



Sector Skills Academy Train-the-Trainer Request to Participate Application Opportunity

Introduction and Project Overview

For nine years, [the Workforce Strategies Initiative at the Aspen Institute](#) (AspenWSI) has run the national [Sector Skills Academy](#) (SSA), a year-long leadership development academy. The Academy focuses on sectoral workforce initiatives to build more effective regional workforce systems that connect business' talent needs with low-income workers' career advancement aspirations. The Academy provides experienced workforce development leaders with an opportunity for experiential learning that has practical applications for present and future work in the sector field. Over 200 workforce leaders nationally are alumni of the Sector Skills Academy, drawn from organizations such as nonprofit workforce training programs, local workforce agencies, community colleges, unions, and worker centers.

In 2015-16, with generous support from [The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation](#), AspenWSI will offer an opportunity for 12 to 15 experienced workforce or training professionals to engage in a train-the-trainer program, preparing them to deliver local or specialized versions of the Sector Skills Academy. For interested potential SSA trainers, Requests to Participate applications are due to be submitted to AspenWSI by Friday, October 9th, 2015. This Request to Participate document provides background information on the Sector Skills Academy, project goals, and expectation; and it concludes with a description of the application process and format. Key information about this opportunity is highlighted below.

Key Facts for Prospective Applicants

Webinar/Conference Call for Prospective Applicants: September 29th, 2015, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. EDT. To participate, send an RSVP email by Wednesday, September 23rd with your name and organization name to info@sectorskillsacademy.org, and you will receive instructions prior to the event.

Requests to Participate Due Date: October 9th, 2015, by 5 p.m. EDT, via email to info@sectorskillsacademy.org

Selection Announcement: By Monday, November 2nd, 2015

Train-the-Trainer Event: December 2-4, 2015, at [The National Conference Center](#) in Leesburg, Virginia

Resources Provided: For each trainer selected, the Aspen Institute will provide lodging, food, and training for the Dec. 2-4, 2015 train-the-trainer event, plus a travel cost reimbursement up to \$500 to attend the event. Trainers will be given online access to the Institute's 15-module SSA Train-the-Trainer toolkit. For a four month period following the event, the Institute will provide limited technical assistance to develop implementation plans.

Contact for Questions: Bill Browning, AspenWSI, at info@sectorskillsacademy.org

About the Aspen Institute Sector Skills Academy and Its Results

Interest in sector-oriented workforce training has growing dramatically in the last decade, largely because such approaches hold the potential to improve employment opportunities for low-wage workers while also supporting business competitiveness. That potential has prompted a variety of institutions—including community-based organizations, community colleges, labor-management partnerships, worker centers, and business associations—to launch new initiatives. This approach has steadily been incorporated into local, state, and federal policies, including the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#). And today, the sector field embodies a diverse mix of industry-specific approaches. Some sector strategies are now very common, such as those that help workers gain the skills and education they need to obtain quality employment and career opportunities in a particular industry. Other types of sector strategies, such as those designed to improve the quality of bad jobs or low-wage occupations within a particular sector, are also taking root in more communities. Together, strategies that build ladders to better job opportunities and strategies that raise the floor for workers in low-wage jobs comprise a field that is bursting with innovation and impact.

To build on the momentum of this work and to strengthen, sustain, and grow the sector field, the first Sector Skills Academy was initiated in June 2005. Since 2005 the Academy, which is facilitated and managed by [the Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative \(AspenWSI\)](#) and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, has graduated eight classes and nearly 225 Marano Fellows, named in honor of Cindy Marano, a pioneering leader in the sector field who helped design the Academy.

The Academy provides emerging and experienced leaders with an opportunity for experiential learning with practical applications for present and future work in the sector field. The national Academy consists of three workshops over roughly a 10-month period that allow participants to acquire new skills, engage in peer exchange and benefit from relationships with guest faculty and facilitators. Faculty are drawn from experienced leaders in the field of sectoral employment development. As a result of participating in the Academy, fellows are expected to apply the lessons they learn in ways that enhance their work in their chosen sector.

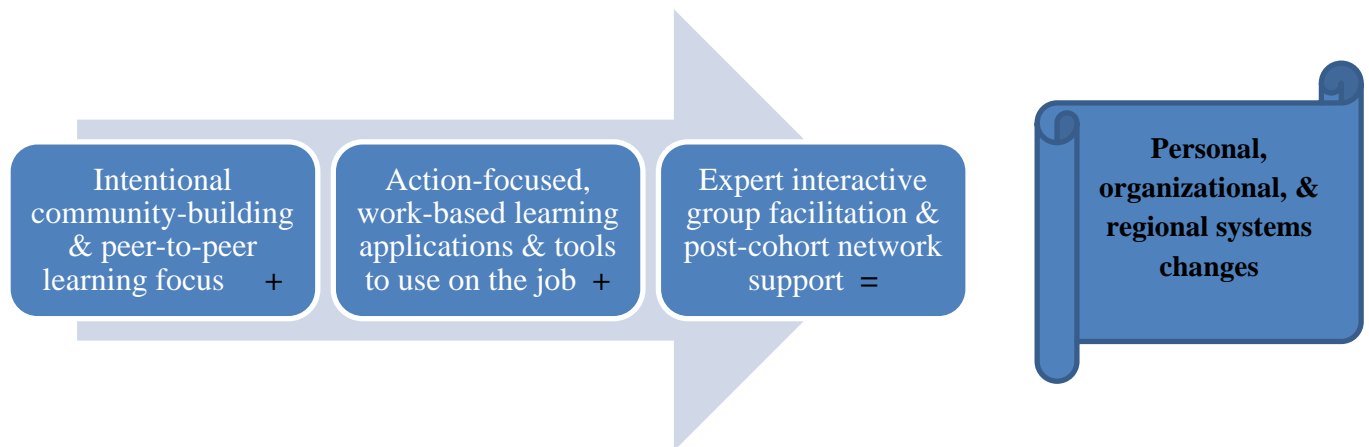
In 2014, AspenWSI conducted an extensive review of its nine-year Sector Skills Academy (SSA) program that included a national survey, three focus group meetings with alumni, and multiple consultations with an 18-member national advisory committee. Many Fellows attributed numerous personal, organizational, and regional systems change results to their Academy experiences. This review resulted in numerous findings that both affirmed the value of the SSA methodologies and provided fresh insights into the success drivers that can help to inform local or specialized sector skills training programs, such as:

Value of Peer Networks: SSA alumni focus group members spoke to the value of accessing a national network of peers from many different types of organizations and communities. Focus group members and survey respondents repeatedly stated how much they learned from peers during the cohort, and how many continued to rely on SSA's alumni network to learn about new practices and to test ideas.

Value and Usefulness of Tools: Our survey found that SSA's most popular tools are still used by about half of alumni (including many who completed SSA over five years ago), confirming the value and staying power of such tools to accomplish project work. The SSA toolkit offers a suite of existing tools that can be adapted for local or specialized programs, such as influence mapping, sector mapping, and partnership development, and the expertise to custom-develop new tools for different audiences and purposes.

Systems Change Results: Nearly half of SSA alumni survey respondents described regional or state systems changes that resulted from their SSA experiences. These included new or expanded business-driven sectoral training collaborations, new regional partnerships formed or strengthened in specific ways, local or state policy changes, and new employer engagement strategies.

Based on these findings, SSA established a Theory of Change formula, depicting the impact of the Fellowship programs from a participant perspective using this graphic:



Project Goals and Expectations

Overall Project Goal: To select and train 12 to 15 trainers around the use of the SSA curriculum and toolkit, establishing a network of trainers prepared to continue building the field through local and specialized Sector Skills Academies.

AspenWSI will provide to accepted applicants:

- Online access to the 15-module SSA Toolkit, including customizable facilitator's guides, participant tools and handouts, and PowerPoint slides;
- Access to a directory of SSA alumni and past SSA guest faculty who have expressed interest in assisting with local or specialized Sector Skills Academies;
- Funding for lodging, food, and training costs of 2 ½ day Train-the-Trainer Toolkit Workshop on December 2-4, 2015, plus up to \$500 in travel cost reimbursements;
- Facilitation of the learning community of trainers during planning phase through March 2016, including conference call(s), a follow-up webinar on Thursday, February 11th from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time, and an online forum to post and share information within the learning community; and
- Limited individualized technical assistance to support local program planning for four months following the train-the-trainer event, through March 2016.

Train-the-Trainer participants will be expected to:

- Attend the full train-the-trainer workshop and complete all related learning assignments;
- Fully participate in SSA Train-the-Trainer learning community;

- Share new materials and/or adaptations of SSA core materials with the Aspen Institute and other learning community members;
- Provide evaluation for the train-the-trainer experience and the Toolkit products to the Aspen Institute for the final revision of SSA materials; and
- Begin developing implementation plans for a local or specialized version of Sector Skills Academy.

SSA Train-the-Trainer Request to Participate Application Instructions

The Aspen Institute invites workforce leaders and training professionals who meet the following criteria to apply to participate in this train-the-trainer initiative:

- Direct leadership experience with a workforce development program, preferably one that has implemented sectoral strategies, or association with an organization committed to leadership and capacity building in the workforce field;
- Experience in training or facilitating workshops or network activities for adult professionals; and
- Experience with the Institute's national Sector Skills Academy or a similar workforce development leadership program, either as a graduate or guest faculty member.

In addition, the Aspen Institute is also interested in working with practitioners who have a vision for developing a local or specialized version of a Sector Skills Academy in 2016 or the near future.

We welcome individual applicants, as well as pairs from organizations that are larger in scope or geography.

Interested applicants can apply by sending a narrative application that addresses the questions and requested information below by 5 p.m. EDT on Friday, October 9th, 2015. Narrative applications should be no more than three or four pages long. Applications should be emailed as a Word or PDF attachment to info@sectorskillsacademy.org. By November 2nd, 2015, the Institute's selection committee will review all applications and notify applicants whether they have been accepted.

Questions and Topics to Address in Narrative Application

Applicants' three to four-page narrative application should address each of the following questions or topics in sequential order. More specific and concrete responses to the questions below are encouraged.

- **Contact Information:** Describe your current title, role, and organization. List your phone and email contact information. List contact information for one reference that the selection committee may choose to contact to learn more about your experiences as a leader and/or a trainer. (Note: There is an option to attach a letter of reference as well.)

Affirmations: Affirm your commitment to fully participate in the initiative, including advance preparation assignments, the train-the-trainer event, and follow-up evaluation activities. In particular, affirm your availability to participate in the entire December 2-4, 2015 train-the-trainer event at [The](#)

[National Conference Center](#) in Leesburg, Virginia (near Washington Dulles Airport). The event is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2nd and conclude by 1 p.m. on Friday, December 4th.

- **Your Qualifications:** Summarize your organizational leadership experience, including any experience leading a workforce organization, and your training experience, including any experience in training on workforce practitioner or leadership topics. If you are an alumnus or a guest faculty member of the Institute's Sector Skills Academy program, or have completed a similar workforce development program, please note this information within this section.
- **Your Interests and Goals:** Describe why you are interested in participating in the SSA train-the-trainer program, and note the goals that you hope to achieve through this initiative. Describe any local networks or coalitions that you might have in mind to engage in delivering a version of the Academy.
- **Your Plans:** If you plan to develop and lead a local or specialized version of the Sector Skills Academy in 2016, please describe your plans, including the target audience, location, timing, and any partner or funding stakeholders. Indicate if plans are tentative/conceptual, proposed, or confirmed.
- **Required Attachments:** Include your resume and a one-paragraph professional bio. (If applying as pairs from a larger organization, please include both resumes and bios). This material does not count towards the three to four-page limit of the narrative application.
- **Optional Attachments:** The following optional attachments can be included at the end of the application. They do not count toward the three to four-page limit for the narrative application:
 - Letter of reference; and/or
 - Letter of support from a sponsoring and/or funding organization confirming support for implementation plans of a local or specialized Academy.