

Guide for Advocates and Community-Based Organizations

Workforce Pell expands access to federal financial aid for short-term workforce programs that prepare learners for employment and economic mobility. Strong oversight, reliable and transparent data, clear communication, and sustained collaboration can help ensure that Workforce Pell fulfills its promise of broader opportunity and lasting impact. Interested and impacted stakeholders, such as advocates, community-based organizations, and students and families, can play a crucial role in ensuring that this expanded access leads to meaningful outcomes for all students.

Advocates can engage with policymakers and inform implementation by elevating student experiences, monitoring program approval, and flagging unintended consequences. Community-based organizations can also help ensure that information about Pell-eligible short-term programs reaches learners who may not be connected to the formal education system.

How Advocates Can Act Now: A Checklist for Workforce Pell Engagement

Advocates at the state level can support implementation and adoption by engaging with decision-makers in the design and approval process and helping learners understand their options.

Early Rollout

- Reach out to your governor's office, state workforce board, and/or the higher education agency to understand the program approval process and how interested stakeholders can get involved.
- Partner with other stakeholders such as program providers, employers, college access networks, and advisers to elevate student and community perspectives and to raise questions about access, oversight, and coordination across agencies.
- Ask about opportunities to weigh in on implementation, such as submitting written comments or attending public hearings or advisory meetings on state implementation.
- Advocate for states to integrate Workforce Pell into existing higher education and workforce funding systems so that learners experience a coherent and simplified system.
- Encourage a thoughtful and careful approval of eligible programs that meet all requirements during the period between the 2026-27 and 2028-29 academic years.
- Encourage states to define [high-skill, high-wage](#) in a way that ensures learners can access good-paying jobs with opportunities for upward mobility and continued growth.
- Ask states to confirm that the necessary data infrastructure and data-sharing agreements are in place to ensure proper oversight of program outcomes.

Ongoing Oversight and Improvement

- Document early implementation challenges and share them with policymakers for corrective action.
- Track whether the state is collecting and publishing outcomes related to program participants' completion, employment, and earnings.
- Advocate for consistent and up-to-date data on completion, job placement, and earnings disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender.
- Advocate for resources that cover the full cost of the program for Pell-eligible students, including support for basic needs.

Building Stronger Education and Workforce Systems Over Time

- Advocate for policies that improve coordination across education, workforce, and economic development systems.
- Advocate for investments in student support services such as child care, transportation, and basic needs assistance.
- Promote accessible and publicly available data systems that connect education and workforce outcomes across programs.
- Advocate for clear pathways that inform learners on how short-term credentials can stack toward related degrees.

Advising Students on Workforce Pell

Students who otherwise meet the eligibility criteria for a Pell Grant can use their grant for a short-term workforce program, but it's important for students to be aware of all their options and how they fit into their overall goals. Advocates and help in the following ways:

- Encourage financial aid administrators, high school counselors, advisers, and college access networks to provide clear, accurate information about Workforce Pell eligibility, including which programs are eligible and how they compare to other options.
- Use trusted channels to inform students and communities about their options, including the need to fill out and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Ensure that students understand their [lifetime Pell Grant limit](#) of 12 semesters (or its equivalent), or roughly six academic years, of Pell eligibility, and that Workforce Pell will count toward that lifetime limit. If a student enrolls in a short-term program and uses their Pell funds, they will have fewer semesters of Pell eligibility if they choose to pursue a degree program in the future.

Workforce Pell for Justice-Impacted Populations

With Pell eligibility restored for incarcerated students, it's important for states to consider how Workforce Pell programs will operate in [prison education](#) settings and ensure that they are not the only option available for incarcerated learners. Due to structural barriers affecting time to completion, job placement, and earnings, combined with limited access to other financial aid, outcomes for incarcerated learners may differ. Justice-impacted populations continue to face systemic barriers after completing a program due to a lack of opportunities to develop their skills and barriers in the labor market. These barriers to access and success need to be accounted for when assessing the value of Workforce Pell for justice-impacted learners. The best policies and practices for implementing higher education in prison programs more broadly should prioritize the inclusion of student voices, ensure continuity of education through reentry, and protect against financial harm. These same considerations should be applied to Workforce Pell programs in prison.