



Workforce Pell Grants: Expanding Access to Short-Term Career Training Initial Resource Guide

Overview:

The Workforce Pell Grant program expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to include short-term, high-quality workforce training programs enacted under the first Reconciliation package (signed July 4, 2025). It allows students to use federal aid for career-focused credentials typically completed in 8-15 weeks. Beginning in July 2026, it is expected to expand access to short-term training for hundreds of thousands of learners annually and increase funding for participating providers. For employers and HR professionals, it strengthens alignment between education funding, skills first hiring, and in-demand occupations.

What Is Workforce Pell?

Workforce Pell Grants extend federal student aid beyond traditional degree programs to include short-term workforce training programs that prepare individuals for immediate employment or career advancement.

Eligible programs generally:

- Last 8-15 weeks (150-599 clock hours)
- Lead to a recognized postsecondary credential
- Align with high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations
- Support stackable and portable credentials
- May connect to academic credit or degree pathways

The goal is to support adult learners, working professionals, and nontraditional students seeking alternative pathways into the workforce.

How Workforce Pell Works

Workforce Pell is a shared federal-state responsibility between the U.S. Department of Education and state governments. States will play a central role in determining which programs are approved for Workforce Pell funding.

To qualify, programs must:

- Connect to recognized credentials
- Offer stackable pathways to additional credentials or degrees
- Demonstrate alignment with employer demand and workforce needs
- In some cases, allow transferable academic credit

Workforce Pell approval of programs generally follow this process:

- 1) Receive approval from the institution's accrediting agency or be included in the institution's grant of accreditation by its accreditor;
- 2) Receive approval from the State Governor; and
- 3) Receive approval from the Department of Education.

What This Means

Workforce Pell expands federal student aid to include short-term job training programs — not just traditional college degrees. Most eligible programs are offered by Title IV institutions, including community colleges, technical colleges, and other accredited postsecondary institutions. This means Workforce Pell builds on an existing federal financial aid system rather than creating a new one.

For students, it reduces cost barriers to fast, career-focused training, and for employers, it expands the pipeline of candidates trained in specific, validated job skills aligned with labor market demand.

SHRM Engagement

SHRM members play a critical role in shaping how Workforce Pell works in practice because implementation is largely determined at the state level. As hiring leaders and workforce planners, SHRM members are directly positioned to ensure programs reflect real labor market needs and job requirements.

For SHRM and its state council and affiliate network, this is a timely opportunity to engage governors, workforce boards, and education systems to ensure employer perspectives shape program approval decisions.

Learn More at shrm.org/advocacy/workforce-pell