

Request for Information (RFI)

Co-Designed Workforce Programs for People with Disabilities

This RFI seeks information and comments for review and consideration related to the design, administration, and implementation of programs for a new pilot workforce development program for New Yorkers with disabilities co-designed with community members (“Program”).

Background

The Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity (“NYC Opportunity”), the New York City (“NYC”) Department of Small Business Services (“SBS”), the Center for Workplace Accessibility and Inclusion (the “Center”), and the Workforce Development Corporation (“WDC”) are launching an initiative to co-design and pilot new workforce development programs for New Yorkers with disabilities. The Center represents a new collaboration between the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development (“NYC Talent”), NYC Opportunity, and the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (“MOPD”) with the mission of removing structural barriers impeding people with disabilities from pursuing jobs and careers.

Over the past year, NYC Opportunity, NYC Talent, and MOPD conducted research exploring evidence-based program models in workforce development for people with disabilities. This initiative aims to replace traditional, prescriptive policy-making methods with a more inclusive co-design approach that centers the role of New Yorkers with disabilities as experts on their own needs.¹ This means that those from a program’s target population not only provide feedback on program design, but carry out the necessary research, analysis, and design themselves, with decision-making power over the resulting program model. These cohorts will be guided by a service design firm which will offer training, facilitation, and assistance in the development of detailed program models.

Purpose of the RFI

Traditionally, conventional approaches to workforce development programs from City government use prescriptive policy-making methods to design programs. Over the past year, NYC Opportunity, NYC Talent, and MOPD conducted research exploring evidence-based program models in workforce development for people with disabilities and determined that a new, innovative method for serving those with disabilities is needed.

¹ See “Guide to Co-Design: Learn how to Create a Participatory Design Process” which provides that the term “co-design” refers to a participatory approach to designing solutions in which community members are treated as equal collaborators in the design process.

This initiative aims to draw on deep partnerships and capacity building activities with impacted communities to bring together groups of New Yorkers with different types of disabilities to co-design a new program.² By engaging members of the target population in an extensive program design process, the resulting pilot programs will be better suited to provide the resources most needed by the community, as defined by those in the community.

This RFI is a request for community input to start a new initiative that will collaborate with people with disabilities to co-design workforce solutions. This Program seeks to develop a partnership between a service design firm, providers of jobseeker-designed services, provider of co-designed employer-facing services, and New Yorkers with disabilities to create inclusive and impactful workforce development programs.

Goal of the RFI

The intended goals of this Program are threefold:

1. To support Program participants in finding and keeping quality employment, with “quality” defined in partnership with the participants
2. To build evidence for what works for employment programs for people with disabilities
3. To demonstrate how co-design with community members can be supported via City Tax Levy dollars and built into City government program design

The anticipated initiative would accomplish its overall goals by selecting vendors for the following service tracks:

1. Service Design Firm
2. Providers of Jobseeker-Designed Services
3. Provider of Co-Designed Employer-Facing Services

Track 1 - Service Design Firm:

The **service design firm** will support the providers selected in tracks 2 and 3 below through the design of their initiative. They will do this by facilitating the co-design process in partnership with the selected providers, researching and sharing out best practices in workforce development for people with disabilities, and supporting ongoing learning, collaboration, and capacity building for selected providers throughout the process. They will train participating provider staff and their relevant co-designers in the

² See “NYC Commission on Human Rights Legal Enforcement Guidance on Discrimination on the Basis of Disability” which defines disabilities as any physical, medical, mental, or psychological impairment, or a history or record of such impairment.

principles and practice of co-design, design and evidence research, and service design methodologies, and facilitate workshops guiding participants through the design research process and ultimate co-design of their own programs. The result of this process will be a detailed program design for a workforce initiative from each of the cohorts. Their role will include some work tailored to each selected workforce provider, and some activities that are across providers, including convening a learning community to support the process.

Track 2 - Jobseeker Co-Designed Services:

In this co-design process, jobseekers themselves will define the aim, scope, and target population of the program models they develop. Therefore, in this track, it is anticipated that program funds would be used to create new models or alter existing programs with an openness to what end result will come out of the co-design process.

For tracks 2 and 3, we anticipate selecting individual service providers or partnerships of multiple service providers.

The co-design process will determine the specific services the providers will offer, which could include services that prepare people for and connect them to employment, continue after placement to support newly hired workers and their employers, encourage employers to hire and better support employees with disabilities, or other kinds of services that the co-design cohorts deem appropriate.

We anticipate the **jobseeker services track** will start with awards to multiple providers (or partnerships of a main provider and one or more subcontracted providers) that serve people with disabilities and provide workforce development services. Each provider or team of providers will handle the recruitment of participants, disbursement of stipends, and ongoing support for the cohort throughout the co-design process. Through this initiative, it is expected that providers will build up their internal capacity and skills to use service co-design as a way to build community led initiatives within their existing networks.

Track 3 - Employer-Facing Co-Designed Services:

This initiative also expects to award a **provider focused on employer engagement**. The services for this track will be delivered by one provider or a partnership of two or more providers who will design their services with a co-design team composed of both New Yorkers with disabilities and employers. This provider will work with the same service design firm as on the jobseeker track to develop an employer-facing intervention to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of workplaces throughout New York City for individuals with any kind of disability.

The role of the provider for this track will be to co-design and then deliver services tailored to the needs of employers to support them in improving their recruitment, onboarding, training, retention, and advancement practices and related culture change efforts to better support people with disabilities in being successful at their organization.

Services Launch:

It is expected that once the services are designed, all selected providers will then present their program model to the City partners for final feedback and to finalize the budget. It is then anticipated that the providers will implement the resulting program models for the subsequent three years, during which time they will be monitored and evaluated to support continuous improvement, and to understand their impacts on their clients.

[Content of the Response](#)

Instructions: Responses to this RFI may include, but are not limited to, specific details and solutions, or considerations regarding any or all of the following topics related to the design, implementation, and administration of a new initiative to co-design and then implement new programming to support the workforce needs of people with disabilities.

Please submit a response to this RFI that answers some or all of the following questions:

For all Tracks:

1. In what ways have you seen co-design used with the disability community at your organization or in your community? What challenges were seen and what are some of the drivers of success?
2. What are the projected costs for doing a project such as this? Please outline specific areas to be funded and the related costs.
3. Are there program/initiative details in this RFI that can use more clarification?

For Track 1 - Design Firms:

1. What are some of your lessons learned to date from work in co-design, and especially co-design with people with disabilities? Responses could consider:
 - a. The **qualifications and experience** a design firm would need to be successful in implementing an initiative like this
 - b. The types of staffing and time you anticipate would be needed to succeed in this work

- c. Recommendations you can give to jobseeker-facing or employer-facing providers to ensure a pathway to funding and operational sustainability for co-designed programs
- d. How you would ensure that the co-design process is trauma-informed and accessible to individuals who have diverse ways of thinking, communicating and sharing ideas

For Tracks 2 and 3: Jobseeker-Facing and Employer-Facing Service Providers:

1. **Qualifications and Experience:** What qualifications and experience would a provider need to be successful in implementing either a jobseeker-facing or an employer-facing service like this? Responses could consider:
 - a. Areas of expertise or types of services a strong applicant would offer
 - b. Populations or range of populations a strong applicant would serve
 - c. Any other relevant considerations
2. **Organizational capacity:** What organizational capacity considerations would be necessary to successfully implement either a jobseeker-facing or an employer-facing program? Responses could consider:
 - a. Administrative capacities
 - b. Staffing
 - c. Data and continuous quality improvement practices
 - d. Leadership support
3. **Recruiting Participants:**
 - a. How long would a provider need to prepare to successfully recruit and host a cohort of co-designers? Please include details of each timeline.
 - b. What strategies would be needed to effectively recruit co-designers with relevant lived experience?
 - c. What time commitment is feasible to ask of co-design participants?
 - d. **Employer-Facing Service Providers ONLY:** What strategies could be used to select business partners, and co-design participants from the employer?
4. **Participant supports:**
 - a. What steps could we take to support the inclusion and centering of individuals from especially marginalized populations within the target population? Provide details for each step.
 - b. What types of tailored supports would you anticipate the target populations may need to promote their success in co-designing initiatives
 - c. or programs? How could co-designers be fairly compensated for their time and expertise while balancing concerns around eligibility for their means-tested government benefits, if applicable?

WDC, NYC Opportunity, the Center, and SBS will review and consider the responses to this RFI for the purposes of developing a future solicitation. We will not be able to directly respond to each of your comments. Additionally, the issuance of this RFI does not guarantee that the WDC will initiate a solicitation or contract for the suggested services. WDC reserves the right to cancel or postpone this RFI in whole or in part at any time and will not reimburse respondents for any costs in connection with their responses to this RFI.

INQUIRIES

Please send submissions in response to this RFI as an attachment to:

Chenelle Dennis

cdennis@sbs.nyc.gov AND WDCFiscal@sbs.nyc.org

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: April 9th, 2024

Responses must contain name, organization, and contact information of the respondent.