

LEGISLATIVE TRACKING FORM

Filing for Council Meeting Date: _____ Resolution _____ Ordinance _____

Contact/Prepared By: _____ Date Prepared: _____

Title (Caption): _____

Submitted to Planning Commission? ☐ N/A ☐ Yes-Date: _____ Proposal No: _____

Proposing Department: _____ Requested By: _____

Affected Department(s): _____ Affected Council District(s): _____

Legislative Category (check one):

☐ Bonds	☐ Contract Approval	☐ Intergovernmental Agreement
☐ Budget - Pay Plan	☐ Donation	☐ Lease
☐ Budget - 4%	☐ Easement Abandonment	☐ Maps
☐ Capital Improvements	☐ Easement Accept/Acquisition	☐ Master List A&E
☐ Capital Outlay Notes	☐ Grant	☐ Settlement of Claims/Lawsuits
☐ Code Amendment	☐ Grant Application	☐ Street/Highway Improvements
☐ Condemnation	☐ Improvement Acc.	☐ Other: _____

FINANCE Amount +/-: \$ _____

Funding Source: Capital Improvement Budget
Capital Outlay Notes
Departmental/Agency Budget
Funds to Metro
General Obligation Bonds
Grant
Increased Revenue Sources

Match: \$ _____

Judgments and Losses
Local Government Investment Project
Revenue Bonds
Self-Insured Liability
Solid Waste Reserve
Unappropriated Fund Balance
4% Fund
Other: _____

Approved by OMB: _____

Approved by Finance/Accounts: _____

Approved by Div Grants Coordination: *Juanita Paulsen*

Date to Finance Director's Office: _____

APPROVED BY

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE: _____

ADMINISTRATION

Council District Member Sponsors: _____

Council Committee Chair Sponsors: _____

Approved by Administration: _____ Date: _____

DEPARTMENT OF LAW

Date to Dept. of Law: _____ Approved by Department of Law: _____

Settlement Resolution/Memorandum Approved by: _____

Date to Council: _____ For Council Meeting: _____ ☐ E-mailed Clerk

☐ All Dept. Signatures ☐ Copies ☐ Backing ☐ Legislative Summary ☐ Settlement Memo ☐ Clerk Letter ☐ Ready to File

Department of Law - White Copy

Administration - Yellow Copy

Finance Department - Pink Copy

GRANT APPLICATION SUMMARY SHEET

Grant Name: Advancing Workforce Mobility 26-27
Department: METRO ACTION
Grantor: WAL-MART CORPORATION
Pass-Through Grantor (If applicable):
Total Applied For \$400,000.00
Metro Cash Match: \$0.00
Department Contact: Tanya Evrenson, Director of Workforce & Youth
862-8860
Status: NEW

Program Description:

Our project expands MAC4Jobs, the Metropolitan Action Commission’s (MAC) workforce program, to empower STARs from low-income households to access high-demand, high-paying jobs. Using CTDL (Credential Transparency Description Language), we will demonstrate and validate the indicators and metrics that have propelled STARs’ economic and professional mobility through our CompTIA A+ program.

Plan for continuation of services upon grant expiration:

N/A

APPROVED AS TO AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS:

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY:

Jenneen Reed/mjw 2/23/2026 | 8:56 AM
Director of Finance JE AP Date

Matthew Garth 2/23/2026 | 8:58 AM
Metropolitan Attorney Date

APPROVED AS TO RISK AND INSURANCE:

Balogun Cobb 2/23/2026 | 9:15 AM
Director of Risk Management Services Date

Reddie O'Connell 2/23/2026 | 3:46 PM CS
Metropolitan Mayor Date
(This application is contingent upon approval of the application by the Metropolitan Council.)

Grants Tracking Form

Part One

Pre-Application ☐		Application ☒		Award Acceptance ☐		Contract Amendment ☐	
Department	Dept. No.	Contact				Phone	Fax
METRO ACTION	075	Tanya Evrenson, Director of Workforce & Youth				862-8860	77411
Grant Name:		Advancing Workforce Mobility 26-27					
Grantor:		WAL-MART CORPORATION				Other:	
Grant Period From:		03/30/26		(applications only) Anticipated Application Date:			
Grant Period To:		10/18/27		(applications only) Application Deadline:		02/20/26	
Funding Type:	FOUNDATION			Multi-Department Grant ☐		If yes, list below.	
Pass-Thru:				Outside Consultant Project: ☐			
Award Type:	OTHER			Total Award:		\$400,000.00	
Status:	NEW			Metro Cash Match:		\$0.00	
Metro Category:	New Initiative			Metro In-Kind Match:		\$0.00	
CFDA #	N/A			Is Council approval required? ☐			
Project Description:		Applic. Submitted Electronically? ☐					
Our project expands MAC4Jobs, the Metropolitan Action Commission's (MAC) workforce program, to empower STARs from low-income households to access high-demand, high-paying jobs. Using CTDL (Credential Transparency Description Language), we will demonstrate and validate the indicators and metrics that have propelled STARs' economic and professional mobility through our CompTIA A+ program. We will continue to expand our reach beyond Head Start and Early Head Start families to STARs from low-income households throughout the Nashville community, to include Network+, Security+, and AI certifications, embedding employer-validated quality indicators (competency alignment and outcome data) into these credentials, while strengthening the quality, trust, and portability of non-degree credentials that workers and employers trust. It will help MAC move beyond offering certifications to guarantee the quality of these credentials through nationally recognized frameworks, linking them to verified skills and performance-based assessments, and reporting that can easily be replicated. In practice, we'll (1) co-design with STARs, employers, and Nashville Workforce Network; (2) collect and structure quality/outcome data using ChildPlus, Oracle, THO, and other systems; (3) integrate these metrics into state and federal reporting; and (4) document impact on hiring and promotion. Our goal is to train 50 STARs in two cohorts of 25, achieving 70% credential completion, 50% job placement, and 20% median wage within 12 months.							
Plan for continuation of service after expiration of grant/Budgetary Impact:							
N/A							
How is Match Determined?							
Fixed Amount of \$		\$0.00		or		% of Grant	
						Other: ☐	
Explanation for "Other" means of determining match:							
For this Metro FY, how much of the required local Metro cash match:							
Is already in department budget?		\$0.00		Fund		Business Unit	
Is not budgeted?		\$400,000.00		Proposed Source of Match:			
(Indicate Match Amount & Source for Remaining Grant Years in Budget Below)							
Other:							
Number of FTEs the grant will fund:		1.00		Actual number of positions added:		1.00	
Departmental Indirect Cost Rate		11.27%		Indirect Cost of Grant to Metro:		\$45,065.00	
*Indirect Costs allowed? ☒ Yes ☐ No		% Allow.		11.27%		Ind. Cost Requested from Grantor:	
						\$45,065.00	
*(If "No", please attach documentation from the grantor that indirect costs are not allowable. See Instructions)							
Draw down allowable? ☐							
Metro or Community-based Partners:							

Part Two

Grant Budget										
Budget Year	Metro Fiscal Year	Federal Grantor	State Grantor	Other Grantor	Local Match Cash	Match Source (Fund, BU)	Local Match In-Kind	Total Grant Each Year	Indirect Cost to Metro	Ind. Cost Neg. from Grantor
Yr 1	FY26	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$400,000.00	\$0.00		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$45,065.00	\$45,065.00
Yr 2	FY__									
Yr 3	FY__									
Yr 4	FY__									
Yr 5	FY__									
Total		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$400,000.00	\$0.00		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$45,065.00	\$45,065.00
Date Awarded:					Tot. Awarded:		Contract#:			
(or) Date Denied:					Reason:					
(or) Date Withdrawn:					Reason:					

Contact: luanita.paulsen@nashville.gov
vaughn.wilson@nashville.gov

JP

Advancing Workforce Mobility: An RFP for Credential Transparency and Skills Validation

Issued by: Education Design Lab (The Lab)

RFP Release Date: January 8, 2026

Application Deadline: February 20, 2026 | 11:59pm ET

About the RFP

The **Advancing Workforce Mobility initiative** is a collaborative effort led by [Education Design Lab](#), in technical partnership with [Credential Engine](#), and made possible by a foundational grant from [Walmart](#).

Education Design Lab (The Lab) invites you to join us in transforming how workers' skills are recognized, shared, and valued. This \$3.5 million fund will support up to 12 innovative projects designed to help workers that are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (*STARs: working adults who have developed valuable skills through pathways other than a bachelor's degree, such as military service, community college, work experience, bootcamps, or self-directed learning*) connect their skills to quality jobs, advancing solutions that can contribute to systems-level change over time.

Problem

The Challenge: Today's Fragmented Landscape

Today's learn-to-work ecosystem is fragmented and hard to navigate. Millions of workers, especially those who have built skills outside of traditional degree programs, struggle to show what they can do in ways employers trust and understand.

Education and workforce systems often overlook skills gained through non-degree credentials, short-term training, on-the-job learning, and military and community-based experiences. Data about these experiences and credentials is scattered, incomplete, or locked in systems that don't talk to each other. As a result:

- (1) Workers' skills are invisible or undervalued, especially for STARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes) who do not hold a bachelor's degree, limiting their upward mobility.
- (2) Employers miss out on qualified candidates because they can't see or trust the skills possessed or signaled by many candidates.

At the same time, new tools and technologies, including AI, are changing how skills can be assessed, described, and matched to opportunities. There is growing interest in using these tools to support transparency, quality, and skills validation, but open questions remain about how to do so in ethical, responsible, and equitable ways.

Meeting this challenge requires collective action, and scalable infrastructures, tools, partnerships, and models that:

- Make credential and skills data more transparent, connected, and machine-readable (easily processed by digital systems and tools)
- Validate skills developed in real-world settings
- Demonstrate what “quality” looks like in non-degree credentials, in ways that are inclusive and meaningful to both workers and employers.
- Use AI to enhance skills assessment, validation, and credential transparency, and ensure these innovations follow responsible, equitable, and privacy-safe practices.

The Advancing Workforce Mobility initiative exists to help build these proof points and share what works with the field, especially approaches that can be adapted and adopted beyond a single site or cohort.

Vision

A Connected Ecosystem: Skills Visibility and Mobility at Scale

Our vision is a more connected, open, and fair talent marketplace where workers’ skills are visible, trusted, portable, and valuable, no matter where those skills were developed.

In this future state:

- Workers, especially STARS and others excluded by systems that prioritize formal degrees over skills gained through multiple routes, can clearly show what they know and can do through high-quality, transparent skills validation and credentialing opportunities.
- Employers can see and trust skills evidence, making it easier to hire, promote, and upskill based on skills rather than degrees alone.
- Credentials and systems share data in common formats, making it easier to understand, compare, and reuse information about programs, outcomes, and skills.
- Communities and systems leaders can use better data to design pathways, target investments, and track progress toward economic mobility and local economic growth.
- Learning + Workforce Systems are Inclusive by Design: Systems reduce barriers and offer solutions that are accessible, relevant, and support multiple routes to opportunities based on skills.

Roles of Education Design Lab, Credential Engine, and Walmart

Education Design Lab (Intermediary + Program Lead)

Education Design Lab (The Lab) serves as the intermediary and overall program lead for this initiative. In this role, the Lab will:

- Design and run the RFP process
- Lead selection and support of an anticipated portfolio of 7-12 grantees
- Facilitate a Community of Practice among grantees
- Ensure grantees have the technical assistance and personalized support they need for success
- Coordinate learning and evidence-building across projects
- Lead communications and storytelling related to the fund

The Lab is not just a financial conduit. We are an active, trusted partner to our grantees, providing expert facilitation, coordination, and hands-on support.

Walmart (Funder + Strategic Partner)

Walmart, through its philanthropy, provides funding for this initiative and serves as a strategic partner on workforce mobility for frontline and STAR workers. Walmart will:

- Provide financial support for the initiative.
- Collaborate with the Lab on high-level program vision and learning agenda questions.
- Review learnings and outcomes to inform broader field impact and potential replication.
- Serve as a thought partner in convenings about how insights may inform employer practices, policy education, and future philanthropic investments.

One representative from Walmart will serve as a member of the review panel but will not have approval or veto authority over awards, will not direct individual awards, and will not manage day-to-day grantee activities. The Lab administers the RFP and makes all final award decisions in its sole independent discretion.

Credential Engine (Technical Assistance Partner)

Credential Engine is the initiative's technical assistance partner on credential transparency and open data. In this role, Credential Engine will:

- Provide guidance on credential transparency, including how to describe credentials, skills, and outcomes in clear, structured ways.
- Offer hands-on support on using open data standards and tools, such as the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) and the Credential Registry.
- Help grantees identify where and how their projects can publish and connect credential and skills data in machine-readable, interoperable formats.
- Co-design and deliver trainings, office hours, and resources that help grantees build lasting

capacity for transparency and interoperability.

Not every project will be “about” credential transparency as its primary goal. However, **all funded projects will be expected to consider how their work contributes to more transparent, connected credential and skills data**, with tailored support from Credential Engine and the Lab.

What We’re Funding

Funding Tiers

The Lab will award a total of \$3,500,000 across an anticipated portfolio of 7-12 grant awards. We will use a tiered funding model to support projects at different stages of maturity, from early exploration to scaling proven models, though proposals at all tiers must show a credible pathway to broader adoption/replication and systems-level impact. Applicants should select the single tier that best matches their project’s scope and readiness.

Explore – up to \$250,000 For early-stage discovery, research, and prototyping. These projects are intended to build and test new ideas and solutions, articulating the potential for scale or replication.	Example projects might include: • Building or deeper testing of a new skills validation tool with one training provider and a small cohort of workers looking to advance into higher-wage roles. • Working with a college or state agency to develop and publish an initial set of non-degree credentials to an open registry (for example, using CTDL and the Credential Registry) and demonstrate how this data supports STARs’ understanding of pathways or opportunities.
Demonstrate – up to \$400,000 For pilots or limited implementations with clear milestones and a plan to generate evidence. These projects are intended to build on existing ideas and validate their effectiveness, informing adoption/replication beyond the pilot setting.	Example projects might include: • Piloting a performance-based assessment in a specific industry (such as logistics or healthcare) and documenting its impact on hiring or promotion decisions. • Implementing a credential navigation tool with a small college network and tracking how it impacts workers’ and learners’ approach to choosing programs or pathways.

Scale – up to \$600,000 For projects with a strong foundation that are ready for broader (i.e. multi-site/system) implementation and adoption. The focus is on maximizing impact and scaling proven models.	Example projects might include: • Scaling a state or regional learning and employment record (LER) ecosystem to additional employers, training providers, and regions, so that more workers and employers can access and use verified skills and credential data. • Expanding a validated skills assessment and credential model across multiple employers or regions, with shared, machine-readable data on outcomes for workers, and agreements to share lessons learned in open, reusable formats.
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Amounts are ceilings, not entitlements; actual award sizes will depend on project scope, proposed budget, and due diligence, and may vary across projects.

Final award decisions, including tier and amount, will be made by Education Design Lab during the selection and negotiation process, informed by technical review and input from Credential Engine and other reviewers. These decisions will be based on project design, readiness, and portfolio balance.

Funding Tracks

The Lab will select and support an anticipated portfolio of 7-12 projects across two interconnected tracks. This fund is designed to drive change by supporting projects that generate scalable/replicable evidence and proof points to inform the field.

Proposals must align with one or both of the following tracks, which reflect the primary objectives of this initiative:

Track 1: Advance Credential Quality and Transparency

Track 1 is organized into two related sub-tracks. Applicants may select Track 1a, Track 1b, or indicate that their project spans *both*, depending on their primary focus. All Track 1 projects should ultimately help STARS navigate, earn, and use credentials that are more visible, trusted, and portable.

Track 1a: Credential Transparency	Track 1b: Credential Quality
Objective: To advance the <i>transparency, interoperability, and reusability</i> of credential and skills data by using	Objective: To strengthen and make the <i>quality</i> of non-degree credentials visible, including how they are designed,

machine-readable standards, open registries, and linked data so that information about credentials can move seamlessly across systems and be reused in tools that benefit STARs.	what skills they represent, and what outcomes they produce—so workers and employers can better trust and act on credential signals.
Proposals in this sub-track should address one or more of the following focus areas: ● Credential Transparency and Interoperability: Projects that advance the use of machine-readable data standards and open, linked data (e.g., CTDL) to describe credentials, skills, assessments, and outcomes in consistent ways across providers and systems. ● Open Data Infrastructure: Publishing credential and skills data to open registries or similar infrastructures, and demonstrating how that data can be reused by multiple tools and partners (such as LER ecosystems, advising platforms, or employer systems). ● AI-Ready, Structured Data: Using AI responsibly to parse, structure, and maintain credential and skills data (e.g., from catalogs, syllabi, or program descriptions) into standards like CTDL, with clear human review and documentation of risks and limitations. ● Navigation Tools Built on Open Data: Designing and piloting user-centered tools (such as credential explorers, pathway finders, or planning tools) that are powered by open, interoperable data, making it easier for STARs to find, compare, and understand options. ● Cross-System Data Connections: Demonstrating how credential and skills data can flow between learning providers, employers, and technology vendors (for example, integrating registry data into employer talent systems or regional LER ecosystems).	Proposals in this sub-track should address one or more of the following focus areas: ● Credential Quality Design: Projects that establish, test, or apply clear frameworks for designing and evaluating the quality of non-degree credentials (i.e., rigor, relevance, learner support). ● Alignment to Quality Frameworks: Efforts to align credentials with existing quality standards (e.g., industry-recognized skills, quality rubrics) and make that alignment transparent to workers, employers, and other decision-makers. ● Credential Outcomes Data: Projects that help capture, link, and make transparent credential data on outcomes (i.e., that include wage, employment, advancement and other outcomes), so workers can understand the impact and ROI of different credential options. ● Access and Opportunity Through Quality Data: Designing user-centered tools, advising models, or communications approaches that help learners and workers compare credentials based on quality, outcomes, and fit—not just cost or convenience. ● Leveraging AI for Quality & Fit: Using AI to help surface, interpret, and match quality-related credential data (for example, helping STARs identify which credentials best align with their skills, goals, and local demand), with clear guardrails for equity and responsible use.

Example projects might include: • A multi-institution consortium publishing a shared catalog of non-degree credentials and associated skills to an open registry using CTDL, then integrating that data into one or more tools that help STARs explore pathways and job options. • A state or regional partnership that uses AI-assisted data extraction to convert unstructured credential descriptions into machine-readable, interoperable data, and demonstrates how that data supports advising tools, LER ecosystems, or employer talent pipelines.	Example projects might include: • A statewide or regional partnership that aligns a set of short-term credentials to a non-degree credential quality framework and publishes clear data about quality (such as outcomes and employer validation) in ways that workers and employers can easily understand and use. • A workforce board and employer consortium co-designing a quality “signal layer” that helps frontline workers compare credential options based on outcomes, equity measures, and employer recognition, with supporting tools that guide decision-making.
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Track 2: Validate Skills Gained via Non-Traditional Learning Pathways

Objective: To support the development and piloting of performance-based and AI-enabled assessments and other [validation methods](#) that reliably validate skills gained outside of formal education, strengthening employer trust and expanding opportunities for workers.

Proposals in this track should address one or more of the following focus areas:

1. **New, Novel, or Innovative Tools for Skill Validation:** Building, testing, and scaling high-quality methods and tools for skills validation (e.g., performance-based assessments, simulations, skills demonstrations).
2. **Employer Trust and Adoption:** Projects focused on building employer trust in skills developed through alternative routes, rather than a bachelor’s degree, and encouraging employer adoption of skills showcased via validation methods and credentials.
3. **Leveraging AI for Skills Validation:** Projects that explore how AI can be ethically used for skills validation and assessment such as AI-powered simulations, automated evidence capture, and tools to help workers showcase their skills.
4. **New Areas of Insights:** Research or pilots that help validate durable (“soft”) skills as well as technical skills, and translate those validations into portable, trusted credentials.

Projects in this track may focus on specific populations (e.g., gig workers, veterans, caregivers, justice-impacted individuals) or specific industries, regions, or ecosystems.

Example projects might include:

- An employer consortium and community-based organization **co-developing a performance-based assessment** that helps frontline **workers** demonstrate durable skills (like problem solving and collaboration) while performing real tasks, awarding micro-credentials that employers agree to recognize in hiring and promotion.
- A veteran-serving organization and tech partner developing an **AI-supported portfolio tool** that helps veterans translate their service and civilian work history into validated skills statements, with human review to ensure fairness, accuracy, and clear guardrails.
- A workforce intermediary **piloting a skills validation model for gig workers**—combining performance data from a gig platform (i.e Upwork; Fiverr), worker self-evidence, and structured assessments, and working with employers to integrate those signals into screening and hiring processes.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Cross-cutting themes are shared expectations that apply to every project in this initiative—regardless of which track you choose (Track 1 or Track 2) and which tier you apply for (Explore, Demonstrate, or Scale). They describe the foundational practices we believe are essential for producing work that is credible, equitable, and useful to STARs and the broader ecosystem.

Cross-Cutting Theme: Human-Centered Design

A core principle of this initiative is belonging: creating a transparent and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and able to fully engage. All projects must center the voices and experiences of STARs. Projects should ensure that any tools, services, or assessment experiences created through this initiative are low- or no-cost for STARs and mindful of other common barriers such as time, and technology constraints.

Proposals *are* required to demonstrate a strong plan for inclusive design practices and beneficiary engagement, including

- Co-designing solutions with STARs (required), and incorporating employer input where relevant and beneficial.
- Gathering ongoing feedback from STARs and/or employers and using it to refine tools, practices, and policies
- Paying attention to barriers (such as language, technology access, time, or trust) that may limit participation

Cross-Cutting Theme: Ethical and Responsible AI

This initiative recognizes that while AI technologies offer powerful opportunities to enhance credential transparency and skills validation, they also present real risks related to bias, privacy, and transparency.

Use of AI is not required. Proposals that do leverage AI are strongly encouraged to:

- Address how they will identify and mitigate potential bias and equity concerns
- Protect data privacy and security for workers and learners
- Maintain clear documentation of the AI tools used, their purpose, usage, and their limitations

Projects using AI must explain how AI is used and how risks are monitored and addressed as part of their project activities.

Cross-Cutting Theme: Transparency

This initiative is committed to making sure learners, workers, employers, educators, and training providers have clear, up-to-date, and trustworthy information about credentials, assessments, and skills.

Projects that describe and share information about credentials, assessments, or skills are strongly encouraged to:

- Make this information publicly accessible and machine-readable
- Use open, linked data formats where possible, for example, by publishing to the [Credential Registry](#) or similar open data infrastructures.

Even when projects are not primarily “about” credential transparency, projects should clearly define how their work can contribute to a more transparent, connected data ecosystem.

In addition, projects developing tools used in employment contexts must comply with applicable privacy, employment, and consumer protection laws and incorporate bias testing/validation.

Eligibility (Who Can Apply)

Who We're Looking For

We are looking for U.S.-based nonprofit or governmental organizations and partnerships that are ready to design, test, or scale solutions that:

- Improve how workers' skills and credentials are made visible, trusted, portable, and valuable, and
- Contribute to a more transparent, connected, and equitable credential and skills ecosystem.

Strong applicants will:

- Have a clear connection to the STARs they aim to serve, and plans to engage with STARs as a part of their scope of work.
- Clearly communicate a realistic plan for resulting benefits for STARs, particularly access to opportunities and economic mobility.
- Bring together a diverse mix of partners (for example, employers, training providers, workforce boards, community-based organizations, technology partners).
- Show a realistic plan to implement, learn from, and sustain the work beyond the grant period.
- Have processes and capacity to collect and analyze data as it relates to impact

Eligibility Checklist

Use this checklist as a quick way to confirm whether your organization is eligible to apply as the **lead applicant**.

You are eligible if you are a U.S.-based organization that either:

- Is a 501(c) nonprofit organization, including 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), 501(c)(5), or 501(c)(6), or
- Has a .gov domain, or
- Is a public entity
 - You must also be able to:
 - Receive and manage grant funds
 - Center STARs in your project design
 - Participate in the learning cohort and contribute to shared field insights

Required commitments (for all funded projects)

Because this initiative is designed as a learning cohort, all applicants must be willing to:

- Engage workers (including STARs) in design and/or testing
- Participate in cohort learning activities and share practical insights with the field; and
- Report on a small set of shared metrics and learning questions

We actively welcome applications from organizations operating under a fiscal sponsor. If selected for funding, your fiscal sponsor will serve as the legal grantee and signatory on the grant

agreement.

Verification of eligibility will rely on publicly available information (e.g., IRS nonprofit listings, accreditation databases, or .gov/state entity records).

You are **not eligible** to apply as the lead if:

- You are an **individual** (not applying on behalf of an eligible organization).
- You cannot meet basic fiscal and reporting requirements for managing a grant.
- You are a for-profit or social enterprise organization.
- You are a Walmart affiliate; Walton Enterprises; or any other entities directly or indirectly controlled by members of the Walton family.

Organizations that are not able to serve as the lead applicant may still participate as **partners** in a collaborative proposal.

You don't need to have it all figured out.

We know some of the most important ideas come from **smaller organizations and community-based partners** that are closest to workers and communities. You do **not** need to:

- Already have a **perfect data or technology infrastructure** in place.
- Be an **AI or interoperability expert** or have prior experience with CTDL or the Credential Registry.
- Have every partnership fully formalized at the time you apply.
- Come with a fully built product; **early-stage concepts** are welcome in the Explore tier.

However, you **should** be ready to:

- Work with partners who can help fill data, technology, or research gaps.
- Engage workers meaningfully in the design and testing of your solution.
- Participate in a learning cohort and share what you learn—successes and challenges.
- Collect and share data/evidence relevant to the learning agenda and shared metrics.

Target Beneficiaries

All funded projects must primarily benefit **workers**, particularly STARs (Skilled Through Alternative Routes) who do not hold a bachelor's degree and have often been excluded or underserved when degrees are used as a primary requirement in hiring and advancement.

Projects may focus on a particular industry, region, or worker population; applicants should be prepared to describe who their target workers are and how the project will improve economic mobility for them.

STARs are a key focus of this initiative, but participation is open and we do not restrict eligibility or

benefits based on any protected characteristic.

Partnership Expectations

We strongly encourage **multi-organization partnerships**.

While there is no one required partnership model, strong partnerships will:

- Include **at least two types of partners**, such as:
 - Employers or employer collaboratives
 - Education and training providers (for example, community colleges, industry organizations)
 - Workforce boards or public agencies
 - Community-based organizations
 - Technology and data partners
- Clearly define the **role of each partner** (for example: who engages workers, who provides training, who hosts data/technology, who leads data collection, etc).
- Show how partners will work together to **design, test, and refine** the solution with workers at the center.

One eligible organization must be identified as the **lead applicant**. Other partners who have agreed to participate should be named in the application, with a description of their role(s).

What Grantees Can Expect

This section describes what it will be like to participate in the Advancing Workforce Mobility initiative as a selected grantee: the supports you'll receive, what we'll ask of you, and how we'll work and learn together.

Grantee Support

Grantees will receive more than funding. The Lab and Credential Engine will provide comprehensive support to help you design, test, and document your work, including:

- **Technical Assistance:**
 - Guidance from the Lab on human-centered design, worker engagement, and skills validation methods.
 - Technical assistance from Credential Engine on credential transparency, open data standards (such as CTDL), and publishing to the Credential Registry (where relevant).
- **Community of Practice:**
 - A national learning cohort that offers structured peer learning, shared

problem-solving, practical resources, and regular opportunities to gather feedback and refine project designs.

- **Rapid Response Support and Coaching:**
 - Dedicated thought partnership and troubleshooting, along with personalized coaching from the Education Design Lab team
- **Learning + Evaluation Support**
 - Support to clarify your project's learning questions, outcomes, and basic data collection plan.
 - Help documenting your tools, processes, and lessons in ways that can be shared with the field.

The goal of this support is to strengthen your project and ensure that your work contributes to a broader understanding of what advances workforce mobility. Please note: Education Design Lab and Walmart cannot guarantee credential recognition, employment outcomes, or third-party adoption.

Community of Practice

You won't be working in isolation. Every grantee becomes part of a national learning cohort, a community designed to foster peer connection, shared problem-solving, and field-building.

As part of this Community of Practice, grantees can expect:

- Regular convenings
 - Virtual sessions focused on topics such as worker-centered design, credential transparency, skills validation methods, and ethical AI.
 - Opportunities to workshop challenges and share works-in-progress.
- Peer learning and collaboration
 - Space to connect with other grantees working on similar problems or with complementary assets.
 - Optional opportunities to form cross-project working groups or sub-cohorts (for example, by industry, region, or tool type).
- Visibility and storytelling
 - Opportunities to share your work through Lab-led communications (for example, blogs, webinars, or events), subject to your consent and internal policies.

Participation in the Community of Practice is a core expectation of this initiative and a key part of how we advance learning together.

Grantee Commitments & Requirements

Grantees will be asked to commit to a core set of practices that make shared learning and impact possible.

All grantees will be expected to:

- Demonstrate how projects center workers and mobility
 - Involve workers – especially STARs – in shaping, testing, and refining your solution.
 - Monitor who is benefiting from your project and address barriers to participation.
- Participate in cohort learning (Technical Assistance; Community of Practice)
 - Join scheduled monthly and ad-hoc cohort convenings (virtual and in-person).
 - Share progress updates, tools, and lessons with fellow grantees.
- Share data and insights
 - Collect a set of agreed upon impact data points (for example, access, reach, participation, and basic outcome indicators) and stories that speak to workforce mobility.
 - Contribute to cross-project learning products (for example, case studies, briefs, or toolkits), as appropriate.
- Align to transparency and data standards where feasible
 - Where appropriate, work toward making key credential and skills data transparent and machine-readable, with support from the Lab and Credential Engine.
 - Document any alignment to open data standards (such as CTDL) so others can understand and reuse your approach.
- Showcase Work
 - Present project progress, learnings, and demonstrations at the virtual Midpoint Showcase and Final Showcase.
- Travel
 - Reserve funds in the project budget to support key staff to attend two in-person convenings - which will likely be aligned to the Walmart Retail Opportunity Network (RON) convening (Fall 2026; Fall 2027) in Bentonville, AR.

Specific reporting schedules, templates, and any additional requirements will be shared with selected grantees and outlined in the grant agreement and reporting guidance.

Intellectual Property and Data Sharing Expectations

The Lab recognizes that grantees bring their own tools, models, and intellectual property to this work.

In general:

- **Grantees will retain ownership** of their own pre-existing tools, curricula, and platforms as well as anything new developed as a result of this grant funding.
- The Lab and Walmart will seek to **share high-level learnings, case studies, models, and non-sensitive artifacts** (for example, frameworks, process maps, or case studies) with the field, as agreed upon with grantees, to support broader adoption/replication. With your consent, the Lab may share limited organizational contact information and a public project summary with Walmart for the sole purpose of outreach about potential future funding

opportunities. This is optional and will not affect eligibility, scoring, or award decisions.

- Grantees will be encouraged, where feasible, to **make key resources and documentation open or reusable**, especially when doing so will benefit workers, employers, and the broader ecosystem.

Specific intellectual property and data-sharing terms will be detailed in the grant agreement and discussed with grantees during onboarding.

Application + Selection Process

This section describes the application timeline, what you'll need to submit, how to submit, and how proposals will be reviewed and selected.

Application Timeline + Key Date

Application Timeline	
Activity	Date
RFP Released	January 8, 2026
Informational Webinar for Applicants	January 14, 2026 2-3pm ET - Link to Register
Office Hours for Applicants	Session 1: January 23, 2026 12-1pm ET - Link to Register Session 2: February 4, 2026 4-5pm ET - Link to Register Session 3: February 13, 2026 11-12pm ET - Link to Register
Application Deadline (Proposals Due)	February 20, 2026 at 11:59pm ET
Notification of Awards	March 13, 2026
Grant Start Date	March 30, 2026

What You'll Need to Submit

A complete application will include the following components. You can preview the full application in the appendices.

- **Lead Organization + Contact Information**
 - Basic information about the lead applicant organization and primary contact
- **Eligibility + Alignment**
 - Confirm eligibility, baseline requirements, and alignment to this initiative.
- **Project Snapshot (short):**
 - Four short response questions, each aligned to a specific review criterion.
 - Reviewers use these responses to assess the concept, strategic fit, intended impact, and learning contribution.
- **Full Project Narrative (longer):**
 - A set of themed narratives that explain how your project will be implemented, including roles, partnerships, timeline, risks, and sustainability beyond the grant period.
- **Project Budget & Budget Narrative:**
 - A project budget using the provided [template](#).

A single complete application will be used for all stages of the review process; different sections of your application may be used at different stages (for example, your project summary and core narrative will be used in the initial alignment review, and the full proposal will be used in panel review).

Submission Process

- The lead organization should submit **one complete application** on behalf of all partners.
- Applications must be submitted by the stated **deadline**; late submissions cannot be considered.
- After submission, you will receive an email confirming that your application was received.

Applicant Supports (webinars, office hours, FAQ)

We understand that applying for grants can be challenging, especially for smaller organizations. To reduce barriers to entry and support a diverse pool of applicants, the Lab and Credential Engine will offer the following pre-application supports:

- **Informational Webinar**
 - This webinar will provide an overview of the fund and application process, and time for Q&A. A recording will be made available.
 - Scheduled for: January 14, 2026 | 2-3pm ET - [Link to Register](#)
- **Group office hours**
 - These optional sessions will allow potential applicants to ask clarifying questions about eligibility, project fit, and application components
 - Session 1: January 23, 2026 | 12-1pm ET - [Link to Register](#)
 - Session 2: February 4, 2026 | 4-5pm ET - [Link to Register](#)
 - Session 3: February 13, 2026 | 11-12pm ET - [Link to Register](#)

- **Q&A submission process**
 - A simple way to submit questions (for example, via a web form or email address)
- **Living FAQ**
 - A publicly available FAQ which will be updated over time to include answers to commonly asked questions.
- **Background Resources**
 - Brief explainer materials on unique concepts such as human-centered design, skills validation, and credential transparency, to support applicants in interpreting the RFP and preparing strong proposals.

Review + Selection Process

The Lab is committed to a fair, transparent, and equitable review and selection process. Our process includes multiple stages and diverse reviewers (Lab staff, Credential Engine, lived-experience reviewers, and subject-matter experts) and is designed to minimize bias and attract applications from a diverse range of organizations.

How we'll review your proposal

The review and selection process will include:

1. **Eligibility & Alignment Screen (Stage 1):** We'll confirm that applicants meet basic eligibility requirements and are able to commit to core participation expectations, and that the proposal is aligned with the goals of this initiative.
2. **Project Snapshot Review (Stage 2):** Education Design Lab and Credential Engine staff will assess a brief, high-level snapshot of your proposed project to understand the concept, strategic fit, intended impact, and learning contribution. A subset of competitive applications will advance to full panel review.
3. **Full Panel Review (Stage 3):** For applications advancing to the final stage, Part 3 of the application, including detailed plans for implementation, partnerships, timeline, budget, and evidence collection, will be reviewed and scored against the evaluation rubric by panels that include subject-matter experts and "lived-experience reviewers" who represent the STAR population.
4. **Final Selection & Portfolio Balance:** In consultation with Credential Engine and Walmart, the Lab will recommend a final slate of 7–12 sub-grantees for approval, taking into account reviewer scores **and** overall portfolio balance across tracks, tiers, geographies, workers served, and organization types.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome by March 13, 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

We are seeking bold, innovative projects that are also actionable and grounded in a clear plan. Proposals will be evaluated against the six key criteria detailed in the [evaluation rubric](#). At a high

level, reviewers will look for:

- **Relevance to Strategic Focus:** How well the proposal aligns with one or both of the Funding Tracks (Credential Quality; Credential Transparency; Skills Validation) and the Funding Tiers (Explore; Demonstrate; Scale), including a credible pathway to adoption/replication at scale.
- **Impact for STARs:** How clearly the project centers STARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes), and the strength of its plan for improving their visibility, and mobility over time.
- **Technical Merit & Innovation:** The clarity, feasibility, and originality of the proposed solution. This includes explicit plans for using structured, machine-readable data and open standards and/or advancing performance-based or AI-enabled methods of skills validation. Use of AI is not a requirement.
- **Evidence of Human-Centered Design:** The strength of the proposal's approach to human-centered design, including its plans for engaging STARs and other stakeholders through co-design, addressing barriers they face, and ensuring appropriate human oversight and recourse wherever AI/Tech is used.
- **Organizational Capacity + Partnerships:** The qualifications and capacity of the project team, the strength and appropriateness of established or proposed partnerships, a realistic workplan, and the alignment of the budget with the proposed tier and scope.
- **Learning Agenda & Field Impact:** The project's potential to generate useful learning and evidence, both for the grantee and the broader field. Proposals should identify what they plan to learn, how they will collect evidence (including shared core metrics where applicable), and how they will share insights and tangible outputs with others.

Competitive Proposals Will...

Address a clear and compelling need for STARs, grounded in the goals of the selected track and tier. Competitive proposals will clearly define the STAR populations (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes) they aim to serve, articulate a sharply defined problem, describe why it matters for those STARs, and show how the proposed work advances credential transparency, credential quality, or skills validation in ways aligned to the initiative's intended outcomes and the selected funding tier.

Demonstrate technical feasibility, transparency, and thoughtful innovation. Strong proposals will present a solution that is realistic to deliver within the project period while also advancing the field. They will describe the approach, tools, data, technologies, partners, and standards (for example, CTDL and the Credential Registry, where relevant) they intend to use, explain why these choices are well suited to the intended impact, and show how the work will make information about credentials, assessments, or skills clearer, more trustworthy, and more connected over time.

Center STARs through human-centered design, barrier reduction, and meaningful co-design.

Competitive proposals will show how STARs directly shape the solution, from problem definition to testing and refinement. They will outline plans to reduce barriers to participation (e.g., time, cost, digital access, trust) and ensure tools, assessments, or resources are low/no-cost and accessible to STARs. Where AI/Tech is used, proposals will describe how people (including STARs) can understand, question, and, when needed, challenge or correct system outputs. Engagement with employers or other partners is encouraged where it strengthens the approach.

Demonstrate organizational capacity and effective partnership structures. Proposals will show that the lead organization and its partners bring the right mix of expertise, roles, relationships, and experience to deliver the work. This includes a feasible workplan, a high-level budget aligned to the selected tier, and evidence of strong partnership coordination, data readiness, and appropriate governance and decision-making structures.

Contribute meaningfully to the initiative's learning agenda and field-building goals.

Competitive proposals will articulate what they expect to learn, the data and evidence they will collect (including contributing to shared core metrics where applicable), and how they will share insights with the cohort and the broader field. They will identify how their work can produce scalable/replicable assets, artifacts, or evidence that others can use, such as models, guidance, frameworks, or technical learnings.

Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

Across all of these criteria, **equity** is a core lens. Reviewers will pay particular attention to:

- Which workers are being served and how they are engaged as co-designers and testers.
- How the project addresses structural barriers faced by STARs who have been largely excluded from hiring and advancement systems prioritizing bachelor's degrees.
- How data, tools, and practices will be used in ways that reduce, rather than reinforce, inequities.

Ready to apply?



APPLY NOW | Password = mobility

Questions? Submit them [HERE](#).

Application Form Preview

PLEASE REVIEW THE FOLLOWING BEFORE USING THIS APPLICATION FORM PREVIEW:

- This file is a **direct match to the online application form**. Use it to review all questions and draft your responses offline in a separate document.
- This preview file **cannot be used to submit an application. To officially apply, you must complete and submit the [online application form](#) (password: mobility)**
 - "Lead Organization & Contact Information" and "Part 1" answers will require you to insert short text, or select from radio buttons or checkboxes directly into the online application form.
 - "Part 2" and "Part 3" are long-text answers, and will require you to copy/paste text directly into the online application form. Please confirm character limits before submitting online.
 - The budget section will require you to attach your completed Excel file using this [Excel template](#).

Reviewers will use structured rubrics to evaluate proposals at Stage 2 and Stage 3. These rubrics are provided as an optional resource for applicants who want to understand scoring criteria in more detail. [You can access the rubrics HERE](#) (or view under "[Additional Resources](#)" on the [initiative's website](#)).

Lead Organization & Contact Information

Purpose: Provide basic information about the lead applicant organization and the primary contact for this proposal. This section is not scored.

- Project Title: Short text: **MAC4Jobs Empowering STARS: from Credentials to Economic Mobility**
- Lead organization legal name (required)
 - Short text: **Metropolitan Action Committee**
- Organization website (required)
 - Short text (URL): **<https://www.nashville.gov/departments/metro-action>**
- Organization mailing address (required)
 - Short text (street, city, state, zip): **1281 Murfreesboro Pike, Nashville, TN 37217**
- Primary contact (main point of contact during the application process) (required)
 - Name: **Tanya Evrenson**
 - Title: **Director of Workforce and Youth Development**
 - Email: **tanya.evrenson@nashville.gov**
 - Phone: **615-862-8860x77411**

- Project lead (day-to-day lead for the proposed project) (required; allow “same as primary contact”)
 - ☒ Same as primary contact
 - If not same:
 - Name: _____
 - Title: _____
 - Email: _____
 - Phone: _____
- Fiscal sponsor (if applicable)
 - ☒ Not applicable
 - ☐ Yes, we have a fiscal sponsor
 - If yes:
 - Fiscal sponsor organization name: _____
 - Fiscal sponsor primary contact name: _____
 - Fiscal sponsor primary contact email: _____
- **Permission to share with Walmart** *(optional; does not affect eligibility or selection)*
 - May Education Design Lab share your organization's name, public project summary, website, and professional contact (name, title, email) with Walmart for potential future funding opportunities?
 - ☒ Yes, I consent.
 - ☐ No, I do not consent.

Your response to this question will NOT affect eligibility or funding decisions.

Part 1: Eligibility & Alignment

Purpose: Confirm eligibility, baseline requirements, and alignment to this initiative.

In this section, you will verify that your organization is eligible to apply as the lead applicant, that you are able to meet required commitments if selected, and that your project is aligned to the goals of this initiative. Responses in this section are used to determine whether your application can advance to Stage 2 review.

Note: Some Part 1 questions include a “Not sure” option. Selecting this option will not automatically disqualify your application, but it may require additional review and can slow advancement.

Part 1 | Section A: Eligibility

Important: For-profit companies (including benefit corporations/B-Corps and social enterprises) are **not** eligible to apply as the lead applicant, but may participate as a partner in a collaborative proposal.

- A1. Lead organization is U.S.-based (required)
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification.
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No
- A2. Lead applicant legal status (required — select one)
Lead applicant organizations are not eligible to be a "For-profit company" or "Individual / unincorporated group", and selecting these options will trigger disqualification
 - ☐ 501(c) nonprofit (including 501(c)(3), (4), (5), or (6))
 - ☒ Government/public agency (including workforce boards)
 - ☐ Tribal government or Tribal organization
 - ☐ Public education institution (e.g., community college, public university)
 - ☐ For-profit company (including benefit corporation / B-Corp / social enterprise) —
Not eligible as lead (application will not advance)
 - ☐ Individual / unincorporated group — *Not eligible as lead (application will not advance)*
- A3. Lead applicant role in the ecosystem (required — select all that apply)
Selecting roles below does not determine eligibility; it helps us understand the project and shape a balanced portfolio.
 - ☒ Education / training provider
 - ☐ Intermediary / coalition / consortium lead
 - ☐ Employer or employer association
 - ☒ Workforce organization
 - ☐ Credential issuer
 - ☐ Assessment / validation provider
 - ☐ Data/technology platform provider
 - ☒ Public agency or workforce board
 - ☐ Tribal government or Tribal organization
 - ☐ Other (briefly specify): _____
- A4. Ability to receive and manage grant funds (required)
 - By the grant start date (anticipated March 30, 2026), the lead organization (or its fiscal sponsor) can receive and manage grant funds and meet reporting requirements.
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification.
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No
- A5. Grant term timing (required)
 - We can begin project activities by March 30, 2026 and continue through October 18, 2027.
 - ☒ Yes

- ☐ Yes, with conditions (briefly explain)
 - ☐ No (briefly explain)
 - Optional - Brief explanation (max 200 characters):
-

Part 1 | Section B: Alignment

- B1. Track selection (required — select all that apply)
 - ☐ Track 1a — Credential Transparency
 - ☒ Track 1b — Credential Quality
 - ☐ Track 2 — Skills Validation in Non-Traditional Pathways
- B2. Funding tier selection (required — select one)
 - ☐ Explore (up to \$250,000)
 - ☒ Demonstrate (up to \$400,000)
 - ☐ Scale (up to \$600,000)
- B3. Primary intended beneficiaries (required — select one)
 (Note: Even if employers/educators/other are primary **users**, projects must primarily **benefit** STARs.)
 - ☒ Workers/learners
 - ☐ Employers
 - ☐ Education/training providers/systems
 - ☐ Other (briefly specify): _____
- B4. STAR priority (required)
 This initiative is intended to primarily benefit [STARs \(individuals who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes\)](#). To be eligible to advance past Stage 1, proposals must demonstrate that STARs are a primary target population and that the project is designed to improve their economic mobility via direct impact and/or indirect/systemic impact.
 - The proposed project primarily benefits STARs (individuals who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes) and supports their economic mobility.
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification. Selecting "Not sure" will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No (*selecting "No" will trigger disqualification*)
 - ☐ Not sure (*selecting this will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement*).
 Provide a brief explanation regarding your "Not sure" response _____
 - B4a. If "Yes" or "Not sure": Which STAR population(s) are you targeting? (required) (select all that apply)
 - ☒ Workers without a bachelor's degree in the applicant's region/industry (general STAR population)
 - ☐ Frontline workers
 - ☐ Veterans
 - ☐ Gig workers / independent workers
 - ☐ Caregivers / returning workers

- ☐ Justice-impacted workers
 - ☐ Other: _____
- B5. Worker engagement commitment (required — select one)
 - If selected, we will meaningfully engage STARs/workers in designing and/or testing the project during the grant period (co-design or equivalent).
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification. Selecting "Not sure" will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No (*selecting "No" will trigger disqualification*)
 - ☐ Not sure (*selecting this will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement*)
 Provide a brief explanation regarding your "Not sure" response_____
- B6. Transparency contribution (applies to all projects) (required — select one)
 - Even if our project is not primarily "about" credential transparency, we can clearly describe how it contributes to more transparent, connected credential and skills data. (Transparency can take many forms; publishing to CTDL/Credential Registry is encouraged where relevant, but not required for every project.)
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification. Selecting "Not sure" will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No (*selecting "No" will trigger disqualification*)
 - ☐ Not sure (*selecting this will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement*)
 Provide a brief explanation regarding your "Not sure" response_____
- B7. Learning agenda contribution (required)
 - If selected, we commit to contributing to the initiative's shared learning agenda (e.g., gathering data, sharing insights, and contributing to cross-project learning aligned to shared questions).
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification. Selecting "Not sure" will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement
 - ☒ Yes
 - ☐ No (*selecting "No" will trigger disqualification*)
 - ☐ Not sure (*selecting this will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement*)
 Provide a brief explanation regarding your "Not sure" response_____
- B8. Shared metrics / data reporting (required)
 - If selected, we commit to collecting and submitting the initiative's required shared metrics and other reporting information, using reasonable and privacy-safe methods.
Selecting "No" will trigger disqualification. Selecting "Not sure" will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement
 - ☒ Yes

- ☐ No (*selecting "No" will trigger disqualification*)
- ☐ Not sure (*selecting this will trigger an eligibility/alignment review and may delay advancement*)

Provide a brief explanation regarding your "Not sure" response_____

Part 2: Project Snapshot

Purpose: Provide a concise, high-level snapshot of your project.

Instructions: You have already confirmed baseline eligibility and alignment in Part 1. Part 2 is where we need a clear, high-level picture of your proposed project so we can assess concept, strategic fit, intended impact, and contribution to shared learning. **This section is not asking for a full workplan; that level of detail belongs in Part 3.**

This section includes four short response questions, each aligned to a specific review criterion. Reviewers use these responses to assess the concept, strategic fit, intended impact, and learning contribution. Please keep responses high-level; you will have an opportunity to expand in Part 3 of the application.

How to Respond

- Each of the four questions below aligns to a distinct review criterion ([See Stage 2 "Mini-Rubric"](#)) and will be assessed separately.
- Keep your responses **high-level and focused**: prioritize the few details that most clearly show your idea is substantive and strongly aligned.
- **Avoid repeating** the same information across answers. Respond to each prompt differently.
- Remember: At this stage, we are looking for clarity and fit, not exhaustive detail. You'll have space to expand in the next part of the application.

Recommended Length

Each of the four responses has a maximum limit of 1,200 characters.

4 Questions

1. Concept & Technical Merit

- **In plain language, describe what you propose to do.**
 - What is the core idea?
 - What makes it innovative or meaningfully better than common practice today?
 - At a high level, describe how the project would work in practice (e.g., key activities, tools, methods, partners, or data inputs).
 - Your response should make clear that the idea is coherent and feasible to develop and implement.

We will expand MAC4Jobs to empower STARs, from low-income households in Nashville to access high-demand tech roles by validating the quality of CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+, and emerging AI certifications. Using CTDL, we'll publish transparent quality signals—competency alignment, employer recognition, performance-based evidence, and outcomes—so workers and employers can trust what the credential means. In practice, we will: (1) co-design with STARs, employers, and the Nashville Workforce Network; (2) structure program and outcomes data from ChildPlus, Oracle, and THO; (3) integrate quality signals into advising and hiring workflows; and (4) track hiring, promotion, and wages. We will run two cohorts of 25 STARs (50 total) and target 70% credential completion, 50% job placement, and measurable wage gains within 12 months. The core idea is to move from “credential offered” to “credential validated” so non-degree credentials become portable, trusted signals of real skills

2. Relevance to Strategic Focus

- **How does your proposed project align with this initiative?**
 - Identify the funding track(s) you are applying to (Credential Transparency, Credential Quality, and/or Skills Validation) and the funding tier you are selecting (Explore/Demonstrate/ Scale).
 - Briefly explain why this track/tier combination is the right fit for your project's scope, maturity, and goals.
 - Explain how your concept fits clearly within the goals of this RFP initiative, including how your project contributes to making skills/credentials more visible, trusted, and transferable.

Our project aligns with Track 1b: Credential Quality and the Demonstrate tier. We aim to build on MAC4Jobs' success through our CompTIA A+ program, to pilot a credential quality framework for high-demand tech certifications (CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+, and AI). By mapping credentials to recognized rubrics, linking them to verified competencies and outcomes, through verified structured data, we hope to advance the initiative's goal of making skills visible, trusted, and transferable, opening doors to high-demand tech roles for STARs.

Our approach contributes to systemic change by embedding these metrics into advising and hiring tools, leveraging statewide systems (ChildPlus, Oracle, and THO), and partnerships with Nashville Workforce Network and employers like EJO Ventures, Gresham Smith, Justice Integration Services (JIS), Metro Health Department, Metro Sheriff, and State of TN. This work demonstrates how transparent quality data can improve STARs' economic mobility and inform replication across the nation.

3. Impact for STARs

- **Who are the STARs your project is intended to benefit, and why does this work matter for them?**
 - Describe the specific STAR population(s) you aim to serve, the problem or opportunity you are addressing, and the key barriers they face.
 - Explain how your proposed work could reasonably contribute (via direct or systemic impact) to improved economic mobility and/or equitable outcomes for these workers (for example: hiring, promotion, wages, or credential attainment).

Our project targets STARs from low – income households, without a bachelor's degree, who desire to work in Nashville's tech sector. These workers face systemic barriers to economic and social mobility. STARs are often excluded when hiring systems prioritize degrees over skills, impacting their opportunity to be hired, receive higher wages, and be promoted. They struggle knowing what they need to receive education and training, to become certified, and which certifications lead to real opportunities, with a clear return on investment (ROI). Our approach embeds co-design of quality indicators—employer validation, competency alignment, performance, and outcome data—into CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+, and AI credentials to help STARs make informed choices and gain credentials that employers recognize. We combine training, internships, childcare, transportation, coaching, and stipends to help mitigate the economic and systemic barriers and create more pathways to economic mobility through trusted, portable credentials. We aim to shift employers' practice from degree-first to skills-first hiring.

4. Learning Orientation & Field Contribution

- **What do you hope to learn from this project, and why might that learning matter beyond your organization?**
 - Name at least one relevant question, assumption, or hypothesis you want to explore or test through your project, and explain why that learning matters.
 - At a high level, describe how you will learn from the work by describing

what types of information you might collect and how you'll use it.

- Explain how what you learn or produce could be useful to others beyond your organization, even if the exact outputs are not fully defined yet.

We aim to learn how transparent quality indicators influence STARS' credential choices and employer trust in hiring and promotion. Our hypothesis: Embedding competency alignment and outcome data in credentials improves hiring and mobility. We will collect data on STAR engagement, credential attainment, job descriptions, performance-based outcomes, and employer feedback on trust and usability. This learning matters beyond our organization because it addresses a critical gap: how to operationalize credential quality programs in ways that are viable, portable, and actionable across systems. We will share our findings through this initiative and the learning community and develop a replicable model. Outputs will include a playbook for credential quality transparency and evidence on its impact, informing adoption and evidence-based practices by the workforce, education, and community.

Part 3: Full Project Narrative

Purpose: Expand on your Part 2 Snapshot responses with detail.

Instructions: You have already provided high-level information in Stage 1 (Eligibility & Alignment) and Stage 2 (Project Snapshot). **Stage 3 is where we need depth, nuance, and specificity.**

In this section, you will provide additional information on how your project will be implemented, including roles, partnerships, timeline, risks, and sustainability beyond the grant period. You may reference earlier sections briefly, but we encourage you to use this space to add new detail, expanding on your earlier responses.

How to Respond

- Each of the six themes below is scored using the Stage 3 rubric.
- You will submit one narrative response per theme.
- To ensure your proposal can be scored fairly, your narrative **must clearly address each component of the prompt** (these map to scored rubric components). You might consider using sub-headers within your narrative to ensure all components are addressed, though this is not a requirement.
- If a piece of a prompt is not applicable, state **"Not applicable"** and briefly explain why.

Clarity matters more than length. Use concrete specifics where possible (who, what, how, when, outputs, adoption, assumptions, risks, mitigation).

Recommended Length

Please note the unique character limits for each question below.

Theme 1 — Relevance to Strategic Focus

Prompt (one narrative response):

Describe your concept, in detail, including what problem it addresses, and why this approach should be pursued at this time, and in this context. Explain why your proposed work is a strong fit for this initiative. Going into greater depth than Part 2, explain why the track(s) and tier you are applying for are the right fit for the work you propose.

Response: maximum limit of 4,000 characters

Problem & Why Now

Nashville’s tech sector is projected to grow by 15% over the next three years, creating urgent demand for validated skills in cybersecurity and AI. STARs—from low-income households, without degrees—who want to work in Nashville’s tech sector face systemic barriers. They may lack the knowledge, education, training, or social capital to achieve certifications or degrees to establish a professional career and advance their economic mobility. This leaves workers unsure what steps to take, which certifications to receive, or how to create opportunities for future employment. Employers are hesitant to trust non-degree credentials or hire someone with limited experience unless they can be reassured and validate the quality of the program and the outcomes that one can achieve. This limits mobility and perpetuates inequity. The initiative calls for solutions to ensure credentialing provides viable, trusted, and portable options for both the workers and employers. Through short-term credentials, there can be a great return on investment (ROI) to good jobs, and careers that advance one’s economic and professional mobility.

MAC hopes to scale out its CompTIA A+ to Network + and Security +. Although MAC has had CompTIA A+ for nearly ten (10) years, MAC has only recently offered the program to STARs participants, not involved in MAC’s Early Education program (HS/EHS), and offered Network+ to one of those participants. The CompTIA A+ provider plans to expand their program to include AI later this summer.

As AI becomes an integral part of the workforce market, so does network security, and understanding employers' needs. We need to partner with the community to provide quality certificate programs that meet the needs and address the barriers of our marginalized communities, to advance STARs economic and social capital, and develop quality candidates for employers.

Our Concept

We will demonstrate how we can scale CompTIA A+, to include Network+, Security+, and AI credentials through our MAC4Jobs program. We will embed quality metrics (alignment to industry competencies, employer recognition, performance-based evidence, wage/promotion, and outcomes data), through open, structured formats (CTDL) and integrate them into advising and hiring workflows across regional/state systems (Oracle, THO Software, ChildPlus). Embeds indicators and matrices in the tools workers use and employer hiring flows, increasing trust and portability of credentials. Centers STARs via co-design and barrier reduction, aligned to cross-cutting expectations (human - centered design, and responsible AI), and return on investment (ROI). This helps to shift the practice from “credential offered” to “credential validated”.

Why Now

Nashville's tech ecosystem is growing rapidly, yet STARs remain excluded when hiring systems prioritize degrees. Employers need trusted indicators and matrices to confidently hire based on skills. Our approach aligns with the initiative's goals and leverages strong local partnerships for systemic impact.

Pathway to Scale

By producing reusable quality indicators and matrices (rubric mappings, CTDL profiles, outcomes schema, integration playbook) and documenting adoption with employers and networks (Nashville Technology Council, Workforce Network; EJO Ventures, Gresham Smith, Justice Integration Services (JIS), Metro Health Department, Metro Sheriff, and State of TN), we hope to create artifacts that other regions can replicate.

Theme 2 — Impact for STARs

Prompt (one narrative response):

Clearly identify the STAR population(s) your project will address, describe the context(s) in which they generally live, learn, or work, and explain why this effort matters for them. Describe the specific barriers these STARs often face and how the proposed work intends to reduce or remove these barriers. In addition, explain how your work will (directly or indirectly) lead to improved economic mobility for this population.

Response: *maximum limit of 5,000 characters*

Who We Serve

We will provide two cohorts for STARs from low-income households, who do not have a bachelor's degree, reside in high-poverty zip codes, who seek entry- and mid-level tech roles (help desk, network support) in Nashville. Select participants will also be provided with the opportunity to receive Network+, Security+, and AI certifications.

Barriers

- Lack of clear ROI signals for credentials (wage, advancement).
- Fragmented, non-standardized data on credentials and competency-based outcomes produced.
- Employer skepticism about non-degreed STARs, credentials.
- Workers are undervalued in the hiring/promotion process.

Our Solution.

- **Co-design with STARs** to ensure usability and barrier reduction (time, cost, supports, access) and preferred formats for quality information; ensure low/no-cost access to assessment experiences.
- **Employer validation** through the Nashville Workforce Network, and our partners: EJO Ventures, Gresham Smith, Justice Integration Services (JIS), Metro Health Department, Metro Sheriff, State of TN; mapping competencies with credentials, performance-based assessments, job requirements, internships, and employment opportunities.
- **Transparency:** Publish structured quality metrics (competency alignment, outcomes, employer recognition) using open data standards (e.g., CTDL); integrate into statewide systems and tools, increasing trust and portability.
- **Equity Lens:** Provide support and stipends, childcare, coaching, referrals, transportation assistance; and incorporate equity frameworks (CLIFF, Family Well-Being Matrix), to track holistic outcomes (wages, stability, mobility), disaggregate results,

Expected Impact

- **Direct:** STARs earn validated credentials linked to employer-recognized competencies, improving hiring and wage outcomes (higher-quality interviews, hiring of STAR workers, and promotions in tech roles).
- **Systemic:** Employers shift from degree-first to skills + quality for hiring; adopt quality indicators, advising systems, and guiding STARs to credentials with proven ROI; and a model that can be replicated.

Theme 3 — Technical Merit & Innovation

Prompt (one narrative response):

Provide a detailed narrative of your technical/implementation approach (key activities, tools/platforms, data flows, and partner roles) and why it is feasible within the grant period. Describe how your work advances transparency and usability of information about skills/credentials, particularly for STARs and other key stakeholders. In addition, explain what is new, innovative, or significantly improved about your approach (compared to current practice), and how this innovation can create value for STARs and/or the broader field.

If applicable (not required for all projects):

- Describe your proposed use of structured, connected data (e.g., CTDL, Credential Registry, other open standards/registries).
- Describe how you plan to use AI or other technologies, any potential risks (i.e., inaccurate or incomplete data, unfair or biased results, breaches of privacy or security, people misusing or misinterpreting outputs, or over-relying on automated decisions), and how risks will be mitigated.

Response: *maximum limit of 6,000 characters*

Approach

We will operationalize credential quality transparency by creating and publishing a structured quality signal layer for CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+, and AI, integrating those into advising/hiring systems.

1. **Quality Framework Integration:** (1) Apply Quality Framework; map credentials to employer-validated competencies and performance standards; credentialing standards, and incorporate evidence-based practices (HSVC, CLIFF, and equity-focused measures); convert program and outcomes data into CTDL; publish to Credential Registry; configure APIs for ChildPlus, and THO; pilot. (2) Data Modeling and reporting: converting program, skills, and outcomes into CTDL.
2. **Structured Publishing:** Convert program/skills/outcomes data into CTDL; publish to Credential Registry; document schema and governance to support replication beyond Nashville.
3. **Systems Integration:** Configure signal layer for Oracle, THO Software, ChildPlus; establish APIs/data feeds.
4. **Performance-Based Assessments:** Assess STARs at start/end of cohorts; link evidence to credential records; embed in internships.
5. **Innovation:** Combines **quality + transparency** with employer validation and interoperability-design; integrates equity frameworks and financial forecasting tools; through a holistic approach to advance and achieve economic and social mobility.

Through AI, we will parse syllabi, curriculum, testing, and job postings to competencies. We will incorporate design thinking, through human-centered design, and incorporate bias testing, documenting limitations, protect and ensure privacy and security; and provide challenge/correction pathways for workers and employers.

Feasibility and Key Milestones:

- **Start:** March 30, 2026
- **First Quarter:** April 2026—Project kickoff, hire staff, recruit STARs, onboarding, rubric selection, data inventory, with an employer co-design kick-off.
- **Second Quarter:** June 2026—Co-design sessions and rubric selection finalized. First cohort begins.
- **Midpoint:** October 2026—Define indicators and metrics; pilot assessments; initial reporting. First cohort ends.
- **Fourth Quarter:** December 2026—Recruitment for second cohort with start date in January 2027
- **Fifth Quarter:** June 2027—Second cohort ends; multi-system integration achieved
- **End:** October 2027—Final Showcase and dissemination of outputs; expanded reporting; multi-partner integration; outcomes documented; playbook released.

Theme 4 — Human-Centered Design & Human Oversight of AI/Tech

Prompt (one narrative response):

Describe your plans to engage STARs and other key stakeholders in designing, implementing, and refining the work of your project. Explain when and how you will gather their input throughout the project, and how you'll incorporate that feedback into your project's design.

If applicable: If AI or other technologies are used, describe how humans will provide meaningful oversight (i.e., review, interpretation, challenge/override/correction options) and how affected stakeholders can raise concerns if something doesn't seem right.

Response: *maximum limit of 5,000 characters*

- **Co-design:** Conduct design sprints and feedback cycles with STAR participants and employer partners (, Nashville Workforce Network; and our partners: EJO Ventures, Gresham Smith, Justice Integration Services (JIS), Metro Health Department, , Metro Sheriff, State of TN; co-designing metrics, to shape which quality metrics are most useful and understandable, how they should be integrated and appear in advising/hiring tools, and assessment design, and support. Participation will be at low/no cost for STARs, with short-term sessions and mobile-friendly materials.
- **Feedback Loops:** Gather user feedback at each phase (prototype→ pilot→ integration); track barriers (time, cost, digital access); iteratively test; content, navigation, tracking of barriers and supports; ensure metrics are accessible (plain language, visual cues, multilingual, mobile-friendly interfaces); iterative testing; barrier tracking; multilingual, mobile-friendly interfaces.
- **Oversight:** If AI is used, humans review the mapping, competencies, and outputs; STARs/employers can request corrections, transparent logs, and document changes. Risk mitigation includes bias testing, privacy/security controls, and clear disclaimers about limitations; no automated high-stakes decisions without human oversight.
- **Accessibility & Equity Supports:** Reduce participation burdens through stipends, flexible scheduling, childcare referrals, transportation assistance, etc.), tracking participation by income, zip, race/ethnicity, veteran/caregiver status, and ensuring content meets accessibility standards, incorporating visual cues and plain language for low-literacy users.

Theme 5 — Organizational Capacity & Partnerships

Prompt (one narrative response):

Explain why your team and partners have the relevant skills and expertise (i.e., prior work with STARs, similar projects, technical/field expertise) to execute this work. Describe roles, staffing, partnerships, and a realistic, high-level workplan with major phases/milestones. Based on your budget, included in the attached template, provide a short narrative explaining alignment to the workplan, tier, and goals.

Response: *maximum limit of 6,000 characters (not counting budget file, in the next section below)*

Lead: MAC through MAC4Jobs will lead credential delivery, STAR engagement, coaching, credentialing, data stewardship, and project management.

Capacity & Relevant Experience: MAC4Jobs has delivered CompTIA A+ to the public and will deepen scope (Network+, Security+) and add AI courses. Existing curricula/testing standards and internal data position us to lead a quality validation pilot and manage multi-partner coordination.

Staffing:

- **Workforce Services Coordinator**—coordinate project, recruitment, onboarding, reporting, and credentialing process
- **Case Manager** – provides eligibility, enrollment and wrap around services to STARs
- **Trainer/Training Materials**—trainer, curriculum, training, and credentialing data and outcomes
- **Partner**—
- **Nashville Workforce Network**—worker recruitment, employer engagement, advising, and integration.
- **Current Employers**—EJO Ventures, Gresham Smith, Justice Integration Services (JIS), Metro Health Department, Metro ITS, Metro Sheriff, State of TN
- **Expanded+ Employers** across nonprofit, public, health, and private sectors—internships, hiring adoption. —internships and hiring.
- **Credential Engine** (TA on CTDL, and registry publishing)

Budget Highlights: Hire Workforce Services Coordinator, Case manager trainers for Network+/Security+/AI courses; curriculum/licensing; paid internships; travel for two in-person convenings.

Governance & Risk Mitigation: Risks—data quality/integration; delays; employer adoption; participant time/cost barriers; AI bias (if used). Mitigation—clear data standards and validation; employer MOUs, flexible scheduling/stipends; human review and bias testing; privacy/security practices; transparent documentation and field-ready artifacts.

Sustainability: Institutionalize the indicators and metrics with partner systems; secure employer recognition agreements; explore state funding, employer sponsorships, and philanthropic co-investment.

Theme 6 — Learning Orientation & Field Impact

Prompt (one narrative response, max 6,000 characters):

Describe what you aim to learn through this project and how learning will inform decisions, iteration, or improvements during the grant period. Explain how you will generate and use evidence to support this learning, and describe the insights and/or tangible outputs (e.g., replicable models, playbooks, tools, policy/practice guidance) you expect to produce, as well as how you'll share these so others can benefit from the work.

Response: (max 6,000 characters)

Learning Questions:

- Do transparent quality indicators and metrics (competency, alignment, employer validation, outcomes data) change STARs' credential choices and improve employer trust/hiring/promotion?
- Which indicators and metrics, and formats/tools are the most influential for STARs and employers? In the adoption and advising/hiring tools? How should they appear in advising/hiring tools to drive behavior?

Evidence & Methods:

- **Participation/Engagement:** Collect credential attainment, hiring/promotion outcomes, wage changes, employer adoption/trust metrics, usability feedback.
- **Quantitative and Qualitative Data:** Incorporate mixed methods for quantitative and qualitative analysis from Oracle, THO, ChildPlus, the Family Wellbeing Assessment, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and contribute to shared metrics.
- **Rapid Cycle Learning:** Employ rapid cycle learning to refine indicators, metrics, and outcome measures, user interfaces, and employer integration steps, reporting, findings, cohort convenings, and at the Midpoint/Final Showcases.

Outputs:

- **Credential Quality Transparency Playbook** (rubric mappings, CTDL profiles, reporting, data governance, adoption agreements).
- **Integration guides** (embedding indicators and metrics for Oracle/, sample APIs/data feeds).
- **Case studies and evidence briefs** (worker outcomes on STAR outcomes and employer adoption, stories, lessons learned, through the co-design and responsible adoption of AI).
- **Dissemination:** Webinars, open-source guides, and presentations at national workforce conferences. Shared via the initiative's learning agenda and open channels for replication.

Hypothesis: Embedding quality indicators and metrics in HR systems accelerates employer adoption and STAR mobility.

Budget

Purpose: Please complete and submit your project budget using this provided [Excel template](#). Budget attachments must be uploaded in Excel (.xlsx) format.

Before You Submit

Before submitting your application, please confirm that you have:

- Verified your organization's eligibility and required commitments
- Selected the appropriate track(s) and tier
- Clearly described your project concept, fit, intended impact, and learning contribution
- Reviewed character limits and section guidance

Thank you for your interest and for the work you do to support workers and learners.

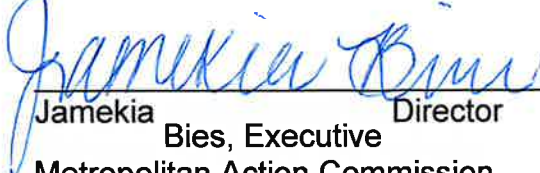
Advancing Workforce Mobility RFP		
BUDGET for Metropolitan Action Commission		
	DEMONSTRATE (up to \$400k)	
Budget Category	Description	TOTAL
PERSONNEL		
Salaries & Benefits	Workforce Case Manager	\$ 66,096.00
Personnel Subtotal		\$66,096
DIRECT EXPENSES		
Contractors	Consultant who is a subject-matter expert	\$ 100,000.00
Technology + Software		
Supplies + Materials	Supplies for project	\$ 2,000.00
Marketing + Communications		
Honorariums + Stipends	Stipends and Internships for participants	\$ 174,000.00
Convenings + Workshops		
Travel (including RON 2026 + 2027)	Travel	\$ 9,839.00
Other Direct Expenses	Miscellaneous Costs for Transportation, Daycare, etc...	\$ 3,000.00
Direct Expenses Subtotal		\$288,839
INDIRECT EXPENSES		
Indirect cost rate (maximum 15%)		13%
Indirect Expenses Subtotal		\$45,065
TOTAL PROGRAM BUDGET		\$400,000

Notes
Compensation for project staff, includes salary and fringe
Costs for external partners/ experts providing specialized services/training
Supplies for training and activities
Payments to participants as stipends or internships
Minor Expenses for participants
General administrative and overhead expenses that support the project but aren't attributed to a specific line item above (applied at the organization's approved rate).

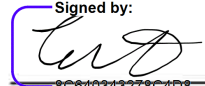
**SIGNATURE PAGE FOR
ADVANCING WORKFORCE MOBILITY
Effective March 30, 2026 (\$400,000.00)**

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have by their duly authorized representatives set their signatures.

METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY


Jamekia Bies, Executive Director
Metropolitan Action Commission

2/20/26
Date

Signed by:

8C640343278C4D8...

2/20/2026 | 4:22 PM CST

Erika R. Burnett, Chair
Metropolitan Action Commission

Date

APPROVED AS TO AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS:

Not needed on this form for application
(See Grants Application Summary Sheet)

Jenneen Reed, Director, Department of Finance

Date

APPROVED AS TO RISK AND INSURANCE:

Not needed on this form for application
(See Grants Application Summary Sheet)

Balogun Cobb, Director of Insurance

Date

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY:

Not needed on this form for application
(See Grants Application Summary Sheet)

Metropolitan Attorney

Date

Not needed on this form for application
(See Grants Application Summary Sheet)

Freddie O'Connell, Metropolitan Mayor

Date

ATTEST:

Not needed on this form for application
(See Grants Application Summary Sheet)

Metropolitan Clerk

Date