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Peninsula consortium receives health-care training bonanza

Federal grant will train skilled workers in high-growth health fields

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The federal government has awarded a \$5 million grant for the training of health-care workers to a public-private consortium on the Peninsula.

The Peninsula Council for Workforce Development learned of the award on Tuesday. President Matthew James credited Shawn Avery, a vice-president for the council, with spearheading the grant application. It's estimated that the grant will allow for training more than 330 unemployed and dislocated workers for jobs paying an average salary of \$43,000. Those particularly targeted are minorities, veterans, military spouses and those displaced as a result of the disestablishment of the U.S. Joint Forces Command.

In announcing the award, Sen. Jim Webb said the grants "will help Virginians acquire the skills they need to gain employment in existing jobs. ... They will help ensure that our workers have the chance to succeed in jobs where there's a documented need for trained workers."

The grant money will be shared among the training facilities that are consortium members: Hampton, Norfolk State and Old Dominion universities; Eastern Virginia Medical School; local community colleges — Tidewater, Thomas Nelson and Paul D. Camp; and Bon Secours, Chesapeake Regional Medical Center, Riverside and Sentara health systems.

With the collaboration of the region's two workforce investment boards, one representing the Peninsula and the other the Southside, the consortium will come up with a prioritized consensus plan, says James. He anticipates that work on the distribution of grant money and associated curriculum development will start "fairly soon."

The grant is part of \$159 million awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor for technical skills training to help U.S. workers fill jobs in high-growth fields. They target industries that rely on skilled foreign workers with H-1B visas. The grants are funded through fees paid by employers to bring workers into the United States and are intended to eventually phase out the H-1B program. About half the money will go to train people who've been unemployed for more than six months and \$70 million will go to on-the-job training.

A second grant phase for on-the-job training has \$100 million more than anticipated to hand out from revenue from H-1B visas. Interested parties have until Nov. 17 to check for eligibility and apply at <http://www.grants.gov>.

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