

running the shop

Developing staff in a downturn with state grants

<http://tinyurl.com/dlymna>

AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

can present a number of opportunities for the forward-thinking firm. The hurdle is the reduction in billable hours and what that means to a firm's bottom line. Maintaining the right-size staff is a challenge for any company in any industry. A balance needs to be achieved in billable hours and overhead—and in slowdowns, overhead is often first on the chopping block.

However, instead of reducing staff to the lowest level needed to complete the work in hand, it's wiser to continue operating with the best staff to help a firm grow. That means keeping those employees with great promise but minimal projects happily employed.

With more overhead hours available, there's more time for

professional development, an often-overlooked benefit during times with heavier workloads and more-demanding schedules.

One way to use a downtime productively is to invest in new technology, such as building information modeling (BIM) and the training it demands. And the silver lining is that many Massachusetts employers are eligible for training grants that can pay from 50 to 100 percent of an employee's training costs. Massachusetts has three types of grants available through its Workforce Development Fund. Grants include Express Grants, General

Grants and Hiring Incentive Training Grants (HITG). **Express Grants** are limited to employers with 50 or fewer employees and pay 50 percent of an employee's training costs within a year, up to \$15,000 per applicant. Training courses

must be chosen from a pre-approved list of courses registered with the state. Current pre-approved courses include classes on Solidworks and AutoCAD; ArchiCAD BIM courses are pending approval and should be included on the pre-approved course list within the month. The grant application is simple and the turn-around time is quick.

General Grants are available to companies of any size and can be applied to courses of the applicant's choice. Grant matches can be in-kind or cash, and higher levels of grant money are available to companies creating significant job growth or higher levels of job retention. While General Grants can be generous and courses aren't limited to a pre-approved list, the application process is arduous, requires a significant amount of preparation and can have a

three- to four-month timeframe for approvals.

HITG Grants are available to companies hiring a person who has been unemployed for one year or permanently separated from his/her previous employer. These are the richest grants available from the perspective that there is no monetary employer contribution required for the training, with the exception of paying the attendee's wages during the training time. Applications must be filed within 30 days of a new employee's start date, and the application has a quick three-day turnaround.

To learn more about Workforce Training Funds or to apply for a grant, visit <http://tinyurl.com/dlymna>.

*Valerie Conyngnam
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More tips on managing through tough times

Are your accounts receivable?

The very tactful BSA accounts-receivable management service described in recent issues of the ChapterLetter can be explored by calling Janet Allison, who directs this service for the BSA, at 617-951-1433 x304.

"Surviving the Slowdown: 7

Strategies for Principals" is the title of one of a series of articles the BSA has collected over the years that address pre-recession, mid-recession and post-recession issues. Other articles

include "Learning to Thrive in a Downturn," "Management Tips for A/E Principals in a Declining Economy," "Are Those Who Forget the Recession Doomed to Repeat It?" and "While the Good Times Roll: Why Not Consider Recession-Proofing Your Firm?" For a copy of this packet of articles (available only by mail), members in Massachusetts should send requests with a \$1.17, 9" x 12" SASE to Survival/IC, BSA, 52 Broad St., Boston 02109; all others should include a \$15 service fee

payable to the BSA along with the \$1.17, 9" x 12" SASE. (These articles are all drawn from Principals Report, the national practice newsletter; for subscriptions, call 212-244-0360.)

Do you have to pay your consultants if your client does not pay you? Knowing your rights and your consultants' rights in these difficult situations is the subject of a recent Principals Report article. For a copy of this reprint, along with complementary articles on how to deal with

"tight-fisted clients" (the packet is available only by mail), members in Massachusetts should send requests with a 42¢ SASE to Tight Fists/IC, BSA, 52 Broad St., Boston 02109; all others should include a \$15 handling fee payable to the BSA along with the 42¢ SASE. (For a subscription to Principal's Report, call 212-244-0360.)

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