

Request for Proposals

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has accelerated innovation in workplaces across industries around the United States. In Connecticut, demand for AI skills is rising. Since August 2024, nearly 11,000 job postings have required AI skills—a 40% increase from the year prior. Today, 1 in 52 jobs in the state list AI skill requirements, up from 1 in 70 a year ago. The demand is even stronger in roles requiring an associate or bachelor’s degree, where 1 in 23 jobs now call for AI expertise, spanning nearly every industry and occupation (BHEF analysis of Lightcast Job Postings). Current and future workers in Connecticut must be equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in an AI-driven world. To meet the burgeoning demand for AI-skilled tech talent and keep Connecticut’s workforce competitive, the state must deploy its entire higher education ecosystem, including community colleges, four-year public and independent colleges and universities, and engage the K-12 system. Each sector and institution has a critical role to play in preparing learners for the workplace, and in reskilling and upskilling incumbent workers.

Since 2022, Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) and The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) have worked with the Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) to direct a higher education innovation challenge: **the Connecticut Tech Talent Accelerator (TTA)**. Through two grant periods (TTA 1.0 and TTA 2.0), TTA has built higher education-business partnerships to modernize curricula, deliver short-term credentials that offer targeted training in essential tech skills, and increase the supply of skilled tech talent for Connecticut’s employers.

The third phase of TTA (“TTA 3.0”) will award competitive grants to postsecondary institutions, working together with their business partners, to provide learners and workers with essential skills in AI. TTA 3.0 will include two cohorts of grantees. First, a cohort of Pilot Grants that will expand or scale existing programs that embed AI competencies, with a duration of 6-months. This will be followed by a second round of Innovation Grants in late 2026 to launch new industry-led AI skills programs and partnerships, building on lessons learned from the Pilot Grantee cohort.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is for the first cohort (Pilot Grants) of the third installment of the Tech Talent Accelerator program (TTA 3.0). The grant period will run from February 1, 2026 to August 31, 2026. The due date for applications is December 5, 2025.

Program Objectives

TTA 3.0 seeks to increase the supply of individuals with AI skills and credentials by accelerating the efforts of Connecticut’s public and independent higher education institutions. In the Pilot Grant phase, applicants are invited to propose projects that expand or update existing postsecondary programs, pathways or partnerships with AI skills. This may include:

- Refreshing an AI-focused program with updated curriculum or a new industry-recognized credential;
- Adding new AI competencies to a program or pathway that does not currently include them (e.g. applying AI skills in finance or healthcare); or

- Expanding an active partnership with business(es) to extract AI skills and embed them into curricula.

Priority Areas

Proposals must address one or more of the following priority areas.

- **Priority Area 1: Reskill/Upskill the Tech Workforce for AI Competencies**
Expand or update *short-term postsecondary programs* focused on reskilling and upskilling those currently employed within industries that have a high demand for AI competencies.
- **Priority Area 2: Align Postsecondary Programs with Industry AI Needs**
Embed industry-recognized credentials and/or industry-validated AI knowledge, skills and abilities in *postsecondary degree pathways*.
- **Priority Area 3: Create Pathways to AI Skills Development for Secondary Students**
Develop dual enrollment pathways or short-term secondary programs aimed at preparing secondary students with AI skills – with transferability to postsecondary programs.
- **Priority Area 4: Expand Innovative Work-Based Learning Models**
Create or expand AI-focused Work-Based Learning (WBL) models. WBL provides learners with the opportunity to apply academic learning to the workplace and develop professional skills, providing additional feedback loops between the classroom and workplace and strengthening talent pipelines.

Note: We are not awarding standalone WBL grants. Applicants are invited to submit supplemental proposals that build a WBL component onto a proposed Pilot Grant project. Please see the Fund Use, Award Criteria and Resources sections of this document and WBL Supplemental Fund application for more details.

Technical Assistance

As part of TTA 3.0, postsecondary institutions have access to the combined expertise of BHEF and NEBHE. During the proposal development process and during the grant period, applicants and grantees may contact BHEF and NEBHE for assistance that includes:

- Access to regional labor market data including metrics on job openings, in-demand AI skills and hiring demand, top employers, and required credentials.
- Assistance in identifying prospective business partners and industry subject matter expert (SMEs) for partnership and proposal development.
- Access to experts in Connecticut and around the United States to better understand AI knowledge and skill requirements, in-demand industry recognized credentials, or training for faculty or learners.
- Information on curriculum mapping tools, models, and case studies.
- Feedback on proposal concepts.

Grantees will also participate in a Community of Practice that meets regularly to share best

practices, hear from national experts and learn from their peers.

Eligibility

We invite Connecticut-based 2- and 4-year independent and public postsecondary institutions to apply for TTA 3.0 Pilot Grants.

Available Funds

- **Total funds available:** \$150,000 for Pilot Grants and up to \$100,000 to support institutions' supplemental WBL models. Applicants seeking supplemental WBL funding must submit the WBL Supplemental Fund application in addition to this RFP
- **Number of awards:** Expected 5-12
- **Award range:** \$10,000–\$30,000 per Pilot Grant project, with supplemental WBL grants made at the discretion of the TTA advisory committee.

Fund Use

Awarded Pilot Grant funds can be used for:

- Faculty and/or staff stipends to update curricula and instructional materials related to programs, courses, curricula, support resources, credentials, and certificates.
- Course, credential or certificate implementation costs, including funds to offset fees for students related to IRC assessments.
- Internal and external convenings with employers or other partners to support program planning and implementation.
- Support for faculty or staff to attend professional development related to the proposed project.
- Qualified consultants.
- Course or program marketing.
- Project staff travel.
- Other costs related to grant planning, credential development and implementation.

Including uses listed above, awarded Supplemental WBL funds can be used for:

- Student compensation for their participation in WBL experiences.
- Costs associated with utilizing experiential learning platforms (e.g. Riipen, Parker Dewey, etc.).

Applicants are permitted to request funds for program activities not explicitly stated in the current document. Applicants must have a clear purpose and strong justification for their alternative activities.

Indirect costs are not allowed. Grantees may not commence grant activities until the receipt of a grant award letter and the completion of a grant agreement.

Award Criteria

Pilot Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis. Successful grant proposals will include adequate consideration of the following:

- Current labor market data demonstrating demand for, and future relevance of, the proposed certificate, credential, course, or programmatic innovation to AI skills needs in Connecticut.
- How participation in TTA 3.0 will catalyze the improvement or expansion of an existing AI skills-focused initiative, program or partnership.
- A strong commitment from at least one business partner that has a presence in Connecticut, such as provision of subject-matter expertise to inform curriculum development, hiring commitments, WBL opportunities, or other partnership activities represented through a letter of support. (Note: For proposals applying for the supplemental WBL fund, applicants only need to provide one letter of support that includes employer commitment to the Work-Based Learning component.)
- Evidence of how the proposed course, credential, certificate, or program activity connects to further postsecondary programs or credentials, supports stackability, transfer of credits, and clearly aligned degree pathways.
- Ability to leverage other federal, state, institutional or other support to sustain the program or partnership.
- Capacity to complete proposed project and begin enrolling learners before the end of the grant period.
- Clear statement of expected outcomes and impacts, including how they will be measured.

Supplemental WBL funds will be considered on the items above, as well as:

- A thorough description of the WBL learning model (e.g. project-based learning, micro-internship, co-op, etc.), how it blends learning with work experience and how partners will ensure a high-quality experience for learners.
- The AI knowledge and skills that learners will gain through WBL that they would not receive through classroom learning alone.
- A commitment from at least one business partner to participate in the WBL program.
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the business partner(s) and postsecondary institution and/or faculty.
- Commitment of pay, credit or coverage of other expenses that typically prevent learners from participating in WBL.
- Estimates of how many learners will participate or be hired in a WBL experience before the end of the grant period and/or within 6 months of launching the program.

Grant Timeline

- 10/14/25 - RFP released
- 10/16/25 and 10/20/25 – Informational webinars (see [program website](#) for registration)

links)

- 10/24/25 – FAQ published
- 12/5/25 – Proposals due
- 1/15/26 – Grantees selected
- 2/1/26 – Grant period begins
- 8/31/26 – Grant period ends

Resources to Consider in Developing a Proposal

The following resources provide relevant information that can inform the development of successful proposals:

- [The Connecticut Tech Talent Accelerator: Partnerships Closing the Tech Skills Gap](#)
- [Expanding Internships: Harnessing Employer Insights to Boost Opportunity and Enhance Learning](#)
- [Regional Partnerships: Creating Highly Tailored Educational and Work-based Learning Opportunities In Communities](#)
- [Blurring Lines: How Business and Technology Skills are Merging to Create High Opportunity Hybrid Jobs](#)
- [The New Foundational Skills of the Digital Economy: Developing Professionals of the Future](#)
- [The Digital Talent Forecast: Mapping the Evolving Role of Digital Skills in a Dynamic Labor Market](#)
- [CSCU Transfer Navigator - CT Guarantee](#)
- [The WPI Playbook: How Business-Education Partnerships Prepare Tomorrow's Talent](#)
- [Forging Partnerships to Align Education and Industry for the Workforce of Tomorrow](#)

Labor Market Information on AI Skills and Industry Transformation

- **Microsoft**, [Working with AI: Measuring the Occupational Implications of Generative AI](#)
- **Lightcast**, [Beyond the Buzz](#)
- **Stanford**, [Artificial Intelligence AI Index Report 2025](#)
- **PwC**, [The Fearless Future: 2025 Global AI Jobs Barometer](#)
- **World Economic Forum**, [The Future of Jobs Report 2025](#)

Please email the TTA team with any questions about the RFP or applications at techtalentaccelerator@bhef.com.