



NURSING APPRENTICESHIP AND PIPELINE GRANTS PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions (as of June 26, 2023)

This FAQ addresses questions related to the Nursing Apprenticeship and Pipeline Grant Program. The Grant Program provides funding to establish or expand partnerships with Vermont nursing schools to create nursing pipeline programs, apprenticeship programs, or both that will train members of the health care employers' existing staff to become higher-level nursing professionals. Specific topics covered in the FAQ include:

- A. Higher-Level Nursing Professional Requirement
- B. Degree / Certificate Programs Supported by the Grant Program
- C. Service Obligation Requirements
- D. Cohort Size
- E. "New" versus "Expanded" Nursing Apprenticeship or Pipeline Programs
- F. Eligible Expenditures
- G. Application – Cover Sheet and Grant Application Questions
- H. Application – Budget Form

A. Higher-Level Nursing Professional Requirement

1. **Question:** The Program Guidance states that all employees who participate in a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program funded by a Grant Program award must become a higher-level nursing professional by December 31, 2026. What are the expectations for the Grant awardee related to this requirement?

Answer: Grant awardees must ensure that employees selected for a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program funded by a Grant Program award are able to attain a degree or certificate that qualifies them as a "higher-level nursing professional" by December 31, 2026. Grant awardees must co-develop a plan with employees selected for the program for achieving this requirement and maintain written documentation of the plan.

The Program Guidance has been updated to better clarify these expectations.

2. **Question:** The Grant Program includes funding for employees who are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. Isn't this inconsistent with the requirement

that employees selected for a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program funded by a Grant Program award be able to attain a degree or certificate that helps them qualify as a “higher-level nursing professional” by December 31, 2026, since an Associate of Science in Nursing degree already qualifies someone to become a registered nurse (RN)?

Answer: The inclusion of the BSN as a nursing degree program supported by the Grant Program is intended to allow employers to design a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program that enables employees without an Associate of Science in Nursing degree to pursue an accelerated BSN program, if this is an approach that the employer feels would best meet the needs of their organization and employees. It also recognizes that attaining a BSN may be a meaningful accomplishment that better positions some nurses to achieve a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), which would in turn qualify them for clinical educator roles.

B. Degree / Certificate Programs Supported by the Grant Program

1. **Question:** May employers support employees pursuing an MSN degree so that these employees can work as nurse educators, which positively impacts the nursing pipeline?

Answer: AHS recognizes the critical importance of increasing the number of masters-level nurses in Vermont. Grant Program eligibility has been expanded to include support for employees pursuing an MSN degree during the Round 1 application period. AHS may elect to expand Grant Program eligibility in Round 2. Please note that Grant Program funding for employees in an MSN degree program will be limited to funding for tuition, fees, books, and supplies and living expenses, only. If funds requested exceed the Grant Program funds available for Round 1, funding for employees pursuing a degree or certificate that would qualify them to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN) or registered nurse (RN) will be prioritized.

The Program Guidance, Grant Coversheet, Grant Application Questions, and Budget Form have been updated to reflect this change.

2. **Question:** Does the Grant Program cover RN to BSN programs?

Answer: Yes, the Grant Program covers RN to BSN programs.

3. **Question:** Would the RN to BSN portion of an RN to MSN program be eligible for support under the Grant Program?

Answer: Yes, the RN to BSN portion of an RN to MSN program is eligible for support under the Grant Program.

C. Service Commitment Requirements

- 1. Question:** Our organization requires a three-year service commitment in the other student loan repayment and tuition support programs we offer for our employees. Is a three-year service commitment inconsistent with the upper limits established by the Grant Program on the length of service commitments we may require of employees selected for a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program funded by a Grant Program award?

Answer: In general, AHS expects that employers that use Grant Program funds to support tuition, fees, and academic materials will require no more than one year of service commitment for each year of funding they provide for an employee who pursues a nursing degree or certificate through the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program. Employers may require that such service commitments begin only when the employee has completed the highest degree attainable through the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program prior to December 31, 2026. For example, if an employee completes both a Practical Nursing certificate and an Associate of Science in Nursing degree through the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program, the employer may require that all years of the employee's service commitment begin only after the employee has completed the associate degree portion of the program.

Employers that intend to use Grant Program funds to support tuition, fees, books, and supplies and require a service commitment of employees in the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program must obtain AHS pre-approval for any such service commitments and are expected to request approval prior to the start date of the academic portion of the nursing pipeline or apprenticeship program. Requests may be submitted with Grant applications.

If an employer receives a Grant Program award but elects to use non-Grant Program funds to support tuition, fees, and academic materials, there are no Grant Program restrictions on the length of the service commitment that an employer may require of employees in the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program.

The Program Guidance has been updated to better clarify these requirements.

D. Cohort Size

1. **Question:** Is there a minimum cohort size for nursing apprenticeship or pipeline programs supported by the Grant Program?

Answer: Nursing apprenticeship or pipeline programs must engage at least two employees to be eligible for Grant Program funds to ensure a minimal level of peer support for employees in the program.

E. “New” versus “Expanded” a Nursing Apprenticeship or Pipeline Program

1. **Question:** Our organization offers a variety of student loan repayment and tuition support programs for our employees, including employees pursuing a nursing certificate or degree, as well as variety of clinical education opportunities for both our employees and students in Vermont nursing programs. Under what circumstances would a program that supports education leading to a nursing degree or certificate be considered a “new” program for the purposes of the Grant Program?

Answer: At minimum, a program must meet all of the following criteria for the first time in the initial cohort supported by a Grant Program award to be considered “new” for the purposes of the Grant Program:

- Program participants are employees of the Grant awardee and are selected for the program via a formal selection process;
- The Grant awardee co-develops a plan with each employee selected for the program for attaining a nursing degree or certificate that enables the employee to qualify as a higher-level nursing professional and maintains written documentation of the plan;
- The Grant awardee provides full financial support (via either the Grant Program award or other funds) for the tuition, fees, books, and supplies for each employee selected for the program as they pursue the nursing degree or certificate supported by the program; and
- The Grant awardee provides financial support (via either the Grant Program award or other funds) for the living expenses of each employee selected for the program to enable them to take the time needed for education and study.

F. Eligible Expenditures

1. **Question:** Are books and supplies for employees pursuing a nursing degree or certificate program an eligible expenditure under the Grant Program? If so, how do we request funding for books or supplies given the established Grant Program expenditure categories?

Answer: Books and supplies are an eligible expenditure under the Grant Program. Funding for books and supplies for employees pursuing a nursing degree or certificate program may be requested in the “Tuition and Fees” category.

The Program Guidance and Budget Form have been updated to reflect this change.

2. **Question:** Our organization would like to provide living expenses for employees selected for the program we intend to establish via both the salary replacement and the study stipend mechanisms, depending on the degree /certificate program an employee is pursuing. Is this allowable? If so, how we indicate this in the Grant Application?

Answer: Yes, this is allowable. To request living expenses via both the salary replacement and the study stipend mechanisms, Grant awardees should complete the relevant templates in the Budget Form. Grant awardees should also briefly explain the rationale for this approach in the response to Question 11 in the Grant application.

3. **Question:** Is an employer able to use a Grant Program award to support tuition and fees for an employee who is in the final year or two of a four-year BSN degree?

Answer: A Grant awardee is permitted to use a Grant Program award to support tuition and fees for such an employee if the following conditions are met:

- The Grant awardee selected the employee for the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program funded by a Grant Program award using the formal selection criteria established for the Grant Program;
- The Grant awardee co-developed a plan with the employee for achieving the BSN degree and maintained written documentation of the plan; and
- The Grant awardee provided support for the employee’s living expenses via either the paid release time or study stipend mechanism.

G. Application – Cover Sheet and Grant Application Questions

1. **Question:** A Letter of Commitment from the academic nursing program that will partner with our organization for the purposes of establishing or expanding a nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program is required for the Grant Program application. What should be included in this Letter of Commitment?

Answer: At minimum, the Letter of Commitment from an employer’s academic partner should include the following information:

- A statement confirming that the academic nursing program intends to partner with the employer on the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program it will establish or expand using Grant Program funds;
- The nursing degree / certificate programs to be supported under the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program;
- The nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program's approximate cohort size;
- A contact person for academic partner for the purposes of the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program; and
- An authorized signature from the academic partner.

Note that Letters of Commitment must either be included in the Grant Program application or provided within three months of application or prior to start date of the academic portion of the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program, whichever comes first.

2. **Question:** Can our organization's agreement with our academic partner to provide clinical education be substituted for the Letter of Commitment?

Answer: No, the Letter of Commitment must be specific to the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program to be established or expanded through the Grant Program.

H. Application – Budget Form

1. **Question:** The cost of the Program Administration and Employer-Based Clinical Education components of our nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program varies across program years; however, the Budget Form only allows us to enter Program Administration and Employer-Based Clinical Education costs for a single program year. How should we handle this?

Answer: The Budget Form has been updated to add budget templates for Program Years 2 and 3 for the Program Administration and Employer-Based Clinical Education components of the program. Employers can now request costs specific to each program year for these program components.