**SWASFAA 2020 Board**

CARES Act and Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) conversation

**April 20, 2020**

***School application***

*Have you applied for your school’s allocation on grants.gov?*

While most schools have applied already on grants.gov, at least one school is waiting to finalize their plan of identifying students and awarding/disbursing, following additional guidance from ED, before turning in their application on Grants.gov.

***Drawdown of funds***

*Have you received your school’s allocation of funds?*

As of April 20th, no one has received funds yet.

***Student recipients***

*Will* ***all*** *of your students receive some funds? Or are you defining cohorts of students?*

Most institutions are utilizing some sort of application process; some even have an existing emergency aid application they have modified, adding a yes/no response box to indicate whether the student has incurred expenses related to COVID-19 disruptions.

A few institutions will give funds to *all* students. Some are defining a flat amount for all students, but will be granting a slightly higher amount to Pell recipients.

The current plan at one institution is to award funds to all students now, but reserving some funds specifically for students who had to forego the FWS earnings and had no other means to pay the expenses they would ordinarily pay with their income.

One institution’s current plan is to give some funds to all students, but the FA Director’s concern is that if all students receive funds, how will it be documented that all students actually incurred COVID related expenses? Because the reporting requirements are as yet relatively unclear, she is concerned this could become problematic after funds are released and reporting requirements begin.

One institution is looking at defining a per credit hour “award” amount, rather than a flat amount to all students, so the per student assistance amount is aligned to the Spring enrollment.

A couple of schools have health professions students whose clinical components have been halted, so one of the groups defined have been the graduating students who will not be finishing on time.

There are some groups specifically excluded, like dual enrollment students, DACA students, and international students. *\*ED published additional guidance 04/21/20, after this conversation, that specifically outlines student eligibility. Please see the FAQs* [*here*](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/heerfstudentfaqs.pdf)*.\**

*Will you allow repeat applications?*

Because the “end time” of the disruptions is a huge unknown factor, many institutions recognize the fact that a one time “award” may not resolve the students’ financial difficulties. They are setting a maximum amount of relief funds, and will accept repeat requests/applications up to that defined maximum amount.

*Are you seeing a general increase in financial aid requests?*

As students await relief, some have turned to the FA office to see if they have remaining aid eligibility. However, this response seems to be on a small scale, whether the students are reluctant to take on additional loans just yet, or they simply know they have no remaining eligibility to ask about.

*Who is involved in making the decisions about the students?*

Some FA offices are being left out of the conversation altogether, with a group like the President’s Cabinet making the decisions, while others are at least being heard in the larger conversation on their campuses.

A couple of branch campus offices are represented on the SWASFAA Board, and all consistently said that the decision about the “awarding” process is being handled at the main campus level, and that the branch campus will simply be informed once decisions are made.

*Are you intending to save a portion for 20-21 potential PJ-like situations?*

Many said it will all depend on:

·         How many applications are received during the initial request period?

·         How long will the disruptions really last?

·         Since so much is unknown regarding the second 50% of the HEERF funds, will some of those funds be able to continue to go to student relief? Or will that portion only be allowed to be used toward institutional disruption?

 One institution has specifically committed to reserving some of the funds to the Fall 2020 incoming class, with an application process at that time that will be very similar to the current application.

Specific to the PJ process, not related to HEERF funds, one institution is entertaining the thought of making a special circumstances form specifically indicating income loss, potentially making 20-21 PJs easier to process, given the expected increase in professional judgment requests that will be made in the 20-21 year.

One institution cited the institutional policy they utilized during the impact of the 2008 recession and if the *dislocated worker* field was indicated on the ISIR, their checklist setup was modified to add a loss of income form; they may revisit something like this for 20-21 processing to ease the initial request of documentation from students and families.

***The processing of the funds***

Of those on the call, there was a mixture in how the institutions will be processing the funds once they are available for disbursement to the students:

Some will be processing through financial aid, with the setup being modified accordingly so it doesn’t affect 19-20 aid packages, then disbursed through the Bursar’s Office or Business Office, bypassing any outstanding charges

Some will be processing through their Accounts Payable process as a stipend

During the call, several institutions said they would use an opt-in feature to allow a student’s funds to be applied to an outstanding balance, if allowed per guidance. However, from the 04/21 [guidance](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/heerfstudentfaqs.pdf), ED made it clear this would not be allowed.