Jenn Smith, Division Chief
Division of Strategic Investments
Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor

Dear Ms. Smith,

The following is submitted on behalf of the Alliance for Learning Innovation (ALI) in response to the "Notice of Request for Information (RFI) on Sector Strategies To Meet Critical Workforce Needs Across Industries." Please direct any questions to:

Alliance for Learning Innovation (ALI)
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2a. Who are the local and regional partners necessary to support an effective regional sector partnership?

As noted by the Department of Labor (DOL), sector partnerships have struggled to "transition from paper to practice." Two ways to help address this transition challenge would be greater involvement of partnerships with philanthropic funders and the K-12 education system. Many funders are eager to engage in the type of economic and talent development DOL is seeking to spur with sector partnerships and many are already involved in local and regional efforts across the country. By better engaging, encouraging, and rewarding the involvement of philanthropic funders in grant applications and engagements with DOL, the Department can maximize existing investments, increase public-private partnerships, and leverage the relationships philanthropic funders have with organizations, often community-based, that can provide valuable support to employers, communities, and workforce development participants. An example of a successful partnership between philanthropic funders and a federal agency can be found in these philanthropic funders partnership with the National Science Foundation (NSF).[1] Another example the Economic Development Administration's leveraging of philanthropies to support a community of practice for Build Back Better Regional Challenge finalists.[2]

Increased partnerships with the K-12 education system should inform any future sector partnership efforts undertaken by DOL. Particularly, through career pathway efforts that involve students, teachers, and parents. By engaging the K-12 system, sector partnerships can help address talent needs and shortages before they become acute. This proactive approach can help regions and sectors be proactive, rather than reactive to employment needs. Like sector partnerships, career pathways are not a new solution to workforce development, but

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[1] https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/announcements/070622.jsp
[2] https://americaachieves.org/eda_cop_announced/

have also struggled with widespread implementation and adoption. Examples of successful career pathways efforts can be found in the Delaware Pathways work.[3]

3f. How have sector strategies built in pathways for new entrants to the workforce, particularly youth? Are specific career and technical education strategies being used to support the transition from secondary to postsecondary education and training models? If so, are there specific challenges to this approach? Are there unique partners that must be included?

We applaud DOL's attention to ensuring sector partnerships can support the inclusion of youth in workforce development. The blurring of education and workforce development continues and will only accelerate as technology creates demands for new models of learning and new types of occupations. Some have even called for a "Big Blur" that erases distinctions between high school and college to create "new configurations that open the opportunity for all students to start on a path toward a postsecondary credential and prepare for a career—free of charge."[4]   As mentioned before, career pathways should more prominently feature in sector partnerships. While career and technical education (CTE) has long utilized and supported career pathways, more could be done to ensure that CTE career pathways are being developed in relevant industries like semiconductor manufacturing and are connected to postsecondary pathway options. Another challenge is the need for better data to determine the ROI from needs and skills assessments.

Future investments in sector partnerships should focus on increasing alignment between K12 and postsecondary education programs with workforce needs and provide middle and high school students with the skills, information, needed to access career pathways in high-skill fields. The U.S. Department of Labor has clearly established the impact apprenticeships have on employment and wages.[5] Yet, efforts to develop pre- and youth apprenticeships have been mixed. Sector partnerships present an opportunity to foster the development of apprenticeship explicitly focused on youth.[6]

6b. What types of funding and other supports—such as data or technical assistance—would be helpful and in what form? Specifically, are there roles the Department of Labor and other federal agencies could play in supporting local or regional sector activity beyond direct investment, including: • Bringing national industry and labor partners together to engage in key sectors? • Leveraging federal data insights to assess targeted sector needs? • Providing technical assistance and capacity building to the field, including learning and exchange across

[3] https://delawarepathways.org/
[4] https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/JFF_Big_Blur_Executive_Summary.pdf
[5] https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/dol-industry-factsheet-apprenticeship101-v10.pdf
[6] "Most (96.5 percent in 2021) youth apprentices are registered in programs that serve both adults and youth rather than youth apprenticeship programs that exclusively serve youth." https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/one-pagers/Apprenticeship-Evidence-Building-Portfolio_State-and_Youth-Apprenticeship-CombinedOnePager.pdf

sector-based efforts? • Specific flexibilities or resources to support regional sector-based efforts at various stages?

Data and technical assistance are key supports that are often overlooked when federal agencies are seeking to engage communities in efforts like workforce development. States and localities need clearer and more explicit direction from the federal government on how to support data modernization while addressing privacy concerns. DOL should look to leverage existing federal data efforts related to workforce and education data including the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) and the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) and encourage opportunities to link these systems when possible.[78] Technical assistance is also key for new entrants looking to engage in federal support for workforce development. DOL efforts like the WorkforceGPS platform are extremely valuable in cataloguing technical assistance resources.[9] More resources are needed, however, for community-based organizations to receive resources to pursue and support technical assistance. This technical assistance should focus on how to secure and manage federal grants and technical assistance on how to scale efforts. Better access to data would also help regions support effective sector partnerships. Effort like https://www.researchdatagov.org/, a web portal for discovering and requesting access to restricted microdata from federal statistical agencies should be expanded.

7e. How have the inputs from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations been taken into consideration when designing a program to serve them? What are effective approaches for soliciting input from marginalized and underrepresented populations?

Soliciting inputs from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations will be key to ensuring sector partnerships are advancing economic and social mobility. California's "Cradle-to-Career Data System" is an example of an approach to ensure genuine input from marginalized communities.[10] The effort pulled in community groups in addition to the traditional representation from state agencies, educational institutions, research and policy organizations in the design of the system.

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[7] WDQI https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/wdqi
[8] SLDS https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/
[9] https://www.workforcegps.org/
[10] https://cadatasystem.wested.org/#:~:text=The%20Cradle%2Dto%2DCareer%20Data,all%20students%20throughout%20the%20state.