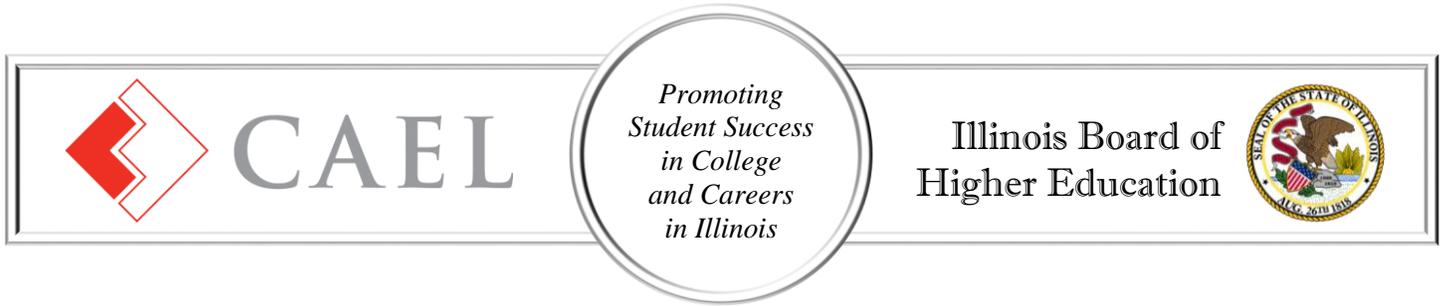


## Future of Illinois Workforce Technical Assistance Program



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### **FOUR ILLINOIS REGIONS TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE TO BETTER MATCH EDUCATION, TRAINING PROGRAMS WITH WORKFORCE NEEDS**

*With USA Funds' support, employers and educators come together to improve job readiness of working adults*

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Illinois has been selected by nonprofit USA Funds to pilot a technical assistance program to align higher education programs in four Illinois regional communities with needs identified by local employers.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is partnering with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), a national nonprofit leader in workforce and economic development, to provide technical assistance at no cost to the four Illinois communities within the coming year. USA Funds has awarded funding of \$238,110 for the initiative in keeping with its focus on promoting a smoother transition from education to employment in the 21st Century global workforce.

The Higher Education Commission of the Future of the Workforce, made up of government, education and business leaders, recommended, in a recent report, the need for state support for a comprehensive regional approach to address workforce needs with educational programs from certifications to graduate degrees.

“We invited Illinois communities with emerging or existing educational, economic and workforce development partnerships looking to improve the educational capabilities of their citizens for available work, to apply for this unique opportunity for expert assistance,” Dr. James Applegate, IBHE executive director stated. “We are pleased to announce our plans to partner with Greater Egypt, Madison County, Northeastern Illinois, and Rockford regions to move forward with a successful strategy for alignment of workforce development with higher educational opportunities, especially for adults rooted in their communities who are looking to complete college or gain additional education and training.”

“Technical assistance will be individualized to meet the needs of the community based on their existing college completion and workforce development strategies and activities.” said Joel Simon, CAEL’s vice president for Workforce and Economic Development. “Our goal is to equip them with the tools necessary to analyze industry needs, assess educational assets, and enhance cooperation between employers and educators.”

“Unemployment remains persistently high in some communities at the same time that quality job openings go unfilled because jobseekers lack the necessary skills,” said Carol D’Amico, USA Funds executive vice president, National Engagement and Philanthropy. “USA Funds is pleased to support this initiative to address this skills gap, while also supporting Illinois’ efforts to increase the percentage of working-age adults with college credentials aligned to the needs of the state’s workforce.”

The four regional technical assistance programs include the following:

**Greater Egypt** represents a multi-county region of Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Perry and Williamson counties, including the cities of Carbondale, Marion and Mt. Vernon. Although job losses in mining and government have increased unemployment rates in the region, the health care and retail sectors have been growing during the same period. Partners on the initiative to create a quality workforce solution for the region include: Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIU), John A. Logan College, Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market, Man-Tra-Con Corporation, the Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission, and Southern Illinois Healthcare. “The Greater Egypt region is constantly seeking improved healthcare access and healthcare practitioners to offer and support those services and the businesses growing to provide them,” said Kyle Harfst, executive director of SIU’s Office of Economic and Regional Development. “With leadership from all the partners, we look forward to the expert assistance we will receive to assess the educational delivery systems, evaluate employers’ workforce demands, and measure economic development progress.”

**Madison County** has benefitted from a strategic alliance between economic and workforce development organizations, and education and training institutions, which has resulted in partnerships in several industries, including logistics, bio-economy, RN-to-BSN nursing programs, health care informatics and industrial engineering. The National Corn-to-Ethanol Research Center, Madison County’s Community Development and Employment agencies, and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville are partnering to focus technical assistance on the energy sector to create and support jobs within traditional and clean energy industries. “With a changing energy world, and evolving energy policies, the timing of this assistance is perfect to examine the future of the energy workforce demands, and the education and training programs needed to fill those jobs,” said Courtney Breckenridge, specialist with the National Corn-to-Ethanol Research Center. “Madison County is in the second largest urban Illinois area, and a transition to a more sustainable economic base is a priority for the communities located there. With this focus we will be able to better help employers and jobseekers navigate new energy industries opportunities.”

**Northeastern Illinois, including Lake, Cook, and Mc Henry counties, and Waukegan City**, has been the focus of the Health Professions Education Consortium (HPEC). With projected job growth of nearly 23 percent by 2022, health care support occupations lead the forecast employment needs for the region. Openings for healthcare practitioners and technical occupations will grow by nearly 14 percent. Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, the College of Lake County, Lake County Partners, and Lake County Workforce Development are all active in the HPEC, and will be the lead organizations in creating strategic pathways and pipeline initiatives to prepare more students in the region to become employees in the emerging healthcare professions. “Through HPEC, this northeastern region will greatly benefit from technical assistance to identify both educational and industry strengths,” said Dr. Bruce Neimeyer, vice president for strategic enrollment at Rosalind Franklin University. “Our regional work will benefit from pinpointing both resources and deficits in order to improve strategic plans for developing the necessary workforce.”

**Rockford and the surrounding Winnebago County** faces challenges in the manufacturing sector, due to the post-recession economy and an aging workforce, Alignment Rockford, joined by Rock Valley College, the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, the Workforce Connection, and Transform Rockford will receive technical assistance to bring manufacturers together to identify and validate skill levels, credentials and degrees needed to fill employment openings. “We look forward to focusing our ongoing collective work in transforming our Rockford area educational system to include a direct link to the manufacturing work needs of our region’s committed employers,” said Bridget French, executive director of Alignment Rockford. “Manufacturing in Rockford includes transportation equipment, machinery, fabricated metals, and chemical, plastic, and rubber products. We want to support our local citizens, young adults and adults looking for advancement with education right here at home. This opportunity to receive assistance strengthening our organization, identifying the skills and the educational programs to train employees is most welcomed.”

As the assisting organizations, CAEL and the IBHE began its efforts with the four regions in August. The plans for moving forward and the assistance provided will be reported on regularly. Other regions interested in following the progress should contact Candace Mueller, at [mueller@ibhe.org](mailto:mueller@ibhe.org) to be included on a communications list for *Future of the Illinois Workforce UPDATES*.

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The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is the state's agency for planning and coordination of higher education, including connecting the needs of the state's workforce with college degrees and postsecondary training programs. Learn more at [www.ibhe.org](http://www.ibhe.org).

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), is a nonprofit that works at all levels within the higher education, public, and private sectors to make it easier for people to get the education and training they need. For more information, visit [www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org).

USA Funds is a nonprofit corporation that promotes Completion With a Purpose, building a more purposeful path for America's students to and through college and on to rewarding careers and successful lives, through philanthropic activities and partnerships, policy research, and programs and services. Learn more at [www.usafunds.org](http://www.usafunds.org).