



## High Road Training Partnership: Resilient Workforce Program (RWP)

### Narrative

#### Section 1: Project Design and Overview (30%)

##### Question - 1.0

***Provide an introduction of your planning project and high road strategy. This should include an overview of the project and how it aligns with the High Road principles.***

Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) is a multi-stakeholder capacity-building organization that provides tools to strengthen labor management systems across the produce industry, certifies the farms of high road agricultural employers to rigorous labor, food safety, and integrated pest management standards, and partners with experts, employers, and workers to offer new skills and career ladders to the agricultural workforce. Headquartered in Washington DC, EFI opened a new office in California this year to sharpen our focus on the country's leading producer of fresh fruits and vegetables.

EFI first began working with CWDB's High Road Training Partnership program in 2021, when we launched a two-year partnership with three employers to engage workers in waste management strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on produce farms. Building on that experience, we began a second two-year HRTP-WIOA grant in April 2022 to create a framework within the produce industry in California for documentation, curriculum development, training, assessment and credentialing of agricultural skills. This proposal continues that effort to establish career pathways to better jobs for farmworkers while providing high road employers with a more professional workforce.

With additional support from the James Irvine Foundation, WIOA funds have allowed EFI to work with [Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF), a national leader in workforce development, on a standardized framework for skill documentation, and to engage workers and employers in identifying specific foundational, crop-specific and technical skills. As a labor shortage, climate change and new technology transform the landscape of the produce industry, the profile of the workforce must also evolve. EFI and JFF have consulted with representatives of state agencies, employer associations, worker organizations, training providers and community colleges, all of whom affirm the value of a statewide system for formally credentialing agricultural skills. This proposal requests support for EFI to host a statewide convening in early 2024, to form a steering committee of employer and worker organizations, government representatives and training groups, and to launch a process leading to formal credentials for agricultural skills that are recognized both by the state and by the produce industry.

Formalizing a statewide credentialing system is a multi-year process, and we are still in the networking and design phase because there is no existing foundation for recognizing agricultural skills. While we hope to schedule pilot trainings late in the proposed grant period, EFI requests a

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new one-year high road planning and development grant to consolidate our partner network into a committed steering committee to identify and certify new high road California produce employers who will pilot skills training and assessment consistent with the emerging credentialing roadmap, and to launch climate and sustainability training for growers.

#### Question - 2.0

***Explain your project objective: to increase access to High Road jobs for underserved populations, create pathways for job growth for incumbent workers, or other (explain) and how input from required partners has or will shape the program design.***

Agricultural work has always been difficult, dangerous and dismissed as 'unskilled,' despite the knowledge and experience required to do it well. Farmworkers are excluded from [federal labor protections](#), suffer high rates of [pesticide exposure](#), and earn annual wages [below \\$25,000](#). California's farmworkers are thus a significantly underserved population, even after the pandemic confirmed how essential they are to the state's economy. Most are of [Mexican origin](#), but immigration enforcement and an aging workforce have created an acute labor shortage. In response, [investment in automation](#) and labor-saving technologies is booming, but the shrinking pool of incumbent farmworkers will need new skills to interface with these innovations.

The goal of this project is to take advantage of the unmet demand for professional agricultural workers by creating formal pathways for frontline farmworkers to acquire and credential new skills that they can leverage into higher-paying jobs. EFI's consultations with California stakeholders convince us that there is broad support for establishing the infrastructure necessary for recognizing new skills, compensating them fairly based on formal credentials, placing workers in safe and dignified environments with high road employers where they will have voice and agency, and integrating climate and sustainability training for workers to help meet government and customer requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The project's three specific objectives are to:

- Formalize a steering committee of California stakeholders (employer and worker organizations, training providers and workforce development experts) and representatives of state agencies, which EFI will facilitate to manage the design, piloting and rollout of standardized skill trainings and assessment processes in subsequent years. Our consultations have affirmed great interest among potential partners in working together toward a skills system for farmworker training, growth, and development that will ultimately offer opportunities for career advancement and better wages while meeting employer needs for a workforce that can interface with new technologies.
- Recruit and certify more high road produce employers. EFI has already certified eight California employers, and could reach many more in the pipeline with additional funding.

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Our training and certification program guarantees safe and healthy working conditions, consistent compliance with workplace laws and regulations, and a proven 'leadership team' methodology for including worker voice and agency in farm policies and procedures. EFI-certified high road employers will be candidates for piloting the formal curriculum and assessment processes that our statewide network will roll out in the phase beyond this planning and development grant.

- Offer introductory training on climate and sustainability to certified and prospective employers to broaden the impact of EFI's H RTP '[Produce and Reduce](#)' program.

### Question - 3.0

***Describe how your proposal will address 3-5 of the components below:***

Improve and/or increase opportunities for skill attainment for retention, upskilling or placement in quality jobs.;Develop and expand career pathways within key industries for populations who have experienced barriers to employment and increase opportunities for skills attainment and career advancement for those at the lower end of the labor market.;Support both labor and management in order to increase productivity by increasing the health, safety, and specialization of jobs in a particular sector.

### Question - 3.1

***Improve and/or increase opportunities for skill attainment for retention, upskilling or placement in quality jobs.***

There is currently no formal system in California for frontline agricultural workers to define their skills, achieve recognition for them, then identify and acquire new skills leading to better quality jobs and higher wages. Training and promotion opportunities on farms are driven more by loyalty, connections or tenure than by any standardized system. A worker's skill and experience at one farm is not necessarily recognized by their next employer, nor are there formal career ladders to map how a worker or supervisor can progress to the next skill level.

EFI and JFF are establishing a framework for documenting foundational, crop-specific and technical skills for agriculture, and are using it to create a catalogue of skills to be further populated by stakeholders across California. This project will consolidate a stakeholder network to expand the catalogue, pilot curriculum and skill assessment processes, and thereby provide the basis for standardizing agricultural skills. And by identifying new high road employers through EFI's certification program, the project will expand the pool of pilot sites for eventual training, and create opportunities for workers and employers to develop skills in greenhouse gas reduction and sustainability.

### Question - 3.3

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***Develop and expand career pathways within key industries for populations who have experienced barriers to employment and increase opportunities for skills attainment and career advancement for those at the lower end of the labor market.***

Agriculture is a key industry for California's economy, but also a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Its workforce is predominantly migrant labor, whose lack of formal education and documentation status relegate them to the lower end of the labor market. There is no standardized system for recognizing the knowledge, skills and experience they already have, or for providing access for training in new skills they could leverage into higher-paying jobs.

This project will advance statewide multi-stakeholder collaboration toward a credentialing system that will include career ladders and lattices, indicating how the acquisition of specific competencies provides the basis for new skills and advancement. While workers will not have access to such a system within the grant period, the project will lay the groundwork for piloting curriculum, training and assessment with high road employers that will eventually lead to the formal credentialing and skill ladder system. The project will also extend sustainability training to workers and managers on EFI-certified farms, and will help identify more such employers.

**Question - 3.4**

***Support both labor and management in order to increase productivity by increasing the health, safety, and specialization of jobs in a particular sector.***

EFI has been a multi-stakeholder partnership since its inception, when 'strange bedfellow' worker and employer organizations came together with major buyers and civil society organizations to create our certification program. One objective of this project is to identify more California high road employers. Their first step toward certification is the formation of a worker-manager 'leadership team,' which EFI trains in communication and problem-solving skills that the team uses to bring their farm into compliance with our rigorous standards, which cover health and safety among many other protections. Labor-management collaboration is thus baked into our model. We built on our certification program to pilot the H RTP '[Produce and Reduce](#)' program, forming worker-manager 'green teams.' That experience will provide the basis for the climate and sustainability training we will offer to growers.

The other objective of the project is to formalize a steering committee of organizations committed to moving the credentialing system forward. This will include both employer and worker organizations, as well as state agencies, training providers and workforce development experts. EFI's goal is to facilitate the development of a system that will ultimately be owned by industry groups, labor organizations and state agencies. Once again, labor-management collaboration will be key to our progress.

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#### Question - 4.0

##### ***Describe how the project creates access to high quality jobs.***

For the vast majority of frontline agricultural workers, the high road definition of a 'quality job' that provides a living wage and benefits is still a long way off in the future, and it will take hard work, collaboration and creative strategies to get there. This planning project is one more step in a multi-year journey toward higher quality, better compensated agricultural jobs. As a planning grant, the project will not support participants to receive training in the next year. It will instead support the convening of the stakeholders and facilitation of their common commitment to a standardized format for skill documentation, curriculum, and assessment that can be applied to foundational, crop-specific and technical skills that will be recognized by state agencies and the produce industry alike.

The project will also support the recruitment of more California high road employers into the EFI program. Certification does not instantly create quality jobs. But it does guarantee workers safe and dignified conditions, and the onsite worker-manager 'leadership team' creates a channel for voice and agency through which any worker on the farm can bring forward concerns or recommendations in the knowledge that the team will process the input, and if necessary, escalate concerns to the appropriate entity. And while certification does not raise wages, it does give workers access to a financial bonus from the participating retailers who are willing to pay a modest premium for certified produce.

However, since that bonus varies significantly from farm to farm, based on how much they sell to retailers like Costco and Whole Foods that pay the premium, EFI has been working to create a more durable and valuable return to workers that can also be distributed more equitably across all certified farms. Part of our interest in catalyzing the launch of a formal credentialing system is that we would eventually like to replace the premium with direct retail investment in on-site skills training for workers on our certified farms. Major retailers have expressed interest in this model, but we want to make sure that there is formal recognition of the resulting credentials so that workers can leverage them with different employers, and can sequence them in skill ladders to progress to higher paying jobs.

In short, this planning grant is an investment in a long-term strategy to create access for farmworkers to quality jobs. It builds on CWDB's H RTP-WIOA grant to EFI which supports development of the framework for skill documentation and curriculum development. And by engaging more high road employers, the grant also expands the pool of workers and managers to whom EFI can provide climate and sustainability training developed during our 2021-23 H RTP grant for greenhouse gas reduction.

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#### Question - 5.0

##### ***Describe how the project will create equity for workers.***

As our name suggests, Equitable Food Initiative has been committed to creating more equity in agriculture from the very beginning. Recognizing the marginalization of women workers and the egregious persistence of sexual harassment on farms, EFI requires a minimum of 30% female participation on the worker-manager leadership teams we form on certified farms, and designates and trains one female and one male member of each team to be the point of contact for any worker on the farm who alleges sexual harassment. EFI standards require zero tolerance for sexual harassment, and we conduct an [annual campaign](#) to raise awareness in the produce industry of strategies to prevent it. EFI also works to combat other forms of discrimination, including against indigenous workers and speakers of languages other than English or Spanish. Our trainings are conducted bilingually with additional translation for indigenous workers, and much of the content uses pictures rather than writing to make materials more accessible.

This project will strengthen equity for workers by engaging more high road employers and extending the protections of our standards into more workplaces. But as noted above, it is also another step in the longer journey toward economic equity. Given tight margins and downward price pressure in the produce industry, farmworker wages are well below local living wage standards, and benefits are unusual in the sector, in part due to the seasonal nature of employment. EFI has tried to address this issue by generating wage bonuses from participating retailers, but the impact has been uneven. As a result, we are committed to offering a more durable and valuable return to workers on our certified farms by providing skills training that leads to recognized credentials and career pathways to higher-paying jobs. This planning and development project is key to establishing the system to formalize agricultural skill credentialing.

#### Question - 6.0

##### ***Describe how the project will amplify worker voice.***

As a multi-stakeholder consortium, EFI believes that one cannot create sustainable, positive change in any system unless all relevant interests and voices participate in the dialogue that leads to the proposed change. Our board includes representatives from the consumer, retailer, employer and worker organizations that for nearly 15 years now have agreed to disagree about many issues in agriculture. But they are united in their belief that when workers are respected, and participate actively with voice and agency in the ongoing function of their farms, then they will improve the quality and integrity of the product for their employer, for the retailer who buys it, and for the consumer.

EFI standards respect workers' right to freedom of association, but do not require unionization: some certified farms have collective bargaining agreements and others do not. However, all certified farms must agree to the formation of a worker-manager 'leadership team' that includes

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representation from all segments of the workforce, from harvesters and supervisors to sprayers and irrigators, all the way to quality control, human resources and farm management. EFI trains the teams in communication and conflict resolution skills to help them overcome cultural and language barriers, then teaches them how to use the problem-solving cycle to resolve any matters that would keep them out of compliance with EFI standards. After certification, the leadership team continues to meet monthly, and the worker representatives can receive input, questions or concerns from the wider workforce that they can bring back to the team or to management. This system is designed to make sure that workers can voice either concerns or recommendations that can be integrated into farm procedures.

This project will support worker voice and agency by helping EFI bring more California farms into our certification program, thereby extending the protections and opportunities for participation to a larger segment of the agricultural workforce. It is also important to note that the demand for more training and access to credentialing was initially voiced by the worker representatives on EFI's board Leadership Team Committee. All of them have been trained on certified farms, and have asked for more in-depth follow-up. They participated actively in our 2021 strategic planning process, which led to the launch of EFI's effort to engage California stakeholders in the development of a formal, standardized, statewide system for documenting, training and assessing agricultural skills.

### Question - 7.0

***(Optional) Describe how project will contribute to employer and/or industry competitiveness and growth.***

When EFI began forming worker-manager leadership teams and certified our first California farms in 2014, our concept was that they would focus on issues arising on the farm that would need to be addressed to maintain compliance with our standards. EFI certification is not a guarantee of perfection: we expect things to go wrong on farms and for problems to arise, as they do in every human enterprise. The difference in our model is that ***when*** things go wrong, as they will, workers are engaged enough to speak up and refer their concerns to a leadership team with the skills to resolve them.

However, we soon learned that employers were so impressed with worker engagement in the problem-solving process that they began asking their leadership teams to tackle issues related to business performance beyond the EFI standards. They engaged the teams on matters from recruitment and retention in a tight labor market to suggestions for making harvesting and packing processes more efficient. When the COVID pandemic began and employers were scrambling to implement social distancing practices in fields and packhouses, employers brought their leadership teams into the design process because workers understood better than anyone what could or could not be done throughout the workday, from the parking lot to the lunch facilities, from the harvest crews to the packing line. One California employer claims that his leadership team came up with a

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set of social distancing protocols in three hours that would have taken his management team three days!

These experiences led to employer demand for worker engagement in the work process redesign pilots that are funded by EFI's current WIOA H RTP grant. Those pilots have articulated new sets of skills as well as production efficiencies, and fully validated the importance of worker voice and agency in business decisions. However, absent a standardized framework for skill documentation, EFI cannot formally credential the skills workers have gained in the redesign processes, or in the waste management strategies described below. This project builds on our earlier experience by bringing more employers into the certification process and training new leadership teams. And by advancing the development of a credentialing system, it also prepares the terrain for a High Road 'win-win' in agriculture: better jobs with higher wages for workers, and greater productivity and higher quality for employers from a more skilled and engaged workforce.

### Question - 8.0

***California strives toward achieving a carbon neutral economy and workers will be at the center of this effort. If applicable, please describe how your project will address climate mitigation, adaptation, and/or resilience.***

EFI's first High Road Training Partnership grant supported a waste management pilot with three California employers who wanted to engage workers in the design and implementation of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. EFI partnered with Measure to Improve to develop specialized training on climate change and the mitigation potential of better waste management practices. At the '[Produce and Reduce](#)' project's closing event in March 2023, workers from the three pilot sites spoke eloquently about the impact of their training, not only in the workplace but also in their homes and communities. And employers acknowledged that they were pleasantly surprised by the efficiencies and cost savings they achieved through improved waste management strategies.

Part of the matching fund for this proposal comes from an anonymous donor through the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. That grant supports the development of a modified curriculum from the Produce and Reduce program that can be delivered to many more farms as an introduction to the need and the opportunity to engage workers in climate mitigation strategies to help meet increasing stringent state regulations, as well as customer demand for emissions reductions in their supply chains. EFI will deliver these trainings to California growers during the grant period.

According to the [EPA](#), Agriculture is responsible for about 10% of total greenhouse gas emissions, making it a priority industry sector for mitigation strategies. By engaging the entire workforce in more efficient waste management strategies, employers can meet multiple goals and requirements. This project will support that effort by engaging more high road employers in EFI's certification program, giving them access to sustainability training and raising awareness of opportunities to



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reduce emissions. It will also document skills related to sustainability in the catalogue of agricultural competencies, such that workers whose career ladders lead them in this direction can eventually be credentialed.

#### Question - 9.0

***Describe the priority industry this partnership will serve. If "other" was selected on the cover page, make the case as to why the industry was selected as a priority based on labor market demand, job quality and access to good jobs. To describe industry, you may use super sector (eg. Transportation, Government/Public Sector) as well as the specific occupation or trade (eg. Farmworker, Electrician, Nurse, etc.).***

For all the reasons referenced above, California's agriculture sector is the priority industry for this high road funding proposal. The agricultural workforce is predominantly immigrant and often undocumented, which exposes them to risk and discrimination. While annual wages are low as a function of tight price margins and seasonality, a serious labor shortage creates opportunities for wages gains if workers can gain skills that make them more productive. The key to incentivizing workers to acquire new skills is to create a system through which:

- The skills are formally assessed, credentialed and portable.
- The credentials are recognized by employers and state agencies alike.
- The credentials fit into career ladders that lead to higher wages.

In other economic sectors, experts agree that non-degree [credentials benefit both workers and employers](#), but there is no standardized system in agriculture for recognizing the skills of farmworkers and supervisors. EFI's approach to raising the ceiling for workers is unique because it builds on a technical partnership with [Jobs for the Future](#) to develop a format for agricultural skill documentation, curriculum and assessment that is consistent with professions in other economic sectors. It also integrates EFI's multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that all key labor, industry and state interests are represented in the design, piloting and implementation of the credentialing system.

#### Question - 10.0

***Describe the occupation(s) targeted by this project.***

As described in our prior funding proposals, EFI's approach to skill-building and credentialing starts with comprehensive documentation of the competencies required to make managers and workers more efficient and productive across three tiers of skill:

- Tier 1 skills represent the broadest level of competencies, including the knowledge, abilities and personal qualities required for workers to be successful in a modern workplace. These

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universal competencies are needed to apply technical skills and tools effectively, including the communication and problem-solving skills EFI teaches worker-manager teams.

- Tier 2 involves crop-specific technical skills, such as use of tools and equipment, health and safety protocols, knowledge of work process, food safety, packing, processing, and team management. EFI aims to work with growers to custom-design and deliver this training to workers and supervisors.
- Tier 3 covers industry-specific technical skills and knowledge that are unique to specialized jobs or occupational clusters and are most prone to rapid change, including skills that need to be upgraded based on sudden changes in technology or market conditions. These skills can be provided through community colleges, vocational technical schools, or worker training centers.

This project targets front-line workers and their supervisors, from harvesters and quality control specialists to foremen and mayordomos. Much of the skill documentation, curriculum development and assessment that EFI and JFF work on will be for Tier 1 and 2 foundational and crop-specific skills for which there is no current credentialing system. Tier 3 technical skills, which are often provided by community colleges or vocational-technical institutes, already have a more formal structure for credentialing. However, for the purpose of developing career ladders that would allow some workers to progress through Tiers 1 and 2 and eventually aspire to Tier 3 skills, it is important that a comprehensive agricultural credentialing system fully integrate all three Tiers and the connections between them. EFI has spoken with Western Growers Association, an employer group that is investing heavily in Tier 3 skill development. They share our belief in the importance of establishing a comprehensive framework that links the foundational and crop-specific skills to the technical skills. But from an EFI perspective, the priority is to make recognition of competencies in Tiers 1 and 2 accessible to more front-line workers.

### Question - 11.0

***Describe the priority region this partnership will serve. Use the region that best describes the scope of your project, such as defined by CERF region, Regional Planning Unit (RPU), County, air district and/or bioregion.***

The goal of this project is to progress toward a statewide credentialing system. The project will prepare the terrain for future pilot trainings in specific regions, but within the grant period there are no participants and therefore no geographic location to identify. The stakeholder convening will likely be held in Sacramento.

### Question - 12.0

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***If applicable, describe the target population(s) that will be recruited, enrolled, and served with this project. See list in the application guide.***

Because this is a planning and development proposal to support stakeholder networking, there is no specific target population. Target participants and regions will be specified in future proposals.

### Question - 13.0

***If serving participants, will the project target new workers, incumbent workers, or both? Include participant outcomes and how the project design will achieve these.***

N/A

### Question - 14.0

***If serving participants, how will the project benefit underserved and/or under resourced communities?***

N/A

### Question - 15.0

***If serving participants, how will this project advance skills, opportunities, and career pathways for specific populations your project will be serving?***

N/A

### Question - 16.0

***If serving participants, describe capacity and strategy to target, engage, and support the populations identified by your project.***

N/A

### Question - 17.0

***If serving participants, how will the project connect workers to high-quality jobs and/or entry-level work with clearly defined routes to advancement?***

N/A

### Question - 18.0



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***Provide a detailed explanation justifying your funding request. Include relevant information justifying any high costs allocated in your Budget Narrative and Supplemental Budget, including high staff salaries, travel, support services, contractor expenses, etc.***

EFI's funding request is organized according to the three proposal objectives, each of which is also supported by supplemental or 'matching' funds from The James Irvine Foundation and/or the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, as described below. Brief profiles of the individuals involved appear below in Section 2, Question 4.

The work of the first objective, to convene stakeholders and form/facilitate a steering committee to create a road map and work plan to establish an agricultural credentialing system, will be conducted by EFI's Organizational and Workforce Development (O/WFD) team, with consulting support from Jobs for the Future. If approved, this proposal would fund 15% of the O/WFD Director's salary and benefits in 2024 to partially cover his oversight of the project. With additional funds from Irvine, it would cover 50% of the salary/benefits of a Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing, to be hired upon grant approval to support the convening and facilitate the steering committee. It would also cover 50% of the salary of the Senior Workforce Development Facilitator responsible for skill documentation and curriculum development. As detailed in the budget below, this would total approximately \$175,000 in salary and benefits (payroll tax, insurance, retirement, vacation etc) for the O/WFD team. The proposal would also provide \$75,000 for EFI to contract Jobs for the Future to continue their support to the standardization of skill documentation and curriculum development, and to provide technical assistance to the steering committee in development of the road map and work plan toward credentialing.

The work of the second and third objectives, to engage more high road California agricultural employers and to deliver climate and sustainability training, will be conducted by EFI's Certification Programs (CP) team. If funded, this proposal would cover 50% of the time of the CP Director, who is also EFI's lead point of contact with California state agencies, and 50% of the Client Manager, who guides new growers through the certification process. It would also cover 20% of both the Certification Manager, who oversees EFI farm audits, and the Sales Manager, who conducts initial outreach and marketing to new growers. The CP Director and Sales Manager would also coordinate outreach to growers regarding sustainability training, which would be conducted with funding from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. As detailed in the budget below, these positions would total approximately \$200,000 in salary and benefits.

The funding request thus includes a total of \$375,000 in EFI staff salaries and benefits, and \$75,000 for Jobs for the Future, yielding a subtotal of \$450,000. An additional 11% or \$49,500 will cover indirect costs, support staff and other overhead. This \$499,500 request will be supplemented during the 12-month grant period by \$250,000 from The James Irvine Foundation and \$100,000 from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.



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#### **Section 2: Partnerships (25%)**

##### **Question - 1.0**

###### ***Describe partner Employer/Employer(s) Association***

EFI's employer partner in this project is [Andrew and Williamson Fresh Produce](#) (A&W), based in San Diego and farming berries and tomatoes in Watsonville, Santa Maria and Oxnard, as well as several locations in Mexico, under the Good Farms Brand. A&W was the first produce company to volunteer to pilot the EFI model when Costco Wholesale agreed in 2012 to collaborate in a multi-stakeholder initiative to train and incentivize workers to develop their voice and agency to maintain rigorous labor, food safety and pest management standards on the farms from which Costco sources fresh produce. A&W was a founding member of EFI's board when we incorporated as a California corporation in 2015, has chaired the board since 2018, and participated actively in our first H RTP 'Produce and Reduce' project (through waste management at its Santa Maria operation) and our second H RTP-WIOA program (through work process redesign at its Watsonville operation).

Having certified its California and Mexico farms, A&W was also the first employer to recognize that the problem-solving skills its worker-manager leadership teams were using to maintain EFI standards could also be applied to business performance challenges. The company has focused on the need for upskilling the workforce as a retention strategy, and recognizes the need for professional workers who can interface with the many technological innovations in the industry. A&W's role in this project will involve outreach to other California employers, as well as trade associations like the Western Growers' Association, to encourage their participation in the stakeholder convening and steering committee that will negotiate the formalization of the proposed statewide skill documentation and credentialing system.

##### **Question - 2.0**

###### ***Describe partner Worker Representative/s***

[United Farm Workers](#) was the first union for agricultural workers in the United States, and has been a leading national voice for better wages and working conditions for more than six decades. Worker organizing and collective bargaining has always been UFW's primary strategy, but it has also been very effective in legislative and regulatory advocacy on behalf of worker protections. UFW was the main driver behind the creation of EFI as a unique labor-management-customer approach to rewarding 'high road' employers with preferred access to participating retailers. The union worked for several years with Oxfam America to bring produce supply chain stakeholders together, which eventually led to development of the EFI standards and the launch of the program as an independent organization.

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UFW chaired the EFI board from 2015-18 and continues to participate actively, especially on matters related to worker protection and compensation. The union's role in the project will be to participate in the stakeholder convening and ensure that the resulting steering committee has adequate worker representation to guarantee that the design of the skill documentation and credentialing system is truly responsive to farmworker interests.

### Question - 3.0

**Select additional encouraged Partner Organization/s and describe**

Other partner/s

### Question - 3.2

**Please describe Community-based organizations**

### Question - 3.7

**Please describe other partners**

- a. [Jobs for the Future](#) is a national nonprofit that drives the transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. JFF achieves this by designing solutions, scaling best practices, influencing policy and action, and investing in innovation. Given their profile and expertise in the design of new workforce systems, EFI began a dialogue with JFF in 2021 regarding the potential for standardizing skill definitions and curricula in agriculture.
- b. With a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, EFI contracted JFF to create a format for skill documentation for eventual credentialing and to assess the landscape in California agriculture to determine whether there is support for a credentialing system. Now that that work is complete, EFI plans to contract JFF with new funds from Irvine and additional support from this HRTP proposal to help plan the convening of California stakeholders, manage the development of the skill catalog and corresponding curriculum, and support the planning process of the stakeholder steering committee that EFI will facilitate with training partners, state agencies, worker organizations, and employer associations to pilot and launch a credentialing program.
- c. The James Irvine Foundation's [Fair Work](#) program is predicated on the idea that workers who are living on low incomes play a vital role in driving California's economy, yet too few workers have a seat at the table on the economic decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. The Irvine Foundation began funding EFI in 2018, and since 2021 has focused a series of planning grants on EFI's effort to engage stakeholders in development of a statewide credentialing system for agricultural skills. Irvine's latest grant from July 2023 –

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June 2025 provides salary support and partial funding to contract JFF, as well as for staff, the stakeholder convening and related costs.

- d. The [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#) has channeled general support funds to EFI from an anonymous donor since 2018. In 2022, the donor made an additional grant to encourage EFI to introduce climate education and mitigation strategies into our existing work. This funding through mid-2024 was a perfect complement to the HRTP agricultural emissions reduction funding that launched the 'Produce and Reduce' waste management pilot. EFI will now create a modified introductory curriculum for workers and managers about the causes and impacts of climate change and the strategies farms can adopt to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. That training will be shared with farms that are already certified as an incentive to the new high road employers that this proposal will help to engage, and eventually to any California grower once a cost-recovery model has been established.

### Question - 4.0

***Who will be the core conveners of the partnership? Include both organizations and individuals along with their role and commitment to engage and act on behalf of the partnership.***

EFI staff will convene stakeholders to expand this partnership into a steering committee of employer and worker groups, training providers and workforce experts, who can liaise with state agencies regarding formal recognition of the skill catalogue, curriculum and assessment processes leading to standardized agricultural skill credentials. The steering committee will identify specific worker populations, commodities and geographic areas where training and assessment can be piloted in the next iteration of this process, beyond the current one-year planning grant. EFI staff will also identify new high road agricultural employers, and provide climate and sustainability training to workers and managers on certified and prospective farms. Specific roles include:

- *EFI Workforce and Organizational Development Director: [redacted]* is EFI's skill development expert, with decades of experience engaging workers in creating higher performing companies. *[redacted]* will design and lead the stakeholder convening, oversee skill documentation and curriculum development, and manage EFI staff responsible for facilitating the steering committee.
- *EFI Senior Workforce Development Facilitator: [redacted]* has worked with EFI for over 11 years, training farm leadership teams for certification. She leads the skill documentation and curriculum development work, conducting extensive on-farm interviews with workers and managers to identify existing competencies and new needs.
- *EFI Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing:* This is a new position to be funded jointly by this proposal and the James Irvine Foundation grant and recruited in the last quarter of 2023, subject to grant approval. The credentialing manager will help lead the stakeholder

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- convening, facilitate the steering committee it forms, conduct outreach and manage all new stakeholder relationships, and manage the implementation of the committee's work plan.
- *EFI Director of Certification Programs*: [redacted], a former state government director, will manage outreach to new high road employers, will oversee the integration of climate and sustainability training, and will also be a point of contact with California state agencies.
  - *EFI Client Manager*: [redacted], a former agricultural worker, will manage enrollment of new high road employers in the certification program.
  - *EFI Sales Manager*: [redacted], a former sales manager for a major apple company, will manage messaging and outreach to new high road employers before handing interested prospects on to the client manager.
  - *EFI Certification Manager*: [redacted], a former compliance manager for a large retailer, will manage the audit and certification process for new high road employers.
- *Jobs for the Future*: role described above.
  - *United Farm Workers*: role described above.
  - *Andrew and Williamson*: role described above.

### Question - 5.0

#### ***Outline how the partnership will convene, prioritize, and engage throughout the grant period.***

Through the end of 2023, with our existing funding from the Irvine Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the H RTP-WIOA grant, EFI will accelerate our outreach to stakeholders and high road employers, hire a Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing to facilitate the steering committee, and prepare curriculum and scheduling for climate trainings. The proposed one-year grant period for this planning and development grant will run January-December 2024 with activities across the three objectives broken out by quarter as follows:

#### **Q1 (January-March)**

- Facilitate a convening (likely in Sacramento) of at least 30 representatives of employer and worker organizations, training providers, community colleges, experts and relevant state agencies (including CWDB, CDFA, LWDA) to refine a draft framework for a credentialing process, and to formalize an ongoing steering committee for the network.
- Engage prospective high road employers in the EFI certification process through site visits, worker-manager training and support to audit planning.
- Deliver at least two subsidized introductory trainings on sustainability and climate mitigation strategies to worker-manager teams on certified farms.

#### **Q2 (April-June)**

- Facilitate the steering committee on a bi-monthly basis to refine and approve draft work plan and credentialing roadmap prepared by EFI and JFF based on stakeholder input from



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the convening; determine which skills from the evolving catalogue will be prioritized for pilot training; create standardized curriculum for specific frontline agricultural roles; and begin funding proposal development for pilot training.

- Continue to engage prospective high road employers in the EFI certification process through site visits, worker-manager training and support to audit planning.
- Deliver at least two subsidized introductory trainings on sustainability and climate mitigation strategies to worker-manager teams on certified farms. Finalize methodology and begin to market a training package beyond EFI-certified farms to the broader California agricultural community.

### **Q3 (July-September)**

- Consolidate steering committee focus on priority skills curriculum for frontline workers and supervisors and begin planning for pilot sites and processes; submit proposals to fund 2025 pilot training.
- Continue to engage prospective high road employers in the EFI certification process through site visits, worker-manager training and support to audit planning.
- Deliver first grower-funded climate and sustainability trainings.

### **Q4 (October-December)**

- Steering committee finalizes 2025-26 roadmap to formalizing agricultural skill credentials, schedule for 2025 pilot trainings by region and commodity, and grant agreements for pilot funding.
- High Road growers in California plan to integrate skills training as part of the requirement for EFI certification.
- EFI expands marketing and delivery of climate training.

### **Question - 6.0**

#### ***How will data and reporting be streamlined and reported back to the state with buy-in from core partners?***

Because there are no participants in this planning and development grant, EFI will not be gathering demographic or performance data on worker skill acquisition. Performance data will instead be based on the three project objectives, and will be reported back to the state through quarterly updates on the work plan. Project results will be measured by EFI's success in:

Formalizing a steering committee of California stakeholders and representatives of state agencies and their progress toward piloting and rollout of standardized skill training and assessment processes in subsequent years.

- Recruiting and certifying more high road produce employers.
- Providing introductory training on climate and sustainability to certified and prospective employers to broaden the impact of EFI's H RTP '[Produce and Reduce](#)' program.



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#### Question - 7.0

***Describe experience and success working and convening employer and worker representatives to improve jobs and training. If applicable, include experience working with other pertinent stakeholders (community-based organizations/non-profits, social services agencies, subject matter experts, local workforce development boards, etc.).***

Convening workers, employers, and other system stakeholders is part of EFI's DNA and origin story. EFI is still governed by the 'strange bedfellow' consortium of unions, civil society organizations, employers, and retail buyers that developed our standards and program over a decade ago. We replicate that multi-stakeholder ethos on every farm we certify by training teams of workers and managers to collaborate in maintaining our standards. In our outreach work to the entire produce industry around the implementation of the [Ethical Charter](#) on Responsible Labor Practices, EFI has convened a group of major retailers and suppliers to design an employer self-assessment system to be complemented by data from worker surveys designed by representatives of 'leadership teams' on farms we have certified.

EFI sees the convening, formalization, and facilitation of a California credentialing steering committee as the next iteration of the same approach. Our methodology starts with the interests and agendas of each stakeholder group (employers, worker groups, skill providers, state agencies) and then guides participants through a process of identifying where those interests might overlap. Rather than asking participants to change or modify their agendas or even to achieve a broad consensus, EFI facilitates a focus on areas of alignment and builds from there. Our team has a decade of experience training workers and managers to collaborate in bringing their workplaces into compliance with our standards. By partnering with JFF, which has ample experience in training to improve jobs, EFI is confident that we can facilitate the first-quarter 2024 stakeholder convening toward the formation of a steering committee that will then design the roadmap toward formalization of the skill catalog, curriculum, assessment, and credentialing of agricultural skills.

#### Question - 8.0

***Outline the status of project partners' relationship, priorities, and strategy to engage and work together throughout the grant term and beyond. Describe the role they will play within your proposed work and how it aligns with the H RTP framework. This should include planned and secured partnerships that will be new to working with your organization.***

With regard to the secured partners who have submitted letters of support for this proposal, UFW and A&W have worked together for over a decade as EFI board members, including most recently on the 5-year strategic plan that launched EFI's commitment to skill credentialing. In the spirit of aligned interests leading to labor-management collaboration, they recognize that employers and workers both gain from investment in skill development and will use their respective leverage and influence with worker groups, employers, and trade associations to encourage participation in the

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convening and engage the steering committee that it forms. Our third secured partner, JFF, has worked with EFI for nearly two years and shares our vision that a formal workforce system for agriculture will improve the professional and economic prospects of farmworkers.

The list of planned or potential partners for this project would be very long. It will include other certified high road employers, and especially their most powerful trade group, the [Western Growers Association](#) (WGA), whose active participation in the steering committee we hope to negotiate. In addition to the UFW, we are also actively reaching out to worker organizations like the [California Farmworker Foundation](#), [MICOP](#), [CAUSE](#), and [North Bay Jobs with Justice](#). We plan to engage providers like [AgSafe](#) and the [Center for Land-Based Learning](#) in curriculum development and skills training. EFI has built relationships with the Labor Centers at UCLA, UC Berkeley and UC Merced, and with several community colleges in agricultural growing regions. We have consulted with the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency to engage them in this process, along with the CWDB. The main role of the Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing will be to cultivate and formalize relationships with these potential partners, solicit their input and feedback, involve them in the convening, and encourage the most committed to join the steering committee.

### Question - 9.0

***If applicable, describe how this partnership builds community and economic resilience.***

If this project succeeds in establishing a statewide multistakeholder partnership to formalize a skill credentialing system for frontline agricultural workers, it will lay the groundwork in subsequent years for stronger and more resilient farmworkers communities. Our vision is that farmworker skill acquisition and progression through skill ladders must include better compensation, which in turn increases activity in local economies. Employer investment in skill training also encourages retention, which brings greater stability to communities characterized by seasonal migration. Meanwhile, a more skilled workforce enhances employer productivity and competitiveness, bringing additional economic benefits to produce growing regions. These longer-term impacts will not be realized during a one-year planning cycle, but they are the natural consequence of a formal, standardized agricultural skill development system.

### Question - 10.0

***If applicable, describe how this partnership addresses worker, employer, and industry needs as they respond and adapt to climate change and environmental sustainability.***

One of the training exercises during the implementation of EFI's H RTP Produce and Reduce project encouraged workers to draw pictures of the impact they experienced from learning about climate change. Most focused on how they had never thought about issues like litter or recycling as relevant to them until they understood how landfill use and product lifecycle changes could reduce greenhouse gas emissions and potentially mitigate the worst impacts of climate change on their

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children's generation. Workers spoke about how this had motivated them not only to engage their colleagues in better waste management strategies at work but also to educate friends, neighbors, and children about the importance of recycling and other climate mitigation strategies. By extending sustainability training to more agricultural workplaces, this project will extend this consciousness to more farmworkers and employers.

Agricultural employers are already seeking help to respond to both regulatory and market pressure to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Legislation like California SB1383 requires them to divert organic material from landfills, so growers who generate huge quantities of compostable waste are eager to learn new strategies for managing it, hence their openness to sustainability training. And from an industry perspective, shareholder and consumer pressure on major retailers to reduce [Scope 3 emissions](#) in their supply chain has led to new requirements for produce suppliers to demonstrate to their customers that they are taking active measures to reduce their carbon footprint. By sharing the strategies from our Produce and Reduce pilot with more employers, EFI can help all these stakeholders meet these pressing needs.

### Question - 11.0

***If applicable, describe how partners will ensure equitable recruitment, retention, and advancement of participants throughout the project.***

Not applicable: while the project will lay the groundwork for future pilot training, the location, nature, and participants will be determined during this planning grant. That process will factor in equity and retention concerns once the steering committee has been formalized and the plan for pilot training developed.

## Section 3: Program Measures of Success and Outcomes (25%)

### Question – 1.0

***Summarize your project outputs and outcomes and how it will expand/evolve your previous work. The response should focus on what the project will do with direct funding and what will be achieved within the grant term.***

1. *To convene agricultural industry stakeholders and experts and facilitate their ongoing collaboration to develop a standardized skills catalog, training curriculum, and credential system for agricultural skills.* This objective builds on the progress of EFI's current H RTP- WIOA grant, which began the process of outreach and consultation with California stakeholders about the value of credentialing. Based on their feedback, this proposal will advance the multi-year process toward a road map and work plan. The primary outputs will be that at least 30 stakeholder representatives will have participated in a first-quarter 2024

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convening; a steering committee will have been formed to meet at least bi-monthly through the end of 2024 to design the credentialing roadmap; and a new EFI Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing will be facilitating the committee and engaging new stakeholders in the process. The outcome by the end of 2024 will be that California agricultural industry stakeholders, including workers, are collaborating to build career ladders for farmworkers and managers through training and credentialing; the road map toward formalization of the credentialing system will be in place, with the support of stakeholders, industry representatives and state agencies; and the first pilot trainings in this format will be planned for 2025.

2. *To recruit and certify more California high road agricultural employers to EFI standards.* This objective builds on EFI's overall mission to distinguish high road employers in the marketplace and incentivize others to adopt better labor practices, but it is also important to the credentialing process set in motion by the WIOA H RTP grant, since certified farms and employers are excellent candidates to pilot skill training as the road map evolves. Through 2024, the desired output is that at least three more California growers begin the EFI certification process. The outcome by the end of the year is that we will have at least a dozen potential pilot sites to begin skills training in 2025, and that EFI will be positioned to begin a transition from retail-paid wage bonuses to retail investment in skill development as a more sustainable and valuable reward for workers.
3. *To provide training on climate and sustainability to California growers.* This objective builds on EFI's H RTP 'Produce and Reduce' grant to pilot waste management strategies that reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, leveraging the learning from that program to design introductory sustainability curriculum for workers, managers and employers to help them respond to regulatory and customer requirements to address climate change. The output will be that at least four sustainability trainings have been conducted, but the outcome will be development of a fee-for-service model in place to expand climate trainings in 2025 and beyond.

## Section 4: Deliverables, Budget, and Work Plan (20%)

### Question - 1.0

***Complete the Outcomes and Deliverables tab, Work Plan, and Budget Documents. These should align with your funding ask and project narrative responses.***

### Outcomes & Deliverables

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Identify your project outcomes and deliverables to be accomplished with grant funding by the end of the grant term, as well as the metric of success for each. Outputs and outcomes documented here will align with your work plan, where steps and dates to be completed are documented.

<b>What will the project do?</b> List specific project outputs and outcomes (quantitative and/or qualitative).	<b>How will this be measured/achieved?</b> Describe how you will know if the project is successful (quantitative and/or qualitative targets).
Convene agricultural industry stakeholders and experts and facilitate their ongoing collaboration to develop a standardized skills catalog, training curriculum, and credential system for agricultural skills.	At least 30 workforce development experts and representatives of state agencies, employer associations, worker organizations, training providers, and community colleges will have gathered for 2 days during the first quarter to build consensus on a road map toward credentialing and select a steering committee to develop a work plan.
Provide training on climate and sustainability to California growers.	At least four sustainability trainings have been conducted, and a fee-for-service model is in place to expand climate trainings in 2025 and beyond.
Recruit and certify more California high road agricultural employers to EFI standards.	At least three more California growers will have begun the EFI certification process, and we will have identified at least a dozen potential pilot sites to begin skills training in 2025.
Hire a new EFI Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing to form and facilitate a steering committee to meet at least bi-monthly through the end of 2024 to design the credentialing roadmap and plan 2025 pilot upskilling for workers and managers.	The Stakeholder Manager for Credentialing has convened at least four meetings of the steering committee and a road map, work plan, funding plan and pilot sites for 2025 training are in place.