



Illinois Board of Higher Education

JB Pritzker, Governor
Pranav Kothari, Chair • Ginger Ostro, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Illinois Higher Education Community

FROM: Illinois Board of Higher Education

DATE: Tuesday, June 10, 2025

RE: Request for Proposals – FY26 Illinois Cooperative Work Study Grant

DUE: **Friday, July 25th at 12:00 p.m.**

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is seeking applications for the FY2026 ICWS grant program. The ICWS program seeks to address financial inequities that have impeded equitable postsecondary outcomes for all Illinois students. The foremost objective of IBHE and the ICWS grant are to make postsecondary credentials for Illinois students attainable and affordable based on principles of the IBHE's Strategic Planning Initiative entitled: *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*. The 25 strategies outlined in this plan are designed to accomplish three goals:

- *Equity:* Close equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind.
- *Sustainability:* Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions.
- *Growth:* Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth.

This will require the continued dedication and commitment of each institution's student support services to make degrees and credentials attainable, while optimizing funds and resources to make those degrees and credentials more affordable. To this end, the ICWS grant looks to fulfill its goals and objectives by endeavoring to ensure that participating institutions are serving diverse populations, being equitable, and supporting principles of inclusion in all areas of their work related to the program.

Eligible Institutions: Applicants eligible to receive grants are approved public and private, associate- and baccalaureate-degree granting Illinois colleges and universities.

Grant Period: The grant period will be date of last signature in 2025 to August 31, 2026.

Application Deadline: Only one proposal per institution may be submitted for this program. The application materials for FY2026 must be emailed to Outreachgrants@ibhe.org. The complete application must be received by 12:00 p.m. on Friday, July 25, 2025.

The application is included in this document and will also be available on the IBHE website at <https://www.ibhe.org/icws.html>.

Contact Person: For more information on this RFP, contact Outreachgrants@ibhe.org

Program Objectives

Grants shall be made for projects that support Illinois resident undergraduate students. The IBHE Program Objectives are to:

- *Expand opportunities for students to pursue internships, clinical placement, cooperative programs with business and industry, and other work opportunities linked to a student's academic program, with a particular emphasis on students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education;*
- *Strengthen cooperation between higher education, business, industry, and government;*
- *Encourage social and community service;*
- *Promote equitable outcomes for all students;*
- *Provide a diverse, inclusive environment;*
- *Maximize the use of matching contributions from business and industry, and governmental and social agencies;*
- *Create new opportunities for public/private partnerships;*
- *Integrate other components of student financial aid to reduce reliance on student loans; and*
- *Encourage students to seek permanent employment in Illinois.*

Fiscal Information

The FY2026 budget recommendations include \$980,500 for the ICWS grant program. A final allocation for the FY2026 ICWS grant program will not occur until a FY2026 budget is signed by the Governor.

The maximum request amount from each institution is \$50,000. A program audit is no longer required - grant funds must be used for student wages and salaries.

Proposal Format

Each proposal must be submitted in the format outlined below. Please review the attachments carefully. The following may be used as a checklist in assembling your completed proposal:

- **Uniform Application for State Grant Assistance (Attachment 1):** This form must be completed, dated, signed by the President/CEO of the applicant institution.
- **Program Goals and Objectives (Attachment 2):** Briefly describe the goals and objectives of the program. Identify the program's plans for achieving these goals. Describe the impact the proposed program will have on the interns and the institution, including opportunities for partnerships and building meaningful connections with students and community partners. Describe how the proposed program will support students and assist in the development of skills. Identify personnel responsible for coordinating the activities and supporting the project.
- **Project Narrative (Attachment 3):** Limit to five double-spaced pages. Provide a brief description of the program, including description of how the proposed program complements the institution's mission and how the program supports the institution's long- and short-term goals priorities of growing talent in Illinois. Demonstrate how the program will support the three goals of the state's strategic plan for higher education *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*.

- **Budget (Attachment 4):** Provide a completed budget request form. Cooperative Work Study funds are to be used only for student wages and salaries. Grant funds may not be used for any administrative costs.

***The following additional information should be included as part of your budget structure:**

- What is your *per student* request?
 - How much per student, if any, is your institution supplementing through institutional contributions described in Attachment 5?
 - Provide justification for the amount you are requesting.
- **Institutional Contributions (Attachment 5):** Indicate the amount your institution contributes with in-kind and institutional contributions to the Illinois Cooperative Work Study program. An in-kind contribution is a non-cash input which can be given a cash value. Examples of in-kind contributions may include program director's salary and fringe benefits associated with running the program. Contributions directly from the institution used to pay for student salaries, fringe benefits, etc. are considered institutional contributions.
 - **List of Participating Employers (Attachment 6).** Please list all participating employers who have submitted letters of intent to participate in the program. Employers must be external and not associated with the institution receiving the award.
 - **Linkage to Student's Academic Program Summary (Attachment 7).** Please briefly describe how the work opportunity is linked to a student's academic program for each employer listed in Attachment 5. Please describe how your project opportunities in this program will help students obtain Illinois employment post-graduation.
 - **Employer's letters (Attachment 8).** A letter of intent on the employer's letterhead that clearly outlines the employer's commitment must include:
 - how the work opportunity is linked to an academic program;
 - the number of positions available;
 - the length of the internship (weeks, hours, etc.)
 - equitable consideration of applicants;
 - the total wage to be paid to the student;
 - the employer's share or percentage of the total wage;
 - if there is a possibility of permanent employment after the internship ends.

A signed contract of intent between the institution and the employer may be substituted for the letter of intent. Employers must submit a new letter of intent each year to participate in the program.

- **Evaluation Plan (Attachment 9):** Describe the program evaluation plan that details the program's effectiveness, including how the performance measure will be assessed in relation to the stated objectives of the program and IBHE goals to close equity gaps. If the institution received funds from this program in prior years, indicate how the prior evaluations have informed the current program proposal. Identify plans for program and student outcomes, including plan for measuring student progress and engagement for employment in Illinois based on the participation in the program.

Attachment #10 is for informational purposes only and not required as part of the application submission.

FY26 Criteria for Review and Approval

Proposals will be reviewed and rated by the following criteria, and in alignment with IBHE's Strategic Planning Initiative. **(100 total possible points)**

1. **Program Overview.** Program description clearly aligns and supports the institution's mission. Institution clearly identifies program plans and support for goals and priorities of growing talent in Illinois. Program provides clear exemplary plans to strengthen cooperation between higher education institutions, K-12 education, business, industry, and government. Institution provides extensive and clear description of how the program will prepare students for high-demand careers in the Illinois economy. **(25 points)**
2. **Leveraging Resources.** Please explain how you will work with low-income and other underserved students to reduce their reliance on student loans; maximize the use of matching contributions from business, industry, and government; and show alignment between the Cooperative Work Study Program and other campus work study programs. **(15 points)**
3. **Enhancing Academic, Employment, and Community Relationships.** The proposal provides a practical and sustainable plan for expansion of student internships for all students, including those historically underserved and linked to a student's academic field, and encourages social and community service, and the extent to which there are supports in place to ensure student continuance in the project or internship to maximize the development of their skills. The proposal clearly shows how the program will have impact on the interns and the institution in building opportunities for partnership and community engagement. **(15 points)**
4. **Program Recruitment, Selection, and Supports.** The proposal clearly articulates the student recruitment, selection, and support process and demonstrates how students are selected across racial, ethnic, disability, socio-economic status, and other diverse characteristics. The proposal also outlines expectations and professional relationships between students, faculty and employers; and defines responsibilities for student supervision and evaluation. Employer letters of intent to participate in the program clearly define their understanding and commitment to equitable consideration of applicants to their business including number and length of positions and employer share of wage or salary. **(20 points)**
5. **Program Evaluation.** The proposed evaluation process is designed to assess the effectiveness of the activities in relation to the goals and objectives and IBHE goals to close equity gaps. It includes clearly stated performance measures and tracking information for follow-up of students' permanent employment in Illinois. If the institution received funds from this program in prior years, the proposal shows how the prior evaluations have informed the current program proposal. **(10 points)**
6. **Budget.** The extent to which the proposed budget is consistent with the scope of the proposed objectives and activities, and the cost-per-student is justified. The budget reflects maximized use of matching contributions. **(15 points)**