The Choose Ohio First Program
Ohio Revised Code 3333.61 establishes the Choose Ohio First Scholarship Program as a component of the Ohio Innovation Partnership. Through a competitive process described in Ohio Revised Code 3333.62, the Choose Ohio First Scholarship Program assigned several scholarships to universities and colleges to recruit Ohio residents as undergraduate students in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) or STEM Education fields.

Choose Ohio First scholarships are student-centered grants from the state for participating eligible students to attend a university or college. As such, Choose Ohio First Scholarships are awarded to each participating eligible student as a grant to the state university or college the student is attending and are reflected on the student's tuition bill.

Ohio Administrative and Revised Codes
The COF Revised Code can be found at: http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/Search/3333.60 and the COF Administrative Code can be found at: http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3333-1-61v1.

*Update* Eligibility Requirements
- COF scholars must qualify for in-state tuition and be Ohio residents according to the Ohio Student Residency Administrative Rule, found at: http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3333-1-10/.
- Scholar must be an undergraduate Ohio resident or a graduate student who qualifies for scholarships under a specified recruitment initiative included in the approved program award.
- Scholars can be enrolled in full-time (12 or more credit hours) or part-time (anything less than 12 credit hours) study.
- Scholarships are only eligible to first year students, institutional and external transfer students, and students seeking certificates. The funds will be used to support those students with finishing their degree or certificate.
  - A COF scholarship may be awarded to a current institutional student transferring from a different Classification of Instruction Program (“CIP”) into a CIP covered by an institution’s agreement. An institutional transfer student must be at least a second-year student. Transfers should result in increased enrollment within the CIP code.
  - Former College Credit Plus (CCP) students are eligible for COF funding because COF considers them first-time, first-year students as they were not degree seeking when they were enrolled in CCP classes.
- Scholar must maintain enrollment in a STEM major and Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code for which the college or university sought and gained approval through the competitive process for program awards (as outlined in the institution’s award agreement).
  - A Choose Ohio First Scholar may change majors and remain eligible if the program is an approved STEM major and the approved CIP Code is in the institution’s award agreement.
  - If a scholar changes out of an approved CIP code major or withdraws from the academic program mid-year, the student will lose the scholarship for future terms.
- It is encouraged that scholars maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. If a student falls below this cumulative GPA, the institution must submit a scholar support plan each term when submitting
for reimbursement to the COF Payment System.

- Institution will inform each student of scholarship requirements and events that may eliminate the availability of the scholarship in future terms or years, including lack of funding from the state and performance by grantee.

*Update* Award Amounts

Through the competitive process, each college or university establishes the scholarship amount for its designated Choose Ohio First STEM or STEM education majors. For the 2021-2022 academic year:

- For scholars who have received their COF scholarship toward a baccalaureate or associate degree, a minimum per student award of $1,500 per academic year from ODHE dollars. If a student attends only one term, they must receive the minimum of $1,500 (with no refund check from COF money) or they cannot receive an award, including seniors in their final term.
  - This minimum amount does not need to be given within one term. If each student receives at least $1,500 between summer, fall, and spring terms, the institution complies with ORC 3333.66.
- For scholars who have received their COF scholarship toward a certificate program, a minimum per student award of $500 per academic year from ODHE dollars. If a student attends only one term, they must receive the minimum of $500 (with no refund check from COF money) or they cannot receive an award, including seniors in their final term.
  - This minimum amount does not need to be given within one term. If each student receives at least $500 between summer, fall, and spring terms, the institution complies with ORC 3333.66.
- A maximum per student award is $8,352 per academic year from ODHE dollars. Per Ohio Revised Code 3333.66, this is calculated annually as one-half of the highest in-state undergraduate instructional and general fees charged by all state universities.
- Modifications to the Project Budget must be approved by ODHE, by way of an amendment being fully executed by the parties. Awardee may modify, without an amendment, individual student scholarship amounts in compliance as long as scholarship amounts fall within the minimum and maximum award amounts set in ORC 3333.66.
  - Requests for modification shall be made in writing to the project administrator identified in Article III of the Grant Agreement.
  - ODHE reserves the right to make budget modifications based on annual evaluations of the performance of the institution. Modifications will be made to better attain the goals and objectives of the Project and of the State of Ohio. ODHE shall notify Awardee of any budget modification to its funding for student COF scholarships. Awardee should not communicate the awards to students until ODHE has released budget notifications or modifications.

Scholarship Use

Beyond instructional and general fees, book vouchers and meal plans are approved as an eligible use of COF funds. The student’s tuition bill shall reflect all eligible costs indicating this use. The entire grant must be used for scholarships, fellowships, grants, or other monetary or nonmonetary incentives to students, and not for administration.

General fees are defined as those assessed uniformly to all students and those that do not allow for a waiver to be offered to any student(s). For example, a fee charged to students to provide health care coverage would not be uniformly assessed if students can opt out, and therefore would not be considered a general fee.

COF Funding is primarily for undergraduate studies. If a scholar falls within the parameters of the exception mentioned under “Eligibility Requirements” for graduate students, they can receive funding. For undergraduate students dually enrolled in a bachelor and master’s program, their COF eligibility would be based on the number of credit hours being applied to their undergraduate courses.

Study Abroad and Internships

Students are eligible for COF funding during study abroad terms if the institution maintains documentation showing courses taken and tuition charges incurred at the study abroad institution. Tuition charges must be indicated on the student’s tuition bill and, in keeping with federal guidelines, the institution must keep this documentation in the event of an audit.
Students are eligible for COF funding during terms they are on co-op or internship if they are paying tuition for that term. It is up to the discretion of the institution whether they provide COF funding during terms that scholars are on co-op or internship.

**STEM Majors & Approved CIP Codes**

Institutions will only be reimbursed for scholars who are enrolled in CIP codes approved in the institution’s current award agreement(s). Any scholar submitted for payment under a CIP code not in the institution’s award agreement will not be provided payment.

- Student CIP codes submitted for payment need to match what is in the award agreement, data submitted in HEI and the COF payment system (CIP codes and degree level) should match.

**HEI System**

COF is part of the HEI system, which can be found at: [https://hei.ohiohighered.org](https://hei.ohiohighered.org). An institution’s financial aid liaison would need to grant access to individuals on their campus by going here: [https://heiauth.ohiohighered.org/](https://heiauth.ohiohighered.org/), click on accounts, then add a new account. Enter the new user’s info, select HEI Portal, and then the FINAID programs to access. A WebEx demonstration can be found here: [https://www.ohiohighered.org/hei/faqs-finaid](https://www.ohiohighered.org/hei/faqs-finaid) under HEI overview.

**COF File and Error Codes**

The COF payment file format, .csv file format, and error codes can be found at: [https://www.ohiohighered.org/content/hei_file_documentation_choose_ohio_first](https://www.ohiohighered.org/content/hei_file_documentation_choose_ohio_first)

**Payment Submissions and Reimbursement**

- The institution must submit the required data in the Choose Ohio First Payment System in HEI by the deadline. Any requests received after such time will not be reimbursed unless an institution received an extension. ODHE will distribute funds within 60 days of receipt of a complete and accurate student file.
- Windows for payment submission requests are listed below:
  - Summer semester window: July 1 to October 1
  - Autumn semester window: December 1 to March 1
  - Spring semester window: May 1 to September 1
- If a grantee needs to request an extension due to extenuating circumstances, a request must be made under the Institution Management tab of HEI before your window closes.
- Please be sure all student payment data (especially CIP code and degree level) are accurate and match the HEI files including the Student Enrollment (SN) file.

**Posting of Funds**

In alignment with federal policy, the institution should apply the funds requested as soon as administratively feasible but no later than three business days following the date the institution received those funds.

**Repayments of Over Awards**

If the institution has previously submitted a payment request that is greater than the amount the student was eligible to receive for that term, the refund adjustment must be submitted via the HEI system. When a refund adjustment is submitted in HEI during an academic year, the refund will be captured from the next COF disbursement. If no further disbursements will be made for the academic year, a refund check must be submitted to our office within 30 days of submitting the refund file.

If after 45 days the refund check is not submitted, the amount owed plus interest and any additional fees may be turned over to the Ohio Attorney General’s Office for collection. Any outstanding amounts owed should be sent by check to the program manager’s attention and payable to:
HEI Secure File Transfer Site
A student’s full social security number should never be sent in an e-mail. Secure files can be uploaded to the following site: https://heifx.ohiohighered.org/ Log in to the site with your COF system username and password and select ‘Choose Ohio First’ where it says, ‘Associate with Program’.

*New* Financial Aid Audits and Selective Service
The Ohio Revised Code authorizes the Chancellor to conduct financial aid audits of state-supported colleges and universities, proprietary, and non-profit private colleges and universities. All Ohio institutions with financial aid errors based on their prior year audit results will automatically be audited in an upcoming calendar year. Additional institutions may be audited by random selection in order to maintain our goal of auditing a set number of institutions yearly. Every institution will be audited at least once every three years. Further guidance from the Financial Aid Auditor will be forthcoming.

ODHE is aware of the recent federal implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act’s removal of selective service regarding the receipt of federal student aid, effective June 17, 2021. Ohio revised code section 3345.32 still requires compliance with the selective service law in order for a student to be eligible for any of Ohio’s state grants and scholarships. ORC 3345.32 Student Noncompliance with Selective Service can be found here: https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3345.32. As such, ODHE will still require selective service verification as part of the audit documentation process. If Ohio legislation is changed, ODHE will inform the campuses.

*Update* Program Accountability
- The Chancellor’s reporting requirements for the Choose Ohio First Scholarship Program require each awarded college or university to:
  - Submit appropriate data to HEI and COF Reporting System according to timelines established for those reporting periods;
  - Submit an Annual Report inclusive of fiscal and performance measures using the required template that will be sent out at the end of the academic year; and
  - Fulfill pledges of other institutional, public, or nonpublic resources and report on the Annual Report.
- Requires all students receiving a COF scholarship to be involved in work-based learning through a co-op, internship, experience in a university, college, or private laboratory, or other work-based learning experience.

Institutional Match
The institution is required to provide a match in a 1 to 1 ratio for each ODHE dollar received. All reasonable institutional, operational, and capital costs that are directly associated with delivering the project outcomes identified in the institution’s Choose Ohio First proposal may, in ODHE’s discretion, be counted as eligible institutional match. Institutional match may exceed the total amount awarded to the institution. The value of institutional, public, or private industry cooperative work experiences and internships shall count toward the statewide aggregate amount of other institutional, public, or private money. Institutional match can be accounted for on an annual, rather than term-by-term, basis, and must be expended in the fiscal year in which the COF funding was provided. All matching funds institutional and partners must be supported by appropriate documentation and records.

Examples of institutional match include but are not limited to:
- Scholarship/Tuition Assistance
- Salaries- Key Personnel (project director/coordinator, faculty, mentors, and others) as it relates directly to the project outcomes including approved CIP codes and the percentage of COF scholars served
• Benefits - Key Personnel (project director/coordinator, faculty, mentors, and others) as it relates directly to the project outcomes including approved CIP codes and the percentage of COF scholars served
• Salaries - Support Personnel (staff from financial aid, accounting, and other areas that support COF but do not have programmatic oversight) as it relates directly to the project outcomes including approved CIP codes and the percentage of COF scholars served
• Benefits - Support Personnel (staff from financial aid, accounting, and other areas that support COF but do not have programmatic oversight) as it relates directly to the project outcomes including approved CIP codes and the percentage of COF scholars served
• Contractual Services
• Equipment/Rental, Lease, Purchase
• Supplies and Materials
• Employee Travel
• Student Travel
• COF scholar research, internship, and co-op wages

Matching funds provided by institutional partners (public or private) may also be counted toward institutional match. Examples of partnership matching funds include, but are not limited to:

• Paid co-op or internship experiences
• Equipment donated to the program
• Donated time (salaries and benefits) for external partners contributing to the educational program

Financial aid personnel should direct questions to John Magill, Associate Vice Chancellor, Economic Development, 614.752-9530 jmagill@highered.ohio.gov