Opportunity Data | Good Energy Collective

A COLLABORATION · POLICY BRIEF

The Nuclear Energy Workforce: What Workforce Pell Can Reach, and Why the Window Is Now

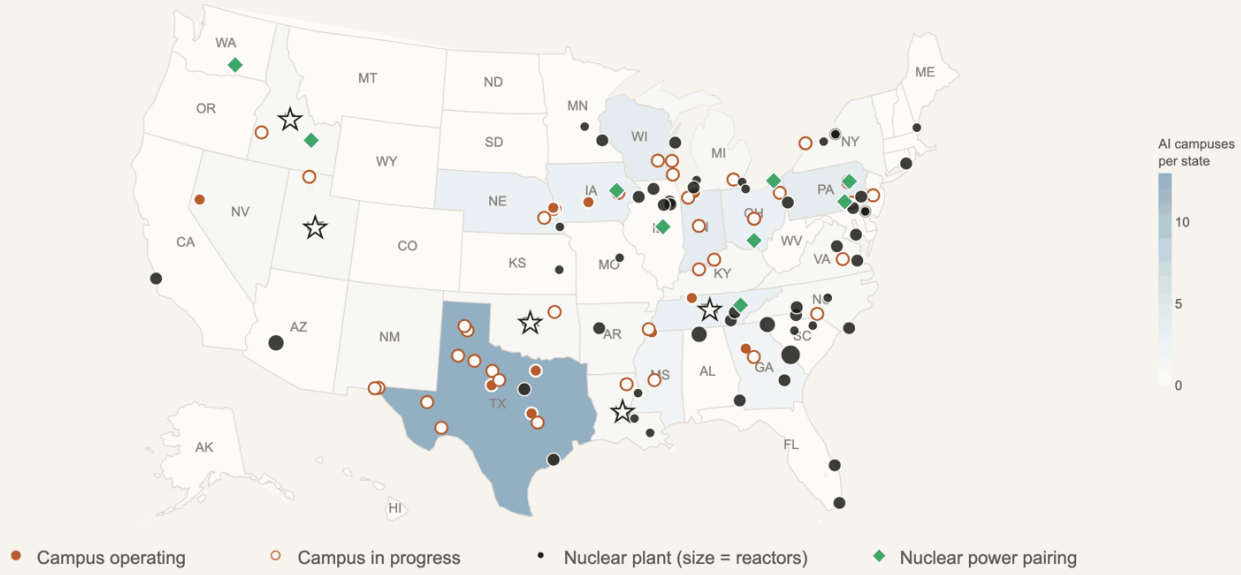
Which occupations the program can fund, where the training exists, and what the five Innovation Campus finalist states have decided so far.

September 14, 2026

opportunitydata.org · goodenergycollective.org

Where AI compute is being built

53 major AI data center campuses and 9 data-center nuclear power deals, over the operating reactor fleet.



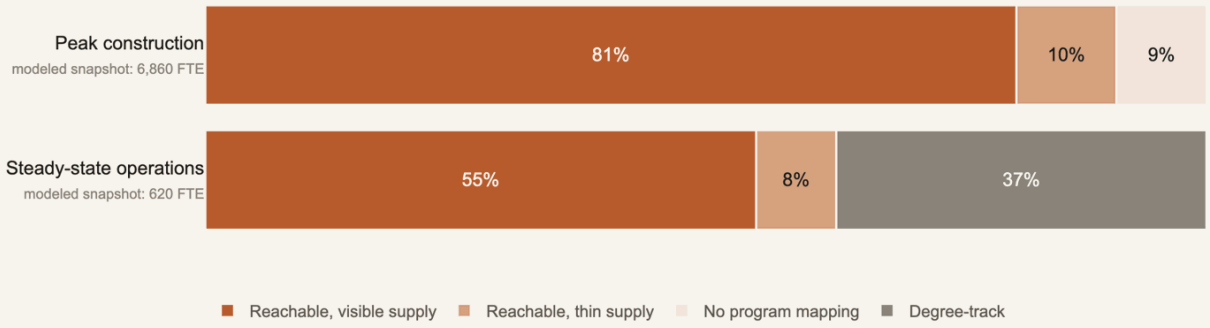
Every site sourced to a company, state, or utility announcement. Shaded states: AI campuses per state. Stars: Innovation Campus finalist states.

THE CORRIDOR

Nuclear power and AI data centers sit in the same geographical corridor. Both draw on the same construction trades, the data center schedule is years ahead of the nuclear one, and states are planning the two buildouts on separate tracks. Workforce policy is where the tracks could meet.

The first stage of a nuclear power plant build is Workforce Pell territory

Demand-weighted disposition of staffing need by build phase (34 staffing-sourced roles, medium build scenario).



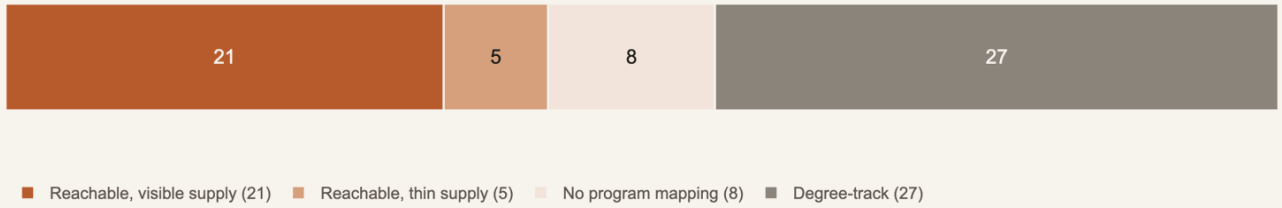
Weighted by demand, 81 percent of peak-construction need is in occupations Workforce Pell can reach; by steady-state operations the reachable share falls to 55 percent.

THE WINDOW

Screen for the future you want, not the status quo you have: a state expecting a build in a few years needs to plan the educational pipeline today, and putting an occupation on the screen now means the programs built for it can qualify as they launch. The phase the instrument can fund is the phase that arrives first.

What a full staffing taxonomy shows

All 61 occupations of a nuclear power plant staffing taxonomy, classified by whether Workforce Pell can reach them.



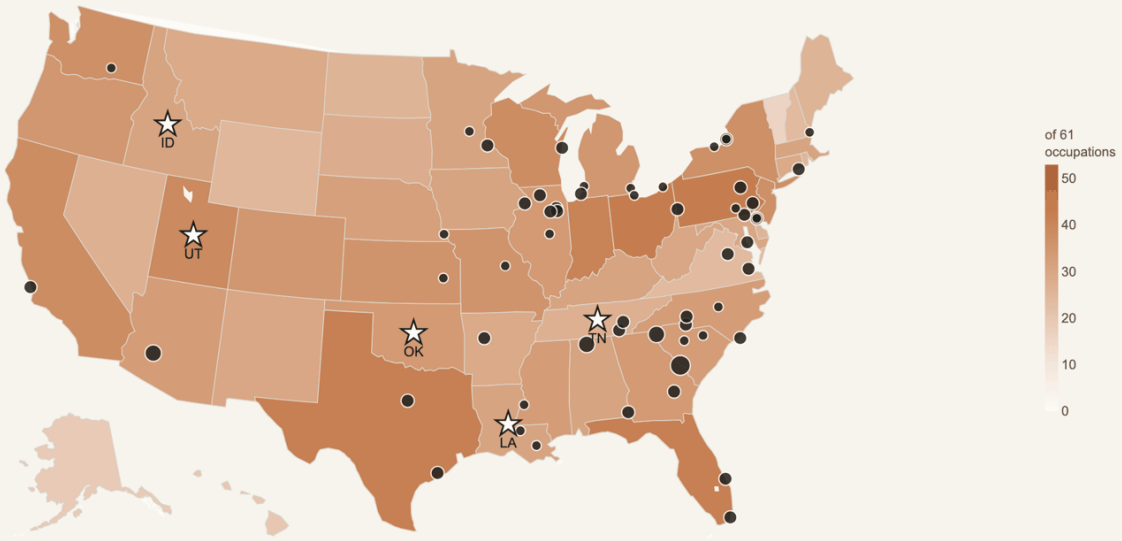
21 occupations are reachable with visible training supply; 5 are reachable but nearly invisible federally; 8 map to no instructional program anywhere; 27 are degree-track.

THE STRUCTURAL GAPS

The gaps are structural. Boilermakers show 25 sub-baccalaureate completions nationally and clear no Workforce Pell eligibility screen that currently exists in any finalist state, and the fuel-cycle occupations the Innovation Campuses are meant to host are among the eight no Title IV program anywhere can be classified as training.

Where the programs are

States shaded by how many of the 61 occupations have any sub-baccalaureate completions in IPEDS (2023-24).



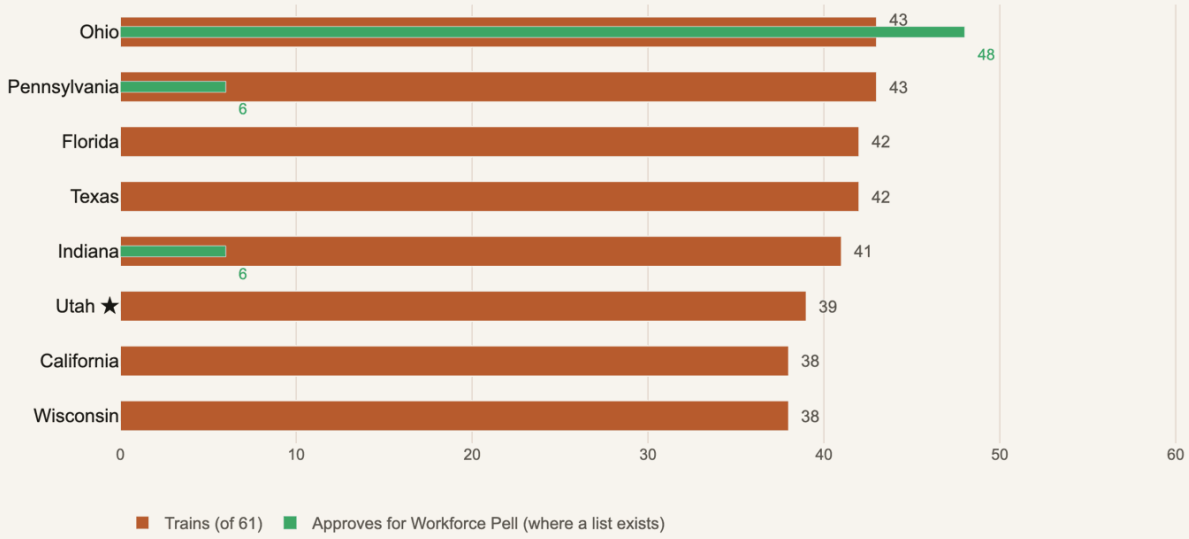
Eight of the 61 map to no instructional program anywhere, so 53 is the ceiling; the deepest states reach 43. Dots: operating fleet. Stars: finalist states.

THE OPEN DECISION

None of the five finalist states has posted an approved Workforce Pell occupation list or program roster. Tennessee, Louisiana, and Idaho have live application processes; Utah has board policy but no application channel; Oklahoma has named a coordination venue and nothing more.

State training capacity

Occupations trained (terracotta) and, where a state has published a Workforce Pell occupation list, occupations approved (green).



Utah, the strongest finalist bench, ranks 6th nationally; Tennessee ranks 39th. Star marks an Innovation Campus finalist.

TWO CONSTRAINTS

Training capacity and Pell approval are separate constraints: Pennsylvania trains 43 of the 61 but approves 6; Ohio approves 48, including occupations it does not yet train. A state needs both before Workforce Pell can fund a single nuclear-relevant seat.

In sum

A nuclear buildout and the AI data center buildout draw on the same trades in the same corridor, and states are planning the two on separate tracks. The phase of a nuclear build that arrives first is the phase Workforce Pell can largely fund: 81 percent of peak-construction need is in occupations the program can reach, a share that falls to 55 percent by steady-state operations.

The gaps are structural: 27 of the 61 occupations are degree-track, 8 map to no instructional program in the federal taxonomy, and the thinnest trades clear no eligibility screen that currently exists in any finalist state. None of the five Innovation Campus finalist states has posted an approved Workforce Pell occupation list, so what the program will fund where the campuses are going is not yet decided.

Training capacity and Pell approval are separate constraints, and a state needs both before Workforce Pell can fund a single nuclear-relevant seat. The screens in force were built from yesterday's labor-market data; for long-horizon projects with known labor demand, approval can work ahead of supply.

Full analysis, maps, data sources, and methods: opportunitydata.org/workforce-pell-nuclear.html

A collaboration between Opportunity Data (opportunitydata.org) and Good Energy Collective (goodenergycollective.org).

SUGGESTED CITATION

Opportunity Data & Good Energy Collective. (2026). *The Nuclear Energy Workforce and Workforce Pell* [policy brief]. opportunitydata.org/workforce-pell-nuclear.html

Published September 14, 2026.