Motion Picture and Television Production

ABSTRACT

West Los Angeles College (WLAC) in Culver City, California, and its workforce development, industry, non-profit, school, and university partners propose a new college program comprising 10 Skills Certificates in Motion Picture/Television Production (MP/TP). This ground-breaking program, made possible by unprecedented cooperation between unions, studios, non-profit organizations, and WLAC, will develop a training curriculum in the specific technical skills needed for the “below the line” portion of the industry that offers a guaranteed pathway to union membership and high-paying jobs.

The industry focus is Motion Picture/Television Production—the high-tech digital and technical side of the film industry. The workforce to be trained is not the actors, directors, or producers who attract media attention; instead, it is the people whose names appear only in the small print at the end of a film or TV episode—the grips, best boys, electricians, set dressers, costumers, scene painters, and all the others who make up the majority of people working in this quintessentially American industry. And this training program will be centered in Culver City, where the American film industry began.

Need for the program is strong. The existing industry workforce, almost exclusively white males, is approaching retirement. Since the studios closed their training programs in the 1970s in response to industry changes, no formal mechanism has existed to provide training for new workers wanting to enter the field or to upgrade skills of incumbent workers. As production, especially for television, has increased, companies have found it more and more difficult to hire enough workers with the needed skills. The equipment used to create movies, television, commercials, and Internet content changes constantly. Manufacturers provide only limited training on operating their new equipment or software and do not train for jobs. A formal training program is sorely needed to support this key Southern California industry.

Partnering with WLAC are the South Bay Workforce One-Stop Business and Career Centers (WIA agency), UCLA Community Based Learning (youth WIA agency), Los Angeles Urban League (WIA agency); Hollywood Cinema Production Resources (HCPR: a non-profit offering non-credit training for limited numbers of underserved youth); Workplace Hollywood (a non-profit which works with production companies on employment of under-represented youth as entry-level production workers for feature films and television series); the International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE: the union representing the industry’s skilled technical workforce); 20th Century Fox (employer for motion picture and television production); Dorsey, Culver City, and Los Angeles High Schools; the 23-campus California State University System; and the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC: major business development and planning agency).

Proposed training and capacity-building activities include development of an introductory class and ten skills courses, with internships leading to guaranteed job placement for qualified program completers. WLAC, in partnership with HCPR and IATSE, will develop curricula for ten Skills Certificates (each comprising the introductory course, one skills course, and an internship), hire faculty and support personnel, and provide classroom/lab space, Internet-connected conference room, and training equipment and supplies to support hands-on instruction.

Funding requested is $2,000,000 over three years, or $1,667 per student. Leveraged resources over the 3 years of the grant total a minimum of $1,972,892 as shown in the Budget Narrative, including $93,000 in WIA training funds (see p. 20), but will also include additional donated equipment and tools as the program progresses, and professionals’ time as program advisors, student mentors, and counselors. Target groups for training include minorities, women, and low-income youths entering the workforce, along with incumbent workers who need to develop new skills related to changing technology. Expected outcomes and benefits include at least 600 new workers trained annually once program development is complete, institutionalization of all program processes and costs at WLAC within three years, and replicability of the program in other states with existing or developing motion picture/television production industries. WLAC has the capacity to manage both the grant itself and development of the new program, as shown by its success with numerous other major grants and academic program