

XX. Massachusetts Educational Rewards Grant

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATIONAL REWARDS GRANT**

The Massachusetts *Educational Rewards Grant Program* was established by the Legislature for the purpose of providing financial assistance to dislocated or incumbent low income workers to enable them to receive education to transition into jobs in targeted high demand occupations. The grant program emanates from the Economic Stimulus Bill that is contained in Chapter 123 of the Acts of 2006 (Ch. 29 Sect. 2SSS of the M.G.L.). Such a bill is relative to the economic investments in the Commonwealth to promote job creation, economic growth, competitiveness and overall stability in the Massachusetts economy. This need-based grant program is to serve as a last resort after all other federal and state grant resources have been exhausted in meeting postsecondary education enrollment costs. The Educational Rewards Grant Program also allows up to thirty percent of the grant amount to be used by the recipient for living expenses.

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

An eligible institution is defined as a public, private, independent, for-profit or non-profit, or vocational technical institution located in Massachusetts and authorized to offer post-secondary certificate or undergraduate degrees. The institution must be accredited and eligible to participate in both Federal Title IV and Massachusetts State Financial Aid Programs.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAMS

A program is eligible if it is an accredited post-secondary certificate or vocational technology program or an associate or bachelor degree program in high-demand occupation fields.

The Board of Higher Education and the Department of Workforce Development, in consultation with the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association, State Workforce Investment Board, Reach Higher Initiative, and the Workforce Accountability Task Force, shall determine the eligible high demand occupations.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Student applicants enrolled in an eligible program must meet the following criteria to be considered for an award under the Massachusetts *Educational Rewards Grant Program*:

- Shall be a dislocated worker or an incumbent worker whose income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level or meet other criteria as established by the Department of Workforce Development and the Board of Higher Education, in consultation with the Workforce Accountability Task Force.
- Has applied for financial aid using the standard Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and submitted necessary documentation to verify dislocated worker status and/or an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Is not in default of any federal or state student loans for attendance at any institution or owe a refund for any previous financial aid received.
- Is enrolled in an approved full time or part time certificate or degree program located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and meets the institution's requirements for satisfactory academic progress.
- Is a Massachusetts resident living in The Commonwealth for at least one year prior to the beginning of the current academic year.

- Is a United States citizen or eligible non-citizen capable of receiving federal financial aid under Federal Title IV.
- Has not received a first bachelor's degree.
- Is not considered a dependant for the purpose of state or federal financial aid.

STUDENT AWARD

The award under this program shall be a minimum of \$200 and a maximum of \$3,000 and shall be used to fund tuition, fees and books and may include up to 30 percent of the student's calculated cost of living as determined by the institution or the Board of Higher Education.

The funds from this grant shall serve as a last resort, after other federal, state and institutional aid has been exhausted. To comply with this provision, institutions shall complete and submit to the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance a detailed financial aid Cost of Attendance and a listing of all financial aid awarded.

Institutions must also report the student's enrollment information as requested.

INSTITUTIONAL DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

Each institution must provide information to the Office of Student Financial Assistance regarding every student's award, credit hours, and financial aid budget plan for the current academic year.

One hundred percent of the funds allocated shall be used for awards for students. Funds that are not disbursed by the institution to the student, for any reason, must be remitted to the Office of Student Financial Assistance as required by the Refund Policy for State financial aid programs.

Education Rewards Grant funds awarded in excess of billed tuition and fees must be disbursed to the student for books and related living expenses, according to program guidelines.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

All institutions must file a State Financial Aid Participation Agreement to be maintained on file at the Office of Student Financial Assistance

AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

It shall be the responsibility of each institution to maintain adequate documentation of a recipient student's eligibility for the Educational Rewards Grant Program.

All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall at all times be open to inspection, review and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records and documents are located. The institution shall retain such financial books, records and documents for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.