

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5077

To authorize workforce development innovation grants for the implementation, expansion, and evaluation of evidence-based workforce programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 22, 2026

Mr. BENNET (for himself and Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To authorize workforce development innovation grants for the implementation, expansion, and evaluation of evidence-based workforce programs, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Better Jobs through
5 Evidence and Innovation Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. EVALUATIONS AND RESEARCH.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 169 of the Workforce In-
8 novation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3224) is amend-
9 ed—

1 (1) by redesignating subsection (c) as sub-
2 section (d); and

3 (2) by inserting after subsection (b) the fol-
4 lowing:

5 “(c) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INNOVATION
6 FUND.—

7 “(1) PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.—

8 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may,
9 on a competitive basis and in accordance with
10 subparagraph (B), award workforce develop-
11 ment innovation grants described in subpara-
12 graph (C) to eligible entities to enable such en-
13 tities to—

14 “(i) establish, implement, replicate, or
15 take to scale evidence-based, field-initiated
16 innovation programs or services for im-
17 proving the design and delivery of employ-
18 ment and training services—

19 “(I) that generate demonstrated
20 sustained improvements in earnings
21 and employment outcomes for partici-
22 pants (including participants who are
23 individuals with barriers to employ-
24 ment); and

1 “(II) that may demonstrate im-
2 provements in—

3 “(aa) the performance or
4 impact of the workforce develop-
5 ment system with respect to the
6 purposes of this Act described in
7 section 2 (29 U.S.C. 3101), such
8 as increasing access to and op-
9 portunities for employment, edu-
10 cation, training, and support
11 services for individuals with bar-
12 riers to employment;

13 “(bb) addressing employer
14 and labor market needs; or

15 “(cc) the cost-effectiveness
16 of such innovation programs or
17 services, particularly for partici-
18 pants and communities not suffi-
19 ciently served by existing models
20 such as participants and commu-
21 nities in rural areas; and

22 “(ii) except with respect to an expan-
23 sion grant described in subparagraph
24 (C)(iii) for which the Secretary waives an
25 evaluation because the Secretary deter-

mines there are multiple compelling examples of high-level evidence, perform—

“(I) a well-designed, well-implemented, and rigorous impact evaluation, through a partnership with a third-party research organization or a third-party researcher, of such innovation programs or services that—

“(aa) assesses for effectiveness in achieving any demonstrated long-term improvements in earnings and employment outcomes for participants and for improvements in other relevant outcomes, such as the outcomes described in item (aa), (bb), and (cc) of clause (i)(II); and

“(bb) is accompanied by a process or implementation evaluation for the purpose of programmatic improvement and supporting scale-up; or

“(II) in the case of an early-phase grant described in subpara-

graph (C)(i), an early-stage evaluation (such as a feasibility study, pilot, or rapid-cycle evaluation) that prepares the innovation program or service for an evaluation described in subclause (I) for a potential subsequent grant.

“(B) GRANT AWARDS.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary—

“(I) shall award grants under subparagraph (A) on the primary basis of—

“(aa) reliable evidence presented with respect to potential achievements of the innovation program or service proposed by the eligible entity with respect to demonstrated, long-term improvements in an outcome described in subclause (I) or (II) of subparagraph (A)(i);

“(bb) the anticipated cost of the program or service relative to anticipated earnings and employment outcomes for participants;

1 “(cc) the anticipated con-
2 tribution of the evaluation of the
3 program or service to the overall
4 evidence base, including evidence
5 on cost-effectiveness; and

6 “(dd) the existence of sup-
7 porting projects in geographically
8 diverse sites, including rural
9 areas, or that serve populations
10 with diverse needs; and

11 “(II) may award, under subpara-
12 graph (A), different types of grants
13 described under subparagraph (C) to
14 an eligible entity for separate innova-
15 tion programs or services that meet
16 the relevant criteria for such different
17 types of grants.

18 “(ii) DURATION OF AWARD.—A grant
19 awarded under subparagraph (A) shall be
20 awarded for a period determined appro-
21 priate by the Secretary.

22 “(iii) AMOUNT OF AWARD.—The Sec-
23 retary shall ensure that any grants award-
24 ed under subparagraph (A) shall include

1 sufficient funding for the cost of the eval-
2 uation and program implementation.

3 “(iv) USE OF AWARD.—An eligible en-
4 tity that receives a grant awarded under
5 subparagraph (A) shall use not less than
6 60 percent of such award for direct pro-
7 gram implementation.

8 “(C) DESCRIPTION OF GRANTS.—The
9 grants described in subparagraph (A) shall, to
10 the extent feasible, include—

11 “(i) early-phase grants for an innova-
12 tion program or service supported by any
13 level of evidence described in clause (i),
14 (ii), or (iii) of subparagraph (D), for the
15 purposes of funding the development, im-
16 plementation, and evaluation of such pro-
17 gram or service;

18 “(ii) mid-phase grants for an innova-
19 tion program or service supported by a
20 moderate level of evidence or a high level
21 of evidence (as described in clause (ii) or
22 (iii) of subparagraph (D), respectively) for
23 the purposes of funding the operation, re-
24 finement, expansion, and continued evalua-
25 tion (as described in subparagraph

(A)(ii)(I) of such innovation program or service at a single site that would, if successful, prepare the program or service for a subsequent expansion grant; and

“(iii) expansion grants for an innovation program or service supported by a high level of evidence, as described in subparagraph (D)(iii), for the purposes of—

“(I) funding the operation of such innovation program or service at an existing site;

“(II) expansion or such innovation program or service to another site;

“(III) implementation of a multi-site experimental rigorous impact evaluation of such innovation program or service; and

“(IV) if necessary, continued refinement and adaption of the program or service model to address new contexts or needs.

“(D) LEVEL OF EVIDENCE STANDARDS.—

The levels of evidence described in this subparagraph are the following:

1 “(i) LOW LEVEL OF EVIDENCE.—An
 2 innovation program or service is supported
 3 by a low level of evidence if such program
 4 or service has demonstrated, through a
 5 reasonable hypothesis and credible research
 6 findings (such as a correlational study with
 7 statistical controls for selection bias), a de-
 8 scriptive study (such as a case study), or
 9 evidence review and needs assessment,
 10 the—

11 “(I) ability to achieve positive ef-
 12 fects on earnings and employment
 13 outcomes for participants (including
 14 participants who are individuals with
 15 barriers to employment) and earnings
 16 for employers; or

17 “(II) potential to achieve such ef-
 18 fect on such outcomes.

19 “(ii) MODERATE LEVEL OF EVI-
 20 DENCE.—An innovation program or service
 21 is supported by a moderate level of evi-
 22 dence if such program or service has dem-
 23 onstrated the ability to achieve sizable, but
 24 not yet conclusive, positive effects on earn-
 25 ings and employment outcomes for partici-

1 pants (including participants who are indi-
 2 viduals with barriers to employment) and
 3 earnings for employers, through—

4 “(I) a well-designed and well-im-
 5 plemented experimental study of such
 6 program or service, such as a random-
 7 ized controlled trial; or

8 “(II) a rigorous quasi-experi-
 9 mental study of such program or serv-
 10 ice capable of drawing causal conclu-
 11 sions about the effectiveness of such
 12 program or service.

13 “(iii) HIGH LEVEL OF EVIDENCE.—
 14 An innovation program or service is sup-
 15 ported by a high level of evidence if such
 16 program or service has demonstrated,
 17 through replication of studies, the ability
 18 to achieve a substantial and statistically
 19 significant, positive impact on earnings
 20 and employment outcomes for participants
 21 (including participants who are individuals
 22 with barriers to employment) and earnings
 23 for employers, through—

24 “(I) 2 or more well-designed and
 25 well-implemented experimental studies

1 of such program or service conducted
2 at different implementation sites; or

3 “(II) through a well-designed and
4 well-implemented large, multi-site, ex-
5 perimental study.

6 “(E) FUNDING ALLOCATION.—Of the
7 funds made available to carry out this sub-
8 section for a fiscal year, the Secretary shall, ex-
9 cept when determined that there is not a suffi-
10 cient number of qualifying applications to do so,
11 use—

12 “(i) not less than 50 percent of such
13 funds to award expansion grants described
14 in subparagraph (C)(iii); and

15 “(ii) not more than 25 percent of such
16 funds to award early-phase grants de-
17 scribed in subparagraph (C)(i).

18 “(2) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EVALUATION
19 RESEARCH.—Of the funds made available to carry
20 out this subsection for a fiscal year, the Secretary
21 shall reserve not more than 10 percent of the funds
22 to—

23 “(A) provide technical assistance to eligible
24 entities, which may include preapplication work-
25 shops, web-based seminars, support for con-

ducting feasibility studies and other planning activities, assistance with methods and requirements for purposes of evaluation research under subparagraph (D), and support for improving grant implementation and the quality and effectiveness of activities and services funded by grants awarded under paragraph (1)(A), including the use of administrative data and information to improve outcomes for participants;

“(B) disseminate information on low-, moderate-, and high-evidence-based practices;

“(C) fund staffing and other costs related to such activities; and

“(D) conduct evaluation research regarding activities or services funded by grants awarded under subparagraph (A).

“(3) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

“(A) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term ‘eligible entity’ means an entity that is any of the following:

“(i) A State workforce development board established under section 101 (29 U.S.C. 3111).

1 “(ii) A local workforce development
2 board established under section 107 (29
3 U.S.C. 3122).

4 “(iii) An Indian tribe, tribal organiza-
5 tion, Alaska Native entity, Indian-con-
6 trolled organization serving Indians, or Na-
7 tive Hawaiian organization that is eligible
8 to receive an award under section 166 (29
9 U.S.C. 3221).

10 “(iv) An institution of higher edu-
11 cation (as defined in section 101 of the
12 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
13 1001)).

14 “(v) A State workforce agency.

15 “(vi) An organization—

16 “(I) that—

17 “(aa) is a community-based
18 organization, a nonprofit organi-
19 zation, or a nongovernment orga-
20 nization, including a labor orga-
21 nization (as defined in section 2
22 of the National Labor Relations
23 Act (29 U.S.C. 152)); and

24 “(bb) serves an underserved
25 population; or

1 “(II) that is a national or re-
 2 gional organization that intends to
 3 use funds awarded under this Act to
 4 make direct grants to an organization
 5 described in subclause (I).

6 “(vii) A consortium of any entities de-
 7 scribed in clause (i) through (vi).

8 “(B) FIELD-INITIATED.—The term ‘field-
 9 initiated’, with respect to a program or service,
 10 means a program or service in which the ele-
 11 ments of the program or service have been de-
 12 veloped by practitioners or researchers in the
 13 policy area, including such a program or service
 14 model that is—

15 “(i) a sectoral employment program;

16 “(ii) an employment social enterprise
 17 or other revenue-generating workforce pro-
 18 gram serving people overcoming barriers to
 19 employment;

20 “(iii) a registered apprenticeship;

21 “(iv) a re-entry initiative;

22 “(v) a career pathway model;

23 “(vi) an industry and sector partner-
 24 ship; or

1 “(vii) on-the-job or incumbent worker
2 training.

3 “(C) INNOVATION PROGRAM OR SERV-
4 ICE.—The term ‘innovation program or service’
5 means a program or service designed to dem-
6 onstrate innovative and cost-effective ways to
7 augment and improve employment, licensure, or
8 training services.

9 “(D) WELL-DESIGNED AND WELL-IMPLE-
10 MENTED EXPERIMENTAL STUDY.—The term
11 ‘well-designed and well-implemented experi-
12 mental study’ means a study that—

13 “(i) is replicable;

14 “(ii) uses programmatic and control
15 groups that are representative of the type
16 of population served by the program or
17 service that is subject to the study, includ-
18 ing by avoiding over-selection of partici-
19 pants who are highly skilled prior to par-
20 ticipation for such programmatic group;

21 “(iii) uses controls for aggregate
22 shifts that might affect baseline numbers;

23 “(iv) does not have problems with at-
24 trition of participants from the study;

1 “(v) is conducted in a manner that is
 2 consistent with applicable evaluation, data,
 3 and privacy standards and practices de-
 4 scribed in the Foundations for Evidence-
 5 Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Public
 6 Law 115–435; 132 Stat. 5529) and the
 7 amendments made by that Act; and

8 “(vi) to the extent feasible, is aligned
 9 with the standards for experimental studies
 10 conducted pursuant to the education inno-
 11 vation and research program under section
 12 4611 of the Elementary and Secondary
 13 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7261).

14 “(4) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

15 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
 16 this subsection, such sums as may be necessary for
 17 each of the fiscal years 2027 through 2031.”.

18 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section

19 132(a)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Oppor-
 20 tunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3172(a)(2)(A)) is amended by strik-
 21 ing “169(c)” and inserting “169(d)”.

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