



Door to College Scholarship Program

Program Guidelines

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This guidance document is advisory in nature but is binding on an agency until amended by such agency. A guidance document does not include internal procedural documents that only affect the internal operations of the agency and does not impose additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties or include confidential information or rules and regulations made in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act. If you believe that this guidance document imposes additional requirements or penalties on regulated parties, you may request a review of the document.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Door to College Scholarship Program (DTC) is to provide financial assistance toward the educational expenses of undergraduate students enrolled at Nebraska postsecondary educational institutions who graduated from high school from a Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC), or graduated from an approved or accredited public, private, nondenominational or parochial school after being discharged from a YRTC, or received a diploma of high school equivalency (GED) issued by the Commissioner of Education after being discharged from a Nebraska youth rehabilitation and treatment center (YRTC).

II. STATUTORY PROVISIONS – NEB. REV. STAT. §§ 85-3201 to 85-3211 (Appendix D)

III. DEFINITIONS

1. Award means a grant of money under the Door to College Scholarship Act by the commission in the form of a Door to College Scholarship to an eligible student for educational expenses.
2. Award recipient means an eligible student who has applied for and been approved to receive a Door to College award.
3. Award year means the period beginning on July 1 through the following June 30.
4. Commission means the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education.
5. Educational expenses means student costs for tuition, mandatory fees, other education-related fees, room and board, books, and other costs related to a student's education.
6. Eligible institution means a public or private postsecondary educational institution:
 - (a) Located in Nebraska;
 - (b) Primarily engaged in the instruction of students;
 - (c) Satisfying state statutory requirements relating to the approval and licensure of schools, colleges, and universities and maintaining accreditation by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of Education;
 - (d) Offering courses of instruction in regularly scheduled classes to regularly enrolled undergraduate students who reside in Nebraska and have received a high school diploma or the equivalent; and
 - (e) Which has adopted, and has available for inspection, award refund and repayment policies.
7. Eligible student means an undergraduate student who:

- (a) Graduated from high school from an accredited education program at a youth rehabilitation and treatment center operated and utilized in compliance with state law, or graduated from an approved or accredited public, private, denominational, or parochial school, or received a diploma of high school equivalency (GED) issued by the Commissioner of Education after being discharged from a youth rehabilitation and treatment center operated and utilized in compliance with state law;
- (b) Is enrolled in an eligible postsecondary educational institution;
- (c) Has applied for federal financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid for the applicable award year;
- (d) Is a resident student who is domiciled in Nebraska as provided by section 85-502; and
- (e) Complies with all other provisions of the Door to College Scholarship Act and any rules and regulations and/or guidelines adopted and promulgated pursuant to the act.

8. Full-time status means enrollment in at least twenty-four semester credit hours, thirty-six quarter credit hours, or nine hundred clock hours per award year.

9. Part-time status means enrollment in at least twelve semester credit hours, eighteen quarter credit hours, or four hundred fifty clock hours per award year.

10. Undergraduate student means an individual who has not earned a first baccalaureate or professional degree and is enrolled in a postsecondary educational program which leads to, or is creditable toward, a first baccalaureate degree, associate degree, certificate, diploma, or the equivalent.

11. Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) means a youth rehabilitation and training center operated and utilized in compliance with state law.

IV. START DATE AND APPLICATION TIMELINE

Applications will be accepted any time during the award year but may not be made retroactive to the end of the enrollment period for which funds are requested; e.g., a student may not apply for a scholarship for the fall term after the term has concluded. Because awards will be made on a rolling basis, the Commission may adjust awards for new applications to remain within appropriation limits; e.g., students applying for a scholarship in January may receive less than the maximum scholarship amount if funds have been depleted.

V. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS

The Door to College Scholarship Program is decentralized, meaning that eligible institutions act as agents on the Commission's behalf. Eligible institutions must submit a participation agreement

to the Commission agreeing to provide services at several points in the application and awarding process and during the scholarship recipients college career:

1. During the application and awarding phase, eligible institutions will:

A. Advertise the availability of the Door to College Scholarship and identify potential eligible students through their participation in on- and off-campus programs and partnerships to the extent allowed by law.

B. Receive and process applications for awards under the Door to College Scholarship Act. The application will include certification by the student that the scholarship will be used only for eligible expenses.

C. Determine eligibility of students based on criteria set forth in the act except for verification of YRTC status.

D. Make recommendations to the Commission for awards to eligible students, including but not limited to the name and social security number of each eligible student, within 30 days of receiving an application.

E. Notify award recipients of their awards and apply the awards to their campus charges and/or refund the remainder to the award recipients for the sole purpose of meeting educational expenses.

F. An eligible institution must agree that it will not reduce institutional scholarships, grants, or tuition or fee waivers that a student would otherwise be eligible to receive if such student did not receive a Door to College Scholarship award. For example, a Door to College Scholarship award cannot be used to reduce an institutionally funded promise scholarship.

2. After an award is made, an eligible institution will ensure that an award recipient is provided adequate support and opportunities to meet with an assigned advisor at regular intervals to discuss academic progress and to develop a job-search plan.

3. An eligible institution must agree to provide to the Commission information required to evaluate the Door to College Scholarship Program, including but not limited to enrollment, retention, and graduation information for all award recipients.

VI. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Eligible student means an undergraduate student who:

1. Graduated from high school from an accredited education program at a YRTC operated and utilized in compliance with state law, or graduated from an approved or accredited public, private, denominational, or parochial school, or received a diploma of high school equivalency (GED) issued by the Commissioner of Education after being discharged from a YRTC operated and utilized in compliance with state law;

2. Authorizes the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to verify for the Commission the applicant's name and previous status at a YRTC.
3. Is enrolled in an eligible institution;
4. Has applied for federal financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid for the applicable award year;
5. Is a resident student who is domiciled in Nebraska as provided by section 85-502;
6. Complies with all other provisions of the Door to College Scholarship Act and any rules and regulations and/or guidelines adopted and promulgated pursuant to the act; and
7. In the case of an eligible student beginning the first year in attendance at an eligible institution, such eligible student has satisfied requirements for admission and has enrolled or indicated an intent to enroll in an eligible institution; or
8. In the case of an eligible student enrolled in an eligible institution following the successful completion of the student's first year in attendance, such eligible student continues to meet the requirements of the Door to College Scholarship Act and has maintained the minimum standards of performance as required by the eligible institution in which the eligible student is enrolled.

VII. APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Applicants must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and identify the eligible institutions they intend to apply to on the FAFSA.
2. Application must be made annually on a form developed by the Commission and submitted directly to the financial aid office an applicant plans to attend.
3. Application forms will be available on the Commission website and directly from eligible institutions.
4. The eligible institutions will receive and process all applications, determine eligibility, and make recommendations to the Commission within 30 days of receiving an application.
5. Within 30 days after receiving recommendations from an eligible institution, the Commission will notify each eligible institution of its approval or disapproval of recommended awards and the total award amount approved for eligible students at the eligible institution.

VIII. AWARDS

The Commission will notify eligible institutions of award amounts, based on institutional recommendations, within 30 days of receiving the recommendations. The maximum annual award for full-time students (24 or more semester credit hours, 36 or more quarter credit hours, or 900 or more contact hours) is \$5,000. Awards for part-time students will be prorated:

Annual Basis	Enrolled Hours	Semester Award	Quarter Award
\$5,000	12 or more	\$2,500	\$1,666.66
\$4,500	11	\$2,250	\$1,500.00
\$4,000	9 or 10	\$2,000	\$1,333.33
\$3,500	8	\$1,750	\$1,166.66
\$3,000	6 or 7	\$1,500	\$1,000.00

In the event award amounts recommended by eligible institutions exceed available appropriations, the Commission will prorate all awards by the percentage required to stay within the available appropriation.

IX. DISBURSEMENT AND REFUNDS

The Commission shall distribute to each eligible institution the total award amount approved for eligible students at such institution. The eligible institution shall act as an agent of the Commission to disburse the awards directly to eligible students during the award year.

If an award recipient discontinues attendance before the end of the award year, enrolls in fewer hours than what was anticipated, or the award is terminated pursuant to section 85-3207, the award recipient shall remit any award balance allowable to the eligible institution in accordance with such institution's withdrawal policy. The institution shall remit such award balance to the commission in accordance with such institution's refund policy.

X. AWARD RECIPIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Award recipients must agree to:

1. Attend all required courses regularly;
2. Meet with an assigned advisor at regular intervals to discuss academic progress and to develop a job-search plan;
3. Maintain good academic standing at their eligible institution without any disciplinary action by the institution;
4. Use the award only for eligible education expenses, meaning tuition, mandatory fees, other education-related fees, room and board, books, and other costs related to their education.
5. In case of withdrawal, remit any award balance allowable under their eligible institution's withdrawal policy back to their eligible institution.
6. Authorize their eligible institution to release to the Commission educational records necessary to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Door to College Scholarship Act, including but not limited to federal financial aid eligibility, enrollment status, credit hours attempted and completed, cumulative credit hours, and graduation status.

XI. STUDENT APPEAL PROCESS

Students who are adversely affected by the actions of the Commission or an eligible postsecondary educational institution in the distribution of funds or granting of awards may appeal the decision.

A. Students shall first make an appeal directly through the eligible postsecondary educational institution's financial aid appeal procedure.

B. Students who desire further consideration of an institutional decision may appeal, in writing, to the Commission within 21 calendar days of the institutional decision. The decision of the Commission shall be binding.

Appendix A: Sample Application

Name

Date of Birth

SSN

Previous DTC award recipient Y/N

High School and Graduation Date or GED receipt date

Name of Institution (College or University)

Degree or Certificate Sought

Intended Major

Academic Year

Enrollment Status

Full-time (at least 24 semester credit hours, 36 quarter credit hours, or 900 clock hours per award year)

Part-time (at least 12 semester credit hours, 18 quarter credit hours, or 450 clock hours per award year)

I affirm that by applying for a Door to College Scholarship Program award I am agreeing to the following requirements. I understand that if I receive an award, my award may be terminated if I fail to meet the requirements.

1. File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid;
2. Authorize the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to verify for the Commission my name and previous status at a YRTC;
3. Attend all required courses regularly;
4. Meet with an assigned advisor at regular intervals to discuss academic progress and to develop a job-search plan;
5. Maintain good academic standing at my institution without any disciplinary action by the institution;
6. Use the award only for eligible education expenses, meaning tuition, mandatory fees, other education-related fees, room and board, books, and other costs related to my education.
7. In case of withdrawal, remit any award balance allowable under my institution's withdrawal policy back to my institution.
8. Authorize my institution to release to the Commission educational records necessary to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Door to College Scholarship Act, including federal financial aid eligibility, enrollment status, credit hours attempted and completed, cumulative credit hours, and graduation status.

Applicant Signature _____ Date _____

For Postsecondary Institution Use Only

Applicant information confirmed

Enrollment status confirmed

Minimum standards of performance met for continuing applicants

Recommended award:

Annual Basis	Enrolled Hours	Semester Award	Quarter Award
\$5,000	12 or more	\$2,500	\$1,666.66
\$4,500	11	\$2,250	\$1,500.00
\$4,000	9 or 10	\$2,000	\$1,333.33
\$3,500	8	\$1,750	\$1,166.66
\$3,000	6 or 7	\$1,500	\$1,000.00

In the event award amounts in applications recommended by eligible institutions exceed available appropriations, the Commission will prorate all awards by the percentage required to stay within the available appropriation.

Authorized Signature _____

Date submitted to the Commission _____

Appendix B: Sample Institutional Statement of Assurance

Statement of Assurance Door to College Scholarship Program

I assure that the below-named institution is eligible to participate in the Door to College Scholarship Program (DTC), will work with the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) to identify students who are eligible for awards under DTC Program, and will act as the CCPE's agent to disburse DTC grant funds directly to the eligible student, pursuant to the Door to College Scholarship Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 85-3201 to 85-3211).

I assure the CCPE may review the financial aid recipients' files, including but not limited to those files associated with enrollment and financial aid for the award year specified.

I assure compliance with the rules and regulations and/or guidelines regarding the DTC.

I assure that all DTC award recipients will be provided adequate support and opportunities to meet with an assigned advisor at regular intervals to discuss academic progress and to develop a job-search plan.

I assure all recipients of a DTC award will:

1. have applied for financial assistance by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid;
2. be undergraduate students that have not earned a bachelor's, graduate or professional degree;
3. be Nebraska residents as provided in Neb. Rev. Stat § 85-502;
4. meet all requirements listed in the rules and regulations and/or guidelines governing the program;
5. be selected for awards without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, or handicap.

I further assure that CCPE staff will have access to records to verify applicant information, institutional recommendations, and administration of funds during an on-site audit. Intentional misrepresentation will result in the institution's suspension from the program.

Name (Please print or type)

Institution

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Door to College Scholarship Act

85-3201. Act, how cited.

Sections 85-3201 to 85-3211 shall be known and may be cited as the Door to College Scholarship Act.

85-3202. Terms, defined.

For purposes of the Door to College Scholarship Act:

- (1) Award means a grant of money under the act by the commission in the form of a Door to College Scholarship to an eligible student for educational expenses;
- (2) Award year means the period beginning on July 1 through the following June 30;
- (3) Commission means the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education;
- (4) Educational expenses means student costs for tuition, mandatory fees, other education-related fees, room and board, books, and other costs related to a student's education;
- (5) Eligible postsecondary educational institution means a public or private postsecondary educational institution:
 - (a) Located in Nebraska;
 - (b) Primarily engaged in the instruction of students;
 - (c) Satisfying state statutory requirements relating to the approval and licensure of schools, colleges, and universities and maintaining accreditation by an accrediting organization recognized by the United States Department of Education;
 - (d) Offering courses of instruction in regularly scheduled classes to regularly enrolled undergraduate students who reside in Nebraska and have received a high school diploma or the equivalent; and
 - (e) Which has adopted, and has available for inspection, award refund and repayment policies;
- (6) Eligible student means an undergraduate student who:
 - (a) Graduated from high school from an accredited education program at a youth rehabilitation and treatment center operated and utilized in compliance with state law, or graduated from an approved or accredited public, private, denominational, or parochial school or received a diploma of high school equivalency issued by the Commissioner of Education after being discharged from a youth rehabilitation and treatment center operated and utilized in compliance with state law;
 - (b) Is enrolled in an eligible postsecondary educational institution;
 - (c) Has applied for federal financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid for the applicable award year;
 - (d) Is a resident student who is domiciled in Nebraska as provided by section 85-502; and
 - (e) Complies with all other provisions of the Door to College Scholarship Act and any rules and regulations adopted and promulgated pursuant to the act;
- (7) Full-time status means enrollment in at least twenty-four semester credit hours, thirty-six quarter credit hours, or nine hundred clock hours per award year;

(8) Part-time status means enrollment in at least twelve semester credit hours, eighteen quarter credit hours, or four hundred fifty clock hours per award year; and

(9) Undergraduate student means an individual who has not earned a first baccalaureate or professional degree and is enrolled in a postsecondary educational program which leads to, or is creditable toward, a first baccalaureate degree, associate degree, certificate, diploma, or the equivalent.

85-3203. Awards to eligible students.

The commission shall, as provided in the Door to College Scholarship Act, provide for awards to be made directly to eligible students beginning with the 2024-25 school year. An award shall not exceed a maximum of five thousand dollars annually to an eligible student with a full-time status and shall be prorated for eligible students with a part-time status. The commission may adjust the value of awards annually to make awards to all eligible applicants who apply by the application deadline set by the commission.

85-3204. Eligible postsecondary educational institutions; duties; awards; prohibited acts.

(1) Eligible postsecondary educational institutions, acting as agents of the commission, shall:

(a) Receive and process applications for awards under the Door to College Scholarship Act;

(b) Determine eligibility of students based on criteria set forth in the act, except that such institutions shall not be responsible for determining if a student meets the requirements of subdivision (6)(a) of section 85-3202; and

(c) No later than the application deadline set by the commission, make recommendations to the commission for awards to eligible students, including the name and social security number of each eligible student.

(2) An award under the Door to College Scholarship Act shall not be used by a postsecondary educational institution to reduce institutional scholarships, grants, or tuition or fee waivers that a student would otherwise be eligible to receive if such student did not receive an award under the act.

85-3205. Awards; review; distribute to eligible postsecondary educational institutions.

(1) Within thirty days after receiving recommendations pursuant to section 85-3204, the commission shall review the recommended awards for compliance with the Door to College Scholarship Act and any rules and regulations adopted and promulgated pursuant to the act and notify each eligible postsecondary educational institution of the approval or disapproval of recommended awards.

(2) For purposes of such approval or disapproval of recommended awards, the submission of an application by a student for a scholarship pursuant to the Door to College Scholarship Act shall authorize the Department of Health and Human Services to verify for the commission the applicant's name and previous status at a youth rehabilitation and treatment center in order to determine a student's eligibility under subdivision (6)(a) of section 85-3202.

(3) The commission shall distribute to each eligible postsecondary educational institution the total award amount approved for eligible students at such institution. The eligible postsecondary educational institution shall act as an agent of the commission to disburse the awards directly to eligible students during the award year.

85-3206. Award; conditions.

An award may be granted to an eligible student for attendance at an eligible postsecondary educational institution if:

(1) The eligible student is accepted for enrollment as follows:

(a) In the case of an eligible student beginning the first year in attendance at an eligible postsecondary educational institution, such eligible student has satisfied requirements for admission and has enrolled or indicated an intent to enroll in an eligible postsecondary educational institution; or

(b) In the case of an eligible student enrolled in an eligible postsecondary educational institution following the successful completion of the student's first year in attendance, such eligible student continues to meet the requirements of the Door to College Scholarship Act and has maintained the minimum standards of performance as required by the eligible postsecondary educational institution in which the eligible student is enrolled;

(2) The eligible student receiving such award certifies that the award will be used only for educational expenses; and

(3) The eligible student has complied with the act and any rules and regulations adopted and promulgated pursuant to the act.

85-3207. Award; recipient; requirements; termination.

(1) A recipient of an award shall:

(a) Attend all required courses regularly;

(b) Meet with an assigned advisor at regular intervals to discuss academic progress and to develop a job-search plan; and

(c) Maintain good academic standing at the eligible postsecondary educational institution without any disciplinary action by such institution.

(2) An award may be terminated if such person fails to meet the requirements of this section.

85-3208. Award recipient; discontinue attendance; award termination; remit award balance.

If an award recipient discontinues attendance before the end of the award year or the award is terminated pursuant to section 85-3207, the award recipient shall remit any award balance allowable to the eligible postsecondary educational institution in accordance with such institution's withdrawal policy. The institution shall remit such award balance to the commission in accordance with such institution's refund policy.

85-3209. Commission; powers and duties.

(1) The commission shall:

(a) Supervise the issuance of public information concerning the Door to College Scholarship Act; and

(b) Establish a reasonable and fair appeal procedure for students adversely affected by the actions of the commission or an eligible postsecondary educational institution in the distribution of funds or granting or termination of awards pursuant to the act.

(2) The commission may adopt and promulgate rules and regulations necessary to carry out the act.

85-3210. Act; limitations.

The Door to College Scholarship Act does not grant any authority to the commission to:

(1) Control or influence the policies of any eligible postsecondary educational institution because such institution accepts students who receive awards; or

(2) Require any eligible postsecondary educational institution to enroll any student receiving an award or, once admitted, to permit continued enrollment in such institution by any student receiving an award.

85-3211. Door to College Scholarship Fund; created; use; investment.

The Door to College Scholarship Fund is created. The commission shall administer the fund, which shall consist of amounts transferred from the State Lottery Operation Trust Fund pursuant to section 79-3501 prior to July 1, 2029, as well as any money transferred by the Legislature and gifts, grants, or bequests from any source, including federal, state, public, and private sources. All amounts accruing to the Door to College Scholarship Fund shall be used to carry out the Door to College Scholarship Act. Any money in the fund available for investment shall be invested by the state investment officer pursuant to the Nebraska Capital Expansion Act and the Nebraska State Funds Investment Act.

Source

Laws 2023, LB705, §§ 28 - 38.

Laws 2024, LB1270

Laws 2025, LB306