

FAFSA 21 Funding Opportunity

Frequently Asked Questions

Applicant Eligibility

Question: As a public college, are we eligible to apply?

Answer: Yes. The application does not exclude public colleges and universities from applying, nor does it exclude other not-for-profit institutions of higher education. Per the “Focus and Evidence of Effectiveness” section, “Please describe the lead organization’s focus on college attainment and highlight relevant work to date, particularly on FAFSA, and/or the relationship with the schools/district being served.”

Question: Is a private college eligible for funding, and if so, what would be an example of how a college might meet the requirements to receive funding?

Answer: The application does not exclude not-for-profit institutions of higher education. The application must meet the program purpose, which is to provide short-term intervention services to support FAFSA completion for the students most impacted by COVID-19. The application guidelines and criteria apply regardless of applicant.

Question: Can a school or district apply?

Answer: The partnership of schools and districts is critical to the success of this initiative. Unfortunately, due to the equitable services provisions associated with GEER I funding, schools and districts are not eligible for direct funding. LEAs should partner with local nonprofits and/or consider leveraging their Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to provide additional FAFSA services to students.

Question: Are we eligible to apply even if only one school in our county is on the Priority list?

Answer: There is no requirement that an applicant serve more than one school/district; in addition, applicants may serve schools/districts not on the Priority list if they follow the guidance. However, per application guidelines, the needs of the schools/districts served and the outcomes (including numbers of students served) will be used to assess applications. In addition, applicants may serve schools/districts not located within their county or within particular geographic boundaries; note that the selection criteria is, “Collaborative relationship with schools/district served, as evidenced through organizational history and letters of support.”

School/District Eligibility

Question: Is the school/district list complete?

Answer: Per federal guidelines, the GEER funding used for this program should be used for students “most impacted by COVID.” The attached list represents schools and districts that the Ohio Department of Higher Education believes meet that criteria, based on *available data*, which indicates low 2020 FAFSA completion numbers and/or a decline in FAFSA completion. Applicants are asked to prioritize these schools but may include other schools and districts. In the grant rationale, address the adverse impact of COVID-19 on these additional district/schools, and/or how the activities will focus on populations known to be adversely impacted by COVID-19, such as low-income students, students with limited access to broadband, students with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster youth.

Question: What focus is being directed towards Title I schools, given the disparity in FAFSA completion rates compared to non-Title I eligible schools?

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Answer: Per federal guidelines, the GEER funding used for this program should be used for students “most impacted by COVID.” The Priority list represents schools and districts that the Ohio Department of Higher Education believes meet that criteria, based *on available data* which indicates low 2020 FAFSA completion numbers and/or a decline in FAFSA completion, and many Title I schools are on the Priority list. In addition, applicants may request to serve schools and districts not on the list by focusing on populations known to be adversely impacted by COVID-19, such as low-income students.

Partnerships

Question: If a school/district signs a letter of support for an applicant, does that mean the applicant is the “exclusive provider of FAFSA services” for that school/district?

Answer: No, the applicant does not become an “exclusive provider of FAFSA services.” Schools are welcome to continue engaging with other partners in this important work. The intent of the letter is to demonstrate that the school will work with the applicant organization; there is no expectation that the school will work *exclusively* with the applicant organization.

Budget/Timeline/Activities

Question: Can funds be used for FAFSA completion activities after the June 30, 2021 deadline?

Answer: The primary goal of this first round of funding is to propel urgent action/intervention in what remains of the current academic year. In the initial draft of the application guidelines, applicants were required to outline how funds will be prioritized and used by June 30, 2021 and allowed to request a roll-over into the following weeks and months. However, the deadline to use funds has now been extended to August 31, 2021 to better allow applicants to plan for additional services to students leading up to the fall semester.

Question: In the first part of the application it indicates grants can range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 and you can justify and ask for more. In the budget section, it indicates the maximum request is \$30,000. Is the maximum for which you can ask without justification \$50,000 or \$30,000?

Answer: Revised guidelines have been posted. Requests between \$30,000 and \$50,000 do not require additional justification.

Question: Is there a cap on indirect costs?

Answer: The goal of this funding opportunity is to directly impact as many students as possible. If indirect costs are requested, the rate should not exceed 10 percent. Note that, per the application, “likelihood of impact on students” is the driving criteria for consideration. High indirect costs may diminish the perceived impact of an application.

Question: If an organization has staff that are already well-versed/trained in FAFSA completion, is the agency allowed to utilize these staff members in after-hours events and pay them to assist families in the community that still need to submit a FAFSA? If that is permissible, who determines what is a reasonable/allowable pay rate for that worker’s time and efforts?

Answer: Funds may be used to supplement, not supplant, services; in other words, the funds *cannot* be used to pay for services that would otherwise be occurring. Adding new, supplemental services is allowable. The applicant should determine a reasonable pay rate and

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may provide justification on the assumptions made, if desired, in the Budget Detail section under “Assumptions.”

Question: Texting campaigns were called out specifically, are other marketing campaigns allowable as well?

Answer: Marketing is permissible when it is program outreach (designed to raise awareness of FAFSA completion/support). Any generic marketing to benefit the entity is not permitted. Also, promotional items are not permitted.

Question: Can we make revisions to our grant activities after the award if we discover a different idea we would like to implement?

Answer: Yes, grantees can request revisions. Note that approved budget revisions will not impact the total amount awarded.

Question: Can you share some resources on best practices?

Answer: Applicants are welcome to leverage existing promising practices or to innovate and develop new best practices. Some known best practices include using student-level data to drive outreach, leveraging peer coaches, one-on-one FAFSA completion events, text “nudging,” and digital outreach. The links below provides information and resources on an array of promising practices: https://www.ncan.org/page/fafsa_completion_resources

Question: Does the August 31st deadline mean the FAFSA completers must be enrolled by then or can it be completed applications for enrollment past August 31?

Answer: The August 31 deadline refers to the time by which services should be provided to students.

Question: Are ESC's able to subcontract with an OTC to assist local schools with FAFSA completion?

Answer: Yes. Partnerships and subcontracts are permitted, including with OTCs. Applicants will have to follow the federal guidance for who has oversight and when the funds can be drawn for reimbursement.

Question: Is the purchase of laptops allowed?

Answer: Necessary and reasonable purchases of devices are permitted. Please note that the budget will be assessed for its logic and thoughtfulness as part of the awards process.

Question: Are incentives allowed?

Answer: As the funding for this program comes from the GEER funds, it is subject to [federal Uniform Guidance](#), which in general requires that grant expenses are reasonable, allocable, and necessary to accomplish the goals of the federal program. Per the application guidelines, gifts, souvenirs, door prizes, etc., are not permitted.

Application/Awards Process

Question: We will serve multiple districts; should we apply using a different application for each?

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Answer: You are welcome to apply using a single application. As a reminder, there is no minimum request and requests up to \$50,000 may be made without supplying additional justification. If the number of schools/districts being served requires funding beyond that cap, please provide the rationale in the Budget Request portion of the application.

Question: Can we submit our application early to receive feedback?

Answer: Unfortunately, early reviews are not possible.

Question: Is there a page limit?

Answer: No, there is no page limit.

Question: The guidelines indicate that bullets are welcome; are they acceptable or preferred?

Answer: There is no format preference. Applicants should format in whatever way they prefer.

Question: Can there be more than one grant awarded for the same region. For example - a community college and access organization applying for 2 different grants?

Answer: Yes. However, geographic diversity will be considered in making final awards.

Reimbursement

Question: How frequently can reimbursement requests be made?

Answer: Reimbursement requests can be made monthly.

Question: How long does reimbursement take after a request has been made?

Answer: Reimbursement typically takes approximately two business weeks.