Commonly Asked Questions and Answers
Related to the Michigan Skills Alliances (MiSA) Request for Proposal (RFP)

Q. In the Work Plan section, is it allowable to deviate from the narrative requirements (i.e. double spacing and 12 point font) and to use a table with tasks and timelines?

A. In order to allow for a reasonable review structure, a concise and succinct Work Plan is required in MiSA proposals. It is allowable to utilize single spacing in a table format to detail the 48-month timeline, but the 12 point font is still a requirement. Proposals that receive a score of 80% or more on each section will have an opportunity to provide an enhanced Work Plan during the site visit portion of the review process.

Q. Due to the size of attachments, there could be difficulties in sending proposals and accompanying documents via email. Are any alternative means of submission available?

A. The only acceptable electronic submission of proposals and accompanying documents is via email in Microsoft Word (doc) or Adobe Acrobat PDF format. Sending multiple files via email(s) is an acceptable means of satisfying the MiSA proposal electronic submission requirements. If doing so, be sure to designate in the file name the number of the attachment such as MiSA_proposal_name-of-applicant_1of 4.doc. The second email will contain the file MiSA_proposal_name-of-applicant_2of 4.doc, etc.

Q. Pages 29 and 30 of the MiSA RFP state that employers must be partners of an alliance, but the public workforce system "should" be included in an alliance. Is the public workforce system a necessary partner?

A. Yes. Mandatory partners of a Michigan Skills Alliance include employers, the public workforce system, post secondary education institutions/universities, and the Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth (DELEG). In addition to being a mandatory partner, Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs)/ Workforce Development Boards should be actively involved in a Michigan Skills Alliance. Beginning on page 29, the MiSA RFP states:

Partners **MUST** include:

- **Employers.** Because the Sectoral Skills Alliance is built around the workforce needs of employers, the majority of partners should be businesses engaged in the targeted industry.

- **Public Workforce System.** The public workforce system--Michigan Works! Agencies/Workforce Development Boards--should be actively involved to seamlessly bring together private enterprise and public resources.

- **Post Secondary Education Institutions/Universities.** Educational institutions are responsible for providing training for the current and future workforce making them an important partner. Representatives must be included from local or regional post secondary education institutions and/or universities.

- **The Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth.** DELEG is poised to provide value-added support to Regional and Sectoral Skills Alliances in several ways, including:

- Alliance Convening
- Strategy Development
- Labor Market Research
- Communications Linkages
- Regional and Sectoral Academy

Q. The MiSA RFP Budget Summary does not fully display numbers in the Program Subtotal Costs line.

A. The Bureau of Workforce Transformation (BWT) amended the Budget Summary to allow for full display of numbers in the Program Subtotal Costs line. Please click here for a link to the budget summary:
http://w3.michigan.gov/documents/rsa/MiSA_RFP_Budget_Summary_FINAL_Apr2010_317776_7.xls

Q. Why is the state launching a next generation of Michigan Skills Alliances?

A. Michigan was one of the first states to engage in regional and sectoral strategies as a workforce development model through the creation and launch of the Michigan Regional Skills Alliances (MiRSA) five years ago. With the launch of the Michigan Skills Alliances, we are building upon what we have learned from the 36 existing MiRSAs to improve our ability to meet the workforce needs of employers and to align with the Governor's No Worker Left Behind (NWLB) program.

Q. What are the key elements of a Michigan Skills Alliance?

A. A successful alliance will have the following key elements:

- **Employer Driven:** Regional and sectoral alliances are more effective when employers' workforce needs are central to the alliance. Employers often present a galvanizing issue that draws in other partners and stakeholders to help create solutions.

- **Outcomes Driven:** The jointly developed, customized solutions developed by Michigan Skills Alliance partners have the greatest impact with clearly defined goals and outcomes. The goals and outcomes work well because they are a targeted (not assumed) response to identified workforce opportunities.

- **Effective Conveners:** For employers, educators, workforce developers, and community leaders to work together, a Michigan Skills Alliance requires neutral individuals or entities that have industry expertise and credibility. It's the job of the convener to facilitate discussions about regional or sectoral workforce needs, to listen for common challenges, and to bring multiple stakeholders together to design and implement joint, customized solutions.

- **Sustainable:** An enhanced partnership structure and comprehensive funding support mechanism drives the sustainability of Michigan Skills Alliances. MiSAs emphasize a strengthened partnership structure which includes employers, workforce developers, community colleges/universities, and the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth. Extensive

leveraging of funds from the private sector, foundations, federal, state, and local sources drives funding support.

- **Inclusive of Multiple Stakeholders:** Collaboration builds on the strengths of individual organizations to develop and provide the highest quality regional and sectoral workforce development strategies available. Inclusivity ensures customized solutions and focused outcomes.

Q. Can a Business Solutions Professional be a convener?

A. Conveners are typically organizations that can serve the alliance in a neutral role and come in many forms. A few of the organizations eligible to serve as conveners include: an industry association, a labor organization, a post-secondary education institution, or a non-profit organization.

Q. What are some examples of compelling workforce development needs identified by employers?

A. There are several existing examples of compelling needs or galvanizing issues identified by industry including:

- The Michigan Academy for Green Mobility (MAGM) formed when employers identified a need for engineers with the skills to work on energy efficient advanced vehicle propulsion. Employers have an immediate need for their engineering staff to learn how to go from concept to prototype related to hybrid electric vehicles without requiring them to go through another bachelors, masters, or doctorate degree. The training is short-term and credit based, allowing individuals to accumulate additional credits to earn another degree. MAGM training prepares individuals for emerging technologies in vehicle propulsion and vehicle component design, manufacturing, and maintenance. The result of addressing this galvanizing issue is a 14-week course that over 270 engineers have already attended.

- From a regional perspective, the plastics industry has begun to identify a need for entry-level job training. These entry-level workers may not have finished high school and need specific training on equipment that can lead to a portable certificate.

- The tool and die industry employers also identified the need for entry-level training so the staff can receive different certificates of training that lead to apprenticeships.

There are a variety of models to consider. The galvanizing issue is going to be specific to the area, the industry, and the industry's specific workforce needs.

Q. Is there any funding available for current MiRSAs?

A. Yes. If you are a current MiRSA, you may submit a proposal in response to the MiSA Request for Proposal. The RFP response must demonstrate an expansion of the work the MiRSA is currently doing. The expansion may be in the form of a wider geographical area, a different industry sector or focus, or

expanding workforce training. More information on the required criteria is included in the RFP document posted on the RSA Web site www.michigan.gov/rsa.

Q. How do the 36 existing MiRSAs sustain themselves after the DELEG funding period ends?

A. MiRSAs utilize various models to sustain alliance operations including:

- The "membership model" where all members/employers pay annual dues. The alliance determines the amount of the annual dues accessed.
- The "pool-based model" where all employers within the alliance pay into a pool based on the number of employees. The pooled dollars are then leveraged against funds that the Michigan Works! Agency (MWA) utilizes in the No Worker Left Behind program.
- Another model exists where, in combination with the MWAs and other members, employers pay a portion of the operational costs of the alliance. Once again, the models will vary and it depends upon the type of alliance, the galvanizing issue, the industry represented, and the region covered.
- Some alliances also respond to competitive solicitation for federal grants offered by the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Labor, and various state departments. Alliances are typically in a very good position to apply for competitively offered federal grants due to the rich level of partnership and collaboration that is already established.

Q. Are new MiSAs considered for support or just existing MiRSAs?

A. Existing MiRSAs and new MiSAs are both eligible for consideration.

Q. Can a portion of the financial award to Michigan Skills Alliances go directly to private sector companies as incentives to participate in or to provide leadership to the alliance?

A. Offering cash incentives to encourage employers to participate in an alliance is not an eligible use of MiSA funds. However, bringing together multiple stakeholders to design and implement joint customized solutions is an incentive for employers to participate.

Q. Please explain the need for linemen positions in the utilities sector. Does this mean that companies like Consumers Energy will participate and train people?

A. Utility companies have the ability to train their workforce through their participation in an alliance. The State of Michigan received a $4.38 million grant under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. These funds target the training of four different categories of employees in the utility industry, including linemen, substation operators, plant maintenance, and engineering technicians. These funds flow through the Utility Workforce Development Consortium, an existing Michigan Skills Alliance convened by DELEG's Bureau of Workforce Transformation.

Q. Are MiSAs limited to the industry sectors identified in the webinar?

A. No. Sectoral Skills Alliances may be associated with any industry. The RFP outlines the awarding of extra points to sectoral proposals that concentrate on identified sectors based upon projected growth and other workforce factors.

Q. What is DELEG's budget for the Michigan Skills Alliances initiative?

A. DELEG possesses a few different funding options for regional and sectoral strategy activities:

- DELEG allocated a budget line item of $1 million this year to establish non-green Regional and Sectoral Skills Alliances.
- The U.S. Department of Energy awarded DELEG $4.38 million delivered through the Utility Workforce Development Consortium targeting training for employees in the utility sector.
- In August 2008, DELEG announced the Green Jobs Initiative (GJI). DELEG allotted $6 million dollars to the GJI split into three areas of workforce enhancement: $3 million to support green-related occupational training, $1.5 million dollars for the establishment of green regional and sectoral alliances, and $1.5 million dollars to support capacity building with post-secondary training.
- The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (Recovery Act), awarded DELEG, in partnership with the State of Michigan Council for Labor and Economic Growth, a $5.8 million State Energy Sector Partnership (SESP) and Training grant. The SESP grant allows MiSAs to train more than 1,000 Michigan citizens and to place them in jobs.
- DELEG received an award of $3.8 million from USDOL in ARRA National Emergency Grant funds to support on-the-job training delivered through MiSAs.

DELEG diligently pursues any and all available funding opportunities to accumulate the maximum possible amount of funds. The leveraging of funds on a statewide level, in addition to the leveraging of funds through MiSAs on a local level, allows for the greatest amount of training and job placement assistance possible for Michigan citizens.

Q. Do you have to choose between applying for support of either a regional or a sectoral alliance?

A. Yes, you must choose either a regional or a sectoral focus.

Q. What does this new model mean to current MiRSAs that are self-sustaining?

A. The launch of the next generation of skills alliances creates an exciting opportunity for MiRSAs across the state to refresh and refocus their efforts. Current MiRSAs have the opportunity to re-examine

their goals and to determine the best fit for their efforts. Existing MiRSAs can increase the likelihood of sustainability through applying for technical assistance and/or funding assistance from DELEG.

Q. What is the benefit for current MiRSAs to change to a MiSA?

A. The Michigan Skills Alliance model emphasizes a distinction between sectorally focused alliances and regionally focused alliances. In the MiSA Regional Skills Alliance model, a range of leaders (i.e., community-based, faith-based, employers, educators, government, etc.) organize Regional Skills Alliances within a region with goals such as community reinvention, improving overall educational attainment, or solving workforce issues that cut across multiple industries and occupations. Employers in a single industry who develop workforce strategies in partnership with educators and workforce developers to address shared workforce needs, on the other hand, drive MiSA Sectoral Skills Alliances. Their geographic coverage may be local, regional, or statewide. Training to increase the skills of workers is at the heart of all Michigan Skills Alliances.

MiRSAs who respond to the state's RFP supporting the MiSA model will have access to increased state support – both technical assistance and funding. Alliances can receive the following kinds of technical assistance from the state:

- ✓ Alliance Convening
- ✓ Strategy Development
- ✓ Labor Market Research
- ✓ Communications Linkages
- ✓ Regional and Sectoral Learning Network and Academy

DELEG is strengthening the funding platform for MiSAs by increasing the level of funding support competitively awarded to Michigan Skills Alliances.

Q. How can organizations compete with state developed alliances?

A. DELEG does not view workforce development as a competition and routinely partners with local organizations in working towards the same common goal.

Q. Can one entity apply to convene more than one Michigan Skills Alliance?

A. Yes. However, we will be considering the capacity of the convener to carry out the responsibilities required to lead more than one MiSA.

Q. Does the RFP require the submission of the resume of the Project Manager with a proposal?

A. Yes, the proposal must include the resume, curriculum vitae, or brief biography of the project manager.

Q. Is training for entry level positions an eligible activity under the RFP?

A. Yes. As training represents the true focal point of MiSAs, DELEG fully expects all alliances to strive towards the application of demand driven training, i.e., employers drive the alliance's training needs. The specific traits of an alliance's training focus depend upon the needs of the involved employers.

If employers identify a training need for entry-level positions, it is an eligible activity. When the placement of individuals in entry-level positions is the galvanizing issue for an alliance, the overall training plan should include a skills progression or career ladder that leads to a family sustainable wage. Also, with the alignment with No Worker Left Behind, DELEG supports in-demand occupations defined within the local area. Examples of training opportunities include on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, occupational skills training, classroom training, customized training, etc.

Q. Is incumbent worker training an eligible Michigan Skills Alliance activity?

A. Training needs are driven by employers of the alliance. Therefore, if employers have identified a training need for incumbent workers, it can be an eligible training activity and should be coordinated closely with the Michigan Works! Agencies that partner with the Michigan Skills Alliance.

Q. Is an alliance regional or sectoral if it focuses on a specific industry in a specific region?

A. It is a sectoral alliance. Workforce strategies developed by employers from a single industry in partnership with educators and workforce agencies that address a galvanizing workforce challenge drive Sectoral Skills Alliances.

Regional Skills Alliances focus on how to engage various public-private partnerships to support regional, community, and economic development from a workforce perspective. RSAs focus on a geographically defined area but do not particularly centered on one specific industry.

Q. The RFP does not identify information technology as a targeted industry. Are proposals based on the information technology sector eligible for consideration?

A. Yes. Michigan Skills Alliances are employer driven. If employers identify a galvanizing workforce issue within the information technology sector, a complete proposal will be considered. It is important to fully explain in the proposal compelling galvanizing workforce needs and projected job growth within the sector.

Q. Is it possible that a regional alliance could include two or more industries?

A. Yes. By definition, a regional alliance focuses on multiple industries within a specific geographic area that have similar galvanizing workforce issues.

Q. The potential points allocated to each section of the RFP suggest a competitive selection process. How will that work when you accept proposals all year? Is there a minimum point total required for consideration?

A. Michigan Skills Alliances form, grow, and have needs that don't necessarily align with a once-a-year issuance of an RFP. The United States Department of Labor - Employment and Training Administration (USDOL-ETA) approved the utilization of a rolling RFP. DELEG's review process considers all proposals that score 80% or more on each section of the RFP, as well as a comparison of all proposals received to date.

Q. Is it permissible for a consortium of partners that are awaiting a USDOL-ETA funding decision to apply for a skills alliance?

A. Yes. Leveraging resources drives sustainability and is a key component of successful skills alliances.

Q. Is DELEG's technical assistance available prior to RFP submittal?

A. Yes, the Regional & Sectoral Strategies Division (RSSD) developed an External Technical Assistance Team to specifically address questions respondents may have about the RFP. RSSD excludes the members of this team from the proposal review and selection process to make impartial support available to respondents.

Separately, the RFP offers awards of technical assistance for the development, organization, and maintenance of skills alliances.

Q. Is there an overall minimum number of points required for consideration or funding of a proposal?

A. DELEG's review process considers all proposals that score 80% or more on each section of the RFP, as well as a comparison to all proposals received to date.

Q. Why would DELEG support mechanisms be included in the budget? Does this mean costs of available DELEG support need to be charged to the grant itself as part of the local budget?

A. There is no cost associated with DELEG technical assistance. For proposals requesting technical assistance, only the In-Kind/Other Funding columns of Attachment A- Budget Summary need to be completed.

Q. What are the matching requirements?

A. There are no specific matching requirements for the RFP. However, Regional and Sectoral Skills Alliances build on the premise of extensive leveraging of funds. The primary components of a sustainable approach to funding include private sector, public sector at the state and local level, philanthropic, and other resources.

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers
Related to the Michigan Skills Alliances (MiSA) Request for Proposal (RFP)

Q. Does a funded skills alliance have to use a competitive bidding process to award contracts for services?

A. Yes, a competitive bid process is required.

Q. Can training be provided by private training providers?

A. A private training provider (proprietary school) could be selected to provide training through a competitive bid process.

Q. Rural areas have a smaller population base. A sectoral focus on training in allied health care professions may affect a small number of individuals compared to larger job markets. Does this put rural applicants at a disadvantage when considering the performance measures?

A. Regional and Sectoral Skills Alliances are employer driven. Proposals identifying specific employer workforce needs and that demonstrate a strategic process showing impact on that need will be considered. Rural areas are identified in the RFP as target regions.

Q. Will the information that is required to be entered in the One Stop Management Information System (OSMIS) be the same as it currently is for NWLB and incumbent worker training or will it be different?

A. It is the same process as outlined on pages 19 and 34 of the RFP.

Q. Will the Michigan Works! Agencies have to report on the items in Section IX of the RFP on some regular basis or will the state run reports from OSMIS? Can the system generate data on all of the items in Section IX (bulleted list of performance items)?

A. It is expected that this information be entered in OSMIS in a timely manner by the partnering Michigan Works! Agencies. OSMIS reports will be generated at the state level.

Q. Do you have to conduct a competitive process to select a project manager prior to submitting the grant?

A. A competitive bid is required if Michigan Skills Alliances funds are utilized.

Q. Some employers identify career-related assessments and career coaching as a valuable first step before training and tuition refund programs. Are there any funding limitations for assessments and career coaching?

A. Career assessments and coaching could be appropriate components of an overall workforce development strategy. The funding needs of these services must be indentified in the proposal.

Q. How soon will applicants hear back after submitting a proposal in response to the RFP?

A. A decision will be made within 60 days of receipt of electronic and hard copies of proposal.

Q. Where should questions about the RFP process be directed?

A. E-mail questions to: MiSA@michigan.gov.

Q. What is the proposal submission deadline?

A. There is no deadline for proposal submission. The RFP is rolling, i.e., open year-round.

Q. Is training a mandatory component of any proposed work plan? If so, is it necessary to quantify the amount of training in the proposal?

A. Yes, training is one of the required outcomes through alignment with No Worker Left Behind. Meeting employers' training needs is a critical component of all skills alliances and needs to be part of the proposal.

Q. Since the RFP is rolling, it appears as though grant awards will be first-come, first-funded. Is it possible that all funds will be exhausted early in the year?

A. DELEG provides a tiered structure for alliances for up to a four-year period; therefore, it is not anticipated that funding will be exhausted early in the year.

Q. Is the $250,000 cap on the grant used for any training or are all training costs to be covered by NWLB funding?

A. The funding made available through this RFP is to support the formation, ongoing development, and implementation of skills alliances. It is strongly encouraged that the alliance leverages all available resources through the partners to fund training activities. There are examples of alliances where employers pay 100% of the training. In other alliances, training costs are covered by NWLB or by both employers and NWLB.

Q. What is DELEG's role in a skills alliance once a proposal is funded?

A. DELEG is a required partner along with employers, the public workforce system, and post secondary education institutions/universities. In addition, DELEG strongly encourages engaging additional partners as outlined on pages 15 and 30 of the RFP. DELEG is poised to provide value-added support to Regional and Sectoral Skills Alliances in several ways, including: alliance convening, strategy

development, labor market research, communications linkages, and capacity building through a regional and sectoral academy.

Q. If a proposal is not funded, will DELEG provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal?

A. Yes, DELEG will provide feedback upon request.

Q. Will grants awarded under the MiSA RFP have a 10% administrative cost reimbursement cap?

A. No, funds provided under this RFP are considered programmatic. Michigan Skills Alliances funding awards are specifically for the coordination of various skill training, job development, and employer outreach activities deemed necessary to ensure that all job seekers in industries located in Michigan are trained to do the work that employers need.