Hired! IT Workforce Accelerator
Developing the Central Illinois Workforce through a Talent Pipeline Management System
Illinois Central College

Section 1: Project Description and Overview: *Section 1a: Executive Summary*

The *Hired! IT Workforce Accelerator* grant project is designed to create a sustainable workforce ecosystem in Central Illinois by establishing an information technology (IT) sectoral partnership (see attached diagram). A Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) system will use a supply chain approach to construct a pipeline of individuals who are credentialed in areas that specifically address employers' IT skills needs. The new regional IT workforce ecosystem will be developed by building both: (a) an external talent pipeline for new hires with credentials that match employers' IT skills needs; and (b) an internal talent pipeline by upskilling incumbent workers to meet employers' skills needs. When incumbent workers are promoted to new jobs after upskilling, their vacated jobs may be backfilled with new hires credentialed through the *IT Workforce Accelerator*. The region's IT workforce shortages will be addressed by credentialing **1,249** individuals over the three-year period and placing or retaining **1,000** in quality jobs.

Pipeline development will focus on pathways from K-12 through college credential completion by cultivating: (a) awareness and interest in IT career pathways; (b) essential skills for workforce readiness; and (c) IT skillsets through employer-driven IT programs. Wrap-around support is critical for mitigating barriers, and career development and job coaching will be instrumental to participant success in quality jobs. Uncredentialed adults, career-changers, and incumbent workers will be targeted to develop IT workforce pipelines. Employers will be supported through skills needs analysis, workforce planning, pathways consulting, upskilling incumbent workers, placing new hires, and onsite job coaching.

Section 1b: System Lead Entity or Backbone Organization

Illinois Central College (ICC) will serve as the backbone organization. Located in Peoria, ICC is a community college that enrolls 8,700 students. Equity is ICC's foremost priority and the focus of all recent student success initiatives. Subawardees Bradley University and Eureka College are baccalaureate institutions with enrollments of 4,600 and 600, respectively. These three institutions have established a consortium to engage an IT sectoral partnership and deliver equity-based workforce programming through the *IT Workforce Accelerator*.

Convene Necessary Stakeholders. ICC is well-positioned to mobilize and lead a large network of employer partners, strategic partners, and participants. The IT sectoral partnership has broadly engaged **64** stakeholder partners—including **38** district high schools—and **69** employer partners. In November 2021, ICC convened an IT Summit to gather industry input, and **47** partners attended. Following the Summit, an IT Workforce Needs Survey was completed by **69** employers. In January 2022, **60** partners attended a project update. This pattern of engagement demonstrates ICC's ability to convene the necessary stakeholders.

Dr. Sheila Quirk-Bailey, ICC President, and her leadership team have the committed support of a broad network of leaders from business and industry, local and state-level government, Career Link (the regional Workforce Board), and community organizations. Dr. Quirk-Bailey is a member of CEO Council and serves in a leadership role with the Regional Workforce Alliance.

Track Record of Success. ICC has convened a diverse array of partners by launching major

innovations such as the Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI). ICC serves as lead college of the **$18.7 million**, statewide WEI program, comprised of 17 colleges. Since the program launched in 2019, ICC has served **461** students, over **70%** of whom are African American and **100%** of whom are low-income. Through WEI, **243** individuals have earned a total of **500** credentials. Of the **5,221** students who have enrolled in WEI statewide, **60%** have earned credentials, and **71%** of program completers are employed at an average hourly wage of **$17.50**.[1] The statewide WEI program was showcased in Governor Pritzker's 2022 State of the State Address.

Fundraising Plan and Track Record: Leveraging Other Funds. ICC, Bradley, and Eureka will leverage $2.16 million in cash and in-kind investments to fund the project. (See attached list.)

Ability to Reach Underserved Workers. Two Recruitment and Case Management Coordinators will recruit program participants, under the direction of the Outreach Manager. Targeted recruitment will be delivered in the region's most distressed area: the southern portion of Peoria within the 61605 zip code.[2] Strategic recruitment efforts will focus on populations underrepresented in the IT workforce. Grassroots recruiting—leveraging community-based organizations (CBOs), K-12 schools, and other community partners—will be the primary strategy for targeting historically marginalized populations. These efforts will include promotion and referral by sectoral partners and in-person recruitment at gathering places in 61605.

Staffing Plan. Grant staff will carry out *IT Workforce Accelerator* initiatives and achieve its objectives for enrollment, completion, and quality job placement and retention. The program will be championed by President Quirk-Bailey, Executive Sponsor.

Figure 1—Organization Chart: *IT Workforce Accelerator*
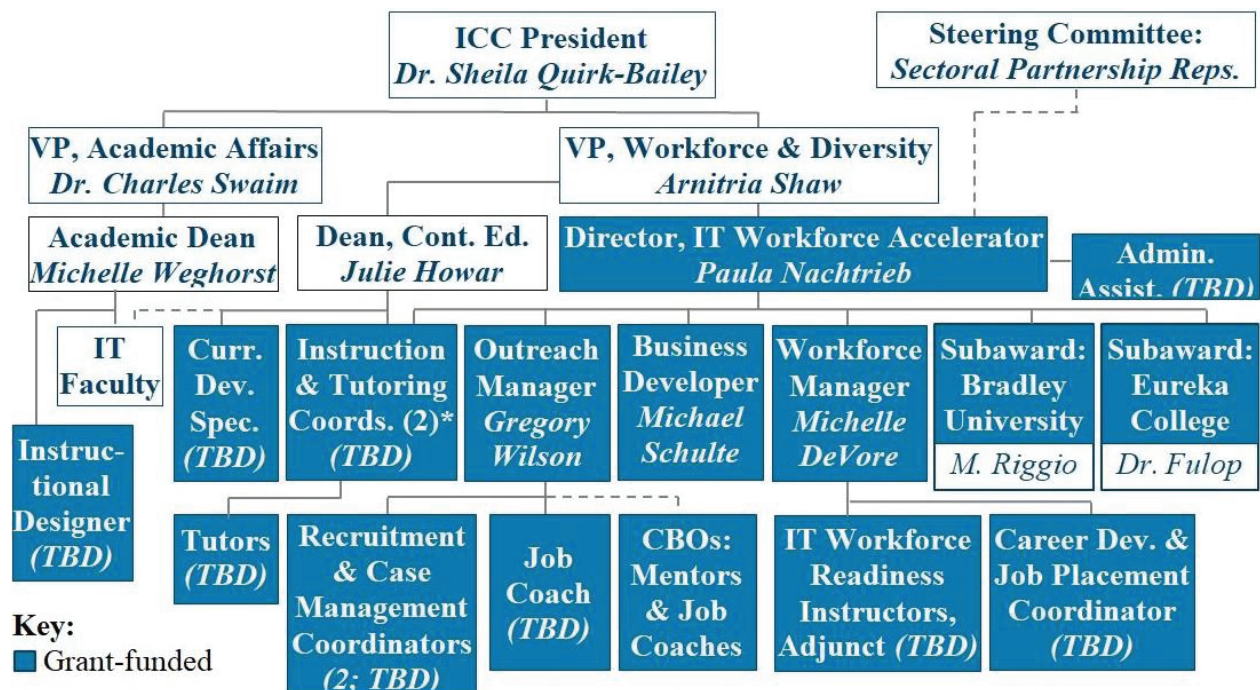
* <u>Note:</u> Two Instruction & Tutoring Coordinators will be hired, one reporting to the Dean of Continuing Education and one reporting to the Director of the IT Workforce Accelerator.

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[1] Workforce Equity Initiative. (2021). Providing high-skill, high-wage outcomes. IllinoisWEI.org
[2] Economic Innovation Group. (2020). Distressed communities index: Peoria (61605). Eig.org.

ICC Project Lead. Paula Nachtrieb will serve as Director of the *IT Workforce Accelerator*. She currently serves as Director of the Workforce Equity Initiative, leading a team that provides workforce credentialing with wrap-around services for historically marginalized populations. Under Ms. Nachtrieb's leadership, ICC's program has met or exceeded all State WEI targets.

Subaward: Bradley Project Lead. Michelle Riggio Rarick, Executive Director of Continuing Education, oversees ongoing development of non-credit programming for professionals and youth and chairs the University Senate Education Committee.

Subaward: Eureka Project Lead. Dr. Ann Fulop, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, serves on President's Council and is a tenured faculty member. She has a PhD in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and previously worked as a Human Factors Engineer.

Section 2: Sectoral Partners: *Section 2a: Employer Leadership and Commitments*

Regional IT Workforce Ecosystem. A key goal outlined in Greater Peoria's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is to "develop a more resilient, robust, and equitable talent pipeline."[3] Talent Pipeline Management is a nationally recognized strategy that applies the supply chain model to workforce development, starting with employer demand then developing a supply of qualified workers to meet that demand.[4] To grow the workforce, the program will target uncredentialed individuals and those who are underemployed. Participants will be supported through an array of wrap-around services to address their individual needs and barriers. These services are essential for developing an IT workforce ecosystem with credentialed workers who qualify for quality jobs.

In addition to serving regional employers, the *IT Workforce Accelerator* will include a pilot for placing **10** IT credential completers per year in jobs with national employers, through remote work performed locally. Participants from underserved backgrounds will be targeted. A collaborative, furnished office space will be provided as an incubator with an on-site Job Coach.

Employer Commitment. Participating employers commit to provide data on their IT skills needs. They also commit to provide "quality jobs" commitments through apprenticeships, a commitment to hire a specified number of credential completers, or a commitment to upskill a specified number of incumbent workers. Also, employers commit to allow job coaching during the first three months on-the-job and to provide feedback on the performance of new hires.

Central Illinois employers are vested, as evidenced by their participation in the IT Summit, IT Workforce Needs Survey, and the presentation and feedback session on the *IT Workforce Accelerator*, which was designed as a result of employers' survey input. Employers' three-year IT skills needs for hiring and upskilling are outlined in the attached "Process to Gather Skills Needs." Through the survey, employers expressed their collective need to hire **1,212** newly credentialed individuals and upskill **1,320** current employees over the next three years to address their IT skills needs. A number of those employers provided letters of support and hiring commitments (attached). The *IT Workforce Accelerator* will—within the first three years— credential and place or retain **1,000** individuals in quality jobs, addressing employers' needs.

Employer partnerships have been established and a portion of hiring commitments secured.

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[3] Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (2021). Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Retrieved from https://greaterpeoriaedc.org/strategy/

[4] U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. (2021). Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM): Academy Curriculum, p. 11. Retrieved from www.uschamberfoundation.org/TPM-publications

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Additional partners will be recruited through September 2022 by the business development team (*i.e.,* the grant-funded Business Developer and leaders from the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (GPEDC) and four Chambers of Commerce). Through October 2022, ICC will continue securing hiring commitments among employers who completed the survey.

Benefits of Employer Participation. Foremost, partner employers will benefit from access to new external and internal talent pipelines of workers credentialed in areas that directly match their IT skills needs. All credentials will be portable and industry recognized. In addition, in the IT Workforce Needs Survey, employers rated their need for the skills-based hiring training and consulting services listed in Table 1. Consulting has been budgeted to deliver these services.

Table 1—Central Illinois Employer Training and Consulting Needs: Percentage of Employers that Agreed or Strongly Agreed that this Service is Needed	
Skill-Based Hiring Training and Consulting Services	**Percentage**
Upskilling plan development at my company	91%
Career path development for IT occupations at my company	88%
Free job coaching for IT program participants during the first 3 months on-the-job	83%
Professional development on delivering effective work-based learning programs	80%
Workforce readiness/essential skills development for IT program participants	79%
Free re-training if the credentialed participant does not demonstrate skills needed	74%
Comprehensive IT workforce development planning at my company: identification of knowledge/skills needed for the future to meet company goals, assessment/gap analysis, plan design, coaching through implementation phase, evaluation	74%
Consulting to address IT workforce challenges at my company	70%
Professional development on diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI)	70%

Employers' IT Skills Needs. See the attached "Process to Gather Skills Needs" for these data.

Participant Recruitment Requirements. Employers and project staff will collaboratively establish participant recruitment requirements. Employer training will also be provided to "drive a regional shift in business culture from expecting a workforce with available skillsets to investing in the workforce pipeline creation to develop skills in high demand sectors" (CEDS Tactic #2.6).

Continuous Improvement. Employers will play an integral role in program design and the continuous improvement of *IT Workforce Accelerator* programming and supports. A continuous feedback loop will be integrated, with regular feedback and input obtained from all employer partners by the business development team and formally reported to the Steering Committee, comprised of stakeholder representatives from the IT sectoral partnership. Quarterly sectoral partnership meetings will be provided for updates, dialogue, and input.

Also, external evaluation will be conducted annually and summatively and will include quantitative and qualitative insights from employer partners, strategic partners, and participants. Based on the evaluation findings, the project staff and Steering Committee—with input from the full sectoral partnership—will collaboratively identify improvements to design and implement.

Section 2b: Other Stakeholders and Partnerships

The strategic partners listed in the IT sectoral partnership (attached) will be critical to credential and place/retain **1,000** participants in quality jobs. All strategic partners will be responsible for facilitating participant recruitment and referral, in partnership with project staff.

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Community-based organizations (*e.g.,* Goodwill Industries, METEC, Tri-County Urban League) serve as a linchpin for wrap-around support. Under the direction of the grant-funded Outreach Manager, these CBOs will provide mentoring/case management for uncredentialed individuals and career-changers for the duration of Workforce Readiness and their IT credential programs, as well as job coaching for the first three months on-the-job. Rental of business attire will be provided by CBOs, as well. The specific roles and responsibilities of CBOs and other strategic partners are outlined in the attached support letters and memoranda of understanding (MoUs).

Section 3: Regional Description

Regional Assessment. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* will serve Central Illinois employers, most located within the Greater Peoria Economic Development District of Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford Counties. Greater Peoria is located midway between Chicago and Saint Louis.

Peoria County is located on the west coast of the Illinois River. The City of Peoria is the largest city with a population of about 113,500, a decline of about 1,800 since the 2010 census. Peoria County is representative of the wider regional economy. Agriculture is a dominant economic factor in rural areas. Peoria County also has a strong manufacturing base. Though Caterpillar relocated its corporate headquarters in 2016, the county retained large Caterpillar facilities including its research and development operation (Mossville), a foundry (Mapleton), and a variety of administrative units (Peoria, Mossville). The county has a number of other major manufacturing operations, including Komatsu, ATS, and Liberty Steel, as well as small and medium-sized manufacturers. The largest employment sector in Peoria County is healthcare with three hospitals, a college of medicine, a number of nursing schools, and the headquarters of the 14-facility OSF Healthcare hospital system. Downtown Peoria is the business, financial, government, legal, and entertainment hub for the metropolitan area.

Tazewell County is located across the Illinois River. Its largest city, Pekin, is also the second largest city in the region with a population of about 31,000, a decline of 2,300 over the past ten years. The four largest Tazewell communities (Pekin, East Peoria, Morton, and Washington) are experiencing diversified economic development growth in multiple sectors. The county has considerable agricultural operations. Manufacturing plays a significant role, too, with a large Caterpillar factory plus mid-sized manufacturing and logistics companies such as G&D Integrated, Nestle, Morton Industries, and Yamashin Filter. Two hospitals are located in Tazewell County. While most of the region's medical jobs are physically located in Peoria County, many Tazewell County residents work in that field.

Woodford County, located northeast of Tazewell County, runs along the Illinois River and sits between Peoria and Bloomington-Normal, sharing a labor pool with both urban centers. While the entire region witnessed population decline over the past 10 years, Woodford County's population loss was the slowest, losing about 200 citizens (-0.5%). It is largely rural with some suburban areas near Peoria. Agriculture dominates the Woodford County economy, in addition to a number of smaller manufacturing operations and a critical access hospital.

Assessment of Economic State. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* provides targeted opportunities for individuals residing in the 61605 zip code, an urban Southside neighborhood in Peoria and one of the most distressed communities in America. Peoria County ranks among the lowest 13% of Illinois counties on the "Illinois County Well-Being Index," placing it on the state's "Poverty Warning List." The U.S. Census reports persons below poverty level in the state

of Illinois at 11.5% but 19.7% for the city of Peoria, Illinois.[5]

Peoria 61605 was ranked as one of the most distressed zip code areas in the nation, according to an analysis of more than 25,000 zip codes conducted by the Economic Innovation Group in 2020. Peoria's 61605 area fared poorly on indicators of economic and social well-being even when compared to the most distressed zip codes throughout the nation. On average, 25% of residents lived below the poverty line in the most distressed communities. In 61605, it was 44%. On average, 35% of working-age adults were out of work in the most distressed communities. In 61605, it was 45%. The median household income was $37,800 but only $21,900 in 61605. The average housing vacancy rate was15.3% compared to 21.1% in 61605. On average, 20.6% of adults in the most distressed communities did not have a high school diploma. In 61605, it was 27.4%. The 61605 zip code received a Distressed Communities Index score of 99.6 out of 100. To quote the EIG report, "The terms of the American experience are too often dictated by race, place and inequality."[6] A recent analysis of federal data by *Governing* magazine found Peoria was home to the most racially segregated public school district in the country and the sixth most racially segregated metropolitan residential area.[7]

Peoria 61605 has five public schools operated by LEA Peoria Public Schools (PPS). With 12,864 students (79% low income), PPS is the largest, most racially and economically diverse school district in the region, with 1,892 PPS students residing in the 61605 area code.

Assessment of Employers and Employer Hiring Needs. While the pillars of the regional economy are manufacturing and healthcare, information technology jobs are critical to those industries. Greater Peoria's largest employers have significant local back-of-house systems that rely on programmers, network specialists, PC support, and a range of other IT services. In addition to these internal company needs, the region is home to a variety of IT service providers such as Heart Technologies, Pearl Technology, and Facet Technologies who serve both local and national clients. A key economic development strategy of the region is tied to innovation and entrepreneurship, which has a heavy focus on technology-related companies that offer products and services related to smart and connected communities.

Most Significant and Difficult-to-Meet Needs. The Good Jobs Challenge will be critical for funding Phase 1 of the regional TPM strategy, focused on IT. Of the region's top three sectors, IT was slated for implementation first because this sector spans multiple industries, and the region has over **1,000** IT jobs openings annually.[8] Following implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the TPM process, Phase 2 will consist of establishing new sectoral partnerships and expanding TPM to the region's other top two sectors: healthcare and manufacturing.

Identification of Specific Employers' Existing or Projected Needs. See the attached "Process to Gather Skills Needs," as well as in their individual employer letters, for employers' three-year skills needs projections for new hires and incumbent worker upskilling.

Proposed Plan for Addressing Needs by Providing Quality Jobs. See Section 4c (page 10).

Section 4: Impacts of the Regional Workforce Training System:
Section 4a: Regional System Development, Program Design, and Program Implementation

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[5] U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). Quick facts: Illinois.
[6] Economic Innovation Group. (2020). Distressed communities index: Peoria (61605). Eig.org.
[7] Vock, D, C., Charles, B., & Maciag, M. (2019). How states and cities reinforce racial segregation in America. *Governing Magazine.* Retrieved from www.governing.com
[8] Emsi (2021). Central Illinois IT jobs and job outlook: Eighteen county region.

The project will include three phases, as outlined in the timeline below.

Table 2—Timeline: *IT Workforce Accelerator* Development, Design, and Implementation	
Task	**Timeline**
Phase 1: System Development	
Establish a regional system of key stakeholders for training model	05/2018 – 09/2022
Develop processes to gather employers' skills needs; translate/training models	11/2021 – 12/2021
Phase 2: Program Design	
Employers identify in-demand IT roles; hiring needs/market analysis	11/2021 – 09/2022
Determine skills needs from employers	11/2021 – 09/2022
Develop training model and curriculum with employers	01/2022 – 02/2023
Perform gap analysis: Determine existing training to address skills needs	01/2022 – 09/2022
Secure employer commitments to hire	11/2021 – 10/2022
Develop plan with CBOs: Outreach and recruitment of underserved workers	12/2021 – 08/2022
Phase 3: Program Implementation	
Recruit underserved workers	08/2022 – 04/2025
Deliver skills training	10/2022 – 07/2025
Provide wrap-around services	10/2022 – 07/2025
Place workers into well-paying, quality jobs	01/2023 – 07/2025

System Development. Development of the *IT Workforce Accelerator* will capitalize on the existing network of deep partnerships that prioritize workforce development, which began in 2018, when the Greater Peoria CEO Council and ICC formed the Regional Workforce Alliance (RWA). The RWA's strategic focus is to create the workforce required to stabilize and grow the Central Illinois economy by systemically connecting employers, educators, and community-based organizations (CBOs) with: (a) K-12 and GED students; (b) uncredentialed adults with a solid employment record in low-skilled jobs, typically part-time with low pay and no benefits; and (c) adults with multiple barriers to employment.

Essential Workforce Skills. In a regional workforce needs survey, essential skills were identified as the top priority. The RWA's first major project was to develop a regional Essential Skills program, including behavioral evaluation standards and a badging system. Over **80** businesses, community organizations, and educational providers came together to develop the program in partnership with Jobs for the Future and Northern Illinois University. The resulting GPEAK (Greater Peoria Essential Abilities and Knowledge) program is currently utilized by K-12, higher education, and CBOs. To date, 495 individuals have been certified.

Regional Problems to Address. The goal is to forge pathways toward jobs with family-sustaining wages and employee benefits for the **23,900** Greater Peoria adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.[9] The RWA sees TPM and the *IT Workforce Accelerator* as the next step in the region's workforce progression and a key strategy to help "put people back to work."

Continued Employer Outreach and Recruitment. Continued employer outreach and recruitment will be conducted by the business development team. Benefits of participation will be shared with employers, including: (a) direct access to a "new hire" IT talent pipeline,

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[9] Hill, B. (2020). Record April job losses hurt some communities even more than Illinois' statewide decline of 13.4%. Illinois Policy. Illinoispolicy.org.

designed specifically to meet employers' IT skills needs; (b) incumbent worker upskilling, also driven by employer IT skills needs; (c) coordinated implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies to grow a more diverse IT talent pipeline; (d) business consulting for customized workforce plan development and TPM training; and (e) opportunity to network and learn from other IT employers and other strategic partners.

Process to Gather Skills Needs from Employers and Translate Needs into Effective Training Models. See the attached "Process to Gather Skills Needs" for a detailed description.

Program Design: The Training Model. The IT skills needs of Central Illinois employers were gathered through an IT Summit focus group, survey, and feedback opportunity during a program plan update. In support of TPM, the training model will be designed to address the high-priority IT skills needs identified by employers.

Worker Outreach and Recruitment. Aligning with Greater Peoria's CEDS, the *IT Workforce Accelerator* will serve as a vehicle for achieving CEDS objectives, credentialing **1,249** individuals and placing or retaining **1,000** individuals in quality jobs. In 2021, the National Association of Development Organizations recognized the Greater Peoria CEDS as a Best Practice Model for Equity and Inclusion. Advancing this priority, individuals from historically marginalized populations will be recruited, including: females, minority races/ethnicities, low-income, and other populations with labor market barriers. Target populations and skillsets were identified by the sectoral partnership, based on workforce data and employer input (see Table 3). A wide range of marketing and recruitment strategies will be implemented to recruit participants: print, radio, social media, and geofencing. Sectoral partnerships will be leveraged for referrals.

Table 3—Targeted Populations to Credential through the *IT Workforce Accelerator**	
Population	**Description**
Uncredentialed Individuals	Middle school and high school students; recent high school graduates; uncredentialed adults, typically those with multiple barriers to full-time employment paying family-sustaining wages and providing employee benefits.
Career-Changers	Adults who have college degrees but typically in fields with low labor market value, leading to under-employment and earnings that are not family sustaining.
Incumbent Workers	Adults whose employers have identified them for upskilling opportunities to develop the organization's skill needs.

* Note: The recruitment process will include career exploration to confirm interests and goals.

IT Pathways. Utilizing the methods outlined earlier to assess employers' skills needs, two credential pathways were developed: a Networking and Cybersecurity Pathway and a Computer Programming Pathway (see attached diagrams). The IT credential pathways were established to "meet each population where they are" and equip them with the IT skills needed by Central Illinois employers. The pathways have flexible entry and exit points, based on participants' individual needs and goals. All credentials along these pathways are portable and industry-recognized. Introductory exposure to these skillsets is also reflected in the K-12 Pathway (see attached diagram).

Wrap-Around Services. Tiered wrap-around services will be available to participants (outlined in Table 4). Two Recruitment and Case Management Coordinators, along with assigned Mentors/Case Managers from the CBOs, will serve as a consistent source of individualized support, from recruitment through credential completion and job placement. They will: (a) administer an intake process to identify the specific barriers that threaten each

individual's success; (b) coordinate support to help mitigate those barriers; (c) monitor class attendance and performance; and (d) deliver early interventions as needed. Upon job placement, three months of job coaching will be provided.

Measurement and Tracking. The new Workforce Manager will oversee project operations. Utilizing the effective approach ICC has used for WEI, the Workforce Manager will track credential program outcomes using ICC's advising and case management platform. Subawardee program staff will report their participants' outcomes to ICC. Also, the Workforce Manager will coordinate with CBOs and other strategic partners (listed in the attached diagram) to compile, analyze, and report outcomes and usage of the wrap-around services listed in Table 4.

Table 4—Tiered Wrap-Around Services		
Tier	Eligibility Criteria	Free Access to Grant-Funded Services
1	**K-12: Early IT Pipeline Development**	• Essential Skills (GPEAK) program, with behavioral standards and badging system (icc.edu/gpeak/)
2	**All Uncredentialed and Career-Changers** (*i.e.,* "New Hire" Participants)	• Advising & success coaching • Basic computer apps. course • Broadband internet • Career closet: Rental of interview and job attire • CBO mentoring & case mgmt. • Disability services & referrals • Financial counseling • Food pantry referrals • Free tuition, textbook loan, course materials • Job coaching • Laptop loan program • Legal services • Mental health counseling • Tutoring • Veterans services • Workforce Readiness/GPEAK
3	**Uncredentialed and Career-Changers:** Maximum Income of 250% of Federal Poverty Guidelines	Tier 2 services, plus: • Childcare assistance (Note: State-funded childcare assistance will be accessed first—before Good Jobs Challenge grant funds— for those earning at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines.) • Transportation assistance
4	**Uncredentialed:** Maximum Income of 150% of Federal Poverty Guidelines	Tier 3 services, plus eligible for: • $3,600 participant stipends, funded through the State of Illinois Workforce Equity Initiative (contingent on enrollment at ICC, WEI eligibility, and continuation of legislative funding)
5	**Incumbent Workers**	• Free tuition, textbook loan, and course materials

Program Implementation. Program recruitment, delivery of credential programs and wrap-around supports, and quality job placement will occur as outlined in the project timeline (page 7). Recruitment and program delivery will occur immediately upon grant award for existing curricula that will be provided through the *IT Workforce Accelerator*, leading to those job placements already committed by employers. Simultaneously, system development will continue through September 2022, as additional employers join the sectoral partnership. Their IT skills needs will be assessed, leading to quality job hiring commitments. Skills-based hiring will also be provided for employers (see Section 2, page 3).

Section 4b: Advancing EDA Priorities

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The COVID-19 pandemic magnified economic challenges in Peoria. During the first month of the pandemic lockdown (March – April 2020), **23,900** adults in Peoria—**14.6%** of the metro population—lost their jobs. In fact, Peoria was second only to Decatur with the highest percentage of job loss in Illinois.[10] Peoria 61605, specifically, was already designated as one of the most distressed communities in the U.S.[11] The families of poverty who live there have experienced health challenges as well. Evidence points to the E.D. Edwards coal-fired power plant in neighboring Bartonville as a chief source of air pollution that resulted in chronic illnesses. The coal-fired power plant was ordered to close by the end of 2022.[12]

The pandemic amplified that distress, as Illinois shut down, and thousands of hospitality and retail jobs were lost. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* is designed to provide **1,249** individuals with portable, industry recognized credentials in IT to qualify individuals for jobs with labor market value, jobs that can be performed remotely if the pandemic resurges. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* is an excellent example of EDA's Recovery and Resilience Investment priority.

The program also supports four other EDA investment priorities: equity, recovery and resilience, workforce development, and technology-based economic development. This investment will create value in Central Illinois by changing the trajectory of people's lives, particularly those who have been historically underrepresented in the IT profession, by qualifying and placing them in quality jobs. Ultimately, this investment will create a self-sustaining regional workforce ecosystem that bolsters the regional economy.

Section 4c: Workers Served and Job Placements Expected

Job Details related to Employer Commitments

Table 5—Credential-Seeking Participant Outcomes: Three-Year Totals								
	New Hires				Incumbent Worker Upskilling			
IT Pathway	Employer Need	Enroll	Complete	Quality Jobs	Employer Need	Enroll	Complete	Quality Jobs
Pathway: Networking / Cybersecurity								
Help Desk / User Support	120	195	117	80	105	121	97	72
Networking and Cybersecurity	396	261	204	149	405	280	223	215
Pathway: Computer Programming								
Secure Software Apprenticeship	60	60	54	54	0			
Micro-Credentials	348	270	190	135	309	427	322	263
Google, Microsoft, and Other Certificates								
Other Certs.	288	60	42	32	501	TBD	TBD	TBD
TOTAL	**1,212**	**846**	**607**	**450**	**1,320**	**828**	**642**	**550**

[10] Hill, B. (2020). Record April job losses hurt some communities even more than Illinois' statewide decline of 13.4%. Illinois Policy. Illinoispolicy.org.
[11] Economic Innovation Group. (2020). Distressed communities index: Peoria (61605). Eig.org.
[12] Greenfield, N. (2020). The revitalization of this former coal town starts now. Nrdc.org.

Participant Outcomes: Enrollment, Completion, and Quality Job Placements

Total Credential-Seeking Participant Targets: *Enrollment:* A total of **1,674** credential-seeking participants will enroll in *IT Workforce Accelerator* programs between 2022 and 2025. Of those participants, **846** will enter the program as uncredentialed individuals or career-changers, and **828** will be incumbent workers seeking upskilling.

Credential Completion: Of all **1,674** who enroll, **1,249** (**75%**) will successfully complete a credential program. Completers will be comprised of **607** participants who entered programs as uncredentialed individuals or career-changers, in addition to **642** incumbent workers.

Quality Jobs: Of the **1,249** credential completers, **1,000** (**80%**) will be placed or retained in quality jobs. Those in quality jobs will include **450** who entered their programs as uncredentialed individuals or career-changers, as well as **550** incumbent workers.

Table 6—Demographic Breakdown: Credential-Seeking Participants' Three-Year Targets				
Population	**Enroll**		**Complete**	**Quality Jobs**
	Number	**Percentage of Total Credential-Seeking Population**		
Females	438	26%	74% (323/438)	76% (247/323)
Minority Races/Ethnicities	303	18%	79% (240/303)	61%[13] (147/240)
Low-Income[14]	512	31%	68% (348/512)	64% (221/348)
Other Populations with Labor Market Barriers[15]	163	10%	71% (116/163)	67% (78/116)

K-12 Targets: Early Pipeline Development. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* will enroll **9,115** K-12 students in IT camps and career development experiences between 2022 and 2025 as an early pipeline development strategy to support the GPEDC's CEDS goal for creating a more diverse future IT workforce that is inclusive of historically underserved populations. The majority (**8,000**) will participate in an enhanced CareerSpark program, with IT career development experiences in 8th Grade and high school. Of the total **9,115** K-12 students who enroll, **97%** (**8,882**) will complete the program. Of K-12 participants, **41%** will be females, **39%** will be minority races/ethnicities, **41%** will be low-income, and **7%** will be members of other populations with labor market barriers.

Projected Wages. Because Illinois does not have a "prevailing wage" for IT jobs, "**30%**

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[13] Of the 303 participants who enroll, 137 will meet the WEI demographic profile: 100% will be in the lowest income tier served by the program. Many will have multiple labor market barriers.

[14] Low-income is defined as earning no more than 250% of federal poverty guidelines. Of the 512 low-income participants, 195 (38%) will meet the WEI demographic profile, earning the lowest income tier (no more than 150% of federal poverty guidelines).

[15] Includes participants with: disabilities; military service-members, veterans, or military spouses; individuals in recovery; individuals with past criminal records; or other populations.

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above regional living wage" (**$17.59** per hour) [16] will be used as the income metric for defining a quality job. The jobs for which employers are committing to hire or upskill/retain workers meet the "quality jobs" criteria: (a) either paying at least **$17.59** per hour or placing individuals on a pathway to a job that pays at least **$17.59** per hour; and (b) generally offering a full range of employee benefits.[17] The *IT Workforce Accelerator* programs qualify workers for the jobs listed in Table 7. All IT occupations in the 18-county Central Illinois region—except Computer User Support Specialists—pay at least **$17.59** per hour at the 25th percentile of hourly earnings. However, Computer User Support Specialists are on the Networking and Cybersecurity Pathway, leading next to Network/Systems Administrator jobs, which *do* meet the "quality jobs" criteria.

Table 7—Employer Job Commitments Meet "Quality Jobs" Criteria: Earnings and Benefit Eligibility for IT Jobs in the 18-County Central Illinois Region				
Jobs for which Employers Committing to Hire Workers	**Hourly Earnings**			**Employee Benefits?**
	10th Percentile	**25th Percentile**	**Median**	
Computer User Support Specialists	$12.73	$16.19	$24.43	Yes
Web Developers / Interface Designers	$16.56	$20.91	$31.75	Yes
Computer Network Support Specialists	$17.52	$21.69	$27.01	Yes
Computer Programmers	$21.93	$33.18	$42.97	Yes
Network/Systems Administrators	$24.23	$29.15	$36.90	Yes
Database Administrators and Architects	$24.29	$31.88	$43.50	Yes
Management Analysts	$26.51	$33.83	$44.55	Yes
Software Developers/Quality Assurance	$32.30	$40.28	$50.40	Yes
Computer Systems Analysts	$32.47	$38.84	$47.13	Yes
Information Security Analysts	$37.96	$42.93	$51.32	Yes

Sources: BLS (2021); Emsi (2021); and Glasmeier (2021).

Size of Credibly-Projected Income Gains and the Number of New Quality Jobs. The IT Workforce Accelerator will place or retain **1,000** participants in quality jobs in Central Illinois between 2022 and 2025, meeting employers' IT skills needs and filling nearly **40%** (**1,000/ 2,532**) of employers' three-year IT job projections along the Networking and Cybersecurity Pathway and the Computer Programming Pathway for new hires and incumbent worker upskilling. All will either earn at least **$17.59** per hour or will be on an IT pathway that will lead to a job paying that rate. Additionally, all **1,000** individuals placed in quality jobs are projected to receive a comprehensive employee benefits package.

Projected Training Cost per Worker. The average cost for credentialing each of the **1,000** individuals placed or retained in quality jobs, inclusive of wrap-around services costs, is projected at **$14,608**. This rate includes both credential programming and comprehensive wrap-around services, outlined in the tiered wrap-around services listing (Table 4). For K-12 programs, the average cost per completion is projected at **$94** for each of the **8,882** participants.

Section 4d: Feasibility

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[16] Glasmeier, A. K. (2021). Living wage calculation for Peoria County, Illinois. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. LivingWage.mit.edu/counties/17143
[17] Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021). Employee benefits in the United States. BLS.gov.

ICC is highly experienced at designing major, grant-seeded student success initiatives that meet or exceed target outcomes on time and within budget. This program will be modeled after the successful IT WEI model, which currently serves 17 to 44 participants per year. With the addition of more wrap-around services (*e.g.,* childcare, career development, job placement, job coaching), credential completion and quality job placement outcomes will be scaled, as reflected in the targets outlined in Table 5. IT WEI's Workforce Readiness-to-LAN Technician program sequence, as well as the Secure Software Development Apprenticeship, will be scaled to benefit more participants and employers. Also, IT workforce offerings will be expanded to include programming micro-credentials. The following will contribute to program feasibility.

TPM Process. A best practice for workforce program development, this process will contribute to the *IT Workforce Accelerator's* feasibility by beginning with employers' IT skills needs, then developing the supply of qualified workers. A project timeline is provided on page 7.

Speed-to-Completion. Accelerated, flexible, stackable credentials designed for speed-to-completion will be essential for placing or retaining **1,000** newly credentialed individuals in quality jobs by July 2025. Accelerated, credit- or non-credit based options will be offered, with a new credit-for-prior-learning policy explored as part of the *IT Workforce Accelerator*.

Early System Development and Program Design. System development began with the CEO Council's formation of the Regional Workforce Alliance in 2018, and program design is well underway. Immediately upon receiving a Good Jobs Challenge grant award, recruitment of underserved workers will begin for existing IT workforce programs targeted for scaling. The existing Workforce Readiness course will be offered in October 2022, followed by enrollment in the LAN Technician program in January 2023. For existing IT curricula that will be scaled as part of the *IT Workforce Accelerator*, participants will be placed in quality jobs beginning in Spring 2023. Early system development, program design, and well-planned project deliverables and timeline make this a feasible plan for placing or retaining **1,000** workers.

Section 4e: Target Participants

Uncredentialed and Career-Changers. The IT sectoral partnership was formed to increase credential completion and quality job placement among individuals who are uncredentialed, plus those may have degrees but are underemployed an seeking a career change to IT. These populations, in particular, are vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impacts, as **23,900** Greater Peoria adults lost their jobs during the pandemic. These two populations will be targeted for *IT Workforce Accelerator* participation, and **450** will be placed in quality jobs.

Incumbent Workers. The regional IT workforce ecosystem will generate entry-level IT job openings by investing in the advancement of incumbent workers—who currently hold those entry-level openings—to fill employers' more advanced IT skills needs. Through the *IT Workforce Accelerator*, **550** incumbent workers will upskill and earn IT credentials to qualify for added job responsibilities or promotion. Their vacated positions may then be filled by formerly uncredentialed individuals or career-changers who are newly credentialed in IT.

Equity-Based Strategies. Equity is the College's chief priority. ICC was honored with the national 2020 Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) Charles Kennedy Equity Award for the success of WEI and for facilitating community roundtables on racial disparities. Equity-based strategies will be essential to realize the vision for the *IT Workforce Accelerator*.

Early Pipeline Development: Creating a Diverse IT Workforce of the Future. To generate early interest in IT, equity-based K-12 programming will be delivered through IT/STEM

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academies and bootcamps, leading to dual-enrollment in IT credential programs. Recruitment will target underserved populations, particularly those in the 61605 zip code. Additionally, the GPEAK Essential Skills program will be expanded in K-12 schools through intensive curriculum mapping and development of GPEAK communities of practice among teachers. GPEAK integration will support student success in high school, college, and, eventually, work.

Targeted Recruitment and Admission. The WEI recruitment model admits cohorts that are **100%** low-income and **70%** African American. This model is built upon grassroots recruitment strategies that leverage sectoral partnerships with K-12 schools, Career Link, CBOs, and other partners with deep connections in targeted, underserved communities. This model will be replicated to scale IT WEI programming through the *IT Workforce Accelerator*. Additionally, the consortium will adopt WEI's comprehensive interview process for program applicants. This process will assess their interest in IT and their motivation to complete the program.

Workforce Readiness: Essential Skill-Building. The Workforce Readiness course, with integrated Essential Skills development, will be integral to the success of participants from historically marginalized populations. Workforce Readiness will be redesigned and contextualized for IT, with integration of CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+) credentialing.

Job Coaching: Essential Skills Reinforcement. Each new hire will engage in three months of job coaching. The job coach will contact the individual weekly to reinforce essential skills, address challenges, and celebrate successes.

Section 5: Funding Request and Program Design and Implementation:
Section 5a: Funding Request; and Section 5b: Project Development Activities

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A three-year total of **$15,442,617** is requested to credential **1,249** individuals and place or retain them in **1,000** quality jobs. Annual totals are: Y1: **$5,203,485**; Y2: **$5,125,319**; and Y3: **$5,113,813**.

System Development. Substantial system development work has already been completed to establish the IT sectoral partnership. Upon grant award, **$149,020** is requested for system development to promote the sectoral partnership to additional employers.

Program Development. A three-year total of **$2,645,247** is requested for program development. Hiring commitment-related activities will include: (a) confirming the hiring commitments and obtaining input from employers on any changes in their IT skills needs since their commitment letters; (b) securing further hiring commitments for the IT pathways programs; (c) assessing employers' IT skills needs specifically tailored to healthcare, one of the region's three largest industries; (d) if employers' skills needs do require healthcare IT programs, performing a gap analysis to determine existing curricula and identifying areas where new curricula are needed; and (e) securing hiring commitments for healthcare IT programs. Curricula will be co-designed with employers, and wrap-around services will be developed in partnership with CBOs and other strategic partners. Plans for outreach and recruitment of underserved workers are well-developed and ready to implement to recruit for existing IT programs that will be scaled.

Program Implementation. A three-year total of **$12,648,350** is requested for program implementation. In addition to advertising, grassroots recruiting strategies will be implemented in collaboration and coordination with CBOs and other strategic partners to recruit underserved workers. IT lab equipment will be integrated, credential programs and wrap-around services will be delivered, and **1,000** credential completers will be placed or retained in quality jobs in IT.

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Continuous Improvement. The *IT Workforce Accelerator's* participant outcomes, outlined in the Section 4c (page 10), will be measured and reported to faculty, the Steering Committee, and the entire IT sectoral partnership. Additionally, an External Evaluator will provide technical grant assistance and evaluation services to assess the project's progress, performance outcomes, and financial management. Most importantly, with guidance from the External Evaluator, participant outcomes will be instrumental in determining any needed adjustments to IT credential programs or wrap-around services. This agility will position the *IT Workforce Accelerator* for continuous improvement and responsiveness to employers' evolving IT skills needs.

Section 5c: Regional Investment and Sustainability

Regional Investment and Sustainability. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* is supported by regional investment, and the Good Jobs Challenge grant will provide model demonstration for its sustainability. As outlined in the attached list, cash and in-kind contributions total **$2.16 million**.

State-Funded Participant Stipends. A **$270,000** cash contribution has been allocated for participant stipends. To support enrollment and retention, **$3,600** participant stipends may be paid to WEI-eligible individuals who attend ICC. Qualifying participants earn no more than **150%** of federal poverty guidelines, and at least **70%** of participants receiving WEI stipends must be African American. Qualifying participants will earn **$10** per hour for attending Workforce Readiness and will receive a periodic retention stipend during the LAN Technician college credential program. Participant stipends are contingent on continuation of legislative funding. Continued state funding is anticipated, as advocated by State Representative Jehan Gordon-Booth, Speaker Pro Tempore of the Illinois House (see attached letter).

College-Provided In-Kind Contributions. In-kind contributions totaling **$1.9 million** will be invested in the *IT Workforce Accelerator*. These include a variety of wrap-around services and use of office and classroom space. Also, ICC has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement of **35%** but elected to charge only **20%** of indirect costs to the grant. The remaining **15%** of indirect costs (**$1.35 million**) will be funded in-kind, demonstrating ICC's support.

On-Going Support for Program Completers. Participants will engage in career development and job placement services until they obtain quality jobs. Retraining in essential skills or IT skill development will be provided for participants unable to secure quality job placements within six months of credential completion. Additionally, employer partners have agreed to provide job coaches with feedback on participants' job performance. If their performance is not satisfactory to the employer, they will receive free retraining.

Employer-Funded Sustainability. Through the three-year grant period, the *IT Workforce Accelerator* will provide a model demonstration of the outcomes achieved through the grant-seeded credential programs, wrap-around services, and business consulting services. Once the programs, outreach, and job placements are built into the program, the value of the *IT Workforce Accelerator* will be established. That value can be quantified as: decreased duration and cost of position vacancies, reduced recruiting costs for IT talent, and increased employee engagement and retention. The *IT Workforce Accelerator* also supports Greater Peoria's CEDS Plan for credentialing people of poverty and color to increase the percentage of credentialed individuals in the region from **40%** to **60%**, which may support organizations' DEI goals. Employers will be incentivized to begin funding this regional IT ecosystem following the three-year model demonstration of the program's effectiveness.

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