



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Economic Development

In coordination with

Mass Technology Collaborative

Request for Proposals (RFP) Pathmaker Workforce Program Advanced Manufacturing & AI

Program Guidelines

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A. Introduction

Massachusetts is home to some of the world's leading innovation industries, including life sciences, advanced manufacturing and robotics, defense, artificial intelligence and technology, and climate tech. These sectors are critical to the Commonwealth's economic future and offer significant opportunities for residents to build well-paying, long-term careers. Ensuring that Massachusetts residents—particularly those who have historically faced barriers to entering these industries—can access these opportunities requires clear and accessible pathways from education and training into employment.

Building on the success of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center's Pathmaker program, the Commonwealth is expanding the Pathmaker model into additional priority sectors. The existing Pathmaker approach is intentionally demand-driven: training is developed in response to demonstrated employer hiring needs, industry partners help inform program design, and participants receive the technical and professional skills necessary to move directly into employment. The model combines a consistent set of core competencies with the flexibility for employers and training providers to tailor programs to specific occupations, technologies, and regional workforce needs.

Through sector-specific Pathmaker solicitations, the Commonwealth will bring this model to advanced manufacturing and robotics, defense, artificial intelligence and technology, and climate tech, while continuing to strengthen Pathmaker in life sciences. Each sector will have distinct workforce needs and competencies, but all Pathmaker programs will operate within a common framework centered on employer demand, accessible training, quality jobs, measurable employment outcomes, and opportunities for long-term career advancement.

A key feature of this approach is the connection between Massachusetts' industry and education ecosystems. Sector-focused quasi-public agencies bring deep relationships with employers and an understanding of the technologies, occupations, and skills driving their respective industries. Through Pathmaker, those relationships can be leveraged to connect employers with community colleges, workforce organizations,

labor organizations, and other training providers across the Commonwealth. Training providers can then translate demonstrated employer demand into programs that give residents the skills necessary to compete for available jobs.

The vision for Pathmaker is a statewide network of employer-connected career pathways in which residents can access opportunities in the industries driving Massachusetts' economy, regardless of whether they begin with a four-year degree, a community college credential, workforce training, or another pathway. By establishing a consistent framework across sectors while preserving flexibility to respond to individual employer and regional needs, Pathmaker can create a more accessible bridge between Massachusetts residents and the high-quality jobs being created across the Commonwealth's innovation economy.

B. Program Overview

The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech) Pathmaker program is an employer-driven workforce development initiative designed to expand access to careers in two of the Commonwealth's key industries, manufacturing and defense, and artificial intelligence (AI) and technology, while addressing critical employer skills and talent needs. Pathmaker supports short-term, industry-aligned training programs that prepare individuals—particularly those without significant industry experience or related higher education—for high-demand occupations in manufacturing and defense or AI and technology.

Pathmaker programs are developed in direct partnership with industry. Each program must have an employer partner demonstrating a direct hiring need and must incorporate Pathmaker Core Competencies, while allowing training providers to add skills and curriculum responsive to specific employer needs.

Funds will enable applicants to:

- Recruit individuals from low-income and underrepresented communities, individuals from federally recognized or state-acknowledged tribes within the Commonwealth
- Recruit individuals who do not have significant industry experience or related higher education
- Place individuals into open positions immediately upon completion of the program or within 3 months of completion of the program
- Create new and/or expand technical and job readiness training opportunities to provide the skills necessary to attain placement in life science occupations
- Develop and nurture new relationships with employers in the manufacturing and defense or AI and technology sectors to develop job placements and identify avenues for career growth
- Establish and grow wraparound and retention support services to address social and economic barriers and increase the likelihood of long-term career success

This program is not intended to:

- Train individuals for internship or apprenticeship positions
- Train individuals who will be below the age of 18 at the completion of the program
- Train individuals who are not eligible to work at the industry partner company

C. Program Details

Each training program proposal will be evaluated based on the cost per employment outcome. As a benchmark, we have established a planned investment target of **\$10,000 per employment outcome** for budget-planning purposes. Applicants should be thoughtful about what they propose in order to maximize public dollars. This amount includes all expenses required to obtain an employment outcome, including recruitment, training, support, program design and program management. If an applicant proposes to serve a population that requires more intensive and/or longer duration of services to be successful, applicants may propose a cost per outcome that exceeds this amount; however, applicants must justify this cost per outcome in the budget notes section.

Planned training programs must cover the required **Pathmaker Core Competencies Checklist**, Funded training is generally designed to be completed in **8–12 weeks and 80–180 hours**, creating an accelerated pathway from training to employment.

Alternatively, training providers can seek the Pathmaker validation without applying for funding, provided that their existing program(s) meets the minimum [Core Competency Checklist](#).

Target Sectors, Industry Insights and Consortium Model

This solicitation supports two tracts: Manufacturing & Defense and AI & Technology. Applicants must select one of these tracks when they submit their application.

Applicants **must have at least one industry partnership**. Applicants can also bring together a **Consortium of multiple industry partners** with overlapping workforce needs for similar occupations, skills, and/or competencies. This model will ensure that training investments are directly connected to documented employment opportunities while reducing reliance on the hiring needs of any single employer. By aligning training capacity with collective industry demand, Pathmaker will expand the number and range of career pathways available to graduates and maximize opportunities for successful placement in high-demand roles.

Participants and Collaboration with MassHire Career Centers

Furthermore, MassTech is committed to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within manufacturing and defense and AI and technology sectors. The program prioritizes individuals from low-income and underrepresented communities and those without

significant industry experience or related higher education. Pathmaker investments support recruitment, technical and job-readiness training, participant stipends and wraparound supports, employer engagement, job placement, and retention services. The goal is to place participants into open positions immediately following training or within three months of completion and provide a foundation for long-term career growth.

Through this model, Pathmaker creates a direct bridge between Massachusetts residents seeking economic opportunity and manufacturing and defense or AI and technology employers seeking skilled talent, while giving training providers the resources and industry connections needed to develop responsive workforce programs.

As Pathmaker is a **Skills Cabinet initiative**, all funded applicants are required to contract with the MassHire workforce system to support outreach, recruitment, and participant data collection. This partnership ensures alignment with statewide workforce strategies and enables consistent tracking of participant demographics, enrollment, and outcomes.

Applicants must **demonstrate their intent and capacity to work with MassHire Career Centers** to support recruitment efforts and comply with required data capture and reporting standards. Costs associated with this required partnership should be reflected appropriately in the project budget.

Branding and Communications

This program is intended to help build job training and support capacity to fill gaps in the workforce for manufacturing and defense and AI and technology sectors while creating opportunities for underserved individuals. The Pathmaker program requires all funded cohorts to clearly inform participants that they are not employees of the Pathmaker program provider or MassTech.

D. Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Grant funds shall be used for activities including, but not limited to:

- Staff time devoted to the program, including outreach and recruitment, intake and assessment, training delivery, wraparound support services, job placement services, and retention services; personnel & support & supplies needed
- Marketing, communications, and outreach activities related to recruitment for the program, such as design costs for marketing collateral, purchasing mass media spots, and website or social media costs
- Subcontracting with training providers for curriculum delivery or with vendors providing specific training platforms or licensure testing services;
- Consumable materials used for training purposes
- Training stipends
- In-state workforce program related conference registration costs; and

- Program related transport costs within state allowance parameters (must be approved by funder)
- Administrative costs directly attributable to the program may be included, but cannot exceed 10% of the budget.

Activities that are NOT eligible for funding include, but are not limited to:

- Capital expenditures, such as the purchase/renovation of training facilities or equipment.
- Indirect expenses that support the overall operation and administration of the organization and cannot be directly attributed to a single program or project.
- Purchase or lease of venue space or equipment intended for general operating purposes;
- Costs associated with preparing this proposal
- Activities that occur before or following the term of an awarded grant
- Meals for individual staff members are not reimbursable. Food purchases will only be reimbursed when directly related to program activities such as student events, graduation ceremonies, networking sessions, or meals provided for a full class and instructors.
- Lodging and accommodation costs for personnel (e.g., hotels, Airbnb, temporary housing)
- Air travel expenses, including flights and associated airline fees
- Alcohol purchases, regardless of event or purpose
- Out of-state conference-related expenses, including registration, travel, and associated fees.

MassTech reserves the right to adjust the requested amount of funding for each proposal. Following execution of the Grant Agreement, funds will be provided via electronic fund transfer (EFT)—60% of total funding will be available immediately upon execution, with the remaining 40% available on a reimbursement basis after all necessary receipts (for 100% of expended funds) and reports have been received and upon verification of those costs.

Budget must include an itemized list of equipment, materials, supplies, and/or technology with the estimated cost for each item. If applicable, budget must separate by fiscal year expenses. MassTech reserves the right to adjust the requested amount.

Following the execution of the grant agreement, funds will be provided to the Awardees based on the terms of the Grants Agreement.

E. Application Process

Applications will only be accepted through the MassTech's online application portal, accessed via the **program webpage**.

It is recommended that applicants carefully follow the online instructions and provide complete, clear, and concise responses to all required questions. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure that its application is complete, meets minimum threshold requirements, and is properly submitted to MassTech prior to the established deadline.

Multiple users can be given access to the application. Any and all responses, applications, data, materials, information and documentation submitted to MassTech in response to this RFP shall become MassTech's property and is subject to public disclosure. As a public entity, MassTech is subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law (set forth at Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 66). There are very limited and narrow exceptions to disclosure under the Public Records Law. The applicant shall clearly label any information and/or documentation as "CONFIDENTIAL" in the application that it believes may be proprietary in nature and that may fall within the parameters of MassTech's Trade Secrets Exemption (which covers information that consists of "trade secrets or commercial or financial information regarding the operation of any business conducted by an applicant..."). See Mass. Gen. Laws Chpt. 40J, sec. 12 (h).

F. Eligibility and Evaluation

Following the application deadline, timely and complete applications will be reviewed for eligibility and evaluation using the common scoring calculator.

Applicants must be a Massachusetts legally organized:

- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), including CBOs relying on a fiscal agent
- Community Colleges, Colleges, and Universities
- Comprehensive and Vocational High Schools, including Vocational Schools offering an after-hours or Career Technical Initiative evening training program
- Non-Profit Entities
- For-Profit Companies
- Municipalities
- Workforce Development Organizations
- MassHire Workforce Investment Boards and Career Centers

MassTech is interested in supporting applicants that will further its goal of developing a skilled workforce suitable for employment in manufacturing and defense or AI and technology sectors, particularly in high-demand occupations. Successful proposals will explain how the requested funds will create learning opportunities that are aligned with the needs of the relevant industry.

MassTech staff will conduct an initial administrative review to determine eligibility of all submitted applications. Eligible applicants will then be reviewed and scored. Depending on the amount of the award, funding recommendations will then be made to the

MassTech Board of Directors based on feedback and scores. The amount of awards will be determined by the quality of the proposals.

MassTech staff may contact the applicant to request supplemental information prior to formal review. In addition, the MassTech reserves the right to make no awards, to award less than the applicant requests, and/or to award less than the maximum amount of funds potentially available through this solicitation.

Core Competencies

Core Competencies represent the minimum requirements for a Pathmaker-approved training program. Additional skills and competencies based on specific employer needs and/or requests may also be included. The MassTech Pathmaker [Core Competency Checklist](#) defines the areas that *must* be included in a proposed curriculum, with specific examples of focus areas that *may* be included to satisfy that required area. There are distinct core competencies identified for the Manufacturing Pathmaker and AI Pathmaker tracks. See more about the Core competencies above. Proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Description	Points
Program Design, Core Competencies & Delivery	• Presents a comprehensive program design that addresses required Core Competencies. • Includes strong technical, durable-skill, career-readiness, and work-readiness components appropriate to the target roles. • Demonstrates that curriculum and program design are responsive to employer and industry needs. • Includes clear staffing, implementation, and evaluation plans.	20
Employer & Industry Engagement	• Includes a letter of support from at least one industry partner clearly articulating goals, roles, and responsibilities. • Demonstrates meaningful employer involvement in program design and/or delivery, such as curriculum development, advisory participation, mentoring, job shadowing, guest instruction, equipment, or financial support.	20

	• Uses employer input to ensure programming aligns with current industry needs. • Demonstrates opportunities to connect participants to employment and continued career advancement.	
Target Roles, Skills & Population	• Clearly defines the target roles, skills, and participant population. • Demonstrates alignment between the target roles and relevant industry/workforce needs. • Recognizes participant assets and potential barriers and reflects them in program design. • Demonstrates potential to reach and benefit students who are underrepresented in the life sciences or economically disadvantaged.	15
Recruitment, Student Supports & Job Readiness	• Provides a clear and effective recruitment and outreach strategy for the target population. • Offers support services designed to promote participant enrollment, completion, and success. • Incorporates career awareness and job-readiness preparation, including teamwork, communication, time management, and other professional skills. • Identifies staff, partners, or referral resources responsible for participant support.	15
Outcomes, Evaluation & Participant Tracking	• Proposes outcomes that are ambitious but attainable given the target population and program design. • Includes practical methods and data-collection practices for evaluating program effectiveness. • Tracks participant outcomes in a manner that supports assessment of program success and equity.	15

	• Demonstrates a clear connection between proposed activities and expected participant outcomes.	
Budget, Matching Funds & Sustainability	• Provides an accurate and reasonable budget that aligns with proposed program activities. • Demonstrates appropriate and committed matching funds. • Shows that proposed costs are reasonable relative to the scale and intensity of programming. • Identifies resources or strategies that support continued programming and sustainability beyond the grant period.	15
Total		100

MassTech reserves the right to consider the applicant's past performance in operating grants administered by both MassTech and/or the Commonwealth and factor this performance into funding decisions. All applicants will be notified of their award status by email. In addition to the scoring system outlined, MassTech reserves the right to only consider submissions that, in our sole judgment, are complete and responsive to the solicitation's requirements and include all required application components. Additionally, MassTech reserves the right to consider other criteria in making awards.

G. Award Recommendation and Contracting

Following the application reviews, all applicants will be notified in writing of the decision on their application. Applicants that are approved for funding will receive a commitment letter outlining the grant amount and any conditions of the award. Grantees will need to verify the project's readiness and address any related conditions at the time of award.

All awards are subject to MassTech's receipt of funds from the Commonwealth and are contingent upon full execution of a contract between MassTech and the Grantee.

H. Post-Award Information

Successful applicants, upon notification of award, will be required to enter into a grant agreement with MassTech prior to the disbursement of any grant funds. All scope of work items, timelines, and project outcomes will be detailed and incorporated into the

contract. Grantees are not authorized to expend any grant funds until a contract is fully executed. All grant funds must be expended in accordance with the contract.

I. Compliance

At the end of each fiscal year (June 30), each grantee is required to report information on the project. MassTech will review annual reports to determine whether the awardee has substantially achieved its obligations set forth in the agreement.

A Post Project Report will be submitted by all Awardees one year after Final Report and should describe the progress of the Awardee towards project execution and the impact of the Award on such progress. This report should describe outcomes from using the grant, as well as other metrics including, but not limited to number of students recruited, how recruited students heard about the program, number of graduates, demographic information, reasons for program exits, and placement / job status of graduates. A standard reporting form and/or platform will be provided to awardees upon execution of the Grant Agreement.

The Grant Agreement will outline expectations and requirements for minimum cohort recruitment and graduates. A successful program would be one that results in at least 60% of the original stated cohort size graduating from the program. A completion/graduation rate of less than 40% will result in an investigation by MassTech.

MassTech will close out a grant award upon receipt of an annual report evidencing the grant has met its obligations and all projects are complete. Upon project close out, any grant funds awarded but not utilized will no longer be available to the grantee.

J. Additional Information

- 1) If an application fails to meet any material terms, conditions, requirements or procedures, it may be deemed unresponsive and disqualified. Mass Tech reserves the right to waive omissions or irregularities that it determines to be not material.
- 2) MassTech reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to withdraw the RFP, to engage in preliminary discussions with prospective applicants, to accept or reject any or all applications received, to request supplemental or clarifying information, to negotiate with any or all qualified applicants, and to request modifications to applications in accordance with negotiations.
- 3) MassTech may provide reasonable accommodations, including the provision of materials in an alternative format, for applicants with disabilities or other hardships. Applicants requiring accommodations shall submit requests in writing, with supporting documentation justifying the accommodations. Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right to grant or reject any request for accommodations.

- 4) Applications shall be treated by MassTech as an accurate statement of an applicant's capabilities and experience. Should any statement asserted by an applicant prove to be inaccurate or inconsistent with the foregoing, such inaccuracy or inconsistency shall constitute sufficient cause for MassTech in its sole discretion to reject the application and/or terminate of any resulting agreement.
- 5) Costs that are not specifically identified in the applicant and/or not specifically accepted by MassTech as part of the grant agreement will not be compensated under any contract awarded pursuant to this RFP.
- 6) MassTech's prior approval is required for any subcontracted services under any grant agreement entered into as a result of this RPF. The selected applicant is responsible for the satisfactory performance and adequate oversight of its subcontractors. Subcontractors are required to meet the same requirements and are held to the same reimbursable cost standards as the selected applicant.