



Initiative FAQs
Updated: May 8, 2023

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
AND COMMERCE





21st Century Techforce – Initiative FAQs

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1 FAQs relevant to Short-form and Stackable credentials

1.1 Application scope

Can we submit our application in Spanish?

Yes – you can submit your applications in English or Spanish.

Can we apply for both Short-form and Stackable credential grants?

Yes – you can apply for both grants.

Can we partner with American Universities like the University of Notre Dame?

Yes - we look favorably on partnerships that will enable accelerated progress in adopting and scaling innovative training programs.

However, we want to clarify that we want to drive impact for Puerto Rican students that can benefit from a short-form credential.

Our university system is comprised of three registered campuses comprised of individual UEIs -- can each campus apply to both initiatives?

Yes - so long as each campus has a plan to expand their computer science programs. However, if there are efficiencies in a joint application, that may improve the ROI on our investment. Our goal is to grow the number of skilled graduates entering with workforce with high quality training and we are open to multiple avenues for achieving that goal.

The project term is indicated as 12 months, starting in July 2023. Is this period intended to achieve the goal of having 400 additional graduates in Puerto Rico per year? Should execution, spending, and performance metrics (e.g., graduation and placements) all occur within this timeframe?

We aim to achieve a steady state goal of 400 additional graduates in Puerto Rico per year by 2026. This is the minimum impact we want to drive across all selected grantees. We encourage you to design proposals where execution, spending, and performance metrics (e.g., graduation, retention, and placement) are multi-year projections to help us understand the long-term impact and sustainability you will drive. The 12-month performance period describes the one-year implementation phase to stand-up your designed programs and/or curriculums.

No obligation of funds will be allowed before or beyond the grant period of performance. Any grant funds not expended during the grant agreement period shall be returned to the DEDC. Multi-year funding / spending



projections will help us understand what alternative investment sources you will leverage to sustain the program beyond the 12-month performance period.

Do the non-conflict of interest certification and the sworn statement count towards the 30-slide / 20 pages maximum submission?

No - these can be considered addendums or attachments to your proposal outside of the page/slide count.

Is there a specific format for the certification that all the information submitted in the proposal is correct (Section 3), and would it count toward the page/slide count?

No - there is no specific format for certification and signature that all the information submitted in the proposal is true and accurate. It can be considered an addendum or attachment to your proposal outside of the page/slide count.

Do the financial statements for the past two years need to be audited statements?

No - your submitted financial statements do not need to be audited if they are not available. If you have audited financial statements, please include those in your application.

1.2 Funds & finances

Do the funds need to be used from July 2023 to July 2024?

Yes - please provide a projected expense timeline with rationales to help us understand when best to disburse funds. Additionally, we will not reimburse you for expenses, so we appreciate your indication of when fund batches should be disbursed to pay for items in advance.

If there was a "funding extension" or if available funds were to increase, would there be an additional RFP?

This is not our plan at this time - while there may be additional Grant Application Guidelines on similar topics, we do not anticipate that funding and additional funding-related to this Grant Application will require additional proposals. DEDC has the right to flexibly increase the amount of funding available as part of this Grant Application as well.

Would an example of the use of funds be upgrading current facilities and buying chairs, tables, and computers for the classrooms?



Yes - you would be able to use funds to invest in infrastructure or equipment so long as you can prove that it will facilitate expanded student / employee capacity so we can grow the number of high-quality technical graduates in Puerto Rico.

Can the funds be used for OpEx / SG&A expenses? For example, to hire a local team in Puerto Rico to execute the project.

Yes - you can use funding for use cases that will directly help you expand the capacity of and improve your short-form credential program(s).

Examples include but are not limited to scholarships, funding for faculty / teams, marketing / brand awareness, paying for co-ops / internships, or equipment/systems support. We would encourage you to describe how the proposed investment is catalytic and sustainable, though, so if you are using funds for SG&A expenses, we would want to ensure that you can sustain higher enrollment numbers once these funds are depleted. If you are using grants to hire faculty or local teams, please describe you would fund these roles in the longer-term and why this Grant would be catalytic to your operations.

Will the grant funding amount be divided into two disbursements, one in July 2023 and another in January 2024, as mentioned in the Important Dates, or are those just guidelines, and disbursements will be based on the provider's work plan?

No - dates related to funding are suggestions. As mentioned in Section 4.6 Payment Terms & Methods, funding will be awarded in multiple payments (first funding batch when the Grant is awarded, additional installments at agreed upon later dates dependent on your anticipated expense timeline, timely/complete monthly reporting on progress/KPIs and on-track status with outlined work plan)

One of the evaluation criteria is co-investment. Can you share more information on how that criterion will be evaluated? Will it be during the funding program or after the funding program?

Resources committed during or after the program funds are disbursed are eligible for consideration as co-investment and will be assessed as part of the evaluation process. The co-investment criteria aim to ensure that funding is catalytic and creates long-term change.

An indicator of "strong" co-investment would include thorough plans for sustaining the program once grant funds are depleted. We want to ensure the Proponent is considering the longevity of an investment in expanding short-form credential programs. Additionally, a "strong" proposal will provide details on additional resources and co-investment that can be provided by its partner ecosystem, where applicable.

This will just be one factor across multiple, and it will be assessed relative to the other strengths of the proposal.



Can the provider continue charging for its offerings, or does the grant require providing the courses for free to the participants?

Yes - the provider can continue charging for its offerings and there is no expectation that courses be provided for free. The fund is designed to support sustainable business models that can ultimately help to train thousands of Puerto Ricans per year and we recognize that an earned revenue model will be important for many providers. However, we will of course assess accessibility to students and market demand for programs at particular price points.

Can we use funds to contract professors? Offer students scholarships? Pay for co-ops or internships? Cover the infrastructure costs for equipment and systems?

Yes - you can use funding for use cases that will directly help you expand the capacity of and improve your short-form credential program(s).

Examples include but are not limited to scholarships, funding for faculty, marketing / brand awareness, paying for co-ops / internships, or equipment/systems support. We would encourage you to describe how the proposed investment is catalytic and sustainable, though, so if you are using funds for scholarships, we would want to ensure that you can sustain higher enrollment numbers once these funds are depleted.

Can we use funds to hire tutors and student mentors? Can we use funds to upskill faculty?

Yes - you can use funding for use cases that will directly help you expand the capacity of and improve your short-form credential program(s). That includes hiring faculty, tutors, and student mentors if there will be return on investment.

You must also have a clear plan for how to pay faculty, tutors, and student mentors in a steady state after funds have been disbursed and the pilot is implemented.

Can I use the funding on marketing campaigns?

Yes - you are welcome to use funding on marketing campaigns. However, we are striving for long-term sustainability of programs. You will need to demonstrate how a one-time injection of marketing funds will lead to a long-term and sustainable impact on enrollment and retention / graduation.

1.3 Submission requirements

We project that we can increase graduation classes to a total of 100 students per year. Is that the step change you are looking for?



Yes - we would like to encourage all providers to be bold and ambitious – but realistic - in their scale projections. We would love to see proposals that project impact in the 100s or 1000s of students or employees in technical careers / tracks

Do I need to have the program accredited by June 5th?

No - we are only looking for your proposal and approach to accrediting your program, we do not expect that accreditation would have happened

Do we need a letter of commitment from a leadership?

Yes - please submit a letter of commitment from senior leadership to ensure a promise of continued investment and sustainment. If you have a Chancellor, please include a letter of commitment from your Institution's Chancellor.

Do we need letters of commitment for partnerships?

No - they are not required but we would strongly encourage them where possible. It will ensure proposal robustness.

Can I send you a hard copy over the mail?

No - to ensure timeliness of submission deadlines, we would appreciate email submissions.

Can I get a deadline extension?

No - unfortunately, we cannot offer extensions. We are evaluating several applications and would like to ensure the selection process is as timely and fair as possible.

What are the components that we should include in the application?

Please refer to [Section 3.0 Application Package Instructions](#) for information on application guidelines.

Where and how do I submit my application?

Please submit your Proposal via email to the following DEDC email address: 21stcentury@ddec.pr.gov



What are the key dates in the application process?

Please refer to [Section 5.1 Important Dates & Deadlines](#) for a list of application milestones.

Do you have examples of in-scope roles and skills?

Yes - please refer to [Attachment D](#) in the Grant Application Guidelines for a list of priority roles and skills.

What is the purpose or value of registering for WIOA’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)?

Registering for WIOA’s Eligible Training Provider List gives training providers, Institutions, and employers the ability to access Federal WIOA grants that can be leveraged to scale and sustain your short-form credential programs. You can also receive access to WIOA’s broader ecosystem of resources, best practices, and communities.

How important is it to have an established presence in Puerto Rico at the time of submission? For instance, working with local employers.

We will not disqualify proposals if the proponent does not have an established presence in Puerto Rico. We would encourage you to submit applications that propose engagement with a robust partner ecosystem, regardless of local, national, or global presence. We do encourage applicants to partner with local employers, if possible, to help improve socioeconomic outcomes in Puerto Rico.

Is there a specific weight assigned to the listed criteria, or are they all considered equally important?

We will evaluate the quality of your proposals holistically. However, we encourage you to be as comprehensive as possible across all evaluation criteria to understand the relative strengths of your proposal’s components.

What curriculum delivery models are in-scope for these grants?

We are open to all delivery models, including in-person, on-campus, online / virtual, or hybrid.

Can an organization bring its proposal to the technical assistance team to gain specific insight, or have it briefly evaluated by the team to see if it meets their interests?

Yes - you are welcome to leverage the Technical Assistance team as much as you would like. We would recommend 1x per week check-ins for feedback as you build out your proposal



Will you be hosting webinars on the Stackable / Short-form credential programs?

We held Q&A Webinars on the Stackable and Short-form credential grant applications on Friday, May 5th. You can find the recordings on the DEDC website. If you require additional 1:1 support, we recommend you sign up for Technical Assistance. The deadline to register for Technical Assistance is May 10 and you can register below:

- [Registration form for Stackable Credentials](#)
- [Registration form for Short-form Credentials](#)

What format does our submission need to be in?

A maximum of 30 slides in PowerPoint or 20 pages in Word will be accepted. Applicants have the flexibility to decide how they want to distribute up to 30 slides or 20 pages.



2 Short-form credentials

2.1 Application scope

We would like your guidance on how to handle our proposal. If we respond to the short form certification RFP, will there be room to discuss our larger proposal, or should we treat this proposal outside this RFP process?

We strongly encourage you to submit an RFP for the short-form credential Grant Application, and we would appreciate you being as robust as possible in describing the vision, scope, and outcomes. Perhaps, you present the 30,000-foot view of your vision and how the short-form credential program plays an enabling role.

We encourage you to register for Technical Assistance so we can help provide feedback on the scope and details of your Grant Application, as needed.

In Attachment D, are those the specific roles the grant is looking for, or can the provider suggest others?

These were the priority roles identified during our landscaping of the most in-demand roles Puerto Rico will need to generate.

That being said, if you have additional suggestions, we would love to identify them, understand why you are suggesting them, and your plan to help generate additional employees in that role.

My question is related to the definition of short-form credentials. In the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DECEP) we offer non-credit short courses and certificates in a variety of areas. I want to confirm if this grant includes these types of non-credit short-form credentials or if it refers to academic certificates (that include accredited classes).

Yes - the short-form credential grants include non-credit short-form credentials.

If your certificates are not accredited or credit-bearing, we recommend you develop a plan to ensure that they are of industry relevance and can meaningfully contribute to improving employment outcomes for students.

Lastly, there are alternatives to developing accreditation for short-form credentials. For instance, Google Career Certificates are accredited by the American Council on Education (ACE).

Do Data Analyst, Data Science, and Data Engineering roles qualify as in-scope?

Yes, you can propose courses / certificates that can help develop Data scientists, Data analysts, or Data Engineering roles and these are highly encouraged.

Are there specific certifications you are looking for?



No – we do not want to constrain your proposal to specific types of short-form credential, certification, and/or digital badges. Examples of certifications include but are not limited to provider-specific credentials; employer-specific badges; Google / AWS / LinkedIn badges or certificates; and/or a combination of all of the above.

The Key dates table on the DDEC website indicates an expected program launch date of "Año Académico 2024-25". In the grant guide, under Project term, section 4.2 "the anticipated implementation start date is July 2023". Can you clarify the difference?

By July 2023 we hope selected grantees can start operationalizing their designed programs. This phase can include but is not limited to implementing course redesign, developing new course modules / materials, defining and tracking implementation performance indicators / milestones, and prepping for the full program launch.

Academic launch dates listed are target dates for selected grantees to go-live with their designed programs with enrolled students.

If we are ready to launch sooner, can we? (Expected launch: October 2023)

Yes - if the applicant's Institution is already ready to launch your first pilot / cohort of professional certificate courses prior to Fall 2024, we would welcome faster implementation. We would work with you to ensure that we have the appropriate performance metrics, dashboarding, and governance mechanisms in place to track rollout success.

2.2 Funds & finances

Last week it was presented that the 21st Century Techforce project had a \$50M allocation, and we noticed a grant of \$3M for the Short Form credential RFP and \$1.4M for stackable credentials RFP. Is the remaining \$45.6M divided by other initiatives or will it be for the Short Form & Stackable Credentials through a specific period (10 years)?

Prior fiscal plans allocated \$50 million for a 21st Century Technical and Business Education Fund. These \$50M will support multiple initiatives that will help us launch our five priority initiatives. They will not exclusively be used to support the Short-form and/or Stackable Credential initiatives.

Is \$500,000 the maximum amount of funds that will be awarded to individual companies? Or will applications requesting more than this threshold be considered?

We will consider proposals requesting additional funding. However, we would like you to help us understand what is possible with a grant that could be up to \$500,000. Additionally, we would encourage you to clarify what the incremental impact and scale would be if you had access to additional funding.



2.3 Submission requirements

Can we shape our proposal around shifting people from low-tech to high-tech jobs?

Yes – we are primarily interested in growing the tech labor force, and part of that may involve supporting people to transition from low-wage / low-tech to high-wage / high-tech jobs. We recommend being as thoughtful and aggressive with your projected outcomes.

While we do want to upskill Puerto Ricans to 21st Century roles, we also want to incrementally create net new graduates who otherwise would not have taken this path.

Under the Partnerships section, you reference an appendix on additional information for WIOA funds qualification. Is it the same information as the one accessed on the WIOA website through the link in that same section?

Please see Attachment E for additional details on WIOA and the Eligible Training Provider List.

Can the Program Coordinator (section 2.3) be a current employee? Is this coordinator the same individual as the key stakeholder described in section 3, V? Is specific project-management experience required? Is Project Management certification required for this individual?

Yes - the Program Coordinator can be a current employee. The program coordinator will ideally have a minimum of 3-5 years of experience in executing relevant programs but does not need to be specific project-management experience. Project Management certifications or degrees are not required. A track record of executing relevant programs is strongly encouraged.

Under Section 3, the key stakeholders referenced include a broader group of lead personnel that will be involved in the design and implementation of the short-form credential program.

Under Key Individuals, can you expand on what "engagement from faculty and employer partners" entails? How will that be measured or assessed?

We are looking for examples that faculty, employers, and other partners contributed to course design and will contribute to program execution in the future. Examples include but are not limited to number of faculty/employees interviewed to design courses, number of employer partners leveraged to understand industry relevance of designed courses, number of faculty willing to redesign syllabi and implement a new program, number of employer partners indicating interest in offering an internship / co-op, and/or number or employers willing to conduct guest lectures or lead classes.

This will just be one factor across multiple, and it will be assessed relative to the other strengths of the proposal.



3 Stackable credentials

3.1 Application scope

The grant application guidelines in part 2.1 "Respondent Eligibility", establishes as a requirement that the "respondent offers accredited Bachelors of CS degree". My question is if our institution meets this requirement with our mechatronics bachelor's degree. The mechatronics degree has an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and computer science.

Yes - the mechatronics Bachelor's degree mentioned would qualify as an accredited Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. It appears like an interdisciplinary approach would provide a foundation of Computer Science courses for you to build a stackable credential program off.

For Stackable credentials, can we expand the pathway to include graduate certificates and Master's degrees?

Our primary focus is creating stackable credential programs where students can receive a one-year certificate / credential, which could then feed into an Associate's degree and / or Bachelor's degree or lead to industry employment placements. While this could then flow into post-graduate courses our primary focus is on getting people who complete 1-2 years of education a market-recognized certification to improve their employability (and ensure they learn high-value skillsets within the first 1-2 years of their post-secondary education).

Are you open to a stackable professional certificate model that could be converted to academic credits in either an undergraduate or Master's program? Practitioners interested first in a professional certificate, undergraduate students, BA/BS alumni wanting to increase their computer science skills, people interested in graduate programs in computer science, individuals who want to develop technical certifications in a broader context, with deeper understanding of the technology and issues. This approach is highly compliant with the stated program metric for "individuals re-skilled".

Based on the use cases listed, we highly encourage you to apply to the Short-form Credentials Grant. For the Stackable Credential program, we are envisioning shorter-form credentials that build on or supplement each other on the pathway to a bachelor's degree.

However, the use cases listed (i.e., practitioners interested in professional certificates, BA/BS alumni wanting to increase computer science skills, etc.) are highly relevant for the Short-form Credential grant.

If you have concepts that can apply to both Stackable and Short-form credentials, we encourage you to apply to both initiatives or put forth one proposal but note that your proposal is relevant for both initiatives.

We could be ready to launch the first cohort of professional certificate courses by January 2024 -barring unforeseeable regulatory details- instead of waiting until the fall 2024 term. Would you be OK with an early start on our part?



Yes - if the applicant's Institution is already ready to launch your first pilot / cohort of professional certificate courses prior to Fall 2024, we would welcome faster implementation. We would work with you to ensure that we have the appropriate performance metrics, dashboarding, and governance mechanisms in place to track rollout success.

The main sponsor university is a well-known university system in PR. We will also include an IT company partner from a different country that also has a corporate presence in the US and that is exclusively represented for doing business in PR by another IT PR-based company. Would that business relationship suffice to comply with our international partner's respondent eligibility?

Yes - however, we strongly encourage applicants to identify the most robust and relevant partner ecosystems they can. Partner ecosystems will be evaluated based on quality of partnerships, opportunities for employment for students, resources provided, and/or long-term sustainability of co-investment and support.

Please note, partners do not need to be international but can be based in Puerto Rico or elsewhere.

The list of Priority Roles to Develop does not include data scientists nor artificial intelligence-specific roles, even though AI and Machine Learning are listed among your list of High-Demand Skills within Priority Roles. Please clarify if we can propose an AI-specific Priority Role.

Yes, you can propose courses / certificates that can help develop Data Scientists or Artificial Intelligence-specific roles and these are highly encouraged.

3.2 Funds & finances

Can we use funds to hire technical specialists, such as laboratory technicians or language specialists?

Yes - you can use funding for use cases that will directly help you expand the capacity of and improve your short-form credential program(s).

However, you must present a clear plan and rationale for how the funds will lead to improved student outcomes. It must be clear how funding technical specialists will lead incrementally to additional students graduating with 21st Century Skills and entering 21st Century jobs.

You must also have a clear plan for how to pay these technical specialists in a steady state after funds are disbursed and the pilot is implemented.

Can we use funds to hire Project Managers and/or Project Management services?



This is allowable, but a clear link must be provided between onboarding Project Managers and expanding the capacity of your short-form credential program in a sustainable way. We would need to understand how these positions will be funded once this initial injection of capital is depleted.

Can we use funds to hire Career Advisors and/or Career/Employer Relations Liaisons?

Yes - if you can develop a plan explaining how access to additional Career Advisors and/or Career/Employer Relations Liaisons can increase the number of students graduating into 21st Century jobs or serve as a recruitment mechanism for your Stackable credential program.

Can we use funds to purchase equipment and software?

Yes - you would be able to use funds to invest in infrastructure or equipment so long as you can prove that it will facilitate expanded student / employee capacity.

Can we use funds to cover infrastructure costs, including facilities and labs?

Yes - you would be able to use funds to invest in infrastructure or equipment so long as you can prove that it will facilitate expanded student / employee capacity.

3.3 Submission requirements

Is it a requirement for curricular revisions to have the approval of the Junta de Instituciones Postsecundarias (JIP)? Those processes take time.

Yes - we would like programs to have JIP approval. However, **we do not need JIP approval by June 5th**. Part of your longer-term implementation roadmap should include this approval.

Should those processes [obtaining JIP approval] be included as part of the launch work plan?

Yes - please include information on your accreditation / JIP approval process as part of your work plan. We want to ensure you are considering the end-to-end implications of the project rollout.

Because our Bachelor's degree is new and will start in September 2023, we are not able to provide retention and graduation rates. I want to confirm if we are still eligible to submit our proposal.

Yes - you are still eligible. Please include retention and graduation rate figures for existing degrees or programs that are similar (within your institution) to use as a benchmark.



4 K – 12 Connection Lighthouses

Are you soliciting proposals? When will the proposal be available? What is the proposal timeline?

We are not opening an RFP for the K-12 Career Lighthouse initiative. Instead, we are working with PRDE to identify K-12 schools in Puerto Rico to set up the pilot programs. We will post regular updates related to the K – 12 initiative on the DEDC website.

Is the K-12 program directly geared to schools? Or can it be for an entity that can group and manage schools? Is the grant for each individual school or per grade? What is K-12 Program's reach?

The K-12 Lighthouse program is geared directly to K-12 Puerto Rican schools. We want to disburse grants directly to the schools and not an entity that manages or coalesces them.

The Grant can be given to public or private K-12 schools based in Puerto Rico. We will post regular updates related to the K – 12 initiative on the DEDC website.



5 Talent Accelerator

What are you referring to when you say, "world-class talent"? When you are referring to technology, what are you describing? There are thousands of technologies that are available, and each company has their own preferred stack, please be more specific.

By "world-class-talent" we want to communicate that the talent generated in Puerto Rico will be able to compete for top local, regional, national, and international positions across all 21st Century Jobs

In Attachment D of the Short-form and Stackable Grant Application Guidelines, we list the priority digital roles and skills we are looking to develop. These were the priority roles / skills identified during our landscaping of the most in-demand roles Puerto Rico will need to generate.

That said, if you have additional suggestions, we would love to identify them, understand why you are suggesting them, and your plan to help generate additional employees in that role or with those skills.

Employer feedback will be critical in any training provider developing the right curriculum to meet industry needs and we encourage proposals to incorporate systems / processes for securing this feedback to ensure that "technology" training and industry technology needs are well aligned. We will post regular updates related to the Talent Accelerator initiative on the DEDC website.



6 Quick Start

Can you provide more context on the Quick Start Grant Application? Where does the one-stop-shop need to be housed? What is the amount of grant allocation? Desired scope, goals, and outcomes? Does the Quick Start proposal need to be virtual or physical? Which industries, employers, and roles are in-scope?

There is no open grant application process for Quick Start at this time and further details will be provided when relevant. We will post regular updates to the Quick Start initiative on the DEDC website.