



Ohio Third Frontier Internship Program

2013

Evaluation Report



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Prepared by Invantage Group

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Ohio Third Frontier Internship Program

Program Purpose

The Ohio Third Frontier Internship Program (OTFIP) was inspired by a desire to identify, cultivate, and match talented students together with dynamic companies in an effort to improve Ohio's long-term growth prospects. The OTFIP helps to prepare a highly talented workforce which enables Ohio to achieve its overall goals for the Ohio Third Frontier program, including building a young, talented workforce for the future and assisting students in gaining valuable work experiences which can lead to permanent full-time employment in Ohio after graduation. This goal is especially important given the state's consideration and heightened desire to promote high-tech capabilities in the evolving knowledge-based economy.¹

Program Parameters

Ohio students enrolled in an eligible community or technical college or four-year college or university can earn up to \$6,000 over a twelve month period. The OTFIP is designed to reimburse employers for up to 50 percent of the intern's wage. To stimulate further development in target high-technology segments, the OTFIP is looking for participating businesses which can provide internships relating to one or more of targeted sectors.

Eligible Proposals

Goals of the OTFIP require coordination both within and across regions to bring together eligible and interested participants from higher education, business, and students. In order to achieve these goals, the Ohio Third Frontier works with a select group of Ohio non-profit organizations with strong regional networks highly engaged and involved with the various interests of industry and higher education in order to attract both qualified students as well as businesses.

- Successful regional partners are expected to provide services including technical assistance, program eligibility verification and funding reimbursement to for-profit companies and students within its region.
- Development expects to fund one partner from each of the six OTF-defined regions, with one additional partner in both the Northeast and Southeast regions for a total of eight partners.
- Lead Applicants were specified from the existing Ohio Third Frontier Internship Program Grantees.

Funding

Development anticipates awarding up to \$3,000,000 in grants through the FY13 OTFIP. Each grant is expected to be up to \$428,571 in OTFIP funding. No more than ten (10) percent of the total OTFIP funds being requested may be used to support administrative costs of the regional partner. The project period for this program cycle will be 18 months, longer than previous 12-month program cycles.

¹ Additional background information about the program can be found at <http://thirdfrontierintern.ohio.gov>.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The program RFP details important elements for applicant proposals and outlines the evaluation criteria to be considered in determining the creditability of proposals for funding. The evaluation criteria include the following:

- Alignment of the Proposal with the OTFIP purpose, goals, objectives, eligibility, and funding requirements of the RFP; and quality of responses with respect to the following components:
 - Organizational Experience and Qualifications
 - Statement of Work
 - Performance Goals and History

Evaluation Process

In order to ensure a fair and thorough evaluation process, Development has engaged Invantage Group to provide expert, independent evaluation of the OTFIP proposals. Invantage Group is an experienced team of business strategy and finance professionals who apply a practical and proven approach to helping organizations improve performance through better analysis, planning, and implementation.

Invantage Group developed a multi-step evaluation process to provide both a thorough and consistent analysis in order to evaluate proposals. The evaluation process included the following steps:

- Develop an evaluation paradigm in accordance with the RFP criteria.
 - Evaluation criteria based on the RFP with scoring ranges and relative weighting.
 - Three primary evaluation categories with multiple sub-components.
 - *Organizational capabilities*
Assess the regional partner's ability to represent both the business and education interests, especially in the identified high-tech fields. Specifically looks at the organizational structure available, especially given limited program funding, to provide OTFIP services.
 - *Management plan, team, & budget*
Provides a focus on the key personnel identified, their backgrounds, and any rationale provided regarding the selection of the program management team. Includes a review of the regional partner's plans for evaluation and assessment of program progress, including budget details, clarity, completeness, and consistency.
 - *Performance goals and history*
An assessment of any documented performance history whether directly on the OTFIP or similar internship programs, as well as how performance history impacts realistic assumptions and supporting projections for the proposed services.
- Review proposals using the evaluation criteria.
- Discuss evaluation findings with Development staff and prepare materials for presentation to the Third Frontier Commission.

After reviewing the original proposal submissions, the evaluator determined that additional historical performance data would greatly help the evaluation. Development was able to provide supplemental performance data as an additional input for the assessment. Proposals were evaluated based solely on the information provided within each regional partner’s submission and the supplemental performance data provided by Development.

Overview of General Findings

Proposals were evaluated against standards based on the degree to which the available information provided credible support to meet the criteria and goals set forth in the program RFP. The following table provides an “at-a-glance” summary of the Lead Applicants and evaluation findings.

Ohio Third Frontier Internship Program FY2013 Proposals Evaluated								
Lead Applicant	Region	OTFIP Funds Requested	Funds for Administrative Costs	Funds for Internships	Projected Internships	Proposal Evaluation Criteria		
						Organizational Capabilities	Management Plan & Budget	Performance Goals & History
						45%	20%	35%
TechColumbus	Central	\$277,200	\$25,200	\$252,000	84			
Workforce Initiative Association	Northeast	\$428,571	\$42,655	\$385,916	133			
Workforce Institute of Lorain County	Northeast	\$428,571	\$42,857	\$385,714	129			
Toledo Chamber of Commerce	Northwest	\$428,571	\$42,857	\$385,714	129			
Community Action Organization of Scioto County, Inc.	Southeast	\$157,500	\$7,500	\$150,000	50			
Southeastern Ohio Port Authority	Southeast	\$211,200	\$19,200	\$192,000	64			
Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber	Southwest	\$428,571	\$42,857	\$385,714	129			
Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce	West Central	\$428,571	\$41,300	\$387,271	129			
		\$2,788,755	\$264,426	\$2,524,329	846			

Evaluation Definitions

- Strong supporting evidence
- Adequate supporting evidence
- Weak supporting evidence

Proposal Evaluation Summary

To varying degrees, each of the Lead Applicants has met the criteria requirements defined by the program RFP. Better prepared proposals included more specific information, greater supporting details, and clearer explanations regarding organizational design, performance expectations, and enhancement plans. Each of the applicants was able to provide sufficient details about their experience, organizational design, and program administration plans.

Almost all of the regional partners mention performance and satisfaction tracking, though only limited information is provided. Tracking should occur not just during the program year, but over time (e.g. interns accepting high-tech jobs in Ohio). Several proposals did mention follow-up satisfaction surveys

and many applicant support letters did indicate the hiring of interns, both valuable information, but no detailed tracking or survey data was provided.

Recommendation Overview

Each of the regional partners has achieved a recommendation for program funding, though there are some areas where specific partners would benefit from some improvement efforts. A recommendation for funding indicates that the applicant provided a preponderance of clear and adequate evidence to support their organizational design, operational plans, and performance goals to indicate a likelihood of program success in the coming cycle.

The larger, more experienced applicants demonstrated reasonably solid organizational infrastructures to support an array of activities, though even the smaller organizations (e.g. Community Action Organization of Scioto County, Inc. and Southeastern Ohio Port Authority) demonstrated organizational improvements. Each regional partner has some form of specific experience in workforce development, whether providing employment services, workforce training, or technology entrepreneurship. Similarly, each of these regional partners has developed working relationships and commitments from a large array of area educational partners. The breadth and depth of educational networks is a key factor in the ability to identify and attract qualified students for the internship program.

The better applicant proposals were able to show how their organizational plans and efforts resulted in past program success, identified learning opportunities for program improvement, and factored into performance goals for increasing program size.

Regional Partner Summaries

This evaluation was designed to assess applicant preparedness and performance according to the key program metrics, as well as to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of each organization. The following regional partner summaries are provided within that context.

TechColumbus

A strong history in venture development and work as an ESP brings significant benefits. They have a strong network (via the ESP, membership organization, and relationship with the Columbus Chamber and area communities) already in place and may have learned a valuable lesson this past year when they had some troubles generating timely interest from companies. Significant organizational changes may have negatively impacted performance, resulting in a surprisingly weak number of interns. The leadership team is mostly new, but filled with solid, experienced players. Poor current year performance raises some concerns about how much focus and effort has been applied to this program. Prior performance has been sound, though often trails other regions. The organization would benefit from a stronger focus on program marketing and a broader spread throughout the region. Some plan revisions and a settled organizational structure should enable TechColumbus to at least return to prior program performance levels.

Workforce Initiative Association (Canton)

Their role as a One-Stop Employment and Training Center has enabled Workforce Initiative Association (WIA) to have built a broad network throughout the region. In addition, they have relationships with other valuable partners, including Team NEO and MAGNET, City and County economic development agencies, JobsOhio business representatives, and business services representatives from other northeast Ohio One-Stop agencies. On the education side, they have past experience with a wide array of schools within the region, having worked with 22 area schools (and 40 schools overall) for this program. WIA provides very specific performance goals based on past performance, including goals for new and minority business participation. Past and current performance has been strong, indicating good likelihood of continuing to meet their goals.

Workforce Institute of Lorain County

Workforce Institute (WFI) has solid experience with similar program management, currently coordinating services for the Lorain County One-Stop Employment Network and is responsible for coordination and delivery of all services, including job search training, career decision making assistance, job matching, funds management, OTJ training, and performance measurement. Through a wide array of partnerships (Innovation Fund, Northeast Ohio Regional Information Technology Engagement Board, TeamNEO, etc.), they appear to be well connected throughout their region. They have a strong performance history, including a broad range of new companies participating each year. Past performance shows an ability to attract both companies and students, as all internships were filled and there are a reasonably large number of employers involved. They have also been able to utilize funds reallocated from other regions.

Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce

Their role as a major regional business chamber and partnerships with other area chambers, as well as other business groups, provides a large membership base to leverage. They outline a sound action plan which includes several mass marketing and direct marketing efforts. About half of the expected interns come from a small set of area schools, so a greater effort at program expansion to other area schools would be valuable. There are several mentions of minority and diversity outreach efforts. They host the regional Minority Business Assistance Center and partner with the Minority Business Incubator, which should be good platforms. Past performance has been sound and they expect to meet their goal this cycle. There is recognition of the need to expand coverage throughout the region, though a clear plan was not provided.

Community Action Organization of Scioto County ("CAO")

CAO is the One-Stop Operator for Ohio Workforce Area #1, which provides it with existing relationships among high-tech businesses within the region. They have built networks with area schools, chambers, industry associations, and economic development organizations. CAO indicated their own concern about the challenges of starting the program late last summer, though they also mention an ability to ramp up quickly. The key personnel appear to be well qualified and experienced for the selected roles, though it is a small staff. The proposal contains a few procedural miscues, nothing serious, but raises some minor concerns about attention to

detail. Current year performance has been adequate, though CAO believes they need more progress in raising program awareness which can help to grow outcomes.

Southeastern Ohio Port Authority (“Port Authority”)

Past experience as an economic development agency is helpful, especially with existing business and education networks, but the proposal lacked any specific discussion about high-tech target fields. Even though they mention having relationships in other parts of the region, their organizational focus is on one county and it is not clear how well they will perform throughout their designated section of the region. There is an agreement to split the southeast region between CAO and the Port Authority, but no mention of how the two will coordinate. The Port Authority does maintain relationships with many area businesses and mentions the inclusion of the Marcellus and Utica Shale areas as a key initiative, but no specific details were included regarding how they will do it. The Port Authority appears to get a lot done for having such a limited staff, but it may limit some abilities. The proposal makes a clear commitment to this initiative and current year performance has been adequate, indicating potential for future gains.

Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber (“The Chamber”)

They are well positioned to manage the internship program based on their role as a major regional chamber and their proposal has some strengths. The proposal provides a reasonable description of program operations and existing infrastructure will aid program administration, though lacks specific references to some areas of planning and timing. Connections to CincyTech and the Minority Business Accelerator should help with accessing targeted companies. Existing connections to several area companies and access to traditional communications tools (emails, newsletters, etc.) provide a good basis for connecting with educational and business partners. Past performance has been sound, though the program would benefit from a broader representation across area schools (88% come from the University of Cincinnati).

Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce

The Dayton Chamber has participated in the internship program since 2004. During that time, they have collectively assisted over 90 companies and over 720 interns. Last year's performance indicates interns spread across 34 different companies and an ability to utilize all internship funding. The full listing of past participating institutions and the inclusion of some satisfaction metrics (the only regional partner to include satisfaction data) demonstrates solid efforts and tracking. With strong past performance and reference to a waiting list of employers, there is good reason to believe that they can fulfill their projections.

Conclusion

Based on the evaluations conducted during the review process, there is sufficient supporting evidence to believe that the regional partners can continue to manage the program well. An increased focus on follow-up tracking and participant satisfaction (both interns and employers) would benefit the regional partners and the overall program.

Evaluators

Invantage Group provides a suite of innovative market development and business strategy services to help organizations succeed through better planning and implementation. By understanding market development, critical metrics, technical requirements, and customer-centric strategies, we assist clients to leverage assets in order to optimize market entry and growth opportunities. A fundamental part of our business plan development and evaluation experience has focused on market entry, commercialization, and team development.

Invantage Group thanks the Ohio Development Services Agency and the Ohio Third Frontier Commission for the opportunity to review these proposals and to provide our recommendations. It is hoped that the evaluation process provides helpful insights and directions to assist Development and the Internship Program in the successful development of a world-class entrepreneurial and high technology ecosystem.

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