



MEMORANDUM

September 4, 2026

WED 26-58 | Via Email

TO: Chief Executive Officers
Chief Instruction Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Chief Business Officers

FROM: Anthony Cordova, Vice Chancellor of Workforce and Economic Development

RE: Workforce Pell Grant: Provisional Program Eligibility and College Preparation

The Workforce Pell Grant program represents a significant expansion of federal financial aid eligibility for short-term, workforce-aligned programs and is a key priority for the State of California to prepare students for employment in high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations. This informational memorandum provides colleges with a comprehensive understanding of the new Workforce Pell Grants, including what is changing under federal law, how the state will manage implementation during the transition period, and what colleges should begin doing now to prepare. The intent is to support colleges in planning proactively, avoiding disruptions to programs and students, and ensuring alignment with state and federal expectations as guidance continues to evolve.

Workforce Pell Overview

Workforce Pell Grant program is designed to increase access to high-value, short-term workforce training that leads directly to employment. For California, this opportunity aligns directly with statewide workforce needs, equity goals, and the role of community colleges as the state's primary provider of workforce education.

The expansion of federal financial aid eligibility for Workforce Pell was enacted on July 4, 2025, through the Working Families Tax Cut Act, amending the Higher Education Act of 1965, Section 401(k). Beginning July 1, 2026, the Workforce Pell Grant program expands federal financial aid eligibility to include short-term, career-focused training programs that are between 150 to 599 clock hours of instruction delivered over a minimum of eight weeks and fewer than 15 weeks. This expansion to programs that traditionally have not been eligible for Pell funding is designed to increase access to workforce training that leads directly to employment, particularly for adult learners, working students, and individuals seeking rapid reskilling or upskilling.

Workforce Pell eligibility is based not only based on student financial need, but also on program-level design, outcomes, and performance. Colleges should anticipate that Workforce Pell implementation will require close coordination among academic affairs, workforce development, institutional research, and financial aid offices.

Key Workforce Pell Federal Eligibility Guidelines

Federal eligibility under Workforce Pell is grounded in a defined set of program characteristics and accountability standards intended to ensure student success and labor market value.

Program Duration and Structure

Programs must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be between 150 and 599 clock hours;
- Be a duration of at least 8 weeks and less than 15 weeks. This duration requirement excludes very short bootcamps and longer semester-based programs, focusing instead on intensive, job-aligned training;
- Lead to a recognized postsecondary credential, such as an industry-recognized certificate or state license;
- Meet quality and accountability measures which may include:
 - Alignment with state and regional labor market needs to prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations;
 - Meeting completion and job placement metrics;
 - Providing return on investment for students;
 - Meeting applicable tuition, fee, earnings, and value standards;
- Maintain required data reporting and compliance standards.
 - Have been in operation for at least one year as of June 30, 2026.
 - Be approved by the State of California; and
 - Be offered by a federally approved Title IV eligible, accredited institution, not through correspondence, study abroad, or direct assessment.

Student Eligibility

Students apply for Workforce Pell and other federal financial aid programs by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students must meet applicable eligibility criteria, including:

- Enrolled in an approved short-term program;
- Must have a high school diploma or equivalent, or participating in an Ability to Benefit program approved by the Chancellor's Office;
- Must be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen; and
- Meet other federal requirements for Pell and demonstrate financial need as determined by the FAFSA.

Accountability Metrics

To be approved, programs must meet the following accountability metrics:

- **Completion and Job Placement Rate (70/70 Rule):** At least 70% of students must complete the program within 150% of the normal program length, **AND** at least 70% of graduates must secure employment within 180 days of completion.
 - Programs that do not meet the 70/70 rule for any two out of three consecutive years will lose eligibility.
 - Students enrolled in a higher education program at the time of the calculation will not be counted as employed in the job placement rate.
- **Value-Added Earnings:** Calculated by the U.S. Department of Education as the difference between the program's median earnings for Pell Grant recipients who completed the program and are employed during the earnings measurement period and 150% of the federal poverty guideline applicable to a single individual. This requirement reflects a federal expectation that students will experience economic return on investment.
 - **Regional Cost of Living Adjustment:** The median graduate earnings are adjusted using state and metropolitan area Regional Price Parities (RPPs) published by the Bureau of Economic Analysis based on the program's location.
 - **Exclusion of Continuing Students:** Students who are enrolled in an institution of higher education during the earnings measurement period are excluded from the earnings calculation
 - **Tuition-to-Earnings Requirement:** A program's published tuition and fees may not exceed its calculated value-added earnings.
 - **Minimum Earnings Threshold:** Programs with zero or negative value-added earnings are ineligible for Workforce Pell Grant participation.

Colleges will be required to collect and submit student-level data to demonstrate compliance with federal accountability. Colleges should begin reviewing potentially eligible programs that meet the accountability requirements. Further guidance on data collection and submission requirements will be provided by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) at a later date.

Career Pathways and Stackable Credentials

Colleges must clearly document that Workforce Pell programs articulate into higher awards or be explicitly designated as credentials leading directly to licensure or employment. A core Chancellor's Office priority for the system is ensuring that the Workforce Pell Grant program strengthens, rather than fragments, career pathways.

Colleges should begin mapping:

- which short-term certificates lead directly to licensure or employment,
- how short-term certificates align with longer credit or licensure pathways,

- how stackable credentials support continued progression to related certificates, degrees, and career advancement opportunities,
- where program documentation or catalog language may need clarification.

Workforce Pell Implementation and Program Readiness

California will implement Workforce Pell beginning in the 2026–27 academic year while state agencies, colleges, and workforce partners continue developing the data-sharing, reporting, and administrative processes necessary to support the program.

State planning analysis indicates that approximately 300 programs may currently satisfy several of the principal federal Workforce Pell requirements. This estimate is intended to help assess implementation needs and does not constitute a determination that those programs are eligible. Before a program may be approved for Workforce Pell, it must satisfy applicable federal eligibility requirements and the additional requirements established under California law, [Education Code section 69872](#).

CSAC, on behalf of the Governor, is responsible for determining whether programs meet Workforce Pell requirements. CSAC will work with colleges and partner agencies, including the Chancellor’s Office, to develop the state’s program approval procedures, data submission requirements, and required documentation as aligned with federal guidance. Federal approval is also required for final program eligibility. Programs must meet all federal and state eligibility requirements in full for CSAC and federal authorization. Partial or threshold-based compliance is not sufficient for approval.

During the initial implementation, colleges should review their potentially eligible short-term programs, identify gaps in available program and outcomes data, and begin assembling the information necessary to demonstrate eligibility for Workforce Pell.

What Colleges Should Do Now

Colleges are encouraged to use 2026–27 as a planning and readiness year. Early preparation will reduce implementation risk and position colleges for long-term success.

Table 1: Institutional Implementation Checklist

Institutional Activities
Identify potential Workforce Pell eligible programs
Align outcomes with minimum federal articulation outcomes
Identify and document articulation options
Map out on-ramps to other forms of aid including state, institutional, employer support
Establish and support methods to track outcomes

Institutional Activities
Identify processes for collecting and maintaining student identifiers necessary to support federal earnings and employment outcome reporting requirements
Engaging employer partners early to support program design, placements, and outcome validation.
Clarifying internal governance, roles, and cross-functional ownership across financial aid, workforce, institutional research, and academic affairs.
Prepare for staff training and technical assistance to ensure consistent implementation and compliance.
Stay informed and support student and public awareness

Alignment with Cal Grant C

Cal Grant C, administered by CSAC, provides financial aid for students that are enrolled in occupational and technical training programs. Beginning with the 2026–27 academic year, Cal Grant C eligibility has been expanded to students enrolled in programs between 8–14 weeks in length. Expanded program eligibility aligns Workforce Pell and Cal Grant C to support students in career-focused short-term programs. More information regarding Cal Grant C eligibility and award amounts is available on the [CSAC website](#).

Upcoming Webinars and Technical Assistance

To support colleges in preparing for Workforce Pell implementation, the Chancellor's Office will provide informational webinars, technical assistance sessions, and implementation resources beginning during the 2026–27 academic year. These sessions are intended to help colleges understand federal and state requirements, prepare eligible programs for submission, and establish the local systems and processes necessary to support Workforce Pell participation.

The Chancellor's Office Workforce Pell System Webinar

The **first Workforce Pell System Webinar** will be Sept. 16, 2026, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. To register visit the [**Workforce Pell System Webinar link**](#).

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Colleges are strongly encouraged to include representatives from financial aid, workforce and economic development, academic affairs, institutional research, curriculum, and student services in Workforce Pell planning discussions. Early cross-functional coordination will help institutions successfully navigate implementation requirements and position eligible programs for future approval.

CSAC Workforce Pell and Cal Grant C Resources

The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) has developed resources to support institutions as they prepare for Workforce Pell implementation and understand the intersection of Workforce Pell and Cal Grant C program requirements. Colleges are encouraged to review the following materials:

- [CSAC Educational Opportunity Memorandum \(EOM 2026-17\): Workforce Pell and Cal Grant C Guidance](#)
- [Recorded Webinar: Workforce Pell and Cal Grant C Overview](#)

Additional Guidance and Technical Assistance

Colleges will receive ongoing support and updates as implementation guidance is finalized and application tools are available. The Chancellor's Office will issue additional guidance and technical assistance related to:

- The Workforce Pell application and submission portal
- Program submission and documentation standards
- Reporting, tracking and outcome verification process and requirements

The Chancellor's Office is currently in negotiations with the Employment Development Department to allow for redisclosure of earnings data directly to the colleges. In the interim, supportive data for exploring potential eligibility is available by TOP Code in the new [Labor Markets and Outcomes Insights](#) section of [DataVista](#) (which includes a brief [user guide](#), an [initial FAQ](#), and a [recorded webinar](#) and [slides](#) introducing the new features to support district and college stakeholders in using the new section) while the Chancellor's Office works to develop additional resources for districts and colleges. For questions about the available information, please contact DataVista@CCCCO.edu.

When fully implemented, Workforce Pell will expand access to high-value workforce training, reduce financial barriers for students, and strengthen alignment between education and labor-market outcomes. The state's approach reflects a commitment to shared responsibility, thoughtful implementation, and sustained support for colleges.

Chancellor's Office Contact

For questions or additional guidance regarding this memorandum, please contact Dean of Education Services and Support, Allison Beer, at ABeer@CCCCO.edu and Dean of Workforce and Economic Development, Cheri Fortin, at CFortin@CCCCO.edu.

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