

Workforce Credential Grant Talking Points and Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Workforce Credential Grant Program?

The New Economy Workforce Credential Grant Program was developed through legislation passed by the 2016 General Assembly Session and signed into law by Governor Terry McAuliffe. The program is designed to create and sustain a demand-driven supply of credentialed workers to fill occupations where demand outstrips supply in Virginia. The program does this by driving increased attainment, by Virginians, of industry certifications and occupational licenses that count for jobs and business growth. The program makes attainment of these workforce credentials more affordable to Virginians. Participants in the program can enroll in a noncredit workforce training program and pay only one-third of the program's tuition cost as long as they complete the training.

How much funding is available?

The General Assembly authorized \$4m in state FY 2017 and \$8.5m in FY 2018.

Where are these programs offered?

Eligible institutions include Virginia community colleges, Richard Bland College, the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, New College Institute, Roanoke Higher Education Center, Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, and Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center.

What is the difference between a noncredit workforce training program and a workforce credential?

A noncredit workforce training program is a noncredit course or set of noncredit courses that are offered by an eligible institution, and that *prepare* an individual to obtain a workforce credential. A workforce credential is an industry-recognized, third-party validated, portable certifications or occupational license that qualify individuals for employment in high-demand fields.

How do I know what fields are in high-demand?

The Virginia Board for Workforce Development (VBWD) is required to annually identify a list of high-demand fields and post the list on their website (www.elevatevirginia.org). The governing boards of each participating postsecondary institution are then responsible for aligning the occupational fields identified on the list with regional business demand and labor market information to select the noncredit workforce training and credentials that will be funded by the program at their respective institutions in support of the VBWD's recommended high-demand occupational fields. To identify the high-demand fields in Virginia, the VBWD uses a process that identifies growth occupations aligned to the commonwealth's economic development strategies. More details are provided in the next question and answer.

The VBWD will approve the state's first annual list of high-demand occupational fields at the Board's June 23, 2016, meeting and, in future years, at their regular January board meeting

How does the VBWD identify the high-demand fields?

The VBWD seated a taskforce, comprised of Board members and subject matter experts, to develop the list of high-demand fields, which will be based on analysis of occupations that meet certain criteria. The Demand Occupations Taskforce identified three primary criteria for inclusion on the Virginia Demand Occupations List. They include: 1) the occupational group's relevance to the state's economic development strategy, 2) the degree to which specialized skills were required for entry into an occupation, and 3) the projected statewide demand for an occupation. These criteria resulted in identification of 177 occupations clustered under 11 distinct occupational fields. Eligible institutions will be able to use this information to identify the programs and credentials most aligned to Virginia's workforce needs.

How often are the fields updated?

The VBWD will update and publish the high-demand fields list annually, but a petition process will also be available through which eligible institutions and their partners can identify new or unexpected regional demand, if an employer or group of employers identifies a workforce need that was not identified through the high-demand occupational field analysis conducted by the VBWD.

How do I know what noncredit workforce training programs qualify?

Eligible institutions are required to identify noncredit workforce training programs that align with high-demand fields and have those programs approved by their governing boards. All noncredit workforce training programs, and related credentials, in the state that are eligible for funding through the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant Program will be posted on www.elevatevirginia.org.

Who qualifies for the grant?

Any Virginian who meets Virginia domicile requirements (same requirements that must be met to qualify for in-state credit tuition), including unemployed, underemployed, and employed Virginians qualify for the grant as long as the workforce training program is aligned with a high-demand occupational field as approved by the governing board of the eligible institution.

Can other forms of funding be used to pay the student portion of the cost of the program?

Yes, other types of aid, such as a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act training voucher (ITA) or state noncredit financial aid (as available) can be used to pay for the student portion of the training. Employers may also pay the student portion of the cost of the program.

Do registered apprenticeship programs qualify for the grant?

Registered apprenticeship programs are a nationally recognized workforce credential; therefore, if a registered apprenticeship program aligns with a high-demand field identified by the Board of Workforce development and the required training is offered as a noncredit workforce training program, then the registered apprenticeship qualifies for the grant program.

As a note, based on discussions with several eligible institutions, it does not appear that a noncredit workforce training program has been developed to meet the full instructional requirements for the length of a registered apprenticeship program of 144 hours per year over several years. Instead, institutions often provide shorter noncredit training programs that lead to individual certifications that may count towards the required instructional hours of the registered apprenticeship program. It is expected that these shorter, noncredit training programs will meet the requirements of the grant program if they align with a high-demand field.

Once a noncredit workforce training program that is aligned with a high-demand field is approved by an eligible institution, can it be removed from the list?

Because high-demand fields can change as the VBWD analyzes occupational trends in Virginia and updates the list of high-demand fields, some noncredit workforce training programs may be removed, each year, from the list of programs approved for funding from the grant, and others may be added.

What happens if a student enrolls in a noncredit workforce training program, but is unable to attend or does not complete the program? Will the student be required to pay an additional one-third of the program cost?

Non-completion of a program is based on the eligible institution's refund policy and the type of circumstance that causes an individual to not complete a course or program. Enrollees should refer to the eligible institution's policies related to refunds and non-completion of a training program. If the institution's criteria for receiving a refund or completing the program, then the student will be required to pay the eligible institution an additional one-third of the cost of the program.

Is there a maximum amount an institution can receive per student per program?

Yes, the program will award a maximum of \$3,000 per workforce training program per student to eligible institutions.

Can an individual enroll in multiple noncredit workforce training programs and be eligible for the grant?

There is no limitation on the number of noncredit workforce training programs that a student may enroll in and complete as long as the programs are approved by the governing board of the institution.

How are funds distributed?

Funds are provided on a first-come first-served reimbursement basis to eligible institutions for programs approved by their governing boards and aligned to a high-demand field, as identified by the VBWD. The eligible institutions receive one-third of the program costs (up to \$1,500) once a student successfully completes the program and another one-third of the cost (up to \$1,500) when the student receives the workforce credential. No eligible institution can receive more than 25% of the total funds available to the state for the New Economy Workforce Credentials Grant program in any given year.