

# How to Tap Government Funds For Training and Development

BY SIMONA COVEL

**H**ere's the good news: Government funding—sometimes lots of it—is available to small companies to use for employee training and development.

The bad news: It can take some work to track it down.

With some diligence, even someone with little knowledge of the labyrinth of government agencies responsible for employee training can locate programs.

"There's a lot of money coming from different sources," says C. Michael Ferraro, president and chief executive of **Training Solutions Inc.**, a Chantilly, Va., training company. Some of the funds come as grants. But in most cases, it is "appropriated," meaning the money may go to states or local work-force boards, which then decide what industries and areas to spend it in.

Mr. Ferraro, who is also a member of the Public Policy Council at the American Society for Training & Development, an industry association, offers some tips on navigating the system:

■ **Start at the federal level.** A good starting point is the U.S. Department of Labor's Business Relations Group ([www.doleta.gov/etainfo/brg.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/etainfo/brg.cfm)), which considers the business community its customers. Contact representatives by phone (202-693-3949) and email ([businessrelations@dol.gov](mailto:businessrelations@dol.gov)) and tell them what industry you're in and what you're hoping to accomplish with worker training.

"They will spend hours on the phone" with a business owner, Mr. Ferraro says. "The more they can get business involved, the more successful they feel."

Representatives should know if a specific program is coming up that's applicable to your industry, such as nursing or manufacturing. If not, they can make sure you're on the right lists for funding-availability notifications.

■ **Take similar steps at the state level.** Call your state's economic-development group. These departments have different names in each state so try other key phrases, such as work-force development. Ask about available grants and tax credits. Some companies, says Mr. Ferraro, can earn tax credits by updating employees' skills.

And don't underestimate the power of going to the statehouse and walking around, he says. You never know who you'll meet and the partnerships that can ensue.

■ **Contact your local community college and public university.** Government agencies often dole out money to colleges and universities, which, in turn, run training programs. These schools usually have an office of work-force development or work-force preparation. Don't worry too much about writing grant proposals justifying your need for the funds. Usually, the most a company is asked to do is provide data about its workers or training needs. The college generally will craft a grant proposal, if it's necessary.

■ **Seek out the local work-force board.** Local work-force boards receive money from various federal and state agencies, and then decide how to spend the funds locally. Every community has a work-force board, which operates like a school board with members of the community who are appointed or volunteer to be on it. Find yours at [www.servicelocator.org/wibcontacts](http://www.servicelocator.org/wibcontacts).

Attend meetings or get in touch with members about funding opportunities. Mr. Ferraro also suggests that a small-business owner might try volunteering, if possible, to serve on the board or one of its industry-specific committees. Someone who is on the board will hear first of new money flowing in—and may have a voice in how that money is spent.

■ **Go to a One-Stop Career Center.** There are more than 3,200 of these centers across the country, which were designed as one-stop shops for both employers and workers to get information about the job market and economic development. Employers can use the centers—which have different names in each state—to research training programs and to access databases of workers. Locate the nearest one at [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org).

A One-Stop representative may be able to tell you about training programs—particularly federal ones—that your local work-force board may not be aware of.

Write to [Simona.Covel@wsj.com](mailto:Simona.Covel@wsj.com)

