

# The Texas Workforce Commission Advancing Skills, Capabilities and Expertise for Next-Level Development (ASCEND) Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Employers in the industries listed below are eligible to apply.**

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Information Technology
- Aerospace
- Aviation and Defense
- Semiconductor Manufacturing
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Nuclear Energy
- Healthcare
- Shipbuilding

**Q: What occupations are eligible for training under the grant?**

A: Training programs must focus on high-demand occupations within the targeted industries:

- Software Developer
- Data Scientist
- Cybersecurity Analyst
- Industrial Engineering Technician
- Maintenance Technician
- QA Technician
- Semiconductor Technician
- Aerospace Technician
- Physical Therapist/ Occupational Therapist
- Shipfitter / Welder / Marine Electrician
- And others on a case-by-case basis

Below is a list of occupations and examples of job titles. You will be asked to provide us with detailed information on how your trainees will fit into one of the Top 10 H-B1 occupations. Job titles listed are examples to guide you.

<b>Targeted Industry</b>	<b>Top 10 H-1B Occupations That Fit</b>	<b>Example Occupations &amp; Job Titles</b>
<b>Advanced Manufacturing</b>	Electronics Engineers; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects; Software QA Analysts & Testers; Business Intelligence Analysts	Industrial Engineering Technician; Automation Technician; Robotics Technician; Quality Assurance Technician; Electronics Engineering Technician; Manufacturing Process Analyst
<b>Information Technology (IT)</b>	Software Developers; IT Project Managers; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects; Software QA Analysts & Testers; Computer & Information Systems Managers; Business Intelligence Analysts; Data Scientists	Software Developer; IT Project Manager; Cybersecurity Analyst; Systems Engineer; Software QA Analyst; Business Intelligence Analyst; Data Engineer
<b>Aerospace, Aviation &amp; Defense</b>	Electronics Engineers; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects; Software Developers; Software QA Analysts	Aerospace Engineering Technician; Avionics Technician; Composite Materials Technician; Mechanical Systems Technician; Defense Cyber Technician; Electronics Systems Engineer
<b>Nuclear Energy</b>	Electronics Engineers; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects; Software QA Analysts & Testers	Nuclear Technician; Radiation Protection Technician; Instrumentation & Controls Technician; Electrical/Mechanical Technician; Nuclear Systems Analyst
<b>Artificial Intelligence (AI)</b>	Data Scientists; Software Developers; Business Intelligence Analysts; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects	Data Scientist; Machine Learning Technician; AI Model Technician; NLP Technician; Computer Vision Technician; AI Systems Engineer
<b>Semiconductor Manufacturing</b>	Electronics Engineers; Computer Systems Engineers / Architects; Software QA Analysts & Testers; Software Developers	Semiconductor Processing Technician; Photolithography Technician; Cleanroom Technician; Electronics Engineering Technician; Equipment Maintenance Technician; Yield Analysis Technician
<b>Healthcare (Physical &amp;</b>	Physical Therapists; Occupational Therapists	Physical Therapist (PT); Occupational Therapist (OT); Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA); Occupational Therapy Assistant

<b>Occupational Therapy)</b>		(OTA); Rehabilitation Technician (credentialed)
<b>Shipbuilding (Federal Priority Industry)</b>	None (Not in Top 10)	Shipfitter; Marine Welder (certified); Marine Electrician; Marine Maintenance Technician; Marine Coatings Technician

**Q: What does Occupation/Employer Partner Alignment to H-1B\* Occupations mean?**

A: H-1B funds must focus on middle- to high-skill occupations, such as professional, scientific, and technical services occupations that support AI infrastructure, shipbuilding, advanced manufacturing, nuclear energy, domestic mineral production, and information technology industry sectors.

**Q: What are the employer eligibility requirements?**

A: To be eligible, employers must:

- Operate a business in Texas
- Conduct business in one or more of the **key industries listed above in Question 1**
- Commit to train a **minimum of 25 new hires** and/or upskill current employees
- Collaborate with TWC to develop a training strategy that is **more than 40 hours** and meets the employee training needs, identify how the training will be provided (e.g., in-house training, third-party training provider, or a combination) and the total training cost
- Ensure that training provided to employees aligns with the industry skills needed and **leads to a credential**
- Agree to report training and employment outcomes to TWC for reimbursement and grant reporting requirements
- Possess an active TWC Tax Account Number and be current on tax obligations
- **Retain the trainees** for 6 months after the training ends
- **Provide wage data** as well as other PII
- **Contribute at least 20%** of the total allowable training costs

## **Grant Award & Reimbursement Questions**

### **Q: What is the maximum grant award amount?**

A: The maximum award amount is up to \$500,000 per grantee.

### **Q: What is the maximum reimbursement per trainee?**

A: The maximum reimbursement per trainee is \$4,000.

### **Q: What types of training are eligible for funding?**

A: Funds can be used for training programs, work-based learning programs (including on-the-job training), and apprenticeships. Allowable activities include classroom and virtual instruction.

### **Q: How does the reimbursement process work?**

A: The employer could receive up to an 80% reimbursement tied to demonstrated performance:

Reimbursement will be issued in two installments:

- 60% of the eligible amount upon successful completion of training by the participant
- 20% of the eligible amount upon the participant's successful completion of six months of post-training employment retention with the employer

## **Application Questions**

### **Q: How do I apply for the ASCEND grant?**

A: Applications can be sent to [skills@twc.texas.gov](mailto:skills@twc.texas.gov) with the following documents:

1. Download and complete the ASCEND application.
2. Complete the Detail Budget Form.

### **Q: What is the application deadline?**

A: ASCEND will accept applications on a rolling basis until all available funds have been awarded. Employers are encouraged to apply as soon as possible.

**Q: What information is required on the application?**

A: Describe the skills gaps, hiring challenges, or workforce shortages the business is experiencing in the targeted industry. **Explain how the proposed training will reduce dependence on hard-to-find skills workers\*, strengthen the local talent pipeline and move workers into middle-to-high skilled and high demand occupations.**

**Other Questions**

**Q: What costs are allowed to be reimbursed?**

A: **Employers will be reimbursed for actual direct training costs** that may include required materials, books, course supplies or equipment, exam preparation courses, tuition and other costs that directly support training activity.

**Q: How will the application and budget be evaluated?**

A: Applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

**Alignment with Program Goals:** The extent to which the proposed project aligns with the goals of the ASCEND project, including addressing skills gaps in shipbuilding and/or H-1B-related occupations\* and reducing reliance on foreign labor

**Demonstrated Need:** The severity of the skills gap being addressed and the potential impact of the training on the employer's competitiveness

**Training Plan Quality:** The quality and effectiveness of the proposed training plan, including the relevance of the curriculum, the qualifications of the training provider, and the likelihood of successful completion. Training must lead to an industry-recognized credential or certification

**Anticipated Outcomes:** The potential impact of the training on employee wages, job retention, and career advancement, as well as the employer's productivity

**Budget Soundness:** The reasonableness and allowability of the proposed budget

**Q: Can a public sector entity apply for ASCEND?**

A: No. Grant funds **may not be used** for the cost of training public sector employees. However, reimbursing employers for training public sector contractors is allowable.

**Q: What is a public sector contractor?**

A: A public sector contractor is a private company or individual that provides products or services to the government. This can be at the federal, state, or local level. Contractors are hired and get paid through a procurement process and are responsible for fulfilling the terms of their contracts. They can be involved in various tasks, depending on their area of expertise, and their responsibilities often include project management, service delivery, product supply, and research and development

**Q: Is there a minimum number of employees expected to train for a specific number of hours?**

A: Yes, a minimum of 25 participants must train for at least 40 hours to be eligible to apply.

**\*H-1B Related Information:** A demonstration of need for skills training in occupations commonly filled by H-1B visa holders (for industries other than shipbuilding). This may include a description of specific skill gaps, reliance on H-1B visa holders in the past and potential for reduced H-1B usage because of the training.