

# Do you need new skills to get a job?

## Apply to the Training Opportunities Program (TOP)



The Training Opportunities Program (TOP, for short) allows you to collect unemployment benefits while you attend full-time training for new job skills.

If you qualify, you can:

- Collect unemployment benefits, **without** having to search for a job, and
- Extend your unemployment benefits up to 26 weeks.

### Who can be in TOP?

You may qualify if:

- You no longer work for your former employer
- You filed a claim and are eligible for unemployment benefits
- It will be difficult for you to get a new job, unless you get new skills
- You have the skills to complete and benefit from approved training
- Your training program is full-time and approved by the TOP unit

### Is there a deadline to apply?

You must apply during the first 20 weeks you receive unemployment benefits.

**Tip:** Apply for TOP as soon as you know you are eligible for unemployment benefits **AND** have a training course.

### What kind of training can I choose?

Choose a training program that will give you job skills that are in demand.

You can choose training for jobs in demand where you live now, or in another place you would commute to or move.

Learn more about the labor market and which jobs are in demand at: [www.mass.gov/lmi](http://www.mass.gov/lmi).

### Is the training free?

No. You must pay for the training or find scholarships or grants that can help you pay.

Here are some financial aid resources:

- **Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center:** Go to your local center. Ask a job specialist to help you look for grants or loans.
- **Federal Financial Aid:** To find out if you are available for financial aid, including Pell grants for up to \$5350, and other grants and loans, fill out a **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**.

If you already have a 4-year college degree, you won't qualify for a Pell grant but you may qualify for other kinds of aid.

- Visit [www.opportunity.gov](http://www.opportunity.gov) for information about financial aid, and tools to help you explore careers and options.

### How do I know if my program is approved?

You can find out what training is DUA-approved by:

- Calling the TOP Unit at 617-626-5521, or
- Going to any Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center, or
- Searching at [www.mass.gov/jobquest](http://www.mass.gov/jobquest)

The program you choose must be an intensive, full-time vocational, technical or basic skills training program that you can finish within 2 years.

The training program should also:

- Give you job placement opportunities for a specific occupation before the training ends,
- Have proven success in placing similar trainees, and
- Provide proof that the training will help you get a new job.

Type of Program	Minimum Requirement
Vocational/ Industrial Training	20 or more supervised class hours per week See: <a href="http://www.mass.gov/dpl">www.mass.gov/dpl</a>
School- or College-based Training	12 credits per semester at a school or college licensed by the state Department of Education See: <a href="http://www.mass.edu">www.mass.edu</a>
Distance Learning Training	12 credits per semester, or 20 hours per week – <b>Cannot be self-paced; must follow established curriculum</b>
Internships or Externships	20 or more hours a week, if it is part of the established curriculum
	Call the TOP unit to see if your program qualifies if it is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part coursework, part internship or practicum, or</li> <li>• An undergraduate or graduate degree program.</li> </ul>



## What if I need basic skills training first?

You may need basic skills before you can do a training program. For example, you may need to:

- Improve your reading, writing, or math skills,
- Learn English if it is not your first language, or
- Prepare for a high school equivalency test if you did not graduate from high school.

If you need any of these basic skills, your vocational plan will include classes from one or more of these areas:

- English as a second language,
- Adult Basic Education (ABE), or
- General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

TOP allows claimants who need basic skills 3 years to complete their program. That gives you extra time to take the basic skills classes you need along with vocational or technical training.

**Important!** Your eligibility period for benefits does not change.

## How can I apply?

To apply to TOP and to extend your Unemployment Benefit period, follow these steps:

1. Find an approved training program that will prepare you for the job market. The best way to do this is:
  - Go to any Massachusetts One-Stop Career Center, or
  - Search at: [www.mass.gov/jobquest](http://www.mass.gov/jobquest)
2. Call the TOP unit to get an application: 617-626-5521
3. Fill out your part of the application. Ask your training program to fill out their part.
4. Send your completed application to the DUA TOP department at least **3 weeks before** your program starts

If you don't hear from TOP within 3-4 weeks of applying, call: **617-626-5521**.

## Need help selecting a training program?

Go to a One-Stop Career Center where staff can help you find training that is right for you.

The Career Center staff can also:

- Evaluate your job skills,
- Give you a list of approved training programs,
- Tell you if you can finish the training before your unemployment benefits run out,
- Explain your options for paying for the training, and
- Help you fill out the TOP application.

## Could I lose my TOP benefits during training?

Yes. You could lose your benefits, if you:

- Stop requesting your weekly claims for unemployment,
- Do not keep up with the training program requirements,
- Stop the training program before you complete it, or
- Take more than one training program at a time (unless the other program is for Basic Skills).

If you are receiving TOP extended unemployment benefits when your training ends your TOP benefits will end the last week of the training program.

**Important!** If you are having problems with your training program, contact TOP right away. Call: **617-626-5521**.

## If my job training program has vacation breaks, will my TOP benefits stop?

No, if:

- The vacation period is **less than 3 weeks**, and
- You go back to the training program right after the break.

If the vacation period is **more than 3 weeks**, and you continue searching for work as required, you may be able to get regular benefits but not extended unemployment benefits.

