

Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) Round 7: A Grant Initiative for the Appalachian, Delta, and Northern Border Regions
[Funding Opportunity Announcement FOA-ETA-26-23](#)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

June 12, 2026

AWARDS OVERVIEW

1. What is the total amount of grant funding that will be awarded?

The Department of Labor (DOL, or the Department) anticipates awarding approximately \$49.2 million in funding for the Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities Round 7 (WORC 7). However, the Department reserves the right to also apply funding from the FY 2026 appropriation, up to an additional approximately \$54 million, to this Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), should it receive sufficient qualifying applications. See pg. 1 of the FOA.

2. How many grants will be awarded?

The Department anticipates funding 6 to 24 grants out of the FY 2025 appropriation. See pg. 1 of the FOA.

3. What is the funding range for these grants?

The awards will range from \$2 million to \$8 million per grant. See pg. 1 of the FOA.

4. Is there a cost sharing requirement?

No. This grant program does not require cost sharing (including matching) funds. Applicants that include such funds will not receive additional consideration during the review process. Instead, DOL considers any resources contributed to the project beyond the funds provided by DOL as leveraged resources. Section IV.B of the FOA provides more information on leveraged resources. The Department strongly encourages applicants to contribute leveraged funds to provide supportive services, expand the training types offered, and/or sustain effective models beyond the life of the grant. See pg. 5 of the FOA (Section II.B).

5. How long is the grant period of performance?

The period of performance is three years or 36 months with an anticipated start date of 10/01/2026 and includes all necessary implementation and start-up activities.

The Department expects that start-up activities, such as hiring appropriate grant program staff and project design activities, will begin immediately after grant award. Grantees are expected to start

enrolling participants in high-quality training programs and Registered Apprenticeship programs by at least month nine, though sooner is preferred. See pg. 1 of the FOA.

6. What is the timeline of the Funding Opportunity Announcement?

The closing date for receipt of applications under the WORC 7 FOA is July 23, 2026. You must submit your application electronically on www.grants.gov no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date or it will not be considered for funding. See pg. 1 of the FOA.

7. How will applications be evaluated for funding?

The Department has instituted procedures for assessing the technical merit of applications to provide for an objective review of applications and to assist applicants in understanding the standards against which applications will be judged. The evaluation criteria are based on the information required in the application as described in the FOA Sections IV.B (Project Budget) and IV.C (Project Narrative). Reviewers will award points based on the evaluation criteria described below.

Criterion	Points (Maximum)
1. Statement of Need (See Section IV.C.1 Statement of Need)	20 total
2. Expected Outputs and Outcomes (See Section IV.C.2 Expected Outcomes and Outputs)	10 total
3. Project Design (See Section IV.C.3 Project Design)	30 total
4. Sector Partnership and Industry (See Section IV.C.4 Sector Partnership and Industry)	20 total
5. Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity (See Section IV.C.5 Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity)	20 total
TOTAL	100

Section IV.C. (Project Narrative) of the FOA has several “section headers” (e.g., IV.C.1. Statement of Need). Each of these “section headers” of the Project Narrative may include one or more “criterion,” and each “criterion” includes one or more “rating factors,” which provide detailed specifications for the content and quality of the response to that criterion. Each of the rating factors have specific point values assigned. These point values are the number of points possible for the application to earn for the rating factor.

A technical merit review panel will carefully evaluate applications based on the selection criteria. As outlined in section [VI.B](#) above, the selection criteria are based on the policy goals, and priorities explained in this FOA.

Up to 100 points may be awarded to an applicant, depending on the quality of the responses provided. The final scores (which may include the mathematical normalization of review panels) will serve as the primary basis for selecting applications for funding. The panel results are advisory in nature and not binding on the Grant Officer. The Grant Officer can make selections based solely on the final scores or take into consideration other relevant factors when applicable. Such factors may include the geographic distribution of funds, the target industry sectors and occupations, the proposed training strategies, the availability of funds and other relevant factors. The Grant Officer may consider any information that comes to their attention. See pgs. 25-26 of the FOA (Sections VI.B and C).

GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND DESIGN

8. What is the purpose of the WORC 7 Initiative?

The purpose of WORC 7 is to invest in large-scale regional industry and sector partnerships to design and implement industry-driven training programs that address the critical workforce needs of employers in high-growth and emerging industries across the Appalachian, Delta, and Northern Border regions (WORC regions). Industry-driven training programs will close skills gaps and increase the talent pipeline in critical sectors and support increased worker mobility by engaging individuals disconnected from the workforce and offering career pathways into high-wage occupations for rural populations in WORC regions.

Successful applicants will develop grant projects focused on at least one of the following high-growth and emerging industry sectors: skilled trades/construction, health care, information technology, manufacturing, domestic energy production, and business/professional services. Grant projects will embed training options such as early occupational and career exposure opportunities through career and technical education (CTE) that offers dual enrollment that leads to recognized postsecondary credentials; high-quality, short-term training programs that aim to become eligible for the newly authorized Workforce Pell Grants; as well as Registered Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs that lead into Registered Apprenticeships. See pg. 6 of the FOA (Section III.A).

9. What are the core principles of the WORC 7 FOA?

WORC 7 will fund grants to regional industry and sector partnerships that will develop, enhance, or expand workforce solutions that support implementation of [America's Talent Strategy](#) in WORC regions by addressing the following core elements:

- **Core Element 1: Industry-Driven Strategies**
 - Successful applicants will contribute to economic development models driven by the needs of industry across a large-scale regional area. For the purposes of this FOA, a large-scale regional area means multiple counties (or parishes), jurisdictions, municipalities, metropolitan statistical areas, or census tracts within one state or across

state lines. WORC 7 grant projects are intended to support economic development models that are broad in scale and scope to ensure maximum impact across the WORC regions. WORC 7 grant projects must focus on at least one of the priority industry sectors (see Question #10).

- Regional industry and sector partnerships will identify and address the workforce challenges of their targeted service areas. Grant projects will be designed to build or strengthen reliable talent pipelines across a large regional area that are responsive to industry needs in high-growth and emerging industry sectors and help individuals in rural communities reenter and advance in the labor market.
 - These industry and sector partnerships will identify and develop a variety of career pathways to meet their industry needs. Programs of study will include CTE programs and high school dual enrollment programs, shorter-term programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials and support immediate hiring requirements for employers (such as those that may qualify for Workforce Pell), and high-quality work-based learning opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships.
- **Core Element 2: Worker Mobility**
 - Successful applicants will address worker mobility by prioritizing the needs of the WORC region's disconnected workforce, including individuals receiving public benefits and subject to enhanced work requirements, and addressing barriers to employment through rural community reengagement efforts. Applicants will also support the mobility and career advancement of incumbent workers and develop clear pathways for these individuals to gain the skills necessary to secure higher-paying employment within the target industry sectors.
 - Regional industry and sector partnerships will strategize effective ways to leverage resources and provide robust supportive services that assist workers with challenges to persistence and completion of training and help them secure and retain employment within the target industry sectors.
 - Grantees are encouraged to use grant funds to support the use of and/or connection to Learning and Employment Records (LERs), as well as regional Talent Marketplaces, with the aim of strengthening the connection between skill development and employment outcomes, to create a sustainable workforce ecosystem.

See pgs. 6-7 of the FOA (Section III.A).

10. What are the targeted industries and/or occupations for this grant program?

WORC 7 grant projects must focus on at least one of the following industry sectors: skilled trades/construction, health care, information technology, manufacturing, domestic energy production, and business/professional services occupations. See Appendix A of the FOA for definitions of these industry sectors.

Applicants must target occupations with demonstrated higher-level skills and wage progression opportunities along an identified career pathway. Examples include but are not limited to progressing from an equipment operator to crane operator; a certified nursing assistant to a licensed practical

nurse; material handler to a maintenance technician; or an accountant to a financial advisor. See pg. 7 of the FOA (Section III.B).

11. What are the required activities under this FOA?

Projects must offer a grant-funded industry-driven training program. Training programs must consist of an appropriate and relevant combination of the following:

1. **Occupational skills training** in targeted industry sectors that results in a credential of value (see [TEN 25-19](#)). **This training model must offer and include all of the below components; however, not every participant needs to receive each component (e.g., not every participant needs to participate in a Registered Apprenticeship).**
 - Work-based learning such as pre-apprenticeships, or on-the-job training (OJT) that is paired with related instruction/classroom training.
 - Registered Apprenticeship programs.
 - Training should emphasize third-party validated credentials related to occupational priorities.
 - Sector partnerships must develop strong supportive service strategies that benefit rural populations and help increase labor force participation.
 - Successful applicants must leverage resources and funding, including through community-based organizations and other local, state or federally funded programs, to provide supportive services.
2. **Capacity-building activities** that support regional industry and sector partnerships to develop and implement training that is responsive to industry needs. Examples include (but are not limited to):
 - Program development activities to establish Registered Apprenticeship programs, such as creating standards and curriculum, registering programs, building employer partnerships, or enhancing data systems to track and measure effectiveness
 - Developing new programs, or enhancing existing programs, designed to meet Workforce Pell eligibility requirements, which offer career pathways with multiple on- and off-ramps resulting in stackable short-term credentials
 - Leveraging or enhancing existing employment and training infrastructure such as Talent Marketplaces or Learning and Employment Records (LERs)

See pgs. 8-10 of the FOA (Section III.B).

12. What are the requirements for the provision of supportive services?

Regional industry and sector partnerships must develop supportive service strategies in which they prioritize leveraging other resources to provide supportive services to participants, including through co-enrolling participants in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs. Grantees may use up to 10 percent of grant funds to supplement the supportive services leveraged from other resources to cover unmet needs after exhausting opportunities to use leveraged resources and funding. See

Section III.G of the FOA for the definition of supportive services. Grantees who provide supportive services with grant funds are required to assess all participants for supportive service need using a consistent policy.

To be an allowable expenditure, a supportive service may only be provided:

- After a participant has been assessed for need; and
- To address a specific barrier identified during the needs assessment that prevents the individual from fully participating in training.

See pg. 9 (Section III.B), pg. 14 (Section III.H), and pg. 19 (Section IV.C.3) of the FOA for more information on supportive services.

13. Must proposed training projects lead to certain types of credentials?

Yes. All training programs must lead to a recognized postsecondary credential. A recognized postsecondary credential is a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of a Registered Apprenticeship, a license recognized by the state involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. For further information, see [TEN 25-19: Understanding Postsecondary Credentials in the Public Workforce System](#). A project's employer or industry/trade association partners should validate the recognized postsecondary credential(s) offered through the training model as directly aligned with the skill demands and hiring requirements of the target occupations. See pg. 9 of the FOA (Section III.B).

ELIGIBILITY AND PARTNERSHIPS OVERVIEW

14. Who is eligible to apply for this grant?

The following are the eligible applicants, subject to the additional eligibility requirements described further below.

- State governments
- County governments
- City or township governments
- Independent school districts
- Public/state-controlled institutions of higher education
- Indian/Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)
- Indian/Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized)
- Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) IRS status, (other than institutions of higher education)
- Nonprofits without 501(c)(3) IRS status, (other than institutions of higher education)
- Private institutions of higher education
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs)
- Other

The only organizations included in "Other" referenced above are State and Local Workforce Development Boards, Industry and Employer Associations, Labor-Management Organizations,

Indian/Native American tribal governments (other than Federally recognized), and Indian/Native American tribal organizations (Federally recognized).

Among the eligible applicant types provided, the lead applicant must also fall into one of the six categories of organizations listed below and must specify their organization type on the Abstract.

- **Industry and Employer Associations** including regional industry associations, employer associations, or employer intermediary organizations such as chambers of commerce, which may have a cross-industry or broad talent strategy focus or may be focused on specific industry sectors; if focused on specific industries, these should target skilled trades/construction, health care, information technology, manufacturing, domestic energy production, or business/professional occupations. See Appendix A for definitions of these industry sectors. An industry association, also known as a trade association, industry trade group, business association, sector association, or industry body, is defined as an organization founded and funded by businesses that operate in the relevant sectors above. An employer association is defined as a collective organization that represents and supports the interests of its member employers, providing advice, advocacy, and representation in workplace matters.
- **Labor-Management Organizations** that support collaborative efforts between employers and workers in the skilled trades/construction, health care, information technology, manufacturing, domestic energy production, or business/professional services sectors.
- **Education/Training Provider(s)**: Public or private nonprofit education and training providers, including public or other non-profit institutions of higher education as defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001); Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs); Tribal colleges and universities; community and technical colleges and systems; independent school districts; nonprofit and community-based organizations that offer job training, and nonprofit organizations that provide training programs, including programs on the State's Eligible Training Provider List under WIOA.
- **Workforce Development Entities** involved in administering the public workforce system established under WIOA, including State and Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and Indian and Native American Program entities eligible for funding under WIOA Section 166 (29 U.S.C. 3221).
- **Native American Tribal Governments and Organizations** which are defined as the governing bodies of any Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, community, component band, or component reservation, or any affiliated tribal organization that provides relevant education and training services to tribal member.
- **State, County, and Local Governments**, including cities and townships, and State Workforce Agencies (State government agencies that receive funds pursuant to the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.) to administer the State's public labor exchange activities or the lead state agency responsible for the administration of WIOA title I activities).

See pgs. 3-4 of the FOA (Section II.A).

15. Are for-profit institutions of higher education eligible to apply for this grant?

For-profit education and training providers are not eligible as a lead applicant. See pg. 4 of the FOA (Section II.A).

16. Can a lead applicant apply for more than one grant?

The Department will consider only one application from each organization. If an organization submits multiple applications, only the most recently received application that meets the deadline will be considered. See pg. 5 of the FOA (Section II.A).

17. Who are the required partners for this grant?

Applicants must identify the following required partners, **at a minimum**, in the proposed service area, though other partners may also be included in the project design and proposal:

1. **Employers:** At least three employers or industry/trade associations (for each proposed industry sector) who will be engaged in the industry and sector partnership and willing to commit to offering interviewing or hiring opportunities for open positions for successful program participants or upskilling opportunities for existing employees, as well as supporting the project through these additional strategies:
 - Providing feedback on job requirements, necessary credentials, and training content;
 - Offering work-based learning and participating in Registered Apprenticeship programs in the targeted industry(ies) to participants; and
 - Identifying recruitment and referral networks for participant outreach.
2. **Workforce Development Entities:** At least one entity involved in administering the public workforce system established under WIOA, including State and Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Indian and Native American Program entities eligible for funding under WIOA Section 166 (29 U.S.C. 3221), and American Job Center operators or [partner programs](#). The inclusion of a workforce system partner will allow the grantee to build upon existing infrastructure rather than spark duplication and will contribute to the sustainability of the project after the grant period concludes.
3. **Education/Training Provider(s):** At least one public or private education and training providers, including institutions of higher education as defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001); Tribal colleges and universities; community and technical colleges and systems; independent school districts; nonprofit and community-based organizations that offer job training, including that provide training programs included on the State's Eligible Training Provider List under WIOA.
4. **State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs):** Applicants proposing Registered Apprenticeships in states with federally recognized SAAs must include the SAA as a required grant partner, if the SAA partnership is required for activities proposed in the grant application (such as developing and registering new apprenticeship programs). A map of states with SAAs can be found at the hyperlink here: [States with State Apprenticeship Agencies](#).

Applicants may only represent one required partnership role. See pgs. 15-16 of the FOA (Section III.I).

18. Can applicants include additional partners?

Yes. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with other optional partners that support the goals of their sector partnership and proposed training programs. Other organizations that can support this work include, but are not limited to:

- Labor organizations,
- Community-based organizations,
- Economic development agencies,
- Foundations and philanthropic organizations,
- Faith-based organizations, and
- Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Office of Apprenticeship industry intermediaries.

See pg. 16 of the FOA (Section III.I).

19. What are the requirements for documentation of partner commitment?

Applicants must include a **signed letter of commitment or signed agreement from each required partner** that documents their specific commitment(s) to the partnership. **At a minimum, applicants must provide signed documentation of commitment in their application from all employer partners.** Successful applicants will have up to 30 days from grant award to submit documentation of commitment for any remaining required partners. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit documentation of commitment from as many required partners as possible at the time of application submission. See Appendix D of the FOA for additional information. See pg. 16 of the FOA (Section III.I).

20. Who can be served through this grant program and who is the target population?

This grant program must serve participants who live or work within a community that is part of the Appalachian, Lower Mississippi Delta, and Northern Border regions (also known as the WORC regions). Participants eligible to receive services provided through this program represent three primary categories that are named in the appropriation: new entrants to the workforce, dislocated workers, and incumbent workers. Note that these categories are flexible enough to generally encompass any individual (including older youth) seeking training and employment opportunities. These broad categories of eligible participants include within them low-income individuals, ex-offenders, individuals with disabilities, and the long-term unemployed, among others. See Section III.G. Definitions for specific definitions of each category of eligible participant. See pgs. 11-12 of the FOA (Section III.E).

PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

21. What are the expected outcomes for the grant program?

To demonstrate program effectiveness and ensure performance accountability, successful applicants will be required to collect, track, and report data for the following indicators and outcome measures:

- I. **Tracking Indicator**
 - a. Total number of participants who received education/job training activities
- II. **Performance Outcome Measures**
 - a. Total number of participants who completed education/job training activities
 - b. Total number of participants who entered Registered Apprenticeship programs
 - c. Total number of participants who entered training-related employment after training program completion

As part of the application, applicants will provide targets for each indicator and outcome measure. Section IV.D contains a sample target table applicants can include as an attachment. Appendix B provides instructions for submitting targets. The instructions include detailed definitions of each indicator and outcome measure and the required target submission format. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully review the performance reporting requirements for this Initiative and propose targets that align with their project design, are attainable, and will demonstrate effective use of grant funds to achieve the goals of this grant program.**

While applicants are required to propose targets for the tracking indicator and performance outcome measures identified above, which are specific to this FOA, the following WIOA primary indicators of performance will also be tracked for all awarded grants:

- III. **WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance**
 - a. Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit
 - b. Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit
 - c. Median Earnings 2nd Quarter After Exit
 - d. Credential Attainment

Applicants are not required to provide targets for these WIOA indicators. Employment Rate and Median Earnings Indicators are tracked by DOL on behalf of grantees using the [Common Reporting Information System \(CRIS\)](#). Grantees are responsible for tracking and reporting Credential Attainment. See pgs. 10-11 of the FOA (Section III.C).

22. What are the performance reporting requirements?

To evaluate the effectiveness of the WORC 7 grants, ETA requires grant recipients to collect and submit performance data including participant information, the type of services provided, and employment status and earnings. Grantees are required to submit two reports each quarter to document their program activities and participant performance. These two reports will be submitted by uploading a participant data file to the Department's [Workforce Integrated Performance System \(WIPS\)](#):

- **Quarterly Performance Report (QPR)**
 - A quantitative summary of cumulative participant outcomes
 - Compiled from an uploaded data file on all participants
- **Quarterly Narrative Report (QNR)**
 - A qualitative summary of grant activities for that reporting quarter

WORC 7 grantees will use the Demonstration Grant (“Demo”) Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) schema to report participant outcomes to the Department. The Demo PIRL schema is a comprehensive list of data elements that grantees will be required to collect and report on participants. Successful applicants for this grant must be prepared to collect sufficient data from sector partners to report on a subset of data elements from the Demo PIRL schema that will be provided after award. The data collected from partners must be consolidated into one master participant data file for your grant before submission to the Department. Grantees will use their own internal management information system or database to track and submit the data from employers through WIPS.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Demo PIRL schema, which may be viewed on [the DOL performance website](#). Successful applicants will receive additional guidance and training on performance reporting after award. See pg. 34 of the FOA (Appendix B).