



Fiscal Year 2027

Workforce Empowerment Initiative (WEI)

WEI Continuation Plan

Application Due Date: March 16, 2026 - 11:59 p.m. CST
Information Session: January 28, 2026- 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Submit Continuation Plan to: iccb.submitrfp@illinois.gov

UNIFORM NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)

SUMMARY INFORMATION

| 1. | Awarding Agency Name: | <i>Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)</i> |
|------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 2. | Agency Contact: | <i>Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Executive Director, Jennifer.Foster@illinois.gov</i> <i>Ahja Howard, Director for Program SUCCESS, Ahja.Howard@illinois.gov</i> |
| 3. | Announcement Type: | <i>Continuation Plan Initial</i> |
| 4. | Type of Assistance Instrument: | <i>Grant</i> |
| 5. | Funding Opportunity Number: | |
| 6. | Funding Opportunity Title: | <i>FY2027 Workforce Empowerment Initiative</i> |
| 7. | CSFA Number: | |
| 8. | CSFA Popular Name: | |
| 9. | CFDA Number(s): | <i>N/A</i> |
| 10. | Grant Period | <i>July 1, 2026 - September 30, 2027</i> |
| 11. | Anticipated Number of Awards: | <i>Up to 20</i> |
| 12. | Estimated Total Program Funding: | <i>\$18,700,000</i> |
| 13. | Award Range | <i>Up to \$1,200,000</i> |
| 14. | Source of Funding: | <i>State</i> |
| 15. | Cost Sharing/Matching Requirement: | <i>No</i> |
| 16. | Indirect Costs Allowed | <i>Yes</i> <i>No</i> |
| | Restrictions on Indirect Costs | |
| 17. | Posted Date: | <i>Friday, January 23, 2026</i> |
| 18. | Closing Date for Applications: | <i>Monday, March 16, 2026, 11:59 PM CT</i> |
| 19. | Technical Assistance: | <i>An Information Session will be held on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, as listed on page 8 of this Continuation plan.</i> <i>Additional technical assistance will be provided throughout the grant period to grant recipients.</i> |

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is accepting **Continuation Plans** from **currently funded WEI grantees for the FY2027 Workforce Empowerment Plan (WEI) funding**. The grant will extend from **July 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027**. Approximately \$18.7 million is estimated for the WEI project and is contingent on sufficient appropriation state funding. **Eligible institutions must be in good standing with the ICCB to avoid any delays in receiving funding.**

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) will review each application and will fund colleges based on satisfactory progress in the previous year and proposed activities as listed in the Continuation Plan instructions. In addition, the ICCB does not guarantee the same funding amount as received in the previous fiscal year.

Workforce Empowerment Initiative (WEI) Purpose

The purpose of the WEI is to support grantees in serving disproportionately impacted communities, with a targeted focus on underrepresented communities and populations. **The WEI aims to expand access for learners who have traditionally been excluded from workforce opportunities, faced limited pathways to postsecondary education or career advancement, and have been systematically underrepresented in high demand and high wage industries.**

This continuation effort seeks to **sustain and expand progress** made in creating short-term credential programs in high-demand sectors that lead to employment at or above 30% of the regional living wage or on an educational pathway to reach 30% above the regional living wage.

Application Instructions

A. Continuation Eligibility

Only **current FY2026 WEI grant recipients** are eligible to submit a Continuation Plan. Eligible institutions must be able to demonstrate capacity to continue delivering services aligned with the initiative's objectives.

B. FY2027 WEI Continuation Objectives

Institutions must demonstrate how continuation funding will support the following objectives:

1. Provide high-quality short-term training (one year or less) that leads to a credential aligned with a career pathway.
2. Ensure that a minimum of 85% of enrolled participants are from the targeted population and individuals of underrepresented groups.
3. Target high-demand industry sectors that provide employment paying 30% above the regional living wage or on an educational pathway to reach 30% above the regional living wage. As a note, the MIT data is usually updated in mid-February. Use the updated information. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

4. Achieve an employment placement rate of at least 70% for program completers.
5. Integrate employability/life skills instruction aligned with the [Illinois Essential Employability Skills Framework](#).
6. Continue or expand partnerships with employers, workforce boards, and community organizations to support wraparound services and job placement.

C. Eligible Targeted Communities and Populations

Continuing institutions shall serve and prioritize adults aged 18 and older from underrepresented populations residing in Disproportionately Impacted Areas, described as census tract or comparable geographic area that is determined by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Priority populations include, but are not limited to,

- individuals who are historically underserved or disproportionately marginalized due to race or ethnicity;
- residents of communities experiencing poverty, unemployment, limited access to resources, persistent opportunity gaps, or long-term disinvestment;
- individuals from under-resourced or high-need areas facing generational economic and educational disadvantages; and
- programs must also prioritize populations who come from marginalized background, who are facing systemic barriers to education and employment, and those who are underrepresented in high-wage, high-skill sectors.

Individuals who are currently enrolled in a college program and who are taking coursework are not eligible to enroll in or transfer into a WEI program.

D. Allowable Activities Under the FY2027 Continuation Plan

Continuation plans may include the following:

- Stackable credential programs (credit or non-credit)
- Bridge or IET (Integrated Education and Training) models
- Pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship partnerships
- Work-based learning experiences
- Expanded wraparound services (e.g., childcare, transportation, counseling)
- Instructional materials, curriculum updates, or equipment upgrades
- Faculty and staff support, including stipends and professional development

- Outreach, marketing, and student recruitment
- Employment placement and follow-up services
- Allowable activities, including stipends, are posted on the ICCB website listed under **Resources**.
- Other services as approved by the ICCB.

E. Deliverables and Reporting

Continuation awardees must:

1. Maintain all previously approved deliverables and services.
2. Submit quarterly reports according to ICCB's FY2027 reporting schedule.

| FY2027 Reporting Schedule for WEI Grant | | |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Quarter | Period | Due Date |
| 1 | July 1 – September 30, 2026 | October 30, 2026 |
| 2 | October 1 – December 31, 2026 | January 30, 2027 |
| 3 | January 1 – March 31, 2027 | April 30, 2027 |
| 4 | April 1 – June 30, 2027 | July 30, 2027 |
| 5 | July 1 – September 30, 2027 | October 30, 2027 |

3. Supplemental Reports are required and must be submitted within two months after the grant close out.
4. Attend all mandatory meetings and technical assistance sessions.
5. Provide data updates on participant outcomes, credential attainment, and employment outcomes.

F. Submission Requirements

Applications will be reviewed by ICCB staff using the evaluation criteria outlined in this Continuation Plan. Applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully review the following considerations when preparing and submitting their applications.

- All required components of the application must be completed and submitted by the stated deadline.

- Failure to submit required documentation, as specified in the Continuation Plan, may result in a reduced allocation.
- Responses must be concise and clearly address all required elements.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the prescribed section headers when responding.
- Applicants will receive confirmation of receipt of the Continuation Plan.
- Applicants will not be notified of missing, incomplete, or unsubmitted applications.
- Applicants must use the required templates available on the ICCB website.

G. Continuation Plan Review and Structure

All Continuation Plans will be reviewed according to the structure outlined below. Applicants are required to use the specified headers and sub-headers. Applicant **Continuation Narrative** is limited to **six pages**. **This does not include** the cover page, uniform application, continuation abstract, budget, and the attachments. The continuation plan must be double-spaced with a minimum of a **12-point type**. Graphs and charts within the narrative do not need to be double spaced.

1. Cover Page

Signed by the President/CEO stating intent to continue the WEI program under the same terms and conditions.

2. Complete the Uniform Application [Uniform Grant Application](#)

3. Continuation Abstract (Max 3 paragraphs)

Please include a **separate page** that includes a brief **description of the program**, a summary of **proposed goals**, the **targeted communities to be served**, the **number of students to be served**, the **population to be served**, and the **high demand/high wage sectors and pathways** selected for FY2027.

4. Continuation Narrative (Max 6 pages)

The Continuation Plan responses should reflect the current and new activities, expansions, special emphasis, enhancements, and new strategies for FY2027. The narrative should be organized using the specific section headings as listed below:

- **Progress Summary:** Describe the progress towards meeting the FY26 targets and outcomes. Identify the strategies to be used to ensure outcomes/targets are met.
- **Program Updates:** Briefly **highlight** any **program variations or changes** from FY2026. This may include but is not limited to staffing changes, programmatic changes,

plant closures new employers, high-demand or high-wage industry sectors that are no longer needed, services changes, and other areas that may impact the operation of WEI.

- **Justification of Need:**

- **Community and Population Needs:** Describe the needs of the targeted communities and populations to be served. Include, at a minimum, **population demographics, the zip codes of the service area**, and the rationale for selecting these communities. Clearly **cite all sources of information**.
- **Populations to Be Served:** Describe the populations that will be served, specifying underrepresented and priority groups. Cite sources and demographic information if available.
- **Selection of Underrepresented Populations:** Explain the process and criteria for selecting underrepresented populations to participate in the program.
- **Training Programs and Pathways:** Describe the proposed training and employment pathways for FY2027 and provide the necessary justification. **Cite** sources of information **and complete attachment A**.
- **Goals and Timelines for Implementation:** Identify specific **programmatic goals and implementation timelines** for the WEI to ensure successful execution of the initiatives. This may include enrollment timelines, strategies related to enrollment, program development, essential employability skills, outreach, supportive services, employer engagement, and other activities that support the initiative. Also include how the **Objectives in Section B** will be met. **Complete Attachment B**.
- **Partnerships and Employer Engagement:** Briefly describe **partnerships and employer engagement strategies**, including how relationships will be established and sustained, and provide a **list of participating partners and employers** include their **roles and responsibilities** in supporting the initiative.
- **Student Services:** Describe the **academic and non-academic supports** and comprehensive wraparound services that will be provided to participants. Explain how the needs of underrepresented populations will be identified and assessed using data-informed and participant-centered approaches. Additionally, outline the **eligibility criteria** and the transparent, equitable process used to identify and select individuals to receive these services.

- **Capacity to serve Underrepresented populations as describe above:** Describe the **institution's capacity**, infrastructure, and support systems that enable it to effectively serve underrepresented populations.

5. Uniform Budget

All applicants must submit a budget on the State of Illinois [Uniform Grant Budget Template](#). Applicants should submit budgets based upon the total estimated costs for the project. As needed, the applicant organization may refer to 2 CFR 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards" cited within the template's instructions.

Provide **detailed and specific narratives** in completing the budget. Budget items should follow the guidelines set forth in 2 CFR 200.

6. Attachments

Complete the following attachments located on the ICCB website:

- Attachment A: High Demand Training Programs
- Attachment B: Measurable Goals

H. Submission Instructions

Deadline: Monday, March 16, 2026, 11:59 PM CST

Email to: iccb.submitrfp@illinois.gov

Subject Line: [Institution Name] FY2027 WEI Continuation Plan

All documents must be **submitted electronically** as attachments. One pdf. is recommended. Paper submissions will not be accepted.

All applicants will receive a confirmation of receipt of the continuation plan.

Questions: All questions must be submitted to iccb.submitrfp@illinois.gov. Subject Line: [Institution Name] FY2027 FAQ. **FAQs will be posted to the ICCB website.** Last day to submit questions for posting is Monday, March 4, 2026.

I. Notification

All applicants will be notified of funding decisions following the final review process and approval process.

J. Key Dates

- Information session: January 28, 2026, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

- **Meeting link:**
<https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/j.php?MTID=mbe87feaf3df0361a83c69d39edd458f>
- **Meeting number:**
2631 782 5693
- **Meeting password:**
KWrihmR7W34
- **Application Due:** Monday, March 16, 2026, by 11:59 PM CT
- **Grant Period:** July 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027

Contact Information

Jennifer K. Foster

Deputy Executive Director

Illinois Community College Board

Email: Jennifer.Foster@illinois.gov

Phone: 217-785-0171

Ahja Howard

Director for Program SUCCESS

Illinois Community College Board

Email: Ahja.Howard@illinois.gov

Phone: 217-558-4929