

Illinois Workforce Pell Provider and Program Readiness Checklist

July 2026

This document provides a preparation and self-review checklist for postsecondary administrators seeking Workforce Pell program eligibility for short-term programs.

Overview

The U.S. Congress H.R. 1 (2025) established the Workforce Pell Grant Program as a new federal financial aid program, falling under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Workforce Pell expands Pell Grant eligibility to students enrolled in approved short-term workforce training programs at eligible institutions. In May 2026, the Department of Education published its [final regulations](#). Federal law requires the Governor determine eligible programs that prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations, with credentials that are stackable and portable across employers. Programs must meet specific criteria to be approved.

Essential Resources for Illinois Providers

- ☐ [ICCB Workforce Pell Website](#)
- ☐ Illinois Workforce Pell Program Approval Manual
- ☐ Accreditation [guidance from the Higher Learning Commission](#)

2026 Application Timeline

- ☐ The application will be open July 15, 2026-August 31, 2026 for award consideration in AY2026-2027 and AY2027-2028.

Creating a Provider / Institutional Workforce Pell Team

We recommend that provider institutions create a Workforce Pell program team to review provider and program eligibility, assemble information and documentation, and to complete the application. Team members could include the following roles or areas:

- ☐ Leadership in workforce and academic programs (deans, department directors, etc.)
- ☐ Registrar
- ☐ Institutional Research / Institutional Effectiveness
- ☐ Student Services
- ☐ Financial Aid
- ☐ Regulatory Compliance and Accreditation

Provider and Program Eligibility Self-Review

Provider institutions should confirm eligibility and review their short-term programs to ensure programs meet the basic eligibility criteria prior to applying.

PROVIDER INSTITUTION

- ☐ Institution is a federal Pell Grant-eligible Postsecondary Institution designated as Title IV eligible by the U.S. ED, has an active Program Participation Agreement (PPA), and is in good standing.
- ☐ Institution is approved to operate in the State of Illinois, as determined by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and has not been subject to any suspension, emergency action, or termination of programs during the five years preceding seeking Workforce Pell program approval.
- ☐ Out-of-state institutions and for-profit providers serving Illinois students provide sufficient documentation to allow the State to assess financial stability, operating margins, and risk of closure.

PROGRAM

- ☐ **Length:** The short-term program is between 8 and less than 15 instructional weeks.
- ☐ **Hours:** The program is 150 – 599 clock hours, 4-15 semester or trimester hours, or 6-23 quarter hours.
- ☐ **Level:** The program is offered at the undergraduate level.
 - Programs may be credit or non-credit as long as they meet all the requirements.
- ☐ **Delivery:** The short-term program is not offered via correspondence, study abroad, or direct assessment.
- ☐ **Previous Suspension:** The program has not been subject to any suspension or emergency or termination action by the U.S. Secretary of Education during the five years preceding the date of the determination.
- ☐ **Limit on Instructional Partners:** No more than 25% of the short-term program is offered by an entity that is not a Participating Institution, including an employer partner or a contractor that is not a Title IV institution.

- ❑ **Program Start:** The short-term program has been in operation in its current format (length, hours, delivery, and confirmation program was not previously delivered as correspondence, study abroad or direct assessment) for at least one year.
- ❑ **Program is or will be in Grant of Accreditation:** The program is, or will be, included in the provider institution's grant of accreditation.
 - See [guidance from the Higher Learning Commission](#).
- ❑ **Occupational Alignment:** Program delivers curriculum aligned to high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations.
- ❑ **Hiring Requirements:** Program meets the hiring requirements of potential employers in the related sectors or occupations.
- ❑ **Stackability & Portability:** Program must lead to a stackable, portable recognized postsecondary credential (unless it is the only recognized credential for that occupation). Program must ensure students are awarded academic credit toward at least one certificate or degree program at one or more eligible institutions.
- ❑ **Outcomes:** Program must demonstrate that its program outcomes include ≥70% completion (for 150% of time) and ≥70% job placement, as defined in 34 CFR 690.93.

Application Process

STEP ONE: Confirm Demand Occupation Eligibility

The provider institution must verify that the program seeking Workforce Pell eligibility prepares students for employment in an occupation on the Illinois Eligible Demand Occupation List.

- ❑ See Appendix A of the Illinois Workforce Pell Program Approval Manual

STEP TWO: Apply to the State for Workforce Pell Program Approval

To seek Workforce Pell Grant Program approval for a short-term program, the provider institution is required to submit an application and supporting documentation.

- ❑ Gather the application responses and required documentation.
 - Specific criteria and documentation requirements are listed in the Illinois Workforce Pell Program Approval Manual
 - A pdf of the application form - including its required documentation - is available on the [ICCB Workforce Pell website](#).

Gathering Information and Documentation in Advance:

It is recommended that prior to starting the application process, provider institutions gather all of the information, documentation, and evidence they will need to include, including documentation of the following:

- ❑ **Institutional Financial Health:** most recently completed GASB (for public institutions) or FASB Forms 2 and 3 (for private nonprofit institutions) financial statements documenting expenses and revenue, as reported through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) financial health variables. (See page 6 of the Manual)
- ❑ **Program Stackability:** Curriculum maps, program catalogs, articulation agreements, job descriptions, ICCB-approved program of study application. (See pages 14-15 of the Manual)
- ❑ **Program Portability:** Employer verification, competency map, regional job postings, program accreditation. (See pages 14-15 of the Manual)
- ❑ **Program Employer Validation – Hiring Needs:** Job postings data; employer letters. (See pages 15-17 of the Manual)
- ❑ **Program Employer Validation – Alignment of Competencies and Employer Input:** Employer letter; evidence of competency alignment. (See pages 16-17 of the Manual)

NEXT STEPS

After the provider submits its application, several steps occur prior to approval and funds distribution, including:

- 1) Illinois interagency review and data valuation
- 2) IWIB and Governor review, approval, and certification
- 3) U.S. Department of Education approval

See the [ICCB Workforce Pell website](#) and the Illinois Workforce Pell Program Approval Manual for specific details.

Agency Contacts

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