

# Indiana's Explore, Engage and Experience Grant

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Chris Duncombe and Eric Syverson

To foster career exploration and work-based learning opportunities, **Indiana** is using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) dollars to fund a [competitive grant program](#) that encourages pre-K through grade 12 schools to partner with employers, local community organizations, education service centers and postsecondary institutions to design and execute career pathway programs. The Explore, Engage, and Experience (3E) Grant provides career [exploration](#) opportunities for students in pre-K, elementary school and middle school, and hands-on [work experiences](#) for high school students. The pathways align with high-wage, high-demand job opportunities in the local economy and illuminate the range of opportunities available to students after high school.

Work-based learning [benefits students and employers](#) by exposing students to new career fields and early work experiences while giving employers access to robust talent pipelines. Research also shows these programs can [advance equity and opportunity](#) for students by growing [social and professional networks](#) they previously faced barriers to. Indiana's 3E grant offers work-based learning opportunities and postsecondary credentials as part of intentional pathways designed by schools, employers and community partners. Indiana's Department of Education has [awarded grants](#) to 97 partnerships in all 92 counties in the state and has more than doubled the funding to support the overwhelming response of strong applications.

The Indiana Department of Education started accepting [3E grant applications](#) in March 2022 for a budgeted amount of \$25 million in ESSER III funds from the American Rescue Plan. Given the high demand from schools and community partners and the high quality of applications, the department awarded more than twice the budgeted amount for a total of \$57 million in ESSER III funds for these grants in July 2022. Funds were awarded to 97 partnerships for the 2022-23 school year.



## Strategically Identify the Needs of Local Communities

In addition to providing opportunities for students, the career pathways program can benefit local communities and economies. Partnerships are asked to design high-wage, high-demand pathways that meet the unique needs of the local economy. The 3E program allows students to participate in pathways where they can receive a postsecondary degree or credential and gain relevant skills for employment opportunities in their local community. While Indiana has had a relatively strong employment rebound following the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the state economy has struggled to generate sufficient high-paying jobs, as discussed in this 2021 [Brookings report](#). By designing education pathways through the 3E grant, the state can increase the supply of skilled workers and encourage future employment growth.



## Form New District Partnerships

Recognizing that schools cannot be expected to establish meaningful pathways alone, the 3E grant is designed as a partnership. The Indiana Department of Education invited pre-K through grade 12 schools, community organizations, education service centers, postsecondary institutions and employers to collaboratively submit applications. They also permitted applicants who are serving as a convener and/or technical partner on multiple pathways with different schools to be part of more than one application.

Partnerships among [grant recipients](#) include a wide range of employers, community-based organizations and postsecondary institutions. Employers that are participating include automotive manufacturers, hospitals and health systems, technology companies, welding and gas companies, airlines, trade associations, local farms and restaurants, and a naval center. Some examples of community partners include Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Habitat for Humanity, youth services associations, regional economic development organizations, innovation and start-up centers, and organizations serving people with disabilities. Participating postsecondary institutions include Indiana University, local community and technical colleges, and education service centers.



## Monitor Performance to Support Students

The Indiana Department of Education has identified measurable outcomes for 3E grant recipients that require recipients to submit baseline data on the number and percentage of students engaged in four different types of work-based learning activities by grade level and establish goals for future participation after receiving the grant. It also requires all partner applicants to establish data-sharing agreements. In addition, the state requires grant recipients to annually submit data and provides data templates for consistent and accurate data collection. These measures will allow the department to effectively examine post-implementation progress.

The first goal of the program is to increase the number of students who earn a high-wage postsecondary credential by expanding access and enrollment in [Next Level Programs of Study](#), the [Indiana College Core](#) or a [Graduation Pathway](#) high-wage credential. The second goal is to increase the number of students who engage in high-quality work-based learning opportunities during high school. Another aspiration is to increase the number of innovative career exploration and engagement opportunities for students in elementary and middle school.



## Ensure Financial Sustainability

The 3E grant funds have been awarded by the state to recipients for the 2022-23 school year. As part of the application process, recipients were required to develop a sustainability plan to support the continuation of the work beyond the grant period. The department of education may offer workshops to help identify long-term revenue sources. State and local funds may become available for 3E grants in the future but do not currently support the program.

### More Information

See additional state profiles in the series: [Innovative State Strategies for Using ESSER Funds](#).