



Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Montana Foster Youth Higher Education Assistance Program

Montana Foster Youth Higher Education Assistance Program – Eligibility Criteria and Procedures

Statutory authority: 20-26-633 Montana Code Annotated (MCA)

The purpose of the Montana Foster Youth Higher Education Assistance Program administered by the board of regents through the commissioner of higher education (OCHE) is to help youth who have aged out of the foster care system meet their educational, vocational, and professional goals without accruing debt. The Assistance Program will be implemented utilizing the following eligibility criteria and procedures.

A. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. A student is eligible to receive a MT Foster Youth Assistance Grant providing the student:
 - a. Is eligible for the federal John H. Chafee foster care for successful transition to adulthood program;
 - b. Is a resident of Montana (per Policy 940.1);
 - c. Is enrolled full-time and taking courses that lead to an associate or bachelor's degree offered by the institution or a vocational or entry-level professional credential or certification offered by the institution;
 - d. Has graduated from high school or received a secondary education equivalency certificate;
 - e. Has completed and submitted a FAFSA for the current academic year, and has accepted all federal and state grants available;
 - f. Maintains satisfactory academic progress (SAP);
 - g. Maintains a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0;
 - h. Works a minimum of 10 hours per week from the second semester onward; and
 - i. Accepts support services, including tutoring and life skills classes, offered by the institution.

B. AWARD AMOUNTS

1. Provides last dollar scholarship awards, not to exceed the cost of attendance, based on each term for which a student is eligible. The scholarship awards must be 50% funded by the Montana foster youth higher education assistance program and the remaining 50% funded by seeking private academic unit funds.

C. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

1. Awards may be utilized at any of the following eligible postsecondary institutions:
 - a. campus of the Montana University System (MUS), as defined in § 20-25-201;
 - b. Montana community college, defined and organized as provided in § 20-15-101; or
 - c. two-year, accredited tribal community college located in the state of Montana or a four-year accredited tribal college located in the state of Montana.
2. Institutions must submit proposals to the Commissioner of Higher Education each academic year and if awarded a grant, shall develop a unique program that:
 - a. serves students who are eligible participants;
 - b. provides availability of on-campus, year-round room and board, including meal plans, to participants from the time they age out of foster care;

- c. provides support services to each participant, including help with admissions and enrollment, assistance completing financial aid paperwork and scholarship applications, life skills training, academic tutoring, job search and career assistance, and a community family or mentor for the purpose of creating a family-like and nurturing connection in the community;
- d. administers last dollar scholarship awards, not to exceed the cost of attendance, based on each term for which a student is eligible. The scholarship awards must be 50% funded by the Montana foster youth higher education assistance program and the remaining 50% funded by private academic unit funds.

D. AUTHORIZATION TO DISTRIBUTE FUNDS

- 1. Institutions submit proposals to OCHE that include estimates of financial aid funding for each qualifying Chafee student.
- 2. OCHE reviews all proposals to ensure the institutions can meet the requirements of the Program.
- 3. OCHE calculates the estimated 50% of Unmet Need for each student and disburses those funds to the institutions on a first-come, first served basis until funds are exhausted.
- 4. OCHE distributes funding directly to each institution; each institution is responsible for awarding funds to each student according to the established eligibility criteria.
- 5. If a student does not ultimately meet the eligibility requirements, the funds for that semester must be returned to OCHE during the end of year reconciliation/reporting process.

E. ADMINISTRATION

- 1. OCHE is charged with the central administration of the grants and is responsible for the disbursement of the state appropriated funds to each Institution.
- 2. The Institutions are charged with the execution of the individual student awards according to the established eligibility criteria set forth in the operating procedures.

F. REPORTS

- 1. OCHE shall submit an annual report to the education interim committee and the children, families, health, and human services interim committee on the status and impacts of these grants.