



FINANCING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

by Debra Hart & Cate Weir, Think College

There is a range of possible funding sources that can be used to finance program and student costs in higher education. Currently, while the list of possible sources is lengthy, their use is spotty. While each funding source listed is working in at least a few areas of the country, none offer a universal solution. In almost every instance, existing programs use a combination of funding sources to sustain itself. Students are using numerous options to pay college tuition. It is recommended that people who are interested in starting or sustaining a college initiative use a braided funding approach using multiple funding sources. Establish an interagency team to guide the development of the higher education initiative and to foster collaboration in funding. The following information provides a list of several funding sources, examples, and links to further information when available.

FUNDING SOURCE

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID

The postsecondary education program must be an approved Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) through Federal Student Aid. Students are only eligible for Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Federal Work-Study. Students are NOT eligible for student loans.

The following link provides a listing of currently approved CTP:

<http://studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility/intellectual-disabilities>

The following links to a webinar outlining what is required to qualify as a CTP:

<http://connectpro97884399.adobeconnect.com/p6nb1k0zw5d/>

MEDICAID WAIVER

Overall, Medicaid funds can not be used for tuition and fees but can be used to pay for student support services such as educational coaches, mentors, physical or occupational therapy, transportation and supported employment. It is important to note that every state waiver has defined what services and supports can be funded and it varies from state to state so it will be important to first review your state's waiver to determine the services and supports that can be paid for by waiver funds. Another important aspect of using Medicaid Waiver dollars is that the cost must be shown to be less or not more expensive than institutional services, in other words at least cost neutral.

Example: North Carolina, New York, Vermont, New Jersey, California

STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) AGENCIES

VR agencies may cover a range of services including tuition, fees, books, and vocational assessments. However, what is covered varies by student, as each case is different. Students must have been deemed eligible for VR services to receive any VR support for college. Classes in which students are enrolled must be related to an identified employment goal. Relating the course of study to a specific career goal is key to getting VR approval for fiscal support. The decision to support an individual student to attend college is based on their Individual Plan for Employment and the concept that attending college will assist the student in becoming competitively employed. Historically, it has been difficult for students with ID to obtain VR support to attend college, but as data begins to show the positive impact college can have on employment outcomes, this is beginning to change.

Example: Hawaii, Florida, California, Kentucky, Ohio

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT 2004

Preamble to the law & a 2013 letter from OSEP (www.thinkcollege.net/resources-database/item/t-110/1790) allows use of IDEA funds to pay tuition and other costs for students to attend college. School districts across the country are participating in funding "dual enrollment" programs in partnerships with local colleges or universities and funding students aged 18-21 to complete their educational program in a college setting. This Insight Brief discusses how one higher education initiative moved from grant funding to local school district funding:

www.thinkcollege.net/images/stories/17_Fstatefundstoidea.pdf

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (SSA) WORK INCENTIVES

The Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) program allows Social Security beneficiaries to exclude income that is being used to assist the person in returning to work. Under a PASS, income is set aside for current or future expenses of training, equipment, services, or supports - including college - as long as it is related to a specified employment goal.

Link to more information on PASS: www.passplan.org/

STATE INITIATIVES

There are a growing number of states with statewide initiatives related to postsecondary education for students with ID that assist with funding these programs. Examples include a line item in state budgets to fund start-up costs for new programs (South Carolina, Georgia & Massachusetts), establishment of a lottery-funded scholarship for students with ID (Tennessee), state VR funding for pilot programs in community colleges (California), and access to state-funded scholarships for students attending an approved CTP (Kentucky).

NATIONAL SERVICE EDUCATION AWARDS

By participating in National Service, such as through Americorps or Vista, students can earn a Segal Education Award (amount aligned with Pell grant). Some IHEs match the Segal Education Award, resulting in the student have double the amount in funding that they can use to pay for college (e.g., tuition, fees, services).

Example: Wisconsin, South Carolina (College of Charleston), Nevada

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are a small number of scholarship programs specifically for students with Down syndrome. Link to list of scholarships for students with DS:

www.thinkcollege.net/resources-database/item/t-11011630

Students and their families can also look at generic scholarships to determine if they might be eligible for these to help pay for college.

www.elearners.com/online-education-resources/finances/college-grants-and-scholarships-by-state/

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY STATE AGENCIES

Local, regional, and state agencies may not be able to support the program directly with funding but are able to realign their existing services to support their agency clients who are students attending college. For example, if a student is receiving community services such as transportation or daily living skills instruction, these services can be adjusted to support transportation to college and held with college homework.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY COUNCILS

Planning and start up costs have been funded in several states via a grant process through the State DD Council. These usually start with postsecondary education being listed as a goal in the Council's 5-year plan. Typically the funds are awarded for a limited time, from 1-3 years. They are meant to kick start a program that will work to be self-supporting when the grant funds end.

Example: Tennessee, Georgia, California, New Mexico – all University Centers of Excellence in Disability

FOUNDATIONS

There are numerous foundations that may provide funding to develop or maintain a postsecondary education program. These funds have covered a wide range of costs including program development and tuition & fees (e.g., Golisandro Foundation, Riggio Family Foundation, Taishoff Center, Marinov Center). Most states have an organization that offers free information on local foundations but it will require research. There are also national organizations that provide online directories of funders; these often require membership.

For example: <http://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>

TUITION WAIVER

Tuition waivers may be available through state VR agencies or IHEs; however, there is no universal implementation of waiver options nationally. A waiver that is provided by VR agency would typically apply to any state-run college or university. Usually, a waiver only covers tuition, and does not include fees or books. Some community colleges also offer tuition waivers to individuals who receive SSI. Often, information about waivers is listed in the college catalog as a benefit for senior citizens. However, these waivers apply to students of any age receiving SSI.