

## **Section 18004 CARES Act - Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) Emergency Student Grants**

### **Background**

In late March 2020, President Trump signed the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act). This Act created an education stimulus package that included a Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), which contained over \$6 billion for postsecondary education emergency grants to students who experienced a disruption of their education as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. RTI/C was allocated \$105,153 on May 15, 2020 to award to students who experienced expenses related to campus disruptions caused by COVID-19. None of the funds under this allocation will be used by the institution.

### **Eligibility**

Any student who is eligible to receive federal student financial assistance\*, who is enrolled in an eligible program\*\*, and who was not exclusively enrolled in a distance education program at the time of the declaration of the coronavirus national emergency (3/13/2020) is eligible for grant assistance under the HEERF.

\*Students must be eligible to benefit from Title IV FSA funds to receive HEERF Grants. Students do not have to be FSA recipients, but they must be eligible for FSA funds. Students who are enrolled in an eligible program and have an ISIR on file with no eligibility restrictions due to C codes (default, selective service registration, citizenship, etc.) are eligible for FSA funds.

\*\*RTI/C is required, per Rolla 31 School Board Policies and Procedures, to have all disbursements approved at a School Board meeting. The schedule for meetings is posted on the School District's website and deadlines for items to be approved at meetings are generally about two weeks prior to the meeting. Because the HEERF funds are intended to help enrolled students, RTI/C will not disburse funds to any student who will not be enrolled at the time of the actual disbursement.

### **Award Calculations**

HEERF Grants are intended to be used for expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to the coronavirus (including eligible expenses under a student's cost of attendance such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care, and child care).

Students enrolled in eligible programs at RTI/C when the coronavirus national emergency was declared on March 13, 2020 experienced significant disruptions as programs were moved from meeting on campus to meeting online for web-enhanced learning shortly thereafter. RTI/C determined that all students would have qualifying expenses related to this disruption and decided to use an award methodology that includes a base grant award amount for all eligible students and an application process to request additional grant funds for students with qualifying expenses in excess of the base award amount. Since all students would have qualifying expenses, establishing a base grant award was deemed appropriate to reduce the application burden for students and make the funds more immediately available as intended by the CARES Act.

### *Base Grant Award*

Prior to the campus disruption due to the coronavirus, much of the student population relied on a phone and data plan for technology usage and internet connectivity. Web-enhanced learning was not a required component of RTI/C's programs before the campus disruption.

As campus operations shifted to web-enhanced learning, the robust requirements of web-enhanced learning platforms required all students to have a computer with good hardware specifications, a current operating system, a microphone, and a camera. Additionally, students needed high speed internet with adequate upload and download speeds. A conservative estimate for students to purchase an adequate computer, add or upgrade their internet service, and pay for that service over the period of the disruption is \$1,000.

In addition to the computer and internet requirements, students also needed supplies that are normally provided at school and the ability to print. Plus, the additional time at home during the disruption resulted in higher utility and food bills. The closure of elementary and secondary schools also resulted in new childcare costs for students during class time. A conservative estimate for the cost of supplies, a printer, and increased utilities, food, and childcare over the period of the disruption is \$500.

Using this conservative estimate of known expenses related to the campus disruption due to the coronavirus, RTI/C established a base grant award amount of \$1,500 for all eligible students. All eligible students will sign a statement accepting or rejecting this base award amount and certifying that it will be used for eligible expenses related to the campus disruption due to the coronavirus.

### *Application Process for Additional Grant Awards*

The base grant award amount was developed using conservative estimates of known expenses. RTI/C recognizes that these are unprecedented times and that students may have eligible expenses related to the campus disruption due to the coronavirus that exceed the base award amount. To this end, we have created an application that students can use to request additional grant funds.

All applications and supporting documentation will be reviewed by the Financial Aid Department and approved by the Financial Aid Director. Requests will be approved, all or in part, or denied based on whether the expenses exceeded the \$1,500 base award amount, were qualifying expenses under the cost of attendance, and were deemed related to the campus disruption due to the coronavirus.

### **Award Payments**

All HEERF funds awarded will be paid by check directly to the student. RTI/C will not retain any HEERF funds to pay a student's current or future charges. Separate accounting will be maintained and the funds, which are not FSA funds, will not be recorded on the student ledger.

### **Reporting**

RTI/C will comply with all reporting requirements for HEERF funds. RTI/C received its allocation on May 15, 2020 and post the required report to its website within 30 days of this date. RTI/C will also update the required report every 45 days for the duration of the grant period, which is May 14, 2021.

The current reporting requirements are:

1. An acknowledgement that the institution signed and returned to the Department the Certification and Agreement and the assurance that the institution has used, or intends to use, no less than 50 percent of the funds received under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act to provide Emergency Financial Aid Grants to students.
2. The total amount of funds that the institution will receive or has received from the Department pursuant to the institution's Certification and Agreement [for] Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students.
3. The total amount of Emergency Financial Aid Grants distributed to students under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act as of the date of submission (i.e., as of the 30-day Report and every 45 days thereafter).
4. The estimated total number of students at the institution eligible to participate in programs under Section 484 in Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and thus eligible to receive Emergency Financial Aid Grants to students under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act.
5. The total number of students who have received an Emergency Financial Aid Grant to students under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act.
6. The method(s) used by the institution to determine which students receive Emergency Financial Aid Grants and how much they would receive under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act.
7. Any instructions, directions, or guidance provided by the institution to students concerning the Emergency Financial Aid Grants.