Arizona Certifies First Training Programs for Federal Workforce Pell Grants

Three training programs for in-demand occupations in the healthcare and transportation sectors prepare applications for federal Workforce Pell designation

PHOENIX, AZ, UNITED STATES, September 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Governor Katie Hobbs, the Workforce Arizona Council, the state's workforce board, and the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Arizona's lead state agency for workforce strategy and economic data, have certified the first three training programs for federal Workforce Pell eligibility. The three programs, which can now submit for federal approval, are:

> Workforce Pell will open doors of opportunity for Arizonans, giving them the skills they need to thrive."
>
> *Governor Katie Hobbs*

Eastern Arizona College - Commercial Driver License (CDL)
HDS Truck Driving Institute - Commercial Driver License (CDL)
Pima Medical Institute - Phlebotomy Technician

"These programs offer Arizonans pathways to training programs that lead to a postsecondary credential and a job in a high-wage, high-skill, or in-demand industry in the state," said Governor Katie Hobbs. "Workforce Pell will open doors of opportunity for Arizonans, giving them the skills they need to thrive."

Workforce Pell, created by federal legislation passed in 2025 (HR1), expands the existing Pell Grant program to include short-term education and training programs that prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand jobs. The program extends financial aid access to Pell-eligible Arizonans facing financial barriers to postsecondary education through programs that meet specific criteria to ensure their quality.

The next step is for state-certified institutions to submit their programs to the U.S. Department of Education for federal Workforce Pell program designation. The U.S. Department of Education makes the final determination for eligibility. Programs may only accept Workforce Pell Grants once they receive both the state certification and federal designation.

"The Workforce Arizona Council certified these programs because they demonstrated clear outcomes for students and meet the demands of Arizona's transportation and healthcare

sectors," said John Walters, Chair of the Workforce Arizona Council. "The Workforce Arizona Council has worked with the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity to build a process that prioritizes quality and includes key stakeholder feedback from higher education, business, community-based organizations, and federal financial aid experts."

To qualify for Workforce Pell state certification, programs must be short-term (8 weeks to less than 15 weeks) and lead to portable, stackable credentials aligned with Arizona's in-demand occupations. Programs need to demonstrate a 70% completion rate and a 70% job placement rate, along with measurable wage gains for students one year after completing the program. Applications cover institution eligibility, labor market alignment, employer engagement and validation, student outcomes, and consumer disclosures.

"Eastern Arizona College is committed to providing practical, affordable pathways that connect students directly to meaningful careers. State certification of our commercial driver's license program is an important step toward making this high-demand training more accessible to students who may otherwise face financial barriers. We are proud to be among Arizona's first programs to receive state certification for Workforce Pell and look forward to helping more students gain the skills and credentials they need to enter the workforce and strengthen the communities we serve," said Kevin Peck, Dean of Business, Technology and Workforce Development at Eastern Arizona College.

"Receiving Arizona Workforce Pell State Certification is an important milestone for HDS Truck Driving Institute and, more importantly, for the students we serve. For more than three decades, HDS has helped individuals build careers through high-quality commercial driver training, and this certification brings us one step closer to making that training accessible to more Arizonans who may otherwise face financial barriers. The trucking industry continues to need safe, skilled and job-ready drivers, and we are proud that our CDL Training Program has been recognized as meeting Arizona's standards for quality, employer relevance and strong student outcomes. We are especially honored to be among the first programs in Arizona to receive this certification and look forward to taking the next step in the federal approval process and continuing to connect students with meaningful career opportunities in Arizona's transportation industry," said Amy Woods, Director of Schools, HDS Truck Driving Institute.

"Expanding Pell eligibility to qualifying short-term programs has the potential to remove a significant financial barrier for students seeking a quality fast-track into essential healthcare careers. Arizona's certification of Pima Medical Institute's Phlebotomy Technician program in Phoenix by the Workforce Arizona Council within the Governor's Office and Office of Economic Opportunity is an important first step. We appreciate the state's focus on program quality, student outcomes, and workforce demand. Pending completion of the federal approval process, Workforce Pell could help more eligible students access hands-on training while supporting employers' need for qualified healthcare professionals," said Dick Luebke, Pima Medical Institute's CEO and Chairman of the Board.

Arizona plans to offer Arizona institutions two Workforce Pell application cycles per year, with the application windows opening next in January and July, with Council action anticipated in May and November. The predictable schedule provides institutions clear opportunities to apply while allowing sufficient time for state review and appeals. State-certified programs will then advance through the applicable state certification and federal approval process.
Workforce Pell programs will enable students to earn postsecondary credentials, which will advance Arizona's education attainment goal, Achieve60AZ while also supporting the state's workforce needs.
To learn more, visit oeo.az.gov/workforce-pell.

About the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity
The Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) strengthens Arizona's workforce and economy. OEO coordinates workforce development strategy and evaluation, monitors the state's tax and regulatory competitiveness, and produces labor market, economic and demographic research and analysis. OEO is also home to the Arizona Finance Authority, which offers innovative, responsible, and sustainable financing solutions for public and private borrowers. For more information, please visit OEO's webpage.

About the Workforce Arizona Council
The Workforce Arizona Council is responsible for implementing the Governor's strategic vision for a robust and effective workforce system in the State of Arizona. Consisting of industry leaders in private business, community and labor organizations, local and state government agencies, and members of the State's legislature, the Council serves as a guiding force towards a stronger Arizona workforce and labor market. The Council receives its authority from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act which was passed by the Federal legislature in 2014 by a large bipartisan majority. The Council is staffed by the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity. For more information, please visit the Council's webpage.

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