



I) FY27 UpskillOK Individual Program Grant Initiative Strategies

Oklahoma employers need reliable, skills-verified talent pipelines that respond quickly to changing industry demands. The UpskillOK Individual Program Grant Initiative will help institutions increase the value of microcredentials by designing them with employers—not simply for employers. Through sustained industry partnerships, institutions will identify high-demand competencies, align learning outcomes and assessments with workplace expectations, and create short-term, stackable credentials that give employers greater confidence in learners’ job readiness. **Grant-supported projects should demonstrate how employer input will shape credential design, delivery, validation, and continuous improvement while helping businesses recruit, develop, and retain skilled employees.**

The grant also gives institutions an opportunity to build stronger connections between microcredentials and employment by embedding internships, paid apprenticeships, job shadowing, employer-sponsored projects, clinical or field experiences, and other forms of work-based learning. These experiences should allow Oklahoma learners to apply and demonstrate skills in authentic settings, expand professional networks, and gain clearer pathways into employment or advancement. Institutions are encouraged to develop employer commitments that may include hosting learners, providing mentors, interviewing completers, recognizing the credential in hiring or promotion practices, contributing equipment or expertise, and sharing employment outcomes. Together, these partnerships will strengthen the value of microcredentials for employers, improve learners’ employment prospects, and support employment growth in Oklahoma’s priority industries.

II) OUTCOMES AND SCOPE OF WORK

An institution will perform all of the following:

1. Employer-Driven Credential Design and Validation
 - a. Collaborate with employers to identify high-demand skills and co-design or revise a microcredential that addresses documented workforce needs.
 - b. Align competencies, assessments, and learning artifacts with job descriptions, industry standards, and employer hiring or advancement criteria.
 - c. Establish a process for employers to validate the credential and provide ongoing feedback on its relevance and value.
2. Work-Based Learning and Employment Pathways
 - a. Create or expand internships, paid apprenticeships, job shadowing, employer-sponsored projects, clinical or field experiences, or other work-

- based learning connected to the microcredential.
- b. Secure employer commitments to host, mentor, interview, hire, promote, or otherwise support participating learners and credential completers.
- c. Define a clear pathway from credential completion to employment, career advancement, additional industry credentials, or a higher-level academic program.
- 3. Strategic Alignment with Workforce and Economic Development Partners
 - a. Engage at least one workforce board, economic development organization, industry association, or other regional partner to strengthen employer participation and learner placement.
 - b. Leverage partner resources that reduce barriers to participation, including transportation, childcare, equipment, career navigation, and placement support.
- 4. Learner Preparation, Coaching, and Employer Connection
 - a. Provide career coaching, mentoring, workplace-readiness preparation, and opportunities for learners to engage directly with employers.
 - b. Track participation in support services and work-based learning, and examine their relationship to credential completion, interviews, employment, retention, wage growth, or advancement.
- 5. Employer-Focused Communication and Talent Visibility
 - a. Develop or revise a webpage that clearly communicates the credential's verified skills, employer partners, work-based learning opportunities, and related career pathways.
 - b. Provide OSRHE with the webpage URL and describe how employers will discover, verify, and connect with credential earners.
- 6. Measurable Employment and Employer Outcomes
 - a. Set measurable targets for employer engagement, work-based learning placements, credential completion, interviews, hires, promotions, retention, or other employment outcomes.
 - b. Collect employer and learner feedback to assess the credential's workplace relevance and use findings to improve the program.

III) FUNDING AND BUDGET

An institution may request up to \$50,000 to be used among the following categories:

CATEGORY A

Student Scholarships for UpskillOK Programs: Allocate a minimum of \$15,000 towards earner scholarships for individuals pursuing the UpskillOK microcredential program. Scholarships shall be issued in amounts of up to \$1,200 per student for FY27.

AND A COMBINATION OF:

CATEGORY B

Program Development Support Activities: Allocate up to \$35,000 towards a combination of any of the following initiatives which support the development of

microcredential programs:

- *UpskillOK Microcredential Program Operations*: Support the creation, improvement, administration, and instruction of employer-validated microcredentials aligned with Oklahoma's priority occupations. Allowable activities may include employer-led curriculum review, development of authentic workplace assessments, instructional materials, faculty or staff stipends for grant-related work outside regular duties, and coordination of work-based learning.
- *Employer Engagement and Work-Based Learning*: Support activities that establish or deepen industry partnerships and connect learners to employment, including employer advisory groups, skills-mapping sessions, internship and apprenticeship development, employer-sponsored projects, job shadowing, mentoring, career events, learner interviews, and employer validation of credentials. Funds may also support coordination required to create sustainable pathways from microcredential completion to hiring, retention, promotion, or continued education.
- *Faculty Training and Professional Development*: Support faculty training and professional development. This funding may be used to enhance faculty knowledge and skills in areas such as instructional design, technology integration, and industry relevance. Support faculty training and professional development initiatives focused on the integration of artificial intelligence in education through a microcredential. This funding may be used to facilitate workshops, seminars, and hands-on sessions aimed at enhancing faculty expertise in leveraging AI tools for curriculum design, personalized learning, and assessment. Through targeted professional development, educators will gain a deeper understanding of emerging AI technologies, explore ethical considerations, and develop practical strategies for implementing AI-driven solutions to improve student outcomes and program effectiveness.
- *UpskillOK Marketing and Outreach*: Support marketing and outreach efforts. This funding may support promotional activities to raise awareness and participation in UpskillOK programs.
- *Research and Evaluation*: Support research and evaluation initiatives. This funding may be used to assess the impact and effectiveness of UpskillOK programs, providing valuable insights for program improvement.
- *UpskillOK Collaborations*: Support partnerships among multiple institutions. This funding may support joint initiatives, regional networks, or cross-institutional/sector collaborations.

IV) SUPPORT OFFERED TO UPSKILLOK PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- II) State Regents staff will provide professional development/training/consulting for faculty and staff to implement and articulate industry credentials.**
- III) State Regents staff will provide or facilitate outreach, workshops, incentives, etc. for business partners, state and regional workforce staff, and**

institutions.

- IV) State Regents staff will develop a website to showcase microcredential program opportunities and workforce rapid reemployment opportunities.**
- V) State Regents staff will coordinate an outreach campaign to communicate the initiative to employers and students/employees.**

COMPETITIVE EVALUATION, SELECTION, AND AWARD PROCESS

UpskillOK Individual Program Grants are competitive awards. Submission of an eligible application does not guarantee funding. Applications will be reviewed consistently against the published requirements and 50-point evaluation rubric, and awards will be made based on proposal quality, available funds, and the applicant's ability to achieve measurable employer and learner outcomes.

a) a. Administrative and Eligibility Review

OSRHE staff will first review each application for eligibility, completeness, timely submission, required institutional approvals, budget compliance, and alignment with the grant purpose. Applications that are incomplete, exceed the \$50,000 request limit, do not allocate at least \$15,000 for learner scholarships, include unallowable costs, or fail to meet other required conditions may be removed from further consideration or returned for clarification at OSRHE's discretion.

b) Funding Recommendations and Final Selection

Following programmatic and fiscal review, OSRHE staff will prepare funding recommendations for final approval by the appropriate OSRHE authority. Recommendations may consider rubric scores, reviewer comments, budget reasonableness, overall portfolio balance, duplication of proposed activities, geographic and institutional reach, workforce priorities, and the amount of funding available. OSRHE reserves the right to negotiate the project scope, budget, deliverables, performance measures, or award amount; make full or partial awards; fund a lower-ranked application when necessary to meet program priorities; or make no award.

c) Notification and Award Conditions

All applicants will receive written notification of the award decision. Selected institutions must complete an approved budget, scope of work, performance measures, and Memorandum of Understanding before funds are released. Awards are contingent upon the availability of funds and the institution's agreement to comply with fiscal, scholarship, employer-partnership, program, data, reporting, and closeout requirements. OSRHE may request clarification or minor revisions during the review process, but applicants may not use clarification to substantially redesign an application after the deadline.

V) FY27 UpskillOK Individual Program Grant Evaluation Rubric

d) Scoring Guide

Total Possible Points: 50

Award Recommendation Thresholds:

- 45–50: Strongly Recommended for Full Funding
- 35–44: Recommended with Minor Revisions
- 25–34: Consider with Major Revisions
- 0–24: Not Recommended

e) Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Exemplary (5 pts)	Proficient (3 pts)	Developing (1 pt) / Not Evident (0 pts)
Employer Need, Co-Design & Validation	Documents a compelling workforce need using current employer or labor-market evidence; multiple employers substantively co-design competencies, assessments, and delivery; written commitments describe ongoing validation and improvement.	Documents a workforce need; at least one employer contributes to credential design or validation; commitments and feedback processes are identified.	Need is generally stated with limited evidence; employer input is informal or late-stage / No demonstrated employer need, co-design, or validation.
Work-Based Learning & Employer Commitments	Includes well-developed internships, paid apprenticeships, job shadowing, employer-sponsored projects, clinical or field experiences, or comparable opportunities; employers commit to hosting, mentoring, interviewing, hiring, promoting, or otherwise supporting learners.	Includes at least one defined work-based learning opportunity and an employer commitment to support participating learners.	Work-based learning is proposed but lacks clear structure, capacity, or commitments / No work-based learning or employer support is included.
Credential Quality, Skills Alignment & Career Pathway	Competencies and authentic assessments clearly align with job descriptions, industry standards, and hiring or advancement criteria; the microcredential is short-term,	Competencies generally align with workplace needs; assessments and a next-step career or	Alignment, assessment, or pathway details are incomplete / Credential lacks clear skills alignment,

Criteria	Exemplary (5 pts)	Proficient (3 pts)	Developing (1 pt) / Not Evident (0 pts)
	stackable, and connected to employment, advancement, additional industry credentials, or a higher-level academic program.	academic pathway are described.	quality measures, or progression opportunities.
Workforce & Regional Partnerships	Engages employers plus at least one workforce board, economic development organization, industry association, or regional partner with defined roles, resources, and learner-placement strategies.	Engages at least one eligible workforce or regional partner; roles and contributions are generally described.	Initial outreach is noted but roles or commitments are unclear / No relevant workforce or regional partnership is demonstrated.
Learner Access, Scholarships & Career Support	Allocates at least \$15,000 for scholarships of up to \$1,200 per learner; provides targeted recruitment, career coaching, mentoring, workplace-readiness preparation, employer connections, and strategies to reduce participation barriers; participation is tracked.	Meets scholarship requirements and provides defined coaching, mentoring, or career preparation with basic participation tracking.	Scholarship or support plans are minimally developed, with incomplete tracking / Budget is noncompliant or learner supports are absent.
Employment & Employer Outcomes	Sets specific, ambitious, and feasible targets for employer engagement, work-based learning placements, completions, interviews, hires, promotions, retention, wage growth, or other employment outcomes; includes baseline, data sources, responsible staff, timeline, and employer and learner feedback.	Sets measurable targets for several employment or employer outcomes and identifies data sources and a feedback process.	Outcomes are broad, weakly measurable, or lack data sources / No meaningful employment or employer outcomes are provided.
Budget, Capacity & Value	Request does not exceed \$50,000; budget is detailed, allowable, cost-effective, and directly tied to activities and outcomes; at least \$15,000 supports scholarships and up to \$35,000 supports program development; personnel roles, timeline,	Request is compliant and generally aligned to proposed activities; roles, timeline, and capacity are adequate, with minor gaps.	Costs, roles, timeline, or capacity are insufficiently justified / Request exceeds limits, omits required scholarship funding, includes unallowable costs,

Criteria	Exemplary (5 pts)	Proficient (3 pts)	Developing (1 pt) / Not Evident (0 pts)
	and implementation capacity are clear; employer or partner contributions strengthen value.		or is not feasible.
Employer-Focused Communication & Talent Visibility	Provides a strong plan to create or revise a webpage that communicates verified skills, employer partners, work-based learning, and career pathways; explains how employers will discover, verify, interview, or connect with credential earners; includes targeted outreach and an OSRHE URL submission plan.	Includes a webpage and outreach plan that communicates credential skills, employer connections, and career pathways; URL submission is addressed.	Communication is generic or webpage details are incomplete / No employer-focused communication, talent visibility, or URL plan is provided.
Sustainability, Scalability & Continuous Improvement	Presents a credible strategy to sustain employer engagement, work-based learning, scholarships or learner supports, and credential delivery after the grant; identifies diversified resources, institutionalization, scaling potential, and a clear process for using outcome and feedback data to improve the program.	Provides a reasonable continuation plan and describes how feedback or outcomes will inform improvements.	Sustainability or improvement plans depend primarily on future grant funds or remain vague / No sustainability or continuous-improvement plan is provided.
Reporting, Compliance & Data Stewardship	Demonstrates readiness to meet MOU, fiscal, scholarship, employer-partner, program-activity, completion, UDS, and outcome-reporting requirements on time; assigns responsibility and describes secure, accurate data collection and quality checks.	Addresses required reporting and compliance responsibilities, timelines, and data collection with minor gaps.	Reporting responsibilities, timelines, or data processes are incomplete / Proposal does not demonstrate readiness to meet grant and reporting requirements.