

Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants (Sixth Round)

FOA-ETA-26-40

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Released: March 13, 2026

Award Overview

1. What is the timeline of the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)?

The closing date for receipt of applications under the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants Sixth Round (SCC6) FOA is May 20, 2026. You must submit your application electronically on www.grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date or it will not be considered for funding.

2. What amount of funding is available? Is there a limit?

The Department of Labor (DOL, or the Department, or we) expects availability of a minimum of \$65 million in funding, from its Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 appropriation, to award 6-10 grants. The awards will range from approximately \$6.5 million to \$10.8 million per grant.

The Department reserves the right to apply funding from its FY 2026 appropriation to the FOA, up to an additional \$65 million, for a total of up to \$130 million in funding. If DOL receives sufficient qualifying applications, we may use these funds to select additional grantees from the applications submitted in response to this Announcement.

3. What is the timeline for this grant program?

We anticipate that grants will be announced in summer 2026, with an anticipated start date of September 1, 2026.

4. Is there a match requirement?

No. This program does not require cost sharing or matching funds. Including such funds is not one of the application screening criteria and applications that include any form of cost sharing or match will not receive additional consideration during the review process. Instead, the agency considers any resources contributed to the project beyond the funds provided by the agency as leveraged resources. Section IV.B. of the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) provides more information on leveraged resources.

5. How will DOL evaluate the applications for funding?

We have instituted procedures for assessing the technical merit of applications to provide for an objective review of applications and to assist applicants in understanding the standards against which applications will be judged. The evaluation criteria are based on the information required in the application as described in the FOA Sections IV.B.2. (Project Budget) and IV.B.3. (Project Narrative). Reviewers will award points based on the evaluation criteria described below.

Table 1: Criteria and Points Values

Criterion	Points (maximum)
a. Statement of Need (See Section IV.C.1 Statement of Need)	14 total
b. Expected Outputs and Outcomes (See Section IV.C.2 Expected Outcomes and Outputs)	26 total
c. Project Design (See Section IV.C.3 Project Design)	44 total
d. Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity (See Section IV.C.4 Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity)	6 total
e. Past Performance – Programmatic Capability (See Section IV.C.5 Past Performance – Programmatic Capability)	6 total
f. Budget and Budget Narrative (See Section IV.C.6 Budget and Budget Narrative)	4 total
Total	100

Section IV.C. (Project Narrative) of the FOA has several “section headers” (e.g., IV.C.1. Statement of Need). Each of these “section headers” of the Project Narrative may include one or more “criterion,” and each “criterion” includes one or more “rating factors,” which provide detailed specifications for the content and quality of the response to that criterion. Each of the rating factors have specific point values assigned. These point values are the number of points possible for the application to earn for the rating factor.

A technical merit review panel will carefully evaluate applications based on the selection criteria. As outlined in Section VI.B of the FOA, the selection criteria are based on the policy goals and priorities explained in the FOA.

Up to 100 points may be awarded to an applicant, depending on the quality of the responses provided. The final scores (which may include the mathematical normalization of review panels)

will serve as the primary basis for selecting applications for funding. The panel results are advisory in nature and not binding on the Grant Officer. The Grant Officer can make selections based solely on the final scores or take into consideration other relevant factors when applicable. Such factors may include the geographic distribution of funds, proposed industry sectors, availability of funds, and other relevant factors. The Grant Officer may consider any information that comes to their attention.

Eligibility and Partnerships Overview

6. Who is eligible to apply for this grant?

The eligible lead applicant must be a community college that is a public institution of higher education as defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act (HEA), and at which the associate degree is primarily the highest degree awarded, as shown by the college's designation at <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>.

The Department is requiring community colleges to apply for this funding as a consortium of institutions of higher education. Thus, a community college must apply as a lead of a consortium of institutions.

NOTE: The Department will not fund more than one successful application per state. See Section VI.C. Review and Selection Process of the FOA and FAQ #8, below, for further information.

Grants will be awarded to the lead applicant of an SCC Partnership, which will serve as the grantee and have overall fiscal and administrative responsibility for the grant.

7. How many colleges are required for an institution consortium?

An institution consortium must include, at a minimum, the lead applicant and a majority of community colleges in the state. However, the Department strongly encourages applications that encompass a statewide system of community colleges (i.e. all community colleges in the state), where feasible, to support the priorities of SCC6 related to statewide impact.

Applicants that do not apply as a statewide community college system must explain how they have defined a majority of community colleges within their state and demonstrate that their proposed institution consortium members meet the required majority threshold for community colleges in the state.

Consortium members may include community colleges and public and private, non-profit four-year institutions, as defined in Section 101(a) of the HEA.

8. Can we apply as the lead of an institution consortium and join another application as a consortium member?

While the FOA does not limit the number of applications from each state, the Department will not fund more than one successful application per state. To be eligible for consideration, each application must include a letter of support from any one official in “Group A” and one letter from any one official in “Group B,” as listed below. The letters should speak to the commitment to state-level coordination activities to support data integration and data sharing priorities described in Section III.B.3.b of the FOA.

Group A:

- The Governor
- Executive Director/Chief/Chair, Governor’s Workforce Cabinet
- State Workforce Board Chair
- State Workforce or Labor Agency Head/Chief

Group B:

- Chief State Education Office/SHEEO
- Chief State School Officer
- State CTE Director

Moreover, each application must include in their institution consortium a majority of community colleges in the state, as noted in FAQ #7, above.

9. We are part of an SCC grant from a previous round. May we apply?

Yes, institutions that were funded in any previous rounds of SCC as leads or consortium members may apply for SCC6.

10. Is accreditation a requirement to be eligible to apply for SCC6?

To be eligible as a lead applicant or a consortium member, all institutions must, by the closing date of this FOA and throughout the entity’s performance in this grant program, be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association that has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. A database of institutions that are accredited by bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education can be found at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>. Note that the Department will check the accreditation status of lead applicants and consortium members as part of the screening process. Applications that do not meet this requirement will not move forward through the merit review process or be considered for an award.

11. What entities are required as part of the SCC6 Partnership?

All applicants must include the following partners in their SCC partnership:

- Consortium members comprising no less than a majority of community colleges in the state.
- At least one state-level or community college-district level entity, referred to as the institution coordinating entity, which will be responsible for regulating, governing, advising, and/or coordinating the institutions of higher education in the institution consortium.
- At least three employers for each proposed industry sector as an initial industry-driven partnership.
- One or more partners from the publicly funded workforce development system within the selected labor market area(s).

Failure to demonstrate the inclusion of required partners will affect scoring.

An entity cannot serve as more than one type of required partner in the SCC grants for the purpose of meeting FOA requirements. For example, a lead or consortium member institution cannot also serve as the required workforce development system partner.

12. Can we include additional partners beyond those required partners?

Yes, the Department encourages applicants to collaborate with other partners that can support and advance the work of the SCC Partnership.

13. Can we apply for more than one grant?

We will consider only one application from each organization applying as a lead applicant. If we receive multiple applications from the same organization, we will consider only the most recently received application that met the deadline. If the most recent application is disqualified for any reason, we will not replace it with an earlier application. An institution may apply as the lead in one application and be proposed as a consortium member in another application, or as a consortium member in more than one application.

14. Who can be served by the grant?

Eligible participants for SCC6 represent the broad population of community college students at distinct and varied points in their education and workforce pathways, including new entrants to the workforce, dislocated workers who have lost employment, and those currently working but seeking additional skills. These broad categories of eligible participants include within them low-income individuals, ex-offenders, and individuals with disabilities, among others.

Note that, for the purposes of this FOA, there is a distinction between all students enrolled in **programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility**, who must be tracked in order to capture the necessary performance outcomes required for Workforce Pell eligibility, and **SCC6 program participants**, who may also be enrolled in programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility but who are further served by the grant program through additional program services funded by the grant (see III.D.a. Participant-Related Costs in the FOA) and therefore may have additional reporting requirements. Grantees are responsible for tracking these participants in more detail, including data on enrollments, program services and activities, as well as the performance outcomes listed in Section III.C.1.b. Performance Outcomes in the FOA.

Grant Program Overview

15. What is the purpose of the sixth round of the SCC program?

Round 6 of the Strengthening Community Colleges (SCC or SCC6) grants will fund community colleges, with a singular focus on building program and system capacity for implementing and scaling access to short-term training opportunities through Workforce Pell Grants—i.e., promoting industry-driven strategies, worker mobility, and integration with the larger state workforce system (e.g., Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners) for statewide impact.

As authorized by Section 83002 of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (Public Law 119-21), Workforce Pell Grants provide access to federal financial aid for students enrolled in high-quality, short-term workforce programs that are defined as at least 150 clock hours of instruction and less than 600 clock hours (or the equivalent in credit hours) and at least 8 weeks, but less than 15 weeks, in duration, that have demonstrated success in job placement and completion rates for students.

The intent of SCC6 is to fund programs that will be positioned, in relatively short order, to meet the eligibility requirements for Workforce Pell Grants. These efforts may include both the development of brand-new programs, in consultation with employers, that are designed to meet Workforce Pell eligibility requirements and fill critical workforce skill gaps, as well as efforts to enhance existing programs, such as stacking multiple shorter complementary trainings into a program that both meets the clock hours and duration requirements for Workforce Pell, as well as the desired competency and skill needs of employers.

To ensure that SCC6 grant projects accomplish the goals of the FOA, the Department will fund applications that address, in their proposals, each of the required SCC6 Core Elements:

- Core Element 1: Industry-Driven Strategies with Demonstrated Employer Value
- Core Element 2: Worker Mobility through Career Pathways Programs
- Core Element 3: Workforce System Integration to Expand Training Options

See Section III.B. Program Goals and Objectives of the FOA for more information.

16. Our workforce programs are not yet ready to seek eligibility under the Workforce Pell Grants program. Can we still apply to SCC6?

Yes. Workforce Pell Grants were authorized on July 4, 2025, and the program is officially set to begin on July 1, 2026. Moreover, any program seeking Workforce Pell Grant eligibility must be offered by the institution for at least a year prior to seeking approval. Thus, when the SCC6 FOA closes on May 20, 2026, no programs will have obtained approval for Workforce Pell Grants. For this reason, the intent of SCC6 is to promote statewide capacity-building efforts to develop and/or expand high-quality, short-term programs that **will seek eligibility** for the newly authorized Workforce Pell Grants. SCC6 seeks to fund programs that will be positioned to quickly work toward meeting the eligibility requirements for Workforce Pell Grants.

Grant Project Design

17. What are the Core Elements of the SCC6 FOA?

The first core element supports **Industry-Driven Strategies with Demonstrated Employer Value**. See Section III.B.1. Core Element 1 in the FOA. Successful applicants will demonstrate that they understand how to engage employers and industry representatives and provide the training outcomes that employers require to meet the job placement and earnings requirements for Workforce Pell Grants.

The second core element focuses on **Worker Mobility through Career Pathways Programs**. See Section III.B.2. Core Element 2 in the FOA. Workforce Pell Grants support worker mobility by providing high-quality, short-term training that meets the hiring requirements of employers while also leading to portable, stackable credentials that articulate to credit, allowing workers to continue to advance their skills along their chosen career pathway.

The third core element requires **Workforce System Integration to Expand Training Options**. See Section III.B.2. Core Element 3 in the FOA. Successful applicants will strengthen their collaboration with WIOA and other workforce system partners to accelerate career pathways programs through the development and expansion of programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility that will create statewide impact. This statewide impact will be felt through the expanded training options available through Workforce Pell Grants and the more rapid skills gains realized by workers in support of the state's most critical industries. Grant-funded projects will also demonstrate this impact through pursuit of two goals:

Statewide Data Integration and Use. Data transparency is a material requirement of Workforce Pell Grants, as eligibility for the grants necessitates quality outcomes data on completion and employment of those in the programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility.

To support improved data transparency, successful applicants will collaborate with their state workforce development systems to identify strategies that support integrated data systems or system linkages that allow for the state matching of individual records and subsequent calculation of program outcomes. See Question #18 below for an elaboration of these strategies.

- **Inclusion on the State Eligible Training Provider List or ETPL.** DOL wants to ensure that programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility are leveraging the public workforce system through inclusion on state ETPLs, as these programs must provide data about their job placement rates using administrative data sources, which are more easily available at the state level. To build their capacity to submit all programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility to state workforce agencies for inclusion on ETPLs, successful applicants will actively engage their local and state workforce board partners to introduce innovations around and reduce barriers to participating on the ETPL. See Appendix B of the FOA for more information on the ETPL process and requirements.

18. What are the expectations for statewide data integration and use under Core Element 3?

To address challenges related to data collection and reporting and support improved data transparency, applicants must collaborate with their state workforce development systems to identify strategies that better integrate and use education and workforce development system administrative data, both for Workforce Pell Grant eligibility requirements and broader beneficial statewide impacts that will result. These strategies may include:

- integrating data systems that contain both employment and educational outcomes data from multiple institutions through a single, unified data warehouse or data management system;
- creating linkages between separate data systems through a management information system (MIS) that creates record linkages, the use of administrative data research facilities, or another model that the applicant proposes;
- additional methods to address data integration and/or secure data sharing at the state level between education and workforce data; or
- develop talent marketplaces composed of credential registries (e.g., publishing education and training programs in structured, open, linked, and interoperable data formats), skills-based job description generators, comprehensive learner employment records (CLR) or learning and employment records (LER) that connect students, employers, and education providers through a common currency of skills.

19. Does the current state of data sharing and integration within the applicant's state inform DOL's assessment of the applicant's funding need?

Yes. The Department is most interested in prioritizing funding for applicants that can demonstrate strong efforts toward developing an integrated state-level data system but have not yet accomplished the necessary data sharing to facilitate such integration. To this end, the FOA asks applicants to describe the current state of data sharing and data integration activities within their state, the feasibility of the proposed strategies to affect positive change, and the way in which the anticipated outcomes will support efforts to successfully create programs that are determined eligible for Workforce Pell Grants and for inclusion on the state's Eligible Training Provider List. See Section IV.C.1.ii. Education and Workforce Data Sharing and Systems Integration of the FOA for the full description of the evaluation criterion and points tied to this criterion.

20. Are there targeted industries and/or occupations under this FOA?

When selecting the career pathway(s) to be built or enhanced with grant funding, applicants must focus on those critical occupations that provide high-quality short-term training to workers in in-demand industries, such as—but not limited to—AI infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, nuclear energy, domestic mineral production, information technology including AI, and shipbuilding, and which can be developed for Workforce Pell eligibility.

Applicants must demonstrate that the industry sectors that they select align with the skills and needs of their proposed labor market area(s) by providing labor market information as described in Section IV.C. Project Narrative of the FOA.

21. Must proposed projects lead to certain types of credentials under this FOA?

All programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility must lead to a stackable, portable, and recognized postsecondary credential. A recognized postsecondary credential is a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of a Registered Apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. For further information, see TEG 25-19, Understanding Postsecondary Credentials in the Public Workforce System.

22. What are the requirements regarding Open Educational Resources (OER) for SCC grantees?

Before developing any new content, awarded grantees should search existing OER repositories for open learning objects and, where appropriate, leverage these learning objects instead of duplicating existing objects as components of their proposed programs. In cases where no existing OER is appropriate to the specific needs of proposed programs, grantees are encouraged to consider the most efficient and practical means of acquiring content — for example, through college development, licensing or purchasing content, or purchasing existing intellectual property. See Section IX. Resources of the FOA for more information on SkillsCommons, the OER site developed for the Department's TAACCCT grants.

To further support the capacity-building aspect of this grant, SCC represents an investment in developing OER by requiring that all new intellectual property, including all digital content developed using SCC grant funds, be openly licensed for free use, adaptation, and improvement by others. Applicants will build upon and contribute to the body of OER and continue to create technology-driven innovations in career training and education, by openly licensing all work created with the support of the grant. See Section VIII.A.4. of the FOA for more information on open licensing.

As part of the requirement to publicly license grant-funded products, grantees must post their products (with the open license affixed) to a public distribution platform. Grantees may post products to sites such as a state OER repository, SkillsCommons, or other public distribution platforms.

Performance Outcomes

23. What are the expected outcomes for the grant program?

The SCC6 FOA contains two sets of outcomes: capacity-building and performance outcomes.

a. Capacity-Building Outcomes

To quantify the benefits of SCC6 statewide capacity-building efforts, grantees will track the following:

- Total number of programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility developed using grant funds
- Total number of new recognized postsecondary credentials or certifications created using grant funds
- Total number of programs added to the ETPL
- Progress toward the development of the applicant's selected method to address data integration and/or data sharing at the state level between education and workforce data, which may include an integrated data system, system linkage(s), or another proposed output that makes sense in the context of the applicant's data landscape

Grantees will report these indicators in the required Joint Quarterly Narrative Performance Report (see Section VIII.B. Reporting in the FOA).

b. Performance Outcomes

Grantees will report employment and educational outcomes by tracking aggregated student enrollment, completion, credential attainment, and job placement from relevant programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility.

The following indicators will be used to report Workforce Pell Eligibility progress for all awarded grants:

- Student Enrollment in Program(s) Seeking Workforce Pell Eligibility
- Student Completion Rate of Program(s) Seeking Workforce Pell Eligibility
- Job Placement Rate of Students in Program(s) Seeking Workforce Pell Eligibility (Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit (WIOA))
- Credential Attainment (WIOA)

24. Must we set targets for performance outcomes and track participants?

Applicants are not required to provide targets for performance outcomes. After award, additional guidance will be provided to grantees regarding the options for collecting and reporting performance outcomes, which will require grantees to track and report individuals via the use of the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) and upload into the Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS), with the WIOA indicators generated by DOL using the Common Reporting Information System (CRIS) where grantees do not have sufficient data sharing or integration with their state systems to support the necessary collection and reporting. See Section IV.C.2.ii. Participant Tracking Plan of the FOA for more information.

The Department may also use CRIS to collect additional WIOA outcomes data (such as Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit) to support ETPL data quality; this will not be used for the purposes of making eligibility determinations for Workforce Pell Grants.

25. Are only SCC6 participants tracked for the purposes of the performance outcomes needed to determine program eligibility for Workforce Pell?

For the purposes of the FOA, there is a distinction between **all students** enrolled in programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility, who must be tracked in order to capture the necessary performance outcomes required for Workforce Pell eligibility, and **SCC6 program participants**, who may also be enrolled in programs seeking Workforce Pell eligibility but who are further served by the grant program through additional program services funded by the grant (see III.D.a. Participant-Related Costs in the FOA) and therefore may have additional reporting requirements. Grantees are responsible for tracking these participants in more detail, including data on enrollments, program services and activities, as well as the performance outcomes listed above. Therefore, SCC6 participants are only a subset of the students who may be enrolled in programs seeking eligibility for Workforce Pell and will be tracked for aggregated enrollment, completion, employment, and credential attainment outcomes.

26. What does the required project work plan involve?

Applicants must present a comprehensive project work plan demonstrating a cohesive, well-designed approach to implementing the project that is realistic and measurable. Applicants

must also demonstrate the capacity to manage the project and specify the role that employers will play in supporting these activities.

A comprehensive work plan for the purposes of the FOA will include, but not be limited to, high-level implementation steps specific to the following program components: Core Element 1: Industry-Driven Strategies with Demonstrated Employer Value, Core Element 2: Worker Mobility through Career Pathways Programs, and Core Element 3: Workforce System Integration to Expand Training Options. A sample format of the project work plan can be found in Appendix C; project components related to Participant Tracking, Developmental Evaluation, Open Educational Resource Content Development and Posting, Linked Open Data on Credentials, and, if needed, Grant Funded Special Purpose Equipment and/or Altered Space have been pre-populated in the work plan items with the Implementation Activities and Milestones, as required by the FOA, within this sample format.

The applicant must complete the remainder of the project work plan by entering implementation steps for each Core Element and, for all components, the Responsible Entity(ies), Start Dates and Milestone Due Dates (e.g., Year 2, Q3 or Month 34) for each of the Implementation Steps and Milestones, where applicable.

The Department will review implementation progress on the work plans, as reported in Quarterly Narrative Reports, for technical assistance purposes, and annually for performance monitoring and compliance purposes. Significant changes to the project work plan may require a grant amendment. DOL may request clarifications, as well as annualized milestones, after grant award.

27. Must applicants use the formats for the Abstract and Project Work Plan provided in the FOA?

No, the formats are suggested only. Grantees may use their own formats for the Abstract and Project Work Plan; either way, applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which they include the required elements of each. Note that an Excel version of the suggested Project Work Plan format and a Word version of the suggested Abstract are available on the grants.gov “View Grant Opportunity” page for SCC6, under Related Documents, as a courtesy to prospective applicants.