Application for Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program

Frequently Asked Questions

(Updated June 24, 2026)

Funds are distributed on an academic year basis. (July 1 of each year through June 30 of each year)

1. **Do I have to do a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)?**

   YES! If you have not finished your FAFSA, we can't get the information we need to process your DCYF grant application. **NO FAFSA, NO DCYF GRANT! Use this website https://studentaid.gov/ to fill out your FAFSA – remember it is a free service so don't let anyone try to sell you a story that you have to pay for this! If you need help filling it out, you may want to contact the College Planning Center of RI at** https://www.risla.com/ **for free assistance or you can let us know and we will get you the help you need.**

2. **How do I apply for this money?**

   The only way to apply is through our web-based application found here: https://higheredgrant.dcyf.ri.gov/

3. **Somebody told me that this program is an entitlement – that because I was involved with DCYF, I can automatically get the money to help with college or a trade school. Is that right?**

   NO! Like any program, there are rules that say who can get money from this program. We get the money from two places– the federal (Chafee Educational and training Voucher – ETV) and the State of Rhode Island (DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant) and the rules are a little different for each.

   We only get so much money each year and we try to make sure we reach as many youth as possible.

   Once we have awarded all of our money for the year, we can't give out any more awards.

4. **So, where does this money come from again?**

   The short answer is from anyone who pays taxes in Rhode Island and in the United States. The details are:

   a. **DCYF State Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program:** DCYF gets $200,000 each year for the DCYF State Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program. This program provides grants to youth who are eligible based on their time with DCYF (we lay this out in more detail later) and who are part-time or full-time students at the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, or the University of Rhode Island. It also can be used to support students who are participating in a CCRI Workforce Development Program that is approved by the RI Office of the Post-Secondary Education Commissioner. As long as you apply each year and stay in good academic standing with your school, **you can keep getting the grant until the academic year you turn 23.**

   b. **John H. Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program:** If you are eligible for the ETV program (more detail later), you can use it at any program that meets the federal definition of an "Institution of Higher Education" (basically if your school can give you other federal student aid such as a Pell grant, then it qualifies). The amount DCYF gets each year changes, but it is usually about $200,000 each year. Youth must be at least part-time students and each eligible youth can get no more than $5,000 per academic year for up to five years or through the academic year they turn 23.(Academic year is defined as July 1st through June 30th**.** As long as you apply each year and stay in good academic standing with your school, **you can keep getting the grant until the academic year you turn 23.**

5. **I was told I only have to fill out this DCYF application one time and it covers me for the whole time I'm in school. Is that right?**

   No. You must complete the DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program Application for each year you are attending school. If you fail to do so, we cannot consider you for funding for that year.

6. **So, when I get the money, can I use it for anything I want?**

   No. You can use this grant only for what your school includes as part of your "Cost of Attendance". Each school is a little different with how they decide what to include but it is usually includes things like room, board, and student fees. A helpful tool in looking at your school's cost of attendance is the College Navigator website at http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/.

7. **I heard that DCYF won't make me take out loans for school and will cover any cost not covered by other grant and/or scholarship programs. Is that true?**

   No. DCYF uses the following formula to determine a student's unmet financial need:

   > **Cost of Attendance (as determined by the school) -** Private, Federal & State Grants and Scholarships (including Work/Study) **= Unmet Student Need.**

   We try to cover the highest percentage of this unmet need as possible to help reduce the amount of loans a student needs to take out. **However, because we have so many more youth taking advantage of the DCYF Post-Secondary Tuition Assistance Program, we cannot guarantee a certain level of funding and we anticipate that all students, regardless of the school they attend, will need to take out loans.**

8. **How does DCYF decide if I am eligible for the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Sub-Program? Can I use funds from the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant to pay for the cost of attendance at any school in the country?**

   This grant sub-program is limited to covering a percentage of the unmet needs at CCRI, RIC or URI for students who meet all of the following criteria:

   a. You must have been in DCYF foster care (defined as any out of home care except the Training School) for at least 6 non-consecutive months on or after their 14th birthday. Time as a participant in the Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Program count toward this six month requirement. If you were adopted or placed in guardianship while in DCYF foster care after your 16th birthday and you otherwise meet these requirements, you are also eligible;

   b. You graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma not more than one year before the date of your initial application or must be expected to graduate at the end of the semester in which the application is made; **and**

   c. You are attending the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), Rhode Island College (RIC) or the University of Rhode Island (URI) a part-time or full time basis or you are participating in a Workforce Development Program at CCRI that is approved for this grant by the RI Office of the Post-Secondary Education Commissioner; **and**

d. Your school must consider you to be in **good academic standing.**

You will continue to be eligible through the academic year in which you turn 23 years old.

9. **How does DCYF decide if I am eligible for the ETV Sub-Program? Can I use the ETV Grant to pay for the cost of attendance at any school in the country?**

   Youth eligibility criteria are:

   a. You must have been in foster care (defined as any out of home care excluding the RI Training School) for at least one day on or after your 16th birthday **and the Department must have identified you as likely to remain in foster care until age 18** or you have already aged out of foster care at age 18. Young adults who are participants in the Voluntary Extension of Care Program are eligible. If you were adopted from foster care or placed in a relative guardianship placement after your 16th birthday, you can be considered for the ETV Program. Youth who were adopted from foster care or placed in relative guardianship before their 16th birthday are not eligible for this program: **and**

   b. You must be a US Citizen or eligible Non-Citizen (Permanent Resident)

   c. You must be attending a school and academic program which meets the definition of an Institution of Higher education (http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1001/)the definition of an Institution of Higher Education is as follows:

      i. Awards a bachelor's degree or not less than a 2-year program that provides credit towards a degree or,

      ii. Provides not less than 1 year of training towards gainful employment or,

      iii. Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years

      iv. In addition, the school must meet all three of the following criteria:

         1. Admits as regular students only persons with a high school diploma or equivalent; or admits as regular students' persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance;

         2. Public, Private, or Non-Profit;

         3. Accredited or pre accredited and is authorized to operate in that state.

   d. You must be at least a **part-time** student to be eligible to receive ETV funding but the amount of funds we can give you is still based on your unmet need as defined by your school. **ETV funds are not given to students who are simply taking classes without being enrolled in a degree or certificate program.**

10. **Does DCYF send the money to me directly?**

    No. The grant money is issued directly to the student's school. After the school deducts any costs which they pay directly, they will usually give the student a check for the remaining amount (if there is any money left). As with most financial aid programs, the student must use this money to pay for items related to the cost of attendance such as off-campus meals if the student lives off campus and is not part of the school's meal plan, books/supplies off-campus rent, transportation to and from school, etc. These funds cannot be used to purchase durable assets (e.g., a car, a laptop) unless that is identified by your school as part of the Cost of Attendance and/or you receive separate approval from DCYF.

11. **What happens if I drop out of college in the middle of the year/semester – do I have to pay DCYF back?**

    You must notify DCYF anytime your student status changes so that we can see if we have to change your funding for that year. As well, if you decide to leave school in the middle of a year and we haven't used all the funds we set aside for you, we may be able to use those funds for other students.

    a. You will need to notify us that you have withdrawn and the date of your withdrawal. We will work with your school to determine whether or not any refunds are due to us. If you were given a check from the school to cover expenses not directly covered by your school, you may have to return funds to the school and/or DCYF. **You will need to discuss your situation with your school's financial aid office to determine what funds if any, you need to pay back.**

    b. For example, if you live off-campus, you may get a check from the school which is meant to cover your rent while attending that school. If you withdraw before the end of the semester, you cannot use these funds for rent for the remaining time in that semester because you are no longer a student.

12. **What happens if I don't get good grades in one semester – can I still get financial aid from DCYF for the next semester?**

    a. Both the DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Grant Program and the federal ETV Program require the student to be in good academic standing. We rely on your school to make this determination for us. If you are informed by the school that you are not in good academic standing, you need to notify us immediately. We will look at your situation and try to work with you to help you get back on track. We want you to succeed so we may decide to continue your funding immediately as long as you are working toward improvement.

13. **I am being asked to provide a deposit to the school. When will this be given to me?**

    The Department only makes an award on your behalf to your school. Paying bills and paying deposits is the student's responsibility. It is your responsibility to reach out to your financial aid office and let them know you are living in foster care, most schools either will waive your deposit or defer it to be paid in the Fall when your full payment is due. If the school says they won't allow a waiver, contact the DCYF Educational Services Coordinator, Diane Correia at Diane.Correia@dcyf.ri.gov or call her at 401.486.8193. She will try to intervene with your school to have them waive or defer this deposit.

For more information, contact: Diane Correia, Educational Services Coordinator RI Department of Children, Youth and Families at 401-486-8193 or Diane.Correia@dcyf.ri.gov .