



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
Community and Education Partnerships

Overview of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act: *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*

GEAR UP / HEA Reauthorization

- Higher Education Act is the federal legislation that authorizes numerous higher education and financial aid programs, including GEAR UP
- The law has a five-year lifespan, after which it must be “reauthorized” to continue
- The HEA was set to be reauthorized in 2003, but it has been postponed year after year
- The reauthorization provides the most significant opportunity to make changes and improvements to existing programs

GEAR UP Reauthorization

- Who did Congress consult to make their decisions about GEAR UP reauthorization?
 - Grantees
 - NCCEP
 - Higher Ed, Student, and Financial Aid Associations
 - US Department of Education / Inspector General
 - Government Accountability Office
 - Congressional Research Service
 - Member Prerogative and Priorities

NCCEP Reauthorization Priorities

- Grant duration: adding a 7th year

- Cohort management: greater flexibility and providing optional services into postsecondary education
- GEAR UP scholarship: increased flexibility
- Match relief: allowing greater flexibility in raising, documenting and targeting match
- Expanding allowable activities
- Greater role for State leadership and coordination: academic alignment, technical assistance, convening, and college access marketing campaigns

Overview of Changes to GEAR UP

- This document will briefly summarize how changes to GU will impact:
 - Program scope, eligibility and awards
 - Cohort and Priority Student management
 - GEAR UP scholarship
 - GEAR UP match requirements
 - Allowable program activities

Program Scope

- GEAR UP funding “authorization”: \$400 Million
- Grant “award period”: 6 or 7 Years
 - You will have the option to apply for a 7-year GEAR UP grant if you follow GEAR UP students through their first year of postsecondary education
- Far greater emphasis on academics, postsecondary success, and lasting school improvement

Program Eligibility

- Minor changes to Partnership language, deemphasizing “elementary” and “secondary” schools and emphasizing school districts
- Removed CBO’s and Philanthropic Organizations from the list of the required two potential partners, but refer to them as “sponsoring organizations” elsewhere in the legislation as allowable partners
- These changes will have no practical impact on your partnership design

- No changes to the 50% free and reduced lunch requirement for schools to be served through cohort model

GEAR UP Awards

- Retains basic award distribution guidelines with some additional direction for the Secretary of Education
 - 33% set aside for state grants
 - 33% set aside for partnership grants
 - Remainder awarded at the discretion of Secretary, wherein the USDOE will consider, “to the extent reasonably practical:”
 - Number, quality and promise of applications
 - Geographic distribution
 - Urban / Rural distribution
 - USDOE will reevaluate the distribution of funds on an annual basis
- Continues to emphasize coordination between GEAR UP projects and other federal or non-federal programs
- Allows students who fall between two grant projects to be served:
 - “Provide services under this chapter to students who have received services under a previous GEAR UP grant award but have not yet completed 12th grade.”
- Emphasis on “supplement, not supplant”

Cohort and Priority Student Management

- You have the option of serving students through the first year of postsecondary education
- Added “students with disabilities” in program purpose
- Expands “priority student” definition to include students “otherwise considered by the eligible entity [the applicant] to be a disconnected student”
 - Disconnected students include: limited English proficient students; students with disabilities; homeless students; youth participating in or aging out of foster care; pregnant or parenting teens; youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system; and other students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.
- Allows grants to serve students who fall between two grants

- The legislation will require applicants to more explicitly address:
 - How cohorts are defined
 - How cohort vacancies will be filled
 - How applicants will serve students attending different secondary schools

GEAR UP Scholarship

- The original GEAR UP legislation set a very high bar for “minimum” GEAR UP scholarships—the lesser of:
 - 75% of the Cost of Attendance, or
 - The maximum Pell Grant (\$4,731 for FY 2008)
- As a result, most GEAR UP sites didn’t offer GEAR UP scholarships due to the cost of establishing and maintaining scholarships
- The reauthorization of GU will provide partnerships and states with greater flexibility in determining scholarship award sizes by:
 - Reducing the “minimum” GU scholarship to the minimum Pell Grant: \$400 (FY 2008)
 - Allowing for a maximum scholarship to be up to the Total Cost of Attendance (when considering other aid)
 - States can still “waiver” out or reduce their scholarship requirement if they can meet current standards
- The GEAR UP Scholarship is still a requirement for state grants, unless they are provided a “waiver” to opt out of the scholarship requirement or reduce the percentage of funds dedicated to the scholarship requirement
- The reauthorization spells out in more detail what expenses the scholarship can cover:
 - Tuition, fees, books, supplies and any required equipment
 - Any additional expenses required for students with special needs
- Scholarship funds must be put into a “trust” based on:
 - Minimum Pell X # GU Students = GU Trust

- GU Students must be notified about the scholarship eligibility requirements at the time they enroll in GEAR UP (21st Century Scholarship Certificate)
- Students and the program have 6 years after students enroll in postsecondary education to utilize their scholarships
- If funds remain after the 6-year period, those funds must be returned to the Secretary
- Otherwise, grantees still enjoy broad flexibility in creating scholarship eligibility requirements, distribution formulas, and redistribution of underutilized funds

GEAR UP Match Requirements

- GEAR UP will still require a dollar-for-dollar match of non-federal funds (cash or in-kind) with greater clarification on implementation issues and allowable sources
- Match “may be” accrued over the entire duration of the grant award period and the grantee will need to demonstrate “substantial progress” towards meeting annual goals
- Match may be claimed at the time it is “obligated” rather than paid
- Clarification on allowable match sources:
 - Funds paid to scholarships from “pre-existing non-federal financial aid programs”
 - Cost of administering the scholarship program
 - In-kind human resources
 - Equipment, supplies, transportation expenses, in-kind or discounted program services, indirect costs, and facility usage
 - Other resources recognized by the Secretary
- Greater flexibility on match reduction
- Grantee can request a reduced match percentage at the time of application
 - Must demonstrate significant economic hardship
- Partnership grants may request that non-federal contributions to the GEAR UP scholarship funds be matched on a 2-for-1 basis at the time of application

Allowable Program Activities

- There are four big “themes” when it comes to GEAR UP activities

- The inclusion of “mandatory” activities
- The expansion of “permissible” activities
- Greater emphasis on academics
- Greater differentiation between state and partnership grants

Mandatory Activities: (must be addressed by *all* applicants)

- Providing information on financial aid
- Encouraging students to enroll in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework, “to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level.”
- Increasing HS graduation rates
- Assisting students apply for and enroll in postsecondary education
- Scholarships (for State Grant applicants only)

Permissible Activities for State and Partnership Grants: (optional)

- Tutoring and mentoring
- Outreach activities to recruit priority students (states)
- Developing rigorous academic standards and curricula, including AP/IB
- Expanding access to a rigorous core curriculum and challenging state standards
- Dual / Concurrent enrollment
- Application and financial aid assistance
- Developing graduation and career plans
- Special programs in STEM
- Scholarship support
- College trips and college-based programs
- Extended school day, school year, or summer programs that offer additional academic classes or assistance with college admissions applications

- Identifying at-risk students / early alert systems
- After-school programs
- Assisting students find summer jobs and internships
- Academic and personal counseling
- Financial literacy programs
- Skills assessments
- Family counseling and home visits
- Professional development
- Programs for limited English proficient students
- College entrance exam prep course
- Improving parent and family involvement in elementary and secondary schools
- Parent engagement and leadership
- Providing services for students through their first year of postsecondary education
- In the event that you lose a match source or partner, you can engage new partners to provide match resources or services
- College access marketing

Additional Permissible Activities for States Only:

- Providing direct technical assistance to schools, districts and GEAR UP Partnership programs
- Providing professional development for professionals in the State and any Partnership programs
- Aligning state policies for K-16 strategies
- Disseminating information on best practices for serving GEAR UP and other low-income students
- Disseminating information on “effective coursework and support services”

- Disseminating information on how to more effectively engage parents and preparing low-incomes students for postsecondary education
- Aligning state academic standards and curricula with postsecondary and workforce expectations
- Developing “alternatives” to traditional secondary school options that help students earn college credit prior to HS graduation
 - Includes a range of postsecondary credentials—not just an AA or BA
- Creating personalized drop-out recovery programs at community colleges

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