

shortage areas. H-1B Technical Skills Training Grants are not intended to address lower level skill labor shortages nor are they intended to fund training programs aimed at imparting basic educational skills. In addition, H-1B grants are not intended to address occupational shortages due to reasons other than high technology skills shortages.

H-1B training projects may consider utilizing either innovative or proven tools or approaches to close particular skill gaps and provide strategies for training that promote regional development. These may include, but are not limited to, on-the-job training, distance learning, or combinations of training and educational techniques. H-1B grantees should tailor training to the specific needs of the selected incumbent and unemployed workers, both in content and delivery.

Qualified Target Population: Technical skills training should be geared towards employed and unemployed workers who can be trained and placed directly in high skill H-1B occupations, or in the highest echelons of an H-1B career ladder. Candidates for training funded by H-1B Technical Skills Training Grants should possess (and be identified through appropriate assessment tools) a high level of general educational background, the prerequisites for the occupational training being proposed, and certain characteristics such as drive and initiative that will help guarantee successful completion of the high skill level training.

Employees at the H-1B skill level are generally characterized as having a Bachelor's degree or comparable work experience. H-1B technical skills training is not limited to skill levels commensurate with a four-year degree and may be used to prepare workers for a broad range of positions along a specified career ladder. "Career ladder" may generally be defined as a system of career and skill level "steps" directly leading to a high skill level job within a reasonable period of time. Thus, potential trainees are not required to enter training with a four-year degree and trainees do not necessarily have to acquire a four-year degree to be successful. Many will have a four-year degree and others will possess two-year degrees. Career ladders create opportunities for individuals who may vary in experience and education levels (such as specialty training and Associate's degrees) to advance along a defined career ladder and qualify through additional training and education for H-1B level related occupations.

Use of Skill Standards: Skill standards represent a benchmark by which an individual's achieved competence can be measured. Training programs that provide individuals with professionally recognized, portable skills certifications help ensure that these individuals have received useful knowledge and skills relevant to their employers needs and to their own careers. The documentation of skills standards and skills attainment is also indicative of the program's ability to meet industry needs and to reduce the dependence of American businesses on skilled foreign workers.

Well-defined skills standards can be useful tools in matching training goals to targeted occupational areas. Work in the area of skills standards has been performed by private industry and trade associations, registered apprenticeship training systems, and public and private partnerships. Applicants are encouraged to survey the progress to date in developing occupational skills standards and incorporate appropriate ones into their H-1B Technical Skills Training Project.

As alluded to earlier (In Part IA—Background), the definition of the minimum proficiency level required to be considered an H-1B occupation, contained in section 214(i), 8 U.S.C. 1184(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), speaks to a very high skill level for these "specialty occupations." These are occupations that require "theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge," and full state licensure, if required for the occupation, to practice in the occupation. The standard for these occupations is either completion of at least a Bachelor's degree or experience in the specialty equivalent to the completion of such a degree and recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions relating to the specialty. In addition to academic degrees, specialized and professionally recognized certificates may also be characteristic of a high level of technical skill.

Comprehensive Local and Regional Planning: Developing and implementing a training strategy that addresses businesses' high technology skill needs requires applicants seeking H-1B grants to engage in a process of comprehensive local and regional planning with their partners. This planning effort entails a thorough analysis and understanding of applicable local and regional labor markets, identification of high technology skills shortages in the areas, information on the employment opportunities, trends and training needs

within the targeted occupations and industries, as well as knowledge of the impact of skills training in response to the identified skill shortages in the targeted regions.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to utilize all available data sources to demonstrate the high technology skills shortages and training needs in their local or regional areas. Sources of data may include: area businesses and business associations, state labor and local market information systems, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), local employer surveys, academic sources, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

In addition, current data on approved H-1B visa petitions should be utilized to the extent feasible to describe skill shortages in specific occupations. Appendix B to this solicitation is a listing of occupations for which H-1B visa petitions have been recently approved. Requests for H-1B visas for the applicant's region may reflect a skills shortage for those occupations. Applicants should use data from the business partners involved in submitting the H-1B grant proposal, and may consider surveying other local and regional employers to ascertain the extent of employer use of H-1B visas to obtain foreign workers and to obtain information on the specific occupations and skills imported in the regions.

C. DOL Policies and Emphases

To implement the preceding principles and to meet the legislative intent of ACWIA 2000, DOL has established certain policies and emphases for awarding H-1B Technical Skills Training Grants under this solicitation. Applicants are encouraged to develop proposals based on the principles described above and the policies and emphases identified below.

Connection to the Workforce Investment System: Utilizing Federal resources along with H-1B grant funds to strengthen the overall program is a strongly recommended course of action. In order to obtain these resources, applicants are encouraged to form partnerships with local workforce investment boards. Each local workforce investment board prepares a strategic workforce investment plan for its local area and also designates One-Stop center operators and certifies or approves eligible training providers. Local boards thus have a good base of knowledge about the local area, WIA, regional training efforts, ETA grant administration, One-Stop capabilities and training providers. This knowledge and experience should materially aid business partnerships in planning,