

Workforce Development Programs in Tennessee

August 18, 2026

Key Takeaways

- The workforce development system supports individuals from early education through career advancement—spanning K–12, postsecondary education, and ongoing job training.
 - Workforce programs in Tennessee vary in design and scope—using mechanisms like grants, scholarships, technical assistance, and direct services to support schools, employers, and jobseekers.
 - Tennessee’s workforce programs span across multiple state agencies—reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the work.
 - Federal laws shape much of the system’s structure and funding—including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for workforce services and Perkins V for career and technical education.
 - Workforce programs in Tennessee generally fall into four categories: early talent development, employer support, targeted populations, and system coordination and infrastructure.
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A strong workforce is essential to Tennessee’s economic growth and prosperity. Workforce development is one way the state supports this goal. It encompasses a broad range of programs and initiatives that help Tennesseans build skills, pursue education and training opportunities, connect with employers, and advance in the labor market. This report provides an overview of programs and initiatives in Tennessee to help policymakers navigate the state’s workforce development landscape and understand how its various components fit together.

Navigating This Report

This report explores programs and services that support workforce development in Tennessee. It begins by outlining the key state and local entities that oversee workforce programs and the primary federal laws guiding workforce development. We then provide additional detail on major programs and initiatives. The Sycamore Institute developed the following categories to organize workforce development programs based on their primary purpose:

- **Category 1: Early Talent Development** activities aim to develop a pipeline of skilled workers entering the labor market from the K-12 and postsecondary education systems. These programs emphasize academic readiness, career and technical education (CTE), work-based learning opportunities, postsecondary access, and credential attainment.
- **Category 2: Employer Support** programs aim to strengthen and retain the existing workforce by supporting employers. These programs include business incentives and workplace training to help businesses expand job opportunities and remain competitive.
- **Category 3: Targeted Populations** activities connect individuals who are unemployed or disconnected from the labor force to employment opportunities. These programs largely target specific populations, such as veterans, older adults, or formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **Category 4: System Coordination and Infrastructure** initiatives align workforce programs and partners across agencies and sectors. These efforts aim to improve collaboration and create a more seamless workforce system for both jobseekers and employers.

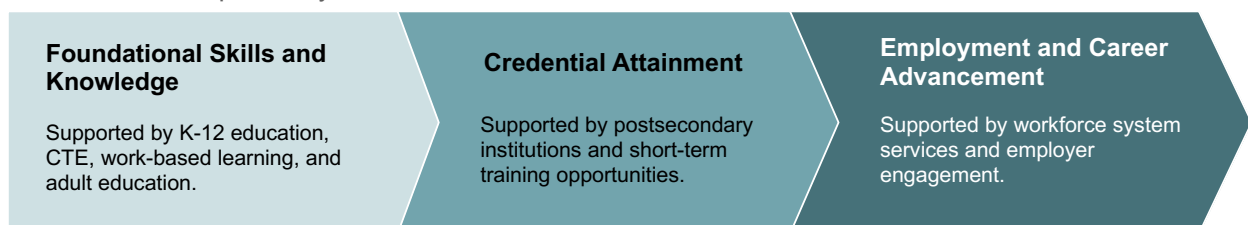
Workforce development programs in Tennessee vary in both their design and scope. They use multiple mechanisms—including grants, scholarships, technical assistance, and direct services—to support recipients that range from school districts and postsecondary institutions to employers and individual job-seekers. While some programs are targeted toward specific industries or occupations, others are designed to strengthen the workforce more broadly by expanding access to education, training, and credential attainment. See the **Key Terms** and **Acronym Glossary** text boxes at the end to help navigate some of the terms used in this paper and related policy conversations.

The Workforce Development System

The workforce development system is a continuum of efforts that support individuals from early education through career advancement (Figure 1). The system supports a pipeline that begins with career awareness and foundational skill-building in K-12 education, continues through postsecondary education, and extends into job training opportunities for workers at all stages of their careers. Programs are supported by a wide range of partners—including education systems, workforce agencies, employers, and community-based organizations.

Figure 1. Tennessee’s Workforce System Spans K-12 Education Through Employment Support

Workforce Development System



Source: The Sycamore Institute

Tennessee Workforce Entities

Tennessee’s workforce programs span across multiple state agencies, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the work. Even as programs are administered or overseen by state agencies, implementation often occurs at the local and regional level through local entities, education and training providers, and community partners. **Table 1** summarizes entities involved in Tennessee’s workforce development pipeline.

Table 1. Multiple State Agencies Play a Role in Workforce Development in Tennessee

Key State Agencies and Offices in Tennessee’s Workforce Development System

Tennessee State Agency/Office	General Role in Workforce Development
Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD)	TDLWD is the primary administrator of the state’s workforce system under the federal WIOA and convenor of the State Workforce Development Board. It administers job training programs, issues unemployment insurance, oversees workplace safety standards, tracks labor market data, and operates the state’s American Job Centers.
Dept. of Economic and Community Development (TNECD)	TNECD focuses on business recruitment, retention, and expansion. It also provides grants to businesses to support employee training and company infrastructure improvements.
Dept. of Education (TDOE)	TDOE oversees K-12 education, distributes state funding to school districts, and supports implementation of education programs, including CTE, work-based learning, student industry credentials, and early postsecondary opportunities.
State Board of Education (SBE)	SBE sets the rules and policies for K-12 education—including approving academic standards and establishing high school graduation requirements.
Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC)	THEC oversees public higher education institutions, administers the state’s outcomes-based funding formula for those institutions, approves academic degree programs, and tracks data on postsecondary credential attainment.
Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR)	TBR oversees the state’s 13 community colleges and 24 Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs).
Dept. of Human Services (TDHS)	TDHS administers federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and vocational rehabilitation programs—connecting individuals to job training and employment opportunities.
State Workforce Development Board (SWDB)	The SWDB oversees federal workforce programs established under WIOA, state workforce initiatives, and advises the governor on workforce policy, strategic plans, and investments in training and skills development programs.

Federal Workforce Development Laws

Federal laws shape the structure and funding of most workforce development programs. For example, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guides the public workforce system, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) supports career and technical education and early workforce pathways. This section explains the major federal laws guiding workforce development and their role in Tennessee's workforce system.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

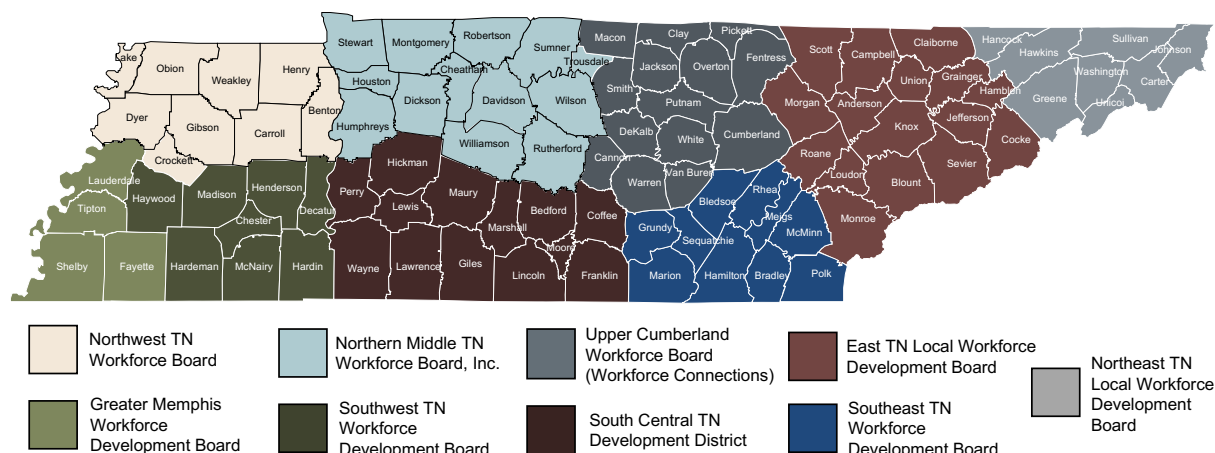
The federal WIOA creates a national framework to coordinate state and local workforce development efforts. WIOA was enacted in 2014 and replaced similar requirements previously in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. To receive WIOA funding, states must create 4-year strategic workforce plans, establish performance goals, and provide coordinated services for education, employment training, and job resources. (1) Tennessee's WIOA state plan outlines the state's workforce priorities, strategies, and partnerships for implementing these requirements—including efforts to align workforce programs with employer needs and regional labor market demands. (2)

WIOA also requires state and local governments to establish the following:

- **The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB)** advises the governor on workforce policy, strategic plans, and investments in training and skills development programs. The board oversees federal workforce programs established under WIOA, partners with local workforce development boards, and monitors the performance of the state's workforce programs. In practice, this includes developing the state's WIOA plan—which identifies in-demand industries and occupations—and setting a statewide strategy that guides how state agencies and local boards align training programs and services with employer needs and priority populations. Tennessee's 33-member SWDB—primarily appointed by the governor— includes state elected officials, agency commissioners, local leaders, and representatives from community, business, and labor organizations. (3)
- **Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB)** oversee and support federally-funded workforce development programs for their region. They develop local plans that include labor market analyses, strategic planning, and details on implementation of federal WIOA programs. In practice, this includes selecting eligible job training providers and directing funding toward in-demand occupations and local workforce priorities. Tennessee has 9 local workforce development boards that include members appointed by local county mayors in their respective areas (**Figure 2**). The state's local workforce development areas are geographically aligned with development districts. (4) (5)
- **American Job Centers (AJC)** offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and employment-related services. WIOA requires LWDBs to establish a "one-stop delivery system" that provides centralized employment services. AJCs function as the "one-stop" location. (6) There are 59 American Job Centers in Tennessee. (1) (7)

Figure 2. Local Workforce Development Boards Oversee WIOA Programs and Services for Their Areas

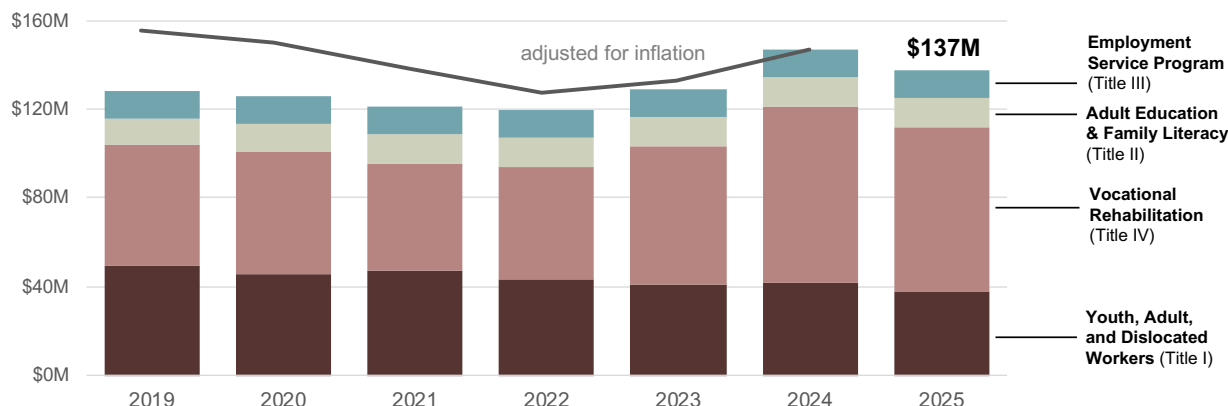
Tennessee Local Workforce Development Boards



Source: Tennessee State Workforce Development Board (4)

Figure 3. Tennessee Receives About \$137 Million in Federal Funds for WIOA Programs

Tennessee Federal WIOA Funding (2019-2025)



Notes: Title I and Title III funds are reported by the U.S. Department of Labor by program year (July 1–June 30). Title II and Title IV are reported by the U.S. Department of Education by federal fiscal year (October 1–September 30). Totals reflect funding awarded within each labeled year and are not perfectly aligned across programs. Inflation-adjusted numbers are in 2024 dollars using the GDP Price Index.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Department of Education (8) (9) (10)

WIOA funding is awarded to states for specific workforce programs and activities. (6) Tennessee received about \$137 million in WIOA funding across the following programs and services in 2025 (based on program year and federal fiscal year allocations) (**Figure 3**):

- **Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Workers** (Title I) programs target young people ages 14-24, low-income adults, and individuals who have lost their job. (11) Federal funding is distributed to TDLWD, which then allocates funding to LWDBs based on a federal formula that considers

unemployment rate, number of disadvantaged youth, and layoffs. Program services are provided by AJCs in each geographic area. (12)

- **The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act** (Title II) supports education services to help adults develop basic skills necessary for employment and postsecondary education. Programs include adult basic education to improve math, reading, and writing skills, high school equivalency credential preparation, and language services. (13) Federal funding is provided to states to distribute to local providers—including school districts, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations. Funding is based on a federal formula that considers each state's share of adults without a high school diploma and legal immigrants. (14)
- **Employment Services** (Title III) includes public employment offices that provide job search and placement assistance, counseling, and referrals to other resources. (15) Because WIOA requires employment service offices to be located with one-stop centers, these services are generally provided in AJCs. Funding is based on each state's share of the labor force and total unemployment. (6)
- **Vocational Rehabilitation** (Title IV) programs support people with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment. THDS administers vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. (16) (17) Funding is provided to states based on a federal formula that considers population and per-capita income.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V)

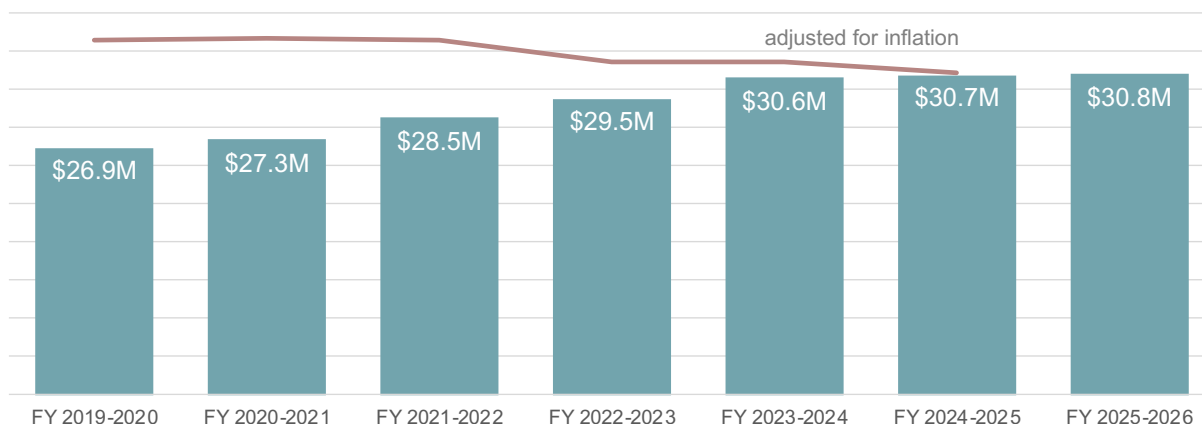
The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act—also known as Perkins V—is a federal law that guides CTE. (18) CTE includes educational programs offered at the secondary and postsecondary levels to provide students with academic knowledge, technical skills, and work-based learning experiences in specific career fields. (19) Tennessee's Perkins V state plan outlines how the state designs, funds, and evaluates CTE. (20)

Tennessee received approximately \$31 million in Perkins V funding to support CTE programming in FY 2025. (21) Federal law specifies a proportion of funds must be distributed to local entities and reserved for certain activities (**Figures 4 and 5**):

- 85% of the state's total allocation must be awarded to school districts and postsecondary institutions. Of the funding distributed to local entities, 15% is awarded through a competitive grant process known as the Perkins reserve grant.
- 10% of the state's total allocation is reserved for state leadership activities.
- 5% of the state's total allocation is reserved for state administrative costs.

Figure 4. Tennessee Receives About \$31 Million in Federal Funds for Career and Technical Education

Tennessee Total Perkins V Grant Award (FY 2019-FY 2025)

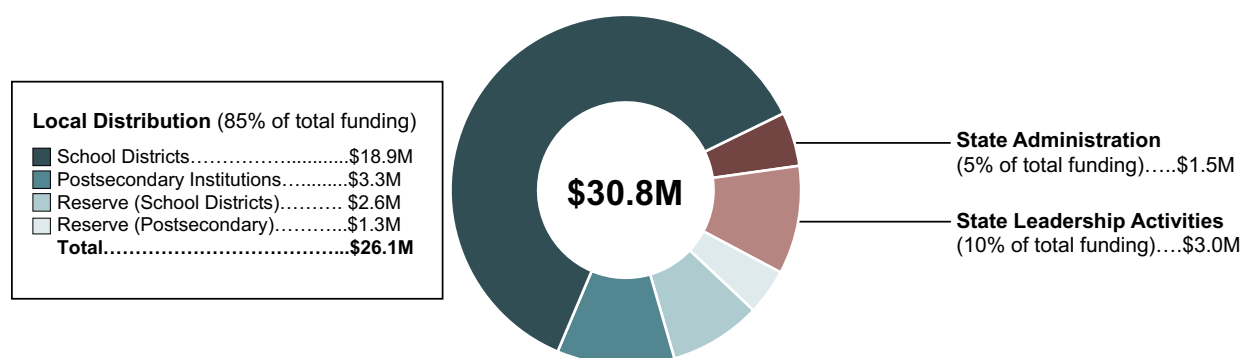


Notes: The fiscal year for Perkins V funding reflects July 1–June 30. For example, FY 2025-2026 reflects funding starting July 1, 2025. Inflation-adjusted numbers are in 2024 dollars using the GDP Price Index.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (21)

Figure 5. 85% of Federal Perkins Funding Must Be Awarded to Local Recipients

Tennessee Perkins V Funding by Category (FY 2025-2026)



Notes: Amounts may not sum up to the total award due to rounding. 85% of funding for state leadership activities is retained by TDOE and 15% of funding is distributed to TBR for postsecondary leadership activities.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; Tennessee Perkins V State Plan (20) (21)

To receive Perkins V funds, school districts and postsecondary institutions must conduct a comprehensive local needs assessment (CLNA). The CLNA requires local recipients to assess labor market alignment, student performance outcomes, gaps across student populations, program quality, and alignment between K-12 and postsecondary CTE programs. The results must directly inform local spending decisions and program strategies. (22)

Tennessee Workforce Programs and Initiatives

While the federal WIOA establishes a framework for workforce development, Tennessee has a variety of standalone programs and investments to address specific needs and priorities. As a result, Tennessee's workforce landscape includes both federally-supported programs and independent initiatives administered across multiple agencies and implemented through regional and local partners. The following section outlines the state's major workforce development programs organized by category. However, many programs serve multiple purposes, and individual initiatives may align with more than one workforce development category based on their goals, activities, and target populations. **Appendix A** provides a list of significant programs and services available across Tennessee.

Category 1: Early Talent Development

Workforce development begins before individuals formally enter the labor force. In Tennessee, K-12 and postsecondary programs and initiatives are designed to prepare students to successfully enter the workforce. These efforts include academic coursework to build foundational skills, CTE and work-based learning opportunities that expose students to specific industries, and financial supports that reduce barriers to postsecondary credential attainment.

K-12 Coursework and Early Career Exposure

- **Early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs)** are courses and exams that allow high school students to earn college credit or workforce credentials. EPSOs are typically offered through national organizations or postsecondary institutions. (23) **Table 2** summarizes each EPSO, its provider, and how students can obtain credit. In the 2024-2025 academic year, Tennessee students took about 335,000 EPSOs. (24) The state's K-12 school funding formula incentivizes school districts to offer EPSOs, and student completion is one of the qualifying criteria for outcomes bonuses (see below).
- **Career and technical education** courses allow middle and high school students to learn about specific industries through classroom instruction and hands-on experiences. Tennessee's CTE courses are categorized into 14 clusters (e.g., agriculture, digital technology, health care and human services, etc.). Within each career cluster are "programs of study" that outline the course sequence for more specific occupations. For example, the advanced manufacturing cluster includes a program of study for welding with 4 courses. (19) Student enrollment in CTE programs is also included in the state's K-12 school funding formula (see below).
- **Work-based learning (WBL)** opportunities allow high school students to gain work experience for school credit. WBL activities include project-based learning, internships, apprenticeships, and practicums. They are typically associated with a CTE program of study and allow students to connect classroom instruction with workplace experiences. (25)
- **Youth Employment Program (YEP)** is a program led by TDLWD to provide young people ages 14-24 with paid work experiences, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities. The program awards grants to employers to create youth employment opportunities, and participants are eligible to earn up to \$3,000 through their job placements. In FY 2027, the state allocated \$8

million for YEP, and TDLWD also leverages federal WIOA Title I Youth funds to support the program. (28) (29)

- **Innovative School Strategies** was a one-time state initiative administered by the TDOE to help school districts implement innovative workforce education strategies. In FY 2023, the state distributed \$500 million to middle and high schools to invest in programs that reimagine time, space, and modes of learning. (26) School districts could use these funds to expand CTE programs, EPSOs, and career exploration opportunities for students. (27)

Table 2. Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs) Give Tennessee Students Knowledge and Skills for Workforce Preparation

Types of Early Postsecondary Opportunities in Tennessee

	Description	Provider
Advanced Placement (AP)	College-level courses offered in high school that culminate in standardized exams. Students may earn college credit or placement based on exam scores.	The College Board
Cambridge International Exam (CIE)	Curriculum and examinations that allow high school students to earn advanced-level credentials and potential college credit.	Cambridge International Education
College-Level Exam Program (CLEP)	Standardized exams that allow students to demonstrate college-level knowledge and earn college credit without taking a course.	The College Board
Dual Enrollment (DE)	Postsecondary courses taken by high school students for both high school and college credit. Courses are typically taught by postsecondary faculty or approved high school instructors.	Postsecondary Institution
International Baccalaureate (IB)	International curriculum and assessment program designed to prepare students for college and global citizenship. Students may earn college credit or placement based on exam scores.	International Baccalaureate
Statewide and Local Dual Credit	High school courses aligned with postsecondary expectations that allow students to earn postsecondary credit upon passage of an exam.	Postsecondary Institution
Industry Credentials	Certifications or credentials that validate career-specific knowledge and skills and are recognized by employers or industry organizations.	Industry

Note: Statewide dual credit is currently being phased out, with full discontinuation beginning in fall 2027.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education (23)

Postsecondary Access and Credential Attainment:

- **Tennessee Promise** is a last-dollar scholarship program administered by THEC and funded through endowment earnings, surplus lottery revenues, and excess sports wagering fees. (30) It helps students cover tuition and mandatory fees at community colleges or TCATs. By reducing financial barriers to postsecondary education, the program supports credential attainment for students pursuing associate degrees and technical diplomas. In the 2024-2025 academic year, nearly 12,000 students participated in Tennessee Promise. (31) (32)
- **The Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE) Act** focuses on capacity-building through competitive community grants that support partnerships between K-12 school districts, postsecondary institutions, and employers to expand CTE programming aligned with workforce needs. Between 2019 and 2024, THEC awarded a total of \$91 million in GIVE community grants to postsecondary institutions. (34) (35)
- **Workforce Pell** is a new federal program initiated in July 2026 that expands access to Pell Grants—need-based financial aid for low-income students—to those enrolled in eligible short-term workforce training programs aligned with high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations. In Tennessee, the SWDB, TDLWD, and THEC coordinate implementation of the program to approve eligible programs. (36)
- **Supporting Postsecondary Access in Rural Counties (SPARC)** is a program administered by THEC and designed to expand postsecondary and workforce training opportunities in Tennessee's rural communities by addressing gaps in infrastructure, geographic access, and CTE dual enrollment. The program provides grants to K-12 school districts in distressed, at-risk, and transitional counties—a national designation based on county poverty, income, and unemployment. School districts can use funds for CTE equipment, industry certification exam fees, work-based learning, teacher training, and dual enrollment partnerships with TCATs. In FY 2023, the state appropriated approximately \$10 million for SPARC. (34) (37)
- **Rural Health Care Pathways Programs** is a THEC initiative to strengthen Tennessee's rural health workforce by expanding education and career pathways in health care, behavioral health, and dental health. The state allocated about \$68 million over FYs 2025-2030 for grants to higher education institutions to support activities spanning K–12, postsecondary education, and midcareer advancement—including increasing early exposure to health careers, improving transitions into health science education, and expanding opportunities for career advancement in in-demand fields. (38) In 2025, THEC awarded \$2 million across 20 institutions to develop or scale programs that connect rural students to training and employment opportunities. (39)
- **Rural Works Health Care** is a state grant program administered by TDLWD that provides local education providers, health care organizations, and workforce partners with up to \$250,000 to expand health care training and apprenticeship opportunities in rural communities. It seeks to address rural health care workforce shortages by increasing access to credentials and employment pathways while helping remove barriers that prevent individuals from entering health

care careers. In FY 2027, the state allocated \$8.2 million in non-recurring funding for the program, supporting 50 grantees across the state. (40) (29)

Tennessee’s workforce development priorities are also embedded within the state’s funding formulas for both K-12 and postsecondary institutions. Each includes components that allocate funding based on CTE enrollment, program completion, and credential attainment to incentivize institutions to expand early exposure to careers pathways and increase the number of students earning workforce-relevant credentials. This approach encourages schools and colleges to align their programs with labor market demands and to strengthen the pipeline of students prepared to enter high-need fields.

The Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA)—the state’s public K-12 school funding formula—incentivizes school districts’ workforce development efforts two ways.

- **CTE Direct Funding:** The TISA formula provides different funding amounts to school districts for student participation in CTE programs that are in-demand, high-wage, and high-skill. The amount of funding a district receives per student is based on the tier of the program and student progression through the program. Each CTE program is categorized into 3 tiers based on whether the program is in-demand, high-wage, and/or high-skill. Districts also receive additional funds for “high-cost” CTE programs that are distributed proportionally based on the number of students participating in certain programs. (41) (42)
- **Outcomes Bonuses:** TISA also includes bonus payments for school districts whose students meet specific performance targets. One of the qualifying outcomes is completion of EPSOs that results in either postsecondary credit or clock hours, a passing score on EPSO exams (e.g., AP exam, CLEP, etc.) or attainment of a Tier 2 or Tier 3 industry credential identified by TDOE. (41) (42)

Tennessee’s outcomes-based funding (OBF) formula for public higher education incorporates workforce development priorities by tying a portion of institutional funding to student outcomes. OBF allocates operating funds to public colleges and universities based on student outcomes, fixed costs, and quality assurance measures. 80% of the formula is tied to outcomes. Of that degree completion and student credit progression account for 65% of outcome measures for universities and 55% for community colleges. Economic development outcomes—which include job placement and workforce training for community colleges—account for an additional 15% of outcome measures in the formula. (43) (44)

OBF also includes a workforce investment premium which provides additional funding to postsecondary institutions for programs in in-demand fields. For the 2026-2030 formula, THEC approved changes to the workforce investment premium to place greater emphasis on credentials leading to livable wages and alignment with in-demand fields. The revised approach aligns the premium with Workforce Pell-eligible programs and allows institutions to nominate academic programs that meet regional workforce needs and priorities. (45)

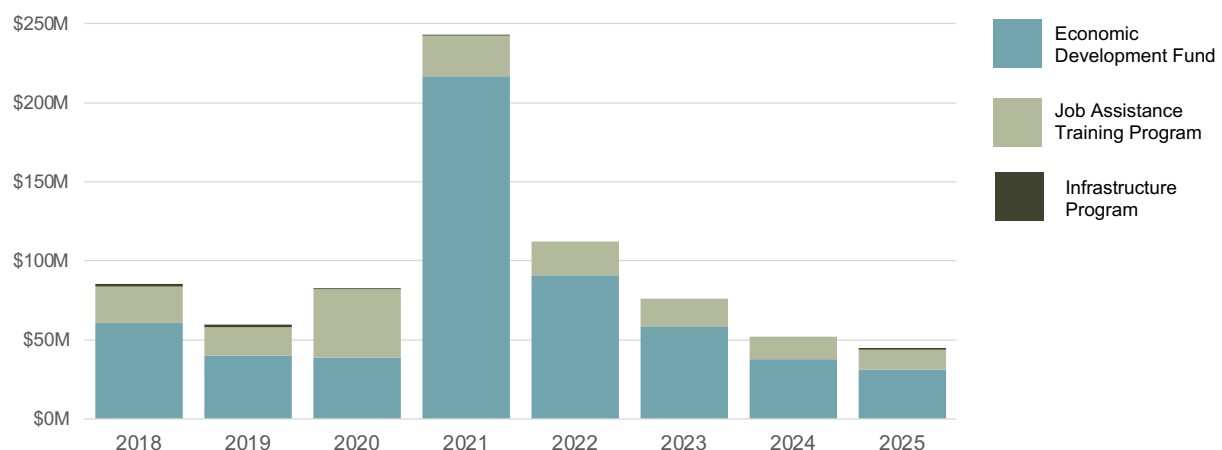
Category 2: Employer Support

In addition to building a future talent pipeline, Tennessee's workforce strategy includes an emphasis on supporting employers and strengthening the current workforce. These efforts focus on enhancing business competitiveness while helping workers adapt to evolving industry needs through upskilling, reskilling, and workplace-based training. The state leverages a mix of financial incentives and targeted initiatives to encourage business investment, expand job opportunities, and improve workforce retention.

- **Apprenticeship TN** is a statewide initiative led by TDLWD to promote apprenticeships as a workforce development strategy. In addition to its outreach and coordination role, it provides technical assistance to employers who want to develop registered apprenticeship programs and promotes state and federal grant opportunities targeted at launching and expanding apprenticeship programs. As of April 2026, there are about 10,000 apprentices in Tennessee. (46) (47)
- **FastTrack Grants** from the TNECD provide financial incentives to new and expanding companies that commit to creating and retaining jobs. One of these investments is the Job Training Assistance Program which supports the training of new employees. FastTrack funding can also support site development (known as the Economic Development Fund) and public infrastructure improvements tied to business expansion (known as the Infrastructure Program). (48) Additional incentives target projects in economically distressed or at-risk counties to encourage job creation in areas with greater need. In 2025, TNECD awarded about \$45 million in FastTrack grants to 45 projects across 30 counties—\$12 million of which supported Job Training Assistance Program grants. (49) (Figures 6 and 7)

Figure 6. Since 2018, Tennessee Has Awarded Over \$756 Million in Fast Track Grants

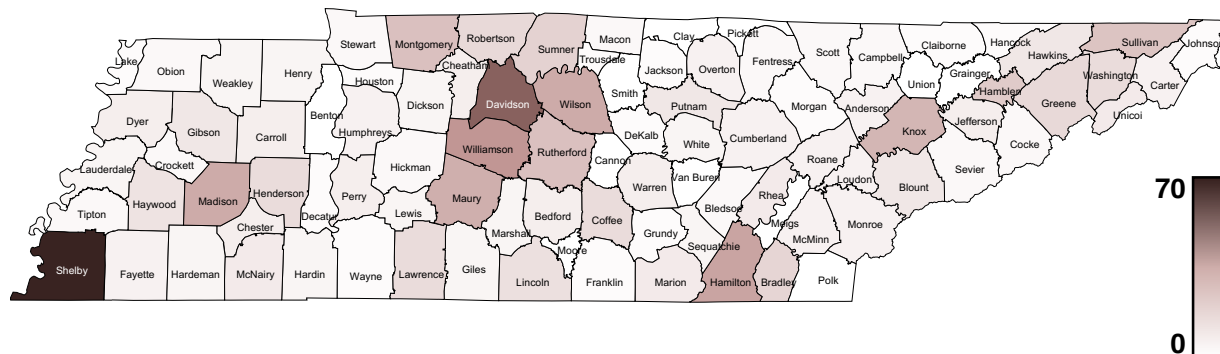
Tennessee FastTrack Awarded Grants by Program (2018-2025)



Source: Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (49)

Figure 7. FastTrack Grants Have Supported Business Development in 84 Tennessee Counties

Total FastTrack Grants by County (2018-2026)



Notes: Reflects the total number of FastTrack grants awarded to companies from 2018 to June 2026 for projects in specified counties.

Source: Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (49)

Category 3: Targeted Populations

Tennessee's workforce system also includes targeted efforts to support individuals who face barriers to employment. These programs include both state and federally-funded initiatives to help individuals enter or re-enter the labor market by providing job search assistance, training, and other services. They frequently prioritize specific populations, like veterans, older adults, and individuals involved in the criminal justice system, to improve labor force participation and access to employment opportunities.

- Tennessee Reconnect** is a last-dollar scholarship program funded from lottery proceeds that helps eligible adult learners cover tuition and mandatory fees at community colleges or TCATs. The program is designed to help adults return to school, complete a postsecondary credential, and re-enter the workforce with in-demand skills. In the 2024-25 academic year, about 7,000 adults participated in Tennessee Reconnect. (50) (32)
- The Tennessee Office of Reentry (TOOR)** is an initiative within TDLWD to coordinate workforce services for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. The office administers state-funded grants like the Community Reentry Reinvestment Grant (CRRG) and federally-funded initiatives like Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD). The programs support community-based organizations in providing training, wraparound services, and employment pathways for individuals returning from incarceration. (51)
- Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)** is a federally-funded program for individualized career and training services to help veterans transition into or re-enter the civilian workforce. In federal FY 2026, Tennessee received \$3.9 million for JVSG. (52) (53)
- The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)** is a federally-funded program that supports unemployed older adults (55+) by offering subsidized, work-based training

opportunities that build skills and facilitate re-entry into the labor force. In 2026, Tennessee was allocated about \$1.5 million in federal funds for the program. (54) (55)

Programs targeting specific populations often operate alongside other federal safety net programs. For example, programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Benefit Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program leverage existing infrastructure—such as AJCs and other WIOA-funded services—to connect participants to training, job placement, and supportive services.

Category 4: System Coordination and Infrastructure

Tennessee’s workforce system includes efforts to strengthen coordination and improve access across the many entities involved in workforce development. These efforts include governance structures, cross-agency initiatives, and shared infrastructure that connect state agencies, education and training providers, employers, and job seekers.

- **TN Works** is a statewide initiative established in 2025 and housed within TDLWD that serves as a single point of contact for employers seeking workforce support. It brings together 6 state agencies to help better coordinate workforce programs, reduce duplication, and make it easier for businesses to access the state’s range of workforce development services and partners. (56)
- **Executive Order 109** issued by Governor Lee in 2025 sought to reestablish and outline the role of the SWDB in advising the governor on workforce priorities and overseeing coordination across the state’s workforce system. The order directs the board to work with state agencies, education partners, employers, and other stakeholders to identify workforce needs, align programs and investments, and support strategies that connect Tennesseans with employment and training opportunities. (57)
- **Jobs4TN** is a public database managed by the TDLWD that compiles job postings provided by Tennessee employers and offers access to labor market information, hiring tools, and training resources. (58)

Parting Words

Tennessee’s workforce development system includes a diverse network of programs that support individuals at different stages of the education and employment pipeline. These efforts help students explore career pathways, provide workers with opportunities to gain skills and credentials, assist employers in meeting workforce needs, and improve coordination among workforce partners. As Tennessee’s economy and labor market continue to evolve, coordination among these partners will remain important to ensuring that workforce programs effectively connect individuals with opportunities and meet the needs of employers.

Key Terms

American Job Center: A local workforce service center established under WIOA that connects job seekers and employers with employment services, training opportunities, and career resources.

Apprenticeship: A structured training program that combines paid on-the-job learning with related instruction to prepare individuals for a specific occupation.

Career and Technical Education: Educational programs that provide students with academic and technical skills needed for careers in specific industries or occupations.

Credential: A recognized qualification that verifies an individual has completed education, training, or demonstrated skills needed for employment.

Early Postsecondary Opportunities: Courses or exams that allow high school students to earn college credit or industry credentials (e.g., Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, etc.)

High-skill occupations: Occupations that require education or training beyond a high school diploma—such as postsecondary credentials, industry certifications, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training.

High-wage occupations: Occupations that offer wages above a defined threshold relative to state or regional wages. In Tennessee, this includes occupations with wages at least 20% above the median regional wage. (67)

In-Demand Occupations: Occupations identified using state or regional labor market data as having a need for workers based on number of openings, projected growth, or difficulty filling positions.

Industry-Recognized Credential: A credential valued by employers that demonstrates an individual has the skills and knowledge needed for a specific occupation or industry (e.g., commercial driver's license, certified nursing assistant, etc.).

Local Workforce Development Board: A local entity responsible for overseeing federal workforce programs, developing local workforce plans, and coordinating services to meet regional workforce needs.

One-Stop Delivery System: The network of workforce programs and partners that provide coordinated employment and training services through American Job Centers.

Registered Apprenticeship: A federally recognized apprenticeship program that combines paid on-the-job training with related instruction and meets established standards for quality and worker protections.

Reskilling: Training that helps workers learn new skills needed to transition into a different occupation or industry.

Upskilling: Training that helps workers develop new or advanced skills related to their current occupation or career path.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: A federal law that provides funding and guidance for workforce programs designed to connect individuals with employment, training, and career services.

Acronym Glossary

AJC:	American Job Center
AP:	Advanced Placement
CIE:	Cambridge International Exam
CLEP:	College-Level Exam Program
CLNA:	Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment
CTE:	Career and Technical Education
DE:	Dual Enrollment
DC:	Dual Credit
EPSO:	Early Postsecondary Opportunity
GIVE:	Governor's Investment in Vocational Education
IB:	International Baccalaureate
JVSG:	Jobs for Veterans State Grant
LWDB:	Local Workforce Development Board
OBF:	Outcomes-Based Funding
SCSEP:	Senior Community Service Employment Program
SPARC:	Supporting Postsecondary Access in Rural Communities
STEM:	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SWDB:	State Workforce Development Board
TCAT:	Tennessee College of Applied Technology
TBR:	Tennessee Board of Regents
TDHS:	Tennessee Department of Human Services
TDLWD:	Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
TDOE:	Tennessee Department of Education
THEC:	Tennessee Higher Education Commission
TISA:	Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement
TNECD:	Tennessee Economic and Community Development
WBL:	Work-Based Learning
WIOA:	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

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Appendix A. Tennessee Workforce Development Programs by Agency and Type

The Sycamore Institute reviewed programs administered by key state agencies and workforce partners to capture a broad range of efforts spanning K-12 education, postsecondary education, career and technical training, employer engagement, and adult workforce services. The following table summarizes Tennessee workforce development programs and initiatives, including information on program authority (state or federal), primary recipients, program mechanisms, industry focus, and funding (state or federal). Programs are organized by the following categories and may fall into more than one category:

- Category 1: Early Talent Development
- Category 2: Employer Support
- Category 3: Targeted Populations
- Category 4: System Coordination and Infrastructure

We compiled information from state agency resources, program documentation, and publicly available reports. Where available, funding amounts reflect total program allocations and may include resources that support multiple activities or populations beyond workforce development. While this table includes many major workforce development initiatives, it is not intended to represent every program or investment supporting workforce preparation and economic mobility in Tennessee.

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
		1	2	3	4	State	Federal				
Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development											
American Job Centers	Local centers that offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and employment related services. AJCs serve as the "one-stop" location for WIOA-funded programs.	X	X	X	X		X	Job-seekers and employers	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
Apprenticeship TN	Initiative to supports employers in developing and registering apprenticeship programs, coordinates efforts across education and workforce partners, and promotes apprenticeships as a workforce development strategy.	X			X	X		Employers	Information/ Marketing	n/a	n/a

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
		1	2	3	4	State	Federal				
<u>Community Reentry Reinvestment Grant (CRRG)</u>	Grant to support community-based reentry programs that connect formerly incarcerated individuals to employment, education, and supportive services.			X		X		LWDBs, state and local agencies, and community-based organizations.	Grant	n/a	\$2.9M state (FY27)
<u>Federal Bonding Program</u>	Provides bond coverage to employers to incentivize them to hire high-risk applicants, such as justice-involved citizens or individuals with poor credit.		X				X	Employers	Financial Support	n/a	n/a
<u>Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)</u>	Provides individualized career and training services to veterans, particularly those with significant barriers to employment to helping them successfully transition or re-enter the civilian workforce.			X			X	Veterans	Direct Services	n/a	\$3.9M federal (FFY 2026)
<u>Jobs4TN</u>	Job database that compiles job postings provided by Tennessee employers and offers access to labor market information, hiring tools, and training resources.				X	X		Job-seekers and employers	Information	n/a	n/a
<u>Justice-Involved Youth Initiative (JIYI)</u>	Program to support justice-involved youth in gaining meaningful employment, training, and supportive services to promote long-term success and reduce recidivism.			X		X		Justice-involved youth	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
<u>H-2A Agricultural Recruitment Program</u>	Allows agricultural employers who anticipate a shortage of domestic workers to bring non-immigrant foreign workers to the United States to perform seasonal agricultural labor or services.		X				X	Agricultural employers	Legal Flexibility	Agriculture	n/a
<u>H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Program</u>	Allows employers to temporarily hire non-immigrants to perform non-agricultural labor or services.		X				X	Non-agricultural Employers	Legal Flexibility	n/a	n/a
<u>Linking Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP)</u>	Program to support incarcerated individuals with career-building and job-readiness training prior to their release.			X			X	Currently incarcerated individuals	Direct Services	n/a	n/a

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
Local Workforce Development Boards	Regional boards that support federal workforce development programs, develop local workforce strategic plans, and receives WIOA funds to implement federal workforce development programming.				X		X	n/a	Administrative Function	n/a	\$37M federal (PY 2025) ¹
Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers Program	Supports migrant and seasonal farmworkers in stabilizing or transitioning their employment through training, job placement, and supportive services.			X			X	Migrant and seasonal farmworkers	Direct Services	Agriculture	n/a
Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD)	Assists individuals transitioning from incarceration to the workforce by providing pre-release and post-release workforce services.			X			X	Local workforce system providers (e.g., LWDBs, American Job Centers)	Grant	n/a	\$6.7M federal (FY 2023-FY 2027)
Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)	Requires unemployment insurance claimants to participate in reemployment services to accelerate their return to work.			X			X	Unemployment insurance claimants	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) / Senior Work Experience Program	Supports older adults (age 55+) who are unemployed by offering subsidized, work-based training opportunities that build skills and facilitate re-entry into the labor force.			X			X	Adults age 55+	Direct Services	n/a	\$1.5M federal (PY 2026)
SNAP Employment and Training	In collaboration with TDHS, helps SNAP recipients meet work requirements and connect to employment through job training, education, and supportive services, with the goal of increasing labor force participation.			X			X	SNAP recipients	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
State Workforce Development Board	State-level board overseeing federal WIOA programs and advises the governor on workforce policy, strategic plans, and workforce investments.				X		X	n/a	Administrative Function	n/a	n/a
Tennessee Office of Reentry	Division within TDLWD focused on justice-involved individuals by coordinating employment, training, and support services to facilitate successful reintegration into the workforce.			X	X	X		n/a	Administrative Function	n/a	n/a

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
TN Works	Initiative to create a single point of contact for employers seeking workforce support across multiple state agencies and better coordinate workforce programs, reduce duplication, and make it easier for businesses to access the state's full range of workforce development services and partners.				X	X		Employers	Information	n/a	n/a
Trade Adjustment Assistance	Assists workers displaced by foreign trade in re-entering the workforce by providing training, income support, and reemployment services.			X			X	Displaced workers due to foreign trade impacts	Direct Services	n/a	\$133,500 federal (FFY 2024)
Youth Employment Program (YEP)	Provides grants to employers to offer education, training, and employment opportunities to youth ages 14–24..	X		X		X		Employers / young people 14-24	Grant / Direct Services	n/a	\$8M state (FY 2027) ²
WIOA Title I Youth Program	Provides education, training, and employment opportunities to at-risk youth ages 14-24.	X		X			X	At-risk young people 14-24	Direct Services	n/a	\$13.1M federal (PY 2025) ³
Tennessee Economic and Community Development											
FastTrack Job Training Assistance Program	Grants provided directly to new or expanding companies to support the training of new full-time employees		X			X		New or expanding companies	Grant	n/a	\$12.5M state (2025) ⁴
FastTrack Economic Development Fund	Grants provided to local communities for eligible expenditures such as real property acquisition, new construction, and building retrofit.		X			X		Local governments	Grant	n/a	\$31M state (2025) ⁴
FastTrack Infrastructure Program	Grants provided to local governments on behalf of new or expanding companies		X			X		Local governments	Grant	n/a	\$1.3M state (2025) ⁴
Fund Tennessee – Lend TN	Loan program for new and existing small businesses and entrepreneurs with funding.		X				X	Small businesses and entrepreneurs	Loan	n/a	\$46.9M federal (FFY 2023) ⁵
Fund Tennessee – Invest TN	Provides equity capital support to small businesses, emerging early-stage companies, and start-ups.		X				X	Small businesses and start-ups	Equity Investment	n/a	\$70M federal (FFY 2023) ⁵

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
Fund Tennessee – Assist TN	Provides legal, accounting, financial advisory, and training resources for TN businesses		X				X	Small businesses and entrepreneurs	Information/ Technical Assistance	n/a	n/a
Tennessee Department of Education											
Career and Technical Education	Courses for middle and high school students to learn about specific industries through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on experiences.	X				X		Middle and high school students	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs)	Courses or exams that allow high school students to earn college credit or workforce credentials.	X				X		High school students	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
Innovative School Strategies	State initiative to support middle and high schools in implementing innovative strategies in workforce education.	X				X		K-12 school districts	Grant	n/a	\$500M state (FY 2023)
Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA)	TN funding formula for public K-12 education. Includes direct funding for CTE programming and outcomes funding for EPSO credit.	X				X		K-12 school districts	Financial Incentive	In-demand, high-skill, and high-wage programs	\$7.1B state (FY 2027) ⁶
Work-Based Learning	Opportunities for high school students to gain work experience for school credit. Includes internships, apprenticeships, project-based learning, and practicums.	X				X		High school students	Direct Services	n/a	n/a
Tennessee Higher Education Commission											
GIVE Community Grants	Competitive grants provided to postsecondary institutions to facilitate the alignment of local workforce and education partners.	X				X		Postsecondary institutions	Grant	Regionally determined in-demand industries	\$41M state (FY 2024)
Outcomes Based Funding	TN funding formula for public postsecondary institutions. Includes outcomes on degree completion, dual enrollment participation, and workforce training..	X				X		Postsecondary institutions	Financial Incentive	State determined in-demand industries	\$1.6B state (FY 2026) ⁷
Rural Health Care Pathways Grant	Initiative to strengthen Tennessee's rural health workforce by expanding education and career pathways in health care, behavioral health, and dental health.	X		X		X		Postsecondary institutions	Grant	Health care	\$67.7M state (FY2025-FY2030)

Program or Initiative Name	Description	Category				Authority		Primary Recipient	Program Mechanism	Industry-Specific Focus	Funding
Supporting Postsecondary Access in Rural Counties (SPARC)	Initiative designed to expand postsecondary and workforce training opportunities in Tennessee's rural communities.	X		X		X		K-12 school districts	Grant	n/a	\$10M (FY 2024)
Tennessee Promise	Last-dollar scholarship program that helps students cover tuition and mandatory fees for community college or TCATs.	X				X		Recent high school graduates	Financial Aid	n/a	\$23.1M state (2025) ⁸
Tennessee Reconnect	Last-dollar scholarship for eligible adult learners to provide tuition-free access to community colleges and TCATs.			X		X		Adults without a postsecondary degree	Financial Aid	n/a	\$19.2M state (2025) ⁹
Tennessee Workforce Pell	Expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to certain short-term workforce training programs that prepare students for in-demand or high-skill/high-wage occupations. Administered in collaboration with TDLWD and the State Workforce Development Board.	X					X	Students seeking short-term workforce credentials	Financial Aid	In-demand, high-skill, and high-wage programs	n/a
Tennessee Department of Human Services											
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	WIOA-funded services support people with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment.			X			X	Individuals with disabilities	Direct Services	n/a	\$74M federal (FFY 2025)

Notes:

¹. Reflects total WIOA Title I funds (youth, adult, and dislocated worker activities) distributed to local workforce areas based on federal allocation formulas in the program year (July 1-June 30).

². YEP is supported through both state and federal funding sources. While all young adults ages 14–24 are eligible to participate in YEP, federal WIOA Title I Youth funds may be used for participants who meet the federal eligibility criteria.

³. Reflects WIOA Title I Youth funds distributed to local workforce areas based on federal allocation formulas in the program year (July 1-June 30).

⁴. Reflects FastTrack grants awarded by TNECD in the calendar year.

⁵. Reflects federal funding awarded to Tennessee through the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI 2.0)

⁶. Reflects total state appropriation for TISA, including base, weights, and direct funding.

⁷. Reflects total funding distributed to locally governed institutions, community colleges, TCATs, and University of Tennessee universities.

⁸. Reflects total amount of Tennessee Promise dollars awarded to students in the 2024-25 academic year.

⁹. Reflects total amount of Tennessee Reconnect dollars awarded to students in the 2024-25 academic year.

Source: (59) (53) (8) (60) (61) (49) (62) (26) (35) (32) (63) (64)