Program Evaluation Plan

The vision for The Kentucky Solution uses a comprehensive, cohesive and unified approach to address the needs of prospective employers, as well as Kentucky firms looking to expand in the state. This collaborative approach delivers on Kentucky's new brand, integrating economic and workforce development solutions.

The evaluation component of this grant will assess the innovative approaches around the Commonwealth's five goals:

- Goal 1 –Vertical and horizontal policy alignment between workforce and economic development;
- Goal 2 – Employer-led state and regional sector strategies;
- Goal 3 - A world-class talent pipeline;
- Goal 4 – An interagency customer relations approach; and
- Goal 5 –Return on investment.

Factor 1

The Commonwealth will engage in a Request for Information (RFI) process to support our transformational activities intended to strengthen workforce, education and economic development. The broad outcomes would include significant improvements in employer and individual customer services and greater cost and operational efficiency and effectiveness. We will encourage input from potential service providers and stakeholders about how to better serve our customers and use it to assess interest and ability to perform the evaluation process.

Critical components to be addressed by service providers expressing interest in The Kentucky Solution monitoring and evaluation activities must include:

1) direct monitoring and evaluation experience in the area of workforce, education and economic development initiatives;
2) qualifications of key evaluation team members;
3) evaluation plan based on the state's application;
4) evaluation budget and narrative; and
5) samples of previous evaluation reports.

Critical components sought in the RFI include:

1) **Direct monitoring and evaluation experience of workforce, education and economic development initiatives.**
   - Minimum of five years of technical expertise in diagnosing program and system shortfalls and underperformance.
   - Demonstrated experience evaluating policy development and program design.
   - Expertise and experience in database and dashboard development.
   - Knowledge of government contracting and reporting procedures.
   - Organizational capacity to provide services.
2) **Qualifications of key evaluation team members**
   - Members have subject matter expertise in business services, customer-relations databases, sector strategies and return on investment.
   - Members have backgrounds in progress evaluation methodologies as well as qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

- Project manager has the adequate experience leading multi-year federal and/or state evaluation processes.

3) Evaluation plan based on the state's application

- Description of the organization, including the key contact person.
- Demonstrates understanding of The Kentucky Solution.
- Detailed work plan, performance accountability framework, and monitoring and evaluation methodology.
- A detailed list of activities and milestones.
- Project timeline of interim and final deliverables.

4) Evaluation budget and narrative

- Detail budget and narrative.
- Description of the costs associated with the proposed program evaluation component.
- Provide list of key personnel and time allocation per staff person.
- Reasonable and appropriate costs match project timeline and deliverables.

5) Samples of previous evaluation reports

- Demonstrate ability to meet federal standards for rigorous evaluation as defined in the federal Workforce Innovations Fund SGA Type C proposal.
- Reflect the diverse evaluation needs envisioned in The Kentucky Solution application.
- Ability to communicate evaluation outcomes in a clear and understandable format for policy makers, partners and stakeholders.

After reviewing stakeholder and potential provider comments on the RFI, the Engagement Team will work with each of the Steering Committees to create a Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFP will be released within 75 days of the responses to the RFI. Proposals will be scored based on qualifications and technical merit. Interviews will be conducted with top proposers. Following selection of the evaluator, the Senior Leadership Team, Engagement Team and Steering Committee leads will have a kick-off meeting with the evaluator to finalize the evaluation work plan.

Factor 2

The Kentucky Solution envisions a robust evaluation approach comprised of the following components:

- development of the evaluation questions on the Commonwealth's application including the goals, activities, outputs and outcomes,
- description of how to measure the initiative, outcomes and target populations,
- coordination of the components of the evaluation,
- analysis of the evaluation data, and
- discussion of how the results will be used in management and decision-making processes.

Kentucky will utilize a number of evaluation techniques over the life of the grant.

To determine if activities and outputs in our proposal are implemented as we intended, we will use ***normative evaluation***. This method should demonstrate that the business teams operate according to the business services framework and follow the processes and protocols developed by the Policy Steering Committee. Monthly implementation reports we developed for the

WORKSmart Kentucky initiative will serve as another critical monitoring and reporting benchmark.

Process evaluation will show if The Kentucky Solution is working, especially in the area of establishing viable industry partnerships. We will collect data on seeded industry partnerships and partnerships that implement emerging workforce and incumbent workforce training. This will allow us to make course corrections over the life of the grant for both types of industry partnership grantees. It will also provide valuable insights to other states that are pursuing employer-driven partnerships like talent pipeline networks or collaboratives. A variety of survey tools, including onsite visits and data collection activities will be used. These tools are in the process of being developed and should be in place before the grant is awarded.

This evaluation could also benefit the career pathways framework and its alignment with education policy. It will be essential to understand how the framework is used by industry partnerships and the education system. In addition, it will be important to see how the state's K-12 system, adult education, community colleges and universities interpret and use of the framework. We will identify and evaluate the policies. It will also be important to capture the unintended consequences of those policy shifts, so that we can re-evaluate and refine policies accordingly. Survey instruments, site visits and focus groups will be used to make these assessments.

Impact evaluation will be another component as outlined below.

- Goal 1 – we will measure the impact of the business services framework, resource guides and processes/protocols on business services outcomes using surveys, site visits and focus groups.

- Goal 2 – we will track the decrease in the number of employers leaving the state due to workforce quality, demonstrate the number of new employers coming to the state, and increases in the leverage of resources and incumbent worker retention within target sectors. The Cabinet for Economic Development has some tools to track these elements, but additional data elements may be required. An increase in incumbent worker retention within sectors is another important new data element that will be collected. Kentucky is modifying its WORK reporting system to track sector elements, but enhancements will be required.
- Goal 3 – we will track increases in the number of NCRC, high school equivalency and stackable credentials awarded as well as low-income and low-skilled workers receiving industry recognized credentials via career pathways. The state has initiated this tracking through Accelerating Opportunity Kentucky focusing on KYAE, KCTCS and OET. However, we are in discussions with the P-20 Data Collaborative about expanding data collection beyond the original partners.
- Goal 4 – we will document the improvement in partner information sharing, streamlined communications among Kentucky Solution team members, use of sophisticated business intelligence and increased employer awareness. Data will be gathered through survey instruments, site visits and analysis of customer relationship data. The same survey and site visit techniques will be used with our employer partners.
- Goal 5 – the benefits of data-driven decision making will be demonstrated using the ROI and dashboard based on existing information in the P-20 collaborative, the Office of Research and Statistics and census tools like the American Communities Survey.

However, new data elements must be gathered and tracked to support decision making at state, regional and local levels.

Specifically, competition in today's economic climate is the lifeblood of progress. Kentucky must develop the skills and knowledge base to ensure talent pipelines that meet the needs of industry and can be integrated into the educational system. This can be measured by currently collected data on individuals that is required to receive federal, state or local services and supports for both educational and employment-related activities.

Kentucky will hire an evaluation team through its state procurement process to provide analyses and comparisons of related data across targeted sectors identified by the KWIB, KCED's strategic plan and regional targeted sectors. Sector-driven data is the best way to find out where businesses and industries are located and determine the cross-section of positions that are essential to those operations.

Establishing regional business services teams linked to targeted sectors will result in qualitative and quantitative information. The assessment of employer data such as employee retention rates; cost of training/recruiting workers and employee turnover; ROI; worker satisfaction; wages; and the impact of tax incentives on regional/local economies will help business service teams respond to the needs of employers and economic development. In addition, the cabinets will use this analysis to develop business profiles.

Strategic plans, a required element of Industry Partnerships, identify skills gaps, potential remedies, future and current training needs of various job seekers, and approaches to improving the workforce over the next three to five years.

The additional data elements and aggregated activities that can be gleaned from the Kentucky Solutions Strategic Logic Model include the following:

- A collaborative business services framework - new state-level business services policies and business' protocols;
- An increase in an industry-recognized, credentialed workforce – two new programs is Accelerating Opportunities (AO) and NCRC. AO validates the number of new GED completers, the number in certification programs, and the type of sector industry that certification program created. NCRC is a national certification that indicates work readiness by administering three WorkKeys assessment in applied mathematics, locating information and reading for information. With the outreach and public awareness of the new NCRCs, it will be important to track the number being conducted and employment demographics for those individuals.
- Job title profiles in targeted sectors – profiles will identify skill sets and knowledge requirements. We will count the number of job seekers in Focus Career, a newly implemented job-matching system, who meet minimum or mid-point requirements. On the employer side, we will assess how many applicants in Focus Career who fit job orders in Focus Talent. We will also track the number of training sessions required to assist the employer in creating appropriate job orders to match their needs.
- A common data sharing, reporting and maintenance system – a unified MIS to gather and make available data elements in a shared environment to maximize the system's current strengths and future needs, and eliminate costly program duplications.
- A common solution to meet the needs of business – our plan will evaluate this solution based on creating more jobs in selected industry sectors and the number of job seekers

gaining employment in a variety of jobs with a range of wages. To evaluate the quality of solutions, we will conduct ongoing, targeted surveys of businesses to find out if the new service system meets their needs. It will be essential to measure the changes and their impact on employers' business decisions.

- State-level business service policies and protocols developed – Kentucky will measure stakeholder participation, the number of meetings, the number and diversity of stakeholders involved in writing the protocols. We will conduct cost-benefit analyses to determine the impact of the protocols to assess their value.

Another significant area for success is an effective communication plan to reach and educate stakeholders and users of The Kentucky Solution. We have hired a brand manager to implement a newly developed communication strategy that promotes outreach, enhances customer relationships and coordinates statewide use of the new brand approach.

Business services team development, training and deployment will be measured over the life of the grant. The teams will provide feedback on their experiences with the new process and employer groups and stakeholders will have input on the value of the new approach.

The Kentucky Solution Team understands and embraces the challenges ahead for this systemic service delivery change. Changing our culture and implementing the new brand promise will transform the nature and scope of our partnerships with government agencies, stakeholders, employers and job seekers. To gauge the success of our transformation, we will design and conduct targeted surveys throughout the life of this grant.

The proposed Request for Information (RFI) will give cabinet leaders the most relevant information on which to base The Kentucky Solution including necessary qualitative and quantitative assessments.

Finally, The Kentucky Solution Team has embraced a five step theory of change outlined in the proposal which will be central to the activities and tasks that will drive the success of this overall project. Each of these steps will provide additional areas for mining data, surveying the perceptions of the workplace and the workforce, and assessing progress toward the main goals of the project. The evaluator(s) can use the information from identified processes, protocols and stakeholders assess the project's outcomes. The training of staff, partners and community representatives will be an important feedback tool to gauge impact changes in the service delivery system and the level of interaction, collaboration and responsiveness.

The evaluator selected will be asked in the planning phase to ensure the Commonwealth has identified the key data elements and the ways in which data will be captured. They will be asked to do an independent assessment of existing data and new data. The evaluator will be asked to review the monthly implementation status report to make sure there is enough information to show a progression of grant activities in quarterly reports. The evaluation team will validate the lead indicators of success in the initial phases of the grant and outcomes of the project. Evaluators will work with DTS and P-20 Data Collaborative staff to confirm what data must be captured for this project.

Kentucky may use a comparison group evaluation method. We will work with our evaluator to fully outline the source of the comparison and program participant groups in the planning phase. We will establish how the comparison group will be drawn from industry partnership and career pathways participants. The methodology will include data on both how the comparison and program participant groups will be drawn from compatible sources. We will also address any selection bias issues. Additionally, the evaluator will ensure that a detailed explanation of how anticipated follow-up data will be collected from group participants.

Factor 3

Kentucky is committed to capturing data that can demonstrate cost savings. We will assess the costs of measuring outcomes of individual and employer customer service. We will establish an evaluation process to calculate the personnel and other costs associated with individual customer and employer intervention. The study will include a two-year assessment period on industry partnerships and career pathways. Business service leads and career coaches will participate in structured 30-minute telephone interviews. Job-title-specific times will be used to calculate costs from the business service team lead's perspective as well as that of the career coach. One-time costs and administrative costs will be documented. Costs per individual and employer will be tracked. This study should help the Commonwealth's education, economic and workforce development decision makers with policy and practice decisions.

Kentucky will also undertake a nine-step cost-benefit analysis process that will include either an individual participant or target-of-services study. We will identify and estimate the cost of resources used in the intervention such as direct-service staff salaries, office space rental, program supplies, and supervision and administration. Next, we will estimate the cost of program outcomes based on existing research on sector strategies and career pathways. For example, our evaluator may track data based on individuals who complete a career pathway and those who do not. The data will then be aggregated and the evaluator will apply a decision rule and priority of outcomes. We will then describe distributional consequences specifying who gains and who loses under different conditions. We will conduct a sensitivity analysis identifying the assumptions behind our cost estimates. Finally, there will be a discussion about the qualitative residual; simply put those elements that cannot be quantified during the process.

Factor 4

Our evaluation will be valuable to the public workforce system because it mirrors elements of WIA reauthorization bills under consideration. The data could assist national, state, regional and local workforce partners in transitioning from policy to practice. Kentucky has chosen to focus on normative, process and impact evaluation techniques as well as a cost per outcome measurement system and cost-benefit analysis. The results of these efforts will be shared in quarterly federal reports as well as annual reports. We will make all deliverables available to the appropriate federal clearinghouses in the departments of Labor, Education and Commerce. The state will gladly participate in conferences and peer-to-peer learning exchanges to share results as well.