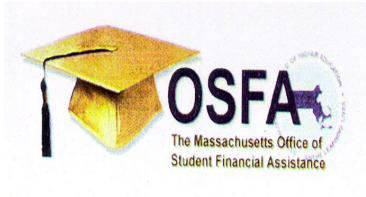


The Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance



ACTION LETTER

Action Letter #1
April 2024

2024 MASSGrant Plus and MASSGrant Plus Expansion Programs Update

Dear Colleague:

This Action Letter serves to confirm expectations and authorize the approval of certain expenditures in FY2024 (Academic Year 2023-2024) under the existing guidelines for the MASSGrant Plus and the MASSGrant Plus Expansion programs. Unless otherwise extended in subsequent years, the authorization of this Action Letter apply only to FY2024 (Academic Year 2023-2024).

MASSGrant Plus Program

Under Award Calculation within the guidelines, the following language is included:

AWARD CALCULATION (FINANCIAL NEED DETERMINATION)

In determining eligibility for the MASSGrant Plus, a student must demonstrate “unmet” financial need for each term awarded. As a last dollar grant, the MASSGrant Plus award is determined after all other sources of non-loan aid (grants and scholarships) are considered for the cost of tuition/fees and books, if applicable. In all circumstances, priority is given to Pell eligible students. Institutions may extend MASSGrant Plus to other low-income students after all Pell eligible students are awarded

As a condition for receiving MassGrant Plus funds, institutions must certify that they have fully met the financial aid need for tuition and fees related to instruction for all eligible undergraduate students, as defined above, using a combination of federal, state, and institutional aid resources.

This Action Letter reinforces the conditions under which an institution can provide assistance to other students, as allowed in the guidelines. Specifically, if an institution has residual allocated funds available after issuing MASSGrant Plus awards to all enrolled, Pell-eligible students (identified as eligible under the guidelines) institutions may extend MASSGrant Plus funds to other low-income students. Further institutions are reminded that the MASSGrant Plus program may be used to provide assistance for trailing summer enrollment if unspent funds remain.

Finally, before calculating the amount of residual, allocated funds available institutions must anticipate and budget for potential awards to enrolled, undocumented students, as noted in the concluding paragraphs of the Action Letter.

MASSGrant Plus Expansion Program

Guidelines for the MASSGrant Plus Expansion program include the following language:

AWARD VALUE

Subject to appropriation, MASSGrant Plus Expansion assistance must be awarded as a last dollar resource to eligible students under this Program and shall not exceed the calculated costs of tuition, fees, books and supplies, as defined and as published in the institution's annual Cost of Attendance (COA), for the academic term, during which the award is made. MASSGrant Plus Expansion funds may not be used to cover educational expenses that are not related to tuition, fees, books and supplies, unless otherwise approved or authorized by the Commissioner of Higher Education, or his designee.

- *Higher costs certificate or degree programs that exceed the institution's average tuition and fee costs may require annual approval by the Department of Higher Education. Students that have an eligible Pell Grant EFC may be awarded MASSGrant Plus Expansion funds.*

This Action Letter also serves to provide notification that the Commissioner of Higher Education is authorizing approval for institutions to provide assistance to students for "other educational expenses" as set forth below. If an institution has residual, allocated MASSGrant Plus Expansion funds available after issuing awards to all eligible, enrolled students, institutions may cover other educational expenses for eligible students as follows:

- Other educational expenses are limited to those defined by the institution for the student's total Cost of Attendance (COA) for the 2023-24 academic year.
- Institutions shall confirm and demonstrate that the financial need for all other students, as defined under the guidelines for tuition, fees, books and supplies, have been met, if exercising the option to award additional funds to students for other educational expenses
- Funds may be used to support students during the trailing summer term, if available
- The Commissioner's discretionary expansion of MASSGrant Plus Expansion funds to cover "other educational expenses" is limited to this fiscal year (FY2024/ academic year 2023-2024), unless expressly extended by the Commissioner to future fiscal years in writing. Students awarded supplementary funds under the Commissioner's exercise of his discretionary authority here should be advised of this one-time availability of funds.

Notice Regarding Budgeting for Students Retroactively Eligible Under the Tuition Equity Law

This Action Letter reaffirms the eligibility of currently enrolled, undocumented students who may seek assistance from the DHE – administered state financial aid program, including the MASSGrant Plus and MASSGrant Plus Expansion programs, upon completion of the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA) and a determination of eligibility. Please note that such students are allowed to submit the MASFA through June 30, 2024, for the 2023-24 academic year. Institutions are reminded of their responsibility to budget for and provide assistance to these students if they are eligible.

Institutions are invited to contact the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance at (617)391-6070, if they have any questions or need further clarification about the above update.

Thank you,

Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance
(617)391-6070