

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund Process
for
Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students
May 5, 2020

The CARES Act designates funds under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to provide direct grant assistance to students to cover expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus (each, a “grant”). The following sets forth the process Illinois Institute of Technology (“Illinois Tech”) will use to distribute funds to students consistent with applicable regulations.

Eligible Students

Students must be Title IV eligible to receive HEERF grants, and a valid FAFSA for the 2019-20 academic year must be on file with Illinois Tech for HEERF grant consideration. Any items preventing a student with a valid FAFSA from receiving Title IV aid (i.e., SAP ineligibility, outstanding federal verification, or c-codes) will also preclude a student from receiving a HEERF grant. Per HEERF guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education, schools have discretion over further awarding details, and Illinois Tech has elected to award HEERF grants only to current degree-seeking undergraduate students (full or part time). Within this population, Illinois Tech will prioritize students with higher need. Students graduating in Spring 2020 are eligible through June 30, 2020 in alignment with the end of the federal funding period for the 2019-20 academic year.

Application Process

Students will need to apply for HEERF grants so Illinois Tech has documentation of what expenses students are facing as a result of the disruption of university operations due to the coronavirus. Students will apply through the Office of Financial Aid’s [Student Assistance Form](#) where a HEERF category will be designated. The application will prompt students to indicate the type of such expenses they are facing: food, housing (including cost to move off campus), course materials, health care, child care, technology-related expenses, transportation (such as travel home from study abroad), and other. Students will also be prompted to describe their circumstance so the Office of Financial Aid can, in accordance with the Professional Judgment guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education, understand if the student needs further financial support. Students will be encouraged to apply immediately upon release of the application form. Students who have already submitted the assistance form for other financial consideration need not reapply. Applicants will be reviewed in the order received and the portion of the grant designated for appeals (see methodology section) will be awarded on a first come first serve basis. Grants will begin being distributed the first week in May upon opening of the application.

Methodology

In order to distribute funds as widely as possible while maintaining equity, student applicants will have need calculated through a direct cost need assessment. While funds are to be *used* for expenses, the need calculation allows for Illinois Tech to consider a family’s ability to respond nimbly to the coronavirus related expenses in the *awarding* process.

The direct cost need assessment takes the total net charges for the spring term minus the student’s expected family contribution (EFC) (at half the academic year value) minus the student’s total financial assistance (including institutional scholarships, donor scholarships, tuition remission, third party contracts, and federal and state grants). Federal loans and federal work study are not included. Any remaining need is calculated against the total direct cost for the term to determine what percent of need was met for those costs. The unmet need percent will then be used to calculate a minimum grant amount.

Grant amounts will range from a minimum award of \$300 going up progressively in \$100 increments to a maximum of \$6200 (in alignment with the 2019-20 Pell Grant maximum) with greater amounts going to students with greater need.

The student's unmet need percentage will be calculated against a baseline of \$5,000 to determine a student's individual relief fund value. All students who had to travel home once the campus closed due to the coronavirus will receive an additional \$300 to compensate for expenses incurred in returning home. The baseline value was determined based on the total institutional relief grant against the maximum eligible student body; this baseline puts the university in a position to have as far reaching impact as possible through the relief funds while prioritizing those with the greatest need.

Financial aid has an existing appeal structure through which it is anticipated further needs will arise. Thus, a portion equal to one third of the allocation has been set aside for financial aid appeals where increased expenses are uncovered or information provided necessitates a recalculation of the student's need calculation. Funds awarded through this part of the process will be on top of the need assessment formula. This may result in a student receiving greater than \$5,300 but no more than \$6200 (again, to avoid exceeding the 19-20 Pell Grant maximum).

Awarding Process

Upon submission, each application will be reviewed individually through the Office of Financial Aid. As a situation warrants, in the Financial Aid Officer's professional judgment, the need calculation will be adjusted based on the information contained in the application (i.e., either increased costs or a change of situation that impacts EFC/need calculation). The direct cost need calculation will then be used to determine the total amount awarded to the student. Any EFC adjustments made will follow the separate Professional Judgement guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education. Upon completion of the process, students will receive personal communication indicating the value of the grant, the timeline for distribution, and remind students of the intent of the funds. Again, students ineligible for Title IV aid based on outstanding federal aid requirements will not be awarded funds nor will co-terminal students who have completed all bachelor's requirements.

Distribution

A new accounting code, detail code, and financial aid fund code will be created for HEERF funds. To maximize existing systems, all HEERF funds will be added to the student's financial aid award record in Banner and disbursed to the student bill. Per the HEERF guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education, the funds will not count against the student's estimated financial assistance nor will the funds reduce any outstanding balance on the bill. The funds will flow through this system as it has been determined the quickest method for notifying students of their awards and getting the funds to them; it also will enable the tracking awards and spending to facilitate reporting. Students will be able to see the funds on their student portal. Students will be encouraged to submit their direct deposit information in TouchNet in order to receive the funds in the fastest timeline possible. Students without direct deposit available will have a paper check cut and mailed to their current address as indicated on the assistance form submission.

Communication

All current Title IV eligible students will be communicated with regarding the purpose of the HEERF funds and the application process.

Reporting

The mechanism for reporting is pending with the U.S. Department of Education. However, schools must report how grants were distributed to students, how the amount of each grant was calculated, the instructions and directions given to students about the grant, and a confirmation the school has continued to pay all employees and contractors to the greatest extent possible. The Office of Financial Aid will be responsible for making all required reports, and will undertake this effort in coordination with other relevant offices. The first reporting deadline is May 9, 2020, which is the thirtieth day after Illinois Tech signed its Funding Certification and Agreement Form). Reporting is then required every 45 days thereafter.