

**Digital Bridge: Workforce Training Technology
Technical Assistance Program**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AWARD GUIDELINES

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SECTION I – GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Introduction

The Digital Bridge Technical Assistance Program provides matching funds from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) under the Department of Commerce, with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) as the pass-through entity and is administered by Catalyst Connection.

This funding is designed to assist Small and Medium Manufacturers (SMMs) in **developing and enhancing workforce training through technology or projects to position the company for future workforce training technology adoption** - including on-the-job training, adoption of digital platforms, and integration of advanced technologies such as AR/VR, Data Visualization, and AI. Eligible activities include proof of concept, prototyping, vendor research and evaluation, selection services, implementation, training, and other assistance. The Digital Bridge Technical Assistance Program funds provide a reimbursement of up to 80% of eligible project costs, not to exceed \$10,000.

B. Program Eligibility

Applicants requesting assistance through this program must meet all the criteria listed below to be eligible for funding consideration:

1. **Small and Medium Manufacturer** – Manufacturing companies registered in D&B with a NAICS code beginning with 31-33 are preferred. Businesses from supporting industries as defined by NIST MEP, including Metal Service Centers (423510), Packing and Crating (488991), Engineering Services (541330), Testing Laboratories (541380), Packaging and Labeling Services (561910), and Commercial and Industrial Machinery/Equipment Repair and Maintenance (811310) will also be considered.
2. **Location** – Facility is located within one of the following counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland.
3. **Funding** – applicants must be able to pay at least 20% towards the total project cost and be able to cover the total project costs until reimbursement is issued.
4. **Timing** - the project will be initiated no earlier than January 1, 2026, and complete

implementation and payment of total project costs incurred within 7 months of approval and no later than July 31, 2026 (whichever is soonest).

5. **Surveys** - We are supported, in part, by the National Institute of Standards and Technology Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program (NIST/MEP). After the project is completed, you will be asked to provide feedback for quality assurance purposes. Please consider participating in this survey process to share your input and feedback on our services.

C. Funding Availability and Matching Requirements

Awards will be made on a first come, first served basis to eligible. Once all Digital Bridge Technical Assistance Program funds have been depleted, applications will be placed on a waiting list for consideration should additional funds become available.

Applicants may request funding support up to 80% of the total project cost up to \$10,000 their smart manufacturing related projects. The amount and source of matching funds shall be detailed within the application and be an allowable expense. Any change to the project scope post-award must have prior written approval of Catalyst Connection. In addition, a post award decrease in the project budget may result in a proportional decrease in funding award to maintain the minimum 20% match requirement.

D. Eligible Uses

Technical Assistance funds may be used to support direct, project-related consulting costs, contracted services, supplies, and one-time costs related to **integrating and expanding the adoption of smart manufacturing technologies for improved workforce training**. Eligible activities are **focused on process improvement and standard work, including on-the-job training (OJT) and digital work instructions**, that reduce variability and human error, preserve critical process knowledge, and accelerate Industry 4.0 adoption across small and medium manufacturers (SMMs). Below is a list of technologies and activities that may be eligible for funding support:

1. **Process Improvement / Standard Work** - Activities that support the definition, documentation, and continuous improvement of standardized manufacturing and workforce processes. Eligible uses include documentation of workflows and standard work; analysis of current-state vs. future-state processes; design of consistent task execution models; and integration of process data to reduce variability, improve quality, and preserve institutional knowledge. These activities form the operational foundation for effective digital work instructions, training, and Industry 4.0 adoption.

2. **Digital Work Instructions & Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Digitization** - Development and configuration of digital work instruction platforms, including conversion of paper-based SOPs, job aids, and tribal knowledge into structured, version-controlled digital content. Eligible activities include initial platform setup and configuration, validation and approval workflows, integration with shop-floor data sources (e.g., sensors or systems), and deployment of real-time guidance to support consistent execution, quality, and safety on the production floor.
3. **Workforce OJT Enablement & Training Asset Creation** - Design and implementation of workforce on-the-job training (OJT) enablement solutions, including development of OJT curricula, guided task flows, role-based training assets, skills matrices, and competency checklists. Activities may also include coaching and mentoring process design, documentation of training-related standard work, and measurement/reporting of upskilling outcomes to support faster onboarding, cross-training, and workforce resilience.
4. **Augmented Reality**— Implementation of augmented reality (AR) solutions that deliver contextual, visual guidance for training, assembly, maintenance, inspection, or quality activities. Eligible activities include AR-enabled work instructions, training content development, and integration of real-time data overlays to improve learning effectiveness, safety, quality, and speed while reinforcing standard work practices.
5. **Big Data / AI / Analytics** - Application of data visualization, dashboards, and analytics— including AI or machine learning where appropriate—to manufacturing and workforce data generated through digital work instructions, training systems, and connected operations. Eligible uses include monitoring SOP compliance, tracking training effectiveness, supporting continuous improvement, improving enterprise asset management, and enabling data-informed decision-making aligned with standardized processes and workforce practices.

Technical Assistance dollars **cannot** be used for the following expenses:

1. Purchase of equipment
2. Support recurring costs related to connectivity
3. Support internal salary costs of the applicant
4. Replace existing grant funds received by the applicant or support costs already paid for by another government grant (duplicate funding)
5. Pay for travel
6. Support indirect costs
7. Investment of equity or working capital
8. In-kind costs

9. Support other costs prohibited by EDA, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or federal law (for example: Lobbying, Advertising, Relocation costs, or Services provided by Huawei Technologies Companies/ZTE Corporation).

SECTION II – THE APPLICATION PROCESS

A. Application Submission

Catalyst Connection and its partners have staff available to assist SME manufacturers through the technical assistance process from assessment, project selection, scoping and application. The Catalyst Connection Point of Contact is either your assigned SBA or Matt Minner (mminner@catalystconnection.org) concerning questions regarding potential projects, eligibility, or application completion.

Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis starting January 1, 2026, through June 30, 2026, or until all funds are obligated (whichever is soonest). Applications received by the close of business on the first Monday of the month will be considered during the next round of application reviews. Application reviews will be reviewed as applications are received with complete information and documentation. Reviews will continue until all funding is awarded. After which, applications will be placed on a waiting list for consideration on a first-come, first-served basis.

B. Contents of the Application

All applications must include the following components:

1. **Completed Application Form** - signed by the applicant
2. **Detailed Project Proposal/ Scope of Work**
3. **Detailed Budget/Cost Proposal** – budget detail must match what is reflected in the application budget summary
4. **Vendor Selection Process** – two or more vendor rates/prices are needed for purchases over \$50,000. A full RFP process in accordance with [2CFR200](#) is required for purchases of \$150,000 or more.
5. **Completed W9 form** – for subsequent processing of reimbursement funds

C. Application Review and Approval Process

Upon receipt, applications will be reviewed to ensure that the parameters for eligibility are met and that all required application components are included. Applicants submitting incomplete applications will be asked to resubmit and consideration of their project request may be delayed depending on the timing of application resubmission.

Applications will be reviewed by the Digital Bridge Technical Assistance Program Review Committee. Committee members include representatives from Catalyst Connection who ensure

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applications meet award criteria, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and federal requirements. In some cases, the applicant may be asked to provide clarification and/or to submit additional documentation in support of its application. The extent of the information required, and the timeliness of response will determine whether the project can be considered within the current round or if they will need to reapply in a future round.

D. Award Criteria

Applications will be reviewed and recommendations for award to those that meet the following criteria:

1. All program eligibility criteria are met (see **Section 1, B. Program Eligibility**).
2. A clearly defined project and scope of work is included that integrates and expands the adoption of Smart technologies with allowable project expenses (see **Section 1, D. Eligible Uses**).
3. Budget within cost parameters that include required match of 20%. (see **Section 1, C. Funding Availability and Matching Requirements**)
4. Documentation of a Vendor Selection Process for purchases.

E. Post-Approval Process

Applicants will receive written notification of application status within 30 days of the application deadline. Award notifications will include additional instructions and details on next steps and contractual requirements.

Catalyst Connection will provide project management support to awardees to assist with reporting and invoicing requirements. Any changes in project specs, timeline, budget and/or match will require written approval of the project sponsor and Catalyst Connection. **A post award decrease in the project budget may result in a proportional decrease in award in order to maintain the minimum 20% match requirement.**

F. Disbursement of Funds

Technical Assistance awards are paid on a reimbursement basis following completion of the project and the applicant's submission of satisfactory documentation of paid expenses (applicant's W-9, vendor invoices and corresponding proof of payment) equivalent to the total project budget/costs. Requests for payment and supporting documentation shall be submitted to the project sponsor for review and processing.

Funding reimbursement requires an invoice accompanied by payment documentation equivalent to the total project costs including match. Vendor invoices with corresponding

cancelled checks documenting payment are required for reimbursement. A signed *Closeout Checklist* is also required to confirm submission of the required documentation and project budget/actual amounts.

G. Reporting and Record Keeping Requirements

Awardees are responsible for the following reporting and record keeping requirements:

1. Comply with all state and federal rules regarding the maintenance of appropriate contractual and accounting documentation. These files must be available for review by the Commonwealth, auditors, the project sponsor, and/or fiscal agent upon request.
2. Report updates to the project status to Catalyst Connection when they occur.
3. Collect quantitative and qualitative data on the results of the implemented projects, which may include, jobs created/retained, new/retained sales, cost savings, new/retained customers, and success stories. (If company elects to complete NIST Impact Survey).

SECTION III – Contacts for Manufacturers

Contact Catalyst Connection for more information:

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