to this solicitation is not a legally binding document. However, the contents of the proposal of the successful bidder will become contractual obligations and failure to accept these obligations in a contractual agreement may result in the cancellation of the award. Staff will negotiate and execute contracts with the bidder approved for funding. These discussions will take place after final funding approval and may include such items as budget, cost, program design, service levels, location, target population, projections and clarifications.

### **Award Decision**

- Following the completion of all evaluation rounds, the evaluation committee will recommend the highest-scoring proposer to the NTWDB for a contract award.
- The NTWDB reserves the right to negotiate with the selected proposer to refine the scope of work, deliverables, and contract terms.
- The award decision will be based on the best overall value, considering qualifications, proposed service delivery approach, and cost-effectiveness.

### **Protest and Appeals Process**

This Request for Proposal contains an allowance for written appeals for disputes involving this procurement action. Appeal dispute sources may include, but are not limited to:

- Unfair competition in the decision-making process
- Illegal/improper act or violation of law

Written appeals must be made to Melissa Fleming, Workforce Director, Northern Tier Workforce Development Board. All disputes will be reviewed by the Workforce Director with written response in twenty (20) days. If appealed, the NTWDB's decision is final.

## **5. Terms and Conditions**

Providers must follow all federal, state, local, and NTWDB laws and guidance. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Northern Tier EARN and SNAP Policy Manual at (available in provided OneDrive)
- Financial Management Guide Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry  
<https://www.dli.pa.gov/Businesses/Workforce-Development/Documents/Current-Directives/Financial-Management-Guide-2021.pdf>

### **Monitoring**

NTWDB staff are responsible for reviewing all in-house and contractual operations. The primary purpose of monitoring is to evaluate program effectiveness, ensure compliance with mutually agreed goals, and to offer technical assistance and/or recommendations for corrective action to providers as deemed necessary.

All providers that receive funding will be monitored by the NTWDB monitor periodically. The visits may include the following areas: training, fiscal, participant files, administrative records, participants'

terminations (plan vs. actual), follow-up, participant responses, monitor's observations, Equal Opportunity, ADA compliance problem areas and best practices.

## **Overview of Administrative Requirements**

At a minimum, all provider organizations must meet the Standards for Financial and Program Management found at 2 CFR 200 in the OMB Uniform Guidance, as well as any regulatory requirements related to the funds. Your organization's financial management system must provide for the following:

Tracking spending on multiple individual funding streams: Identification, in its accounts, of all Federal awards received and expended and the Federal programs under which they were received. Federal program and Federal award identification must include, as applicable, the CFDA title and number, Federal award identification number and year, name of the Federal Agency, and name of the pass-through entity (i.e., NTRPDC).

Fiscal reporting on an accrual basis: Accurate, current, and complete disclosure of the financial results of each Federal award or program in accordance with the reporting requirements set forth in 2 CFR 200.327 Financial Reporting and 200.328 Monitoring and Reporting Program Performance. If a federal awarding agency requires reporting on an accrual basis from a recipient that maintains its records on other than an accrual basis, the recipient may develop accrual data for its reports on the basis of an analysis of the documentation on hand. Similarly, a pass-through entity must not require a Provider to establish an accrual accounting system and must allow the Provider to develop accrual data for its reports based on an analysis of the documentation on hand.

Maintaining documentation supporting all spending and assets: Records that identify adequately the source and application of funds for federally funded activities. These records must contain information pertaining to Federal awards, authorizations, obligation, unobligated balances, assets, expenditures, income, and interest and be supported by source documentation.

Maintaining internal controls that ensure compliance with all funding regulations: Control over, and accountability for, all funds, property, and other assets. The non-Federal entity must adequately safeguard all assets and assure that they are used solely for authorized purposes. See § 200.303 Internal Controls.

Producing a budget to actual report: Comparison of expenditures with budget amounts for each Federal award.

Processing payments on a reimbursement basis: Written procedures to implement the requirements of § 200.305 Payment.