

Project QUEST:

A Sustainable Funding Model Supporting Workforce Development through Comprehensive Assistance



Project QUEST is a workforce development program founded in San Antonio, Texas that focuses on preparing underemployed and unemployed individuals for high-demand, well-paying jobs. Founded in 1992 in response to a massive manufacturing layoff resulting in the loss of 1,200 jobs, the program offers comprehensive support services, including financial assistance, educational support, career coaching, and career readiness training to help participants complete job training programs and secure employment. This evidence-based model has demonstrated success in improving educational and employment outcomes, especially for participants from underserved communities.

Project QUEST's Funding Model

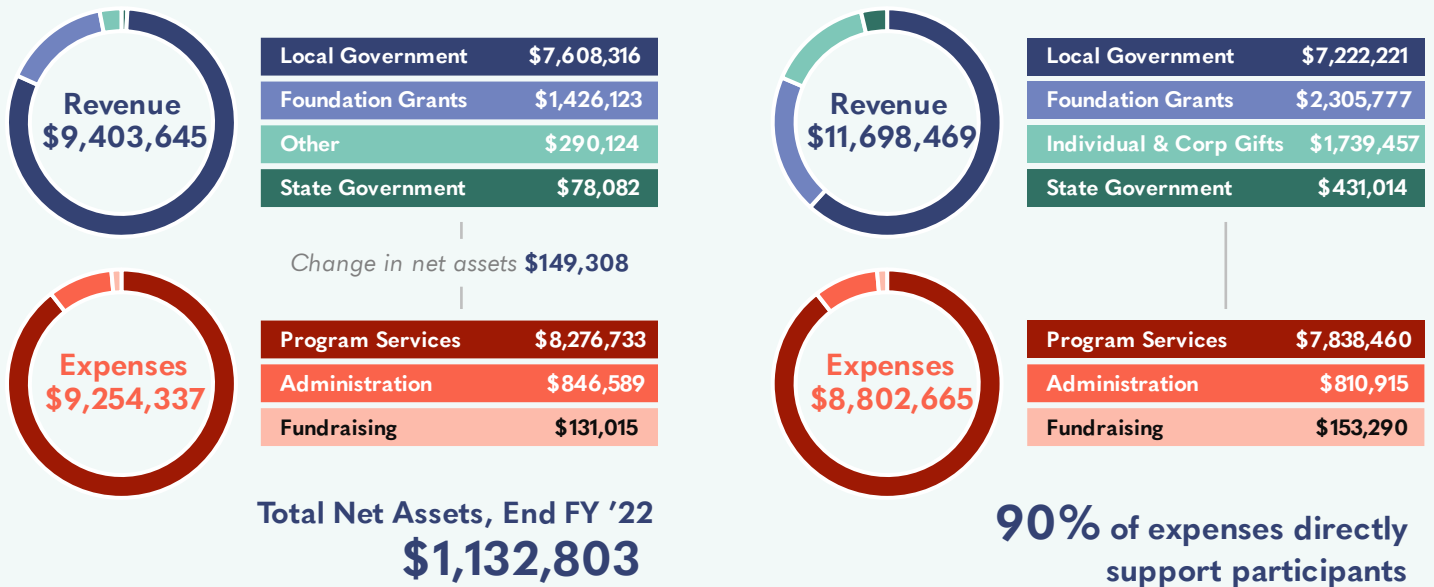
Project QUEST's funding model integrates public grants, philanthropic contributions, and local, state, and federal government support. Combined with collaboration from local governments, foundations, and employers, this diverse funding ensures program sustainability and growth. Local funding allows QUEST to tailor services to individual needs, such as covering gaps like rental assistance or childcare, to ensure that participants can focus on their training.

Key Components of the Funding Model

- 1 Public-Private Partnerships:** Project QUEST has built a diversified funding base through partnerships with local governments, community colleges, private foundations, and other stakeholders. This collaboration not only strengthens financial sustainability but also enhances the program's alignment with local labor market needs.
- 2 Braided Funding Streams:** The program leverages multiple funding sources, including:
 - **Federal Grants:** Project QUEST often utilizes Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds and other federal grants.
 - **State and Local Support:** State and local governments provide additional grants or subsidies that help cover training costs and participant services.
 - **Foundation Grants:** Various philanthropic organizations, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation, have provided grants to support specific populations or initiatives within Project QUEST.
 - **Corporate Contributions:** Contributions from local corporate partners help support the program's role in building a skilled local workforce.
- 3 Individual Sponsorships:** Some funding comes from individual sponsors or donors who want to support specific participants, with contributions often targeted toward designated expenses like transportation or childcare.

Figure 1.

Year-on-Year Growth in Braided Funding: Project QUEST FY 2022 vs. FY 2023



Source: [Project QUEST Annual Report 2022](#)

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As Figure 1 shows, from FY22 to FY23, Project QUEST saw significant growth in its braided funding, reflecting increased buy-in and support from diverse sources, including state and local governments, foundation grants, and other contributors. This funding boost underscores the program's effectiveness and alignment with workforce development priorities across multiple sectors.

Program Cost Structure

The comprehensive support offered by Project QUEST is resource-intensive, with costs averaging around \$10,000 per participant over 22 months. However, by leveraging various funding sources, the program minimizes out-of-pocket costs for participants. Primary expenses include:

-  **Educational Costs:** Tuition, fees, and other training-related expenses.
-  **Supportive Services:** Childcare, transportation, counseling, and career coaching to support participants' persistence.
-  **Employment Services:** Job placement assistance, resume workshops, and other services to help participants transition into stable employment.

Evidence-Based Success and Sustainable Impact

Project QUEST's outcome-driven funding model is supported by strong evidence of its impact on participants. Evaluations, including those from the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, show that Project QUEST participants experience higher employment rates, increased earnings, and greater job stability. The program's measurable success helps attract sustained support, ensuring its ability to deliver impactful, long-term training and economic benefits to participants.

Scaling Workforce Development Models

San Antonio - Ready to Work: The San Antonio Ready to Work (RTW) program exemplifies innovative workforce development by leveraging community partnerships and strategic funding. Approved by voters in 2020 and launched in May 2022, the five-year initiative is supported by a 1/8-cent sales tax, providing \$200 million to help San Antonio residents overcome barriers to career advancement. The program targets adults earning under \$34,000 annually, offering training and education opportunities in high-demand industries, such as healthcare, IT, and construction.

Role of Project QUEST: As one of RTW's four primary partners, Project QUEST applies its proven workforce training model to prepare participants for careers in advanced manufacturing, IT, healthcare, and skilled trades. This collaboration demonstrates how RTW integrates effective local expertise to build a sustainable, scalable workforce development framework.

Key Features of Ready to Work



Comprehensive Support Services: Participants receive tailored career guidance from RTW coaches, assistance with tuition costs, and access to childcare, transportation, and emergency financial support.



Diverse Training Options: The program partners with over 70 local colleges and training providers, offering pathways to industry-recognized certifications, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees for eligible participants.



Collaborative Workforce Solutions: RTW engages nearly 400 employers, ensuring alignment between training programs and labor market needs. Employers provide internships, review resumes, and pledge job opportunities for graduates.

Impact and Vision

By 2025, RTW aims to interview 39,000 applicants, enroll 28,000 participants, and help 15,600 individuals secure quality jobs with wages of at least \$15 per hour. Early projections highlight its strong return on investment, with participants collectively expected to generate \$780 million in lifetime income gains.

RTW's model serves as a blueprint for cities seeking to invest in workforce development, highlighting the power of community-wide partnerships and innovative funding structures to drive economic mobility and transform local labor markets.

Key Structural Insights for Scaling Success

Cities interested in replicating the San Antonio Ready to Work program should consider the following structural elements:

- ✓ **Dedicated Funding Source:** The program's foundation is its secure funding stream—1/8 of a cent from sales tax revenue, approved by voters for a five-year term. This approach ensures a predictable and sustained investment in workforce development.
- ✓ **Strategic Partnerships:** The program's partnership with Project QUEST as a prime contractor exemplifies the importance of partnering with established workforce development organizations. By integrating their expertise, the program connects participants to training and careers in emerging fields, aligning workforce supply with industry demand.
- ✓ **Eligibility and Equity Focus:** The program is designed to serve underemployed and economically disadvantaged residents, ensuring inclusivity by targeting individuals earning below a specific income threshold. This equity-driven model addresses barriers to workforce participation and creates pathways for upward mobility.
- ✓ **Multi-Tiered Educational Offerings:** RTW provides a flexible range of options, from short-term certifications to long-term associate degrees, catering to diverse learner needs and timelines.
- ✓ **Outcome-Oriented Approach:** The program's focus on measurable outcomes, such as job placements in high-demand fields, ensures accountability and demonstrates value to stakeholders and funders.

Conclusion

Project QUEST's funding model demonstrates the power of leveraging public and private resources alongside comprehensive support to achieve transformative outcomes in workforce development. By strategically aligning its funding sources with its mission to empower under-resourced populations, Project QUEST has established a sustainable and impactful framework for workforce readiness. To further meet today's evolving workforce needs, organizations like Project QUEST can strengthen partnerships with stakeholders and institutions of higher education, fostering equitable resource sharing that drives meaningful and lasting outcomes for their communities.

The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization advocating for student-centered public policies that promote affordability, accountability, and equity in higher education.

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Learn More

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