



Workforce Pell: Frequently Asked Questions

For Institutions Considering Submitting Programs for Workforce Pell Eligibility

Based on Maryland's Workforce Pell Program Determination Policy (GWDB Policy Issuance 2026-01)

ABOUT WORKFORCE PELL

Q1. What is Workforce Pell?

Workforce Pell is a new federal financial aid program established under U.S. Congress H.R. 1 (2025) that expands Pell Grant eligibility to students enrolled in short-term, career-focused training programs. Previously, Pell Grants were only available to students in longer programs. Workforce Pell makes grants available to eligible students in qualifying programs that are 8–14 weeks long and lead to industry-recognized credentials in high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations.

Q2. Who authorizes Workforce Pell programs in Maryland?

Federal law gives Governors authority to define key eligibility standards for Workforce Pell programs. In Maryland, the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) leads policy development and implementation on behalf of the Governor. Programs must receive both State approval (from the GWDB Chair as the Governor's designee) and federal approval from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) before students can receive Workforce Pell funds.

Q3. When does Workforce Pell begin?

The federal Workforce Pell program is set to begin July 1, 2026. Maryland is accepting applications beginning July 10, 2026. Institutions can only award Workforce Pell grants to eligible students in eligible programs once both State and federal program approvals have been issued to the institution.

Q4. Is participation mandatory for eligible institutions?

No. Participation by eligible institutions is entirely voluntary.

INSTITUTIONAL ELIGIBILITY

Q5. What types of institutions can submit programs?

To be eligible, an institution must be an accredited public, nonprofit, or for-profit postsecondary institution that is currently eligible to participate in student aid



programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Institutions can verify their status via the [Federal School Code List](#) maintained by ED.

Q6. Can a Title IV institution offer a program in partnership with a non-Title-IV institution?

Yes, with limitations per federal regulations. An ineligible institution may provide part of the educational program, but must provide 25% or less of the program. For registered apprenticeship programs, the related instructional component provided by an ineligible institution must be more than 25% but less than 50% of the program.

Q7. Are there any institutional disqualifiers?

Yes. Institutions may not participate if they have been subject to any suspension, emergency action, or termination of programs during the five years preceding the date of the determination.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Q8. What are the program duration requirements?

Eligible programs must have:

- Have a minimum of 8 weeks, but less than 15 weeks of instruction ;

- Have a duration of at least 150 clock hours but less than 600 clock hours; at least 4 but less than 16 semester or trimester hours; or at least 6 but less than 24 quarter hours

Programs must also have been operational and meeting all requirements for at least 12 months prior to applying.

Q9. Can online or hybrid programs apply?

Yes, subject to limitations. Programs may not be offered entirely through correspondence courses, study-abroad programs, or as direct assessment/credit-equivalency programs as defined by federal regulations. Hybrid and online programs that meet the other requirements may be eligible.

Q10. What occupations qualify for Workforce Pell?

Programs must train students for occupations that are high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand as defined by Maryland policy. Programs need to train for a program that meets at least one of these three definitions:

- High-Skill: Occupation is assigned an O*NET Job Zone of 3 or higher (medium to extensive preparation required);

- High-Wage: Occupation pays a median wage higher than the Maryland statewide median wage per Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS);



In-Demand: Occupation is in the top 30% of projected annual openings statewide AND has a projected growth rate at or above the statewide average; OR is designated by the Governor as strategically critical.

Additionally, if a program does not train for a high-wage occupation, it must demonstrate that the credential it awards can stack into at least one high-wage occupational pathway.

An institution may submit a program for consideration if it determines the occupation is in demand within its local service area, even if it does not meet the State's high-wage or State in-demand thresholds. The application must include a letter of support from the Chair of the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) verifying that the occupation meets the applicable local median wage criteria (based on MD Labor data) and/or documenting local workforce demand with supporting data and cited sources. If the supporting demand data is already included in the Local Area's most recent WIOA Plan, that plan may be cited instead.

Q11. Where can I find the list of qualifying occupations?

The GWDB maintains a publicly available list of qualifying occupations (Appendix D of the State policy) in coordination with the Maryland Department of Labor's Labor Market Information Unit. This list is updated at least twice per year.

Q12. What if my program trains for an occupation not on the State list?

Institutions may request a local area variance by obtaining a letter from the Chair of the Local Workforce Development Board for the area in which the institution is located. For high-wage variances, the letter must verify the occupation meets the applicable median wage criteria within the Local Workforce Development Area. For in-demand variances, the letter must verify local demand with cited data sources (or reference the occupation in the LWDA's most recent WIOA Plan).

Q13. How does a program demonstrate alignment to employer hiring needs?

Programs must demonstrate employer alignment through one of two pathways:

Registered Apprenticeship: The program serves as the related technical instruction (RTI) component of a U.S. DOL or Maryland-registered apprenticeship in a qualifying occupation with active apprentices enrolled;

Employer Validation: The program awards a qualifying credential AND provides either (a) a letter of endorsement from a state/regional sector partnership or one or more Local Workforce Development Boards confirming hiring demand and curriculum alignment, or (b) letters of support from three or more Maryland employers confirming hiring demand and curriculum alignment. Please email employer validation to workforce.pell@maryland.gov and reference your application.

Q14. What credential requirements apply?

Programs must lead to a recognized postsecondary credential, which includes:



- An industry-recognized certificate or certification;
- A certificate of completion of a Registered Apprenticeship;
- A license recognized by the State or federal government; or
- An associate or baccalaureate degree.

Maryland also recognizes credentials approved under Maryland's industry-recognized credential policy. Programs must also ensure the credential is stackable (can be applied toward further credential attainment or higher education) and portable (can support employment at more than one Maryland employer).

Q15. What is the credit articulation requirement?

Programs must ensure students receive academic credit toward at least one certificate or degree program at one or more eligible institutions. Institutions must provide written documentation – such as an articulation agreement, transfer-of-credit agreement, or consortium agreement – that specifies which institution(s) accept credit, how many credits are awarded, and that the program aligns to the same 2-digit CIP family or documented O*NET occupational competencies. The applying institution can itself be the receiving institution for credit articulation purposes.

Q16. What performance standards must programs meet?

Programs must demonstrate:

- A completion rate of at least 70% (calculated as the percentage of students completing within 150% of normal program time);
- A job placement rate of at least 70% (calculated as the percentage of students employed in the second quarter after exiting the program; beginning in Award Year 2029–2030, this will be calculated for students employed in the program's target occupation or a comparable high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupation);
- A passing value-added earnings (VAE) pre-screen, confirming that program completers earn more than the program's tuition and fees plus 150% of the federal poverty line (regionally adjusted) within three years of completion.

Q17. What are the requirements for Registered Apprenticeship programs?

Registered Apprenticeship programs receive automatic presumption of meeting high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand definitions and employer alignment requirements. However, they must still independently demonstrate compliance with completion rates, job placement rates, VAE, credential, stackability, portability, and credit articulation requirements. Only the related technical instruction (RTI) portion counts toward the 8–14 week / 150–599 clock hour duration requirements. RA programs may participate regardless of whether the employer pays tuition, as long as enrolled students meet federal financial need requirements.



APPLICATION PROCESS

Q18. How do I apply?

During Year 1, institutions submit Workforce Pell applications through a dedicated application posted on the Maryland Workforce Exchange platform. The application link is: [MWEJobs](#). Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed quarterly.

Q19. If my program is already on the ETPL, do I need to submit a new application?

Yes. During Year 1, programs already on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) will also need to complete the Workforce Pell application separately on the Maryland Workforce Exchange. However, you may be able to leverage existing ETPL performance data to satisfy some application requirements.

Q20. What is the review timeline?

Applications are reviewed quarterly. Details can be found in GWDB Policy Issuance 2026-01 and the process includes the following:

- GWDB staff completeness and initial eligibility review;
- WPRC evaluation and recommendation to GWDB Chair;
- Final determination issued by GWDB Chair on behalf of the Governor;
- Institutions submit their State-approved programs to ED for federal review (timing governed by federal regulations);
- Institution notifies GWDB and MHEC upon receipt of ED determination.

Q21. What happens after State approval?

After the GWDB Chair issues State approval, GWDB will transmit your application to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for federal Workforce Pell eligibility review. ED will issue a separate determination directly to your institution. Workforce Pell Grants may only be awarded to eligible students after federal approval is received. Institutions must notify GWDB when they receive an ED determination and provide documentation to gwdb.maryland@maryland.gov.

Q22. Where will approved programs be listed?

State- and federally-approved programs will be noted on Maryland's ETPL and published on MHEC's website within 30 days of ED's final determination. Published information will include program name, provider, credential type, CIP/SOC alignment, tuition and fees, and other required disclosures.

APPEALS AND RENEWAL

Q23. What if my application is denied? Can I appeal?



Yes. Institutions may appeal a denial by submitting written notice of appeal to workforce.pell@maryland.gov within 30 calendar days of the denial letter. The appeal must state in writing the basis for the appeal, the relevant facts or issues, and any clarifying data. The Workforce Pell Review Committee will consider the appeal in its next quarterly program determination cycle. Institutions may also reapply in subsequent quarterly review cycles (subject to any reapplication restrictions in cases of performance-based denials).

Q24. Are there limits on reapplying after a denial?

If a program is denied or loses eligibility due to failure to meet the completion or job placement rate requirements under federal regulations (34 CFR § 690.97), the institution may not reestablish the same program or a substantially similar program (sharing both the same four-digit CIP code and identical SOC codes) until two years after the date of the determination. Other types of denials do not carry this restriction.

Q25. How long does Workforce Pell approval last? Is renewal required?

Approved programs remain subject to ongoing performance monitoring, periodic State compliance reviews, and continued compliance with all State and federal eligibility requirements. The State reserves the right to revoke or decline renewal of eligibility for programs that fail to meet performance or compliance standards, consistent with federal regulations.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Q26. What technical assistance is available to help me apply?

GWDB, MHEC, and partner agencies offer the following resources:

- Written guidance, FAQs, and applicant resources posted at gwdb.maryland.gov and mhec.maryland.gov;

- Information sessions and application office hours – dates to be posted on GWDB and MHEC websites and distributed to Title IV providers;

- Direct technical assistance on eligibility criteria and application procedures from GWDB staff via workforce.pell@maryland.gov or (443) 934-6546.

- Direct technical assistance on financial aid, credit articulation, and accreditation from MHEC staff via darius.craig@maryland.gov or Bryson.barksdale@maryland.gov.

Q27. Who do I contact with questions?

For general inquiries about the Workforce Pell program and application process:

- Email: workforce.pell@maryland.gov

- Website: <https://gwdb.maryland.gov/workforcepell/>



This FAQ will be updated as additional federal and State guidance is finalized. Institutions are encouraged to check gwdb.maryland.gov regularly for the most current information.