Workforce Pell (WF Pell) Grants were authorized by the passage of H.R. 1 on July 4, 2025, and are set to be implemented by July 1, 2026. WF Pell Grants will allow Pell Grant funds to be used for short-term training or credential programs designed to help students quickly and efficiently learn new skills and earn credentials that open the door to new, higher-paying career opportunities.

Following the passage of this authority, the Department of Education announced a negotiated rulemaking session for the Accountability in Higher Education and Access through Demand-driven Workforce Pell (AHEAD) committee. This committee is charged with helping the Department to create regulations to help operationalize this program. The committee held its first session from December 8 – 12, 2025.

Prior to the session, the Department released the following documents related to the first session of the AHEAD negotiated rulemaking committee.

- Committee Member List
- Committee Protocols
- Committee Agenda
- Discussion Draft and Amendatory Text

At the conclusion of this session, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) took a final consensus check, and the AHEAD Committee reached consensus on the regulatory language relating to WF Pell Grants. Notably, the Department also said that they will be ready to accept WF Pell grant applications from institutions for their programs by July 1, 2026, but could not commit to when WF Pell grants will be awarded. Through the issue papers and monitoring the negotiated rulemaking session Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC) identified the following major points of discussion, as well movement on these points throughout the session.

Apprenticeship and WF Pell

ED acknowledged their intent in trying to keep WF Pell apprenticeship friendly. ED is WF Pell to be used for the related instruction of an apprenticeship program through the regulatory language. While the regulatory proposal does not reflect this, ED indicated that this instruction could take place in a non-continuous fashion. More detail will need to be provided by ED on how apprenticeships and WF Pell will work operationally.

Appeals Process

ED discussed how students would be affected if a program lost eligibility while students were mid-completion. ED emphasized that institutions would receive advance notice to prevent programs from being deemed ineligible without warning and stated that it intends

to adhere to a three-month standard for reporting ineligibility. While Governors are responsible for certifying completion and placement rates, ED clarified that the Secretary retains ultimate authority to approve placement rates. ED further added language that states the Secretary will not make determination on a program's eligibility, approval, or report completion/job placement rates while the program is in the appeals process or waiting on the governor's final determination.

Program One Year Clock

The original proposal from ED indicated that a WF Pell program would only be eligible one year after the approval by the Governor. To clarify that this would not be the case, ED modified its regulatory language allowing a program, to be approved, if it meets eligibility requirements and have met those requirements 12 months preceding its certification by the Governor.

Governor Role

The original language proposed by ED provided an involved role for the Governor approval process, some of which the statue envisioned for the Secretary. In the AHEAD session, ED reaffirmed that Governors will play a central role in determining program eligibility and ensuring the collection of required data and did not indicate any intent to scale back the Governor's role.

ED added language requiring Governors to publish reviews of high-skill, high-wage occupations at least every two years and clarified how workforce programs establish academic credit when students transfer institutions. ED also stated that Governors may work with other State agencies during the approval process, with further explanation expected in sub-regulatory guidance.

Additionally, ED introduced language clarifying that WF Pell programs are approved by the State in which the program is administered. States may enter into bilateral agreements allowing students from one State to participate in programs offered in another, provided the program is approved by the Governor in the State where the student is located, in consultation with the State Board, and included on that State's list of occupations or sectors.

Job Placement Measures

ED extended the period of time to an additional year for the Governor's to measure job placement rate in a fashion that does not require placement to be in an occupation related to the training provided in a WF Pell program.

Termination of Governor Approval and Program Participation Agreements (PPAs)
The original proposed language stated that Governor approval of a WF Pell program expires when an institution's Program Participation Agreement (PPA) expires. ED maintained this position throughout the session, and there were no changes to this language.