

February 18, 2020

# Federal Aid for Individuals Pursuing Non-degree Education and Training Programs

## Introduction

The Trump Administration and Congress have demonstrated bipartisan support for increasing federal assistance to individuals pursuing postsecondary non-degree programs, sometimes referred to as *short-term programs*. A prominent argument for supporting individuals pursuing non-degree programs is that there is a substantial employer need for individuals with some postsecondary credentials but not necessarily a degree. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2016, 6% of jobs in the national economy were in occupations for which the typical entry-level education was a non-degree credential.

Postsecondary non-degree programs often provide training and education primarily to individuals who are beyond the typical age for secondary education. Non-degree programs may be described as primarily provided by employers (work-based learning) or by educational institutions (non-degree instructional education), although some programs include both work-based learning and instructional training. Some occupations require a non-degree credential early in an employee's career.

## Instructional Programs

A postsecondary non-degree instructional program is any curriculum or any combination of courses or subjects that generally fulfills one or more identified educational, professional, avocational, or vocational objectives; does not lead to a degree; is primarily offered through instruction; and does not require being enrolled in or having completed a bachelor's or higher-degree program. Examples include certificate programs for business administration, nurses' aides, photography, and cybersecurity.

Diverse entities offer non-degree instructional programs including, but not limited to, colleges, technical schools, businesses, professional organizations, and the military. Some non-degree instructional programs meet recognized quality standards such as accreditation if offered for credit; state board, licensure, or certification standards if the relevant occupation requires state board approval, licensure, or certification; or state standards if offered by an educational institution, as required by state law.

## Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning refers to a range of training and educational activities that are intended to impart general or

specific workplace skills to individuals through time spent at an employer's worksite or a simulated work location. Work-based learning experiences may be provided by employers, labor unions, external training providers, or educational institutions.

Some examples of work-based learning include the following:

- Internships, which are planned, structured learning experiences that take place in a workplace for a limited period of time.
- On-the-job training (OJT), which is paid, productive work experience intended to provide knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job for which training is provided.
- Apprenticeships, which combine OJT and an instructional component.
- Co-op programs, which are full-time programs of education consisting of phases of school instruction alternated with training in a business or industrial establishment, with such training being strictly supplemental to the school instruction.

## Federal Assistance

Several federal programs or benefits provide financial support to individuals pursuing non-degree programs. Support for individuals pursuing non-degree programs is generally a small share of federal assistance for higher education, and support of non-degree program pursuits is often not the primary objective of the programs and benefits that can be used for such pursuits.

**Table 1** provides a summary of select federal funding sources that assist individuals pursuing non-degree education and training programs. Sources selected provide transition supports that lead to or help sustain employment and/or overall financial support for individuals in non-degree programs. The programs and benefits presented in **Table 1** appear in an order that aims to correspond with their relevance to supporting non-degree program pursuits. **Table 1** is intended to highlight differences and similarities in program design and purpose, the types of eligible non-degree programs, the target participant population, and the payment structures.

**Table 1. Federal Assistance for Individuals Pursuing Non-degree Education and Training Programs**

<b>Federal Agency</b>	<b>Program or Benefit</b>	<b>General Purpose</b>	<b>Eligible Non-degree Programs</b>	<b>Eligible Participants</b>	<b>Payments / Tax Benefits</b>
Department of Labor	P.L. 113-128, Individual Training Accounts	Workforce development. Primarily supports career services but also training and training support services.	Non-degree instruction.	Adults over age 18 who need training to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.	Funds disbursed to training providers.
	P.L. 113-128, Contracts		Job training, customized training, and incumbent worker training.		
Department of Education	Pell Grants	Wider distribution of the benefits of postsecondary education. Primarily support students pursuing degrees.	Instructional credit programs of at least 600 clock hours over 15 weeks.	Undergraduate students with financial need and no bachelor's degree.	Funds disbursed to schools. Funds remaining after payment of institutional charges are remitted to student or parent.
	Direct Loans		Instructional credit programs of at least 300 clock hours over 10 weeks.	Undergraduate and graduate students, and parents of undergraduates.	
Department of Veterans Affairs	Post-9/11 GI Bill	Adjustment to civilian life and civilian employment. Facilitate recruitment and retention in the uniformed services.	Non-degree instruction and training.	Veterans and servicemembers and their family members.	Tuition and fees paid to educational providers. Housing allowances paid to participants.
	Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses		Only non-degree high-technology programs that are not offered by degree-granting colleges.	GI Bill-eligible veterans.	
Internal Revenue Service	Lifetime Learning Credit	Offsets higher education costs, including those incurred to acquire or improve job skills.	Non-degree instruction and training.	Eligible taxpayers (or their dependents) if income is below specified limits.	Credit that reduces federal income tax liability.
	Employer-Provided Educational Assistance	Increased employee productivity.	Non-degree instruction and training.	Employees of participating employers.	Assistance not subject to federal payroll or income taxes.
	529 Accounts	Encourages saving for educational expenses	Non-degree instruction and training.	Beneficiaries of established savings accounts.	Tax-advantaged savings account.
Department of Agriculture	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training (E&T)	Providing employment and training opportunities for SNAP participants, particularly those subject to the work-related eligibility requirements.	Non-degree instruction and training.	SNAP participants (financial and other eligibility rules apply); E&T participants are typically those subject to work-related requirements.	State agencies typically fund direct services or fund contracted partners to provide services.
Department of Health and Human Services	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	End government dependency of needy families and promote families living together. Primarily assistance for basic needs.	Non-degree instruction and training.	Parents or caretakers of TANF households.	States may pay participants or service providers.

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS)

IFI1432

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