

# Workforce Pell

## Federal Overview, Program Design, and Institutional Readiness

Presented by: Dr. Andrew Gardner, Associate VP Workforce Strategies



# Why Workforce Pell Exists and Why It Matters for NC



Increase access to  
high-return short-term  
training



Improve labor market  
outcomes



Expand economic  
mobility



Connect students to  
stackable career  
pathways

Workforce Pell is about

**Alignment + Accountability**

## Why It Matters in North Carolina

- Expands Pell to short-term workforce programs
- Elevates WCE into the federal aid ecosystem
- Strengthens measurable alignment between education and workforce systems
- Positions NC as a national implementation leader
- *More support for more students*

## Characteristics of Potentially Eligible Programs in NC

- ✓ **Lead to stackable, portable credentials**  
(NC Workforce Credentials)
- ✓ **Articulate to academic credit**
- ✓ **<25% outsourced**
- ✓ **Strong completion history**
- ✓ **Proven labor market demand** (jobs, job growth, pay)
- ✓ **Tied to workforce system**  
(Eligible Training Provider List)

Examples: Healthcare • Skilled Trades • CDL • Advanced Manufacturing • BioWork • Public Safety

# The Accountability Standards

## Programs must demonstrate:

- **≥70% completion** within 150% of program time
- **≥70% job placement** within 180 days  
(measured via wage records, 2<sup>nd</sup> qtr. after exit)
  - Academic year 2029-30:  
job placement within related field
- **Positive return on investment (ROI)**  
considering Valued-added Earnings

## ROI Formula

**Median Earnings – 150% FPL\* > Tuition/Fees**

Example (federal guidance)

**\$33,870 – \$21,870 = \$12,000**

**\$12,000 > \$10,000 tuition**

**=PASS**

*\*FPL: Federal Poverty Level  
(single individual)*

# NC Timeline...where are we now?

November  
2025

- Governor Stein directed Governor's Council to make recommendations for implementation.

November

- Agency staff from the Governor's Office, Commerce, NCCCS, NCICU, and UNC begin working with Education Strategy Group (ESG) to prepare for Workforce Pell.
- ESG is providing on-going TA to the state through implementation.

Jan. – Mar.  
2026

- Agency staff and ESG to develop policy and application in alignment with federal law and regulations.

April

- Draft policy and application available for public comment

May 13<sup>th</sup>

- Policy and Application submitted for approval through the NCWorks Commission.
- Application to go-live soon after

July

- Goal to approve initial applications in advance of U.S. Department of Ed application opening.
- Timeline for approvals will be communicated beforehand.

## Current state-level work to support Workforce Pell

- State Interagency Effort supported by Education Strategy Group
- Review and update of NC Workforce Credentials list (as credentials for WF Pell)
  - Connection to occupations that are in demand (jobs, job growth, wages)
  - Stackability of credential and portability to more than one employer
- Consideration of connection of programs to Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)
- Definition of employer alignment
  - High-skill, High-wage, or In-demand (HHI) industries or occupations
  - Connection to hiring criteria

## Student Impact

### For students:

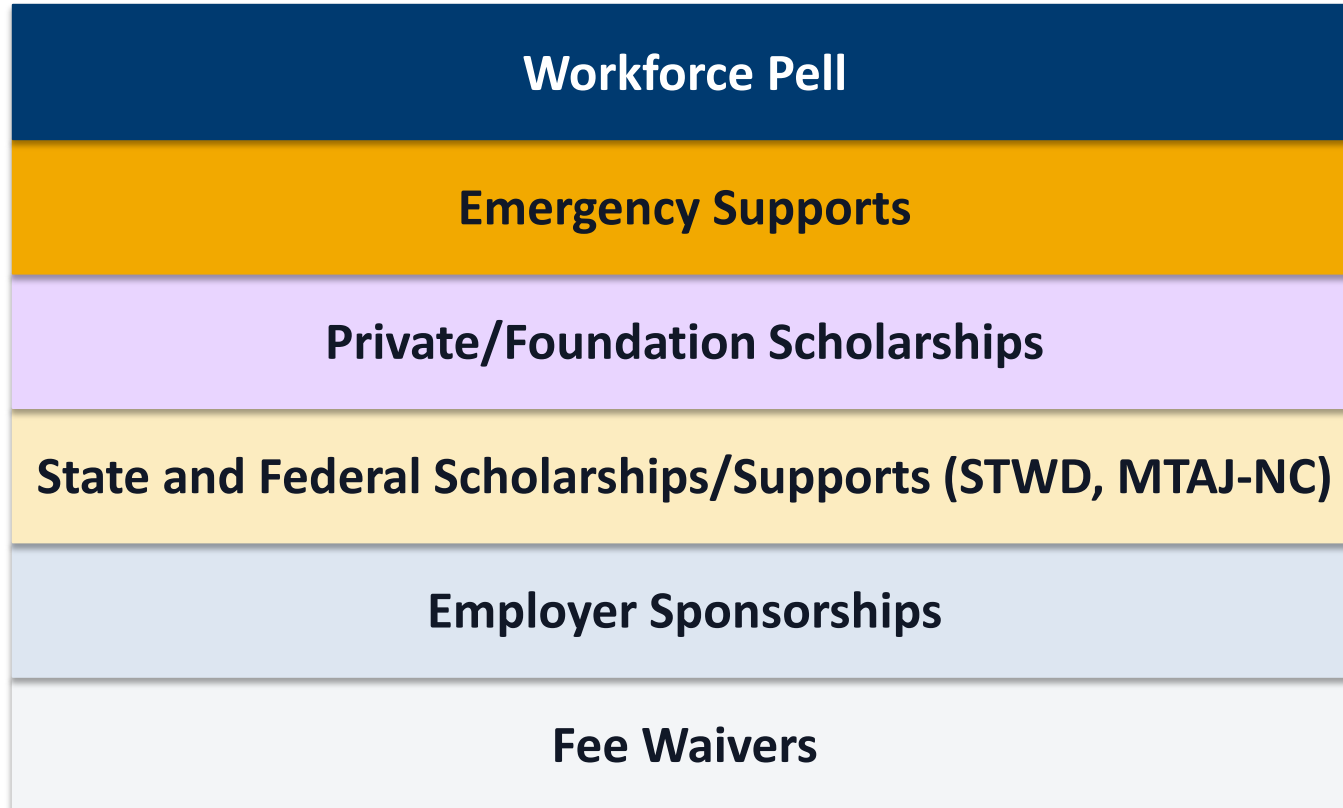
- Greater access
- Lower financial barriers
- More transparency about outcomes
- Clearer career pathways

### But also:

- Pell lifetime usage implications
- FAFSA requirements
- Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards

Students will need proactive advising and clear packaging guidance.

# The Workforce Funding Ecosystem

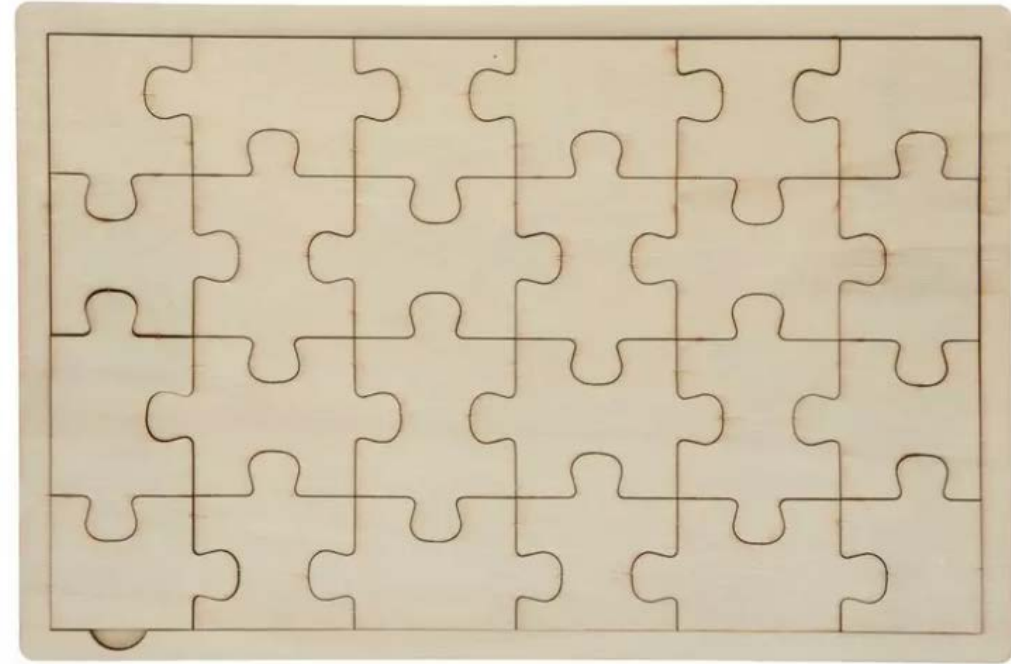


## Your Strategy

- Fee waivers come into play first
- Use most restrictive/hardest to use funds next
- Align larger grants/scholarships with higher-cost programs
- Consider unique needs of students and unique nature of funding sources
- Reduce unmet need
- Layer strategically
- Maximize access

# A Mindset Shift: Pell is one piece of the puzzle

Workforce Pell is NOT replacing...



- Short-Term Workforce Development Grants
- Golden LEAF Scholarships
- SECU Foundation Bridge to Career Scholarships
- Finish Line Grants
- Fee Waivers
- SNAP E&T / More Than a Job - NC supports

**It joins them.**

## Who Might Workforce Pell Best Serve?

### Likely strongest fit:

- Financially needy students
- Students pursuing CE programs leading to credentials, of a medium length (# weeks, contact hours)
- Programs with consistently strong employment outcomes
- Established, stable offerings

**Not every program.**

**Not every student.**

**Strategic deployment matters.**

# 5 big things we learned since the fall:

- WF Pell program eligibility metrics will be determined at the institutional level. (Outcomes will be reviewed for each college, not at state level.)
- There is more to consider than what's written in the law.
- For 2029-30 award year and beyond, job placement will be expected to be within field or in comparable field.
- States determine stackability and portability of credentials.
- States define “High-skill, High-wage, or In-demand” (HHI) industries or occupations and alignment of programs to hiring requirements.

Workforce Pell is about

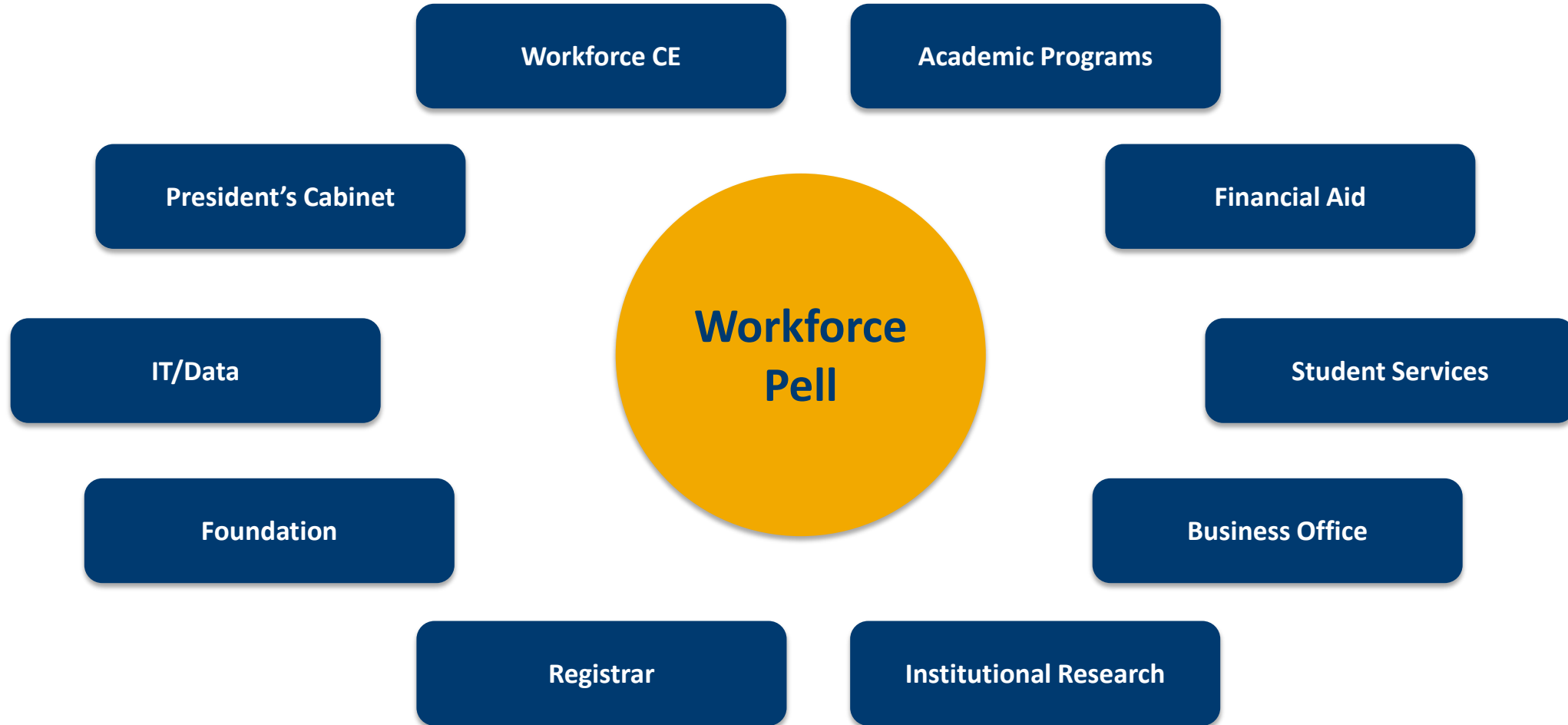
**Alignment + Accountability**

## Questions Colleges Should Be Asking Now

- Which programs already meet the hour/credential thresholds?
- What are our completion rates?
- Can we document 70% placement?
- What are the wage outcomes of my programs?
  - This will be tracked via State/Federal data, but you should have a good understanding to predict what is a good program.
- Are our programs stackable into CU? (If not at our college, where?)
- How do we package Pell with existing scholarships?



# This Is a Cross-Division Effort



**Who is your cross-division A-team?**

# Cross-Department Coordination

## What Must Happen Operationally

Workforce Pell will only work if:

- CE notifies Registrar of withdrawals immediately
- Registrar notifies FA of enrollment changes immediately
- FA notifies Business before disbursement
- IR verifies reporting consistency

## Practical Action Steps

- Establish standing Workforce Pell team meeting
- Create shared checklist by department
- Document handoffs
- Define escalation process

# North Carolina is positioned to lead

## Workforce Pell Elevates Workforce CE

- Brings CE into the federal aid ecosystem
- Requires measurable outcomes
- Encourages stackability
- Strengthens workforce alignment

## Questions for you:

- What programs are strongest candidates?
- What gaps must you close?
- Who is at your implementation table?
- What tools do you need from the System Office?

# Final Takeaways

## Workforce Pell is:

- ✓ A major opportunity
- ✓ A compliance responsibility
- ✓ A data accountability shift
- ✓ A cross-division challenge
- ✓ A funding portfolio addition

## It is not:

- ✗ Automatic
- ✗ Universal
- ✗ Simple

Strategic implementation will determine success.



**WORKFORCE**

**Questions?**

**Keep Moving Forward**

## Call to Action:

The U.S. Department of Education recently released **proposed draft rules for Workforce Pell**, which outline how short-term workforce training programs may become eligible for federal Pell Grant funding. The proposed rules can be reviewed through the attached document or at the following link:

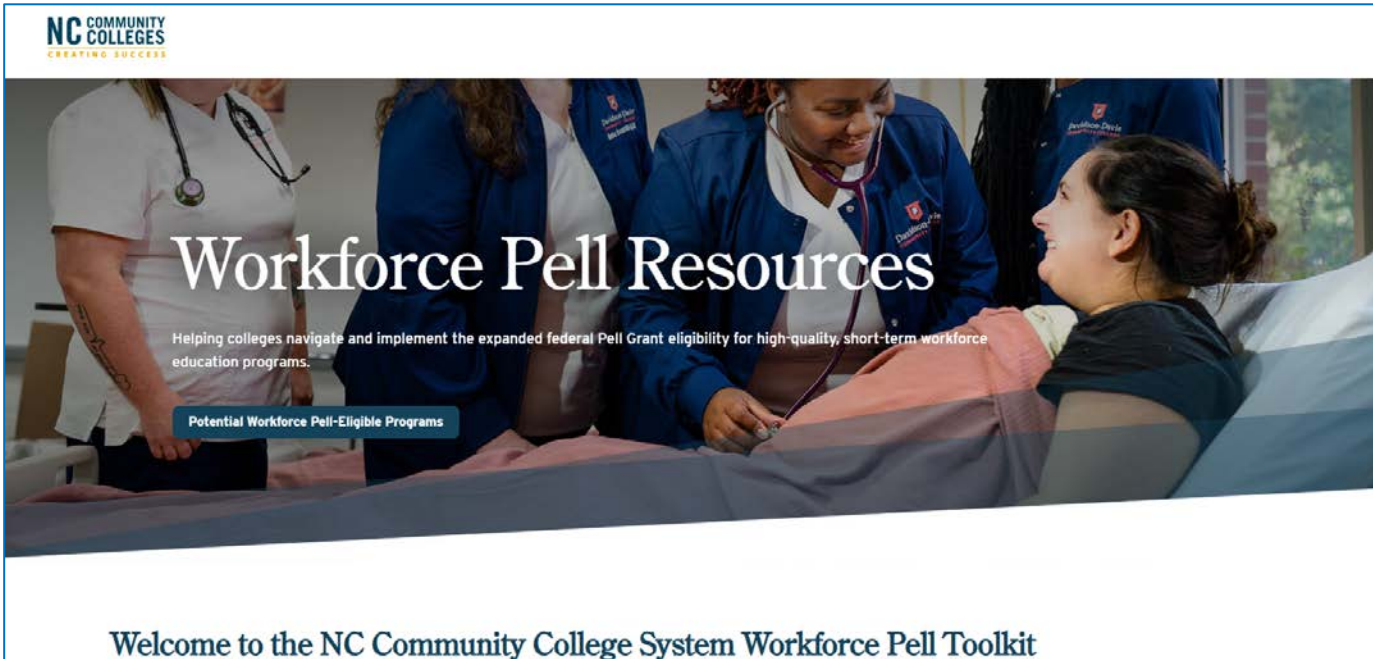
**[U.S. Department of Education Issues Proposed Rules to Implement Working Families Tax Cuts Act's Workforce Pell Grants | U.S. Department of Education](#)**

### **Public Comment Period**

Comments may be submitted through **[www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)** and must be received **by April 8, 2026**. Colleges may submit comments directly or share feedback through the **Workforce Pell Toolkit feedback form**, and we can compile a coordinated system response.

# Resource: NCCCS Workforce Pell Toolkit

## Workforce Pell – NCCCS



**NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES**  
CREATING SUCCESS

## Workforce Pell Resources

Helping colleges navigate and implement the expanded federal Pell Grant eligibility for high-quality, short-term workforce education programs.

Potential Workforce Pell-Eligible Programs

Welcome to the NC Community College System Workforce Pell Toolkit

