



# Passport to College Student Support Fund Guide

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## 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.

Incentive 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 incentive grant 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 incentive grant 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.



September 7, 2023

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 (PSSF) 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 PSSF 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 PSSF 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 PSSF 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.

PSSF 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.

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

If you have any questions about the use of PSSF money, you may contact me at 360-753-7846 or email [dawnc@wsac.wa.gov](mailto:dawnc@wsac.wa.gov).