

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION MASSGRANT PLUS

PURPOSE

The Massachusetts Assistance for Student Success Grant Plus (MASSGrant Plus) is the Commonwealth's Tuition-free assistance program for students enrolled at a public four-year institution and who meet the Pell Grant Student Aid Index (SAI) eligibility criteria.¹ MASSGrant Plus is subject to the availability of funding and appropriation by the Massachusetts legislature (M.G.L. c. 15A, section 16). These guidelines pertain to the state's MASSGrant Plus program.²

MASSGrant Plus is a last dollar state financial aid program that provides full and part-time undergraduate students, enrolled at a public four-year college or university in the state, with the resources needed to fully cover the cost of tuition and fees towards a bachelor's degree. Additionally, the MASSGrant Plus program provides eligible students, enrolled at any public two or four-year institution of higher education in the state, with an ***Allowance and Support Award*** (also referred to as a stipend) to cover other educational expenses that may impede opportunities to enroll in college or complete a program of study.

DEFINITIONS

ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION:

A Massachusetts two or four-year college or university within the system of public institutions of higher education as identified in Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

ELIGIBLE PROGRAM:

Any approved undergraduate degree or certificate program offered by an eligible institution, as defined.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for the MASSGrant Plus program, a student must:

- a) be enrolled in an eligible institution, as defined;
- b) physically reside in Massachusetts for at least one year, as of the start of the enrolled term, with an intent to remain in Massachusetts consistent with Board of Higher Education (BHE) policy;

¹ Students, such as undocumented students, who are unable to complete a FAFSA due to their immigration status shall, consistent with the Tuition Equity Law, complete the state alternative financial aid application (MASFA) and must have an SAI that falls within the eligibility range for Pell, as calculated based on the state alternative form.

² Students interested in learning more about the state's "Free Community College" Programs can do so by clicking on the following links: www.mass.edu/masseducate and www.mass.edu/massreconnect

- c) be a U.S. Citizen, lawful permanent resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations; or have an approved eligibility status designated by the BHE pursuant to the Massachusetts Tuition Equity Law³ or otherwise;
- d) complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or, if ineligible to complete the FAFSA, then complete the Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA) by June 30, 2025;
- e) comply with financial aid verification requirements;
- f) not be in default on any federal or state student loans, or owe a refund for any previous state financial aid program;
- g) not have earned a prior associate or bachelor's degree if enrolled at a community college, or a prior bachelor's degree if enrolled at a four-year college or university;
- h) enroll, as a matriculated student, on a full-time or part-time basis (minimum of 6 credits, or the equivalent) in an eligible undergraduate program of study leading to a certificate, associate, or bachelor's degree; and
- i) meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) according to institution's requirements and federal standards.

MASSGRANT PLUS CONDITIONS

- Disbursement of funds: MASSGrant Plus funding is to be allocated to participating institutions through a formula or process approved by the Commissioner of Higher Education.
- MASSGrant Plus funds allocated during an academic year must be committed to students by institutions and expended at the conclusion of the fiscal year.
- The institution is required to report recipient, programmatic, and other data to the Department of Higher Education (DHE) upon request; and no less than on a quarterly basis.
- Institutions shall facilitate access to on-campus support services to students who receive assistance under the MASSGrant Plus program, to promote persistence in and completion of their program of study.
- The institution is responsible for verifying student eligibility, to include an accurate determination of whether the student has earned a prior associate or baccalaureate degree

³ M.G.L. c. 15A, Section 9, as amended by Section 11 of Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2023, and further amended by Section 22 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024 For information on the Massachusetts Tuition Equity Law see here: <https://www.mass.edu/tuitionequity/>

(or equivalent), which may include a signed affidavit from the student after all reasonable attempts were made by the student to access prior transcripts.

- MASSGrant Plus may be awarded to support summer enrollment, if funds are available.
- Institutions are required, upon request, to submit data to the Department of Higher Education to demonstrate maintenance of fiscal effort in their commitment to institutional aid to students, while participating in the MASSGrant Plus program.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY BY ENROLLMENT INTENSITY AND DEGREE TYPE

Eligible students may be awarded MASSGrant Plus funds as follows⁴:

Bachelor's Degree

Full-Time	Maximum of 5 years, 10 semesters for full-time (minimum of 12 enrolled credits per academic term)
Part-Time	Maximum of 7 years, 14 semesters for part-time (minimum of 6 enrolled credits per academic term)

Associate Degree

Full-Time	Maximum of 3 years, 6 semesters for full-time (minimum of 12 enrolled credits per academic term).
Part-Time	Maximum of 5 years, 10 semesters for part-time (6 enrolled credits minimum per academic term).

Certificate Program

Full-Time	Maximum of 4 semesters
Part-Time	Maximum of 8 semesters

AWARD VALUE

Subject to appropriation and the availability of funds, the **MASSGrant Plus Award** is a last dollar resource made available to students enrolled at any one of the Commonwealth public four-year colleges and universities. Awards should not exceed the calculated costs of tuition and fees as determined by the institution and published in its annual Cost of Attendance (COA) and approved by the BHE pursuant to M.G.L. c.15A, Section 5B(c)(1), for the academic term, during which the grant is made.

⁴ Please note that an additional year of assistance may be awarded based on extenuating circumstances, with prior approval of a written appeal by institution.

An additional **Allowance and Support Award** (also referred to as a stipend) of up to \$1,000 for books and supplies, and other approved costs, may be provided to students enrolled at any one of the Commonwealth's public four-year or two-year colleges and universities who meet the eligibility requirements and award criteria.

Any MASSGrant Plus award (either grant or stipend) expended beyond costs related to tuition and fees, and the allowance for books, supplies, and other costs as defined, must be approved or authorized by the Commissioner of Higher Education, or their designee.

AWARD CALCULATION

Students enrolled at a public four-year college or university and pursuing an undergraduate program of study leading to a bachelor's degree may receive a **MASSGrant Plus Award** to cover *Financial Unmet Need* for costs associated with **tuition and fees** the corresponding academic term or year. The award calculation for an eligible student is as follows:

$$\text{MASSGrant Plus Award} = \text{Tuition and Fees (minus) All Other Non-Loan Aid}$$

An additional **MASSGrant Plus Allowance and Support Award**⁵ (also referred to as a stipend) for books and supplies, and other approved costs, may be available to students enrolled at any one of the Commonwealth's public two-year or four-year colleges or universities and who meet the eligibility requirements. The maximum Allowance and Support Award in any academic year shall be \$1,000, and shall not exceed \$600 in any single semester. This award calculation, **based on the number of enrolled credits each semester**, is as follows:

$$\text{MASSGrant Plus Allowance and Support Award} = \text{Cost of Attendance COA (minus) All Other Non-Loan Aid}$$

12 or more credits	up to \$1,000 per academic year; not to exceed \$600 per semester
9-11 credits	up to \$800 per academic year, not to exceed \$450 per semester
6-8 credits	up to \$500 per academic year, not to exceed \$300 per semester

Student eligibility for the **Allowance and Support Award** should be assessed and determined at the beginning of each semester and the student's semester award amount should align with the student's credit hours per semester.

⁵ Students participating in the state's MassEducate programs may also be eligible to receive an additional Allowance and Support Award of up to \$1,000, if they meet the MASSGrant Plus eligibility and award calculation requirements. This award is subject to the appropriation and availability of funding.

For financial aid award packages that were finalized before the effective date of these guidelines using the **Allowance and Support Award** funding amounts approved for Academic Year 2024-2025, please note the following: in no event shall any such student's Fall 2025 **Allowance and Support Award** amount be reduced to recoup the difference between the amount awarded and the amount allowable pursuant to these guidelines. To address this issue and ensure that student Fall awards are not reduced, the DHE has maintained the prior maximum allowable amounts for a semester award, subject to the updated maximum annual award for Academic Year 2025-2026.

Example #1: Student A enrolls in the fall semester for the first time during Academic Year 2025-2026. Student A enrolls in 12 credits and prior to the effective date of these guidelines the student was awarded the maximum annual Allowance and Support Award based on last year's guidelines (e.g., \$1200) with a fall disbursement in the amount of \$600; to stay within the \$1000 maximum award Student A's spring disbursement would be \$400 (provided the student maintains their prior semester credit load (e.g., 12 credits) for the spring semester.

Example #2: Student B enrolls in the spring semester for the first time during Academic Year 2025-2026. Student B enrolls in 12 credits, and receives an Allowance and Support Award spring disbursement in the amount of \$600; to stay within the \$1000 maximum award Student B's summer disbursement would be \$400 (provided the student enrolls in and maintains their prior semester credit load (e.g., 12 credits) for the summer semester.

Example #3: Student C enrolls in the fall semester for the first time during Academic Year 2025-2026. Student C enrolls in 9 credits, and receives an Allowance and Support Award fall disbursement in the amount of \$450; to stay within the \$800 maximum award Student B's spring disbursement would be up to \$350 (provided the student maintains their prior semester credit load (e.g., 9 credits) for the spring semester.

AWARD DISBURSEMENT

Participating institutions must verify that each recipient is eligible in accordance with guidelines established for the MASSGrant Plus program, and that the student is enrolled in an approved certificate, associate, or bachelor's degree program. Further, the institution is required to verify that the student has not earned a prior degree (or equivalent) before awarding and disbursing funds, which may be done through a signed affidavit after all reasonable attempts were made to secure prior transcripts, if any.

Institutions are required to refund to the DHE any funds that are deemed to have been improperly awarded and disbursed to recipients who are later determined to be ineligible for the program. Refunds may occur because of adjustments to SAI, changes to dependency status, and/or changes to a student's enrollment status. Refunds may also occur if the institution receives payment and becomes aware that a student has withdrawn, dropped below full-time status, taken an approved leave of absence, or otherwise fails to complete the period of enrollment as charged. MASSGrant

Plus may be awarded to support trailing summer enrollment that occur prior to the end of the corresponding fiscal year, if funds are available.

ANNUAL REVIEW

The Department of Higher Education is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the MASSGrant Plus program. Institutions that have signed an agreement to participate in the Massachusetts State financial aid programs are required to share data for all students with the DHE or its designee, and the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) for this purpose. The program may be evaluated annually to determine any immediate impact or to determine if adjustments are required for various processes, such as disbursement of funds.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

All institutions receiving funds under the MASSGrant Plus Program must have an active Massachusetts State Financial Aid Participation Agreement on file with the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

AUDIT REQUIREMENT

- a) It shall be the responsibility of each college to maintain documentation of a recipient student's eligibility for the MASSGrant Plus program.
- b) The Commissioner shall require each college to furnish annually to the BHE a report detailing specific information regarding recipients of the MASSGrant Plus program. OSFA will establish the timeline, specifications, and procedures for this report.
- c) All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall, at all times, be open to inspection, review and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records, and documents are for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years, if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.