Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant Program

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families
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The Department of Children, Youth and Families actively encourages and supports any youth in the legal custody of the Department who wishes to pursue post secondary education. The Department recognizes that although a youth may possess the academic ability and the interest to seek higher educational goals, he or she may be precluded from doing so because of a lack of financial resources. To afford such youth the opportunity, the General Assembly created the Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant Program (RIGL 42-72.8). An eligible youth is able to receive a financial grant to supplement federal, state and institutional scholarships and grants when attending a state college in Rhode Island. Eligibility for these grants is limited to two years of full-time study at the Community College of Rhode Island, or four years at Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island. An eligible youth who completes two years of full-time study at Community College of Rhode Island can qualify for an additional two years of full-time study at the University of Rhode Island or Rhode Island College.

Staff are encouraged to inform youth in the custody of the Department of their potential eligibility for these grants. Planning for youth interested in applying for higher education should be initiated as early as possible, preferably during the middle school years, but at least by the freshman and sophomore years in high school. This should be a collaborative effort with the youth, his/her caretaker, the assigned caseworker or probation counselor and the school guidance counselor and educational advocate, if appropriate. The youth's interest in higher education together with planning details should also be identified on the Department's Transitional Living Plan as part of the youth's plan for independent living (Refer to Policy 700.0200 - Independent Living). Information about this grant should also be included in the Life Skills curriculum offered to youth in placement over the age of 16. Youth interested in obtaining these grants which may cover tuition, fees and room and board charges must submit specific information through their assigned social caseworker or probation counselor who will forward the application to the Department's Independent Living Coordinator. Grant awards will be made by a committee based upon the applicant's academic record, financial need, and general interest in higher education.

Related Procedures...

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Procedure from Policy 700.0210: Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant Program

A. In order to initially apply for the Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant Program, the following criteria must be met:
   1. Youth must be in the legal custody of the Department on the day of recommendation and have remained in such custody for at least 24 months prior to the day of recommendation;
   2. Youth must have graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma not more than one year prior to the date of recommendation or must be expected to graduate at the end of the semester in which application is made;
   3. Youth must not have reached his/her twenty-first birthday by the date of recommendation;
   4. Youth must be enrolled full-time or accepted for full-time admission at either Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, or University of Rhode Island. (The only exception is a youth with a documented disability that would preclude the youth from full-time status. Youth with a disability should be referred to the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) representative from the specific institution of higher education who can assist in determining eligibility status for the grant.)
   5. Youth must apply for financial aid by completing and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

B. A youth who is interested in qualifying for the Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant must provide his/her caseworker or probation counselor with the following information:
   1. Copy of high school diploma or GED certificate or expected date of high school graduation;
   2. Copy of the letter of acceptance into the college or university the youth is planning to attend;
   3. Copy of the financial aid award.

C. In order to assist a youth with the application for a Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant, the primary service worker shall:
   1. Assist the youth with gathering the above information necessary for the application;
   2. Send a memo to the Independent Living Coordinator as soon as the youth's interest in the grant is established. The memo should include the following:
      a. youth's name and date of birth
      b. foster home or residential program name and address and a contact person
      c. DCYF worker's and supervisor's names
      d. information regarding where the youth will be living during the school year and semester breaks
      e. the information in B above as it becomes available

D. Grant recipients will be chosen by a grant award selection committee comprised of representatives from the Department of Children, Youth and Families, each of the institutions of higher education, and the offices of higher education and elementary and secondary education. Grant awards will be made on the basis of scholastic record, aptitude, financial need and general interest in higher education. Grants may not exceed the full cost of tuition,

fees and room and board charges. Cumulative grants may not exceed available appropriations in any fiscal year.

E. A youth is eligible to renew any grant award for subsequent years of study as long as the following requirements are met:
   1. Grant recipient must continue to be enrolled full-time.
   2. Satisfactory progress toward an academic certificate or degree must be made.
   3. The financial aid application (FAFSA) must be renewed.
   4. Another application to receive the grant including verification of 1, 2, and 3 above must be submitted by the youth's primary service worker as well as a copy of any other financial aid awards received by the youth.

F. A youth who wishes to receive the Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant must remain in the care of the Department. A youth who reaches age 21 but remains eligible to receive the grant should be brought to the attention of the supervisor and regional director/administrator to determine which services may be needed by the youth to successfully continue his/her education.