

Application For Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated February 2, 2011)

Funds are distributed on an academic year basis – Fall through August of each year. Applications for this program are not available before January 1st and are due no later than June 1st of each year for the next academic year (e.g., The deadline for Academic Year July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012 is June 1, 2011).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I apply for funding?

All applicants **must** use our web-based application that is hosted on the website of the RI Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA). The link to the DCYF page at RIHEAA is <https://secure.riheaa.org/DCYF> . **If you applied in 2010-11 for our funds, you will need to enter your user name and password that you created at that time.** If you are newly applying for our funds, you will need to create a username and a password to open an account. You will be asked for an email address. RIHEAA will send you an email to which you must respond for your account to be accessible to you. After you have entered your existing account or opened your new account, simply follow the directions on the application screens. **If you have not completed your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), you will need to complete that in order for us to process your application. Applications without a completed FAFSA will not be processed and you will not be able to receive funding.**

2. It is my understanding that, as a youth who was involved with DCYF, I am entitled to financial aid from DCYF for college. Is that true?

The DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program is funded through two separate sources, both with somewhat different rules for eligibility. **These are not true entitlement programs.** DCYF receives a set amount of money each year from each funding source and gives that money out based on youth who apply and meet eligibility criteria. **The Department does not make any funding decisions until after the annual deadline has passed so that we can look at all students who applied by the deadline, each students need and then distribute the money as fairly as possible. It is important to apply no later than the annual deadline of June 1st because, once we've committed our funds for the year, we can't get anymore to give out. We will not be accepting applications past this deadline!**

3. What are the two separate funding streams that make up the DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program?

- a. **DCFY State Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program:** This program was created by RI Law (see <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE42/42-72.8/INDEX.HTM> for the law) and funded by the RI General Assembly. DCYF receives \$200,000 each year to provide financial aid to youth who meet the criteria for DCYF involvement and who are full-time students at the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College or the University of Rhode Island. **Eligibility for DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program funds ends at age 21 unless you are participating in the program when you turn 21 – if you are, then you can remain eligible until you turn age 23 as long as meet the other criteria and you stay in school and are considered by the school to be in good academic standing.**
- b. **Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program:** This program was created by Federal Law (see <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/etv> for more information) and can be used for students attending a school which meets the federal Higher Education Act's definition of "Institution of Higher Education". While the amount DCYF receives for this varies from year to year, it

generally is about \$225,000 per year. Youth do not need to be attending full time and each youth identified as eligible can get no more than \$5,000 per academic year (which we define as the Fall Semester through the Summer Sessions of each year – e.g., Fall 2011 through Summer 2012). **Eligibility for ETV funds ends at age 21 unless you are participating in the program when you turn 21 – if you are, then you can remain eligible until you turn age 23 as long as you stay in school and are considered by the school to be in good academic standing.**

4. **I was told I only have to fill out this DCYF application one time and it covers me for the whole time I'm in school. Is that right?**

No. You must complete the DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program Application for each year you are attending school. If you fail to do so, we cannot consider you for funding for that year.

5. **If I get financial aid from DCYF, can I use it for any expenses I want?**

No. DCYF must use the “Cost of Attendance” as determined by the school you are attending. How a school determines what is included in “Cost of Attendance” can vary a little from school to school but generally includes things like tuition, room and board, and student fees. A helpful tool in looking at your school’s cost of attendance is the College Navigator website (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>). The information is sometimes a year behind but can at least show you what your school includes in the cost of attendance and help give you an idea of what your total cost for a semester/year might be for that school.

6. **I heard that DCYF won't make me take out loans for school and will cover any cost not covered by other grant and/or scholarship programs. Is that true?**

No. In fact, in 2010-11 DCYF was able to provide each student with no more than 30% of their unmet need as identified by their school before loans were considered (i.e., if a student's unmet need was \$10,000 before loans were considered, then their award from us was \$3,000. The student needed to find other ways, including loans, to cover the remaining \$7,000 of unmet need). This is due to the rising costs of attendance, the increased numbers of applicants and the level funding of our program.

DCYF uses the following formula to determine a student's unmet financial need:

Cost of Attendance (as determined by the school) – Private, Federal & State Grants and Scholarships (including Work/Study) = Unmet Student Need.

We try to cover as much of this unmet need as possible in order to reduce the amount of loans a student needs to take out. However, because we have so many more youth taking advantage of the DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program, we cannot guarantee a certain level of funding and we anticipate that all students, regardless of the school they are attending, will need to take out loans.

It is important to remember that students attending CCRI, RIC or URI have two potential DCYF funding sources from which to get help– the DCYF State Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. **If you are attending any other school, you can be considered only for the Chafee ETV Program.**

7. **How does DCYF decide if I am eligible for the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program? Can I use funds from the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant to pay for the cost of attendance at any school in the country?**

This grant program is limited to students at CCRI, RIC or URI who meet the following criteria:

- a. You must have been in DCYF foster care (defined as any out of home care except the RI Training School) on or after your sixteenth (16th) birthdate **and** you must have spent at least the last two years in foster care prior to your closing to DCYF. If you've already turned 18 before your initial application, you must have been in foster care from your 16th birthday to your 18th birthday. If you were adopted while in DCYF foster care, even if you were adopted at age 17,

you are not eligible for these funds; **and**

- b. You graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma not more than one year before the date of your initial application or must be expected to graduate at the end of the semester in which the application is made; **and**
- c. You are attending one of the following Rhode Island schools **on a full-time basis**: the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College or the University of Rhode Island; **and**
- d. Your school must consider you to be in **good academic standing** for you to keep getting these funds; **and**
- e. You must not have reached your 21st birthday when you first apply. If you are attending school and participating in the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program on your 21st birthday, (this includes if you turn 21 during the summer break as long as the school continues to view you as a student), you can remain eligible until your 23rd birthday as long as you meet the other criteria and you stay in school and are considered by the school to be in good academic standing.

8. How does DCYF decide if I am eligible for the ETV Program? Can I use the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Grant to pay for the cost of attendance at any school in the country?

Youth eligibility criteria are:

- a. You must have been in foster care (defined as any out of home care excluding the RI Training School) for at least one day on or after your 16th birthday **and the Department must have identified you as likely to remain in foster care until age 18** or you have already aged out of foster care at age 18). If you were adopted from foster care or placed in a relative guardianship placement after your 16th birthday, you can be considered for the ETV Program. Youth who were adopted from foster care or placed in relative guardianship before their 16th birthday are not eligible for this program; **and**
- b. You must not have reached your 21st birthday when you first apply. If you are attending school and participating in the ETV program on your 21st birthday, (this includes if you turn 21 during the summer break as long as the school continues to view you as a student), you can remain eligible until your 23rd birthday as long as you stay enrolled in a post secondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program; **and**
- c. You must be attending a school and academic program which meets the definition of an Institution of Higher Education according to Sections 101 and 102 of the federal Higher Education Act. For a full definition, see <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/programs/pdfs/hea1965.pdf>. A brief summary of the definition of an Institution of Higher Education is as follows:
 - i. Awards a bachelor's degree or not less than a 2 year program that provides credit towards a degree or,
 - ii. Provides not less than 1 year of training towards gainful employment or,
 - iii. Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.
- iv. In addition, the school must meet all three of the following criteria:
 - 1. Admits as regular students only persons with a high school diploma or equivalent; or admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance;
 - 2. Public, Private, or Non-Profit;
 - 3. Accredited or pre accredited and is authorized to operate in that state.

- d. Please note that a you can be a **part time** student and be eligible to receive ETV funding but the amount of funds we can give you is still based on the your unmet need as defined by the school. ETV funds are not provided to students who are simply taking classes without being in enrolled in a degree or certificate program.

9. Does DCYF send the financial aid check to me directly?

- a. No. Awards are issued directly to the student's school. After the school deducts any costs which they pay directly, they will usually give the student a check for the remaining amount. As with most post secondary financial aid programs, the student must use this money to pay for items related to the cost of attendance such as off-campus meals if the student lives off campus and is not part of the school's meal plan, books/supplies, off-campus rent, transportation to and from school, etc. These funds cannot be used to purchase durable assets (e.g., a car, a laptop) unless that is identified by your school as part of the Cost of Attendance and/or you receive separate approval from DCYF.

10. What happens if I drop out of college in the middle of a year/semester - do I have to pay DCYF back?

You must notify DCYF anytime your student status changes so that we can see if we have to change your funding for that year. As well, if you decide to leave school in the middle of a year and we haven't used all of the funds we set aside for you, we may be able to use those funds for other students.

- a. You will need to notify us that you have withdrawn and the date of your withdrawal. We will work with your school to determine whether or not any refunds are due to us. If you were given a check from the school to cover expenses not directly covered by your school, you may have to return funds to the school and/or DCYF. **You will need to discuss your situation with your school's financial aid office to determine what funds, if any, you need to pay back.**
- b. For example, if you live off-campus, you may get a check from the school which is intended to cover your rent while attending that school. If you withdraw before the end of the semester, you cannot use these funds for rent for the remaining time in that semester as you are no longer a student.

11. What happens if I don't get good grades in one semester – can I still get financial aid from DCYF for the next semester?

- a. Both the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program and the federal ETV Program require the student to be in good academic standing. We rely on your school to make this determination for us. If you are informed by the school that you are not in good academic standing, you need to notify us immediately. We will look at your situation and try to work with you to help you get back on track. We want you to succeed so we may not stop your funding immediately as long as you are working toward improvement.

For more information contact:

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