STEP 2: IMPLEMENTATION GRANT APPLICATION

Fiscal Year 2027

First Credential Program Applications Due: January 8, 2027

Enabling job opportunities and career transitions	**Building confidence for the future**	**Expanding access to higher education**

Questions Regarding the Program/Application May be Directed to:
firstcredential@schools.utah.gov

Stephanie Patton, EdD
Director of APEX Grant Program and First Credential
Utah State Board of Education
Phone: (801) 538-7989
stephanie.patton@schools.utah.gov

Overview

The **First Credential Program** is a statewide initiative that enables every high school student to graduate with a diploma while earning a credential through one of five different routes. The program aims to bridge the gap between high school, higher education, and the workforce. Providing students with stackable credentials accelerates a student's journey to a college certificate, a college degree or a high-paying career.

The program provides five distinct **First Credential Routes** designed to serve as clear on-ramps to future opportunities. Students can earn a credential through any of the following routes:

- **Concurrent Enrollment (CE):** Completing 12–18 core general education credits, including a required course in both Writing and Quantitative Literacy.
- **Technical College Certificate:** Completing an approved certificate or a meaningful portion (at least 300 hours) of an approved certificate from a Utah public technical college.
- **Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathway Completer:** Completing a state-approved sequence of high school courses aligned with a specific industry sector.
- **Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC):** Earning an industry-recognized credential included on the **First Credential Master List.**
- **Youth Apprenticeship:** Completing a minimum of 300 hours in an approved youth apprenticeship pathway that leverages a state public secondary or postsecondary institution as the related training instruction (RTI).

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can apply for First Credential grants to launch or expand programs tailored to the specific needs of their district and local community. This flexible funding allows schools to invest in necessary infrastructure and personnel to get high-demand pathways off the ground, including purchasing equipment for CTE labs, IRC exam fees (IRC must appear on the approved First Credential Master Credential List), or stipends for specialized educator certifications. These funds can aid LEAs in establishing First Credential routes that directly serve their area's students and employers.

GRANT INFORMATION

To access this funding, LEAs must first complete the First Credential Needs Assessment. The assessment is designed to evaluate current offerings and capacity, driving the development of an Implementation Plan (the application for funding) and future spending decisions. It provides a vital opportunity to identify targeted areas for improvement and ensures that every student has access to a credential of real value. LEAs that submit an implementation plan are then eligible for incentive grants, which are paid later based on student completions.

Award Information

- Estimated funds are determined by the legislature each year. **You may request up to a maximum of $250,000 for the current fiscal year.**
- Estimated initial project period - funds must be spent within the fiscal year of the application. Any unspent money will be put back into the program's general fund. Extensions will not be approved.
- The expectation is that reimbursements will be entered in the Utah Grants Management System quarterly, but preferably monthly.
- Program activities may begin only after receipt of an official award through the Utah Grants Management System with USBE.

Requirements

To be considered, the Implementation Grant Application must be submitted through Utah Grants by **January 8, 2027 at 5:00 pm.** A completed application must include all necessary information, including any attachments required. The USBE will not consider applications that are missing any required documentation.

Application Review and Selection Process

The First Credential Oversight Committee will evaluate each completed grant application received. Applications will be scored and ranked by the quality of the LEAs' overall needs assessment, application, and budget information and then recommended for final approval.

If conditional approval is recommended, a letter will be sent to the applicant, setting forth a list of conditions that must be met for the application approval. Application amendments must be submitted and contain the recommended changes or explanations of how the applicant will meet these conditions. Upon review and approval of the applications and amendments, and if monies are available, the applicant may be approved for funding.

Unallowable Expenses

Funds from this program **cannot** be used for the following:

- Incentives for student enrollment
- Ongoing program costs already supported by other federal, state, or local funds (supplanting)
- Food and gifts
- Equipment that will be used by administrators (equipment must directly support student instruction)

SECTION 1 - LEA PROFILE

Please list the name of the LEA and each school you are representing in this application:

LEA Name: _____

Number of Schools Participating: _____

Names of Schools Included: _____

Total LEA Enrollment: _____

Contact Information

Official contact (team lead) designated by the LEA who is responsible for answering or responding to inquiries regarding this application and is also established as the "authorized representative" for this agency.

- Name: _____
- Official Position Title: _____
- Phone Number: _____
- Email: _____

Official secondary contact designated by the LEA who is responsible for answering or responding to inquiries regarding this application and is also established as the "authorized representative" for this agency.

- Name: _____
- Official Position Title: _____
- Phone Number: _____
- Email: _____

By completing and submitting this application in Utah Grants, the eligible agency, through its representative(s), agrees that, to the best of their knowledge & belief, all information & data included in the First Credential Application submission is true and correct.

SECTION 2 - PROGRAM NARRATIVE

Comprehensive Narrative: Detail the First Credential route your LEA anticipates launching, expanding, or scaling using these grant funds. This may encompass all five routes, including concurrent enrollment (CE), Career and Technical Education (CTE), registered apprenticeships, industry-recognized credentials (IRCs), and technical college offerings. Ensure your narrative explicitly includes:

A. The Program Description (maximum 500 words): Specify which First Credential routes and CTE pathways will be targeted. List the specific credentials students will earn. Explain how funds will be used to support operational and capital needs. Tie the description back to the industry demand and partnership information gathered in the Needs Assessment.

B. Implementation Timeline (maximum 250 words): Provide a comprehensive implementation timeline (i.e., initial planning & launch; implementation & full operation; scaling & expansion). The timeline should be comprehensive, clear, and logically map out the realistic project milestones directly tied to program goals.

C. Recruitment & Engagement Strategy (maximum 250 words): Describe your targeted marketing, counseling, and outreach strategies to attract and retain students.

D. Targeted Support (maximum 250 words): Describe the comprehensive plan for providing tailored support to specific student populations, including special education students.

E. Partnerships (maximum 250 words): Describe how the LEA will utilize industry and postsecondary partnerships to meet the goals of this project.

SECTION 3: GAP ANALYSIS AND GOALS

A. Gap Analysis (maximum 250 words): List the gaps identified in the needs assessment for each area listed below (as applicable). What strategies will be used to mitigate the identified gaps?

	Gaps	Mitigation Strategies
Staffing		
Facilities		
Equipment		
Schedule		
Enrollment & Student Interest		
Transportation		
Partnerships (e.g., USHE, industry)		
Other		

B. Outcome Goals (maximum 250 words): Define measurable targets for student enrollment and completion of pathway courses, number of students earning a First Credential, or post-graduation placement.

C. Goals (maximum 250 words): List any goals assigned by the First Credential Oversight Committee in the Needs Assessment review process and outline strategies for completing those goals.

SECTION 4 - PROGRAM BUDGET

A. Budget Narrative: Utilize the budget table in Utah Grants to provide a general budget. In addition, provide a narrative describing how the budget aligns with the goals of First Credential and the overall application and addresses gaps identified in the needs assessment. The budget must reflect the anticipated spending for the current year and should clearly demonstrate how the requested funds directly support specific operational or capital needs of the program.

*Note: The project period for this grant is February 1st through **June 30, 2028** (17 months).*

B. Budget Details:

Provide additional details for each category of expenditure, using the **First Credential Budget** spreadsheet. The spreadsheet can be uploaded in Utah Grants as an attachment or

C. Program Sustainability: (250 words maximum) Provide a detailed, long-term financial and operational plan. Refer explicitly to future funding streams, district matching, or industry partnerships.

Final Step: Attach this completed application (PDF format only) in Utah Grants and submit it for approval. Make sure that the internal approver also approves the application in Utah Grants by the deadline. If approved for First Credential funding, the LEA contacts listed will be notified by email.