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Gov. Reynolds congratulates third round of Employer Innovation Fund awardees, wraps up first year of awards

DES MOINES – Today, Governor Reynolds announced 14 recipients of the Future Ready Iowa Employer Innovation Fund, a matching grant that helps employers provide postsecondary training and education opportunities for their employees. The third round of grants will distribute \$244,100 to the recipients. The three rounds of Employer Innovation Fund grants have allocated \$1.2 million in funds to 49 awardees across the state.

“Through the Employer Innovation Fund, Future Ready Iowa is working to spur innovation among employers and communities,” said Gov. Reynolds. “We have thousands of open jobs and rewarding careers and that is why we launched Future Ready Iowa. The Employer Innovation Fund is just one way we can help remove the barriers to postsecondary training and education and help Iowans achieve their goals.”

Funding for the grant was passed by the Iowa Legislature in 2019, making this the first year for the Future Ready Iowa Employer Innovation Fund.

"The Employer Innovation Fund has quickly become an important tool for employers investing in growing their skilled workforce and nonprofits and community groups looking to help those with the most barriers complete skills training," Director Beth Townsend, Iowa Workforce Development. "The Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship takes care of tuition and fees but that is not often the barrier for individuals to receive training. The programs proposed

through the Employer Innovation Fund address those barriers in creative and innovative ways and not only will help Iowa meet the Future Ready Iowa goal, but also provide hope and inspiration to those who may have been left behind in our economic success."

Employer Innovation Fund Round 3 Awardees:

Hope Haven Area Development Center – Burlington: In partnership with the West Burlington School District, students from the Corner Academy will gain employment experience at Hope Haven, a nonprofit that provides vocational, residential, community employment and living services for the disabled. Students will be trained as job coaches with the opportunity for future employment after high school graduation. The funding will support training and equipment for three students. Awarded \$2,360

Optimae LifeServices Inc. – Cedar Rapids: Optimae's Front Line Supervisor project will offer training for supervisors to become certified through the National Association of Direct Care Support Professionals. The program will train and certify 50 employees currently in supervisory positions. This certificate is nationally recognized and will assist Optimae supervisors in recruiting, training and retaining individuals in direct care occupations, as well as provide improved client services for the individuals with disabilities Optimae serves. Awarded \$40,000

Good Neighbor Society – Manchester: Funding will support course the costs of training and certification for 9 employees from Delaware and surrounding counties to earn their CNA. It will also be used to purchase a new training manikin for continued employee skill development. Awarded \$10,000

Sukup Manufacturing Co. – Sheffield: The funds will help implement a Quality Pre-Apprenticeship Program between Sukup and West Fork Community School District. It will support the skilled labor academy that provides opportunities for students to attend the welding program at North Iowa Area Community College and earn a nationally recognized credential. The project will purchase welder set up kits, new textbooks and provide 5 sets of the required tools for students in the program. Awarded \$5,250

Goodwill of the Heartland – Iowa City: This project will provide occupational skills training and certification for 25 individuals with significant barriers to employment. The project will serve individuals from Burlington, Mount Pleasant, Muscatine, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Clinton and Davenport. Nationally recognized certifications such as the Custodial Technician Certification and multiple national credentials through the National Restaurant Association and the National Retail Federation will be earned. Paid work experience and employment opportunities are also part of the project. Awarded \$23,549

Goodwill of Central Iowa – Johnston: This award will support the Creating Excellence in Re-Entry (CEiR) program. This collaborative partnership provides a holistic set of support services as well as occupational skills training in high-demand fields of food services and warehouse/packaging/logistics for returning citizens in community-based corrections. Opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials in these high-demand field is an essential part of the program. The program will serve 48 participants. Awarded \$45,000

Mid-Iowa Council, Boy Scouts of America – Des Moines: This funding will support the creation and implementation of the Scouts ITech Exploring Pathways Program focused solely on advanced manufacturing. The ITech Exploring pathway program will be available to youth ages 12 through 20 and will be the first of its kind in the nation. The program will create interest and build skills through gamification of STEM skills by creating connections to local employers and work opportunities. The goal will be to enroll 200 Iowa teens into the advanced manufacturing ITech Exploring program. Awarded \$25,000

Mount Pleasant Area Chamber Alliance – Mount Pleasant: To meet identified employer needs in the area, this project will fund the purchase a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine to be placed in the Mt. Pleasant High School as well as cover the cost of training instructors. The school district and the local business community have partnered together to teach students and parents about the advanced technology involved in manufacturing jobs within their community. Twelve local manufacturers will serve as project advisors and teach 176 students how to use the CNC machine in the first semester. Awarded \$10,000

One City United – Waterloo: One City United will undertake a Momentum pilot project in Waterloo. This is a neighborhood-based program connecting unemployed and underemployed individuals with training, coaching and networking in construction. Eligible participants will earn construction credentials. The project is developed for 14 at-risk youth, ages 18-24. The grant will be used for participant support costs such as transportation, child care and emergency funds. Awarded \$1,500

Iowa iJAG Inc. - Des Moines: This funding will support the efforts of Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates (iJAG) to increase the number of employers trained in the successful iJAG employer engagement model of work-based learning experiences for iJAG students. iJAG will engage with new employer partners across Iowa to provide training and guidance in work-based learning through internships, pre-apprenticeships, certifications and paid on-the-job training. Awarded \$10,863

Iowa Specialty Hospital – Clarion: This project will encourage nurses to continue their skills and credential development. The fund will cover cost of class, books and certification testing in order to remove barriers for participants. The next step will be providing employee scholarships for individuals to obtain the next level of training, LPN, RN and/or specialized certifications. The program goals are to support 10 employees in obtaining CNA certification, 10 employees in obtaining LPN, RN or DNP degrees and 20 employees to earn specialty certificates. Awarded \$10,000

Willis Dady Emergency Shelter – Cedar Rapids: This project will provide support services to 6 individuals who are experiencing homelessness or near homelessness in order for them to obtain CNA certification and stable employment. The grant will provide wrap-around services designed to address the numerous barriers and challenges faced by individuals in this situation while providing them with a way to develop a sustainable career pathway. Awarded \$10,643

Matthew 25 – Cedar Rapids: Fifteen high school age youth will participate in a program that focuses on teaching the critical skills of communication, teamwork, and problem solving while having a paying job that will teach small business management and customer service skills. Awarded \$9,935

Iowa Skilled Trades – Johnston: To address critical shortages in the skilled trades, this project will build two new labs at Central Campus in Des Moines as part of a much larger project. The funding for this request will purchase equipment needed for a new HVAC lab. This project will provide opportunities for an additional 100 students to enter the trades program at the school. Awarded \$40,000

Employer Innovation Fund Awards

Round 1 = \$387,425

Round 2 = \$568,475

Round 3 = \$244,100

Total = \$1,200,000

For more information about the Employer Innovation Fund, visit www.FutureReadyIowa.gov/innovation

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