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

Applicants will have 90 days to respond to this FOA from publication. The closing date for receipt of applications under this Announcement is September 24, 2019. We must receive applications no later than 4:00:00 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date.

2) **What is the *Apprenticeships: Closing the Skills Gaps* grant program?**

The purpose of the *Apprenticeships: Closing the Skills Gaps* grant program is to promote apprenticeships as a significant workforce solution in filling current job vacancies and closing the skills gap between employer workforce needs and the skills of the current workforce. Recognizing that apprenticeship is a training strategy that operates on both the supply side and the demand side of the labor market, this grant program aims to increase both the number of apprenticeship positions and the ability of all Americans to gain access to this proven pathway to family-sustaining careers.

3) **What are the grant program goals?**

The overarching goals of this grant program are threefold: (1) to accelerate the expansion of apprenticeships to industry sectors and occupations that have not traditionally deployed apprenticeships for building a skilled workforce, such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and health care; (2) to promote the large-scale expansion of apprenticeships across the nation to a range of employers, including small and medium-sized employers; and (3) to increase apprenticeship opportunities for all Americans.

4) **Who can apply?**

Grants under this program will be awarded to apprenticeship partnerships of public and private sector entities. The lead applicant of an apprenticeship partnership will serve as the grantee and have overall fiscal and administrative responsibility for the grant.

The following organizations are eligible to apply as a lead applicant:

- An institution of higher education (IHE), or an IHE representing a consortium of IHEs, as defined in Section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002); or

- A state system of higher education, such as a community college system office or a single state higher educational board; or
- A nonprofit trade, industry or employer association; labor union; or labor-management organization*.

Trade, industry, or employer associations, also known as industry trade groups, business associations, sector associations, or industry bodies, are nonprofit organizations founded and funded by businesses that operate in a specific industry.

The apprenticeship partnership, including the lead applicant, must include public and private sector entities; otherwise the application will be considered non-responsive and will not be considered or reviewed. An entity cannot serve as more than one type of required partner for the purpose of meeting FOA requirements.

5) What entities are required as part of the apprenticeship partnership?

Required partners in the apprenticeship partnership include:

I. **Employer Partners**
Applicants proposing to serve a local/regional or statewide geographic scope are required to partner with at least three employers that will implement apprenticeships.

Applicants proposing to serve a national geographic scope are required to partner with at least five employers. These employer partners will be engaged in developing the apprenticeship program and hiring and training apprentices.

II. **Institutions of Higher Education**
If the lead applicant is not an IHE, applicants must include in their apprenticeship partnership an IHE or a consortium of IHEs, as defined in Section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002); that offer skills instruction for the apprentices.

6) Can we include additional partners?

Yes, applicants are strongly encouraged to collaborate with other partners that can support and advance the work of the apprenticeship partnership. These include: additional trade and industry groups; employers; non-profit organizations; educational institutions; labor unions; joint labor-management organizations; education and job training providers; community colleges; other organizations to support outreach and training activities; Small Business Development Centers; community organizations that provide social support and/or wrap-around services; State Apprenticeship Agencies; foundations and philanthropic organizations; and Federally-funded programs.

Applicants may opt to include as partners organizations involved in administering the workforce investment system established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), (including State and Local Workforce Development Boards under Sections 101 and 107 of WIOA (29 U.S.C. 3111 and 3122), American Job Center Operators under Section 121(d) of WIOA (29 U.S.C. 3151(d)), and Native American Program entities eligible for funding under Section 166 of WIOA (29 U.S.C. 3221).

These organizations have expertise in workforce development and may provide leadership in implementing the following types of activities: 1) understanding and analyzing the need for education and training in the local area, including identifying targeted industries, occupations, regional clusters, and hiring needs, and populations to be served, and providing relevant sources of data, including labor market information, and other tools or reports; 2) assessing potential participants for the grant program; 3) identifying and referring potential apprentice candidates for education and training in the grant program; 4) providing additional supportive services; 5) connecting and placing participants with employers that have apprenticeship opportunities; and 6) collecting, tracking, and reporting participant data to DOL and the Department of Education.

Applicants that are proposing to develop new apprenticeship programs are strongly encouraged to partner with professional, industry groups, and academic institutions that can accredit apprenticeship training received through the grant as meeting national industry standards and provide quality assurance.

7) Can I apply for more than one grant?

We will consider only one application from each lead applicant. However, you may submit one application as lead applicant, and in addition may be included as a partner in one or more applications submitted where you are not the lead applicant.

Multiple applications from an organization as lead applicant are not allowed. If multiple applications are received from the same organization as lead applicant, the most recent application submitted that met the deadline will be reviewed. If the most recent application is disqualified for any reason, we will not replace it with an earlier application.

8) How is the grant program funded?

The *Apprenticeships: Closing the Skills Gaps* grant program is authorized under Section 414(c) of the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998 (ACWIA), as amended (codified at 29 U.S.C. 3224a) These grants are financed by a user fee paid by employers to bring foreign workers into the United States under the H-1B nonimmigrant visa program.

9) What amount of funding is available? Is there a limit?

Through this FOA, we expect to award up to $100 million in H-1B funds. Additional grants may be awarded depending on availability of funds. We expect to fund approximately 16-30 apprenticeship grants with individual grant amounts ranging from $500,000 to $6 million. The amount of grant funding an applicant can receive will depend on the proposed geographic scope of the apprenticeship project. Any grant application with a proposed value greater than $6 million or less than $500,000 will be deemed non-responsive and will not be considered.

10) How long are the grants active?

The period of performance is 48 months. This performance period includes all necessary implementation and start-up activities. These activities include: promoting apprenticeship programs within the targeted H-1B industry and/or occupation(s) on a local/regional, statewide, or national scale; developing or expanding training activities for apprentices; providing training to apprentices; and follow-up for tracking and reporting performance outcomes. We expect hiring appropriate grant project personnel and undertaking start-up activities will begin immediately and expect that grantees will begin enrolling apprentices no later than nine months after the date of grant award. For those applicants that propose a national scope for their project, we also expect that applicants will have begun expanding their apprenticeship program nationally by at least the beginning of the fourth year of the grant. We strongly encourage applicants to develop their project work plans and timelines accordingly. Grantees must plan to fully expend grant funds during the period of performance.

11) Who can be served by the grant?

The intent of this FOA is to fund projects that provide apprenticeship training and services to individuals whose employment status at the time of hire, and prior to enrollment in an apprenticeship program, are unemployed workers, underemployed workers, incumbent workers, and workers currently employed, including transitioning military personnel.

All participants must be 17 years of age or older and not currently enrolled in secondary school within a local educational agency. Training must result in advancement of an individual's skills along a career pathway into middle- and high-skilled occupations in H-1B occupations and industries.

Among the individuals eligible to receive apprenticeship training, those of particular interest include veterans, military spouses, transitioning service members, and underrepresented populations in apprenticeships, including women, people of color, and ex-offenders. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to include individuals who are not traditionally represented in apprenticeship programs and H-1B industries.

12) Are there minimum goals for apprentice service levels based on the amount of funding requested?

Yes. The *Apprenticeships: Closing the Skills Gaps* FOA sets minimum goals for the number of participants to be served during the grant period, based on the funding amount requested by applicants. These are minimum thresholds to ensure the largest number of participants possible can be served and applicants can and are encouraged to serve more participants than required.

- Applicants seeking funding between $500,000 and $1,000,000 , must serve at least 800 participants;
- Applicants seeking funding between $1,000,001 and $2,000,000, must serve at least 1,600 participants; and
- Applicants seeking funding between $2,000,001 and $4,000,000, must serve at least 3,200 participants.
- Applicants seeking funding between $4,000,001 and $6,000,000, must serve at least 5,000+ participants.

Applicants must propose participant targets based on the FOA requirements and that are appropriate to the geographic scope of the project. Applicants should refer to the scoring criteria for more information on how they will be scored on proposed targets.

13) What is the geographic scope of these grant programs?

Applicants may propose projects of the following geographic scopes:

• **Local/regional** means serving a part of one state or a contiguous area that includes multiple sites in a regional workforce area that may cross more than one state.
• **Statewide** means serving an entire state or multiple non-contiguous sites within one state.
• **National** means serving multiple states in multiple locations across the country. The service area does not need to be contiguous.

The geographic scope is the physical service area in which awarded applicants will serve participants.

14) Is there a match requirement?

Yes. This program requires cost sharing or matching funds. Such funds may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions and must be equal to 45 percent of the total Federal share of costs.

To be allowable as part of match, an expenditure must be an allowable charge for Federal grant funds and considered necessary and reasonable to accomplish the project or program objectives. DOL will make determinations of allowable costs

in accordance with the applicable Federal Cost Principles as indicated in Section IV.E. Funding Restrictions of the FOA.

Applicants are expected to fulfill the match amount specified on the SF-424 during the grant period of performance. If the match amount specified is not met or if a portion of the matching funds are found to be unallowable costs, the amount of DOL grant funds will be decreased on a dollar-for-dollar basis. If this occurs, the grantee will be required to repay funds to DOL.

Any resources contributed to the project in addition to cost sharing or matching funds will be considered leveraged resources. Section IV.B.2. Project Budget of the FOA provides more information on leveraged resources.

DOL encourages applicants to leverage additional resources beyond the required match to supplement grant activities. Applicants must count and document as leveraged resources any cash or in-kind commitments beyond 45 percent of the grant award amount required as matching funds.

Both matching and leveraged resources can come from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to: the private sector (e.g., businesses or industry associations); the investor community (e.g., angel networks or economic development entities); the philanthropic community (e.g., foundations); and the non-profit sector (e.g., community organizations, faith-based organizations, or education and training institutions). Non-Federal, public sector funds (e.g., from States or local governments) may be used for matching funds, if necessary.

15) Are there targeted industries and/or occupations under this FOA?

This grant program will fund projects that expand apprenticeships to industries in which apprenticeships may traditionally be unavailable or underrepresented by providing apprenticeship training that leads to well-paying, middle- and high-skilled jobs across a diversity of H-1B industries and occupations.

The Department is particularly interested in expanding apprenticeships in cybersecurity and AI occupations.

To help American industry reduce the need for skilled foreign workers under the H-1B visa program, applicants must design their apprenticeship programs to target one of the following:

Option 1: Occupations in an H-1B industry – Applicants may choose to expand apprenticeships in an H-1B industry. An H-1B industry is an industry in which the Department has certified H-1B visas for occupations in that industry. The list of H-1B industries that are acceptable for applications is found in Appendix A of the FOA. These industries are the information technology (IT) and IT-related industries, health care, and advanced manufacturing. Applicants may propose occupations across one or more H-1B industries, target multiple occupations

within an H-1B industry, or narrow their focus to a specific occupation within an H-1B industry.

If using Option 1, applicants that do not clearly identify they are serving one of the H-1B industries identified in Appendix A of the FOA will be found non-responsive and will not be considered.

Option 2: H-1B occupations – Applicants may choose to target a specific H-1B occupation(s) for which a significant number of H-1B visas have been certified, even if that occupation is not in one of the identified H-1B industries listed in Appendix A of the FOA. If this occupation is not within the H-1B industries identified in Appendix A of the FOA, the application must provide data showing that the H-1B occupation is one for which a significant number of H-1B visas have been certified. Applicants must use verifiable data to make this demonstration, such as data provided by DOL's Foreign Labor Certification Data Center. Applicants may propose to serve more than one H-1B occupation. The Department is particularly interested in expanding apprenticeships in cybersecurity and AI occupations.

If using Option 2, applicants that do not demonstrate they are proposing to serve an H-1B occupation and provide justification for a specific H-1B occupation(s) on the application will be found non-responsive and will not be considered.

16) What standards are required for apprenticeships funded through this grant program?

All apprenticeship programs funded through the grant program must include recognized standards of high-quality apprenticeship programs. Moreover, apprenticeship programs that 1) include a paid, work-based learning component and a required educational or instructional component that results in the issuance of an industry-recognized credential, and 2) meet appropriate quality assurance standards, can help fill current job vacancies.

Apprenticeship programs funded and developed under this grant program must have the following characteristics:

1. Paid Work Component
2. Work-based Learning and Mentorship
3. Educational and Instructional Component
4. Industry-Recognized Credentials Earned
5. Safety, Supervision, and Equal Employment Opportunity

17) What types of apprenticeship training can be provided under these grants?

Applicants may use grant funds to support the following training and training-related activities:

a) Establish New Apprenticeship Programs
Applicants may propose the development of new high-quality apprenticeship programs where an individual obtains workplace-relevant knowledge and skills that include both a paid, work-based learning component combined with an educational or instructional component. As an important indication of quality, programs must lead to an industry-recognized, portable credential. The educational or instructional component may also be designed to ensure that apprentices receive college credit for classroom or related instruction.

b) Expand Registered Apprenticeships Programs (RAPs)
Registered Apprenticeship Programs (29 CFR part 29) combine an educational or instructional component with a paid work-based learning component. Apprentices are hired and earn a wage upon registration, and receive progressive wages commensurate with their skill attainment throughout the training program. Upon successful completion of all phases of work-based learning and related instruction components, registered apprentices receive nationally recognized certificates of completion leading to long-term career opportunities. For more information on RAPs, please visit www.apprenticeship.gov.

c) Supportive Services
Grant funds may be used to provide some supportive services for training apprentices, up to 10 percent of grant funds. Supportive services are those necessary to enable an individual to participate in education and training activities funded through this grant program. Examples of such services may include transportation, childcare, dependent care, housing, and needs-related payments. Grantees may fund supportive services through various means, including, but not limited to, providing the actual supportive service (e.g., childcare), providing apprentices with a voucher for the service (e.g., public transportation cards or tokens), or providing a stipend directly to the apprentice. See Section IV.E.5. Use of Funds for Supportive Services of the FOA.

A wide range of activities may assist applicants in their efforts to deploy apprenticeship training, establish new apprenticeships, and/or expand existing apprenticeship programs. Accordingly, applicants may propose to use grant funds to undertake additional activities designed to create an environment for apprenticeship expansion and training opportunities, including, but not limited to those listed in Section I.E.1b) and 1c) of the FOA.

Note that Pre-Apprenticeship training is not an allowable activity funded through this grant program.

18) Does the instructional component for this project need to be a for-credit degree or certificate program?

Apprenticeship programs must provide or arrange for classroom or related instruction that is high-quality and adequate to help apprentices achieve their proficiency goals and earn certifications or equivalent credentials. As an important indication of quality, programs must lead to an industry-recognized, portable credential. The instructional components may be designed, but are not required, for apprentices to receive credit for classroom or related instruction.

19) What are key features of the credentials that must be earned by participants served through the grant?

Apprentices must earn industry-recognized credential(s) as part of their apprenticeship programs. The credential(s) earned in the program must be portable, and applicants must identify all of the portability benefits in the application. In sectors in which generally accepted credentials already exist, or will be issued by industry organizations or credentialing bodies, applicants must describe whether program completion will result in one or more of these existing credentials or qualify an apprentice to sit for relevant credentialing exams. In sectors where independent credentials exist and are not issued by the apprenticeship program, the applicant must describe the alternative credential(s) that apprentices may earn and information on who is offering the exam.

20) Are there any restrictions on using grant funds for work-based learning?

Organizations may only use grant funds to reimburse a portion of the apprentice's work-based learning costs for small employers (50 or fewer employees). For grants awarded under this FOA to small employers (50 or fewer employees), the negotiated reimbursement percentage of work-based learning costs may be as high as 50 percent of the participant's hourly wage for employers.

For those businesses that have more than 50 employees, grant funds may not be used to reimburse work-based learning costs.

Additionally, the following restrictions apply to work-based learning –

> a) Participant placements may only occur in private for-profit and nonprofit sectors (i.e., the grant does not allow for public sector placements); and
> b) No placement may be made in staffing agencies providing workers on a temporary basis to employers for which the agency receives compensation from an employer.

21) Can our grant project serve more than one industry sector?

Yes, applicants may propose apprenticeships in occupations across one or more H-1B industries, target multiple occupations within an H-1B industry, or narrow their focus to a specific occupation within an H-1B industry.

22) Can I co-enroll current Apprentices in this H-1B funded grant program?

Applicants may co-enroll current apprentices through this grant program provided those apprentices are not already enrolled in a grant program funded with H-1B funding.

23) How will applications be evaluated?

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

Criterion	Points (maximum)
1. Statement of Need (See Section IV.B.3.a.(1) Statement of Need)	12
2. Expected Outcomes, and Outputs (See Section IV.B.3.a.(2) Expected Outcomes and Outputs)	38
3. Project Design (See Section IV.B.3.a.(3) Project Design)	36
4. Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity (See Section IV.B.3.a.(4) Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity)	6
5. Past Performance – Programmatic Capability (See Section IV.B.3.a.(5) Past Performance – Programmatic Capability)	4
6. Budget and Budget Justification (See Section IV.B.2. Project Budget)	4
TOTAL	100

Section IV.B.3. Project Narrative of this FOA has several "section headers" (i.e., IV.B.3.a. (1) Statement of Need). Each of these "section headers" of the Project Narrative 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 has 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 against the selection criteria to determine the merit of applications. These criteria are based on the policy goals, priorities, and emphases set forth in this 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 selection of applications for funding. The panel results are advisory in nature and not binding on the Grant Officer. The Grant Officer reserves the right to make selections based solely on the final scores or to take into consideration other relevant factors when applicable. Such factors may include the geographic distribution of funds, distribution among industries/occupations, representation among new and expanded apprenticeship programs, and/or other relevant factors. The Grant Officer may consider any information that comes to his/her attention.

   24) Will projects focused on health care or other H-1B occupations than cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence receive the same number of points based on the scoring criteria?

No. Projects that propose to focus on cybersecurity or AI and provide a *detailed* description of these proposed apprenticeship programs and an explanation of how they meet current demand may earn an additional 2 points (See Section IV.B.3 (a) (1) iii, page 34 of the FOA).   Since the Department is particularly interested in expanding the apprenticeship model across H-1B industries for cybersecurity and artificial intelligence occupations, projects that do not focus on cybersecurity or AI do not have the opportunity to receive these points.