




A New Door to Opportunity in Illinois

**Illinois' Pell Grant for Workforce ("Workforce Pell")
Information Session**


WEBINAR · APRIL 6, 2026

Let's Connect!


Please take a moment to introduce yourself in the chat window. We'd love to know who's with us today.



Your Name



Your Organization



Your Role

Welcome

Emily Goldman

**First Assistant Deputy
Governor of Education**



State Goal

To maximize student access to high quality short-term workforce programs and expanded financial aid, while maintaining consumer protections.

Interagency Steering Committee

Illinois has meaningful discretion in how the state implements expansion of the Pell Grant for Workforce. The Governor's Interagency Steering Committee is leading this work.

Today's Objectives

1. Understand the Basics of Pell for Workforce
2. Identify Key Program Requirement and Guardrails
3. Gain Insight to the State's Implementation Approach
4. Understand Implications for each Stakeholder Group

Intended Audience

- Employers and industry partners
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Workforce organizations and counselors
- Philanthropic and community partners

Our Time Together

- 60 minutes
- Questions welcomed throughout in the chat; your questions will help us prepare additional information and events
- Chat prompts and open reflection time built in

Presenters Today

**Education Strategy Group
(ESG)**

Brings national expertise; serves as advisor and provides support with context and analysis.



Annie Phillips
Director
ESG

**Illinois Community College
Board**

**Facilitating the Interagency Steering
Committee**



Whitney Thompson
Deputy Director for
Workforce Education
ICCB

Additional Presenters Today

Representatives of the Interagency Steering Committee

Engages with key stakeholder groups, conducts analysis, and develops recommendations.



Leslie Daugherty
Managing Director of
Talent and Workforce
Development
IBHE



Carrie Thomas
Deputy Director, Business
Services
IDES



Katharine Gricevich
Director, Government
Relations
ISAC



Lisa Jones
Assistant Deputy Director,
Office of Employment and
Training
DCEO

What Is Pell for Workforce?

A historic expansion of federal financial aid — for the first time, able to be used for short-term workforce programs.

The Law

Created by Congress under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed July 4, 2025 — extending Pell Grant eligibility to short-term workforce programs for the first time in history.

Who It Serves

Working adults, career changers, and learners who need faster pathways to good jobs — people who can't wait years for a credential.

What It Funds

Short-term programs that lead to credentials with real labor market value.



Federal Requirements

The federal rule sets the floor. Illinois must meet these minimum standards. Federal regulations (NPRM published March 9, 2026) establish the following criteria:

Program Requirements

- **Time:** 150-599 clock hours; can be 8-14 weeks
- Prep learners for **high-skill, high wage, in-demand jobs**
- Meet **hiring requirements** for >1 employer
- Has been **offered by the institution for ≥ 1 year** prior to receiving eligibility
- **Not a correspondence, study abroad or direct assessment course**
- **No more than 25% of teaching is outsourced**

Stackability Requirements

- Lead to an **industry-recognized credential** that is stackable and portable
- **Provides credit** that articulates to one or more additional certificates or degree programs

Outcome Requirements

- Have a verified **completion rate** of at least 70%
- Have a verified **job placement rate** of 70%
- Meet an **earnings requirement** that relies on program cost, median earnings, and the federal poverty level.

Key Date: July 1, 2026 is the current federal effective date for Pell for Workforce implementation.

What It Is vs. What It Isn't

Understanding the scope of Pell Grants for Workforce is essential for institutions, students, and policymakers alike.

✓ What It IS

- A federal financial aid expansion for short-term workforce programs
- Available at Title IV institutions (accredited postsecondary schools including public, private non-profit, and for-profit/vocational institutions) eligible to participate in federal student aid.
- Tied to in-demand, high-skill, or high-wage occupations

✗ What It Is NOT

- A replacement for traditional Pell Grants
- Available for all institutions or programs automatically
- Guaranteed — states, institutions, and programs must qualify through a formal process

Pell Grants in IL Today:

- In 2023-2024, Illinois had 223 Title IV-eligible institutions, with about 183,700 Pell recipients and an average Pell grant of about \$5,250.



Your Voice Matters

What workforce needs in your sector or community could short-term training most directly address? Drop a word or two in the chat — we'd love to hear what's on your mind!

Interagency Steering Committee

Illinois is developing its proposed approach through a coordinated interagency effort led by the Governor's Education Office.



Illinois' Key Decision Areas

Illinois has meaningful discretion in how the state implements expansion of the Pell Grant for Workforce. The Governor's Interagency Steering Committee is working through three critical work streams that will determine which programs will be eligible for students to use their Pell grant funding.



Eligibility Definitions

How do we define "in-demand" and "high-wage" for Illinois workers? These definitions set the boundaries of access.



Program Stackability

How do short-term credentials connect to longer pathways?
Ensuring credentials build toward degrees and careers.



Employer Validation

What counts as evidence that employers value a program?
Defining the standard for industry endorsement.

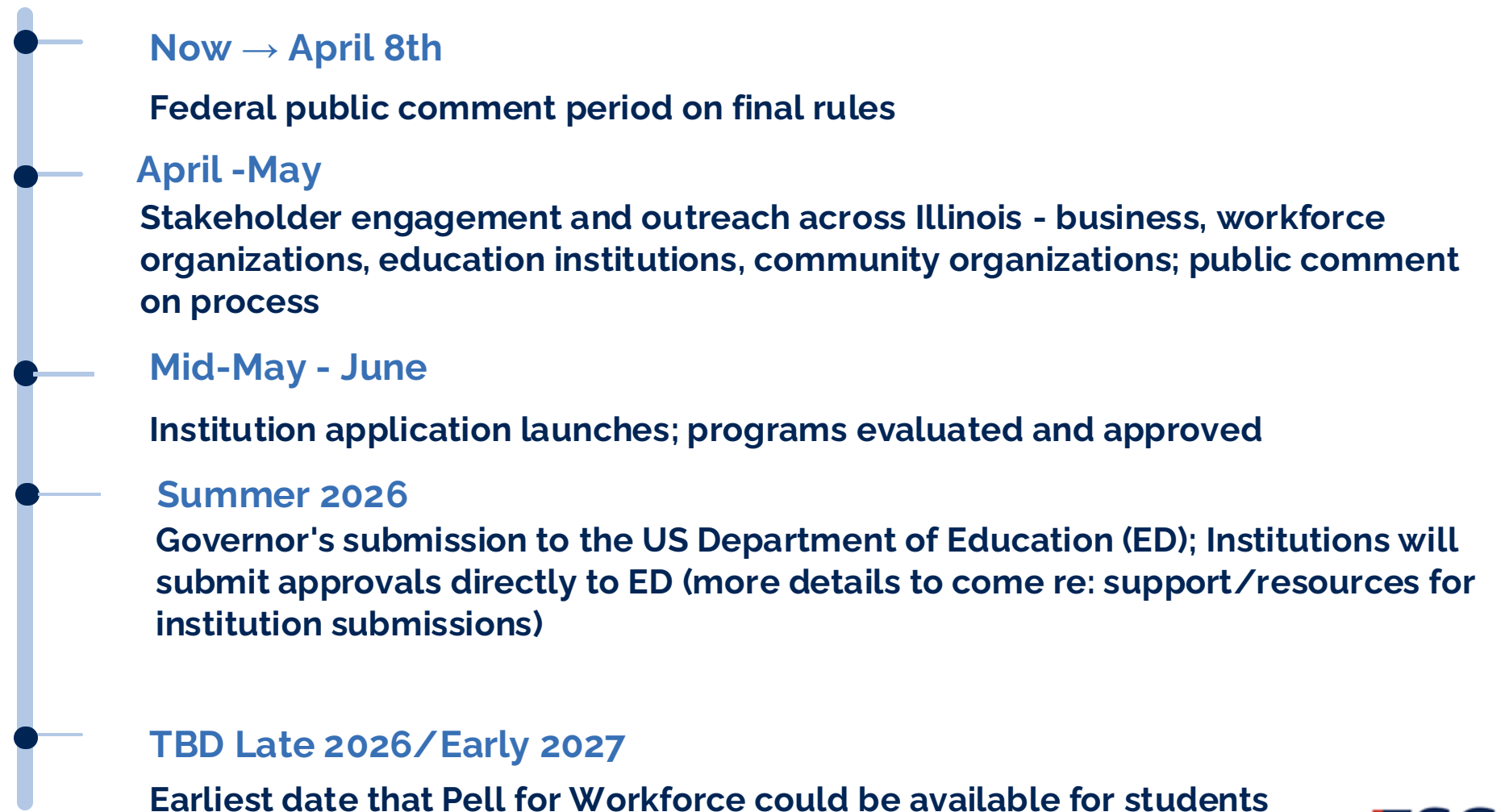
Where Illinois Stands

Illinois is preparing for when the federal law goes into effect, July 1, with the understanding that approval of programs and awards to students would be at a later date.

Active Engagement

- Federal public comment period open through April 8, 2026. We anticipate the rules are fairly final.
- The Interagency Steering Committee is collaborating to develop recommendations, engage stakeholders, and prepare for implementing this expansion of Pell Grants.

Implementation Timeline



We Want to Hear From You

Institutions and providers — are there existing programs at your organization that you think could qualify?

What's your biggest barrier to getting ready?

Employers — what matters most to you regarding the employer validation process for eligible programs?

Illinois Agency Spotlights

Members of the Interagency Steering Committee bring distinct and essential contributions to Illinois' Workforce Pell implementation.



Tell Us What You Think

After hearing from the agencies, what's one thing you'd want the Steering Committee to keep in mind as they develop the policies and approval process?

What matters most to make this successful for our students, workers, and community?

STAYING ENGAGED

The Interagency Steering Committee is leading the engagement efforts to gather input from their stakeholders, including:

Business & Labor

Higher Education Institutions

Additional Title IV Institutions

Financial Aid Advisors

Career Counselors

Students



Thank You & Illinois' Path Forward

Key Takeaway #1

A clear picture of what Pell for Workforce is and what Illinois is actively doing to implement it ahead of the July 1, 2026 federal effective date.

Key Takeaway #2

An understanding of the decisions the state is making — eligibility, stackability, and employer validation — and why they matter for learners.

Stay Connected

Watch for future engagement opportunities. An institution application process will launch this spring.



Have a question or feedback? Fill out the [FORM](#) or reach out to a representative.

Whitney Thompson (ICCB)

Leslie Daugherty (IBHE)

Katharine Gricevich (ISAC)

Lisa Jones (DCES)

Carrie Thomas (IDES)