



## Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) *Powering STAR Breakthroughs* March 6, 2024

### Application Guidelines

#### Who is Opportunity@Work?

Opportunity@Work (O@W) is a nonprofit social enterprise with the mission to rewire the U.S. labor market so that all individuals Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) can work, learn, and earn to their full potential. In the next decade, O@W aims to enable at least 1M working adults in the US to translate their learning into earning – generating a \$20B boost in annual earnings.

#### Why Focus on STARs?

Over sixty percent of U.S. workers do not have a bachelor's degree – yet the vast majority of employers list a four-year degree as a basic requirement for most or all of their available jobs, even if a degree is not the only way to obtain these necessary job skills. Even as millions of these workers who are STARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes, such as military service, community college and on-the-job training, rather than a bachelor's degree) demonstrate the skills needed for higher-wage work, employers routinely screen out STAR candidates. These exclusionary hiring practices were mostly adopted to more “efficiently” manage surges of digital job applications – but they also perpetuate the false ideas that: (1) “low-wage” equals “low-skill”; and (2) a bachelor's degree is the only way to obtain relevant skills. As a result, it now takes STARs more than 30 years to earn the same wage college graduates earn on day one of their careers.

O@W aims to demonstrate the vital role STARs play in a diverse and dynamic workforce. We have studied [job pathways to economic mobility](#) for STARs to show that [despite the potential of this workforce, STARs are too often denied the opportunity](#). We [have the data](#) to demonstrate that most STARs already have the skills to succeed in middle and high-wage roles – but not the opportunity.

STARs comprise 65% of Black workers, 55% of Hispanic workers, 66% of rural workers, and 48% of women workers in the U.S. They're also among those hardest hit by the labor market's long-standing divides across race, class, gender, and geography; such [occupational segregation](#) means that workers with similar educational backgrounds but different demographic profiles are concentrated in jobs with vastly different wages and pay

scales, creating persistent salary and wealth gaps. Ultimately, many Historically Excluded STARs end up overrepresented in lower-wage occupations.

To power breakthroughs for STARs, O@W is building the business case for the STARs talent category while providing the infrastructure and data-rich products and tools to support employers, policymakers, educators and STARs themselves to make better informed decisions, ultimately leading to greater economic mobility for *all* U.S. workers.

## How can talent developers Power STAR Breakthroughs?

Inclusive talent developers understand how important it is to support STARs as they obtain the most in-demand skills for higher-wage work. At the same time, entrenched occupational segregation compounds the barriers of degree-based exclusion to hold Historically Excluded STARs back from career paths they've got the skills and motivation to pursue. Workforce organizations looking to help the ecosystem break out of the "status quo" need new tools to establish new norms (e.g., to identify which occupational pathways offer the best opportunities for local STARs to use their transferable skills between jobs and/or industries as they seek higher-wage roles). Effective strategies must rely on real-time data about skills pathways, job/career opportunities, and employer behavior in their communities – the kind of data and insights O@W generates every day.

We know that data-informed, skills-first, place-based approaches will enable more STARs to find pathways toward greater mobility. Through this new funding opportunity, we're looking to partner with community-based, nonprofit talent developers to combat occupational segregation by devising clearer, more defined strategies to help STARs transition into higher-wage jobs and career pathways in their communities, both within and across industries. We want to hear and learn about our applicants' approaches to talent development, track records of success, and how they've used data and decision support tools to bolster their work to date. We'll also ask applicants to evaluate their work and organizational theory of change through the lens of combatting occupational segregation, and we will invite them to use one or more of the following O@W resources:

- Our [Stellarsight](#) dashboard, which aggregates the latest national labor market data about STARs and pathways toward upward mobility
- Our [research](#) on occupational segregation, including our published research [paper](#) (*The Limits of Educational Attainment in Mitigating Occupational Segregation Between Black and White Workers*)
- Resources for employers, talent developers and STARs on the Opportunity@Work [website](#) and at [Tearthepaperceiling.org](#)

## Who should apply?

We welcome applications from a wide range of community-based, nonprofit talent developers that serve Historically Excluded STARs and will consider applications from

organizations with budgets in the \$3M–\$7M range. All applicants must commit to submitting two (2) brief interim reports as well as a final report covering the 18-month grant period, describing progress made on the project and how funds were expended.

As we evaluate submitted applications, we will give extra consideration to those from organizations that are:

- Located in underserved geographic regions;
- Focused on underserved industries;
- Able to demonstrate a track record of using data to inform strategy and action; and
- Eager to use one or more of O@W's resources to enhance their work.

## What should applicants know about the application process + timeline?

Applicants will be asked to:

- Review application guidelines and submit any questions about the application (to be compiled into a shared FAQ document) to [rebeccagerber@opportunityatwork.org](mailto:rebeccagerber@opportunityatwork.org).
- Attend an optional informational webinar on **March 26, 2024** (details to be shared [here](#)).
- Copy/paste narrative questions into an editable document, complete application, and send final version as a PDF entitled **[Org Name] Attachment A**, along with the additional attachments listed below, to [rebeccagerber@opportunityatwork.org](mailto:rebeccagerber@opportunityatwork.org) by **April 26, 2024 @5pm EST**.
- All completed applications MUST include the following:
  - **Attachment A:**
    - Application Narrative
    - Financial Snapshot
    - Certification/Signature Page
  - **Additional Attachments:**
    - Most recent Audited Financial Statements (required)
    - High-level project budget (required)
    - IRS 501(c)3 Determination Letter (required)
    - Annual Report or equivalent (optional)

## When will awards be announced, and what will they look like?

Awards will be announced on **June 3, 2024**, and will range in size from **\$200K–\$300K** each, depending on organizational budget size and proposed scope of work. Grants will be issued in two installments over an **18-month timeframe (June 14, 2024 – December 31, 2025)**.

We anticipate granting between **7–10 awards**.

**The Powering STAR Breakthroughs Application begins on the next page. Thank you for applying to partner with us!**

## Attachment A

### *Powering STAR Breakthroughs Application Narrative* (due April 26, 2024 @5PM EST)

1. **Organization (Legal) Name:**
  
2. **Other Business Name (Doing Business As/DBA), if applicable:**
  
3. **Address / City / State / ZIP:**
  
4. **Contact Information:**
  - **Phone:**
  - **Email:**
  - **Website:**
  
5. **Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN):**
  
6. **Total Staff Size/# of Full-Time Employees:**
  
7. **Year established:**
  
8. **Describe your organization's mission, vision, and major initiatives. (1,000 words max)**
  
9. **Who is your target population of STARs? Identify demographic and geographic/regional trends impacting the STARs you serve. (1,000 words max)**

10. Please share a past example of how your organization has used data and/or decision support tools to guide program strategy or boost program impact. (1,000 words max)
11. Please summarize your proposed strategy and implementation plan for supporting Historically Excluded STARs in geographies and/or industries that have been particularly impacted by occupational segregation. (1,000 words)  
*We ask that you address the following points:*
- Will you be developing a new strategy/implementation plan, or will you be enhancing or expanding an existing one?*
  - What is the focus of your strategy/implementation plan (i.e., will you focus on recruitment? Training? Wraparound services?)*
  - Will your strategy/implementation plan include partnering with local employers?*
12. Using O@W's research and decision support tools, how will you demonstrate that equity is at the center of your work with Historically Excluded STARs? (1,000 words max)
13. Please identify your ultimate goal, as well as three (3) outputs and three (3) outcomes that you will use to evaluate your progress toward that goal over the course of the grant period (500 words max). *For example:*
- **Goal:**  
*To counteract occupational segregation for STARs in [XX geographic region] and/or [XX industry], we will focus on [brief explanation of applicant's proposed project/program].*
  - **Output 1:**  
*We will serve [XX #] of Historically Excluded STARs that have been disproportionately impacted by occupational segregation.*
  - **Outcome 1:**  
*A total of [XX #] of Historically Excluded STARs who have been impacted by occupational segregation will take steps toward entering a career pathway that offers greater economic mobility opportunities.*
14. (Optional) Additional Information: Is there anything else about your organization that you would like to share with O@W? (500 words max)

## Financial Snapshot

Please complete the following for your organization:

- **Total Revenue for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 (or most recent year available):**
  - **FY:**
  - **Total Revenue:**
  - **Total Expenses:**
  
- **Total Operating Budget for FY 2024:**
  
- **To give us a snapshot of your current funding needs and priorities, please list your organization's current top five donors, including name, funding amount and whether this revenue is restricted or unrestricted.**

## Certification

I, individually and on behalf of the organization named above, do by my signature below certify that the information provided in this application is true and correct, and I am authorized to bind the organization contractually. I understand that if the information provided herein contains any false statements or any misrepresentations: 1) O@W will have the grounds to terminate any or all contracts which O@W has or may have with the organization; 2) O@W may disqualify the organization named above from consideration for contracts; or/and 3) O@W may have grounds for initiating legal action under federal, state, or local law. The signatory below is:

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title** \_\_\_\_\_  
(CEO, President, Executive Director, etc.)

**Signature of Applicant** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
(CEO, President, Executive Director, etc.)

## Additional Attachments

- IRS 501(c)3 Determination Letter (required)
- Most Recent (FY 2022 or FY 2023) Audited Financial Statements (required)
- High-level project budget with requested grant amount (min. \$200K - max. \$300K) (required)
- Annual Report or equivalent (optional)