



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Postsecondary Education

July 1, 2020

To: All Higher Education Programs (HEP) Division Grantees, Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE)

Subject: Allowability of certain cost items during the novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by using flexibilities provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

Dear Grantee:

The U.S. Department of Education's (Department) Office of Postsecondary Education has received a number of inquiries regarding the permissibility of spending Federal TRIO and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant funds on services and items that would normally not be allowable under these grant programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CARES Act grants the Department authority to “modify the required and allowable uses of funds” for the following programs in the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, at the request of an institution of higher education (IHE) or other grant recipient¹:

- Title III, part A (Strengthening Institutions Program)
- Title III, part A (Asian American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions)
- Title III, part A (Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions)
- Title III, part A (Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions)
- Title III, part A (Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities)
- Title III, part A (Strengthening Predominantly Black Institutions)
- Title III, part B Historically Black Graduate Institutions
- Title III, part B (Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities)
- Title IV, subpart 2 chapter I (TRIO Programs)
- Title IV, subpart 2 chapter II (GEAR UP)

Title V (Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities For Hispanic Americans) Pursuant to this authority, and in the interests of promoting maximum flexibility during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department will review requests from IHEs or other grant recipients to modify the required or allowable uses of funds in these programs to help support students and ensure the continued delivery of needed services.

¹ Section 3518 of the CARES Act, P.L. 116-136; 134 Stat. 281.

While the CARES Act does not describe the extent of permissible modifications to these programs, the Department will, for example, entertain requests regarding the following modification of uses of funds:

- Meals for participants, including, for example, gift cards for purchasing food.
- Devices to promote remote learning, including, for example, mobile hotspots, data plans, and devices for students (e.g., tablets, computers).
- Items necessary for student participation in the program (e.g., cleaning supplies, face covering, hand sanitizer for on-site activities).

Any such modification request must be directed in writing to your respective program specialist and describe the proposed use of funds, amount, and brief rationale for each specific proposed modification. OPE will respond to any request and will follow up with an approval, denial, or, when necessary, request for further clarification.

Any such request must continue to directly serve project participants and not replace services that, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, are already being offered. The CARES Act places a time limit on this flexibility, from March 13, 2020 and ending on September 30 of the fiscal year following the end of the qualifying emergency, which, as of now, is at least until September 30, 2021. Approval letters from the Department will indicate the length of time in granting the proposed modifications, with the possibility of future time extensions based on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please direct any follow-up questions to my program staff below:

- Craig Pooler, GEAR UP and TRIO Talent Search Division, Craig.Pooler@ed.gov
- ReShone Moore, Graduate and Special Focus Programs Division, ReShone.Moore@ed.gov
- Beatriz Ceja, Hispanic Serving Institution Programs Division, Beatriz.Ceja@ed.gov
- [Sheryl Wilson, HBCU and PBI Division, Sheryl.Wilson@ed.gov](mailto:Sheryl.Wilson@ed.gov)
- [James Laws, Strengthening Institutions Division, James.Laws@ed.gov](mailto:James.Laws@ed.gov)
- Gaby Watts, TRIO Upward Bound and Educational Opportunity Centers Division, Gaby.Watts@ed.gov
- James Davis, Undergraduate Programs Division, James.Davis@ed.gov

Thank you for your continued service to America's students and for all that you are doing during this time to provide the ongoing delivery of services to them.

Sincerely,

Robert L. King
Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education