



People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources

PODER's "One Job at a Time" Job Readiness PROJECT/PROGRAM PURPOSE

The program's goals include preparing low-income job seekers to be able to qualify and compete for entry-level positions in the demand occupations found in their respective labor force areas. According to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, the shift from goods-producing to service-industry employment continues. Thus, although the job market is still tight, the number of consumer-oriented jobs continues to increase. These are the types of jobs that require customer service and work readiness skills which this project will offer through the National Work Readiness Credential training, National Retail Federation Customer Service certificate training and various workshops. The FDIC's Money Smart curriculum will be used to provide financial literacy training so they can start taking charge of their finances and creating a better financial future. In the last few years while the country has been in the midst of the Great Recession and its aftermath, one keeps hearing numbers being thrown left and right until one gets desensitized and no longer puts a face to the numbers. One of the goals of this project, One Job at a Time, is to treat each participant as an individual whose life story is unique and special. The unemployment crisis has to be dealt with one person at a time and one job at a time. PODER proposes a two-year project to help at least 50 job seekers annually in the 78741 and 78744 zip code to prepare for an entry-level position in the City of Austin and Travis County. All participants will receive the following face-to-face workforce training, sequentially:

1) National Work Readiness Credential: A four-week, 10-hour per week curriculum called Ready to Work prepared and made available at no cost by the workforce investment board FloridaWorks will be used to train participants to test for the National Work Readiness Credential (NWRC), the first national, standards-based assessment for entry-level workers to provide a universal, transferable and national standard for work readiness and soft skills. The training will be provided by project staff. The curriculum is based on the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Standards Framework which is used by other such programs so that the trainers/instructors have information on how to help entry-level job seekers develop the skills and knowledge to meet the standards of the NWRC. Possession of an NWRC demonstrates to a prospective employer that the job applicant has the knowledge and skills required for meaningful performance as an entry-level worker. The NWRC addresses the following eight skills that have been identified by businesses from across industries as critical for entry-level workers to succeed in the workplace and the global economy: 1) listen actively 2) solve problems and make decisions 3) cooperate with others 4) resolve conflicts and negotiate 5) observe critically 6) take responsibility for learning 7) read with understanding and 8) use math to solve problems. The score on the exam is either "work ready" or "needs more skill development to be work ready". The latter ones will be re-trained on the module missed. Trainers will use classroom face-to-face teaching, multi-media presentations, speakers, and online instruction to present the information in an interesting manner that produces positive results.

2) National Retail Federation Customer Service credential: The NRF's Customer Service

and Sales Skills Standards curriculum will be used to teach the following four functions which are addressed in the exam: 1) learn about products and services 2) assess customer needs 3) educate customers, and 4) meet customers' needs and provide ongoing support. The NRF developed the Customer Service and Sales Skills Standards curriculum in coordination with the Sales and Service Voluntary Partnership, the National Skill Standards Board, and more than 800 U.S.-based companies. These industry-developed standards identify what employees need to know and be able to do in entry-level thru first-line supervisor customer service and sales positions at high performance workplaces. This credential can serve as the initial pathway for those seeking employment in retail. For those who choose the retail industry as their career pathway and ladder, there are other higher level certifications and credentials that can be pursued either individually or through future employers.

3) Financial Literacy Training: The project will use the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's (FDIC) Money Smart curriculum to train the participants on how to manage their finances while at the same time building wealth. The FDIC is an independent agency created by the U.S. Congress to maintain stability and public confidence in the nation's financial systems. The curriculum, which is free of charge, includes 11 modules on topics such as banking services, borrowing basics, budgeting, saving and building wealth, credit, homeownership, and others. The training will be provided face-to-face both by project staff and representatives from the banking industry and other agencies.

4) GED

Since even most entry-level jobs across all industries, except maybe construction and agriculture, require a high school diploma or equivalency, those participants who lack a high school diploma or equivalency such as a GED will be referred and assisted thru such programs at Austin Community College, Southwest Keys and La Fuente. Therefore, participants are projected to be enrolled in either an accredited online high school program or in a GED preparation program while also participating in the NRF, NWRC, and Financial Literacy training.

Other components of One Job at a Time include: job counseling; job development and referrals; Job Club, follow up, and wraparound services to include referrals to "Dress for Success" and other similar groups for participants who have a documented need for work-attire for an interview and/or a first job. Other wraparound services such as child care, housing assistance, emergency food, drug counseling and other specialized counseling, health coverage and other services to remove barriers to success will be sought from local resources such as the housing authorities, United Way, Catholic Charities, federal health programs, food banks and pantries, etc. and through other workforce programs such as the ones offered via the one-stop centers. All of the ten proposed sites operate one-stop centers or similar operations and have been in the community for decades so they have built a network of partnerships for wraparound services.

Although these options may not meet the demand occupation list for each respective labor market, certification can provide ancillary benefits and skills in other job areas.. An entry level job is defined as one that is non-supervisory, non-managerial, and non-professional. It may be an unskilled OR skilled position where the job-specific skills and tasks can be learned while the worker is on the job.

The program design and scope of work includes the following different components that will be provided by PODER:

1. Outreach, Recruitment, Intake and Eligibility Determination, Enrollment and Orientation

2. Assessment, Testing, Self-Evaluation
3. Short-term Job Training and Preparation: a) National Work Readiness Credential with 20-hour curriculum over four weeks b) two-week, curriculum and test by the National Retail Federation for Customer Service certification c) Financial Literacy training using FDIC's Money Smart curriculum d) GED prep/online high school diploma or GED program/basic skills upgrading referral
4. Long-term occupational and credential training referrals to: 1) workforce centers 2) community colleges 3) proprietary training which have positive working relationships with the workforce centers in their areas.
5. Wrap around Services such as case management, support services, follow up, job development and referrals, access to work supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps, other public assistance, subsidized child care, and health coverage via Medicaid and CHIP.

“ONE JOB AT A Time” Job Readiness PROGRAM ENROLLMENT AND ORIENTATION

The basic qualifying criteria for participants will be: Age 18 or over, U.S. citizenship or eligible to work here, unemployed or underemployed, and a barrier hindering access to an entry-level job. PODER will be responsible for outreach, recruitment, enrollment, training, tracking, performance, placement, case management, wrap around services, and follow up for its own customers. PODER staff will develop the standard operating procedures, forms, and processes for the eligibility determination, enrollment and tracking of the customers, oversight, fiscal, reporting, and will provide the training curricula and study materials. PODER will conduct its own orientation for the participants where the goals of the program, the services offered, and the responsibilities of the individual will be explained.

LONG-TERM OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING:

Job seekers who are assessed as needing longer training or who desire to pursue a career path that requires an associate degree or advanced training of more than a year or two will be referred to the local workforce center system and/or directly to the area community college. Project staff will also be able to assist these customers with financial assistance information. There will also be participants who are placed in entry-level jobs but who desire better opportunities and will want to pursue a career pathway through further training and education. This relationship will allow them to make cross referrals and provide advocacy on behalf of the project's participants referred for occupational training. All of the participants will be provided information on the occupational and education programs offered through their respective locales community colleges. Community colleges offer an array of two-year educational and occupational training programs that can move a person from entry-level positions to mid-level jobs with higher pay and responsibility. Project staff members will provide information on the requirements for entrance, registration, attendance and funding options (including the Pell Grants). All participants will be provided information on this and how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as almost all of the participants will be low-income individuals who may be eligible for the Pell Grant and/or other student financial assistance. Participants who express an interest in pursuing further training will be re-advised to pursue training in the local demand occupation areas in order to have a better opportunity at getting a job after the training.

WRAP AROUND SERVICES:

All of the project participants will receive services from a menu designed to assist the individuals so they can complete all of the services successfully and get at least an entry-level job or pursue post-secondary education or advanced training by the end of a year. All of the participants will receive employment-focused case management to emphasize that the goal of getting successful outcomes such as the NWRC credential and attainment of a GED or high school diploma is to get an entry-level job by the end of the first year of participation. Project staff will use an ACCESS database and management information system to document and track the progress of the participants. Community resource networks that have been established during the years by PODER will also be used to meet some basic needs through food pantries, rental and utilities assistance, subsidized child care, referrals and assistance in applying for food stamps and other public assistance. Project staff will also assist in the participants getting access to work supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and health coverage through Medicaid and CHIP, and the upcoming Affordable Care Act. These kinds of services can complement an individual or families' income and/or they can take the place of no income. All participants will be provided job development, job referrals, and ongoing job counseling after they have finished their short-term job preparation services. There will be cases, though, where it will be a necessity for some participants to work during their participation. Project staff will help these persons by developing part time jobs or full-time, temporary and seasonal jobs to help them. Follow up services will be offered to those persons who still don't get a job after the twelve-month period.

TIMELINE:

PODER is prepared to launch the project within one week of the announcement of an award. PODER proposes a two-year program. The budgeted presented is for one-year. The timeline's key events will be similar for each year. The following is the general timeline:

Month One: Complete all hiring; launch outreach and recruitment; intake, eligibility, and enrollment commence; procure assessment and testing vendors.

Month Two and Three: Complete enrollment and all other assessments and processes with customers; finalize Job/Career Plans; start and complete NWRC for all; select and refer participants in GED prep and online high school programs and take classes simultaneously with the NWRC curriculum.

Month Four: Conduct evaluation; determine those needing long-term occupational and credential training; provide FAFSA and other such information to all; educate on work support programs such as health coverage for children and adults, as eligible; conduct status assessment of all participants.

Month Five: Implement National Retail Federation Customer Service credential training and testing; conduct job development and job referrals for those considered "job ready". Conduct Financial Literacy training.

Month Six: Conduct first batch workshops; Follow-up on referred GED prep and online high school participants for increase in Educational Functioning Levels; Advisory Team meets to discuss future funding strategies and sustainability

Month Seven: Continue job development, job referrals, and job placement for those determined "job ready" to date

Month Eight: conduct site evaluations; QA continues with desk reviews; participants that didn't earn credentials for NWRC and/or National Retail Federation re-take

Month Nine: Determination and selection is made of those requiring more intense and occupational training and are referred to workforce centers community colleges and/or other agencies;

Month Ten: Job development, job referrals, and other job placement services are intensified for all participants

Month Eleven: Job placement services

Month Twelve: Continue final, major placement push for participants and completers in GED and online high school program; carry over for second year job placement services

FUNDING STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

PODER is asking that the City of Austin fund 80% of the project. PODER will be contributing a percentage of their usual overhead costs, facility costs, marketing, and executive-level talent. Funds will be leveraged from local groups and foundations to complement the funds for wraparound/supportive services while the participants are in training.

SUMMARY OF BENEFITS/OUTCOMES

At least 95% of the participants each year will complete successfully their training and receive the appropriate credentials. At least 80% of the first year's participants will obtain an entry-level job or better; 95% will earn the NWRC on the first attempt; 95% will earn the National Retail Federation credential; 100% will complete successfully the Financial Literacy training. The intense activity and credentialing will enhance the participants' ability to obtain entry-level jobs within a relatively short time so that they can start climbing the ladder of success.

Funding

Total Amount Requested for the Program: \$65,000

Total Amount of Program is: \$130,000

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