

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund III PROPOSAL
for
Emergency Financial Grants to Students
July 20, 2021

The America Rescue Plan (ARP) included additional funds under the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) model, established under the CARES Act, to distribute direct grant assistance to students. Schools were allocated specific values to spend on emergency grants to students.

Eligible Students

Eligibility for this round of HEERF funds has been expanded to include anyone enrolled on or after March 2020, when the national emergency declaration began in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Illinois Tech will use enrollment from this timeline to establish eligibility. Per guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, schools must prioritize students with “exceptional need” along with those designated as undergraduate and establish awarding details accordingly. HEERF III funds can be applied to charges or expenses from March 2020 through the present term including items in the student’s cost of attendance, as well as emergency costs due to coronavirus.

Initial Distribution

Students unable to pay prior term balances in full to the university have demonstrated exceptional need as these students are unable to fulfill the necessary financial obligation to pursue their education (and cannot continue enrollment as a result). Illinois Tech will distribute a portion of grant funds to students carrying a balance with the university who were enrolled on or after March 2020. Each grant recipient will receive the amount outstanding up to \$3,000 at maximum.

Pell Grant and MAP Grant recipients have been identified as populations with known exceptional need and difficulty responding to emergency expenses. Illinois Tech will distribute a portion of grant funds to Pell Grant and MAP Grant recipients enrolled in the Fall 2021 term outright. Each grant recipient will receive \$2,000; students receiving both grants will receive one distribution. This population can also submit an application (see below) to be considered for additional grant funds based on additional need.

Remaining Distribution

Students whose FAFSA does not accurately capture their family’s current financial situation often have difficulty responding to unexpected expenses. The use of prior year tax information on the most recent FAFSA means students enrolled in the upcoming academic year whose family income was impacted by the pandemic will not have this reflected in their most recent financial aid offer. Illinois Tech will distribute a portion of grant funds to students who process a professional judgement EFC adjustment as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education during the 2021-22 academic year. Each grant will be a minimum of \$1,000 until funds are fully spent. Additional funds may be granted depending on the severity of need by the student.

Similarly, students who are designated Unaccompanied Homeless Youth per the U.S. Department of Education criteria, often face needs beyond other students pursuing higher education. Illinois Tech will distribute a portion of grant funds to students who provide documentation or complete the required

interview process to show their designation as unaccompanied homeless youth per federal definitions during the 2021-22 academic year. Each grant will be a minimum of \$1,500 until funds are fully spent.

Remaining students will need to apply for HEERF III grants so Illinois Tech can decipher and prioritize the neediest students. Grants will be determined based on the severity of need as demonstrated in their personal expenses and circumstances expressed by the student on the application. Students eligible for the FAFSA will have that application reviewed to contextualize their HEERF application. Students ineligible to complete the FAFSA will be encouraged to submit documentation with their application to demonstrate their need as it relates to their circumstance. Grant amounts will range from a minimum award of \$300 going up progressively in \$100 increments to a maximum of \$6,500 (in alignment with the 2021-22 Pell Grant maximum) with greater amounts going to students with greater demonstrated need.

Application Process

Students will apply through the Office of Financial Aid's HEERF application form (link forthcoming). This application will prompt students to identify which costs they may need assistance with (from the COA or coronavirus related) along with a prompt to describe their personal circumstance and upload any supporting documentation. This information will serve the Office of Financial Aid in determining individual student need (see awarding process section) along with understanding if the student may benefit from further financial support through Professional Judgment or Unaccompanied Homeless Youth guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed in the order received. The portion of the grant remaining after the initial outstanding balance and Pell Grant and MAP Grant recipient distribution will be awarded on a first come first serve basis to applicants until the allocation is fully distributed.

Awarding Process

Upon submission, each application will be reviewed individually through the Office of Financial Aid. As a situation warrants, in the Financial Aid Office'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). Any EFC adjustments made will follow the separate Professional Judgment 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, instructions on the billing application form (link forthcoming), and remind students of the intent of the funds.

To ensure equity, the Office of Financial Aid will collaborate with key university partners as needed to best understand information or details submitted through the application process. This includes but is not limited to input from the Kent Financial Aid Director, the International Center Director, the University Bursar, the University Registrar, Residence Hall Directors, and the Dean of Students.

Distribution

The university created fund codes to distribute HEERF grants after the passing of the CARES and CRRSA Acts, one to be directly distributed to the student and the other to apply to a student's bill, if authorized by the student. Funds are not contingent upon completion of the billing authorization form. All HEERF

funds (regardless of consent for billing application) will be added to the student's financial aid record in Banner and disbursed to the student bill. Students who provided the billing authorization form will have the grant applied directly to any current charges and any excess will be distributed to the student via their direct deposit information on file. Students with no consent will have the funds distributed through direct deposit. For any student without direct deposit information in TouchNet, a paper check will be cut and mailed to their current address.

Communication

All students with an outstanding balance will be communicated to regarding the initial distribution, with instructions on completing the optional billing authorization form. Similarly, Pell and MAP Grant recipients will be communicated to regarding the initial distribution, with instructions on completing the optional billing authorization form. Thereafter, all students enrolled for the Fall 2021 term will be communicated to regarding the purpose of the HEERF III funds and the application process. In this communication, it will be noted that additional support will be available to those who have hardship situations that warrant an EFC recalculation through the professional judgement process or who meet the federal criteria for unaccompanied homeless youth. Students who the Financial Aid Office is aware of that already meet one of these distinctions will receive more personal outreach to engage the student for the 2021-22 academic year to see if criteria are still met.

Reporting

Details on award usage will likely be reported to the U.S. Department of Education similar to the CARES Act reporting. As further guidance is offered, the Office of Financial Aid will make all reports and/or work closely with appropriate campus offices to do so.