A New Door to Opportunity

Washington State's Pell Grant for Workforce Information Session

WEBINAR · MARCH 20, 2026 · 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

ESG

Welcome

This session brings together the full ecosystem of partners who make workforce training work in Washington.

Whether you're an employer, educator, counselor, or community organization — you're part of how this succeeds.

Today's Attendees

- Employers and industry partners
- Community colleges and training providers
- Workforce organizations and counselors
- Philanthropic and community partners

Our Time Together

- 60 minutes
- Questions welcomed throughout in the chat
- Chat prompts and open reflection time built in

Presenters Today

Governor's Policy Office

Provides leadership to the Cross-Agency Steering Committee

Heather Hudson

Deputy Policy Director

Education Strategy Group (ESG)

Brings national expertise; serves as advisor and provides support with context and analysis.

Ahnna Smith

Senior Director

Annie Phillips

Director

Presenters Today

Representatives of the Cross-Agency Steering Committee

Engages with key stakeholder groups, conducts analysis, and develops recommendations.

Inez Olive

Senior Director (WSAC)

Marie Bruin

Policy Associate (SBCTC)

Emily Persky

Implementation and Advocacy Manager (Workforce Board)

Anneliese Vance-Sherman

Chief Labor Economist (ESD)

Let's Connect!

Please take a moment to introduce yourself in the chat window. We'd love to know who's with us today.

Your Name

Your Organization

Your Role

What Is Pell for Workforce?

A historic expansion of federal financial aid — for the first time, able to be used for short-term workforce programs.

The Law

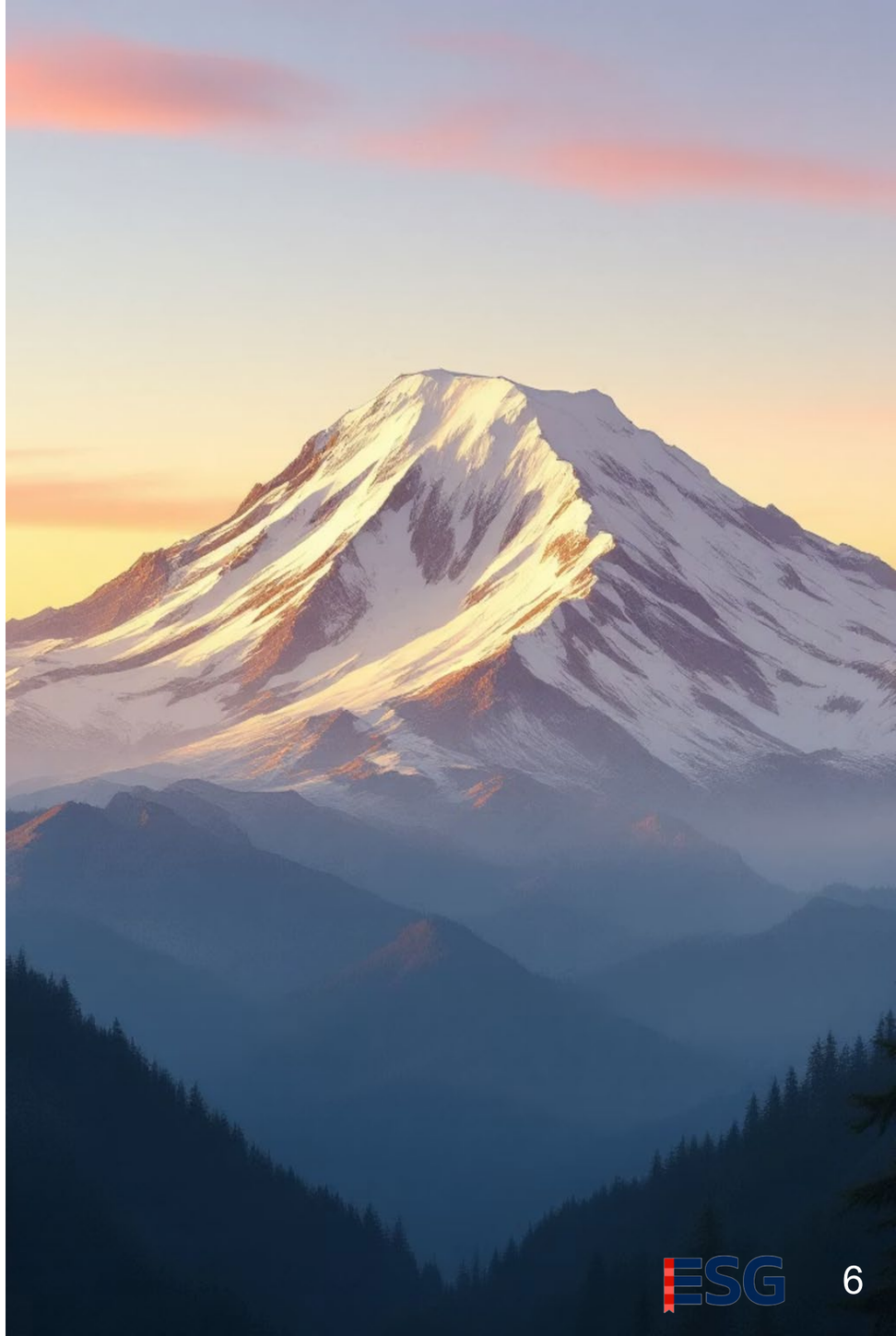
Created by Congress under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed July 4, 2025 — extending Pell Grant eligibility to short-term workforce programs for the first time in history.

Who It Serves

Working adults, career changers, and learners who need faster pathways to good jobs — people who can't wait years for a credential.

What It Funds

Short-term programs that lead to credentials with real labor market value.



Federal Requirements

The federal rule sets the floor. Washington must meet these minimum standards. Federal regulations (NPRM published March 9, 2026) establish the following criteria:

Program Requirements

- **Time:** 150-599 clock hours; can be 8-14 weeks
- Prep learners for **high-skill, high wage, in-demand** jobs
- Meet **hiring requirements** for >1 employer
- Has been **offered by the institution for ≥ 1 year** prior to receiving eligibility
- Not a **correspondence**, **study abroad** or **direct assessment** course
- No more than **25% of teaching is outsourced**

Stackability Requirements

- Lead to an **industry-recognized credential** that is stackable and portable
- **Provides credit** that articulates to one or more additional certificates or degree programs

Outcome Requirements

- Have a verified **completion rate** of at least 70%
- Have a verified **job placement rate** of 70%
- Meet an **earnings requirement** that relies on program cost, median earnings, and the federal poverty level.

Key Date: July 1, 2026 is the current federal effective date for Pell for Workforce implementation.

What It Is vs. What It Isn't

Understanding the scope of Pell Grants for Workforce is essential for institutions, students, and policymakers alike.

✓ What It IS

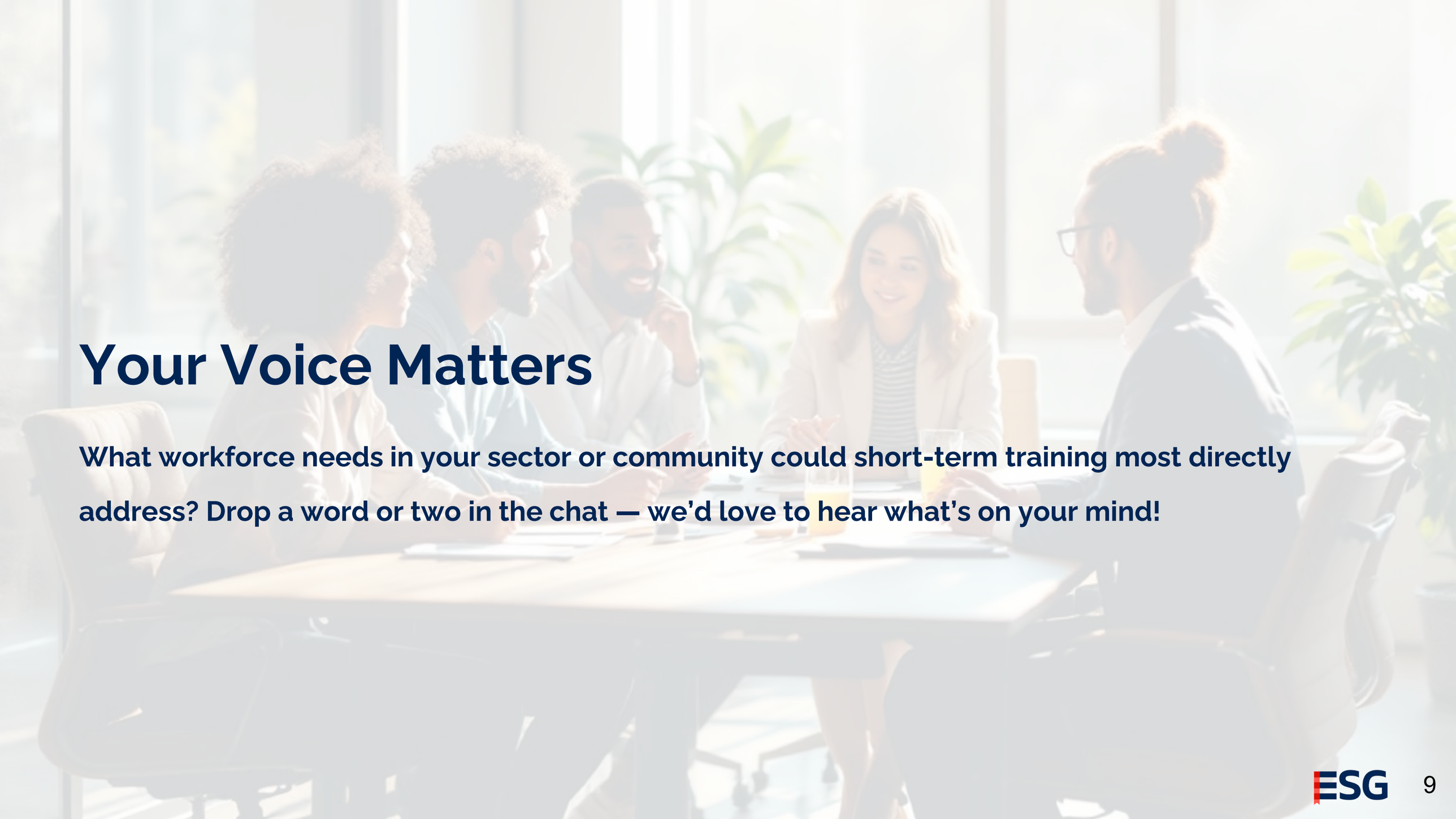
- A federal financial aid expansion for short-term workforce programs
- Available at Title IV institutions (accredited postsecondary schools including public, private non-profit, and for-profit/vocational institutions) eligible to participate in federal student aid.
- Tied to in-demand occupations and high-wage fields

✗ What It Is NOT

- A replacement for traditional Pell Grants
- Available for all institutions or programs automatically
- Guaranteed — states, institutions, and programs must qualify through a formal process

Pell Grants in WA Today:

- As of February 2026, there are 95 Title IV institutions with potentially eligible programs
- In 2023-2024, ~83,000 students received a Pell award averaging $4,684. Pell for Workforce will be prorated based on program length.



Your Voice Matters

What workforce needs in your sector or community could short-term training most directly address? Drop a word or two in the chat — we'd love to hear what's on your mind!

Cross-Agency Steering Committee

Washington is developing its proposed approach through a coordinated cross-agency effort led by the Governor's Policy Office.

WASHINGTON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL
EDUCATION · OPPORTUNITY · RESULTS

COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES
Washington State Board

WASHINGTON Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

Washington State Department of Commerce

Employment Security Department
WASHINGTON STATE

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

Washington's Key Decision Areas

Washington has meaningful discretion in how the state implements expansion of the Pell Grant for Workforce. The Governor's Cross-Agency Steering Committee is working through four critical work streams that will determine which programs will be eligible for students to use their Pell grant funding.

Eligibility Definitions

How do we define "in-demand" and "high-wage" for Washington workers? These definitions set the boundaries of access.

Program Stackability

How do short-term credentials connect to longer pathways? Ensuring credentials build toward degrees and careers.

Employer Validation

What counts as evidence that employers value a program? Defining the standard for industry endorsement.

Program List Process

How will eligible programs be identified, reviewed, and updated? Building a fair and transparent process.

Where Washington Stands

Washington is preparing for when the federal law goes into effect, July 1, with the understanding that approval of programs and awards to students would be at a later date.

Active Engagement

- **Federal public comment period open through early April 2026. We anticipate the rules are fairly final.**

- **The Cross-Agency Steering Committee is collaborating to develop recommendations, engage stakeholders, and prepare for implementing this expansion of Pell Grants.**

Implementation Timeline

Now → April

Federal public comment period on final rules

Spring 2026

Steering Committee finalizes recommendations to the Governor

Late Spring 2026

Institution application launches

Summer 2026

Governor's submission to the US Department of Education (ED); Institutions will submit approvals directly to ED (more details to come re: support/resources for institution submissions)

TBD Late 2026/Early 2027

Earliest date that Pell for Workforce could be available for students

We Want to Hear From You

Institutions and providers — are there existing programs at your organization that you think could qualify? What's your biggest barrier to getting ready? Employers — what matters most to you regarding the employer validation process for eligible programs?

Agency Spotlights

Members of the Cross-Agency Steering Committee bring distinct and essential contributions to Washington's Pell for Workforce implementation. Learn more about four of the agencies and their role in this work.

ESD

Employment Security Department

- Labor market intelligence and unemployment insurance
- Wage data infrastructure for eligibility definitions
- Occupations in Demand methodology alignment

SBCTC

State Board for Community & Technical Colleges

- Governing body for Washington's 34 colleges
- Supporting the program list development
- How WA defines stackability and credit articulation

Workforce Board

Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

- Cross-agency workforce policy coordination and stakeholder engagement
- Third-party evaluation & consumer information (CareerBridge.wa.gov)
- Defining in-demand occupations and high-wage threshold

WSAC

Washington Student Achievement Council

- Access and student financial aid administration
- Student-facing communications and considerations
- Aligning state and federal financial aid systems

Tell Us What You Think

After hearing from the agencies, what's one thing you'd want the Steering Committee to keep in mind as they develop the policies and approval process? What matters most to make this successful for our students, workers, and community?

Staying Engaged

The Cross-Agency Steering Committee is leading the engagement process to gather input from stakeholders. This includes working with organizing input among these key groups.

- Business & Labor
- Community & Technical Colleges
- Additional Title IV Eligible Institutions
- Career Coaches/Counselors
- Students
- Financial Aid Advisors

🤝 A Collaborative Partnership

The Washington Roundtable and Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO are co-leading an employer- and labor-driven process to develop formal recommendations to the Governor's office on Pell for Workforce implementation, including:

- Defining "high-skill, high-wage, high-demand" occupations
- Setting minimum standards for hire-ready training programs
- Ensuring credentials are stackable, portable, and aligned with real career pathways
- Establishing lasting industry voice in Pell for Workforce policy

WASHINGTON STATE LABOR COUNCIL

WR WASHINGTON ROUNDTABLE

Thank You & Washington's Path Forward

🎯 Key Takeaway #1

A clear picture of what Pell for Workforce is and what Washington is actively doing to implement it ahead of the July 1, 2026 federal effective date.

🔍 Key Takeaway #2

An understanding of the decisions the state is making — eligibility, stackability, employer validation, and program lists — and why they matter for learners.

📬 Stay Connected

Watch for future engagement opportunities as the Steering Committee develops and finalizes recommendations. An institution application process will launch this spring.

Reach out to the Cross-Agency Steering Committee Members most relevant to your organization or inquiry:

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