

Connecticut AI Alliance (CAIA)

AI Computing Access Program

Program Guide, Eligibility, Application Guidelines & Policies

Award Period: Summer 2026 – Fall 2026

*Funded by the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE)
Administered by the Connecticut AI Alliance*

[CAIA AI Computing Access Program](#) | | hpc@ctaialliance.org

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1. Introduction

The Connecticut AI Alliance (CAIA) is a consortium of 21 Connecticut higher education institutions dedicated to advancing AI education, research, and workforce development across the state. As part of a two-year initiative funded by the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE), CAIA is launching the AI Computing Access Program—a statewide effort to provide faculty and students at member institutions with access to cloud-based AI computing resources that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive or unavailable through institutional infrastructure alone.

The program addresses a fundamental barrier in AI education and research: the gap between what faculty and students want to accomplish and the computing power available to them. Training modern AI models, experimenting with large language models, and building AI-powered applications all require access to GPUs and cloud APIs that most institutions cannot provide at scale. This program bridges that gap by distributing \$275,200 in cloud computing credits across four targeted tracks, each designed to serve a distinct community of need within Connecticut's higher education ecosystem.

1.1 Program Mission

The AI Computing Access Program exists to:

- Democratize access to AI computing resources across Connecticut's higher education institutions, regardless of size, type, or existing infrastructure.
- Accelerate AI-related research by providing faculty and graduate students with the GPU and API resources needed to pursue competitive, publishable work.
- Transform AI education by enabling hands-on, industry-relevant learning experiences in both dedicated AI courses and general education contexts.
- Build a statewide AI community by encouraging cross-institutional collaboration, resource sharing, and collective capacity-building.
- Promote responsible AI practices by requiring applicants to consider the ethical, social, and safety dimensions of their work.

1.2 Funding & Administration

This program is funded through a grant from the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE), in partnership with CCIC and CEN, as part of CAIA's broader statewide AI capacity-building initiative. The program is administered by CAIA, with credits distributed to awardees based on approved applications and managed through CAIA's centralized cloud accounts. This application cycle supports activities in Summer and Fall 2026.

2. Program Tracks & Funding Allocation

The program is organized into four tracks, each targeting a specific use case. Applicants must select the track that best fits their needs. Faculty may submit applications to multiple tracks, but each application must describe a distinct activity (i.e., the same project or course may not be submitted to more than one track).

Track	Award Range	Primary Audience
Capstone / Senior Design Projects	\$1K–\$10K	Faculty sponsors of undergraduate capstone/senior design teams
Faculty & Graduate Research Support	\$2K–\$25K	Faculty PIs and their graduate student researchers
General Education Integration	\$200–\$3K	Faculty in any discipline integrating AI into non-CS courses
AI Course Delivery Support	\$500–\$5K	Instructors of dedicated AI/ML/data science courses

2.1 Capstone / Senior Design Projects

This track provides computing credits to undergraduate capstone and senior design teams working on AI-related projects. Faculty sponsors apply on behalf of one or more student teams. Projects should demonstrate meaningful use of AI/ML methods and produce tangible deliverables. Industry or community partnerships are encouraged.

2.2 Faculty & Graduate Research Support

The largest track, designed to accelerate active AI research conducted by faculty and their graduate students. Awards support thesis and dissertation research, experimental work, and projects that generate preliminary data for future grant proposals. This track accommodates the most compute-intensive workloads, including large model training, fine-tuning, and multi-GPU experiments.

2.3 General Education Integration

This track supports faculty in any discipline who want to bring AI literacy, hands-on AI experimentation, or AI-augmented learning activities into courses that are not primarily AI or computer science courses. The goal is to broaden AI exposure across the humanities, social sciences, business, health sciences, education, the arts, and other fields. No prior AI or programming expertise is required. CAIA provides onboarding support, no-code interfaces, and sample materials.

2.4 AI Course Delivery Support

This track supports instructors of dedicated AI, machine learning, and data science courses who need computing resources for hands-on coursework, assignments, labs, and demonstrations. Awards are scaled per course section based on enrollment and computational intensity.

3. Available Computing Services

All awards are provisioned as cloud computing credits. Awardees may request one or more of the following service categories:

3.1 GPU Computing

- **Google Colab Pro / Pro+:**

Individual or shared access to GPU-accelerated Jupyter notebook environments. Suitable for model training, fine-tuning, inference, data processing, and coursework. Available GPU tiers include T4 (16 GB VRAM) and A100 (40/80 GB VRAM), subject to availability and workload justification.

- **Unity HPC Cluster (UMass Amherst):**

Access to high performance GPU and CPU computing through the Unity cluster for sustained and compute intensive work. Supports GPU tiers including L4, L40s, A100, and H100 for research training runs, multi GPU experiments, advanced capstone projects, batch jobs, and long running model fine tuning tasks.

- **JupyterHub (Managed Cluster):**

A multi-user JupyterHub environment for courses or research groups that require a shared, persistent computing platform. Best suited for classroom settings or labs with consistent, repeatable workloads

3.2 LLM API Access

- **Google Vertex AI:**

API access to large language models including Gemini Pro, Gemini Ultra, PaLM 2, and other models available on the Vertex AI platform. Supports use cases such as prompt engineering, retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), chatbot development, text classification, code generation, synthetic data generation, and AI-assisted analysis. API access can be provided via direct API keys, through no-code/low-code interfaces, or embedded in Jupyter notebooks.

3.3 Service Selection Guidance

Applicants who are unsure which service best fits their needs may indicate this on the application form. The CAIA Program Office will provide recommendations based on the described use case. A brief summary of typical service-to-use-case mappings:

Use Case	Recommended Service
Training / fine-tuning deep learning models	Google Colab Pro+ or JupyterHub
LLM-based application development (RAG, chatbots)	Vertex AI API + Colab
Classroom assignments with GPU workloads	Colab Pro (per student) or JupyterHub
Students interacting with LLMs (non-coding)	Vertex AI API via aweb interface
AI literacy module (no programming)	Vertex AI API via aweb interface
Large-scale model training (multi-GPU)	JupyterHub or Colab Pro+ (A100)

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Institutional Eligibility

Only faculty at current CAIA member institutions are eligible to apply. CAIA membership is at the institutional level. As of this program cycle, the consortium includes 21 Connecticut higher education institutions.

4.2 Applicant Eligibility

The following individuals are eligible to serve as the Principal Investigator (PI) or lead applicant on an application:

- Full-time faculty (tenure-track or non-tenure-track) at a CAIA member institution.
- Part-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and lecturers who are the instructor of record for a course (for the Course Delivery and General Education tracks).
- Research faculty and research scientists with a faculty appointment at a CAIA member institution (for the Research Support track).

The following individuals are not eligible to serve as PI but may be listed as team members or co-investigators:

- Graduate students (may be listed as co-investigators on Research Support applications).
- Undergraduate students (may be listed as team members on Capstone applications).
- Staff members without a faculty appointment.
- Faculty at non-CAIA institutions (unless participating as a collaborator on an application led by a CAIA-institution PI).

4.3 Track-Specific Eligibility

Track	Additional Requirements
Capstone / Senior Design	Faculty must sponsor at least one undergraduate capstone or senior design team. Department chair acknowledgment is required.
Research Support	Faculty must serve as PI. At least one graduate student researcher should be actively involved. Research must have a clear AI/ML component.
General Education	Faculty must be instructor of record for a course in any discipline. Course need not be in CS/AI. No prior AI expertise required.
Course Delivery	Faculty must be instructor of record for a dedicated AI, ML, or data science course scheduled for Summer or Fall 2026.

4.4 Multiple Applications

Faculty may submit applications to multiple tracks, provided each application describes a distinct and separate activity. For example, a faculty member may apply to the Research Support track for a research project and to the Course Delivery track for a separate course. The same project or course may not be submitted to more than one track.

5. Application Guidelines

5.1 How to Apply

Applications are submitted via Google Forms. Each track has a separate application form. Links to all four forms are available at ctaialliance.org/computing-access. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, with priority given to applications received by the posted deadlines.

5.2 Application Components

While each track's form has tailored questions, all applications include the following common components:

1. Applicant Information:

Name, institutional email, institution, department, and title/rank.

2. Project or Course Description:

A clear explanation of the proposed activity, its goals, and its connection to AI.

3. Computing Resource Requirements:

What services are needed, estimated usage, and a budget estimate.

4. Impact Statement:

How the resources will enhance student learning, advance research, or broaden AI literacy.

5. Responsible Use Plan:

How ethical, legal, and safety considerations will be addressed.

6. Certification:

An attestation of eligibility, accuracy, and compliance with program policies.

5.3 Tips for a Strong Application

- **Be specific.**

Describe concrete activities, not general aspirations. What will students or researchers actually do with the computing resources?

- **Justify your budget.**

Show reviewers that you have thought about how much compute you need and why. A rough calculation (e.g., N students × M GPU-hours × cost per hour) is more convincing than a round number.

- **Articulate impact.**

Explain what becomes possible with these resources that is not possible without them.

- **Address responsible use.**

Even a brief, thoughtful plan for ethical AI use will strengthen your application.

- **Highlight collaboration.**

Cross-institutional partnerships and plans to share deliverables earn bonus points in all tracks.

- **Don't oversell technical expertise.**

Especially for the General Education track, reviewers value creative pedagogy over technical sophistication. Apply from where you are.

5.4 Application Deadlines

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. However, to be considered in the first review cycle, applications should be submitted by the following priority deadlines:

Milestone	Date
Application portal opens	March 24, 2026
Priority deadline (first review cycle)	April 21, 2026
Award notifications (first cycle)	May 15, 2026
Rolling applications accepted until funds are exhausted	Ongoing
Award period begins	Summer 2026
Award period ends	December 31, 2026

6. Review Process

6.1 Peer Review Committee

All applications are evaluated by a peer-review committee composed of CAIA faculty from across member institutions. Reviewers are selected to represent a range of disciplines, institution types, and areas of AI expertise. Reviewers with a conflict of interest (e.g., applicants from the same department or institution) will recuse themselves from evaluating those applications.

6.2 Evaluation Criteria

Each track has its own scoring rubric, detailed in the appendix of the respective application form. Common criteria across all tracks include:

- Technical or pedagogical merit of the proposed activity.
- Feasibility and appropriateness of the computing resource request.
- Expected impact on students, research outcomes, or AI literacy.
- Responsible AI and data practices.
- Potential for shareable deliverables and broader impact.
- Cross-institutional collaboration (bonus in all tracks).

6.3 Scoring & Award Decisions

Applications are scored on a 30-point scale. The review committee will provide scores and brief written feedback. Award decisions are made by the CAIA Program Office based on committee scores, available funding within each track, geographic and institutional diversity across the portfolio, and alignment with the program's statewide mission. CAIA reserves the right to offer partial awards (reduced credit amounts) or to suggest that applicants adjust scope to fit available resources. Applicants will be notified of decisions via email and may receive constructive feedback to support future applications.

7. Rules, Policies & Terms of Award

7.1 Award Period

All awards are valid for the period of Summer 2026 through Fall 2026 (ending December 31, 2026). Computing credits that are not consumed by the end of the award period will expire and cannot be carried forward, refunded, or converted to cash.

7.2 Acceptable Use Policy

All awardees and their team members must comply with the CAIA Acceptable Use Policy and the cloud provider's terms of service. Computing resources provided through this program may only be used for the purposes described in the approved application. Specifically, awarded resources:

- Must be used for the educational, research, or instructional activities described in the application.
- Must not be used for commercial purposes, cryptocurrency mining, or activities unrelated to the approved project.
- Must not be shared with, transferred to, or accessed by individuals not named in the application without prior written approval from the CAIA Program Office.
- Must not be used for any activity that violates federal, state, or institutional policies, including but not limited to activities involving unauthorized data collection, harassment, or the creation of harmful content.

Violations of the Acceptable Use Policy may result in immediate suspension or termination of computing access and ineligibility for future CAIA awards.

7.3 Non-Transferability

Awards are made to the named PI/applicant and are non-transferable to other individuals or institutions. If the PI leaves the institution or is unable to continue the project, the CAIA Program Office must be notified. In such cases, the award may be reassigned to a qualified co-PI at the same institution, at CAIA's discretion.

7.4 Acknowledgment Requirements

Awardees must acknowledge CAIA and the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE) in any publications, presentations, reports, course materials, or public communications that result from work supported by this program. The recommended acknowledgment language is:

"This work was supported by the Connecticut AI Alliance (CAIA) AI Computing Access Program, funded by the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE)."

7.5 Reporting Requirements

All awardees must submit an outcomes report at the conclusion of the award period. The reporting requirements vary by track:

Track	Report Deadline	Key Items
Capstone	Within 30 days of project completion	Project outcomes, deliverables, student impact, usage summary

Research	Within 60 days of award period end	Publications, student milestones, usage summary, grant pipeline
General Education	End of semester	Reflection on AI integration, student feedback, lessons learned
Course Delivery	End of semester	Usage summary, student outcomes, course evaluations

A standard reporting template will be provided to all awardees. Failure to submit an outcomes report may affect eligibility for future CAIA grant awards.

7.6 Data Governance & Security

Awardees are responsible for ensuring that all data used in conjunction with awarded computing resources complies with applicable federal, state, and institutional regulations, including but not limited to:

- FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) for student data.
- HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) for protected health information.
- IRB (Institutional Review Board) requirements for research involving human subjects.
- Institutional data classification and security policies.

CAIA does not provide data storage or data governance infrastructure. Awardees are responsible for the secure storage, handling, and disposition of any data used in their projects. API keys, credentials, and cloud access tokens must not be shared publicly (e.g., in public GitHub repositories) and must be managed securely.

7.7 Intellectual Property

All intellectual property (IP) created using resources from this program remains the property of the awardee and their institution, subject to the institution's existing IP policies. CAIA does not claim ownership of any research outputs, course materials, software, or other deliverables. However, awardees who agree to share materials through CAIA's resource repository grant CAIA a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to distribute those materials for educational purposes within the consortium.

7.8 Monitoring & Compliance

The CAIA Program Office will monitor aggregate credit consumption across all awards to ensure responsible use of program funds. CAIA reserves the right to:

- Request usage reports at any time during the award period.
- Adjust credit allocations if usage significantly deviates from the approved plan (upward or downward).
- Suspend or terminate access in cases of policy violations, misuse, or inactivity.
- Reallocate unused credits to other awardees or to a future award cycle.

7.10 Amendments

CAIA reserves the right to amend these policies at any time. Material changes will be communicated to all applicants and awardees via email and posted at ctaialliance.org. Continued use of awarded resources after policy amendments constitutes acceptance of the revised terms.

8. Contact Information & Support

For questions about the program, eligibility, application process, or technical support:

CAIA Program Office

Email: hpc@ctaialliance.org

Web: <https://www.theccic.org/collaborations/caia/hpc/>

For technical support with cloud computing platforms (Colab, JupyterHub, Vertex AI), awardees may contact the CAIA Program Office for onboarding assistance, platform-specific documentation, and troubleshooting referrals.

Connecticut AI Alliance – Advancing AI Education, Research, and Workforce Development Across Connecticut