

October 5, 2009

Polaroid Fund, Acushnet Foundation, to Offer \$112,500 for Adult Education, Literacy Programs

Two funds of the **Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts** (CFSEMA) are once again teaming up to develop the Greater New Bedford work force by funding family literacy and adult education programs.

Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for up to \$100,000 from the Polaroid Fund and up to \$12,500 in matching funds from the Acushnet Foundation Fund are available from the Community Foundation or its website, www.cfsema.org. They are due at the Community Foundation office, 63 Union Street, New Bedford, no later than **4 p.m. October 28**. An **Applicants Conference** for agencies interested in applying for a grant is scheduled for **10-11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 13**, in the San Francisco Room at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

“The purpose of the project is to support adults in their quest to become more independent and realize their full potential as successful members of society,” said CFSEMA President Craig J. Dutra. “To help accomplish this, the grants will support programs that help the most vulnerable people in the community build the skills and literacy that will help them reach their educational and employment goals.”

In 2006, the Community Foundation began managing the New Bedford Area grant program of the Polaroid Fund, a discretionary fund of the Boston Foundation. The Polaroid Fund will distribute up to \$100,000 each year to support organizations or collaboratives that promote career advancement and economic security for Greater New Bedford residents, with an emphasis on English literacy (ESOL) and adult education (ABE and GED courses.)

This year, a total of \$87,500 from the Polaroid Fund will support career advancement/economic security programming, with an emphasis on making English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and General Education Development (GED) classes available for all who need them. Another \$25,000 – half from the Polaroid Fund and half from the Acushnet Foundation Fund – will support family literacy programs that integrate early literacy programming for children birth to three years old with ABE/ESOL and parenting courses.

Organizations **can request up to \$25,000 for projects** that:

- Mitigate barriers to learning such as cultural and language differences, transportation or child care issues, and fragmentation of available services;
- Advocate for public policy changes that increase provider capacity, create employer incentives to offer workplace literacy programs, and increase state and local funding;
- Advocate for greater private and employer investment in worker education;
- Support programs integrating early literacy programming for children birth to three years old with ABE/ESOL and parenting courses;
- Protect the cultural context and bonds of a community by preserving and supporting neighborhood-based programs providing access to literacy and ABE/ESOL classes;
- Address gaps in programming and provider services: Encourage programming for all stages of adult learning, from adult basic education to preparation for successful enrollment in post-secondary education and training;
- Support capacity building programs that meet one or more of the objectives above.

Early Literacy Program applications an also request up to \$25,000.

The Greater New Bedford region faces numerous workforce challenges, including high unemployment, low educational attainment and language barriers. From 1985 to 2001, total employment in New Bedford declined by nearly a quarter, with employment in the manufacturing industry declining by more than half. Also, more than a quarter of New Bedford area residents speak a language other than English at home, compared to the state average of less than a fifth. The area has a high school graduation rate of only 59%, while the statewide average is 86%.

To achieve true job advancement and readiness in this region, non-English speakers need to become proficient enough in English to perform well in the workplace and to achieve their educational goals. Adults without high school diplomas need ready access to GED classes, and GED recipients need help transitioning to post-secondary education. Also, immigrants need access to citizenship classes and information about worker's rights.

The relationship between family literacy, early literacy development, school readiness, school success, high school graduation rates and workforce development provides an opportunity to engage parents with young children. New Bedford's high school graduation rate is below the statewide average; to improve this, children from birth to age 3 need to have improved early literacy experiences, which can be accomplished by providing support for their parents and caregivers. The matching funds from the Acushnet Foundation will be used for projects that integrate ESOL and ABE classes with early literacy programs.

About the Community Foundation

Since 1995, area residents have been turning to the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts to make their philanthropic giving as effective as possible. CFSEMA is a public charity serving thousands of people who share a common concern - improving the quality of life in Southeastern Massachusetts. To date, the Community Foundation has distributed over \$7 million from 120 funds to humanitarian, educational and cultural organizations in the region. More information about the Foundation can be found at www.cfsema.org.