



Fiscal Year 2026

Taking Back the Trades!

Trades School Grant Program- Round 4 Application

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Application Due Date/Time: Oct 24, 2025, 11:59 p.m.

Submit Application To: ICCB.cte@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>Janelle Washington, Senior Director for Career and Technical Education, janelle.washington@illinois.gov</i>
3.	Announcement Type:	<i>Initial announcement</i>
4.	Type of Assistance Instrument:	<i>Grant</i>
5.	Funding Opportunity Number:	
6.	Funding Opportunity Title:	<i>FY2026 Taking Back the Trades! Trades School Grant Program- Round 4</i>
7.	CSFA Number:	
8.	CSFA Popular Name:	
9.	CFDA Number(s):	<i>N/A</i>
10.	Grant Period	<i>January 15, 2026- June 30, 2027</i>
11.	Anticipated Number of Awards:	<i>Up to 14, depending on funding proposals</i>
12.	Estimated Total Program Funding:	<i>\$5,000,000</i>
13.	Maximum Award Amount	<i>\$350,000</i>
14.	Source of Funding:	<i>State</i>
15.	Cost Sharing/Matching Requirement:	<i>No</i>
16.	Indirect Costs Allowed	<i>Yes</i>
	Restrictions on Indirect Costs	<i>No</i>
17.	Posted Date:	<i>August 25, 2025</i>
18.	Closing Date for Applications:	<i>October 24, 2025, 11:59 p.m.</i>
19.	Technical Assistance:	<i>A Bidder's Conference webinar will be held Monday, September 22, 2025. Webinar link is provided at the end of this NOFO.</i> <i>Additional technical assistance will be provided throughout the grant period to grant recipients.</i>

A. Background and Purpose

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is inviting eligible applicants to apply for the **Taking Back the Trades! - Trades School Grant Program Round 4**. The word “trades” has historically had a negative connotation in relation to Career and Technical Education and technical vocations. However, “trades” occupations are the backbone of our society. The “trades” and CTE are critical to our state and nation’s infrastructure and with these funds, we are helping Illinois “Take Back the Trades”!

This is the fourth year of funding from the State of Illinois to provide access and strengthen pathways to careers in the “trades” for young adults, particularly those in underserved communities marked by high youth unemployment, low graduation rates, or other relevant indicators. The ICCB will provide approximately \$5 million in grant funding opportunities to be administered for the purposes of this grant.

For the purposes of this grant:

- *Youth* is defined as those aged 16-24.
- “*Trades*” are defined as technical occupations in the following sectors:
 1. Architecture and construction
 2. Energy
 3. Healthcare
 4. Information Technology
 5. Manufacturing
 6. Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
 7. Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

B. Eligible Applicants

Community colleges in the State of Illinois are invited to submit proposals under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

All previous awardees of any of the rounds of funding are eligible to apply for funding. Please note that while applicants who received Trades Grant Round 3 funding *are* eligible to apply, applicants **must demonstrate that proposed grant activities will expand upon or enhance Round 3 activities, rather than duplicate previous activities.**

C. Target Population

The intent of the grant is to prepare **in-school youth** for opportunities in trades programs. Primarily, programs should serve students enrolled in high school (including alternative high schools), particularly those in their junior and senior years, but may also create partnerships and pathways with middle schools for career awareness and exploration activities for middle school-age students. Additionally, grantees *can* work with out-of-school youth up to age 24, but the primary focus should remain in-school youth who will be transitioning to additional training and employment in the trades following graduation.

D. Grant Objectives and Priority Activities

The objectives of this grant are intended to increase awareness and access to sustainable wage employment in the trades for youth. Each grant proposal must address how the grantee will implement each objective.

- **Objective 1: Career exploration.** Provide career exploration for youth (as low as middle school) as it relates to the trades.
- **Objective 2: Seamless pathways/credential attainment.** Provide seamless education and training pathways to employment in the trades. These pathways may include the following:
 - providing CTE dual credit coursework to allow for students to earn a credential prior to or shortly after graduating high school.
 - strengthening transitions into the college using CTE Program of Study pathways and [Model Programs of Study Guides](#), as well as [career pathway endorsements](#).
 - developing and implementing stackable credentials, as well as [essential employability skills](#) are also encouraged.
 - enhancing student support services, including wrap-around support services.
- **Objective 3: Work-based learning.** Provide paid, work-based learning opportunities, such as pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and internship, to students participating in select training programs, as appropriate. Work-based learning not only provides students with hands-on training and application, but also provides them with applicable career-related employability skills.

Priority Activities to be carried out in all grant-funded projects:

- **Engage in partnerships** with other entities that may strengthen the ability of students to transition and persist through training and employment. Applicants are required to engage in the following partnerships and those partnerships must be represented in the grant application. Required partnerships include the following:
 - high school district(s)
 - employers
 - community-based organizations (particularly those that work with youth) or labor organizations.

Additional external partnerships that may be beneficial to achieve project goals include area career centers and workforce intermediaries. Internal partnerships that be beneficial to achieve project goals include high school and college counselors and advisors, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices, Career Services, as well as Access/Disability Coordinators, and members of current CTE Advisory Committees.

- **Develop and implement career activities** which may strengthen career development and exploration, career planning, understanding the world of work, and integration of essential employability skills. This may include workplace learning opportunities like job shadowing, industry guest speakers, tours of college CTE labs and workshops, etc.
- **Implement and integrate equity-driven, evidenced-based practices,** strategies, and pedagogy throughout programming. Grantees should utilize data-informed decision-making in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programming to identify equity gaps and address inequities appropriately. Programs should aim to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion is adequately supported in programming. Specifically, programs should aim to advance equitable access and outcomes for racially and ethnically minoritized communities as well as others marginalized by education and workforce systems. Colleges may find it useful to use resources like the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (conducted for the Perkins Grant), the college's Equity Plan, and the college's strategic plan.

E. Allowable Activities:

The expectation is that applicants will propose activities that align with local needs or statewide priorities around career pathway opportunities and activities that promote equity and diversity. Grantees should utilize existing frameworks and resources, where applicable. Student support is allowable and encouraged, however, it should not be the primary focus of the grant funds. Other allowable activities to be carried out by grantees include the following. Please note that this list is **not** exhaustive.

- Developing or Aligning Curriculum: Furthering the alignment of coursework by contextualizing and integrating basic skills or academic and career and technical education offerings.
- Employer subsidies for providing work-based learning experiences for students (internships, trainings, wages, etc.) that fulfill CTE Programs of Study and the secondary districts pathway endorsement requirements.
- Pilot the development and implementation of a currency/incentivization model whereby earners of a College and Career Pathway Endorsement (CCPE) would also earn a unique "currency"¹ in the postsecondary space as a result of their efforts.
- Creating non-credit, short-term training programs that support minority students' transition into trades programs.
- Create and cultivate intentional early college credit including dual credit coursework in core program content (i.e. more than just general education) and career awareness activities like work-based learning experiences, specifically for students from underrepresented populations.

¹ **Definition:** Currency is defined as, "specific incentives or benefits for CCPE earners, which could include the following: specialized access to financial or advising support upon enrollment in a postsecondary program within their CCPE area, or as streamlined access for an exclusive opportunity at the postsecondary institution or employer partner". [Additional examples](https://edsystemsniu.org/community-college-pathway-equity-and-currency/) and resources: <https://edsystemsniu.org/community-college-pathway-equity-and-currency/>.

- *Activities may include planning and implementing dual credit offerings in new or existing disciplines or locations; developing and utilizing innovative instructional models that have not been attempted in dual credit classrooms in the applying district; and engaging secondary and postsecondary faculty in curriculum alignment, articulation activities, and professional development related specifically to dual credit offerings.*
- Creating a program of study for an in-demand industry sector, from high school to postsecondary education.
- Developing models that promote service integration with partners.
- Assistance as it relates to food insecurity, transportation, childcare, textbook loans/lending library.
- Supplemental instruction
- High touch academic advising and career guidance including hiring a CTE Navigator(s).
- Testing and assessment preparation for CTE-related certifications and licenses.
- Assistance for students transitioning into employment or seeking additional education and training.
- Developing support services models that include wrap-around services for basic needs including but not limited to food insecurity, transportation, childcare, textbook loans/lending library, housing, financial literacy, and other services that will reduce barriers to educational success for all students including those from underrepresented populations and special populations ([as defined by Perkins](#)).
- Other activities of statewide significance that expand career pathways and are aligned with labor market information as identified by local or regional needs.

F. Application Package

Applications submitted under this grant program will undergo a merit-based review process. All parts of the application package must be completed by the deadline in order to be considered. Applicants should ensure that all elements are clearly addressed and are strongly encouraged to use headers to address all elements or some consistent form of response delineation. Applicants will receive a receipt of application. However, applicants will not be notified if there are items that are missing from their application. Applicants must use the templates provided on the ICCB website: <https://www.iccb.org/grant-opportunities/>

The application must be organized as listed below.

1. GATA-Exempt Grant Application

Applicants must complete each section of the GATA-Exempt Grant Application in its entirety. If a question is not applicable, please enter NA. *A template is provided.*

2. Application Narrative

The eligible applicant must submit a narrative of **no more than twelve pages** (charts and graphs are a part of the page limitation), double-spaced, 12-point font that must include

the following information in the order listed below and utilizing a header for each Numbered Section.

Narrative Sections

I. Basic Project Information:

- a. *Concise summary of your grant project*, including the following:
 - i. Trade sector selected and the accompanying occupations- Grantees should provide evidence for selection of employment sector, including but not limited to labor market information, listing of relevant employers, anticipated growth in select occupations.
 - ii. Summary of the project activities and how they align with the goals of the grant as listed in this NOFO- please make this concise.
 - iii. Goals of your grant project (what do you hope to get out of this project? Goals will be more explicitly detailed further in the application, so please do not reiterate that section).
- b. *Population to be Served*, including the following:
 - i. Provide a description of the target population of students to be served (e.g., ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status of community, high school district).
 - ii. Applicants should use data as evidence for their selection. This may include but is not limited to dual credit courses, local unemployment rate, income status of community, racial and ethnic representation of the community being served.

II. Statement of Need:

- a. *Identify both the **programmatic** and **financial** need for these grant funds.*
Note: do not assume that the grant reviewer understands the specific financial needs of your institution and/or chosen program area of focus. Financial need should be explicitly addressed.

III. Overall Project Goals/ Indicators of Performance:

- a. Identify anticipated number of youth to be engaged in this grant.
- b. Projected percentage of engaged youth who will participate in education and training preparing them for occupations in the trades.
- c. Number or percentage of engaged youth who participate in a paid, work-based learning opportunity.
- d. Number or percentage of engaged youth who become employed in the trades sector or identify an intention to work in the trades.
- e. Number of employers engaged. *Engagement means contributing to curriculum development and alignment activities, hosting work-based learning opportunities, donating equipment, hosting facility tours, participating in hiring events, hiring students.*
- f. Identify at least one other indicator of performance (system, programmatic, or participant- level).

- IV. **Project Work Plan:** Clearly describe the project activities and associated timeline for each activity to be carried out during the grant period. The activities should clearly relate to the goals of the grant. *A chart or table is encouraged.* Within the Work Plan, applications should address how they will carry out the following activities:
- a. Partnership development and engagement with the various required partners. Included within this section must be a description of all partnerships and the role each partner will play in the grant project. Required partners include: a high school district, employer(s), and a community-based organization. Other encouraged partners include labor organizations, area career centers, and workforce intermediaries, high school and college counselors and advisors, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices, Career Services, as well as Access/Disability Coordinators, and members of current CTE Advisory Committees. **Letters of Commitments must be included for all external partners.**
 - b. Career awareness and exploration activities for the selected trade sectors for the youth engaged.
 - c. Development and implementation of seamless education and training pathways to employment in the trades. (Applicants should identify education and training curriculum to be used, including sequence of courses if applicable, any culminating credentials to be earned, and other activities that contribute to seamless transitions.)
 - d. Work-based learning opportunities to be offered. (Applicants should identify employer partners)
 - e. Wraparound support services. (Applicants should identify both academic and non-academic supports available to youth who participate in programs supported by this grant.)
 - f. All other activities carried out under the grant to support the project goals.
- V. **Desired Project Impact:** Description of the impact of the project on students, the community, the institution, employers, etc.
- VI. **Applicant Capacity and Effectiveness:** Description of the applicant's capacity to execute the project including a description of previous experience in implementing successful grant programs of a similar nature, and related activities such as wrap-around services for the target population. If the applicant has received a previous round or rounds of Trades Grant funding, please be thoughtful about successes and challenges encountered during implementation and execution.
- VII. **Scalability or Replicability:** Description of how the project could be scaled or replicated by others in the State. *All resources and products developed with grant funds will be provided from the grantee to the ICCB to share with the field.*
- VIII. **Contingency Plan:** Description of plan and budget in the event that the program plan must change, and funds are not able to be spent as defined in the original narrative and budget (e.g. unsuccessful in hiring Navigator A). Applicants should

think critically about this section. In the event that an applicant is unable to spend grant funds as originally planned, it is helpful to have a substantial starting place when trying to determine how to change course (*This should not be more than one page*).

3. Uniform Budget

All applicants must submit a proposed budget on the State of Illinois Uniform Grant Budget Template (*template provided*). Applicants should submit budgets based upon the total estimated costs for the project. Costs should be in line with allowable costs under the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act. Grantees should ensure that they have the institutional capacity to fully execute this grant and all funding provided with it. Grants funds must be expended within the allowable timeframes of the grant period.

G. Application and Submission Information

- **Technical Assistance:** One bidder's conference webinar will be held. Bidder's conference attendance is not mandatory. A recording of the information will be available.

September 22, 2025 @ 1 p.m.

<https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/j.php?MTID=m672383ddc3c911f0fe0b655bc68968bc>

- **Questions:** All questions must be submitted electronically to ICCB.cte@illinois.gov. Phone calls will not be accepted. Include in the subject line: [**Organization's Name**] FY26 Trades School Program Grant Question. All questions will be posted in an FAQ on the ICCB website.
- **Submission:** Each grant application package must be submitted no later than **October 24, 2025**, to ICCB.cte@illinois.gov. Grant application and materials may be found on the ICCB website at <https://www.iccb.org/grant-opportunities/>. **Paper copies of the applications are not permitted.** Applicants will receive confirmation of receipt of the e-mail containing the attachments. It is up to the applicant to ensure that all items in the package are attached and sent in the e-mail.

All applicants, funded or not funded, will be notified.

H. Grant Pre-Qualification

Interested institutions may apply for a grant but will not be eligible for a grant award until the institution has pre-qualified through the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) Grantee Portal located at www.grants.illinois.gov.

During pre-qualification, the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) verifications are performed including a check of Debarred and Suspended status and good standing with the Secretary of State. The prequalification process also includes a financial and administrative risk assessment utilizing an Internal Controls Questionnaire.

If applicable, the entity will be notified that it is ineligible for award as a result of the UEI verification. The entity will be informed of corrective action needed to become eligible for a grant award.

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal or State awarding agency that is exempt from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal or State awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110 (d)) is required to:

- Be registered in SAM before submitting its application.
- Provide a valid UEI number in its application.
- Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active award.

ICCB will not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has fully complied with all applicable UEI and SAM requirements.

Grant recipients must comply with all applicable provisions of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to nondiscrimination, sexual harassment, and equal employment.

I. Funding Information

- Grant Period: The grant period is January 15, 2026 – June 30, 2027.
- Funding Availability: A total of \$5,000,000 is appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the ICCB for grants to eligible entities for the educational purposes as outlined under this NOFO. Only one grant application per district.
- Funding Deadlines:
 - Grant funds must be obligated by June 30, 2027
 - Services must be rendered by June 30, 2027
 - Good/products must be ordered by June 30, 2027/received by August 31, 2027
 - Grant funds must be expended by August 31, 2027
- Cost Sharing or Matching: No cost sharing or matching is required.
- Allowable and Unallowable Costs: Grant recipients must adhere to the Grant Accountability Transparency Act (GATA) unless otherwise permitted.

Indirect Cost Rate:

In order to charge indirect costs to a grant, the applicant organization must have an annually negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA). There are three types of NICRA's.

- **Federally Negotiated Rate.** Organizations that receive direct federal funding may have an indirect cost rate that was negotiated with the Federal Cognizant Agency. ICCB will accept the federally negotiated rate.
- **State Negotiated Rate.** The organization must negotiate an indirect cost rate with the State of Illinois if they do not have a Federally Negotiated Rate or elect to use the De Minimis Rate. The indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted to the State of Illinois within 90 days of the notice of award.

- De Minimis Rate. An organization that has never received a Federally Negotiated Rate may elect a De Minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct cost (MTDC). Once established, the De Minimis rate may be used indefinitely. The State of Illinois must verify the calculation of the MTDS annually in order to accept the De Minimis rate.

GRANT DELIVERABLES

1. Carry out deliverables of the proposed scope of work.
2. Work to meet or exceed all of the identified indicators of performance.
3. Recipients must submit at least one student success story. A template is provided under Grant Resources or Guidance on the ICCB website: <https://www.iccb.org/grants/grant-resources/>.
4. Submit required programmatic and fiscal reports on a quarterly basis per the schedule below to:
 - Programmatic: ICCB.cte@illinois.gov
 - Financial: ICCB.grantpayments@illinois.gov

Reporting Schedule (6 Quarters)		
Quarter	Period	Date Due
1	January 15, 2026 – March 31, 2026	April 30, 2026
2	April 1, 2026 - June 30, 2026	July 30, 2026
3	July 1, 2026 - September 30, 2026	October 30, 2026
4	October 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026	January 30, 2027
5	January 1, 2027 – March 31, 2027	April 30, 2027
6	April 30, 2027 – June 30, 2027	July 30, 2027

(Reporting templates and other instructions will be made available to grant recipients at a later date.)

5. Participate in any required Operational Meetings or learning workshops. *Participation in professional development and technical assistance events is encouraged, but not required.*
6. Recipients should be prepared to present grant activities/outcomes at a statewide conferences like the Forum for Excellence and/or be prepared to participate at the Illinois State Fair ICCB Tent, bringing along grant-funded items (i.e. mobile trades units, moveable equipment, etc.).

J. Review Criteria and Selection Process

The ICCB staff will use the criteria listed in this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to review the applications and will award points accordingly. Decisions to award grants and the funding levels will be determined per application based upon compliance with the requirements of this NOFO and the grant proposal. Applications will be scored and ranked using a merit-based review points-based rubric.

Applicants must demonstrate that they meet all requirements under this NOFO as described throughout. The following criteria will be used to evaluate the Application Narrative and other documents submitted under this NOFO. See below for a more detailed breakdown.

Basic Project Information and Statement of Need (15%)

- The applicant provided a concise summary of the project, including the Trades sector selected and accompanying occupations- this should include evidence like LMI and employers.
- The applicant provided a clear summary of project activities and goals of the project.
- The applicant clearly provided a description of the target population of students to be served (e.g., ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status of community, high school district) and the description includes data as evidence for their selection (ex. high school graduation rate, youth unemployment rate, income status of community, racial and ethnic representation of the community being served).
- The applicant clearly identified both programmatic and financial need for the project.

Overall Project Goals / Indicators of Performance (30%)

- The applicant identified the anticipated number of youths to be engaged in this grant.
- The applicant identified the projected percentage of engaged youth who will participate in education and training preparing them for occupations in the trades.
- The applicant provided the anticipated number or percentage of engaged youth who will participate in a paid, work-based learning opportunity.
- The applicant provided the anticipated number or percentage of engaged youth who become employed in the trades sector or identify an intention to work in the trades.
- The applicant identified the number of employers engaged.
- The applicant identified at least one other indicator of performance (ex. system, programmatic, or participant-level).

Project Work Plan (35%)

- The applicant clearly outlined and described project activities that align with the goals of the grant.
- Timelines are generally provided where applicable and are easy to follow.
- The applicant demonstrated meaningful partnership development and engagement with various required partners:
 - High school district
 - Employer(s)
 - Community-based organization(s)
- The applicant described career awareness and exploration activities for the selected trade sectors for the youth engaged.
- The applicant described the development and implementation of seamless education and training pathways to employment in the trades, including:
 - Identified education and training curriculum to be used, including sequence of courses if applicable

- Identified any culminating credentials to be earned
 - Any other activities that contribute to seamless transitions
- The applicant provided a description of work-based learning opportunities to be offered, including identification of employer partners.
- The applicant described wraparound support services, including both academic and non-academic supports available to youth who participate in programs supported by this grant.

Desired Project Impact (5%)

- The applicant provided a description of impact the project will hopefully have on students, the community, the institution, employers, etc.

Capacity and Effectiveness, Scalability and Replicability, and Contingency Plan (15%)

- The applicant provided a description of the applicant's capacity to execute the project. This may include a description of any previous experience in implementing grant programs of a similar nature.
- The applicant provided a description of how the project could be scaled or replicated by others in the State.
- The applicant provided a brief description of the plan and budget if funds are not able to be spent as originally defined in the application.

Uniform Budget (No Points awarded for this section because it is required. If an application does not have a budget, it will not be scored. Budget is reviewed for accuracy, allowability, and completeness; any required revisions will be requested from the institution.)

K. State Awarding Agency Contact

- **Janelle Washington**, Senior Director for Career and Technical Education
- Email: janelle.washington@illinois.gov
- Phone: (217) 785-0068

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