Workforce Pell in Washington

Where the State Has Landed and the Workforce Board's Role

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Presenting on behalf of the Workforce Pell Cross-Agency Steering Committee

Why We Are Here Today

Washington opens its first Workforce Pell application cycle this fall. Before it does, this Board's affirmation of its role in developing and implementing this program is an important milestone.

Where the state has landed

The pilot Year 1 application and approval process the Cross-Agency Steering Committee has designed

How this Board shaped it

The Workforce Board's team, policies, and Career Bridge infrastructure informed the design

The Board's role ahead

Verification, Steering Committee participation, Career Bridge integration, and outcomes oversight

Requested Board action

A vote to affirm the pilot direction and acknowledge the Workforce Board's role in implementation

Workforce Pell: A Brief Refresher

The largest expansion of federal financial aid in a generation: Pell Grants, for the first time, can fund short-term workforce training.

The Law

Created under H.R. 1 (2025), extending Pell eligibility to short-term programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Federal effective date: July 1, 2026.

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

Programs of 150–599 clock hours (8–14 weeks) preparing learners for high-skill, high-wage, in-demand occupations, with credentials that stack toward degrees.

The Bar Programs Must Clear

Verified completion and job placement rates of at least 70%, an earnings test, employer validation, and credit that articulates to further certificates or degrees.

Washington today: 95 Title IV institutions with potentially eligible programs. In 2023–24, ~83,000 Washington students received Pell awards averaging $4,684; Workforce Pell awards will be prorated by program length.

Where Washington Has Landed: The Pilot Year 1 Process

One application. One eligibility bar. No wrong door. Each agency verifies the providers it already knows, and every program is reviewed together before advancing to the Governor.

1 · Agency Verification

The verifying agency for each institution type confirms eligibility using its existing systems and authorities, and issues a verification letter for each eligible program.

2 · WSAC Final Application

The provider submits the final application through the WSAC portal — the state's front door — attaching its agency verification letter.

3 · Committee Review & Certification

The Cross-Agency Steering Committee reviews all verified programs together, across institution types, and advances approved programs to the Governor for certification.

4 · Federal Submission

The institution submits the Governor's certification with its application to the U.S. Department of Education, including any PPA updates.

Behind the scenes: WSAC shares application data with the Workforce Board so approved programs are populated in Career Bridge, the state's public-facing training directory and system of record for program data.

Verification Pathways: One Bar, Three Doors

Every applicant is evaluated against the same requirements, definitions, and evidence standards. What differs is only who performs the verification, building on infrastructure the state already operates.

Program Type	Verifying Agency
Community and technical college programs, including CTC-sponsored Registered Apprenticeship RSI	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)
Private career schools; Registered Apprenticeship programs not administered through a CTC	**Workforce Board**
Public and private four-year institutions, including affiliated Registered Apprenticeships	Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)

Providers begin at the WSAC Workforce Pell webpage, which routes each institution type to the correct pathway — and each agency's page links to the others. **The Workforce Board is the front door for the provider types it already licenses and lists.**

This Design Reflects the Workforce Board's Expertise

The pilot does not create parallel infrastructure. It builds on systems, policies, and expertise this Board already brings to the table.

Career Bridge and the ETPL

The state's system of record for training program data — and the model for outcome-verified program lists — anchors how approved programs will be published and tracked.

Private career school oversight

The Board's Private Vocational Schools licensing framework gives the state an existing, employer-connected quality mechanism for the provider types it verifies.

Registered Apprenticeship expertise

The Board's connection to apprenticeship, with built-in employer validation, stackability, and outcome data, shaped RAPs as a Year 1 anchor pathway.

Staff leadership on the Steering Committee

Workforce Board staff have shaped eligibility definitions, employer validation standards, and the review process from day one, including third-party evaluation experience.

The Workforce Board's Role Going Forward

Four durable roles spanning the application process, cross-agency governance, public transparency, and accountability for results.

Verification Agency

Front door for private career schools and non-CTC Registered Apprenticeship programs — verifying eligibility through Career Bridge and issuing verification letters.

Steering Committee Seat

Full participation in reviewing all verified programs, advancing approvals to the Governor, and refining policies and processes as Year 1 implementation progresses.

Career Bridge Integration

Approved Workforce Pell programs populated in Career Bridge — giving students, counselors, and employers one public source of truth for eligible programs.

Outcomes & Oversight

Annual provider reporting, ETPL maintenance, and completion, placement, and earnings verification through ESD wage records and established data channels.

Verification standards, review policies, and the priority occupations methodology will be reviewed by the Steering Committee at least every two years, in alignment with the WIOA State Plan modification cycle.

Pilot Cycle Timeline (Proposed)

Dates below are proposed and will be confirmed and published on the WSAC Workforce Pell webpage.

Sept 2026

Process opens — Application process opens on the WSAC webpage: guidance, approved occupations list, and verification pathways and a provider webinar to walk institutions through the process.

Sept–Oct 2026

Agency verification — Verifying agencies, including the Workforce Board, complete verification and issue letters on a rolling basis; the application window closes in October.

Oct–Nov 2026

Review & certification — The Cross-Agency Steering Committee reviews the compiled package and advances approved programs to the Governor; certification letters follow.

Late 2026 / Early 2027

Federal submission — Institutions submit the Governor's certification to the U.S. Department of Education, the final step before students can use Workforce Pell for approved programs.

Early 2027

Second cycle — The state evaluates the pilot experience and opens a second application cycle, with refinements informed by what Year 1 teaches us.

A Pilot by Design, Informing Future Improvements

This is where the state lands for Year 1. The Steering Committee will update policies, processes, and the program as it sees how the first year of implementation progresses.

The guidance itself commits to this: Washington will evaluate the pilot experience and refine the process, forms, and language in subsequent cycles. Three areas are already identified for continuous improvement:

Credit Articulation & Stackability

Strengthening how short-term credentials carry credit into certificates and degrees — so a Workforce Pell program is a first step, not a dead end.

Employer Validation

Refining the evidence standard for employer and industry demand as the state learns which signals best predict hiring and wage outcomes.

Streamlined Processes

Reducing friction for institutions and for students and residents — simpler applications, faster verification, and clearer public information.

The through-line: The same cross-agency table that built this process is the table that will improve it, with the Workforce Board in a seat.

REQUESTED BOARD ACTION

Affirm the Direction. Acknowledge the Role.

Proposed motion: *"That the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board affirm the direction of Washington's Workforce Pell pilot application and approval process, and acknowledge and support the Board's role in its development and implementation — including agency verification, Cross-Agency Steering Committee participation, Career Bridge integration, and outcomes reporting and oversight."*

What this action does

- Affirms the pilot Year 1 direction as the state's starting point
- Acknowledges the Workforce Board's roles in implementation
- Signals cross-agency alignment as applications open this fall

What it does not do

- Does not approve any individual program or provider
- Does not lock in Year 1 policies; refinement is the goal
- Does not change the Board's existing statutory authorities



Discussion

10 minutes

Thank You!

The Cross-Agency Steering Committee welcomes the Board's continued partnership as Washington opens this new door for its students, workers, and employers.

Next Milestone

September 2026 (Proposed)

The application process opens on the WSAC Workforce Pell webpage, with a provider webinar to follow.