California Community Colleges

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Workforce Pell Readiness FAQ

This document was developed to address frequently asked questions related to the implementation of Workforce Pell. While several FAQs exist, this resource is intended to answer questions raised by California Community Colleges during the initial rollout and implementation process.

For more specific information about program eligibility, please refer to the FAQs prepared by the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid Office and the California Student Aid Commission.

If you have any questions not addressed in this document, please email WorkforcePell@CCCCO.edu.

Last updated: Oct. 26, 2026

Identifying Eligible Programs

1. What are the program eligibility requirements?

Eligible workforce programs are undergraduate programs offered by eligible California public institutions that:

- Lasts at least 8 weeks, but fewer than 15 weeks of instruction.
- Consists of 150–599 clock hours, 4–15 semester/trimester hours, or 6–23 quarter hours.
- Leads to a recognized postsecondary credential.
- Has operated for at least one year preceding the date an institution begins the application.
- Meets completion and job-placement rate minimum requirements (at least 70%)
- Aligns with a state-identified high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupation.
- Meets value-added earnings requirements (tuition and fees must not exceed the calculated earnings benefit).
- Does not include correspondence, remedial courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses, study abroad, or direct assessment coursework.

2. How should colleges determine which programs to submit for Workforce Pell eligibility?

Colleges can use local educational and employment outcome data to identify programs that meet the Workforce Pell the eligibility requirements. Colleges must submit an application to CSAC, which is responsible for making the state eligibility determinations. Once approved by CSAC, colleges must subsequently submit an application to the U.S. Department of Education for final approval.

Colleges interested in pursuing Workforce Pell eligibility are encouraged to contact the Chancellor's Office early in the process at WorkforcePell@CCCCO.edu.

3. Can programs offered in credit hours, rather than clock hours, qualify for Workforce Pell?

Yes. Workforce Pell eligibility is not limited to programs measured in clock hours. Programs offered in semester or quarter credit hours may also qualify.

4. Can noncredit programs qualify for Workforce Pell?

Noncredit programs may qualify if they meet applicable federal and state eligibility requirements, including requirements related to instructional hours, recognized credentials, and pathways to further education.

Application and Approval Process

5. Must colleges notify their systemwide office before applying for Workforce Pell eligibility?

Yes. Colleges should notify their system office of their intent to apply here. California Education Code § 69872(c)(2) requires the CCC Chancellor's Office and CSU Chancellor's Office, and encourages the UC Office of the President, to coordinate application submissions on behalf of colleges. The coordination is intended to improve efficiency, support application quality, and eliminate duplicative submissions.

To notify the Chancellor's Office of their intent to apply for Workforce Pell eligibility, colleges must complete a brief notification form before submitting their application through the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) portal. The form is intended to inform the Chancellor's Office of a college's intent to apply and provide information that can support coordination and implementation efforts. Colleges must still submit their formal application through the CSAC portal.

6. How long does the Workforce Pell program approval process take?

California law requires CSAC to issue an eligibility determination within 90 days of receiving a college's request for an eligibility determination and a completed program participation agreement, including the required supporting documentation.

Following state approval from CSAC, colleges must submit an application to the U.S. Department of Education through the E-App for final approval. The Department of Education has not specified a timeline for approval. E-App review and approval typically varies from a few weeks to a few months.

Program Length and Eligibility Requirements

7. How can colleges document that a program meets the Workforce Pell length requirement?

Colleges may use their published schedules of classes to document a program's instructional credit or clock hours and program length.

8. Does a program need to have been offered for at least one year before applying for Workforce Pell eligibility?

Yes. Federal regulations require that a program meet Workforce Pell's length requirements for at least 12 months before the college applies for federal program eligibility. This means the program must have been offered in a format that meets the required length of at least 8 but fewer than 15 weeks of instruction during that period.

For state approval from CSAC, if a college recently shortened an existing program from 16 weeks to 14 weeks to meet Workforce Pell requirements, the 12-month period begins when the program starts. The college cannot count the time it operated in the longer format toward the 12-month requirement.

Programs do not need to run continuously throughout the year, but they must meet the applicable requirements whenever they are offered during the 12-month period.

Completion and Employment Outcomes

9. How is the program completion rate calculated for Workforce Pell eligibility?

Colleges must demonstrate a program completion rate of at least 70% within 150% of the program's published length. To calculate the program completion rate, the number of students that completed the program within the 150% timeframe is divided by the number of students enrolled in the program.

10. How is the job placement rate calculated for Workforce Pell, and what if my college needs assistance obtaining this data?

The job placement rate is calculated as the percentage of students that are employed during the second quarter after completing the program. A job placement rate of at least 70% is required. Administrative data, including wage records, may be used as documentation for the calculation. Colleges can email workforcepell@cccco.edu for support obtaining job placement data.

Starting with the 2029–30 award year, federal regulations change, requiring the employment to be in the occupation for which the program prepares students or in a comparable high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupation.

11. Should dual enrollment students or students who continue into another educational program be included in the 70% completion and employment-rate calculations?

Colleges should refer to the federal methodology to determine which students are included in the completion-rate calculations.

Documentation and Supporting Evidence

12. What evidence can colleges provide to demonstrate that a credential is stackable?

Colleges may use their catalog to document how a short-term certificate connects to other educational programs.

Supporting documentation may include:

- Catalog descriptions or other documented connection to additional credentials that may be earned after the workforce program.
- Degree maps showing a sequence of credentials or educational programs.

13. What evidence can colleges provide to demonstrate that a credential is portable?

Potential supporting documentation may include:

- Articulation agreements specifying the credit earned from a workforce program.
- List the recognized postsecondary credential that students will earn upon workforce program completion.
- Employer recognition across multiple employers.

14. What evidence can colleges provide to demonstrate that employers have verified that the program teaches skills that meet hiring requirements?

- Employer letters of support
- Evidence of employer engagement in program through development, advisory councils
- Formal endorsement or recognition by employer-facing industry association that represents two or more employers.
- Survey responses provided by industry partners
- Job postings
- Joint labor managements partnerships

Additional Resources

- CSAC Workforce Pell Webpage
- CSAC Technical Guide (PDF)
- Federal Student Aid Workforce Pell FAQ (PDF)
- CSAC Workforce Pell Grant Program FAQ (PDF)