

Aligning Investments in Short-term Credentials

Community of Practice

Request for Proposals

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Short-term credentials are taking on an increasingly important role in the postsecondary sector, with growing student demand, new state and federal investments, and a groundswell of offerings from non-institutional providers entering the marketplace. Yet many unanswered questions remain about the impact of these credentials on student outcomes and their efficacy as workforce and economic development tools.

To support states in developing a more comprehensive understanding of how their short-term credential investments are impacting their students and economies, WICHE — in partnership with The Pew Charitable Trusts' Quality Skills and Education Pathways project and the Education and Employment Research Center — is convening a small group (three to five) of interested states to collaborate on examining which short-term credentials they are currently subsidizing and exploring how these investments align with the state's economic goals. The project will run for 24 months and includes a \$15,000 subaward to support participation in addition to technical assistance and funded travel. Though not specific to Workforce Pell, this work could be used to support or build on state Workforce Pell approval frameworks.

GOALS

The overarching goal of the project is to support thoughtful policy choices around state and Pacific jurisdiction investments in short-term credentials. Participating states/jurisdictions will take part in a community of practice designed to support inter-agency collaboration, deepen employer engagement, foster cross-state learning, and enhance data-informed decision making.

SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

The project will run on a two-year timeline; selected participants will receive a \$15,000 subaward to support their participation; and all travel costs associated with attending the two annual meetings will be covered. The project will include the following activities:

- **Community of Practice**
Teams will join quarterly community of practice calls and participate in two annual meetings over the course of the project. The community of practice will include

opportunities for peer learning and shared problem-solving, as well as input from national experts on topics including employer engagement, noncredit data, talent marketplaces, and the unique challenges facing rural providers. Additional opportunities to connect with states across the country as part of Lumina Foundation's [FutureReady States](#) network may also be available.

- **Team Meetings**

WICHE will support states/Pacific jurisdictions in convening team meetings throughout the course of the project, including stakeholder mapping, agenda development, and facilitation support as needed.

- **Technical Assistance**

Teams will receive support in identifying focus areas for improvement and developing associated action plans, with technical assistance tailored to their specific needs and areas of interest. Examples of technical assistance could include assisting states/jurisdictions in inventorying their noncredit data, planning to enhance data capabilities, engaging with employers, developing or refining skills-based approaches to talent marketplaces, and mapping alignment with economic goals. Additional opportunities for support may be included related to FutureReady States network activities.

- **State/Pacific jurisdiction Action Plans**

Teams will develop action plans to enhance alignment between their short-term credential investments and state/jurisdiction goals. These will include an overview of the current landscape—including active short-term credential investments, data collected, and policy and practice mechanisms in place to foster feedback loops between education, economic development, and industry—and identify strengths, gaps, and areas of opportunity.

HOW TO APPLY

Interested states/Pacific jurisdictions should submit a three to five page letter detailing:

- How the project aligns with the state/Pacific jurisdiction's current priorities for higher education.
- A brief summary of the state/Pacific jurisdiction's approach to funding short-term credentials, including state financial aid programs and inclusion in institutional funding formulas.
- A high-level overview of the data elements currently collected.
- A description of any related initiatives the state/Pacific jurisdiction is participating in – for example the U.S. Department of Education Connecting Talent to Opportunity (CTO) Challenge, credential registry efforts, etc. and how this work could complement those efforts.

- Desired outcomes for participating in the project and how the project activities would support the state/Pacific jurisdiction in achieving those outcomes. Please include an outcome related to the state/Pacific jurisdiction's goal for data improvements.
- Describe state/Pacific jurisdiction team composition – teams must include a demonstrated commitment from a minimum of three state-serving entities, for example state higher education executive office (SHEEO), economic development agency, workforce services, department of labor, governor's offices, chamber of commerce, state longitudinal data systems, etc. Any state-level entity may serve as the lead applicant, however, at least one of the partners must be a state agency.

Proposals should be submitted via email to Christina Sedney at csedney@wiche.edu by 11:59 p.m. (MT) on October 22, 2026.

Eligibility

The RFP is open to all WICHE states and Pacific jurisdictions: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, the U.S. Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and American Samoa), Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Selection

Participants will be selected by committee of higher education policy experts, including WICHE staff, based on their response to the questions outlined in the RFP proposal form.

Successful applicants will demonstrate: a cross-sector commitment from state leadership to increasing the alignment of short-term credential investments with state goals; willingness and ability to examine relevant data; and political and bureaucratic will to adapt policy and practice approaches based on findings.