



Passport to College

Student Support Fund Guide

Student Support Fund Benefits and Challenges

Institutions have reported that student support funds (formerly incentive grants) are critical to overcoming barriers to student success.

Benefits

- Institutions are building support systems for Washington's most vulnerable students.
- Students are earning credentials, graduating, and transferring from community colleges to four-year universities.
- Building rapport is essential so students will reach out in times of crisis.
- When paired with food, activities have much better attendance.
- Coordination and involvement with community-based programs has increased campus success.

Challenges

- Student support funds can be difficult for the Passport Designated Support Staff to access at the institution.
- External issues can interfere in student success.

Passport Legislative Student Support Fund Budget Language

The Passport budget language from the legislature states:

Funds are provided for student scholarships, and for incentive payments to the college they attend for individualized student support services which may include, but are not limited to, college and career advising, counseling, tutoring, costs incurred for students while school is not in session, personal expenses, health insurance, and emergency services.

Using Student Support Funding

Passport student support fund budget language and program law allow for a broad range of services to foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth, in response to their unique needs. Funds can be used to help cover the costs of typical support services, such as one-on-one advising or helping cover staff salary, and atypical services such as the purchase of food for the student.

Student support funds may be used to help remove barriers (academic, financial, or personal) for Passport-eligible students. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) encourages the institution to use institutional student support funding in the academic year it is received; however, if not all funds are used, the institution must provide a plan for future student support fund use. Student support funds received must be expended within two years of receipt, and institutions will report annually on expenditures.

Some other examples of the support provided and paid for through Passport student support funds include the following:

- Staff salary for one-on-one mentoring, assistance, and advising with students
- Scholarship/financial aid assistance and navigation
- Tuition and fee assistance/entrance placement fees
- Welcome packet/backpacks and supplies/care packages
- Purchase of computers/creating a dedicated computer lab
- Educational planning/graduation assistance/transition services
- Book vouchers/development of a textbook and technology lending library
- Orientation specific to Passport students
- Tutoring/progress reports/mentoring
- Emergency financial assistance/budget development assistance
- Community resource information/referral to services
- Costs for medical and dental care/mental health assistance
- Food assistance
- Housing assistance/priority for campus housing and help with dorm supplies
- Transportation/parking assistance
- Incentives for meeting academic achievements
- Childcare assistance
- Passport student social events/participation in campus clubs

Navigating Challenges for Accessing Funds

Some institutions have reported difficulty in accessing Passport student support funds to help students. To help overcome barriers to spending student support funds to help eligible students, Passport campus administrators—for example the Designated Support Staff (DSS)—can:

Financial Aid

- Work closely with the financial aid office and maintain a good working relationship with the financial aid administrator who is responsible for packaging Passport awards.
- Check the student's financial aid budget. Is the student coded correctly as an independent student for financial aid purposes? Occasionally, students will incorrectly mark the FAFSA as "living at home," resulting in a smaller budget.
- Help the student fill out the FAFSA correctly or provide FAFSA completion training to the Passport students (either in-house or in the community).
- Confirm the number of terms the student is taking for the academic year. The student's budget can be adjusted for a three, six, nine, or 12-month budget.
- Check the number of credits the student is taking. In order to receive the Passport scholarship, students must attend at least half-time. Are they coded correctly for full-time, $\frac{3}{4}$ time, or half-time? If adjusting the student's credits, make sure financial aid is notified in a timely manner so they are able to update the student's award to match their actual enrollment.

Funding Access

- When requesting student support funds, attach a copy of the Use of Funds Memo from WSAC (see memo below) to the purchase order. The Use of Funds Memo provides the Passport budget language and describes how student support funds may be used.
- If your institution has a contracts office, ask them to set up a specific account for Passport student support funds. These funds should be kept separate from financial aid/business office general funds, and should be made easily accessible to the DSS if a student has an emergent need.
- Designate a budget officer (or like position) who is well versed in Passport student support fund permissible use to work closely with the Passport DSS.
- If using purchase orders to use student support funds, be sure to collect a business ID from the vendor. This would be used, for example, when using student support funds to secure a deposit for a student's apartment. Some businesses may not feel comfortable sharing their tax ID with the student but are willing to share it with the Passport DSS.



October 1, 2021

TO: Passport Viable Plan Institutions

FROM: Dawn Cypriano-McAferly
Passport to College Program

SUBJECT: PASSPORT STUDENT SUPPORT FUND GUIDANCE – USE OF FUNDS

Institutions have asked for additional guidance or documentation on how Passport student support funds can be used. The program’s budget language is broad and reads:

Funds are provided for student scholarships, and for incentive payments to the colleges they attend for individualized student support services which may include, but are not limited to, college and career advising, counseling, tutoring, costs incurred for students while school is not in session, personal expenses, health insurance, and emergency services.

Passport designated support staff on campuses report the student support funding has been invaluable to improve the coordination of services and involvement with community-based programs. Building a rapport with Passport students early is essential and is especially helpful during a time of crisis.

Institutions report that student support funding has allowed designated support staff to offer food with activities and provide resources that are unique to students from foster care. Some common uses of student support funds include targeted services, such as financial planning seminars, private study areas and access to computer labs, special orientations and welcome functions and access to additional pre-enrollment, academic, personal and career services.

Student support funds may also be used for general purposes. These purposes include emergency loans, wages, textbooks for a lending library, a resource loan library that included computers and other electronic equipment, gift cards to grocery stores, gasoline or transit passes to help with transportation costs, college survival backpacks and school supplies, healthy snacks, warm clothes including socks, hats, boots, gloves and coats, medical bills, housing expenses, and testing fees.

Please note that if the institution uses student support funds to award a student a gift card, gas card, or another source of cash assistance, it must be considered a “resource” for financial aid purposes. For more information, contact the financial aid staff on your campus.

WSAC encourages institutions to use student support funds in the academic year it is received, however, if not all funds are used, the institution must provide a plan for future student support fund use. Student support funds received must be expended within two years of receipt.

If you have any questions about the use of student support funds, you may contact me at 360-753-7846 or email dawnc@wsac.wa.gov.

Other Important References

RCW 28B117-030

(5)(d) *In designing and implementing the passport to college promise student support program under this section, the office, in consultation with and with assistance from the state board for community and technical colleges, shall ensure that a participating college or university:*

(i) *Has a viable plan for identifying students eligible for assistance under this section, for tracking and enhancing their academic progress, for addressing their unique needs for assistance during school vacations and academic interims, and for linking them to appropriate sources of assistance in their transition to adulthood;*

(ii) *Receives financial and other incentives for achieving measurable progress in the recruitment, retention, and graduation of eligible students.*

WAC 250-83-060

Institutional incentive grant to provide student support services.

Institutional incentive grants are grant payments to institutions based on satisfactory student performance. The payment is available only to institutions agreeing to provide specified student support services.

Institutional participation in the passport incentive grant is voluntary. An otherwise eligible student can receive a passport scholarship to attend an eligible college even if the institution does not participate in the incentive grant option.

For the 2008-09 academic year, and to the extent that funds are allotted for this purpose, the amount of each incentive grant payment will be equal to five hundred dollars per successful student per quarter or seven hundred fifty dollars per semester. The payment amounts in succeeding years will be determined annually.

Participating institutions will meet the following criteria:

(1) Include on their applications for admission or on their registration materials a question asking whether the applicant has been in foster care in Washington state for at least one year since his or her sixteenth birthday. All other institutions of higher education, whether participating in the incentive grant or not, are strongly encouraged to include this question on their admission application.

(2) Have a viable plan. The scope of a viable plan is one that generally:

(a) Identifies those students eligible for assistance under this program;

(b) Tracks and enhances academic progress of eligible students;

(c) Addresses their unique needs for assistance during school vacation and academic interims; and

(d) Links eligible students to appropriate sources of assistance in their transition to adulthood.

At a minimum, each institution's viable plan will:

(i) Designate campus support staff;

(ii) Provide a comprehensive financial aid package taking into account available federal, state, institutional and private funding that, to the extent possible, meets the student's financial need;

(iii) Build a lasting institutional commitment to serve current and former foster youth; and

(iv) As appropriate, communicate with social services and independent living providers.

(3) Institutions choosing to participate will sign an addendum. The addendum to the state student financial aid participation agreement specifies the services that are to be provided through the institution's viable plan.

(4) Institutions may receive incentive grants for the:

(a) Student's initial enrollment at the institution.

(b) Student's enrollment in subsequent terms providing satisfactory progress was maintained for the previous term.