REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
One-Stop Operator for the Southern Alleghenies PA CareerLink® sites

PURPOSE
The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) requires each Local Workforce Development Area to have at least one comprehensive one-stop service center that provides services to employers and jobseekers. Furthermore, the aforementioned legislation requires that a One-Stop Operator must be competitively procured and in compliance with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) at 2 CFR part 200 and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry’s Local Workforce Development System- PA CareerLink® System Operator Policy, dated February 9, 2021. This requirement has led the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAPDC), on behalf of the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB), to issue this request for proposals for a One-Stop Operator, hereafter referred to as the Operator, for the PA CareerLink® sites located in the Southern Alleghenies region. This RFP has been prepared in accordance with the above referenced guidance.

BACKGROUND
The WIOA, was passed in July 2014, and replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) which had been the primary federal workforce development law. Inherent in the WIOA is improved and seamless service delivery to employers and jobseekers through greater alignment of education, economic development and workforce systems and resources. The WIOA calls for the continuation of the existing service delivery structure, the nation’s network of one-stop career centers. In Pennsylvania they are known as PA CareerLink® sites.

The SAPDC is pleased to issue this request for proposals to identify a single eligible entity or consortium or a coalition of eligible organizations, to serve as the Operator (as defined by WIOA) for management of the SAWDB’s 5 comprehensive PA CareerLink® sites and four affiliated sites. The Operator role will be distinct from the roles of the direct providers at PA CareerLink® sites. Those partner organizations that contribute to the operations of the region’s PA CareerLink® sites through the Operating Budget (Budget) and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be come under the direction of the Operator.

The contract with the organization/s selected under this solicitation will begin on July 1, 2021.

SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PROFILE
The Southern Alleghenies region is composed of six counties in south-central Pennsylvania and includes Fulton, Huntingdon, Blair, Bedford, Somerset and Cambria. The majority of the region is rural and forested with a total land area of 4,164 square miles. The region’s population stands at roughly 456,872 with an average median age of 44 years. In terms of educational attainment, more than 90% of the population has a high school diploma or equivalent and roughly 18% hold a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.

The economy in the Southern Alleghenies region continues its transformation from recession to recovery while still dealing with the many issues commonly associated with a prolonged severe downturn. Looking back to 2010, the recession deepened across the region in its latter stages as job losses spiked before giving way to shallower declines through 2014. The 2020 pandemic and economic downtown resulted in the return of double-digit unemployment. Slowly the region is returning to single-digit unemployment but the retail, foodservice and hospitality sectors have been hit especially hard and are
struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels. In addition to those challenges brought on by COVID-19, the regional economy faces a number of challenges covering a broad spectrum that includes:

- Aging population;
- Declining labor force;
- Skills gaps in the labor force needed by employers and those found in the work force;
- Struggle to attract and retain younger workers for the region;
- Creating employment opportunities through a more diverse business base and attraction of new industries.

The region has witnessed a generally slow hiring pace combined with the loss of family sustaining, goods-producing jobs. These positions have been replaced with service industry positions and contribute to the weak job market. In addition, job creation has fallen off resulting in many occupations only experiencing hiring as a result of replacement openings. The history of the region is linked to coal, steel, railroads, and agriculture. The coal and steel industry in the region declined sharply in the 1980s, with only limited activity in these industries remaining. The economy of the Southern Alleghenies Region is now more diverse than it was a decade ago, with no reliance on any one sector. Nearly two-thirds of the jobs in the region are concentrated in five sectors: health care and social assistance, retail trade, manufacturing, accommodations and food service and other professional services.

To meet the needs of the region’s jobseekers and employers, the SAWDB currently supports five comprehensive sites in the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Huntingdon and Somerset and four affiliated sites in Blair, Cambria and Fulton counties. In addition to the mandated one-stop partners, the PA CareerLink® sites in the Southern Alleghenies also include partners from secondary and post-secondary education, career and technology centers, adult education, a staffing agency, the Altoona Housing Authority.

**WHO MAY BE AN OPERATOR IN THE PA CAREERLINK® SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

- The operator must be either an entity (public, private, or nonprofit) or a consortium of entities. If the consortium of entities is one of the one-stop partners, it must at a minimum, include three (3) or more of the required one-stop partners of demonstrated effectiveness as described in WIOA section 678.400. All entities must sign the contract between the LWDB and the selected operator.
- Operator(s) may operate one or more PA CareerLink® service locations, or there may be multiple local area operators in a local workforce development area.

**ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

Organizations eligible to apply under this solicitation include:

- A community-based organization
- Employment Service State agencies under Wagner-Peyser Act
- A for-profit entity (e.g., a corporation, incorporated consultancy or agencies)
- A government agency (e.g., state agency, local or county government, school district)
- Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations
- An institution of higher education
- An interested organization capable of carrying out the duties of the operator (e.g., a chamber of commerce, an economic development corporation or a labor market organization)
- LWDBs under the conditions outlined in the PA Department of Labor and Industry’s Local Workforce Delivery System- PA CareerLink® System Operator Policy of February 9, 202, and complies with the competition requirements in 20 CFR §§ 678.605(c) and 678.615(a); and if after
the competition process the LWDB is selected as the operator, the local CEO and the governor agree to the selection of the LWDB. See Appendix D: Local Board as One-Stop Operator

- A non-profit organization
- A nontraditional public secondary school (e.g., a night school, adult school or an area career and technical education school)
- A workforce intermediary (e.g., quasi-governmental bodies such as a county commission)

The Operator will be accountable to the SAWDB and the Chief Local Elected Officials of the Southern Alleghenies Region.

REQUIRED APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

The selected Operator will have a proven record of performance in selecting, managing and developing staff and partnerships. Significant knowledge and understanding of the WIOA, applicable federal and state regulations, PA Department of Labor and Industry policies, and the region’s Local and Regional Plans is expected. The SAWDB envisions the region’s PA CareerLink® sites as the ‘go to’ resource for employers looking for skilled employees and jobseekers looking to enter or re-enter the world of work. With the WIOA’s emphasis on serving individuals with barriers to employment and out-reach to out-of-school youth, greater emphasis will be placed on identification of effective and innovative outreach strategies, including the use of social media platforms.

OPERATOR ROLES AND PROHIBITED FUNCTIONS

Under the leadership of the SAWDB, and with guidance from the PA CareerLink® site’s Core Partners, the selected Operator will be tasked with the coordination of service delivery of one-stop partners and related service providers in the region’s multi-center, one-stop public workforce system.

Duties of the one-stop operator include but are not limited to support for the following:

- Fiscal management and oversight in concert with the PA CareerLink® site administrators and the SAPDC, as fiscal agent. This includes assistance in the preparation and maintenance of the Operating Budget;
- Seamless integration and availability of services by PA CareerLink® partners;
- Oversight of the performance management system relative to WIOA Performance Metrics;
- Evaluation of customer needs and satisfaction;
- Preparation for SAWDB quality reviews and compliance with PA Department of Labor and Industry and SAWDB one-stop certification criteria;
- Liaison with the SAWDB to include participation in SAWDB and pertinent committee meetings;
- Marketing and outreach for the PA CareerLink® sites and system to jobseekers and employers;
- Recruitment of additional partners;
- Professional development of PA CareerLink® staff;
- Communication of strategic objectives of the SAWDB;
- Tracks and implements the negotiated one-stop partner Memoranda of Understanding;
- Continuous improvement through responding to assessment of customer needs;
- Selection and support for PA CareerLink® site administrators. Note - all current site administrators are expected to be retained and will remain employees of their current employers of record. The Operator will act as the functional supervisor of the site administrators.
Adjustments to the aforementioned duties may be made following input from the board and the region’s PA CareerLink® Core Partners and consideration by the SAWDB.

The selected Operator must disclose any potential conflicts of interest arising from the relationships of the Operator with training service providers. The Operator will refrain from establishing practices that create disincentives to providing services to individuals with barriers to employment who may require longer-term services.

**RELATIONSHIP OF OPERATOR TO THE SAWDB AND PA CAREERLINK® PARTNERS**
The SAWDB will maintain a contractual relationship with the selected Operator and will provide ongoing policy guidance and strategic direction to ensure that the board’s vision and performance expectations remain in the forefront and are addressed. The SAWDB is also responsible for performance monitoring and will perform periodic quantitative, qualitative and on-site reviews of Operator performance to ensure that expectations are being met. In addition, PA CareerLink® partners will be surveyed annually as to their evaluation of the Operator’s performance.

**PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
The SAWDB staff will assist in the provision of accurate and timely data affording the Operator the ability to make data driven decisions to improve performance and customer and client satisfaction.

**FUNDING AVAILABLE**
The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® partners will allocate up to $20,000 in support of the Operator in year one. This funding will include $10,000 of SAWDB administrative funds and $10,000 of one-stop partner support as included in the sites’ Operating Budgets. It is expected that the Operator will leverage other funding in order to support its activities and ultimately improve the public workforce system for job seekers and employers. Funding to cover the cost of the PA CareerLink® site administrators, along with facility operations costs will be covered through the partner-approved Operating Budgets.

**CONTRACT PERIOD**
The anticipated time frame for the contract that will be awarded from this request for proposal (RFP) is July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, with an option, based on successful performance, to renew the contract each year thereafter for a total of four years.

**Timeline**
- Release of RFP: Monday, March 15, 2021
- All Bidders’ Questions to be sent via email to whisler@sapdc.org by Friday, March 26, 2021
- Answers to submitted questions will be provided electronically to those who submitted questions and will also be posted on https://sapdc.org/current-rfps/ by Friday, April 2, 2021
- Proposals are due Monday, April 19, 2021
- Review and Selection: April 21 to May 6, 2021
- SAWDB Award of Contract: May 11, 2021, SAPDC Board Review and Concurrence to follow

**Budget**
- WIOA Title 1 Administrative funds in the amount of $10,000 and $10,000 in PA CareerLink® partner contributions are being made available to support this effort. The allocation was based on an analysis of time spent and level of effort by the previous one-stop operator coordinating services in the region.
Proposers need to identify all funding, including non-Title I leveraged funds, that will be used to support the one-stop operator effort.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE & REQUIRED INFORMATION

The proposal to this request must contain the following:

- Description of the proposer’s organization or in the case of consortiums, a brief description of those entities that make up the consortium.
- Proposer’s identification number (EIN)
- Proposer’s name, or if a consortium, lead agency
- Corporate address
- Telephone numbers
- Contact person(s), including email address

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Address the following in the proposal response:

- Mission and goals of your organization or consortium, identification of your primary customers and services provided, and your outreach strategies to reach your target clients;
- Experience in assisting individuals to enter the workforce and proposer’s relationship with the region’s PA CareerLink® sites;
- Identification of leveraged resources the proposer brings to the role of one-stop operator;
- Strategies for coordinating PA CareerLink® services for jobseekers and employers;
- Why your organization/consortium of entities is well-positioned to serve in the capacity as the one-stop operator either through demonstrated success in the role of one-stop operator or demonstrated success in a similar position or role.

PROPOSAL FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals will include the following information arranged in the order shown:

- **Title Page**: identifying the proposer’s name, address, telephone number, contact person and email.
- **Organizational Profile**: information found under the “Organizational Profile & Required Information” Section
- **Proposal Narrative**: identify succinctly how the proposer will help the SAWDB realize its vision for workforce development including expanded outreach to those with barriers to employment. Include concise responses to the bullet points identified under ‘Proposal Narrative.’ This section will not exceed 10 pages.
- **Proposal Budget**: Include a budget and justification that details the expenditure of the $20,000 as well as non-WIOA Title I leveraged funding that will be used to support the one-stop operator.
- **Proposal Submission**: Proposals in response to this RFP are due by 4:00 PM on Monday, April 19, 2021. The full proposal must be sent electronically to Susan K. Whisler, SAWDB Director at whisler@sapdc.org.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Once proposals are received, the SAWDB staff will review and evaluate proposals to ensure responsiveness to the RFP and confirm that proposers are not suspended or debarred. SAWDB staff will be held to the provisions in their signed SAP&DC Conflict of Interest policy and the Statement of Financial Interests, completed by the SAWDB director. The proposals will then be presented to a
subcommittee of SAWDB for review. In determining membership on the review subcommittee, staff will ensure that those participating in the proposal review are free from a conflict of interest. For this RFP, the following criteria will be evaluated:

- Proposer’s understanding of the requirements of the Operator and the public workforce system in the Southern Alleghenies and demonstrated capabilities to carry out the duties of the Operator as outlined in this RFP;
- Connection to the public workforce system including service to common customer groups (job seeker and employer) and strategies for outreach to those with barriers to employment;
- Innovative strategies for coordinating services for jobseekers and employers;
- Leveraged resources the proposer brings to the role of Operator

The subcommittee will rank the proposals independently and then meet, either in person or virtually to discuss the rankings and prepare their recommendations. These recommendations for funding will be taken to the full SAWDB for review and action.

The board’s recommendations will then be taken to the SAP&DC Board of Directors, the region’s Chief Local Elected Officials (LEOs), for final review and contracting consideration. During each step of the review and approval process, members will be informed of potential conflicts of interest and meeting minutes will reflect the publicly cast votes and abstentions.

The SAP&DC is the responsible authority for handling complaints or protests regarding the proposal selection process. No protest shall be accepted by the State Grantor Agency (PA Department of Labor and Industry) until all administrative remedies at the grantee (SAP&DC) level have been exhausted. This includes, but is not limited to, disputes, claims, protests of award, source evaluation or other matters of a contractual nature. Matters concerning violation of law shall be referred to such authority as may have proper jurisdiction.

The SAP&DC and SAWDB would like to have the opportunity to respond to any inquiry or resolve any dispute prior to the filing of an official complaint by the protester. It is the policy of the SAWDB that all actual or prospective bidders, respondents, offerors, or sub-recipients who believe they are aggrieved by the solicitation or awards of WIOA service contracts be offered administrative adjudication. The following outlines the specific appeal process to be used:

**Step 1:** Advise the SAP&DC Administrative Officer of Complaint

Any party that believes it is aggrieved should seek resolution of their complaint(s) initially with the SAP&DC Administrative Officer. Such complaints may be made verbally or in writing.

In the event that resolution at this initial Step 1 is not accomplished or feasible, the SAP&DC Administrative Officer shall advise the party initiating the complaint(s) in writing to proceed to Step 2.

**Step 2:** Filing of Protest with SAP&DC Administrative Officer

Formal protest shall be made in writing to the SAP&DC Administrative Officer and shall be filed within 15 calendar days after the date of the written notice to the protester from Administrative Officer to proceed to Step 2.
Protests filed after 15 calendar days, as specified above, will not be considered.

Written protests shall include, at a minimum, the following information:

- The name and address of the protestor
- Clear indication that the communication is a formal, written protest/appeal
- Appropriate identification of the procurement, such as the service(s), which were the basis of the solicitation or award in question
- A statement of reasons for the protest
- Supporting exhibits, evidence or documents to substantiate any claims

The Administrative Officer, acting on behalf of the SAP&DC and SAWDB, may request additional information form the protestor who shall submit the information within time periods set forth at the time of the request(s).

When a protest has been properly filed, the Administrative Officer shall notify SAWDB staff and the Fiscal Agent of the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area not to contract until the protest has been settled, unless, after consultation with the Fiscal Agent, the Administrative Officer determines that the award of contracts without delay is necessary to protect substantial interests of the Workforce Development Area.

Step 3: Review by a subcommittee of the SAWDB and Local Elected Officials

A subcommittee of the SAWDB and Local Elected Officials, and with the participation of SAWDB staff, shall conduct an oral debriefing with properly designated representatives of the protesting party at which time the facts upon which a SAWDB decision was made will be explained and discussed with the protesting party’s representatives.

Following the oral debriefing, and in consultation with the SAWDB Executive Committee and a duly designated representative of the Local Elected Officials (LEOs), decisions on protests/appeals shall be rendered and conveyed in writing to the party who has filed the protest on behalf of the SAWDB within ten (10) calendar days.

Decisions so rendered are considered final at the local SAWDB level.

Step 4: Referral to Office of the Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

If the protest can not be resolved through Steps 1 through 3 above, the issue will be referred to the Governor’s office for resolution by the authorized representative of the Governor. Decisions so rendered are considered final and binding upon all parties.