

EDA-HDQ-ARPGJ-2021-2006964

Project Narrative

Section 1: Project Description and Overview

1a. The Quadra-Regional Workforce Alliance (QRWA) is a regional workforce training system comprised of four Local Workforce Development Board regions encompassing multiple sectoral partnerships in healthcare, transportation/logistics, and educational services. To assist communities impacted by the pandemic, this initiative seeks to support economic growth and strengthen the pipeline of skilled workers **servicing 2,836** individuals with quality job placement opportunities. QRWA will target unemployed, underemployed, or incumbent workers within the eight proposed economic development districts (EDDs), **focusing on historically underserved populations**. QRWA is supported by regional employers and training providers **leveraging over \$3.8 million**. **CoxHealth** has pledged to serve and train **1,235 QRWA grant participants** valued at nearly **\$2,500,000**. **Jordan Valley Community Health Center** (Jordan Valley) has committed to placing **150 registered apprentices**. **Truck Dynasty Driving Academy** has committed to training and placing **360 qualified commercial drivers**. **Missouri State University** (MSU) commits to training **200 educational paraprofessional apprentices**. In addition to QRWA's registered apprenticeship (RA) commitments and expansion opportunities, Missouri's workforce system, including **Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD)**, **state and local workforce development boards**, and **Missouri Job Centers**, have committed support and **leveraged Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (WIOA)** services to recruit and support the remaining 900 QRWA participants. QRWA has also partnered with nationally recognized Jobs for the Future (JFF) to support implementation, track outcomes, and expand current employer commitments within our grant service area. QRWA offers a **realistic, low-risk, scalable, demand-driven model**, equipped to provide a roadmap for partnership expansion, economic growth, and **the pathway to good jobs**.

1b. The City of Springfield Department of Workforce Development (CoSWFD) will serve as the system lead entity for QRWA utilizing the current relationships with local governments, Area Chambers of Commerce, and Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs). CoSWFD has a positive track record of driving stakeholders to action and will facilitate connections between QRWA's backbone organizations: Missouri Hospital Association (MHA) supporting the healthcare sector, MSU leading educational services, and Truck Dynasty in the transportation sector. In response to the current regional economic needs as reflected in the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) summaries and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, CoSWFD formed the alliance between four of Missouri's 14 LWDB regions (Ozark, Central, South Central, and Southeast (see the map on page 6) to create QRWA. The City's Department of Workforce Development and Finance Department have demonstrated their capacity in programmatic, administration, and fiscal functions through their delivery of federally funded programs and grants including; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker/Youth, National Emergency Grants, a Skilled Workforce Initiative Incumbent Worker project, a US Environmental Protection Agency Grant, and Department of Labor Reentry Employment Opportunity and H-1B Grants. The City of Springfield's (CoS's) Finance Department brings to this project the knowledge and experience of qualified staff members, demonstrating the capacity of administering over \$160,000,000 of federal grant awards during the past twenty years. CoSWFD will provide QRWA with the leveraged resources of the Fiscal Management Team, Legal Services, Human Resources, Public Relations, Community Engagement Personnel, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion staff. QRWA with the assistance of JFF's proven Research and Analytics Unit, will monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of delivered services. By reviewing program data (including

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demographics, enrollments, completions, credential acquisition, job placement and employment), QRWA will monitor progress against goals and provide an analysis of data to understand participation and outcome patterns for different subgroups of participants. QRWA will employ a mixed methods approach, adding elements such as participant surveys and focus groups to shed light on participants' training experiences and career goals. This includes the impacts of participation not captured through existing data systems and an analysis of implementation to examine the processes, partnerships, challenges, and opportunities related to carrying out the initiative.

CoSWFD and grant partners, leveraging a total of **\$3.8 million** and support (detailed in the budget narrative), provide the capacity and commitment to implement a comprehensive sector strategy serving job seekers, employers, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to achieve the goals of the Good Jobs Challenge. CoSWFD Director, Sally Payne, will function as the Authorized Organizational Representative for the QRWA initiative. Ms. Payne will lead the current CoSWFD Grant Management Team comprised of the Assistant Director, Project Coordinator, and Compliance Coordinator. Additionally, the experienced CoSWFD Supervisor will oversee grant ancillary staff including the Executive Secretary and will also hire/assign Workforce Development Specialists. (See Budget Narrative Staffing Plan for additional details.)

Section 2a: Employer Leadership and Commitments

QRWA's current employer partnerships have been involved in the creation of training programs, and have committed to participate in the implementation, evaluation, and ongoing refinement and improvement of grant curriculum development. In September 2021, MHA and CoxHealth, major healthcare industry organizations and state-wide employers, met with CoSWFD staff to communicate the critical need for training programs in healthcare to address the alarming rates of job openings, including 4,894 vacant staff nurse job positions alone, throughout the state. Recent meetings with other employer groups highlighted unmet demand for trained workers in transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL) and in educational services. These conversations were the catalyst for creating QRWA to address the workforce shortages and to promote quality jobs in these in-demand industries.

CoxHealth, both an employer as well as a training provider through Cox College, has committed to serving **1,235 QRWA grant participants** over the course of the grant and is **providing nearly \$2,500,000** in leveraged funds to cover training expenditures for participants looking to complete the licensed practical nurse (LPN) to registered nurse (RN) bridge program and cover all expenses related to hiring, training, and supporting registered apprentices. **CoxHealth** currently offers a medical assistant registered apprenticeship, but as part of QRWA, they will expand RA programs to include these additional occupations: nurse assistant, pharmacy technician, emergency medical technician, surgical technician, medical technologist, medical coding, graduate nurse resident, respiratory therapy technician, radiology/CT and US technician, cardiovascular/echo technician, and bio-medical equipment technician. **MHA** has committed to serving as QRWA's backbone for the healthcare sector by facilitating engagement between other members and training providers ensuring implementation of QRWA programs with viable, direct employer input. This input in QRWA's meetings will provide worker perspectives of curriculum development. MHA has also committed to engaging businesses and collaborating with Missouri Job Centers to share promotional information and conduct outreach. In response to the high statewide turnover rates in major healthcare professions and the highest vacancies in LPN professions, MHA will continue to advocate the importance of a state-wide system approach to workforce development in support of the QRWA initiative. **Jordan Valley**, the largest federally

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qualified health center in Missouri, provides medical, dental, and behavior health services and primarily serves women and children, individuals with economic and health disparity, and houses the Women Infants and Children program. Jordan Valley, also both employer and training provider, is leveraging services **valued at over \$480,000** through the registered apprenticeship training of 60-90 certified medical assistants and 60 dental assistants and has **documented commitment to provide a 100% placement rate to qualified QRWA participants. Penmac Staffing, serving the target region, has committed to placing 100 substitute teachers** and paraprofessionals trained through QRWA.

The following table identifies employers with firm commitments to QRWA (see attached letters) to fill current and future in-demand and family-sustaining wage jobs in the healthcare, transportation, and educational services industries. Those denoted with (*) have committed support and the specific number of trained participants to hire will be negotiated and solidified during the first six months of the Program Design phase.

Committed QRWA Employer Partners by Region (all support letters attached)	Committed # of QRWA Participants Served	Participate in Recruiting and Outreach	Participate in QRWA grant meetings, hiring events, and/or curriculum review
Ozark Workforce Development Region (Serving Southwest Missouri)			
CoxHealth	1,235	x	x
Jordan Valley	120-150		
Penmac	100	x	x
Central Workforce Development Board Region (Serving Central Missouri)			
Schneider*			
Central Transport		x	x
Greis Trucking and Excavating*			
Boone Health*			
MBS Textbook Exchange*			
Siedhoff Distributing	30-45	x	x
Industrial Warehouse and Distribution*			
Southeast Workforce Development Region (Serving Southeast Missouri)			
Proffer Wholesale Produce		x	x
Iron County Medical Center	52	x	x
St. Francis Healthcare		x	x
South Central Workforce Development Region (Serving South Central Missouri)			
Texas County Memorial Hospital	24-45	x	x
L&R Industries	9-15	x	x
Bales Moving and Storage*			
FMC Transport Inc.*			
Gregory Logistics*			
McLane Transport Inc*			
Mid Continent Steel & Wire Inc*			
Steed Bros In*			
Western Dairy Transport*			

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Missouri Trucking Association*			
Ozark Healthcare*			
Mercy St. Francis Hospital*		x	x
Poplar Bluff Regional Medical Center*			

Through regular grant meetings, QRWA will continue to expand the employer partnerships listed above as well as increase the level of participation in curriculum development, regular grant meetings, involvement in recruitment, and grant participant selection process. Strategic efforts will be made to increase the number of minority- and women- owned business partnerships in QRWA. In return for their involvement in regularly scheduled QRWA meetings, employers will have the opportunity to attend Lunch and Learns to share best practices, benefit from skill-based hiring training, discuss RA opportunities, and obtain resources on creating/maintaining an inclusive work environment. These meetings will provide employers with resources to maintain stable employment levels such as COVID-19 mitigation strategies, alternative work options, and innovative solutions to address transportation and childcare issues with employees.

Section 2b: Other Stakeholders and Partnerships

The table below lists QRWA’s committed partners and training providers, broken down by LWDB, and documents the number of participants they will enroll in related training programs. Those denoted with (*) have committed support, the specific number to enroll, and willingness to participate in QRWA grant meetings, hiring events, and curriculum reviews. Final commitments will be negotiated and solidified during the first six months of the Program Design phase. QRWA’s TDL backbone organization, **Truck Dynasty Driving Academy**, has committed to 100% job placement for qualified grant participants. Additionally, **160 Driving Academy** has made the commitment to **underwrite tuition costs with a value of \$1,705 per student** for those studying to obtain their commercial driver license (CDL). **MSU**, as QRWA’s educational services backbone organization, has committed to **training 200 paraprofessionals** through their RA program. Partners listed below are categorized by their role. Lead entity and subrecipients will enroll, case manage, and match participants with open job positions. Training providers will prepare students with the occupational skills and industry-recognized credentials needed to fill employer-reported open job positions. CBOs/government entities are organizations that have documented commitment to provide wraparound services to grant participants, ensure that grant goals align with local CEDS, and support grant sustainability through initiatives and continued funding.

QRWA Committed Stakeholders and Partnerships by Region (all support letters attached)	Committed # of QRWA Participants Served	Participate in Recruiting and Outreach	Participate in QRWA grant meetings, hiring events, and/or curriculum review	Role
Ozark LWDB Region (Serving Southwest Missouri)				
CoSWFD	1664	x	x	Lead Entity
MSU	200	x	x	Training Providers
160 Driving Academy*		x	x	
Truck Dynasty Driving Academy*		x	x	
SMCOG		x		

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MDHEWD and OWD				CBOs/Govt. Entities
Community Foundation of the Ozarks				
Show Me Christian County				
GRO Marshfield		x		
United Way of the Ozarks				
Missouri Hospital Association		x	x	
CoS Council and Mayor				
CoS Director of DEI		x	x	
Central LWDB Region (Serving Central Missouri)				
Central LWDB	681	x	x	Subrecipient
State Fair Community College	150	x		Training Providers
Clement Truck Driving Academy	270	x	x	
Moberly Area Community College	150	x		
Job Point	60	x	x	CBO/ Govt. Entities
Columbia Chamber of Commerce		x		
MHA		x	x	
COPIC		x		
Southeast LWDB Region (Serving Southeast Missouri)				
Southeast LWDB	225	x	x	Subrecipient
Cape Girardeau AEL	325			CBO/Govt.
South Central LWDB Region (Serving South Central Missouri)				
South Central LWDB	430	x	x	Subrecipient
Missouri State University*				Training Providers
South Central Career Center*				
Three Rivers Community College*				
Texas County Technical College*				
Missouri Hospital Association				CBO/Govt.

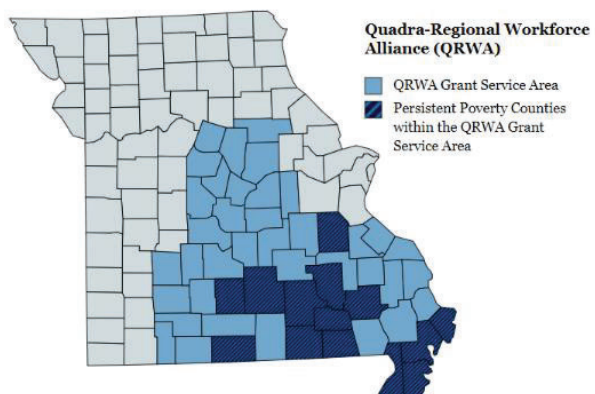
DHEWD, Missouri's Office of Workforce Development (OWD), State and Local Workforce Boards, and associated Missouri Job Centers, all integral parts of Missouri's workforce development system, have committed support. OWD maintains oversight of WIOA and various state grant programs in each region. CoSWFD is the current WIOA administrator for the Ozark Region LWDB and QRWA grant staff are co-located within the Missouri Job Center. A regional network of Missouri Job Centers and partner organizations offer a wide array of vital services to job seekers and businesses. DHEWD is expanding their partnership with the online learning platform Coursera, to offer free, online education opportunities. Through dual enrollment, all QRWA participants will have free access to 4,000 courses, valued at \$600 per person, to develop high-demand digital and job-readiness skills for employment or career advancement. DHEWD and OWD have also committed support to the dual enrollment of grant participants as needed into Wagner Peyser and WIOA grant programs for additional wraparound services. OWD is additionally offering the utilization of [MOJobs](#), the labor exchange system for linking grant participants to employers, grant performance measure tracking, and reporting. OWD's [Missouri Apprenticeship Connect](#) can be used to link grant participants to RA opportunities. Additionally, QRWA will utilize virtual service delivery and training resources (including online courses offered through Coursera) established by DHEWD and OWD in response to the pandemic to serve grant participants. Taj Suleyman, City of Springfield Director of Diversity, Equity &

Inclusion (DEI) oversees DEI initiatives, develops and implements strategies and education programs throughout the CoS, and advances DEI dialog. Taj will be QRWA's lead champion of DEI to ensure grant services are delivered equitably and will utilize his multitude of partnerships with local CBOs, such as the International Institute, to provide referrals to QRWA. Taj's ability to recruit and provide outreach and education to grant partners will effectively facilitate DEI efforts across all grant-related industries. **City of Springfield Mayor and City Council-In** October of 2021, City Council approved CoSWFD to apply for this grant as the lead entity. The Mayor and City Council have prioritized Economic Vitality and support the efforts of QRWA to strengthen Springfield's ability to enhance education and workforce development, close skill gaps, to provide a sustainable economic climate that fosters low poverty, and to provide wage levels that allow the opportunity for people to participate in quality-of-life endeavors. **Southern Missouri Council of Governments (SMCOG)**, representing seven counties located within the QRWA region, has prepared a regional comprehensive Economic Development Program as a part of forming an EDD in southwest Missouri. Communities in rural counties that are both members of SMCOG and the EDD will have the opportunity to participate in other locally initiated economic development programs. SMCOG's role in QRWA is to provide information on the region's current CEDS in regularly scheduled meetings to **ensure key government entities are aligned with QRWA's strategies and sustainability plan**. SMCOG will promote area-wide dissemination of information regarding issues and problems and provide technical and advisory services for community betterment. **JFF** is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. They will support the following: labor market analysis & training, asset mapping, sector partnership planning and implementation, employer engagement, provide recommendations for possible education and training models to expand career pathways, and evaluation of QRWA participant outcomes and system changes by capturing feedback from employers, key partners, and participants. Throughout the project, JFF will offer sustainability planning recommendations and support QRWA by ensuring alignment of grant goals and key activities during regional partner meetings. At the end of the project JFF will create an Economic Impact Report showing a return-on-investment that illustrates QRWA's economic benefits provided to the region.

Section 3: Regional Description

QRWA's grant service area will encompass **fifty-one counties** within four of Missouri's 14 LWDB regions including: Ozark, Central, South Central, and Southeast, containing 28%¹ of Missouri's total population.

QRWA's workforce development regions encompass the following **eight EDA EDDs**: [Southwest Missouri Council of Governments](#), [South Central Ozark Council of Governments](#), [Ozark Foothills Regional Planning Commission](#), [Bootheel Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission](#), [Southeast Missouri Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission](#), [Meramec Regional Planning Commission](#), [Lake of the Ozarks Council of Local Governments](#) and [Mid-Missouri Regional Planning Commission](#).



¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/missouri-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

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Centralized within the United States and connected by waterways, airports, and three major thoroughfares, QRWA will encompass **14 Persistent Poverty Counties**. Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) statistics indicate that **16.6%** of the grant service area is comprised of individuals in poverty. Of QRWA's total regional workforce system, **86.3%** of the total county population of **1,705,585** reside in rural communities². The average per capita income for Missourians in 2020 was \$51,697 with the rural per capita income at \$40,018. The poverty rate of the QRWA grant service area is 16.5%, compared with 11.6% in urban areas of the state.³

QRWA's identified key industries are **healthcare, transportation and logistics, and educational services**.

Healthcare- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused detrimental and long-lasting impacts to the health care industry. MHA's 2021 state-wide report indicated the highest staff nurse vacancy in over 20 years with nearly 5,000 staff vacancies, of which LPNs reported highest. QRWA's Southeast and South Central LWDB regions, respectively, have the highest RN vacancy and turnover rates in Missouri. The need for QRWA to strengthen the regional LPN to RN bridge program is crucial. Missouri's pool of available nurses is at an all-time low and the number retiring, or nearing retirement, will only exacerbate the inability to staff the healthcare system.⁴ As noted above, CoxHealth has committed to engaging **1,235 QRWA** grant participants and has committed **nearly \$2,500,000** in leveraged funds to achieve this target. In 2020 CoxHealth hired 100 medical assistants and 92 LPNs, many trained through QRWA partners. In 2021, 123 medical assistants and 127 LPNs were hired with an anticipated increase annually proving evidence demand exists for QRWA participants. The needed occupations within QRWA's healthcare sector, identified by local employers, include medical and dental assistant, LPN, RN, medical lab technician, respiratory therapist, and surgical technician. Support from current partners have indicated the plan to establish and expand healthcare RAs. As employers are added to this grant collaborative, curriculum development will evolve to fit the needs of healthcare business openings.

TDL- Located in the center of the country, Springfield, Missouri is a transportation hub with numerous trucking terminals. In the Springfield metro area alone, the logistics sector provides an annual **economic impact of \$14.3 billion**. In 2021, the American Trucking Associations, Inc. projected the number of jobs available in America for commercially licensed drivers to be 80,000. TDL is listed as one of the top industries most common for apprenticeship opportunities. Data from OWD shows 173 active apprentices in the 28 CDL programs registered in Missouri. 434 individuals have completed these apprenticeship programs. In addition to CDL, diesel mechanics are in demand to ensure Missouri truck drivers remain active with safe and adequate transportation means. QRWA will utilize partnerships with the Office of Apprenticeship, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and OWD to bring targeted individuals from our grant service area to the transportation industry, creating a scalable sectoral partnership that promotes best practices to serve a progressive and diverse trucking workforce.

Educational Services- According to the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, more than 30% of Missouri parents have left or not taken a job in the last year because of childcare. Missouri's economy is down more than \$1.3 billion for due to childcare issues.⁵ Parents who previously relied on before- and after-school programs across the country are now faced with drastically

² <https://health.mo.gov/living/families/ruralhealth/pdf/biennial2015.pdf>

³ <https://www.Census.gov>

⁴ <https://web.mhanet.com/media-library/2021-workforce-report/>

⁵ <https://fox2now.com/news/missouri-parents-leaving-workforce-due-to-lack-affordability-of-childcare/>

reduced program enrollment availability and are resorting to emergency childcare facility options or removing themselves from the workforce. QRWA will attach this challenge head on by offering substitute teacher certification that will prepare substitute teachers to staff before- and after-school programs in the local public schools. In many regions of the state, public PreK-12 schools are the largest employers, most facing critical staff shortages. In response to this challenge, last fall, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education gave the option of a 20-hour online certification course, replacing the previous 60 college-level credit hours requirement. **Penmac Staffing** has committed to placing 100 substitute teachers throughout the grant service area.

QRWA will also offer participants the opportunity to earn an industry recognized certification through MSU's available **Pathways for Paraprofessionals (Pathways)** program. MSU has committed to training at least 200 apprentices. Pathways is a U.S. Department of Labor RA program which helps apprentices successfully complete their teacher certification while working in public school settings. It has been designed to support individuals employed within the school district but trapped in low-paying positions with little possibility of advancement. Successful apprentices will be able to complete their teacher education degree and immediately increase their wages while addressing the national teacher shortage. By partnering with strong training providers and employers in the educational services industry, QRWA will provide a pathway to those seeking employment as substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, elementary and secondary educators, and special education instructors to address the widespread shortage and availability of childcare service and educators exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Target Population- QRWA will target residents within the proposed service area who are unemployed, underemployed, or incumbent workers in low-skilled jobs with a focus on veterans, military spouses, transitioning service members, disconnected youth, individuals in recovery, individuals with past criminal records including justice-impacted and reentry participants, historically underserved populations and areas, communities of color, women, individuals with disabilities, and individuals participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Women, Infants, and Children Program.

CEDS Alignment- The most significant regional need and priority according to the CEDS is workforce development. QRWA understands that a focus on workforce development will facilitate a multi-region alliance that begins and continues the communication process that will ultimately create a pipeline of skilled workers and revitalize Missouri's communities and economy. While needs across the regions vary, it is evident that local governments representing QRWA counties share the same vision: Attract and retain a skilled workforce and increase effective communication and marketing of employment and training opportunities amongst regional partners and to the public. Upon development of QRWA's priorities and goals, CoSWFD staff met with SMCOG, reviewed individual CEDS summaries from each EDD located in the target service area, and ensured the alignment of grant objectives with the most pressing workforce priorities. Expanded partnership with additional Councils of Government will be pursued prior to the initiation of the Implementation Phase of this grant. The current CEDS in place for each EDD have yet to reflect the impacts of the pandemic and the rapid transition from record high unemployment in early 2020 to the record high worker shortage in 2022. However, we are certain that workforce concerns will continue to be a priority for decades and that the already existing barriers to employment such as lack of a skilled pipeline, lack of childcare and transportation, and the ever-changing environment of working remotely will only be exacerbated. QRWA will align with the CEDS by: promoting RAs, creating and offering

affordable tuition options and scholarships; connecting employers, training providers, and potential employees; creating collective awareness amongst employers about the employee-driven economy and providing inclusive work environments; promoting and leveraging LWDB and Missouri Job Center services; identifying and distributing new funding opportunities at local, state, and federal levels; and collecting accurate census data and efficiently disseminate opportunities and resources.

Section 4: Impacts of the Regional Workforce Training System

4a. Each LWDB region within QRWA is a part of Missouri’s public workforce system, comprised of a network of federal, state, and local government agencies that provide services to workers, job seekers, and employers. **Public workforce system funding has decreased drastically over the past decade and formula grants allocated to the states have declined by 40% since 2001⁶.** These cuts in addition to the workforce-related issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have required LWDB regions to seek innovate ways combine resources and partnerships. QRWA will expand the current regional workforce training system partnerships in place and complete the Program Design component within the first six months of the grant period of performance. **Strengths & Challenges-** Established partnerships as a whole is the greatest strength of QRWA, as CoSWFD and all committed subrecipients have decades of experience administering training and employment services. Leveraged sources totaling over **\$3.8 million** (see budget narrative for details), WIOA services throughout all regions, and local resources through the CoS also contribute to the strengths of QRWA. QRWA will rely heavily on these strengths to address the challenges that impact our current region including the heavy concentration of persistent poverty counties and lack of childcare throughout our grant service area. QRWA will utilize CBO partnerships to provide wraparound services needed to effectively address workforce challenges and move individuals from poverty to meaningful employment. Through training focusing on substitute teacher and paraprofessional certification, wraparound services to cover related childcare costs, and discussions at employer Lunch and Learn events to share best practices for alternative childcare solutions for employees, QRWA will address the challenges identified. In addition to the established partnerships illustrated in *section 2a*, QRWA begin official regional training workforce system meetings to expand and solidify employer commitments within the sectoral partnership in order to progress to the Program Implementation phase.

4b. Resilience and Recovery Investment Priority- In an effort to broaden local sectoral partnerships with **diversification** initiatives, QRWA’s project development and implementation strategies include programs that will **enhance business retention and expansion** in the industries of healthcare, TDL, and educational services. Comprehensive planning efforts will include expansion of the extensive leveraged support and **engagement from the community** as seen by documented commitment from QRWA CBO partners. QRWA will also leverage federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act and WIOA, in addition to state, local, and private sector resources throughout the grant service area. Each QRWA partner has defined and shared the collective vision for economic recovery and will implement programs along career pathways resulting in quality jobs. **Employer training in COVID-19 mitigation strategies, problem-solving skills**, remote work options, and alternative childcare/transportation solutions will build economic resilience and enable nimble operation in both crisis and non-crisis times. Grant participants will have access to courses through the OWD Coursera library and training providers will be counseled in integrating personal resilience skills (along with work readiness

⁶ <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/11102020-Modernizing-the-Public-Workforce-System-Memo-Public.pdf>

training) into their curricula. QRWA project staff and their partners will continuously monitor outcomes to adjust programs to address this priority.

Additionally, to address EDA's number one investment priority, QRWA will continue to advance **equity** through the expansive grant service area, containing 14 of the 19 persistent poverty counties in Missouri. Since 2019, DHEWD has released an annual "Equity in Missouri Higher Education Report", identifying gaps and disparities across postsecondary education and focused on three main themes: access to, progress through, and successful outcomes of postsecondary education. The 2021 report reflected that the most prevalent finding was affordability issues and costs impact all students, but there are certain groups that are more distinctly disadvantaged than others, particularly students of color and low-income students. These results support QRWA's focus on enrolling historically underserved populations and those who meet WIOA eligibility. QRWA's targeted approach to serving these populations and implementing innovative methods to address the childcare shortage will ensure that equity remains the focus for all grant participants.

The COVID-19 pandemic had caused a significant setback for women in the workforce. A 1% decrease of women working part-time instead of full-time has an economic impact of \$5 billion in wages being lost along with the loss of job benefits.⁷ In fact, according to the U.S. Labor Department, the ratio of women working has fallen below 57% for the first time since 1988.⁸ Women are unwillingly leaving the workforce four times more than men to fill the stereotypical parenting role **due to the lack of childcare caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.**⁹ The economic aftermath of **COVID-19 is responsible for the undoing of 25 years of progress**, potentially increasing the gender gap, and increasing the need for government aid and intervention. QRWA will leverage JFF's role as DOL's national DEI technical assistance provider to the apprenticeship system. The project will benefit from having access to these tools and resources in addressing this EDA priority. **Workforce Development-** QRWA will support EDA's workforce development priority through a comprehensive approach to understanding our employer partners' needs. Following a holistic assessment of participants education and supportive service needs, related professional training and wraparound services will strengthen the workforce development services provided throughout the service region. These efforts will result in increased opportunities for jobs that exceed the local prevailing wage for an industry in the region, include basic benefits and/or is unionized, and help the employee develop the skills and experiences to advance along a career path.

4c. Projected workers served, and job placements expected: QRWA projects to recruit/serve 2,836 individuals with 2,468 participants successfully completing the program. Together, QRWA's employer partners have committed to employ more than **1,970** participants trained under this grant. JFF will play a central role in employer engagement and technical assistance to QRWA to leverage employer partners' resources, perspective, and expertise. The training provider partnerships in place (as seen in Section **2b**) and the level of commitment for QRWA is assured. With combined commitment of training providers, QRWA have the capacity to greatly exceed the current level of open positions indicated by committed employers. QRWA's sole focus for the first six months of this grant is to utilize JFF to engage current and new employers

⁷ Center for American Progress. (2021, November 9). *How COVID-19 Sent Women's Workforce Progress Backward*. Retrieved from Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/covid-19-sent-womens-workforce-progress-backward/#:~:text=The%20collapse%20of%20the%20child,gender%20equity%20back%20a%20generation>

⁸ Gogoi, P. (2020, October 28). *Stuck-At-Home Moms: The Pandemic's Devastating Toll On Women*. Retrieved from NPR: *Stuck-At-Home Moms: The Pandemic's Devastating Toll On Women*

⁹ Liu, J. (2021, October 26). *Closing The Gap*. Retrieved from CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/26/nearly-2-in-3-women-who-left-the-workforce-during-covid-plan-to-return.html>

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and accumulate the necessary firm commitments to hire in order to match the supply that our training providers have committed. According to MERIC data, the projected number of jobs in 2028 within QRWA’s grant service and identified sectors is 70,067.¹⁰ MERIC and BLS statistics show highly in-demand “now, next, then” career pathways. The table below illustrates the regional projected number of jobs and progressive industry pathways in QRWA’s identified sectors.¹¹

Occupation	Projected Job Openings	Mean Hourly Wages	Mean Annual Salary	Career Path
Medical Assistants	2,654	\$16.13	\$33,540	Now
Dental Assistant	1,968	\$18.56	\$38,610	Next
LPN	5,789	\$21.39	\$44,490	Next
RN	21,486	\$31.68	\$65,900	Then
Substitute Teachers	3,260	\$16.74	\$34,820	Now
Teacher Assistant	5,494	\$12.84	\$26,710	Next
Special Education, Kindergarten, and	8,044	\$29.11*	\$58,210	Next
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	15,759	\$23.19	\$48,230	Next
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	5,613	\$21.16	\$44,010	Now
<i>**Wages for some occupations that do not generally work year-round, full time, are reported either as hourly wages or annual salaries depending on how they are typically paid.</i>				

QRWA will utilize the City of Springfield departments for administration and oversight of grant activities. In addition, QRWA LWDB regions will leverage WIOA funding to supplement additional participant costs, staffing, and wraparound services as needed. To support system development efforts, QRWA partners have leveraged RA opportunities from CoxHealth, MSU, and several other employers as well as “Let’s Get to Work”, a community funded transportation assistance program. Employer and training provider commitment letters validate additional leveraged resources as well as the wages, growth, benefits and commit to provide their expertise for curriculum development, implementation, and review. At regular grant meetings, QRWA staff will work closely with current and proposed employers to obtain and share current labor market information and to validate the wages, wage growth, and benefits of each organization. As employer partners expand, QRWA staff will only support onboarding employers that fit the Good Jobs Challenge criteria of providing quality jobs.

4d. QRWA is comprised of four LWDB regions, each with a long history of successful partnerships, community involvement, access to leveraged resources, and experience with case management and curriculum development. QRWA partners have also collaborated in the past to connect individuals with training and good job opportunities. This grant funding will not only strengthen and expand each of QRWA’s LWDB regions but will create a synergetic effect on the regional workforce system as a whole. Examples of similar past successes include the following: In 2014, CoSWFD began conducting industry-specific roundtables to engage employer partners, address current workforce needs, and provide information to training providers pertaining to the demand for specific industry recognized credentialing. To address the employer’s demand for positive community engagement, in 2018, Build My Future (BMF) was created and hosted 900

¹⁰ <https://meric.mo.gov/regional-profiles>

¹¹ <https://meric.mo.gov/mogov-search/results?search=now%20next>

students for a day of hands-on activities to shed light on meaningful career opportunities in the construction industry. BMF is now a non-profit organization running the largest events of its kind in the country with similar events replicated nationally. CoSWFD also held regional healthcare round tables discussing the lack of skilled workforce, prevalence of substance use, and capacity of training providers. In response, CoSWFD applied for and was granted a Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration H-1B America's Promise Grant which has currently provided over 425 participants the opportunity to gain needed healthcare credentials. Additionally, just one example of CoSWFD's successful past grant completions, WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Grant PY'18, reflects pre-pandemic performance measures resulting in with all goals met and/or exceeded and serving **421** participants. Results include **109%** of performance met for after exit employment, **159%** credential attainment rate, and **109%** median earnings rate.

With CoSWFD as the System Entity, QRWA will benefit from these experiences and successes and as well as their proven capacity to effectively manage federal grants. QRWA represents a low-risk high return on investment opportunity to address underserved communities through this Good Jobs Challenge grant.

4e. To ensure equitable services are provided to historically underserved populations, business owners, and communities, QRWA will expand current employer partnerships and target specific stakeholders to include minority- and women-owned businesses. Across the grant service area, out of 120,950 reported firms, women-owned firms make up only 33.9%, and minority-owned firms make up an alarming 6.2%.¹² Participation in QRWA will provide these stakeholders access to a skilled workforce and a voice in the community with training providers for curriculum development pertaining to their open positions. In addition, partnering with local area chambers of commerce allows these chambers to utilize the numbers of increased skilled workers to recruit new businesses to the grant service area allowing for additional jobs, higher wages, and increased opportunities for all residing in the communities.

QRWA's leveraged WIOA support ensures that the demographics of target participants will follow WIOA Title I eligibility, which includes individuals that are unemployed, underemployed, and youth in at-risk situations. WIOA priorities include a focus on serving historically underserved populations and communities. QRWA will provide targeted outreach and recruitment efforts to these populations through social media, grant webpage, and referrals from CBOs that serve our targeted demographic.

QRWA will serve and impact **2,836 participants** and their respective employers directly. This will allow for increased averaged household wages, decreased employer vacancies, and increased community economic growth which will create a rippling effect reaching not only the impacted participants, but the **1,807,826** individuals residing in the grant service areas indirectly impacted by the increase economic state. Nearly **50%** of Missouri's counties are included in QRWA's service region impacting all employers, training providers, and CBOs within this area. As shown in section **2a.** and in attached partner letters, approximately **1,970** quality job placements have already been committed. Considering the employer partner expansion prior to Program Implementation, the total number of quality job placements committed will increase to meet QRWA's proposed quality jobs placements of 2,168 and projected wages for jobs, size of credibly projected income gains, and number of new quality jobs will be finalized.

Section 5: Funding Request and Program Design and Implementation

5a. Funding request

¹² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>

Completing Program Design- \$2,000,000, **Estimated Program Implementation-** \$15,500,000
Cost per participant: \$6,171

5b. QRWA system development and the majority of Program Design are in place and upon notice of funding, Program Design will be completed within six months. QRWA's focus for the first six months of the project is to verify our implementation plan and conduct additional employer outreach to meet or exceed our goal of recruiting, training, and placing 2,836 individuals into *good* jobs.

Program Design First 3 months: Employer Engagement and Curriculum Development-The QRWA system lead entity grant management staff and QRWA's LWDB region Directors, with the support of JFF, will develop comprehensive strategies for engaging employers throughout the term of the project. This will include launching and sustaining an employer leadership committee, identifying additional employer champions, enhancing postsecondary providers' capacity to address employers' skill and hiring needs, bolstering roles for employers in program design and curriculum development, and enhancing staffing structures and capacity for effectively working with employers. During these first three months, QRWA will identify opportunities to expand existing and create new registered apprenticeship programs while building recruitment strategies to better connect to a more diverse population of youth and adults. A priority of the project will be supporting the adoption of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility strategies in apprenticeship programs including Equal Employment Opportunity planning for employers. QRWA will leverage JFF's expertise in apprenticeship and implementing DEI strategies during this period. QRWA grant management staff will meet monthly with backbone organizations and JFF to unify and consolidate data pertaining to the newly acquired employer commitments and expanded apprenticeships, discuss progress towards program implementation, and track progress against project milestones. **Program Design 3-6 months: Increase Employer Commitment, Outreach and Recruitment-** QRWA will develop grant specific policy and procedure manuals and continue to compose the region's comprehensive plan for building, launching, and sustaining QRWA's sector strategy in healthcare, TDL, and educational services. QRWA project staff will receive support from JFF to conduct this planning. The project team and partners will continue to explore and confirm their vision and goals for the strategy, propose key components, (e.g., potential funding for local partnerships, policy support, a structure for providing ongoing technical assistance), and co-develop the critical steps and timeline. QRWA staff with assistance from JFF will gather input from key regional stakeholders, including private sector partners, to inform this plan and provide technical assistance and coaching to backbone organizations as they begin to convene employers and stakeholders and transition to the Program Implementation phase.

QRWA and the backbone organizations will begin virtual monthly meetings for each of the identified industry partnerships. Each LWDB region within QRWA will be responsible for recruiting, assessing for eligibility, and enrolling participants into the program.

CoS Public Information Office will work with grant staff to develop an outreach plan to be individualized throughout the economic region, focusing on specific subpopulations. This outreach plan will link citizens to the specific grant website serving as the "front page" for the grant and allow individuals to submit applications for participation in grant-funded activities. The user-friendly website will be built with features that route the applications to their appropriate region for enrollment. Utilizing these virtual outreach tools allows participants safe access to services, which is especially important during the current COVID-19 pandemic. QRWA grant staff will work with schools to receive referrals from high school graduates who

Project Narrative

have not been connected to post-secondary opportunities and utilize community outreach programs to recruit recipients from nonprofit organizations. QRWA will also align our outreach efforts with regional non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, colleges, and universities whose missions align with serving our regional workforce training system as well as garnering assistance from companies and nonprofit partners that celebrate diversity, champion equity, and cultivate inclusion within the regional workforce system's business community. In addition, each LWDB will direct efforts towards our target populations through WIOA programs, Adult Education and Literacy, and partner program populations to promote meaningful and strategic outreach to diverse and minority populations.

Program Implementation: Continual Recruitment and Enrollment- Each LWDB will screen participant applications to determine eligibility and complete enrollment. Enrolled participants will then be assessed following grant specific policies and guidelines to identify strengths and barriers as well as educational capacities. Potential assessments include but are not limited to the following: National Career Readiness Certificate, Tests of Base Education, Talify, or others detailed in the grant specific assessment policy. For individuals seeking tuition assistance for occupational skills training, grant staff will select an appropriate assessment based on length and level of training to evaluate a participant's competency to complete the training and/or interest level in selected training. Individuals seeking RA opportunities will complete an assessment to ensure appropriate job matching with an employer. Each eligible participant will be provided labor market information related to each industry. Utilizing the results of these assessments, an individualized employment plan will be developed to determine short- and long-term goals as related to training and employment. This process will be tailored to consider individual goals and required job competencies to place individuals into the appropriate education and training program. QRWA has developed a comprehensive strategy based on human-centered design principles to guide participants through all stages of the program. The strategy-driven pathway includes training options ultimately leading to industry-recognized credentials on multiple scales. QRWA's currently committed employers have contributed to the curriculum design and development for each sector based on available job openings. QRWA's training providers listed in section **2b**. have committed to offering the following curricula to grant participants based on employer commitment to hire: **Healthcare-** medical and dental assistant, LPN, RN, medical lab technician, respiratory therapist, surgical technician; **Transportation-** CDL, auto/diesel mechanics, OSHA forklift certification, and warehouse training; and **Educational Services-** substitute teacher certification, paraprofessional RA leading to teaching certificate.

As additional employers join QRWA's initiatives, curriculum design and development will expand to meet regional demand. Through a targeted approach, a combination of tuition assistance and apprenticeship opportunities will be provided to individuals to enable them to gain the skills and competencies required to enter good quality jobs along a career pathway in the identified sectors. To facilitate the inclusion of lower-skilled and disadvantaged workers, among the training opportunities offered, several pathways allow participants to begin at entry-level, ensuring assistance can be provided to those lacking educational prerequisites or related work experience. **Program Implementation Year 2: Placement Efforts-** Of the 2,836 QRWA total participants enrolled, 87% (2,468) will complete training, and 76% (2,168) will be placed into good quality jobs. Following completion of the occupational skills training programs, each participant will continue to receive intensive services from grant staff to continue addressing any wraparound services needed to address barriers to entering unsubsidized employment.

Simultaneously, grant staff will reach out to committed employers of QRWA to ensure the

participant matched with open job positions. Similarly, the participants interested in entering directly into registered apprenticeship opportunities will work with grant staff to be paired with QRWA employers who have established programs in the participant's identified career pathway.

Program Implementation Year 3: Follow Up-Following the placement into unsubsidized employment, participants will receive 12 months of regular contact and follow-up services including job coaching, wraparound services, and referrals. During this time, QRWA will continue to work with JFF to compile data for the completion of the QRWA grant survey that will reflect return on investment results. Utilizing these results, QRWA will be able to focus on areas of the grant that demonstrated the highest levels of success. This data will be used as outreach to local employers and CBOs that have provided leveraged funding for the grant, to fundraise for the sustainability of the QRWA projects.

5c. In the identified grant service area, the most pressing **barriers** to worker participation are childcare and transportation which are both acute in the rural areas to be served by this grant. In response, QRWA has begun working with community partner agencies and currently has obtained **commitment to provide transportation assistance to participants in the amount of \$30,000**. Each subcontracted LWDB has also leveraged WIOA funding which can be utilized to provide additional wrap-around support. In addition to the aforementioned services, this grant funding will allow QRWA participants access to a robust wrap-around support system throughout their education and training experience. Types of supportive services offered include, but are not limited to, transportation, childcare, housing, work tools and clothing assistance following the grant-specific supportive service policy, and *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards*. As QRWA partners are well-versed in the administration of similar education and training grant programs, systems are in place to ensure each enrolled participant is supported throughout their participation in grant services. Intensive case management services will ensure that grant participants are contacted regularly in an effort to provide any needed job coaching, financial literacy information, work readiness activities and workshops to address barriers to employment such as reporting legal convictions on an application, computer/financial literacy, career exploration, resume assistance, interviewing, and referrals to community agencies. This intensive case management support, along with QRWA's strong base of CBOs, and available supportive services will be offered to grant participants after completion of training and throughout the follow-up period in order to mitigate the impact of potential barriers.

Sustainability. QRWA will coordinate with JFF's Research and Analytics Unit as mentioned in section **1b.** to examine participant costs, track labor market outcomes analysis capacity, and provide ROI insights related to how the initiative is impacting labor force needs in targeted occupations. These findings will help inform sustainability strategies to ensure the services and partnerships developed and expanded through this grant continue. QRWA will summarize grant accomplishments in a final report highlighting key findings for the QRWA stakeholders and for reference to guide future investments. QRWA, with the assistance of JFF, will leverage their experience in extending and sustaining sector strategies and other workforce development efforts to broaden the reach of this project beyond the end of grant funding to ensure the QRWA regional workforce system is sustained once grant funds end.