



**Illinois**  
**Department of Commerce**  
& Economic Opportunity  
**OFFICE OF EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING**  
JB Pritzker, Governor

**WIOA NOTICE: 25-NOT-02**

**TO:** Chief Elected Officials  
Local Workforce Innovation Board Chairpersons  
Local Workforce Innovation Board Staff  
WIOA Title IB Fiscal Agents and Grant Recipients  
WIOA Title IB Program Services Administrators  
Illinois workNet® One Stop Operators  
WIOA Core Partners  
Other Interested Persons

**SUBJECT:** Program Year 2026 (PY'26) Apprenticeship Illinois Expansion Grant Funds Application

**DATE:** April 16, 2026

**I. SUBJECT INDEX**

Statewide Apprenticeship Illinois Expansion  
Planning

**II. PURPOSE**

This notice announces the availability of Apprenticeship Illinois Expansion funding to support a qualified Apprenticeship Specialist in Local Workforce Innovation Areas (LWIA). The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) will accept one application per LWIA submitted by the Local Workforce Innovation Board (LWIB) or by any WIOA Core Partner (which includes community colleges) designated by the LWIB. The Department will also accept applications with multiple LWIAs that provide services on a regional basis.

The Apprenticeship Specialist serves as the regional face of apprenticeship, as a trusted, knowledgeable resource who makes it easy for employers to adopt and implement work-based learning and Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs). Specialists provide end-to-end employer support: from the first conversation through program design, partner coordination, USDOL registration, and launch. They are embedded within local business services teams and function as the hub of a regional apprenticeship ecosystem connecting employers, education and training providers, workforce partners, and economic development agencies.

This funding cycle reflects three years of program learning and is designed to produce stronger, more focused, and more accountable implementation. Although a goal of these grants is to increase regional/local capacity, grantees are expected to demonstrate genuine readiness to implement the program starting on July 1, 2026. This includes the identification of a qualified Apprenticeship Specialist, committed partners, and focused industry sector strategies.

### **III. ISSUANCES AFFECTED**

#### **A. References:**

U.S. DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 8-25: State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula Round 4 Grant Program

U.S. DOL Training and Employment Notice (TEN) No. 20-15, Change 1: New Apprenticeship USA Brand Information and Updated Technical Assistance Resources for Expanding and Modernizing Registered Apprenticeship Programs

### **IV. PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

The US Department of Labor (USDOL) issued the State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF4) Funding Opportunity Announcement TEGL 8-25, outlining formula grants for States to expand registered apprenticeships. USDOL provides formula funding to increase the State's ability to serve, improve, and strategically expand the national apprenticeship system. Illinois' share of the Program Year 2026 funding is \$2,703,317 with an expected performance period from July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2029. TEGL 8-25 outlines several requirements of the SAEF4 grant program, including:

- **Statewide Expansion Goals.** States must establish a statewide expansion goal for the total number of active apprentices, by industry sector and occupation, as measured through the "Apprentices by State" dashboard on apprenticeship.gov, to achieve by the end of the grant's Period of Performance (POP). States are also encouraged to set other ambitious goals for apprentice growth, and the USDOL will measure states' efforts to meet these goals as part of this program's performance reporting requirements.

Illinois' commitment to expanding work-based learning, including registered apprenticeships under the SAEF 4 program, introduces a new strategic expectation: each funded Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA) will develop and implement a three-year plan to progressively increase the share of WIOA formula funds directed toward work-based learning and apprenticeship-related activities. *Illinois' goal under SAEF4 is that at least 10% of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title IB formula expenditures within a WIOA Program Year will be dedicated to work-based learning activities by June 30, 2029.* This planning commitment reflects Illinois' policy that work-based learning and registered apprenticeship are among the most effective workforce strategies available, and that the provision of local workforce services should reflect that priority.

- **Support Employers and Registered Apprentices in Targeted Industries.** States must specify a percentage of SAEF4 funding that will be reserved to directly support Registered Apprenticeship programs within targeted industries identified by the state. States must describe how funding reserved for the specific industries will be spent, which may include, but is not limited to, developing new and expanding existing programs in the targeted industries, support for employers and Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in the targeted industries, (e.g., incentive payments), embedding pre-apprenticeship opportunities within current or newly developed Career Technical Education (CTE) programs of study, and support for apprentices enrolled in Registered Apprenticeship programs within these targeted industries.

The Illinois State Apprenticeship Expansion Program has historically focused on supporting and building industry sector partnerships. The SAEF4 grant expands these expectations by targeting the grant funding that will support the targeted industries and occupations. *Each applicant must identify at least two (2) priority sectors and concentrate at least seventy-five (75) percent of the SAEF4 grant funds on expanding apprenticeships in these industries.* A focused strategy produces better employer relationships, stronger training partnerships, and more replicable programs than a diffuse, industry-agnostic approach.

- **Leveraged Resources Requirements** States must commit leveraged resources and funds to an amount that is at least fifty (50) percent of the formula allocation to support costs allowable under TEGL 8-25. Leveraged resources are all resources, including cash and in-kind, in excess of the award and associated cost sharing. *LWIA grantees will be required to include leveraged costs in the grant application.*
  - Leveraged funds may also include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, and other costs that help carry out the grant program.
  - Leveraged resources may be met through local, state, federal, public, and private funds, including but not limited to WIOA Governor's Reserve Funds, State-funded tax credits or grants, or other means as appropriate to support the Administration's investments in the SAEF program.
  - States are encouraged to leverage existing public workforce and education system funding streams, such as funds provided under WIOA, Career and Technical Education (CTE) funds provided through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and other relevant funding sources.

Note that the establishment and continuation of a grant is contingent upon the availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the priorities outlined in Illinois' workforce development strategic plan (see <https://www.illinoisworknet.com/WIOA/Resources/pages/stateunifiedplan.aspx>), this funding notice, grant scope of work, and project work plan.

## V. **PROGRAM DESIGN - APPRENTICESHIP ILLINOIS**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, as of March 2026, Illinois has approximately twenty-two thousand, two hundred fourteen (22,214) active registered apprentices. These registered apprenticeship programs have been vetted by industry and are registered with the USDOL.

### ***Apprenticeship Illinois Framework***

The Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB) established the Apprenticeship Illinois Framework to expand apprenticeship and work-based learning through a coordinated ecosystem of Specialists and Intermediaries (see Appendix I). Registered Apprenticeship Programs are industry-driven, flexible training models vetted and approved by USDOL. They allow employers to develop their workforce while offering workers a structured, paid pathway to skilled, high-wage careers.

### ***Apprenticeship Specialist Role and Responsibilities***

Apprenticeship Specialists are regional consultants for employers and partners. They reduce the friction of adopting the apprenticeship model by serving as a single point of contact across

program design, partner coordination, and USDOL registration. Critically, they do not simply refer employers to USDOL; they own the employer relationship and guide programs from initial interest through active implementation.

Experience from the first three years of the Apprenticeship Specialist model demonstrated that the regions producing the strongest outcomes consistently had three elements in place: (1) a Specialist with in-depth sector knowledge, (2) a committed training<sup>1</sup> partner with real training capacity, and (3) an organized employer entry point such as an industry association or sector/employer collaborative. Where any one of these was missing, Specialists struggled to convert employer interest into registered programs. These three elements are the structural foundation that makes the role work.

The most effective Specialists function like industry workforce consultants. They ask employers where they are struggling to find or retain talent, map the apprenticeship model to existing operations, build a three-way working relationship between the employer and a training provider early in the process, and identify an internal champion at the employer to sustain the program long-term.

Since the apprenticeship model is employer-driven, success requires patience, relationship-building, and sector knowledge. This is not transactional outreach. Applicants must account for this in how they structure and protect the Specialist role.

Work-based learning, including on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, and pre-apprenticeship, is a natural on-ramp to Registered Apprenticeship placement. Specialists are expected to actively promote WBL with employers as an immediate, lower-barrier entry point, while simultaneously building the relationship and infrastructure that leads to RAP adoption. Every WBL engagement is a potential pipeline to a registered program. Specialists who treat WBL and RAP as separate, parallel tracks are missing a strategic opportunity.

### ***The Specialist as Sector Strategist and Career Pathway Architect***

Apprenticeship Specialists are not only employer-facing consultants, but they are also regional sector strategists who drive career pathway development and scale work-based learning. Illinois established this role ahead of national recognition that dedicated employer-facing expertise is essential to expanding registered apprenticeships. Both the Strada Education Foundation's [Framework for Effective Employer Intermediaries](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6777c52f82e5471a3732ea25/6977a19b3f4f2e157a47fd060_Strada_WorkBasedLearning_IntermediaryFramework_Resource_Jan2026.pdf) and the U.S. Department of Labor's [Sector Strategies Framework](https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/ETA-AIR-Sector-Strategies-Framework-July-2024.pdf) validate this approach, emphasizing engaged partnerships, data-informed decisions, and job quality as foundations for effective sector work. These frameworks are available as resources for all current Specialists and applicants.

Operating across all elements of sector strategy, Specialists convene employers and partners, coordinate regional efforts, and advance apprenticeship as a core workforce solution. They bring deep, practical knowledge of the region's education and training landscape, including Career

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Strada Education Foundation. (January 29, 2026). *Scaling Work-Based Learning A Framework for Effective Employer Intermediaries*

[https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6777c52f82e5471a3732ea25/6977a19b3f4f2e157a47fd060\\_Strada\\_WorkBasedLearning\\_IntermediaryFramework\\_Resource\\_Jan2026.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6777c52f82e5471a3732ea25/6977a19b3f4f2e157a47fd060_Strada_WorkBasedLearning_IntermediaryFramework_Resource_Jan2026.pdf)

United States Department of Labor. (July 1, 2024). *U.S. Department of Labor Sector Strategies Framework*

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/ETA-AIR-Sector-Strategies-Framework-July-2024.pdf>

and Technical Education (CTE) programs, community colleges, RTI providers, and existing sponsors, to identify gaps, align curriculum, and build partnerships that support apprenticeship expansion. Specialists should recruit education partners who can co-design programs before employers are even at the table.

This work directly supports sector-based service delivery by creating clear career pathways that connect education to employment: from CTE and dual enrollment to pre-apprenticeships, Registered Apprenticeships, and long-term careers. Specialists assess where talent pipelines are strong or lacking and work with employers and educators to strengthen them across priority sectors.

Importantly, this work must align with each region's WIOA Regional and Local Workforce Plan (<https://www.illinoisworknet.com/WIOA/RegPlanning>). Specialists should directly reflect and advance the priorities outlined in Chapter 3: Vision, Goals, and Implementation Strategies of the plans, ensuring apprenticeship efforts are coordinated, system-driven, and positioned for impact.

Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) and employer collaboratives strengthen sector strategies by aligning employers within key industries to define shared skill needs, while Apprenticeship Specialists help translate those needs into structured career pathways. Workforce needs are supported by Registered Apprenticeships and work-based learning that build a sustainable, industry-driven talent pipeline.

***Integrated Business Service Teams (IBST) – Building Coordinated Regional Engagement***

The State's workforce board established the [Illinois Integrated Business Services Framework](#) through its IBST Workgroup to enhance coordination and strengthen business engagement statewide. Integrated Business Services Teams vary significantly across Illinois regions. In some areas, a functioning IBST with regular coordination among workforce, education, and economic development partners is already in place. In others, formal coordination is minimal, partners operate independently, and the infrastructure for shared employer engagement does not yet exist. Applicants should be honest about where their region currently stands; the application should reflect reality, not an idealized structure.

Regardless of where a region starts, the Apprenticeship Specialist is expected to actively work toward building or strengthening coordinated regional engagement around sector strategies. This is a relationship-building responsibility, not an administrative one. IBST partners cannot be directed to align. They have to be brought along, shown the value, and given a reason to coordinate. The Specialist earns their role as the regional apprenticeship SME by becoming the person that partners trust, refer to, and call when an employer raises a workforce pipeline problem.

What this looks like in practice will vary by region and will develop over time. Applicants should describe where they are starting from and what they will do to move toward greater coordination:

- If no IBST exists: The Specialist is responsible for (1) identifying the key regional partners (WIOA partners, high schools, community colleges, economic development agencies, industry associations, adult education providers, and others) and (2) initiating the

relationships and convenings that lay the groundwork for coordinated sector engagement. This does not need to be a formal structure from day one. It starts with knowing who the players are, building relationships, and creating opportunities for partners to work together around shared employer goals.

- If an IBST exists but is not yet functioning around apprenticeship: The Specialist works to earn a seat at the table, educate partners on the apprenticeship model, and gradually introduce shared employer engagement practices, starting with referrals, then moving toward coordinated outreach and joint sector strategies over time.
- If a functioning IBST is in place: The Specialist activates it around the sector strategy, ensuring partners understand the priority sectors, know how to identify and refer qualified employer leads, and are reinforcing consistent workforce messaging when they engage employers in those sectors.

In all cases, the expectation is progress, not perfection. Applicants should describe their starting point honestly, set realistic goals for what coordination will look like by the end of the grant year (e.g., referral processes in place for businesses and participants, bimonthly meetings, joint employer outreach), and identify the specific partners they will prioritize building relationships with. Reviewers will evaluate whether the plan is credible given the regional context, not whether it describes a fully realized IBST that may not yet exist.

The State anticipates continuing to provide Apprenticeship Specialists and other IBST members with support in the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's [Talent Pipeline Management \(TPM\)](#) framework, a sector strategy approach to help address chronic regional and local skill gaps. Apprenticeship Specialists can directly support the creation of industry sector partnerships or collaboratives using the TPM framework or other sector strategies. An overview of the TPM framework and implementation strategies is available at [TPM Videos | U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#).

### ***State of Illinois 5-Year Apprenticeship Expansion Plan***

Illinois' 2026 State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) application to the USDOL under FOA-ETA-8-25 will outline four goals supported by the Intermediary and Apprenticeship Specialist framework to expand RAPs. This framework builds on existing systems and strategies to advance the vision of integrating an apprenticeship ecosystem at the state, regional, and local levels.

- Goal 1: Coordinate and Expand Services to Workers and Career Seekers
- Goal 2: Coordinate and Expand Services to Employers
- Goal 3: Coordinate and Expand Services to Education, Training, Workforce, and Economic Development Partners
- Goal 4: Planning and System Development

### ***Goal 1: Coordinate and Expand Services to Workers and Career Seekers***

Increase the number of apprentices starting and completing Registered Apprenticeship Programs by identifying and replicating successful models, supporting intermediaries, and expanding employer participation. Address barriers to entry, retention, and completion through targeted awareness and best practices. Enhance outreach by leveraging data-driven marketing and community engagement to connect more individuals with apprenticeship opportunities.

***Goal 2: Coordinate and Expand Services to Employers***

Increase employer participation in Registered Apprenticeship Programs by embedding Apprenticeship Specialists within business services teams and enhancing their training. Strengthen employer engagement through coordinated outreach, aligning efforts across education, workforce, and economic development partners. Foster industry sector partnerships and employer collaboratives to identify workforce needs and expand apprenticeship adoption. Address employer challenges by streamlining processes, developing resources, and creating incentives to support program creation, registration, and implementation.

***Goal 3: Coordinate and Expand Services to Education, Training, Workforce, and Economic Development Partners***

Enhance coordination and expand services by fostering collaboration among education, training, workforce, and economic development partners. Provide leadership and support at the regional level to align systems, making it easier for employers and apprentices to navigate apprenticeship opportunities. Proactively engage stakeholders, including employers, community colleges, high schools, and other potential sponsors, to develop and sustain high-quality apprenticeship programs. Strengthen partnerships by sharing knowledge, delivering professional development, and facilitating collaboration among regional and statewide stakeholders to drive apprenticeship growth and accessibility.

***Goal 4: Planning and System Development***

Enhance statewide apprenticeship expansion through strategic planning, research, and continuous system improvements. Refine Illinois' apprenticeship model by assessing challenges, opportunities, and outreach strategies while strengthening collaboration and referral networks. Establish regional core planning groups to represent all stakeholders and guide system development. Solidify and support the statewide apprenticeship ecosystem by identifying funding opportunities, expanding partnerships, and improving communication.

**VI. COMPONENTS**

**A. Eligible Applicants**

One application per LWIA will be accepted. The applicant may be:

- The LWIB; or
- A WIOA Core Partner designated by the LWIB.

Regardless of who applies, the LWIB Chair must formally support the designation of the Apprenticeship Specialist and the proposed sector strategy through a signed designation letter. This letter is a required component of the application. LWIAs not interested in applying directly are strongly encouraged to support a partner in fulfilling this role.

If a Specialist has not yet been hired, the application must describe the specific qualifications required and the hiring timeline.

**B. Required Program Elements**

Grantees that receive funding through this notice must implement the Apprenticeship

Illinois program elements designed to ensure statewide consistency, accountability, and impact in creating or expanding RAPs and other work-based learning models.

**1. *Qualified Apprenticeship Specialist with Protected Time***

Applicants must designate an Apprenticeship Specialist who will hold primary responsibility for apprenticeship development and expansion in the region.

- *Minimum time commitment*: The Specialist must dedicate a minimum of 50% of their time to apprenticeship and work-based learning outreach and development activities to ensure acceptable achievement of performance outcomes. A larger allocation of time may be necessary to meet program expectations. Applications must specify the percentage and explain how that time is protected from competing Business Services Team demands.
- *Qualifications*: The Specialist must demonstrate subject-matter knowledge of the RAP model, including program structure, OJT and RTI components, USDOL registration requirements, and wage progression design. For a Specialist already on staff, a resume must be included in the application. For a Specialist to be hired, please provide the job description to be used for hiring and a timeline for when the new hire will be fully onboarded and productive.
- *Business consultation skills*: The Specialist must be able to position apprenticeship as a workforce solution tailored to an employer's operational reality, not as a compliance exercise or a generic program pitch. This will require sector research, use of labor market information, and the development of primary supply and demand data provided by regional employers and training providers. The outlined approach to employer engagement should be tailored and solution-based.
- *Professional development*: It is DCEO's expectation that Specialists must participate in all mandatory State-provided training and serve as the regional apprenticeship thought leader for IBST partners. This includes monthly cohort calls, Apprenticeship Illinois webinars, and TA sessions.
- *Regional education landscape knowledge*: The Specialist must demonstrate working knowledge of the secondary and postsecondary education infrastructure in their region, including high school CTE programs, community college offerings, and other training providers, within their priority sectors. This means knowing what currently exists, where the gaps are, and which institutions are positioned to deliver RTI or sponsor apprenticeship programs. This is not a research task to complete after being hired; it is a baseline expectation and a key indicator of whether the Specialist is ready to operate effectively in the role.
- *Work-based learning fluency*: The Specialist must be fluent in the full spectrum of work-based learning (OJT, internships, paid work experience, customized training, incumbent worker training, pre-apprenticeship, and RAP) and able to explain to employers and education partners how each fits within a talent development strategy and how WBL activities can serve as a deliberate pipeline to registered apprenticeship.
- *Work-based learning strategic planning*: The Specialist must work with the regional and local LWIBs and workforce administrators to develop and implement strategies that will increase work-based learning to account for ten (10) percent of the LWIAs



expenditures within the next three years. The vision is that, within three (3) years, all LWIA will dedicate ten (10) percent of their spending on apprenticeship. However, leading up to 2028, LWIAs could start with ten (10) percent focused on WBL as a whole. The focus will be on tracking how areas are engaging with employers and the services these employers receive. See Section 6 of this Notice for more details.

## **2. Focused Sector Strategy**

Each applicant must identify at least two (2) priority industry sectors and concentrate apprenticeship development efforts there. A focused strategy produces better employer relationships, stronger training partnerships, and more replicable programs than a diffuse, industry-agnostic approach.

- **Named sectors:** Identify at least two (2) priority sectors aligned with regional labor market demand (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, IT, construction, transportation/logistics, energy).
- **Target occupations:** Identify at least two (2) specific occupations within each priority sector that are candidates for RAP development. Occupations should appear on regional or statewide in-demand lists or be supported by documented employer hiring difficulty. Identified target occupations should provide family-sustaining wages for program completers. (*Note: Sectors may also have cross-cutting occupations such as IT, HR, food service, etc.*) Note that the SAEF4 program requires grantees to establish apprenticeship expansion targets by industry.
- **Target employers:** Name at least two (2) specific and strategic employers per sector who have expressed interest or who the Specialist will engage. Generic descriptions of industry types are not sufficient. Employers who have previously utilized WIOA WBL services are a preferred starting point for this analysis. Specialists may find that employer engagement is more effective when working with regional sector partnerships, including Talent Pipeline Management collaboratives.
- **Regional plan alignment:** Explain how the sector strategy connects to the local WIOA plan and regional economic development priorities.
- **CTE, postsecondary, and other training provider inventory:** Each sector strategy should identify not only target employers and occupations, but also the career pathway, from initial WBL or CTE entry point through RAP completion to long-term employment, that the Specialist is working to build or strengthen. See Requirement 5 (Work-Based Learning to RAP Pipeline) for the education alignment and pipeline tracking expectations that complete this strategy.

*Note: Specialists may develop RAPs in other sectors where organic employer interest arises. The sector strategy identifies where proactive, structured effort will be concentrated.*

## **3. Committed Implementation Partners**

Applicants must demonstrate that all three essential elements are in place: a qualified Specialist, a committed RTI partner, and an organized employer entry point. Applications missing any one of these elements will be scored significantly lower, regardless of organizational reputation or past performance.

- **Training provider (RTI partner):** Identify at least one community college, CTE

program, union training center, or other qualified provider that has agreed to deliver Related Technical Instruction. Formal letters of commitment or MOUs demonstrating partnership are strongly preferred. The application must describe the provider's capacity, their role in program design, and whether their existing curriculum can be aligned to support the apprenticeship program or whether new curriculum development is needed. Education partners should be engaged as co-designers, not just service vendors. Where a community college or K-12 school district has the capacity and willingness to serve as the program sponsor, this should be identified and explored as an option, particularly for sectors where multi-employer models are the goal.

- **Employer entry point:** Identify a regional partner whose relationships will be leveraged in order to reach employers at scale: an industry association, a sector partnership, a chamber of commerce, or an existing employer collaborative. Cold outreach to individual employers as the primary strategy is a weak foundation for this role.
- **Partner roles:** Clearly define what each partner will do, not just who they are. Partners should have active roles in employer outreach, RTI delivery, or apprentice recruitment and support. A letter of support establishing the partnerships and outlining roles is strongly encouraged.
- **IBST integration:** Describe the current state of regional coordination among workforce, education, and economic development partners. Where a functioning IBST exists, describe how it will be activated around the sector strategy. Where one does not yet exist or is not yet functioning around apprenticeship, describe the partners the Specialist will prioritize building relationships with and what coordinated engagement will look like by the end of the grant year. A written referral process among partners, even an informal one to start, is required.

#### **4. *Employer Engagement Methodology***

The application must describe a structured, repeatable process for moving employers from first contact through RAP registration. Effective Specialists do not improvise. They follow a disciplined engagement model that produces consistent results.

Illinois established the Apprenticeship Specialist role in 2018, ahead of national recognition that this type of dedicated employer-facing function is essential to scaling work-based learning and registered apprenticeships. Strada Education Foundation's 2026 Framework for Effective Employer Intermediaries<sup>2</sup> has since provided a useful national framework for articulating what effective employer-facing roles like the Apprenticeship Specialist actually do. While Strada uses the term "intermediary" to describe this function broadly, and Illinois uses that term differently within its own apprenticeship ecosystem, the five functions Strada identifies map directly to what Illinois expects of its Apprenticeship Specialists and provide a clear organizing framework for the role.

In Illinois, Apprenticeship Specialists play the employer-facing function exactly as Strada defines it. They fill the gaps that exist between industry and the education and

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workforce system, providing specialized capacity to help employers launch, scale, and implement work-based learning programs, especially for the small and medium-sized businesses that often lack internal resources to develop these programs on their own.

- **Employer engagement:** The Specialist cultivates ongoing relationships with employers — not one-time contacts — to understand their talent challenges and build genuine buy-in for work-based learning and registered apprenticeship as viable, sustainable solutions to their workforce problems. This is the foundation of everything else. Without a trusted relationship, no program gets built.
- **Solutions design:** The Specialist involves employers directly in designing the apprenticeship program. This means co-developing the OJT work process schedule, aligning RTI curriculum to actual job competencies, and building a wage progression that reflects the employer's structure. The employer's operational reality shapes the program, not the other way around.
- **Solutions brokering:** The Specialist connects employers to the right partners, such as RTI providers, industry associations, WIOA funding streams, DOL ATRs, and other resources, so the employer doesn't have to navigate those relationships alone. The Specialist knows the regional ecosystem well enough to make introductions that actually move things forward, not just hand off a list of contacts.
- **Implementation support:** The Specialist stays engaged after registration. They support the launch of the first cohort, help troubleshoot early implementation challenges, connect apprentices and employers to supportive services, and identify opportunities to scale or replicate the program. A program that registers and then stalls is not a success.
- **Administrative support:** The Specialist handles or guides the administrative complexity of the USDOL registration process, including Standards Builder, paperwork, and ATR coordination, so that the employer can focus on the workforce development work rather than getting bogged down in compliance. Reducing this burden is one of the most immediate and concrete ways the Specialist earns employer trust.

Together, these five functions describe a Specialist who is a full-service partner to employers, not an outreach worker who hands off interested employers to someone else, and not a program administrator who processes paperwork after the design work is done. The Specialist owns the relationship and the outcome across the full arc from first conversation to active, expanding program. Applications must describe how they will track employer movement through this pipeline and what triggers a status update in Illinois workNet.

### ***Incentive Funding***

Applicants may use grant funds to provide “incentive” funds to sponsors, employers, joint labor management organizations, or industry associations (or other partners included in a multi-employer partnership) to directly fund new or expand existing Registered Apprenticeship programs in any targeted industries in which they are serving.

- *These incentive funds are intended to incentivize employers and other stakeholders to develop and expand Registered Apprenticeship programs. Incentive funds may also be used to enroll and support apprentices.*
- *Incentive Funding must be reasonable in accordance with 2 CFR 200.404 and align with the goals of this TEGL.*
- *Applicants must have written policies and procedures in place governing the awarding of incentive funds, and the incentives provided under this TEGL must comply with these organizational policies. Policies and procedures should include detailed processes for the identification of recipients, distribution, and management of the incentive funds to ensure employer commitments are met and risk mitigation.*

### **5. Work-Based Learning to RAP Pipeline**

Registered Apprenticeship is the destination, but WBL exists on a continuum. Incumbent worker training, OJT, internships, paid work experience, transitional jobs, pre-apprenticeship, and active secondary and post-secondary CTE programs are often the on-ramp. Applicants must demonstrate how their WBL activities will intentionally build toward RAP adoption.

- WBL inventory: Identify existing WBL activity in the region across both employer and education settings. Map which community college programs are already operating in the Specialist's target sectors. Identify high school CTE programs operating in the Specialist's target sectors that can be pipelines into a RAP, including which employers are participating in these programs. These are natural RTI partners and, in some cases, potential program sponsors. Don't reinvent the wheel: the strongest programs are built on existing educational infrastructure.
- Conversion strategy: Describe how employers currently engaged in OJT or other WBL will be moved toward RAP exploration and registration. Applicant should provide a goal for how many active WBL employer relationships will involve a dialogue on RAP conversion within the grant year.
- Education alignment strategy: Describe how the Specialist will engage secondary and postsecondary partners as co-designers, not just service vendors. Where curriculum alignment is needed to support RTI, identify where those conversations need to happen and who needs to be at the table. Where a college or CTE program could serve as a program sponsor, describe how that relationship will be developed.
- Pipeline tracking: Applicants must project and track employer movement across stages: (a) qualified employer leads identified, (b) employers with active WBL, (c) employers in RAP design, (d) RAPs submitted, (e) RAPs registered and active, (f) RAPs expanded or reactivated.

### **6. Three-Year Strategy to Align WIOA Investments with Apprenticeship**

Workforce development research emphasizes the importance of using existing funding sources such as WIOA, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), and Higher Education Act Title IV (Pell Grants) to better support apprenticeships and establish a more robust, formula-based funding model that creates a

more structured approach to apprenticeship funding.<sup>3</sup> This would provide stability and predictability for apprenticeship partners to commit to and carry out long-term talent pipeline strategies while also ensuring resources go toward apprenticeship sponsors that deliver strong outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Strengthening Education Connections***

TEGL 8-25 highlights how states can use SAEF4 funds to modify CTE programs to create career pathways, talent pipelines, and expand apprenticeships.

- *To achieve this goal, states may develop partnerships between CTE program providers and Registered Apprenticeship sponsors to encourage CTE completers to enroll in Registered Apprenticeship programs.*
- *States can also work with employers and Registered Apprenticeship sponsors to align CTE curricula with the specific skills and competencies required for Registered Apprenticeship programs in high-demand sectors.*
- *Additionally, states can use SAEF4 funds to create pathways that allow students enrolled in CTE programs to receive advanced standing when those students enter into Registered Apprenticeship programs, facilitating a smoother transition from education to skilled employment.*
- *States should also prioritize data integration and sharing, in addition to scaling the adoption of learning and employment records, or LERs, in Registered Apprenticeship programs for skill validation of Registered Apprentices and/or the acquisition of accelerated credit toward a degree in Registered Apprenticeship. By strategically utilizing SAEF4 funds in these ways, states can create CTE strategies that drive expansion of Registered Apprenticeship opportunities and that provide learners with seamless pathways from the classroom to high-demand jobs while delivering a reliable talent pipeline for employers and supporting regional economic growth.*

### ***Strengthening Workforce Connections***

Illinois' SAEF 4 application to the USDOL will include specific apprenticeship expansion goals as a commitment to expanding work-based learning, including registered apprenticeships, and expenditure goals in the use of existing formula funding sources such as WIOA, Perkins, and Pell Grants. *Illinois' goal is that at least ten (10) percent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title IB formula expenditures within the program year will be dedicated to work-based learning activities by the end of Program Year 2028.* This planning commitment reflects Illinois' policy that work-based learning and registered apprenticeship are among the most effective workforce strategies available, and that the provision of local workforce services should reflect that priority. Grantees must develop a three-year investment alignment strategy that demonstrates how their LWIA will progressively increase the share of workforce funds dedicated to work-based learning and apprenticeship-related services, with a directional target of at least ten (10) percent of the WIOA Title IB formula funds by the end of Program Year 2028.

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<sup>3</sup> National Governors Association (November 13, 2023). *Advancing Apprenticeship: Opportunities for States and Businesses to Create and Expand Registered Apprenticeship Programs*. <https://www.nga.org/publications/advancing-apprenticeship-opportunities-for-states-and-business-to-create-and-expand-registered-apprenticeship-programs/>

<sup>4</sup> Jobs for the Future (April 29, 2025). *Policy Blueprint to Modernize and Expand Apprenticeship Nationwide*. <https://www.jff.org/idea/policy-blueprint-to-modernize-expand-apprenticeship-nationwide/>

This is not solely a budget exercise. It requires local workforce innovation boards and local administrators to think strategically about how apprenticeship is integrated into its core service delivery; how staff time, training dollars, OJT investments, and supportive services are being directed toward RAP-connected activities; and what organizational and partnership changes are needed to get there. Note that the Department will not penalize LWIAs that fail to meet the ten (10) percent expenditure or other goals if the LWIA demonstrates effort and progress toward meeting them throughout the award's POP.

The strategy must include:

- *A baseline assessment:* What percentage of current WIOA formula funds are estimated to be directed toward WBL and apprenticeship-related activities today? This includes Specialist staff time, OJT connected to RAPs, RTI funding, apprentice supportive services, and employer engagement activities tied to program development.
- *Annual targets:* Projected percentage of WIOA formula funds directed toward apprenticeship in PY26, PY27, and PY28, with a rationale for the trajectory.
- *Named action steps:* Specific, concrete actions the LWIA will take to increase apprenticeship investment. For example: prioritizing OJT contracts with employers in active RAP development, directing ITA funds toward RTI-eligible programs, or restructuring BST staff time to support sector-based apprenticeship engagement.
- *Leadership commitment:* A statement from the LWIA Director (not just the Specialist) describing how apprenticeship investment will be tracked, reported, and reviewed at the board level.

*Note: For the purpose of this strategy, "apprenticeship-related activities" include all WIOA-funded activities directly connected to RAP development, expansion, or participation, including staff time on program development, OJT linked to RAPs, RTI funding, pre-apprenticeship, and participant supportive services for active apprentices. DCEO will provide guidance on a consistent methodology for calculating this percentage.*

## **7. Reporting and Accountability**

Apprenticeship Specialists must maintain accurate and timely records in the Illinois workNet Navigator Tool, updated weekly to support performance tracking and transparency. Reporting should document employer outreach, program development activities, and overall progress. Specialists are also responsible for submitting detailed quarterly narrative reports and complying with any additional reporting requirements communicated by DCEO. In some cases, Specialists may be asked to present updates to the IWIB Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship (WBLA) Committee and are expected to attend quarterly IWIB WBLA Committee meetings in person when geographically feasible.

### **C. Program Activities, Deliverables, and Outcomes**

Specific project outcomes, goals, and deliverables must be included in the *Activity and Outcomes* tab of the project workplan. Proposals will clearly articulate how the activities funded under this grant would expand apprenticeships in Illinois. The activities and outcomes will include, but are not limited to, the:

- Number of new businesses meaningfully consulted on developing or expanding work-

based learning and/or registered apprenticeship programs.

- Number of businesses that receive WIOA funding to develop or expand a registered apprenticeship program.
- Number of outreach events (seminars, workshops, stakeholder events coordinated, etc.) *(Note: these events should be employer-facing. Career fairs for individuals do not count.)*
- Number of new Registered Apprenticeship programs developed.
- Number of new Registered Apprenticeship programs added to the Eligible Training Provider List.
- Number of existing Registered Apprenticeship programs expanded (by increasing program cohort size, adding additional program occupations, or adding an employer).
- Number of new Pre-Apprenticeship programs developed.
- Number of existing Pre-Apprenticeship programs expanded.
- Number of IBST engagements focused on apprenticeship expansion programs, projects, or initiatives.
- Number of new registered apprenticeship programs in active development per quarter.
- Number of IWTs (or other WBL) converted to RAPs.

**Post-Award Deliverables:** The following deliverables are due within ninety (90) days of the grant start date (September 30, 2026). The state apprenticeship expansion team is available to provide technical assistance and support in developing these deliverables.

- Three (3)-year plan to align WIOA investments with work-based learning and apprenticeships
- Regional WBL and CTE Inventory (full mapping of existing WBL activity and education partners in priority sectors)
- Training Provider Inventory (complete inventory of RTI-capable providers in priority sectors)
- Sector Strategy Refinement (expanded detail including LMI analysis, TPM back-mapping, and WBL-to-RAP conversion plan)
- Regional Referral and Handoff Process for Employer Engagement (written process for partner referrals to the Specialist)

Mandatory TA Session #1	July 2026
Mandatory TA Session #2	August 2026
Mandatory TA Session #3	September 2026

#### D. Program Funding

The Department anticipates awarding approximately \$2.7 million to support Apprenticeship Specialists across the State. It is anticipated that individual grant awards will range from \$100,000 to \$400,000, depending on proposed activities and projected impact. While geographic distribution is important, funding decisions will prioritize the quality of applications, specifically the applicant's ability to increase the number of businesses establishing new or expanding existing apprenticeship programs, rather than a set number

of Apprenticeship Specialists.

All funds must be used to support apprenticeship expansion activities directly. Funds may be available for one-time employer incentives for employers not previously registered or participating in a registered apprenticeship program. Requests must be reasonable, necessary, and directly related to the purpose of this notice.

E. Application Due Date and Submission Instructions

Applicants must submit an electronic “application package” with the information listed below to [CEO.OET.Grants@illinois.gov](mailto:CEO.OET.Grants@illinois.gov).

- ☐ Uniform Grant Application
- ☐ Mandatory Disclosure
- ☐ Conflict of Interest
- ☐ Formatted Technical Proposal (*To ensure specificity and application quality, minimal use of generative AI is requested for these sections.*)
- ☐ Project Workplan (*Excel spreadsheet with individual tabs for the following*)
  - Tab 1: Project Summary
  - Tab 2: Program Activities & Outcomes
  - Tab 3: Staffing & Partnerships (*named partners, defined roles*)
  - Tab 4: Sector Strategy (*priority sectors, target occupations, target employers, RTI partner*)
  - Tab 5: Projected Three-Year WIOA Investment Alignment
  - Tab 6: Employer Engagement Methodology
  - Tab 7: Implementation Plan (*high-level quarterly milestones for the grant year*)
- ☐ Uniform Budget Template
- ☐ IWIB Designation Letter (*if not an LWIA*)
- ☐ Specialist Resume (*if not already hired, please provide job description and hiring plan so this twelve (12)-month program is not delayed*)
- ☐ Partner Commitment Letters

Applications will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling, first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. To guarantee a funding commitment by June 30, 2026, applications must be received by **May 22, 2026**. The grant term is anticipated from July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2028.

F. Program Information Session

DCEO will coordinate an information session to review the details of this Funding Notice and answer questions about the Apprenticeship Expansion Program on April 23, 2026, at 3:30 pm. Please register for the information session at:

<https://illinoisstate.zoom.us/meeting/register/efkbsU4rQ4KVAabVIBhzAw>

G. Application Review

A team of subject matter experts will review the applications on a first-come, first-served basis until the available funds have been committed. Applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:



- Applicant Capacity and Previous Performance (40%)
- Quality / Commitment to Required Program Elements (40%)
- Budget / Reasonableness of Costs (10%)
- Geographic Distribution of Awards (10%)

H. Reporting Requirements

Grantees will be required to record and report program activities in Illinois workNet. This program activity and outcome data will be included in the quarterly reports for this grant. Illinois workNet reporting will consist of logging new businesses meaningfully engaged/consulted, status updates to apprenticeship programs in development, and detailed quarterly narrative reporting, among other responsibilities to be communicated to the grantees as needed.

I. Fiscal Management and Monitoring

This program is funded by the USDOL Apprenticeship SAEF Grants (*assistance listing number 17.285*). The funding for this grant will be provided on a reimbursement basis, and pre-award costs may be allowed. All costs must be associated with allowable apprenticeship expansion activities and must be documented in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards located at 2 CFR Part 200. This grant will be included in the annual monitoring of the local workforce areas by the Office of Employment and Training, as appropriate.

**VII. INFORMATION SESSION**

The Department will coordinate a webinar to review the details of the 2026 Apprenticeship Expansion program funding notice and answer any questions about the program requirements.

Date: Thursday, April 23, 2026 - 3:30 PM

Register: <https://illinoisstate.zoom.us/meeting/register/efkbsU4rQ4KVAabVlBhzAw>

**VIII. ACTION REQUIRED**

Local Workforce Innovation Boards, Integrated Business Service Teams, and WIOA partners are requested to review this notice, identify apprenticeship expansion activities, and apply for funding as appropriate.

**IX. INQUIRIES**

Inquiries related to this application funding notice should be directed to the appropriate Office of Employment and Training (OET) Regional Manager, Kristen Chevali at [Kristen.I.Chevali@illinois.gov](mailto:Kristen.I.Chevali@illinois.gov) for the Northern Region, Ruth Whitis at [Ruth.Whitis@Illinois.gov](mailto:Ruth.Whitis@Illinois.gov) for the Central Region, and Bryan Ellis at [Bryan.Ellis@illinois.gov](mailto:Bryan.Ellis@illinois.gov) for the Southern Region.

**X. EFFECTIVE DATE**

This notice is effective upon release.

**XI. EXPIRATION DATE**

This notice will remain in effect until June 30, 2027.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julio Rodriguez", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Julio Rodriguez, Deputy Director  
Office of Employment and Training

JR:jl

Appendix I – Illinois Apprenticeship Expansion Framework

Appendix II – Targeting Criteria for High Quality Programs

Attachment A – Formatted Technical Proposal

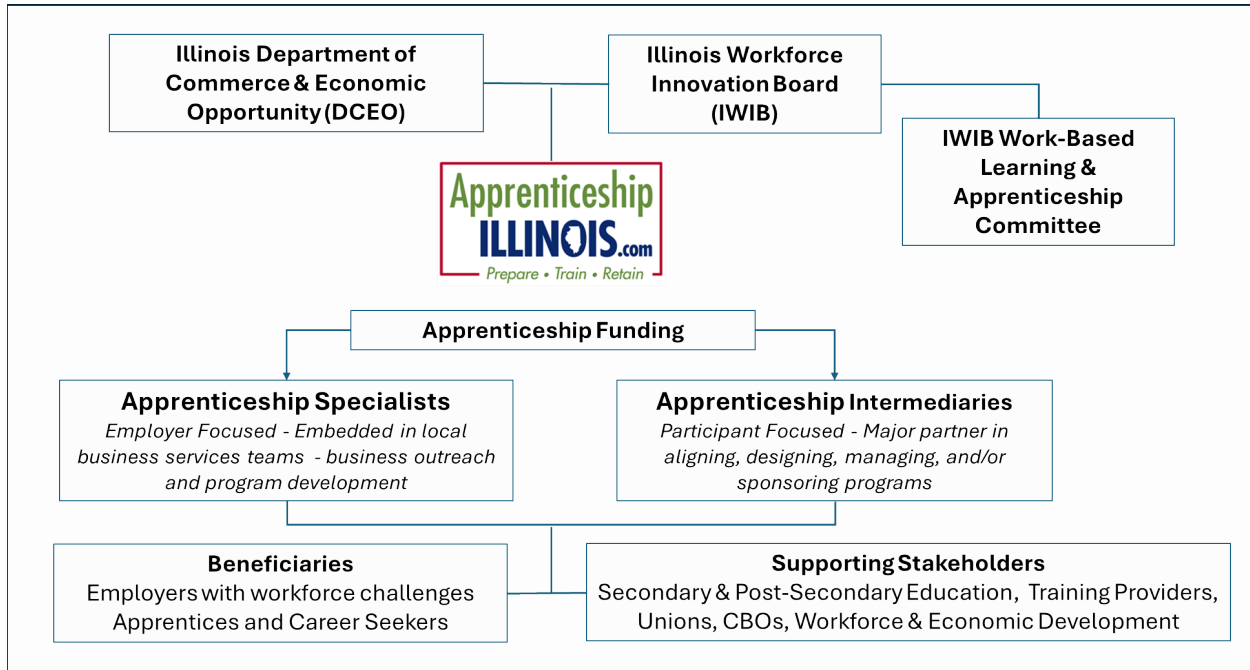
Attachment B – Project Workplan Template

Attachment C – Template LWIB Letter

Attachment D – Uniform Grant Application for State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula Program

Attachment E – Apprenticeship Expansion Formula Uniform Budget Template

## Appendix I – Illinois Apprenticeship Expansion Framework



## Appendix II: Targeting Criteria for High Quality Programs

Specialists should prioritize RAP development that meets most of the following criteria. Programs that do not meet these indicators are of lower priority unless they address a documented strategic need. These criteria should guide how Specialists allocate their time — not every employer inquiry warrants a full RAP development effort.

Criterion	Indicators
<b>High-Demand Occupation</b>	On regional or statewide in-demand occupation list; ≥ 20 projected annual openings regionally or documented persistent hiring difficulty; aligned with State priority sectors.
<b>Family-Sustaining Wage</b>	After completion of RAP, starting wage ≥ 150% of Illinois minimum wage (~\$22.50/hr in 2026). Completion wage meets or exceeds the regional living wage benchmark.
<b>Career Pathway Value</b>	Occupation recognized across multiple employers; transferable credentials; advancement potential beyond entry role; stackable or career-ladder alignment.
<b>Scale and Sustainability</b>	Employer anticipates ≥ 3 apprentices/year, or occupation is common across multiple regional employers; employer commits to continuing beyond first cohort; potential for multi-employer model.
<b>Regional/Sector Impact</b>	Addresses documented regional skill shortage; aligns with sector strategy or partnership; expands apprenticeship into new occupation within sector; reactivates or scales dormant RAPs.
<b>Implementation Feasibility</b>	RTI provider identified and capable; employer leadership engaged; Specialist has sector knowledge or strong partner support; reasonable path to registration within 6–12 months.

Lower-priority programs include: very low-wage occupations with limited advancement; high-turnover occupations; single-employer, one-off programs with no replication potential; programs lacking viable RTI or training partners; programs misaligned with regional demand.