

Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants (Fifth Round)

FOA-ETA-24-23

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Released: July 31, 2024

Award Overview

1. What is the timeline of the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)?

The closing date for receipt of applications under the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants fifth round FOA (SCC5) is September 24, 2024. 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.

2. What amount of funding is available? Is there a limit?

DOL expects to award a total of \$65,000,000 to fund approximately 13-17 grants, including supplemental funding grant modifications to support grantees participating in the national impact evaluation. In the event that additional funds become available, we reserve the right to use such funds to select additional grantees from applications submitted in response to this Announcement.

Applicants may apply for up to \$5,750,000 for initial consortia grants and \$1,750,000 for initial single institution grants. The minimum for both types of applicants is \$1,500,000. Subject to receiving sufficient applications of fundable quality, DOL intends to award approximately 70-80 percent of grant funds to consortium applicants and the remaining grant funds to single institution applicants. DOL anticipates that the funding as described in this FOA will yield approximately 7-8 consortia grants and 6-9 single institution grants.

Approximately \$55,000,000 will be awarded in grants under the competition described in this FOA. After those initial awards the Department will conduct a national impact evaluation feasibility study. Grantees who are selected for the national impact evaluation will receive additional funding to cover data-related tasks associated with the national evaluation, as well as additional services during a short period of performance extension (see Section II.B Period of Performance). The Department anticipates awarding approximately \$10,000,000 in total additional funding to selected grantees for this purpose, for total awards of \$65,000,000. This amount will be allocated as a percentage of initial grant funding. Implementation of the additional funds and period of performance extension for grantees selected for the impact evaluation will come in the form of a grant amendment executed no later than September 30, 2025.

3. What is the timeline for this grant program?

We anticipate that grants will be announced in late 2024 or early 2025, with an anticipated start date of February 1, 2025. The Department will make a determination as to whether to include any fifth round grantees in the national impact evaluation soon after award and, if proceeding with inclusion of round 5 grantees, the Department will undertake the feasibility assessment as soon as possible after the period of performance begins. Dependent on this process, grantees selected for the national impact evaluation will be notified and receive a grant amendment effective no later than September 30, 2025, that includes the additional funding and the period of performance extension described in the FOA Sections II.A and II.B. The period of performance for grantees who are not selected for the impact evaluation will end at 48 months. Per Amendment One, the end date will be January 31, 2029, assuming a February 1, 2025, start date. The period of performance for grantees selected for the impact evaluation will end on June 30, 2029.

4. Is there a match requirement?

No. This program does not require cost sharing or matching funds. Including such funds is not one of the application screening criteria and applications that include any form of cost sharing or match will not receive additional consideration during the review process. Instead, the agency considers any resources contributed to the project beyond the funds provided by the agency as leveraged resources. Section IV.B.2 provides more information on leveraged resources.

5. How will applications be evaluated for funding?

We have instituted procedures for assessing the technical merit of applications to provide for an objective review of applications and to assist you in understanding the standards against which your application will be judged. The evaluation criteria are based on the information required in the application as described in Sections IV.B.2. (Project Budget) and IV.B.3. (Project Narrative). Reviewers will award points based on the evaluation criteria described below.

Table 1: Criteria and Points Values

Criterion	Points (maximum)
a. Statement of Need Labor Market Area, Sector(s), and Occupational Employer Demand (4 points) Equity Gap Analysis (6 points) (See Section IV.B.3.a. Statement of Need)	10 total
b. Expected Outputs and Outcomes Theory of Change (6 points) Strategy Options (4 points) Career Pathways Program(s) Participant Estimate and Tracking Plan (4 points) Sustainable Systems Change (6 points)	28 total

Project Work Plan and Annual Milestones (8 points) (See Section IV.B.3.b. Expected Outcomes and Outputs) Theory of Change (6 points) Strategy Options (4 points) Career Pathways Program(s) Participant Estimate and Tracking Plan (4 points) Sustainable Systems Change (6 points) Project Work Plan and Annual Milestones (8 points) (See Section IV.B.3.b. Expected Outcomes and Outputs)	
c. Project Design Institutions of Higher Education Selection (4 points) Career Pathways Programs (8 points) Demonstration of Industry Sector and Employer Engagement (6 points) Demonstration of Workforce Development System Engagement (4 points) Demonstration of Worker Organization, Labor-Management Partnership, or Labor Union Engagement; Community-Based Organization Engagement; and Secondary School Engagement (4 points) Student Voice (2 points) Advancing Good Jobs (8 points) Advancing Equitable Employment Outcomes (8 points) (See Section IV.B.3.c. Project Design)	44 total
d. Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity (See Section IV.B.3.e. Organizational, Administrative, and Fiscal Capacity)	8 total
e. Past Performance – Programmatic Capability (See Section IV.B.3.f. Past Performance – Programmatic Capability)	6 total
f. Budget and Budget Justification (See Section IV.B.2. Project Budget and Section IV.B.3.f. Budget and Budget Narrative)	4 total
g. Priority Consideration – Investing in America (See Section IV.B.3.g. Priority Consideration – Investing in America)	1 total
Total	101

Section IV.B.3 (Project Narrative) of this FOA has several “section headers” (e.g., IV.B.3.a. 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 against the selection criteria to determine the merit of applications. These criteria are based on the policy goals, priorities, and emphases set forth in this FOA. Up to 101 points may be awarded to an applicant, depending on the quality of the responses provided. See Amendment One, which amends the language in the FOA to reflect the correct number of points.

The final scores (which may include the mathematical normalization of review panels) will serve as the primary basis for selection of applications for funding. The panel results are advisory in nature and not binding on the Grant Officer. The Grant Officer reserves the right to make selections based solely on the final scores or to take into consideration other relevant factors when applicable. Such factors may include the geographic distribution of funds, our intention to select at least one eligible Tribally Controlled College, considerations related to the possible national evaluation, and other relevant factors. The Grant Officer may consider any information that comes to their attention.

6. Does SCC5 use the same FOA as SCC4?

SCC5 uses largely the same FOA as that of SCC4, but with a few significant changes. A primary change is the addition of a priority consideration point for applicants that align their identified career pathway with relevant in-demand infrastructure sectors related to the Administration's Investing in America Agenda.

Another change is the expressed intent to award at least one grant to a Tribally Controlled College if one or more applications of acceptable quality from otherwise eligible Tribally Controlled Colleges is received, in response to Executive Order 14112, *Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations*.

Other changes are of a more technical nature, such as the addition of a secondary school as a strongly encouraged partner and the addition of clarifying language regarding the "strongly encouraged" worker entity partner. However, applicants should be sure to thoroughly read the SCC5 FOA and only use this FOA (FOA-ETA-24-23) in preparing their applications.

Eligibility And Partnerships Overview

7. Who is eligible to apply for this grant?

The eligible lead applicant must be a community college that is a public institution of higher education as defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act, and at which the associate degree is primarily the highest degree awarded, as shown by the college's designation at <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. Specific criteria for how the Department will determine this are in Section III.A.

The lead applicant must apply as a single institution lead or as a consortium lead representing a consortium of institutions of higher education (institution consortium).

Grants will be awarded to the lead applicant of an SCC Partnership, which will serve as the grantee and have overall fiscal and administrative responsibility for the grant.

Institutions funded in SCC4 as leads or consortium members may not apply for SCC5. Institutions that were funded in the first three rounds of SCC (but not SCC4) as either leads or

consortium members may apply as leads (or consortium members) under this fifth round if the SCC5 grant project focuses on a different industry sector (or sectors) than in prior rounds. See FAQ #10 for more information.

8. We are a Tribally Controlled College. What must we do to be considered for the Tribally Controlled College funding priority?

In keeping with [Executive Order 14112](#) (Sec. 5(a)(ii)), DOL intends to award at least one grant to a Tribally Controlled College if one or more applications of acceptable quality are received from Tribally Controlled Colleges that are otherwise eligible under Section III.A.1 above. For the purposes of SCC5 grants, eligibility as a Tribally Controlled College is determined by designation as a public, two-year institution with a Specialized Mission of “Tribal College” (as of the date the Funding Opportunity opens) in the U.S. Department of Education’s College Navigator at <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. Specialized Mission information is found under “More Search Options.”

To be considered for the Tribally Controlled College funding priority, Tribally Controlled College applicants must start block 15 of the SF-424 form, “descriptive title of application project,” with the words “Tribally Controlled College” and explicitly state in the application that they are applying for “Tribally Controlled College SCC5 funds.” Tribally Controlled College applicants may be considered as either a single institution or the lead for a consortium.

In terms of geographic scope, for a consortium led by a Tribally Controlled College, the definition of labor market area is expanded to include colleges within a state, whether or not the colleges are in an economically integrated geographic area.

9. What must we do to be considered for the priority consideration point?

In support of the Administration’s Investing in America Agenda (IAA), this FOA will award a priority consideration point for applicants that align their identified career pathway with relevant in-demand infrastructure sectors related to the IAA. To receive one additional bonus point, applicants must either:

a. Describe how the proposed career pathway aligns with relevant in-demand infrastructure sectors related to the Administration’s Investing in America Agenda (IAA). These IAA sectors include construction, information technology infrastructure and broadband development, engineering, and advanced manufacturing that supports clean energy-related efforts, including electric vehicle battery manufacturing and maintenance, solar and wind energy development and maintenance, and advanced manufacturing tied to semiconductors and nanotechnology.

OR

a. Grantees proposing a sector not listed above must demonstrate that their proposed sector is directly related to at least one specific IAA project (identified by IAA Project Name) in their

service area(s) which is tied to recent investments shown on invest.gov. To assist with identifying relevant investments located in the applicant's service area(s) where specific sector training is needed, applicants can reference the map of public infrastructure investments on invest.gov, which can be filtered by state and public infrastructure projects. Alternatively, users may download the map data file of the underlying dataset and open it with a spreadsheet application such as Microsoft Excel.

Invest.gov is a central listing of projects related to the following IAA investments:

- American Rescue Plan,
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,
- CHIPS and Science Act, and/or
- Inflation Reduction Act.

10. We are part of an SCC grant from a previous round. May we apply?

Institutions that were funded in SCC4 as leads or consortium members may not apply for SCC5. Applications for SCC5 that include leads or consortium members funded in SCC4 will be considered nonresponsive.

Institutions that were funded in the first three rounds of SCC (but not SCC4) as either leads or consortium members may apply as leads (or consortium members) under this fifth round if the SCC5 grant project focuses on a different industry sector (or sectors) than in prior rounds; if not they will receive zero points for their Project Narrative where it describes their Labor Market Area, Sector(s), and Occupational Employer Demand in their Statement of Need (see Section IV.B.3.a.i.). Specifically, if any institution applying for SCC5 as a lead or consortium member received grant funding in SCC1, SCC2, or SCC3 for one of the following nine industries, they must demonstrate that they are proposing a different industry for their SCC5 application:

- advanced manufacturing (includes automation, robotics, and other sub-sectors)
- clean or renewable energy
- construction (including shipbuilding/repair and other sub-sectors)
- education
- healthcare (includes allied health, emergency services, nursing, and other sub-sectors)
- information technology (includes cybersecurity and other sub-sectors)
- public sector
- supply chain and logistics (includes transportation, distribution, logistics, distribution-materials management, and other sub-sectors)
- telecommunications or broadband infrastructure

Note: The list above represents industries proposed for the first three rounds of SCC. SCC5 applicants can propose industries on this list so long as the industry(ies) are not the same industry(ies) for which the applicant previously received funding. SCC5 applicants may also propose industries not on this list.

For example, assume that College X is a member of a Round 1 SCC consortium grant that targeted two industry sectors in its proposal (Advanced Manufacturing and Healthcare). If an SCC5 lead applicant of a consortium proposes to include College X as a consortium member, the SCC5 applicant must demonstrate that it is proposing a different industry sector for SCC5 (i.e., neither Advanced Manufacturing nor Healthcare). Note that this restriction applies both to the SCC5 lead applicant and to all its proposed SCC5 consortium members; that is, in this example neither the SCC5 lead nor any members of the proposed SCC5 consortium may target Advanced Manufacturing or Healthcare in their proposed project design.

In addition, note that this restriction would apply to any sub-sectors and/or career pathways within the industry for which College X previously received funding. For example, assume that College X received SCC1 funding to enhance an allied health career pathways program. In this example, the SCC5 lead applicant may not include College X in its application and propose to enhance a nursing career pathways program as its project design (for any or all of its proposed SCC5 consortium members) because both career pathways are in the same industry. Failure to demonstrate compliance will affect scoring. See Section IV.B.3.a.i. for more information.

Applicants may reference this [list of SCC1, SCC2, and SCC3 grantees showing the industries for which those grantees received funding](#). For the purposes of this Announcement, every institution included in a consortium is considered to be funded for any industry referenced in the abstract submitted in the grantee's initial proposal.

11. Is accreditation a requirement to be eligible to apply for SCC5?

To be eligible as either a lead applicant or as a member of an SCC Partnership, all institutions must be, by the closing date of this FOA and **throughout the entity's performance in this grant program**, accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting agency or association that has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. A database of institutions that are accredited by bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education can be found at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>.

12. What qualifies as an institution consortium? What entities are eligible to participate in the institution consortium?

For consortium applicants, the Department is requiring institutions to apply for this funding as a consortium of colleges that will undertake systems change as a labor market-focused consortium (see Section I.E. Geographic Scope). The consortium must address equity gaps and respond to the workforce needs of one or more industry sectors within the consortium's regional labor market. Labor market-focused consortia must describe their economic region and define how they will coordinate with and between partners to support sustainable systems change at the regional level, as well as how the project will leverage state, interstate, or regional resources in the achievement of program outcomes and outputs. For a consortium led by a Tribally Controlled College, the definition of labor market area is expanded to include

colleges within a state, whether or not the colleges are in an economically integrated geographic area.

Consortium members may include community colleges and other eligible public and private, non-profit institutions, as defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act.

13. How many colleges are required for an institution consortium?

An institution consortium must include at least the consortium lead and one other institution, but the Department anticipates that more than two colleges will be required to accomplish the goals of the consortium, depending on the labor market area and project design.

14. What entities are required as part of the SCC Partnership?

All applicants must include the following partners in their SCC partnership:

- For each sector proposed, a sector convener that has a direct relationship to the proposed career pathways program(s);
- For each sector proposed, at least three employers that are part of the proposed established sector or that commit to being part of an emerging industry sector effort; and
- One or more public workforce development system partners.

Consortium applicants also must include the following required partner(s):

- At least one other institution, in addition to the consortium lead.

Failure to demonstrate the inclusion of required partners will affect scoring.

An entity cannot serve as more than one type of required partner in the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants for the purpose of meeting FOA requirements. For example, a lead or consortium member institution cannot also serve as the required workforce development system partner. The lead institution or a consortium member may, however, serve as the required sector convener if it meets the requirements described in Section III.A.3.b. Required Sector Convener.

15. Are we required to partner with worker-focused entities, community-based organizations, and secondary schools?

These partners are not required. However, the Department strongly encourages applicants to collaborate with a worker-focused entity; with one or more community-based organizations that have successfully engaged the underserved community(ies) targeted in the proposal; and with one or more secondary schools. Applicants will be evaluated on the quality and robustness of their SCC partnership and these partners support higher-quality service delivery in support of the project design.

16. What does the new “strongly encouraged” partnership with secondary school(s) entail?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include in their SCC Partnership one or more secondary schools. In particular, applicants are encouraged to partner with career and technical education (CTE) programs at the secondary level, which can create long-lasting, seamless pathways for students exploring careers in the chosen sector in high school who may be interested in pursuing that pathway at the postsecondary level. A dual enrollment strategy is one way (though not the only way) that an applicant may propose to partner with secondary schools. Grantees may also partner with secondary schools in other ways that support their project design, such as career exposure or recruiting, without counting secondary students as participants. However, given this program’s emphasis on employment outcomes, the applicant’s proposal should focus on those individuals in the target population(s) who intend to enroll in the entire career pathways program. While it is permissible for high school students enrolled in a dual enrollment program to enroll in individual courses within the applicant’s grant-enhanced career pathways program, only those students with a declared intent to enroll in the full career pathways program may be the focus of—and counted as a participant in—the proposed project (see Section III.C.3.a.1, New Entrants to the Workforce).

17. Our service area might not have a union in the sector we are targeting. What are the options for meeting the criterion for engagement with a worker-focused entity?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include in their SCC Partnership a worker-focused entity such as a worker organization, labor-management partnership, or labor union representing workers, or an organization representing target populations of students and workers in relevant industry sectors. Applicants will be evaluated on this criterion.

Worker organization options include:

- A union representing employees of a partner employer. If such a union is not available, another option could be a union that serves workers in the applicant’s targeted occupation(s) but that is not in the local area and/or is not working with a partner employer but which can serve as an active consultant on workers’ views and needs in the targeted occupation(s) throughout the grant. To aid in identifying related unions that focus on the identified industry sectors within (or outside of) the target service area(s), applicants can use the Department of Labor’s Office of Labor-Management Standards’ (OLMS) Union Search Tool, by which you can search on union type, city, state, zip code, and other criteria to identify labor unions for outreach and partnership.
- A labor-management partnership. As defined by the Department, labor-management partnerships allow employers of all sizes to work constructively with the unions that represent their employees to tackle important workplace issues that fall within and sometimes extend the framework of traditional collective bargaining. The Department provides information on effective labor-management partnerships and helpful resources at <https://www.dol.gov/general/workcenter/labor-management-partnerships>.

- A worker-focused advocacy organization, such as worker associations, coalitions, alliances, guilds, or another similar worker advocacy group. Such organizations may set occupational standards or practices, advocate on behalf of their members, or work to develop or change specific policies such as the local minimum wage rate, day worker protections, stable work schedules, and other work-focused issues.
- A student-focused group that advocates for students studying to work in the targeted industry sector(s) and that provides exposure and access to industry culture and awareness, as well as attributes of job quality.

Whichever approach the grantee takes to incorporate the views and needs of workers in the project, the Department expects that the grantee will pursue that approach throughout the grant and incorporate the input gathered into the annual data review and analysis that it conducts to assess good jobs and equitable employment impacts, as described in Section I.A.2. Core Element 2.

These worker-focused entities may engage in grant activities such as identifying necessary skills and competencies; providing related skills-based training in collaboration with the required education/training provider; working with employer and education partners to develop new or modify existing curricula; advising on recruitment, retention, and advancement strategies within an employer or industry; communicating with current and potential workers within the sector; acting as mentors and on-the-job trainers to new workers; and providing supportive services.

18. Can we propose the same organization to fill the roles of both a worker entity and a community-based organization?

The FOA does not preclude using the same organization for both roles since these are not required partners. However, applicants should carefully consider whether the same organization will meet both sets of needs. To receive full points for both sections, applicants must provide clear descriptions that meet the requirements for each role, as outlined in Section IV.B.3.c.v. Demonstration of Worker Organization, Labor-Management Organization, or Labor Union Engagement and Community-Based Organization Engagement.

19. Can we include additional partners beyond those required and strongly encouraged?

Yes, the Department also encourages applicants to collaborate with other partners that can support and advance the work of the SCC Partnership.

Consortium applicants are encouraged to include in their SCC Partnerships at least one state-level or community college district-level entity if this will support proposed goals. Examples include, but are not limited to, a state governing body for community colleges or for institutions of higher education more broadly; a statewide association of community colleges; or a community college district (or equivalent) entity.

Other optional partners may include tribal organizations, adult education providers, technical colleges, State Apprenticeship Agencies, federally funded programs such as those authorized by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Perkins V, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programs, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training programs, housing and community development programs, economic development agencies, and foundations and philanthropic organizations.

20. Can we apply for more than one grant?

We will consider only one application from each organization applying as a lead applicant. If we receive multiple applications from the same organization, we will consider only the most recently received application that met the deadline. If the most recent application is disqualified for any reason, we will not replace it with an earlier application. An institution may apply as the lead in one application and be proposed as a consortium member in another application, or as a consortium member in more than one application.

21. Who can be served by the grant?

For the purposes of tracking participants under this FOA, “participants” are defined as the students enrolled in career pathways programs that are being enhanced using SCC5 Program Grant funds. The definition of eligible participants is broad. Consistent with the funding source, eligible participants include new entrants to the workforce and those seeking their first job after a significant period outside the workforce, dislocated workers who have lost employment, and those currently working but seeking additional skills. Section III.C.3 provides additional important information on eligible participants.

Note that, regarding the category of employed workers, past rounds of SCC funding have included as eligible participants those incumbent workers who receive training offered by their current employer in partnership with the grantee. For the purposes of this FOA, however, incumbent workers by this definition are not eligible for grant-funded participation. This limitation results from the need to focus on a participant pool where students have similar motivations to obtain training, for the purposes of the national impact evaluation.

Within these three broad categories of workers, applicants will seek to reduce equity gaps by selecting career pathways program strategies that are specifically designed to support one or more locally underserved communities as described in the FOA’s definition of an equity gap (see FAQ #25 for this definition). DOL anticipates that SCC5’s focus on building the capacity to train for equitable employment in good jobs will also benefit all students even if not specifically targeted, including the broad range of communities listed in Executive Order 14091, veterans and military spouses, and other individuals.

Note that, under this FOA, grantees or their designated institutional grant partners must establish and document the eligibility of all participants, not just those whom the applicant identifies for purposes of meeting the project’s equity goals.

22. Are high school students enrolled in a dual enrollment program eligible to receive training under the grant?

Given this program’s emphasis on employment outcomes, the applicant’s proposal should focus on those individuals in the target population(s) who intend to enroll in the entire career pathways program. While it is permissible for high school students enrolled in a dual enrollment program to enroll in individual courses within the applicant’s grant-enhanced career pathways program, only those students with a declared intent to enroll in the full career pathways program may be the focus of—and counted as a participant in—the proposed project. See Section VI.C. Reporting.

Grant Program Overview

23. What is the purpose of the fifth round of the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants program?

The fifth round of the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grants program (referred to as SCC5) will build community colleges’ capacity to meet the skill development needs of employers and equitably support students in obtaining good jobs in in-demand industries. Successful applicants will enhance sector-based career pathways programs using strategies rooted in evidence and designed to build further evidence on their effectiveness in leading to positive employment outcomes. They also will use the diverse strengths of their SCC5 Partnership members to accomplish and sustain systems change.

To ensure that SCC5 grant projects accomplish the goals of the FOA, the Department will fund applications that address, in their proposals, each of the required SCC5 Core Elements, which, while presented below sequentially, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing:

- Core Element 1: Sector-Based Career Pathways Programs
- Core Element 2: Good Jobs, Equitable Employment Outcomes, and Student Voice
- Core Element 3: Strategy Options
- Core Element 4: Sustainable Systems Change

24. How does the FOA define “good jobs”?

The Departments of Labor and Commerce jointly identified eight [Good Job Principles](#), published in 2022. For the purposes of this FOA, applicants must specifically focus on training for occupations that pay family-sustaining wages and provide skills and career advancement, as expressed in the seventh and eighth Good Jobs Principles:

- Pay. All workers are paid a stable and predictable living wage, as determined by the local area cost of living, before overtime, tips, and commissions. Workers’ pay is fair, transparent, and equitable (i.e., workers with similar skills and experience are paid the same wage for the same work). Workers’ wages grow commensurate with increased skills and experience.

- Skills and Career Advancement. Workers have equitable opportunities and tools to progress to future jobs. Workers have transparent promotion or advancement opportunities. Workers have access to high-quality occupational training, such as on-the-job training (OJT), and continuing education opportunities.

Applicants are not required to address the remaining six Good Jobs Principles in their application, but the Department strongly encourages doing so to embed job quality in the overall project design.

Applicants will find tools to identify occupations that pay or lead to family-supporting wages in Section I.F. Target Occupations.

25. How does the FOA define “equity” and “equity gaps”?

As defined in [Executive Order 14091](#), the term “equity” means the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including individuals who belong to communities that have often been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander persons and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women and girls; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; persons who live in United States Territories; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality; and individuals who belong to multiple such communities. The term “underserved communities” refers to those populations as well as geographic communities that have been systematically denied the opportunity to participate fully in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as defined in [Executive Order 13985](#), and [Executive Order 14020](#).

In the context of this Announcement, an “equity gap” refers to significant and persistent inequity or disparity in the employment opportunities offered to individuals who belong to one or more underserved communities.

The following demographic groups included in Executive Order 14091 are also included in DOL’s Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) and will be used for the purposes of this FOA to track progress toward reducing equity gaps: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Female, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals (using the WIOA definition of low-income identified in [WIOA Section 3\(36\)](#)).

26. How does the FOA seek to advance equity?

This announcement includes several measures that support the Administration’s equity goals. All of these are discussed in greater detail in the FOA.

- The FOA requires that applicants conduct an equity gap analysis to address equity gaps in opportunities and outcomes for one or more selected underserved communities.

- Successful applicants must institute a data review and analysis process at least annually, with the assistance of the grantee-contracted developmental evaluator. The purpose of the annual process is to determine whether the jobs that participants are being trained for and enter into pay family-sustaining wages and offer skills and career advancement; and whether successful applicants are reducing their targeted equity gaps.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to include in their SCC Partnership a worker-focused entity such as a worker organization, labor-management partnership, labor union representing workers, or organization representing target populations of students and workers in the relevant industry sectors. Applicants will be evaluated on this criterion.
- The Department also strongly encourages applicants to partner with community-based organizations that have successfully engaged underserved populations and communities. Applicants will be evaluated on this criterion.
- Applicants must incorporate student feedback loops throughout the grant to support quality career pathways development that meets the needs of students.

Grant Project Design

27. What is the geographic scope for these grant projects?

For the purposes of the FOA, grant-funded services will take place within the labor market area(s) in which the proposed institution(s) are located, consistent with institutional policies. The term “labor market area” means an economically integrated geographic area within which individuals can reside and find employment within a reasonable distance or can readily change employment without changing their place of residence. See the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ [Frequently Asked Question #6](#), “What are labor market areas (LMAs)?” A labor market area may be within a state or across two or more contiguous states that share a common economic region. For a consortium led by a Tribally Controlled College, the definition of labor market area is expanded to include colleges within a state, whether or not the colleges are in an economically integrated geographic area.

28. Are there targeted industries and/or occupations under this FOA?

When selecting the career pathway(s) to be built or enhanced with grant funding, applicants must focus on those pathways that provide training to workers in in-demand industries, such as—but not limited to—advanced manufacturing, information technology, health care, clean energy, and others. Applicants also may consider how the development of and/or connection to entrepreneurial training to strengthen small business growth may support the chosen career pathways, in these and other industries, provided that the entrepreneurial training is aligned with grant goals and local economic needs.

Note that in support of the Administration’s Investing in America Agenda (IAA), this FOA will award a priority consideration point for applicants that align their identified career pathway with relevant in-demand infrastructure sectors related to the IAA. These IAA sectors include construction, information technology infrastructure and broadband development, engineering, and advanced

manufacturing that supports clean energy-related efforts, including electric vehicle battery manufacturing and maintenance, solar and wind energy development and maintenance, and advanced manufacturing tied to semiconductors and nanotechnology. Grantees proposing a sector not listed above must demonstrate that their proposed sector is directly related to at least one specific IAA project (identified by IAA Project Name) in their service area(s) as listed on invest.gov. To assist with identifying relevant investments located in the applicant's service area(s) where specific sector training is needed, applicants can reference the map of public infrastructure investments on invest.gov, which can be filtered by state and public infrastructure projects. Alternatively, users may download the map data file of the underlying dataset and open it with a spreadsheet application such as Microsoft Excel. Invest.gov is a central listing of projects related to the following IAA investments: American Rescue Plan; Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law; CHIPS and Science Act; and/or Inflation Reduction Act.

To identify occupations that are or lead to good jobs (such as those that offer living wages and opportunities for advancement), applicants may use a variety of tools. For instance, they may use the Department's [Career Trajectories and Occupational Transitions \(CTOT\) Dashboard](#) to help identify good job pathways in their area. The CTOT dashboard is an interactive tool that allows users to explore data on how workers in mid-level occupations move through jobs and occupational clusters within certain sectors and industries. It identifies potential "launchpad" occupations, which are occupations "from which entrants go on to experience higher-than-average wage growth" (Schwartz 2022: ix, Appendix A). Another example of a tool applicants also may use is the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#), which estimates the cost of living in a "community or region based on typical expenses. The tool helps individuals, communities, and employers determine a local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living."

Within these priorities, applicants must demonstrate that the industry sectors that they select align with the skills and needs of their proposed labor market area by providing labor market information as described in Section IV.B.3. Project Narrative.

29. May applicants propose to develop new career pathways programs, or must their proposals focus solely on enhancing existing career pathways programs? And must all such programs be credit-based?

For the purposes of this FOA, DOL expects that applicants will enhance an existing or emerging career pathways program, rather than developing a new one from the start. An emerging career pathways program is defined as one that is under development and will enroll students within eight months of the grant start date (i.e., by Fall 2025). In addition, successful applicants may use grant funds to enhance both non-credit and credit programs, as long as the programs lead to industry-recognized credentials, meet FOA requirements, and support the proposed project design.

30. What is the purpose of the Strategy Options?

To guide applicants in proposing project designs that aim to achieve positive employment outcomes, DOL has identified Strategy Options (Section I.A.3., Table 1.) that evidence shows may influence career pathways program impact, as well as some options that DOL would like to test. These options build on the foundation of evidence for one or more emerging or developed sector-based career pathways programs as described in Core Element 1, and in support of Good Jobs, Equitable Employment Outcomes, and Student Voice as described in Core Element 2.

These Strategy Options fall within three high-level groupings: Employer Engagement, Comprehensive Supports, and Academic and Training Offerings. For the purposes of this FOA, the Department is emphasizing Employer Engagement and Comprehensive Supports. As discussed in Table 1 of Section I.A.3., applicants must select at least one strategy within each of Groups A, B, and C to undertake using grant funds. We encourage applicants to select additional strategies from Groups A and B to further the potential impact of the enhanced career pathways program(s), which they may undertake using grant funds and/or leveraged resources. Applicants may select one or more of the additional optional enhancements listed in Group C, but the Department expects that grantees will use leveraged resources to cover the costs of those strategies, where feasible.

The strategies selected also must align with the required theory of change (see Section I.C.1) in terms of how each strategy relates to achieving employment outcomes in good jobs and closing or reducing identified equity gaps. Applicants must make a clear connection between the strategies that they choose and the desired outcomes of “good jobs” and “equity gap reduction” in their project narrative (Sections IV.B.3.c.iii. and iv).

31. What is the purpose of the DOL Evaluation? How does it relate to the required developmental evaluation?

The Department is considering a national impact evaluation for SCC5 grantees to determine the effectiveness of the programs funded under this FOA for various outcomes of interest. The Department may also conduct a national implementation evaluation to assess how the program is delivered relative to its intended theory of change and to provide information on content, quantity, quality, and structure of services provided.

Separately, each grantee must procure a grant-funded developmental evaluator to support them in documenting outcomes, providing real-time feedback to inform the development of the intervention, and identifying potential adaptations to the intervention to address systemic barriers and dynamic environments. This includes supporting the grantee in instituting a Good Jobs and Equitable Employment Outcomes data review and analysis process, which must occur at least once annually (as described in Section I.A. under Core Element 2 and in FAQ #38). The grantee's developmental evaluator will also complement the grantee's communication with the national evaluator, for those grantees selected for the national evaluation. DOL will provide guidance on procuring the developmental evaluator after award.

32. What will the national impact evaluation involve?

The Department has not yet determined whether SCC5 grantees will be part of the national impact evaluation that is underway with SCC4 grantees. The design for the national impact evaluation is not yet finalized. If DOL decides to include SCC5 grantees in the national impact evaluation, we will conduct a feasibility study (research done before an impact evaluation) immediately after grants are awarded under this FOA to determine the best evaluation design option and which grantees' projects best support the evaluation research questions. See Section VI.B.4. Special Program Requirements for more information.

The evaluation may include an implementation assessment across selected grantees, an impact and/or outcomes analysis of all or selected sites within or across grantees, and a benefit/cost analysis or assessment of return on investment. Conducting an impact analysis could involve random assignment (which involves random assignment of eligible participants into a treatment group that would receive program services or enhanced program services, or into control group(s) that would receive no program services or program services that are not enhanced). Alternatively, the impact study could involve a quasi-experimental research design matching program participants with similar individuals in non-grant funded programs for comparison purposes. Several factors may determine which research methods are selected for the impact study, such as grantee enrollment numbers, participant recruitment strategies, anticipated oversubscription, and availability of necessary data.

All grantees must participate in the national evaluation, if selected for inclusion. Grantees selected to participate in the national impact evaluation will receive significant additional funding and a period of performance extension, as described in Sections II.A. Award Type and Amount and Section II.B. Period of Performance. Grantees selected will also have access to employment outcomes data for some or all of their project participants that might not otherwise be available to them.

As a part of the national evaluation, as a condition of award, grantees must agree to do the following if needed for the evaluation: (1) make records available to the evaluation contractor on participants, employers, and funding; (2) provide access to program operating personnel, participants, and operational and financial records, and any other relevant documents to calculate program costs and benefits; (3) in the case of a random assignment impact analysis, facilitate the assignment by lottery of participants to program services, including the possible increased recruitment of potential participants; (4) in the case of a quasi-experimental design, help evaluators get access to data for comparison groups; (5) collect data elements to aid the evaluation; and (6) follow evaluation procedures as specified by the evaluation contractor under the direction of DOL.

33. Must proposed projects lead to certain types of credentials under this FOA?

All career pathways enhanced with grant funding must lead to industry-recognized credentials. As stated in ETA's [Training and Employment Notice \(TEN\) No. 25-19](#), an industry-recognized

credential is either 1) developed and offered by, or endorsed by, a nationally or regionally recognized industry association or organization representing a sizeable portion of the industry sector; or 2) a credential that is sought or accepted by companies within the industry sector for purposes of hiring or recruitment, which may include credentials from vendors of certain products. See [Attachment 1](#) of TEN No. 25-19, page I-3 for additional information.

Please note that any information about credentials developed through this program must be publicly accessible using linked open data formats that support full transparency and interoperability, such as through the use of the credential transparency description language specifications. See Section IV.E. of the FOA or FAQ #35 for more information.

34. What are the requirements regarding Open Educational Resources (OER)?

Before developing any new content, applicants should search existing OER repositories for open learning objects and, where appropriate, leverage these learning objects instead of duplicating existing objects as components of their proposed programs. In cases where no existing OER is appropriate to the specific needs of proposed programs, applicants are encouraged to consider the most efficient and practical means of acquiring content—for example, through college development, licensing or purchasing content, or purchasing existing intellectual property. See Section VIII.D for more information on [SkillsCommons](#), the OER site developed for the Department’s TAACCCT grants.

To further support the capacity-building aspect of this grant, SCC represents an investment in developing OER by requiring that all new intellectual property, including all digital content developed using SCC grant funds, be openly licensed for free use, adaptation, and improvement by others. Applicants will build upon and contribute to the body of OER and continue to create technology-driven innovations in career training and education, by openly licensing all work under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY) license. See Section IV.E.4 for more information on the CC BY license.

As part of the requirement to publicly license grant-funded products, grantees must post their products (with the CC BY license affixed) to a public distribution platform. Grantees may post products to sites such as a state OER repository, SkillsCommons.org or other sites such as those referenced by [Creative Commons](#).

35. What are the FOA requirements concerning credential transparency?

The Department wishes to ensure that individuals, employers, educators and training providers have access to the most complete, current and beneficial information about providers, programs credentials, and competencies delivered with federal funds. Thus, we require that information about the industry-recognized credentials listed below be made publicly accessible through the use of linked open data formats that support full transparency and interoperability. This includes all industry-recognized credentials that are awarded using grant funds under this Announcement, where such credentials were previously developed by a grant lead or partner

or will be developed using grant funds. Credentials include, but are not limited to, diplomas, badges, certificates, certifications, Registered Apprenticeships, licenses, and degrees of all levels and types. Formats may include, but are not limited to, the use of credential transparency description language specifications. ETA will provide specific guidance and technical assistance on how to meet this requirement, including data elements to include in the published open data. Grantees must submit an implementation plan and complete implementation of the plan before the period of performance ends, as specified in the technical assistance provided.

Successful applicants must take the following steps to fulfill this requirement. Technical assistance will be provided to support these steps.

- By Month 24 of the grant, submit a plan that details the process that will be used to fulfill the credential transparency requirement.
- By Month 36 of the grant, implement the plan.

Performance Outcomes

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

Section IV.B.3.b. Expected Outcomes and Outputs includes the following five aspects of outcomes:

- Theory of Change
- Strategy Options Chart (See FAQ #30)
- Career Pathways Program(s) Participant Estimate and Tracking Plan
- Sustainable Systems Change (See Section I.A.4 of the FOA)
- Project Work Plan and Annual Milestones

The FAQs below address several of these aspects.

37. Must we set targets and track participants?

Applicants do not need to set participant targets for performance purposes, but grantees will be expected to track and report on all participants (see Section VI.C. Performance Reporting).

Grantees will report progress toward equitable employment and educational outcomes by tracking participant enrollment, completion, and credential attainment in career pathways program(s) enhanced with grant funding, with accompanying demographic information. DOL will utilize the Department's Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) to determine employment outcomes for reported participants (see Section VI.C Reporting); further, the Department intends to provide grantees selected for the impact evaluation, via the national impact evaluator, with additional employment outcome data (see Section I.I. Evaluation). While applicants are not required to set participant targets, they must estimate the number of

anticipated participants in each career pathways program proposed for grant-funded enhancements and provide a comprehensive plan for participant data collection. Progress toward advancing equitable outcomes will be reviewed for technical assistance, but not monitoring, purposes. Note that participants include all students enrolled in the career pathways program(s), not just those whom the applicant identifies for purposes of meeting the project's equity goals.

38. What does the data review and analysis process involve?

Successful applicants must institute a data review and analysis process at least annually, with the assistance of the grantee-contracted developmental evaluator, related to the impact of Core Element 2 (Section I.A.2). This annual process will address two key areas:

- To determine whether the jobs that participants are being trained for and enter into pay family-sustaining wages and offer skills and career advancement. This data review and analysis will help grantees build the capacity to undertake this type of analysis, understand whether they are training participants for good jobs, and make data-informed project management decisions with respect to training for good jobs.
- To determine whether successful applicants are reducing their targeted equity gaps. The purpose is to help grantees build the capacity to do this type of analysis, understand whether they are reducing equity gaps that directly or indirectly impact labor market outcomes for locally underserved communities, and make data-informed project management decisions with respect to addressing those equity gaps.

Progress toward advancing equitable outcomes in good jobs will be reviewed for technical assistance, but not monitoring, purposes.

39. What does the required theory of change involve?

Applicants must provide a theory of change which comprehensively and logically depicts the project's overall vision by clearly showing the relationships between:

- The project's identified problem or issue (including the need to build capacity for good jobs and to reduce equity gaps),
- Community assets/needs,
- Influential factors,
- Assumptions,
- Core element strategies and selected Strategy Options, and
- The anticipated employment and educational outcomes.

Applicants must submit the theory of change as an attachment, which does not count against the page limits for the Project Narrative. A sample format of the Theory of Change is found in Appendix D and an Excel version is available on the grants.gov FOA page, under Related

Documents. The sample format includes examples of outcomes. Note that these examples are for illustrative purposes only. Applicants must develop outcomes that are specific to their grant.

40. What does the required project work plan involve?

Informed by the theory of change and guided by the FOA objectives of supporting students in equitably obtaining good jobs, project implementers and their partners should use the comprehensive work plan to track the achievement of annual milestones including those that are evidence of sustainable systems change achievements.

Please note: the applicant's comprehensive work plan, including progress on annual milestones, forms the basis of the Department's assessment of grantee performance.

Applicants must present a comprehensive project work plan demonstrating a cohesive, well-designed approach to implementing the project that is realistic and measurable. A comprehensive work plan for the purposes of this FOA will include, but not be limited to, high-level, key implementation steps for each of the following project components:

- Sector-Based Career Pathways Programs
- Good Jobs, Equitable Employment Outcomes, and Student Voice
- Strategy Options
- Developmental Evaluation
- Participant Tracking
- Open Educational Resource Content Development and Posting
- Linked Open Data Credentials
- Granted-Funded Special Purpose Equipment and/or Altered Space (if needed)

Each of these is explained further elsewhere and listed in the sample work plan in Appendix E. Key implementation steps must address start and due dates, specific responsible entities, and milestones, including those that are evidence of sustainable systems change achievements (see Core Element 4, Section I.A Program Purpose) for each of the above project component areas.

A sample format of the project work plan can be found in Appendix E, and an Excel version, provided as a courtesy to applicants, is available on the grants.gov FOA page, under Related Documents. **Examples** of key implementation steps appear in the sample format. Note that these examples are for illustrative purposes only. Applicants must develop key implementation steps that are specific to their grant.

The Department will review implementation progress on the work plans for technical assistance purposes and for performance monitoring and compliance purposes. Please note that the applicant's comprehensive work plan, including progress on annual milestones, forms the basis of the Department's assessment of grantee performance.

41. Must applicants use the formats for Abstract, Theory of Change, and Project Work Plan provided in the FOA?

No, the formats are suggested only. Grantees may use their own formats for the Abstract, Theory of Change, and Project Work Plan; either way, applicants will be evaluated on the extent to which they include the required elements of each. Note that Excel and Word versions of the suggested formats are available on the grants.gov FOA page, under Related Documents, as a courtesy to prospective applicants.