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State Quality Approaches to Short-Term Credentials: Examples from a Scan of Existing State Funding Programs

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The importance of states in setting quality standards for non-degree credentials (NDCs) has long been known (Duke-Benfield et al., 2019; Cruse et al., 2023; Van Noy et al., 2024; Peterson & Van Noy, 2024). Setting quality standards is particularly urgent now, as Workforce Pell implementation has largely been left to states (Rivera & Reid, 2025). Existing state funding programs throughout the country form a basis for developing the quality standards urgently needed for Workforce Pell implementation. In this brief, we explore how these established state funding programs for short-term credential pathways seek to promote quality through a variety of approaches that can inform Workforce Pell implementation. While not a comprehensive review, this scan of publicly available information from these leading states contains important insight into their approaches to quality, including guidelines for high-demand, high-skill, and/or high-wage; placement or earnings thresholds; employer engagement; and lists of eligible programs and/or credentials.

This scan focused on established state funding programs for short-term credentials that have been in operation in recent years, based on HCM Strategists' 2023 report on state funding of short-term credential pathways (Murphy, 2023). We searched each program's website to gather information on quality standards associated with funding. Among those, 42 states discussed quality standards on its website. This information was coded based on whether the state used any of the following quality approaches:

- processes for identifying the content of the terms high-demand, high-skill, and/or high-wage
- placement rate or earnings thresholds
- process for working with employers
- list of eligible programs and/or credentials

Our final sample contained 32 state programs whose websites contained information that fell into at least one of these four quality approaches. For an overview of which programs aligned with which quality approach, see Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of Publicly Available Quality Criteria by State Program

State	Funding Program Name	High-demand, high-skill, high-wage	Wages	Employer Engagement	List of Programs/ Credentials
AL	Alabama Workforce Stabilization Grant		X	X	X
AR	Workforce Challenge Scholarship				X
CO	Career Development Incentive Program	X			X
CT	Career ConneCT				X
FL	Open Door Grant (Formerly Rapid Credentialing Grant)	X			X
FL	Senate Bill 98 (2021)		X		X
IA	Gap Tuition Assistance				X
IA	Kibbie Grant (Iowa Skilled Workforce Shortage Tuition Grant)				X
IL	Workforce Equity Initiative (Now: Workforce Empowerment Initiative)	X	X		
IN	Workforce Ready Grant			X	X
KS	Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K)				X
LA	Reboot Your Career				X
LA	M. J. Foster Promise Program				
LA	Jump Start				X
MD	Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship			X	
MI	Michigan New Jobs Training Program		X	X	
MO	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	X			X
MO	One Start Credential Training Program (House Bill 417)			X	
MN	Workforce Development Scholarship	X			X
NC	Reinforcement and Investment to Strengthen the Economy (RAISE) Scholarship	X	X		X
NC	Short-Term Workforce Development Grant Program	X	X		X
OH	House Bill 33, Section R.C. 3333.34 (135th General Assembly)			X	
OH	Short-Term Certificate Grant Program	X			
OH	Individual Microcredential Assistance Program (IMAP)				X
OH	TechCred Program	X		X	X
TX	House Bill 8 (2023), Revised State Community College Funding Model	X	X		
TX	Returned-Value Formula at TSTC Campuses	X	X		
VA	New Economy Workforce Credential Grant (FastForward)	X			X
VA	FastForward Wraparound Services			X	X
WA	Worker Retraining Program	X			
WA	Opportunity Grant Program	X	X		X
WV	Workforce Development Component of the Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student (HEAPS) Grant Program				X

High-Demand/Skill/Wage

States held a common goal of making sure funded programs led to jobs in high-demand, high-skill, and/or high-wage industries, as driven by Perkins and WIOA state plans. Programs most often listed that they were looking for potential students to earn credentials in high-demand careers, with 28 explicitly stating that was their focus. Credentials that led to high wages were the second-most common, with eight programs citing that as a priority. High-skill work was the least mentioned of the three categories, with only one program mentioning the importance of credentials leading to high-skill careers. Illinois' Workforce Equity Initiative was the only state program that listed all three—high-demand, high-skill, and high-wage—as priorities.

However, programs' websites very often did not include a clear definition of or criteria for determining what they considered "high-demand," "high-skill," or "high-wage." The information that was made available revealed a range of approaches. Reports and research were the main way that states determined what was considered "high-demand." For example, Colorado used the 2024 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report. Other states consulted regional workforce boards or economic development entities for information about their local and regional needs. Future research will help us understand the various ways these terms are defined among states and the criteria associated with those definitions.

Wage Thresholds

Another approach to promoting quality is to set wage thresholds for the jobs associated with programs. Overall, ten programs offered information on wage thresholds or wages associated with their programs. States commonly used minimum wage or what a high school graduate would typically make as a threshold. Unsurprisingly, states differed in their wage thresholds, largely due to differences in costs of living. For example, Washington State required a minimum pay of \$16.66/hour across the state, whereas Alabama sought a minimum of \$12/hour. Table 3 includes more details on the criteria states used to determine their wage thresholds.

Table 3: Criteria for High-Wage Determination by State Program

State	Program	Wage/Earnings Criteria
AL	Alabama Workforce Stabilization Grant Program	Minimum wage of \$12/hour
FL	Senate Bill 98 (2021)	At or above \$14.00/hour minimum wage
IL	Workforce Equity Initiative (Now: Workforce Empowerment Initiative)	30% above the living wage
IN	Workforce Ready Grant	No specific threshold, but they share pay for different programs
MI	Michigan New Jobs Training Program	175% of the minimum wage (\$13.73/hour at the time of writing)
NC	Reinforcement and Investment to Strengthen the Economy (RAISE) Scholarship	Family-sustaining wage, defined as 300% or more of the federal poverty line
NC	Short-Term Workforce Development Grant Program	Family-sustaining wage
TX	House Bill 8, Revised State Community College Funding Model	Targets credentials of value that empower a student to earn enough within 10 years to pay for the cost of their education and surpass the earnings of a typical high school graduate
TX	Returned-Value Formula at TSTC Campuses	Aggregate of actual student salaries for 5 years that exceed minimum wage (\$7.25/hour at the time of writing)
WA	Opportunity Grant Program	Statewide \$16.66/hour or more

Employer Engagement

Fewer states explicitly discussed the role of employers or employer engagement in the work they were doing. Table 4 shows that only eight state programs discussed employer engagement in some capacity. The most common forms of employer engagement we encountered in our data were descriptions of employers receiving funds for or being reimbursed for costs associated with enrolling their employees in training. For example, in Michigan, employers who created new jobs and hired new employees would get free training at the local community college. Some employers were also provided with funding or reimbursement for providing their own in-house training. Funding was more likely to be disbursed directly to the educational institutions that maintained these relationships and provided the training than it was to be disbursed directly to employers.

Table 4: Employer Engagement by State Program

State	Program Name	Description of Employer Engagement
AL	Alabama Workforce Stabilization Grant	Program provides Mental Health First Aid training to employers to support workers' mental health needs
IN	Workforce Ready Grant	Program provides reimbursement to employers for enrolling employees in eligible training
MD	Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship	Students can be registered as apprentices, but their programs must be administered through a community college
MI	Michigan New Jobs Training Program	Program includes employers who create new jobs and hire new employees who get free training at the local community colleges
MO	One Start Credential Training Program (House Bill 417)	Program helps employers offset the cost of industry-related employee credentialing; funding goes to employers
OH	House Bill 699, Section R.C. 3333.34 (126th General Assembly)	Program supports employers to offer specialized training programs
OH	Ohio TechCred	Program supports employers' efforts to have their technology credential(s) recognized and approved by industry
VA	FastForward Wraparound Services	Program includes employers who serve community partners, sharing their needs and the kinds of training and certifications they need for their workforce

Lists of Eligible Programs/Credentials

Of the state programs we looked at, 24 provided lists of programs/credentials for consumers to use to find the right program fit. Most provided a comprehensive list users could download (e.g., PDF file, Excel spreadsheet) from their website. However, two state programs' websites offered more interactive search features: For example, the Missouri Fast Track Workforce Incentive page had an interactive search feature where consumers could search for eligible programs/credentials by either institution or program.

Table 5: Eligible Program/Credentials Lists by State Program

State	Program Name	Format of Eligible Programs/Credentials Information Available on the State Website	Link
AL	Alabama Workforce Stabilization Grant	<i>Participation Guide</i> handbook	AWSP Handbook
AR	Workforce Challenge Scholarship	Excel spreadsheet	AR Workforce Challenge
CO	Career Development Incentive Program	Downloadable Google Spreadsheet	Colorado CDIP Google Sheet
CT	CareerConneCT	Downloadable PDF	CareerConneCT PDF
FL	Senate Bill 98 (2021)	Master list of credentials displayed on the website	Florida's Master Credential List
FL	Open Door Grant (Formerly Rapid Credentialing Grant)	Downloadable PDF	Open Door Approved Programs PDF

IA	Gap Tuition Assistance	Downloadable Excel spreadsheet	Gap Tuition Assistance Programs
IA	Kibbie Grant (Skilled Workforce Shortage Tuition Grant)	Downloadable Excel file	Kibbie Grant Programs
IL	Workforce Equity Initiative (Now: Workforce Empowerment Initiative)	Displayed on the website	Workforce Equity Programs
IN	Workforce Ready Grant	Displayed on the website	Workforce Ready Grant Programs
KS	Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K)	Downloadable PDF	Accelerating Opportunity Programs PDF
LA	Reboot Your Career	Downloadable PDF	Reboot Your Career Programs PDF
LA	Jump Start Louisiana	Master list of credentials displayed on the website	Jump Start Louisiana Programs
MN	Workforce Development Scholarship	Downloadable PDF	Workforce Development Programs PDF
MO	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Interactive tool	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Search Tool
NC	RAISE Scholarship	Master list of credentials displayed on the website	Master Credentials List
NC	Short-Term Workforce Development Grant Program	On page 4 of a Final Report downloadable as a PDF	Final Report PDF
OH	TechCred Program	Master list of credentials displayed on the website	TechCred Master Credentials List
OH	IMAP	Search tool for individuals to find training	IMAP Microcredentials List
VA	FastForward	Downloadable document	FastForward Program List
VA	FastForward Wraparound Services	Master list of credentials displayed on the website	FastForward Credentials List
WA	Opportunity Grant Program	Downloadable Google Drive spreadsheet	Opportunity Grant Google Sheet
WV	Workforce Development Component of the Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student (HEAPS) Grant Program	Master list displayed on the website	HEAPS Eligible Program List

Next Steps

This scan provides some examples of state approaches to quality in their short-term training programs. While by no means comprehensive, it is meant to help inform the work of states moving forward with Workforce Pell implementation and developing broader state systems by providing a quick snapshot of what some leading states are doing. The appendix to this brief provides short descriptions of the state programs we examined and their quality approaches. As state systems to ensure quality in short-term credential quality develop and mature, more examples are emerging to guide the field (Murphy, 2026). Ongoing research will be important to continue to track and document these processes to promote the sharing of lessons across states, particularly as states seek to implement Workforce Pell in tandem with the development of their broader quality systems.

Appendix: Summaries of State Quality Approaches

Alabama Workforce Stabilization Program

The Alabama Workforce Stabilization program targeted both individuals and employers. Individuals had to be directly affected by COVID-19 to be eligible for the program. The program helped employers avoid layoffs by recruiting incumbent workers who needed upskilling and supporting the development of new employee talent pipelines. Their main goal was to support Alabama workers who had been displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic in gaining training in high-demand industries. The other goal of the program was to provide wraparound services for all participants through community partnerships with various organizations.

Alabama's high-demand industries included healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, transportation, distribution/logistics, and construction. The program's website did not provide information on its "high-demand" criteria. The wage criteria for participation in the program was a minimum pay of \$12/hour. Employers who paid wages at or above the threshold were targeted by the program to enroll their incumbent workers who needed upskilling. As part of the program's wraparound services, a unique and notable community partner was VitAL, which partnered with employers to provide Mental Health First Aid training to support workers' mental health. An eligible list of programs/credentials was provided in the program's *Participation Guide* handbook, which was available on the program's home page.

Relevant Links

Community College Overview: <https://www.accs.edu/awsp/>

VitAL Alabama Overview: <https://vitalalabama.com/projects/awsp/>

Arkansas Workforce Challenge Scholarship

The Arkansas Workforce Challenge scholarship was created in 2017 as part of Act 613 in the legislative session. It provided scholarships for critical workforce training as well as for credit-bearing, noncredit, and workforce training programs in healthcare, information technology, and industry.

The scholarship focused on high-demand programs, but the website provided no clear criteria for defining what counted as "high-demand." There were no wage criteria publicly available, and it's not clear if/how employers were involved. A list of eligible programs/credentials was provided on the website.

Relevant Links

Arkansas Workforce Challenge: <https://adhe.edu/institutions/arkansas-workforce-challenge>

Colorado Career Development Incentive Program

The Colorado Career Development Incentive Program was established by the state legislature in 2016 with the support of Colorado Succeeds and other partners. Workforce programs included qualified industry credential programs, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships; workplace training programs (internships); and computer science advanced placement (AP) courses. The program provided financial incentives to

school districts and charter schools that encouraged high school students (grades 9–12) to complete various workforce programs.

The list of approved programs, available on the state’s website as a Google Sheet, was based on Colorado labor market data; existing postsecondary programs that corresponded with high-growth, high-demand occupations; and business/industry feedback. The state produced the *2024 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*, which explored issues related to the demand for and supply of talent in Colorado, highlighting the need for workers for high-demand industries. No wage criteria were explicitly defined on the program’s website, and there was no explicit description of how employers were engaged in the program.

Relevant Links

Career Development Incentive: <https://ed.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/hb18-1266>

Connecticut Career ConneCT

The Connecticut Career ConneCT program was created by Governor Lamont and the Connecticut General Assembly to support workers displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic by funding short-term (5- to 20-week) training programs in high-demand fields. It provided training for entry-level and middle-skill jobs that were part of career pathways in the following industries: manufacturing, healthcare, information technology (IT), green jobs, infrastructure/construction, life sciences, business services, and transportation (e.g., CDL). These were considered high-demand fields, but the program’s website didn’t provide clear criteria for making that determination.

The program’s website did not clearly define wage criteria or describe how employers were involved in the program. It did provide a list of eligible programs and credentials.

Relevant Links

Career ConneCT: https://portal.ct.gov/careerconnect/knowledge-base/categories/careerconnect-program/about-careerconnect?language=en_US

Florida Open Door Grant (Formerly Rapid Credentialing Grant)

The Florida Open Door Grant provided funds to support learners who were completing credit or noncredit training leading to short-term, high-demand credentials. It also provided funding for CTE programs at Career Centers and Florida College System institutions. The goals of the program were as follows: (1) create and sustain a demand-driven supply of credentialed workers for high-demand occupations, (2) expand the affordability of workforce training programs and credentialing, and (3) increase the interest of current and future workers in short-term, high-demand CTE credentialing and certificate programs.

The original high-demand industries/fields for the former Rapid Credentialing Grant were determined by regional workforce boards. There were no updated wage threshold criteria on the Open Door Grant’s website, and there was no clear discussion of how employers were involved in the grant. A list of eligible programs/credentials was available on the website as a PDF document for download.

Relevant Links

Open Door Grant Program: <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/funding-opportunities/opendoor.shtml>

Florida Senate Bill 98 (2021)

Florida Senate Bill 98 **(2021)** established a Credentials Review Committee in order to develop a returned-value funding model for the Florida College System institutions. It required one-third of performance funding to be based on rewarding student job placement, and the remaining two-thirds to be based on student earnings. The focus was especially on increasing the economic mobility of underserved populations.

The two-thirds share of funding determined by wages was based on a weighted system whereby the aggregate student wages that exceeded the minimum wage impacted institution funding. A list of eligible credentials was included as a master list of credentials on the state website.

Relevant Links

Workforce Related Programs: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2021/98/ByVersion>

Iowa Gap Tuition Assistance

The Gap Tuition Assistance program in Iowa was created as part of the Skilled Worker and Job Creation Fund to provide funding to community colleges for tuition assistance. It was specifically for applicants to complete continuing education or short-term, non-Pell eligible training programs leading to employment in in-demand occupations. It covered for-credit programs that led to certificates, diplomas, or a degree.

The program was focused on high-demand occupational training, but its website did not offer a clear definition of “high-demand.” There were no discussions on the program’s website of wage requirements or employer engagement, but there was a list of eligible programs/credentials.

Relevant Links

Gap Tuition Assistance: <https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/community-colleges/iowa-skilled-worker-job-creation-fund/gap-tuition-assistance-program>

Iowa Kibbie Grant (Skilled Workforce Shortage Tuition Grant)

The Kibbie Grant targeted students enrolled in career or technical education programs at Iowa community colleges. Eligibility for the grant was determined by FAFSA, and eligible programs had to be at least 15 weeks in duration. The grant website provided a list of eligible programs/credentials, but it did not provide any wage data or employer engagement information.

Relevant Links

Kibbie Grant: <https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/financial-aid/scholarships-grants/kibbie-grant>

Illinois Workforce Equity Initiative (Now: Workforce Empowerment Initiative)

The Illinois Workforce Empowerment Initiative (known as the Workforce Equity Initiative at the time of HCM's study) was an innovative partnership between the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), 20 community colleges, and the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus. Funding for the program came from the ICCB. The program was meant to provide participants with training to pursue high-skilled, high-wage, and in-demand jobs. The goal of the program was to create or expand training to address skills gaps for individuals experiencing poverty.

High-demand industries included in the program were transportation, computer technology, manufacturing, healthcare, repair, construction, services, and education. To define "high-demand," "high-skill," and "high-wage," they used the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Occupational Outlook Handbook* search tool. High-wage jobs included those that paid 30% above the Illinois living wage. Employer engagement with the program wasn't explicitly discussed on the initiative's website, but a list of eligible programs/credentials was available.

Relevant Links:

Workforce Empowerment Initiative: <https://www.illinoiswei.org/>

Indiana Workforce Ready Grant

The Indiana Workforce Ready Grant was part of the Next Level Jobs program, which came out of former Governor Holcomb's Next Level Indiana agenda. The grant paid the tuition and mandatory fees for eligible high-value certificate programs at a number of higher education institutions in Indiana. Institutions of higher education, employers, and businesses could all apply to become training providers. The program covered both credit and noncredit certificates.

Qualifying high-value certificate programs were chosen based on employer demand, wages, job placements, and program completion rates. These included programs in advanced manufacturing, building and construction, health sciences, information technology and business services, and transportation and logistics. Wage thresholds for participation in the program were not provided on the grant website. The program provided employers with reimbursements for training their employees through the Employer Training Grant. A list of eligible programs/credentials was available on the website.

Relevant Links

Workforce Ready Grant: <https://www.in.gov/dwd/nextleveljobs/workforce-ready-grant/>

Kansas Accelerating Opportunity (AO-K)

Accelerating Opportunity Kansas (AO-K) was developed and implemented by the Kansas Board of Regents and the Department of Commerce to change the delivery system for adult education in Kansas. It transformed that system by combining career and technical education with adult basic skills instruction within a career pathways framework. In the program, learners finished short-term certificate programs that were aligned with labor market needs.

The program's website provided no clear criteria for what counted as "in-demand." There were also no wage criteria, nor any descriptions of employer engagement. There was, however, a list of eligible programs and credentials.

Relevant Links:

Overview: <https://www.kansasregents.gov/component/content/article/256-accelerating-opportunity-kansas?Itemid=700>

Policy Manual: https://www.kansasregents.gov/resources/2025_AO-K_policy_manual.pdf

Louisiana M. J. Foster Promise Program

The M. J. Foster Promise Program, which was named after former Louisiana Governor Mike J. Foster, provided financial assistance to eligible students who were enrolled in a qualified program (see list below under "Relevant Links") at a two-year public college, university, or an accredited proprietary school licensed by the Board of Regents. No goals for the program were explicitly stated on the program's website.

Students could pursue an associate degree or a shorter-term postsecondary education credential required for high-demand, high-wage occupations aligned with Louisiana's workforce priorities. High-demand and high-wage industry sectors included construction, information technology, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics. The program's website offered no explicit criteria for defining "high-demand" or "high-wage" and no description of how the program engages with employers. A list of eligible programs/credentials was available as a PDF on the website.

Relevant Links

State Website: <https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/mjfofoster/>

Main Program Website: <https://mjfofosterpromise.com/>

Qualified Programs: <https://mylosfa.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/MJ-Approved-Programs.pdf>

Louisiana Jump Start

Jump Start was the state's innovative career and technical education program. The program prepared students to lead productive adult lives by supporting their efforts to further their education and earn credentials in high-wage and high-demand career sectors.

There were no clear criteria for defining "high-wage" or "high-demand" on the program's website, nor was there any description of how employers engage with the program. The website did include a list of eligible programs/credentials.

Relevant Links

Louisiana Jump Start: <https://doe.louisiana.gov/school-system-leaders/ccr/jump-start>

Maryland Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship

The Workforce Development Sequence Scholarship provided financial aid to students who were enrolling in an approved noncredit certificate program that led to apprenticeships, employment, licensure, or job skill

enhancement at participating Maryland Community Colleges. The scholarship had to be used at Maryland Community Colleges to cover expenses that had not been met through other grants or scholarships from the state or an employer.

There were no publicly accessible criteria for defining which programs were included. The scholarship's website did not contain information on wage criteria, but it did address employer engagement in terms of its support of registered apprentices whose education was not fully covered by employers. There was no list of programs/credentials on the website.

Relevant Links

Maryland Higher Education Commission Website:

https://mhec.maryland.gov/preparing/pages/financialaid/programdescriptions/prog_workforce.aspx

Michigan New Jobs Training Program

The Michigan New Jobs Training Program provided flexible funding to businesses moving to or expanding in Michigan to meet employee training and development needs. It was a local program in which individual community colleges partnered with employers and local economic development entities to help support job creation. It was open to all industries and businesses regardless of size. The training for the newly hired workers was paid for by capturing the state income tax associated with the new employees' wages. This program was an economic development tool intended to motivate businesses to move to Michigan and create new and well-paying jobs.

Since the program was open to all industries and businesses irrespective of size, there was no specific focus on high-demand/wage/skill. However, employers had to pay 175% of the state's minimum wage to be eligible for participation. The program worked directly with employers who were creating new, well-paying jobs by expanding within or relocating to Michigan. Funding covered expenses related to training those new employees. There was no publicly accessible list of programs/credentials available on their website.

Relevant Links

New Jobs Training Program: <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/services/new-jobs-training-program/>

Minnesota Workforce Development Scholarship

The Minnesota Workforce Development Scholarship was developed in 2017 and was funded by the Minnesota Legislature. It was piloted in 2018–19 with \$1 million and expanded annually to reach \$4.5 million for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023. The scholarship provided free aid of \$2,500 per academic year, up to a maximum of \$5,000 over four semesters, to students who enrolled in qualified programs. The scholarship's website stated no explicit programmatic goals.

Participants had to be Minnesota residents and be enrolled in training in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, construction management, early childhood, healthcare, information technology, public safety, or transportation. These industries and programs of focus were developed using the Department of

Employment and Economic Development job vacancy survey. Colleges could also offer scholarships to students in one additional program area related to occupations that were in high demand in their region. The state's 2023 report presented some outcomes of the scholarship program. It reported that among the 934 scholarship recipients who earned an academic award in FY2020 or FY2021, 749 began employment within 12 months of graduation—more than half of those within three months. About 274 found employment within three months, and 153 were already employed when they graduated. A list of eligible programs/credentials was available for download as a PDF on the scholarship's website.

Relevant Links

2023 Report: <https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2023/mandated/230551.pdf>

Missouri Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant

The Missouri Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant encouraged adults to pursue a certificate, degree, or industry-recognized credential in an area designated as “high-need.” It was a financial aid program meant to address workforce needs. The grant could be used by Missouri students 25 and older, or adults under 25 who had not been enrolled in an educational program, including high school, in at least two years. The program was meant to help the state meet its goal of 60% of working-aged adults having a high-quality certificate or degree by 2030.

The high-demand occupations of focus were identified using long-term occupational projections developed by the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC). The programs for Fiscal Year 2023 were health professions, business/accounting, transportation, and computer science. There was no explicit wage threshold discussed on the grant's website, nor was there an explicit discussion of employer engagement in the program. An interactive tool on the website allowed the public to access a list of eligible credentials/programs.

Relevant Links

FastTrack Workforce Incentive Grant: <https://dhewd.mo.gov/initiatives/fast-track-workforce-incentive-grant>

Missouri One Start Credential Training Program (House Bill 417)

Missouri One Start was a grant that helped employers cover the cost of industry-related employee credentialing. Employers applied directly to the program, and once an employer was accepted, their employee(s) or prospective employee(s) had 12 months to earn their credential. The employees or prospective employees had to be Missouri residents. Employers could receive \$2,000 maximum per employee, up to a fiscal-year maximum of \$30,000, for eligible training costs.

The industries that Missouri One Start supported included advanced manufacturing, aerospace, ag tech and food solutions, automotive, biosciences, energy solutions, financial and professional services, geospatial, headquarters locations, health and science services, information technology, and logistics and distribution. The program did not explain its criteria for industry inclusion on its website, nor did it discuss any wage threshold for participation. It was

a grant that helped employers offset the cost of industry-related employee credentialing; funding went directly to employers. There was no list of eligible programs/credentials available on the website.

Relevant Links

Credential Training Program: <https://missourionestart.com/credential-training-program/>

North Carolina Reinforcement and Investment to Strengthen the Economy (RAISE) Scholarship

The RAISE scholarship was available to anyone pursuing eligible industry-valued postsecondary credentials. The scholarship provided up to \$750 or the cost of the program, whichever was more. It was a last-dollar scholarship after all financial aid had been applied.

Industry-valued credentials were defined as those designated as either “essential” or “career” credentials by the North Carolina Workforce Credentials Council. These were credentials that led to employment in high-demand, high-growth fields that paid a family-sustaining wage, which was defined as equivalent to 300% or more of the federal poverty line. An essential credential provided skills highly valued by employers that were tied directly to occupations that offered family-sustaining wages or a pathway to career growth. A career credential provided skills highly valued by employers that were tied directly to occupations that offered a family-sustaining wage, with a wage boost. There was no discussion of how employers were involved in the program on its website, but there was a master list of eligible programs/credentials.

Relevant Links

Policy Proposal: <https://www.myfuturenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RAISE-Scholarships.pdf>

Credentials List: <https://nccareers.org/credentials/credentials-list>

North Carolina Short-Term Workforce Development Grant Program

In 2021, the Short-Term Workforce Development Grant Program was established to determine which occupations were in the highest demand across the state. The state also adopted rules for the disbursement of grant funds, linking programs to the high-demand occupations of focus. The program was recently expanded to include apprentices who were actively participating in a registered apprentice program while enrolled in workforce continuing education. The program’s website offered no explicit programmatic goals.

The grant provided funding per course to students who were state residents pursuing short-term, noncredit, state- and industry-recognized workforce credentials. Industries included agriculture and natural resources, biotechnology and life sciences, business, finance and retail operations, construction and skills trade, cosmetic arts and barbering, criminal justice, distribution and logistics, emergency medical services, fire and rescue services, health occupations/medical office, hospitality and tourism, IT certifications, manufacturing, real estate, insurance and appraisal, and the truck driver program. High-demand occupations were determined in partnership with the Department of Commerce. There were no discussions of a wage threshold for participation or of employment

involvement in the program on its website. A list of eligible programs/credentials was available as part of the grant's final report, making it publicly available but more challenging to access.

Relevant Links

Short-Term Workforce Development Final Report: <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/87464>

Ohio Short-Term Certificate Grant Program

The Ohio Short-Term Certificate Grant Program provided need-based financial aid to learners enrolled in state-supported community colleges, state community colleges, and Ohio Technical Centers. It could be used to complete programs of less than one year in length. The investments were meant to help Ohio retain and expand existing businesses, attract new investments and talent, and further entrepreneurship.

In-demand credentials were defined by the local institutions and a local and regional needs assessment. There were no wage criteria discussed on the program's website, nor was there a description of how the program engaged with employers. There was no list of eligible programs/credentials on the website.

Relevant Links

Department of Higher Education information page: <https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/stc>

Ohio TechCred Program

TechCred was designed to support and be responsive to employers who wanted to train their employees to receive new technology credentials. It could be used to upskill current and future employees. The program was meant to help Ohioans learn new skills and help employers build a stronger workforce in today's technology-infused economy.

Credentials were technology-focused and industry-recognized. According to the eligibility list on the website, training for the credential had to be short-term: completed in less than 12 months or fewer than 900 clock hours or 30 credit hours. There was no defined wage criteria information readily available on the program's website. Employers could engage by having their technology credential(s) recognized and approved. A master credentials list of all programs/credentials eligible for the TechCred program was available on its website.

Relevant Links

TechCred: <https://techcred.ohio.gov/>

Ohio House Bill 699, Section R.C. 3333.34 (126th General Assembly)

This bill required the development of a system of stackable certificates at both the pre-college and college level in order to provide a clear and accessible path for adults to advance their education. The stackable credentials were meant to support clear paths to advance education, transfer to college credit, respond to expectations of employers and higher education, clearly articulate competencies offered in specialized training programs, and be available from a range of providers.

The main quality criteria that this bill addressed was employer engagement. In its effort to increase training providers, it allowed employers to be considered training providers. There were no clear criteria for defining credentials or any wage criteria included in the bill.

Relevant Links

Bill Overview: <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3333.34>

Ohio Individual Microcredential Assistance Program (IMAP)

The IMAP program in Ohio covered all tuition, fees, and related costs for learners pursuing microcredentials in order to upskill, reskill, or start a new career path. There was no specification that these microcredentials needed to be in demand. There were also no wage criteria or description of how employers were engaged. There was a list of eligible programs/credentials on the website.

Relevant Links

Workforce Transformation: <https://workforce.ohio.gov/initiatives/initiatives/imap/for-individuals>

Texas House Bill 8, Revised State Community College Funding Model

In 2023, the 88th Texas Legislature passed legislation that changed how Texas funded its 50 community college districts. Rather than a static funding model, the new model was a dynamic, performance-based model that was tied to specific outcomes. The goal was for this funding model to shift community colleges away from competing with one another for funding. Instead, it challenged the community colleges to earn funding by educating more students and awarding credentials of value that aligned with Texas's workforce needs.

The outcomes that were measured to allocate funding included: (1) credentials of value awarded, including badges, certificates, and degrees, and (2) credentials of value in high-demand fields, student transfer to four-year universities, and student completion of dual credit courses, which are offered to high school students. Outcomes were weighted to recognize the higher costs to colleges when educating adult learners and students from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds. A credential of value was defined as a credential that empowered a learner to earn enough within 20 years to pay for the cost of their education and exceed the earnings of a typical high school graduate. In doing so, the credential met the wage threshold for the program. There was no explicit discussion of how employers were engaged in this funding model on the state's website.

Relevant Links

TACC Bill Overview: <https://tacc.org/tacc/what-hb-8>

Texas Returned-Value Formula at TSTC Campuses

During the 83rd Texas Legislature, in 2011, a unique funding formula was developed for Texas State Technical College, the only higher education institution that was 100% outcomes-based funded. The state held them accountable for job placements and wages in order to receive funding.

Relevant Links

Overview of funding formula: <https://www.tstc.edu/blog/2023/01/20/tstc-uses-unique-approach-to-receiving-state-funding/>

Virginia New Economy Workforce Credential Grant (FastForward)

FastForward was launched in 2016. It was a short-term training program for high-demand industries. There were no explicit programmatic goals listed on the grant's website.

High-demand industries included in the program were logistics and transportation, healthcare, welding and manufacturing, skilled trades and infrastructure, information technology, business and customer service, and education. This list was developed by the Virginia Board of Workforce Development. There was no discussion of a wage threshold on the grant's website, nor was there a discussion of how the program engaged with employers. The funding formula specified that one-third of the cost of training for the credential was paid for by the student, one-third was paid for by the grant upon credential attainment, and the final one-third was paid for by the grant upon training completion. There was a list of eligible programs/credentials included on their website for download.

The program has demonstrated success so far when looking at its outcome metrics. At the time of this writing, the program has a completion rate of over 95%, with 71% of graduates being satisfied with their pay post-credential. The average student saw a \$15,958 increase in wages. The highest wage gains were in education, information technology, skilled trades, and welding and manufacturing. Over 85% of FastForward students are satisfied with their job stability post-credential.

Relevant Links

FastForward: <https://fastforwardva.org/>

Washington Opportunity Grant Program

In the early 2010s, the Higher Education Funding Task Force was established as a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership meant for funding higher education. Every dollar raised by the private sector was matched by the state. The task force had two main problems to address: (1) barriers that students in Washington faced accessing postsecondary education (including the rising cost of college), especially in fields like STEM, and (2) the need for businesses across the state to hire skilled workers and maintain strong talent pipelines.

The main criteria for defining quality for this program was what jobs paid. Industries/jobs had to pay credential earners a minimum of \$16.66/hour upon completion to be eligible for the program. Employers (e.g., Microsoft) were partners in both providing funding for the program as well as providing well-paying jobs for credential earners. There was a master list of eligible programs/credentials on a Google Sheet available for download on the grant's website.

Relevant Links

Program guidelines: <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/opportunity-grant/oppgrantguide25.26.pdf>

Information for students: <https://www.seattlecolleges.edu/retraining/opportunity-grant>

Washington Worker Retraining Program

The Worker Retraining Program helped students who were unemployed due to economic changes pay for training expenses at Washington's community and technical colleges as well as some licensed private schools. The goal was to get learners who needed jobs into high-demand, high-wage jobs.

The program prepared students for "high-wage, high-demand" careers that were defined as such according to data available on their state website. No wage criteria were publicly defined. There was also no description of how employers were engaged in the program. The website provided a list of eligible programs and trainers.

Relevant Links

Overview: <https://www.sbctc.edu/paying-for-college/worker-retraining-student.aspx>

Program List: <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/worker-retraining/pcsc-contacts.aspx>

West Virginia Workforce Development Component of the Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student (HEAPS) Grant Program

The HEAPS Grant Program in West Virginia supported financially eligible students' enrollment in a postsecondary certificate, industry-recognized credential, or other skill development program in a demand occupation in the state. No clear criteria for what was considered an in-demand program appeared on the grant's website. There were also no clear wage criteria, nor a description of how employers were engaged. The website did offer a list of eligible programs/credentials.

Relevant Links

HEAPS Workforce: <https://www.cfwv.com/financial-aid/heaps-workforce/>

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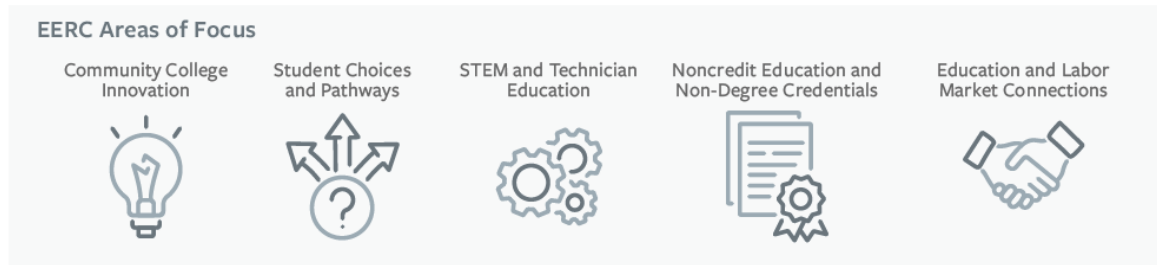
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