



Letter of Interest #722: Community Action Projects Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department

Section I. Project Overview

A. Applicant/Organization information

Agency Name: Opportunity Junction
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At Opportunity Junction, we believe that everyone who works hard deserves the opportunity to succeed. Unfortunately, too many local residents face barriers to employment that they cannot overcome on their own. But when job seekers get the training and support to overcome those barriers, they can launch careers that lead to financial security.

We serve the high-need communities of East Costa County, a region that struggles with suburban poverty. An independent study by Chris Schildt of the University of California at Berkeley and published by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco estimated that nonprofit **dollars available to a poor resident in West Contra Costa exceeds that of East Contra Costa by an 8-to-1 ratio**, despite comparable rates of poverty in the two regions.¹ In East Contra Costa, 16% of adults aged 25 or older do not have a high school diploma or equivalency, and 25% have attained no more than their high school diploma or equivalency.²

Opportunity Junction's core employment programs help motivated, low-income East Contra Costa County job seekers facing addressable barriers to achieve long-term, sustainable employment.

- The **Administrative Careers Training (ACT) Program**, for which funding is requested here, prepares participants for administrative careers by combining computer training with life skills, case management, paid work experience, mental health services, career skills, job placement, and alumni services.
- The **Healthcare Career Pathway (HCP) Program** offers Certified Nursing Assistant training in partnership with Mount Diablo Adult Education and Ombudsmen Services.
- **Career Counseling and Placement Assistance (CCPA)** provides individualized career development, case management, and job placement services in Bay Point, as part of SparkPoint Contra Costa. We also offer CCPA in our Antioch office and at Los Medanos College in partnership with the Contra Costa Workforce Collaborative.

¹ [Building a Robust Anti-Poverty Network in the Bay Area](http://www.frbsf.org/community-development/files/wp2012-03.pdf), page 8, at <http://www.frbsf.org/community-development/files/wp2012-03.pdf>.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey One-Year Estimates.

- **Road Map** staffers specialize in serving young adults, ages 18 to 24. Transition-aged youth are often referred into our own training programs or into short-term career technical education at Los Medanos College.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all employment programs have pivoted to online delivery, except for the HCP, which is offering a hybrid program that includes in-person skills instruction.

Opportunity Junction also runs an evening **Technology Center**, offering the community free access to computers and the Internet, plus career center services as well as classes in computer basics and English as a Second Language. During the tax season, we offer **Do-It-Yourself Tax Assistance (DIYTA)**, which teaches taxpayers to prepare their own returns using Tax Slayer. Technology Center classes and DIYTA are being offered online, over Zoom, but public access to computers in our office is suspended during the period of the pandemic.

Altogether, Opportunity Junction served 1,090 residents last year in one or more of their programs.

Recent honors awarded to Opportunity Junction include:

- 2019—Opportunity Junction’s ACT, for which support is requested here, puts the organization on the ImpactMatters Top 10 Poverty-Fighting Organizations list based on the program’s Return on Investment (ROI).
- 2019—The ACT was highlighted in an MDRC authored, James Irvine Foundation funded report titled, *Beyond the Basics: Integrating Workforce and College-Readiness Training Into California's Adult Basic Skills Programs*.³
- 2018—President and CEO Alissa Friedman honored as Woman of the Year for Senate District Seven by State Senator Steven Glazer.
- 2017—The ACT was featured in a national research paper, *Path to Employment*, prepared by Tyton Partners on behalf of the James Irvine Foundation, highlighting innovative, effective employment programs for low-income and other underserved adults.

B. Project Name

Opportunity Junction has a proven track record (detailed in Section V) of providing the proposed Administrative Careers Training Program (ACT formerly known as Job Training and Placement Program), which has been funded, in part, by CSBG contracts since 2009.

C. Areas of county where services are provided

When program delivery is in person (when we are not in a time of pandemic), services are provided at in East Contra Costa at Opportunity Junction’s main office at 3102 Delta Fair Boulevard in Antioch, with additional orientation/application sessions at SparkPoint East Contra

³ [Beyond the Basics: Integrating Workforce and College-Readiness Training Into California's Adult Basic Skills Programs](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ABE_Irvine_Scan_Full_Report.pdf) at https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ABE_Irvine_Scan_Full_Report.pdf

Costa at 3105 Willow Pass Road in Bay Point. Our current online program delivery over Zoom has made the program accessible to motivated job seekers throughout the County.

Section II. Program Budget Information

A. Amount of CSBG funds requested (not to exceed \$99,999)

\$72,294.60

B. Total CSBG project cost (should match budget)

\$72,294.60 (\$848,459 if you include other funding sources, as shown on the included Sources and Uses Budget)

C. Itemized CSBG project budget: please see the Attachment C spreadsheet.

1. Budget Narrative

In line with our CSBG programming since 2009, Opportunity Junction is requesting funding to cover for the following elements of the ACT program:

a. Key Program Staff

We request salary support for essential program staff providing direct instruction and support services to program participants. The subset of positions to be funded are:

- **Lead Program Manager (\$14,400):** Providing overall program management and oversight, including case management, life skills and career skills training to ACT participants.
- **Manager of Personal Development (\$13,400):** Direct case management services to enable participants to overcome addressable barriers to employment and to complete the program training.
- **Computer Skills Instructor (\$11,786.60):** Provides all Microsoft Office and professional software application training to program participants. Oversees completion of all coursework, proctors and reviews assessments, provides group and one-on-one instruction to trainees.
- **Manager of Alumni Programs (\$11,220):** Funds are requested toward the salary of the Manager of Alumni Programs, who provides individual and group career counseling to participants in the Alumni Advancement Academy (AAA) and Active Alumni Job Seekers.
- **Director of Counseling (\$7,488):** Provides assessments, referrals, and short-term mental health services to program participants. Also provides consultation and training to staff.

The remainder of these staff salaries will be funded from other sources and are identified in the budget as in-kind support/other funding sources. For billing simplicity, we are not requesting fringe benefits to be covered under the CSBG contract. Instead, those fringe benefits will also be funded from other sources.

b. Paid Internships: \$14,000

We also request funding toward the paid work experience component of the program, in the form of wages for four job training interns. We continue to be interested in placing interns in CSB offices to gain work experience and support the CSB generally, for 4 hours per day, within 5 miles of our office or the interns' residences.

2. Fiscal Requirements

- a. Adequate financial resources or the ability to obtain such resources during the performance of the contract to timely deliver services specified in the “Description of Services”**

Opportunity Junction has been a contractor for the Contra Costa County Community Services Block Grant since 2009. We have a diverse funding base, including foundation grants, individual donations, event income, and government contracts. We maintain an Operating Reserve of 3 months of total annual organizational budget that could be tapped in the event of a deficit. The Administrative Careers Training program is our flagship program, and we will secure the resources necessary to timely deliver the specified services.

- b. An adequate accounting system in place to properly account for the funds**

Opportunity Junction uses QuickBooks as our accounting system.

- c. An adequate accounting system to segregate expenses by funding source**

Our QuickBooks system allows us to segregate funding by classes to only apply funding to specified programs or expenses.

- d. A computer system with internet access to create invoices in the Employment and Human Services Department’s (EHSD) billing software and upload documents to EHSD’s secure server (when requested)**

We currently submit printouts of Excel spreadsheet and backup documentation via email for reimbursement. However, we are more than willing to upload electronically in the future if so requested; we do this for many other funding sources and have adequate IT infrastructure in place to do so.

D. Leveraging-describe how you leverage other funds to provide the services you are proposing to fund.

Opportunity Junction leverages revenue from sources that include government contracts, foundation grants, corporate contributions, and earned revenue. Some of these sources may be budgeted only for specific categories of expenses, so CSBG support for the personnel who are the key to the program’s effectiveness is particularly valuable. We also leverage resources from organizations with complementary missions: hot lunches provided by Loaves and Fishes, weekend groceries from the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Counties, and business clothing from Wardrobe for Opportunity. Finally, we also leverage volunteer resources to stretch our budget even further: both Business Math and Business English are taught by long-term volunteers, and other volunteers serve as tutors for those who need additional support in learning computer or language skills.

E. Provide budget contingency plan for reduced funding

We understand that Community Services Block Grant funding is limited and that there may not be enough funding to support 20% of the key ACT positions we include in this proposal. Were

the funding to be at the level of \$40,000, we would preferentially budget the CSBG funding for 1) internships, 2) the Lead Program Manager (program management, career skills trainer, and case manager for the interns), and 3) the Computer Skills Instructor. In that case, or in the case of further reduced funding, we would allocate more of our unrestricted funding to cover the other program expenses and continue to apply to other funding streams to support comprehensive services.

Section III. Project Description

A. Priority Area to be addressed [Housing/Shelter or Employment/Jobs or Food/Nutrition or Comprehensive Health Services]

Employment/Jobs

**B. Goal Statement and
C. Project objective(s)**

ATTACHMENT B

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|---|
| <p>Community Action Projects Housing-Shelter / Employment-Jobs/ Food-Nutrition GOAL AND OBJECTIVE WORKSHEET</p> |
| <p>Opportunity Junction’s goal is to provide a comprehensive program of job training and placement services that help motivated low-income job seekers learn computer and administrative skills and overcome addressable barriers to employment so that they can launch administrative careers that lead to self-sufficiency.</p> |

| <i>OBJECTIVES</i> | <i>METRICS – Quantifiable Results</i> | <i>TIMEFRAME (When will you complete task?)</i> |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Objective 1: Enroll 54 new low-income job seekers in an intensive education and training program leading to employability in the occupation of Administrative Assistant. In addition, provide continuing training and support to up to 20 trainees enrolled February 1, 2021, 18 interns enrolled September 2020, and 125 program alumni.</p> | <p>NPI Employment & Training #6: Provide 80 accessible or increased educational and training placement opportunities. We will report on participants in the training or internship phases of the program (not including the 125 alumni) for consistency with form CSD 295 demographic report, unless otherwise directed.</p> | <p>We will enroll three new classes during the contract period. New classes are scheduled to begin May 2021, September 2021 and February 2022.</p> |
| <p>Objective 2: Graduate an average of 14 trainees into the internship phase of the program from each class of 19, with instruction in computer skills, life skills, business English, and business Math, and business skills.</p> | <p>NPI Employment & Training #3: 42 clients will have newly obtained the skills and competencies required for employment.</p> | <p>Training completion dates that fall within the contract period are: April 2021, August 2021, and December 2021.</p> |

| OBJECTIVES | METRICS – Quantifiable Results | TIMEFRAME (When will you complete task?) |
|---|--|--|
| Objective 3: Provide adequate training and support so that at least 11 trainees per class will be obtain industry-recognized Microsoft Office Specialist certifications. | NPI Employment & Training #5: 33 clients will attain Microsoft Office Specialist certification in Word and/or Excel. | Certification testing will occur throughout the contract period, as participants demonstrate proficiency. |
| Objective 4: Place 40 trained clients into employment through teaching career skills (interviewing, resume, and cover letter writing), providing case management and career counseling, and leveraging employer relationships. | NPI Employment & Training #1: 40 clients who are unemployed will be placed into employment. | Placements into unsubsidized employment will occur through the contract period |
| Objective 5: Support 80% of alumni placed into employment in retain employment for at least 90 days. | NPI Employment & Training #1.A.: 34 of the clients who reach the 90 day mark post-placement during the contract period will be employed at that time. | For this NPI, we will reference the alumni who hit 90 days post-placement during the contract period and not those who are placed during the contract. |
| Objective 6: Provide career ladder training and counseling to employed alumni to help them advance into higher-paying positions with benefits. | NPI Employment & Training #1.B.: 30 clients will obtain an increase in employment income (a raise) and/or secured benefits. | For this NPI, we will reference the alumni who hit 90 days post-placement during the contract period and not those who are placed during the contract. |
| Objective 7: Place participants into positions paying a “living wage” and help them continue to climb the career ladder after placement. | NPI Employment & Training #2: 30 alumni will achieve “living wage” employment averaging at least \$15 per hour and/or employment with benefits. | For this NPI, we will reference the alumni who hit 90 days post-placement during the contract period and not those who are placed during the contract. |
| Objective 8: Provide comprehensive support to all trainees and interns, as well as to alumni who need continuing support. | NPI Food & Nutrition #1: 40 clients will receive food assistance onsite through our partnerships with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano (groceries on Fridays) and Loaves and Fishes (lunch Monday through Thursday), once we return to in-person training (estimating July 2021). | This support will be provided weekly throughout the contract period once we return to in-person program delivery. |

Participants will receive the training, experience, and support they need to start administrative careers at livable wages with opportunities to reach economic self-sufficiency.

The Administrative Careers Training Program (the ACT) serves individuals who are low-income and confront one or more addressable barriers to employment, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, a criminal record, past job instability, or limited out of home work experience.

As detailed in Table 1, ACT participants are primarily women and reflect the diversity of those living in poverty in eastern Contra Costa County.

Opportunity Junction is committed to moving ACT participants from poverty to long-term economic independence, so our strategies are more comprehensive and holistic than traditional job training programs. As diagrammed below, the ACT supplements computer training and other workplace essentials with equally-critical life skills and support services designed to address longstanding barriers that have hindered participants' employability in the past.

| Gender | | Income Status at Enrollment | |
|---|-----|------------------------------------|-----|
| Women | 86% | Extremely Low-Income | 83% |
| Men | 14% | Low-Income | 17% |
| Ethnicity | | Trauma and Mental Health | |
| African-American | 19% | Past Criminal Conviction | 29% |
| Latino | 37% | Experienced Trauma | 77% |
| Other and Multi - Racial | 24% | Domestic Violence History | 25% |
| White | 16% | Substance Abuse History | 27% |
| Additional Barriers to Employment | | | |
| Lacks Applicable Work Skills | | | 96% |
| Disability | | | 27% |
| Long-Term Unemployed or No Prior Employment | | | 37% |

| Administrative Careers Training Program Program Timeline | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------------------------|---------|
| One-on-One Case Management frequent meetings at first and less often as participant progresses in the program | | | | | | | |
| Therapy with an on-site, licensed psychologist | | | | | | | |
| Month 1 | Month 2 | Month 3 | Month 4 | Month 5 | Month 6 | Month 7 | Ongoing |
| Training | | Internship | | | | Alumni Support | |
| Computer Skills | | Career Skills | | | | Active Alumni Job Seekers | |
| Life Skills | | | | | | Alumni Advancement Academy | |
| Business English | | Paid Internship | | | | Alumni Council & Alumni Center | |
| Business Math | | | | | | Alumni Meetings & Special Events | |

Paid work experience and long-term alumni support are critical elements of the program, and **alumni of the program are an important part of the governance of the organization**: four alumnae sit on our Advisory Council (Adriana Ponce-Matteucci, Julin Perez-Berntsen, René Tucker, and Alma Williams); and alumni feedback is provided by our Alumni Council and solicited at quarterly Alumni Meetings. In addition, we employ five ACT alumni on staff,

including two ACT staffers: Manager of Personal Development Natalie Georgia and Computer Skills Instructor Alana Chisholm.

ACT prepares participants for high-quality careers that pay family sustaining wages by taking advantage of the opportunity created by employers' needs for a skilled administrative workforce in the East Bay. The California Employment Development Department estimates that from 2016-2026, there will be **more than 48,000 East Bay job openings in administrative occupations that pay a living wage and yet do not require a 4-year college education.** These jobs are mostly career-track, office positions, offering advancement opportunity. The median wage for Office Clerks is \$18.24 and for Customer Service Representatives is \$20.20, roles many ACT participants are placed into.⁴

For each of the three classes we will enroll during the contract period, the objective above will be reached through the following steps:

TWELVE WEEKS OF FULL-TIME TRAINING IN THREE KEY AREAS—

Life Skills, including many team-building exercises and covering goal-setting, overcoming obstacles, managing change, self-care, business and workplace skills, and public speaking;

Computer Skills, focused on the Microsoft Office Suite and online applications such as Google Docs and Salesforce. Training leads to Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification in Word and Excel, with some trainees earning MOS certification in PowerPoint, Access, and Outlook;

Academic Skills including Business English and Business Math.

This proposal includes funding for the staff members who teach both Life Skills and Computer Skills.

UP TO FOUR MONTHS PAID, ON-THE-JOB EXPERIENCE—Once training is complete, Opportunity Junction hires participants as interns in our Staffing Services social enterprise, where they provide contracted services for local businesses, government agencies and nonprofits as well as administrative support for our staff. Unlike many social enterprises, our emphasis is on the benefit to the participant, so **we hire every graduate.** For program participants, the internship is critical: allowing them to gain practical professional experience and develop confidence in their skills and abilities. **This proposal includes funding for four internships.**

CASE MANAGEMENT—Case managers closely support participants throughout the program and for 18 months following job placement, ensuring that each participant has access to needed services and supports, including childcare, healthcare, transportation. **This proposal includes funding for these services for both our trainees and our interns.**

⁴ CA Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information for Oakland MSA, "2016-2026 Employment Projections" <https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/employment-projections.html>

COUNSELING SERVICES—Because most of our participants have suffered from past trauma, our counselor assesses all ACT participants and provides referrals and counseling. Integrating these services into the program helps to de-stigmatize them and facilitate participation. These services are normally provided onsite as part of the training day but are currently being delivered remotely. **This proposal includes funding for these services for our trainees, interns, and alumni.**

PERSONALIZED JOB PLACEMENT—In order to facilitate a good fit between participants and employers, interns engage in comprehensive career-building activities including skill and interest assessment, job search, resume and cover letter preparation, and interview practice. Meanwhile, our Business Services Manager works directly with employers to develop appropriate placements for interns and program alumni.

LONG-TERM SUPPORT SERVICES—Following job placement, each participant is provided ongoing support services and follow up, which have been expanded significantly in the past two years. Specific services include our Active Alumni Job-Seeker Program, our Alumni Advancement Academy (AAA), the Alumni Council, alumni meetings and activities, use of the onsite Alumni Center, and ongoing case management and counseling services. **This proposal includes funding for these alumni programs.**

During 12-month contract period, the program will enroll 54 applicants, graduate 42 trainees and place them into administrative positions. Of these clients, an estimated 70% will have household income below the federal poverty guidelines; the remainder will be low-income but may be above the official federal poverty guidelines.

D. Sustainability Plan-what steps will you take if funding is reduced/eliminated?

The ACT is Opportunity Junction’s flagship program, in operation since the agency’s founding in 2000. The program has a broad range of ongoing financial support, including government contracts, foundation grants, and corporate contributions, as well as earned income. Staff continues to seek out new funding sources while retaining existing funders. A growing number of alumni are joining us as donors, though the dollar amount of their support is modest. If CSBG funding is reduced or eliminated, we would initially address budget gaps with unrestricted grant support from other government or foundation sources, as well as approach individual donors for increased gifts. Finally, if we were unable to meet a budget gap, we would need to consider what expenses, if any, might be reduced.

E. How will your program partner with existing agencies to avoid duplication and maximize efficiency?

Opportunity Junction partners with other organizations where it best meets the needs of our program participants. As discussed in Section II D, we partner with a number of areas nonprofits to obtain needed services and support for our program participants without duplicating efforts.

This allows Opportunity Junction's staff to focus on providing job training, placement and needed supportive services for our clients.

Section IV. Contract Requirements

- A. Worker's Compensation**
- B. Professional liability**
- C. Comprehensive general liability, including automobile**

Please see Attachment 1 for all insurance.

D. Current list of Board of Directors and Staff

Please see Attachment 2 for our current board members; Attachment 3 shows our organizational chart.

E. Statement of NO potential conflict of interest between the Contra Costa County Economic Opportunity Council members and the applicant

Please see Attachment D/Attachment 4.

Section V. Proven Track Record

Opportunity Junction's ACT has a proven track record of success, backed up by robust data collection and self-evaluation.

A. Data Tracking Methods

We track every element of program application, enrollment, training, and progress in our customized Salesforce database. We regularly follow up with alumni to collect post-program employment and salary information.

First, we enter every applicant to our programs into Salesforce, including income information, demographics, and information about barriers to employment. Case managers enter Work Ready Ratings into Salesforce. These ratings include case notes and quantitative ratings of participants' progress along seven work-readiness dimensions.

For participants in the ACT, we track progress in learning computer skills weekly. Participants complete practice tests for the Microsoft Office Specialist certification, and we enter their scores into Salesforce. We track typing scores weekly; participants' Excellence in Action awards are also tracked. We also monitor disciplinary action and class absences and include those in Salesforce.

Each file includes course enrollment, graduation, and program-separation dates. We track participants' personal barriers and special skills, and our staff records when we approve a participant for job placement.

We conduct post-placement follow-up every three months for the first 18 months and maintain a complete employment history in Salesforce. Using email, texting, telephone and face-to-face meetings, our staff members gather such data as personal demographics; earnings; hours; job title; presence or absence of health, dental, retirement and other benefits (for self and dependents); and type of employment attained. We have configured Salesforce to alert staff weekly of those alumni whose information has not been verified within the past three months.

Many of our alumni keep in touch for years afterwards, providing updates at our alumni social events. Others use our MyOJ.org web interface to submit employment updates directly into our Salesforce database.

B. Use of Wage Data from the Employment Development Department (EDD)

Opportunity Junction pioneered the use of EDD wage data to evaluate the long-term impact of the ACT, in partnership with Tipping Point Community and the EDD Labor Market Information Division. The data is provided as batch information for a group of alumni with a minimum size of five employed alumni (those without EDD wages do not count for reaching the threshold). In this way, data privacy is preserved while allowing trends and employment persistence to be tracked over several years. An evaluation of the ACT using this EDD data by ImpactMatters (which has now been acquired by Charity Navigator) placed Opportunity Junction on its Top 10 Poverty-Fighting Organization list **globally** based on the Return on Investment (ROI) of the ACT.

C. Long-Term Track Record

Since our founding in 2000, a total of 1,058 low-income East Contra Costa residents have enrolled in the ACT. Class size has doubled from 10 to 20, and the number of annual graduates has increased steadily. Over the past three fiscal years, we enrolled 163, and 77 successfully graduated from the training phase of the program (77%). During those same three years, we placed 114 ACT participants into starting positions averaging \$17.00 per hour, working an average of 35 hours a week. Of the 126 who reached 18 months post-placement during those three years, we verified employment status for 123. Of those reached for verification, 99 (79%) were employed at 18 months earning an average wage of \$17.65 per hour, up 16% from their average wage at placement of \$15.21 per hour.

D. Federal Contracting Capacity

Opportunity Junction is an experienced federal subcontractor, including complying with procurement and other regulations. In addition to CSBG and CDBG subcontracts, we subcontract with the California Workforce Development Board and participate in Fresh Success, the Federal Department of Agriculture SNAP E&T reimbursement program.