

Final Report on Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students
CARES Act Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund
Report #6 – March 31, 2020

Whittier College PR/Award Number: P425E202004

In compliance with Section 18004(e) of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act signed by the President of the United States on March 27, 2020, Whittier College submits this report regarding funds received through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to provide Emergency Financial Aid Grants to students. The HEERF provides funding to institutions of higher education “to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.”

1. Acknowledgment of Funding and Certification

Whittier College acknowledges that it signed the Certification and Agreement for these funds and returned it to the U. S. Department of Education on April 13, 2020. Whittier College received its Grant Award Notification on April 24, 2020. As stipulated in the Certification, the College assures that no less than 50 percent of the funds received under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act will be used to provide Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Whittier College students.

2. Total Grant Award

Pursuant to the Certification and Agreement, Whittier College received a total of \$1,879,550 under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act, of which at least **\$939,775** was provided directly to students in the form of Emergency Financial Aid Grants for expenses related to the disruption of campus operations resulting from the coronavirus.

3. Funds Distributed to Date

As of March 31, 2021, Whittier College has distributed **\$939,775** in Emergency Financial Aid Grants to students through three rounds of application.

4. Student Eligibility

The total number of Whittier College students eligible to participate in programs under Section 484 in Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and, therefore, eligible to receive Emergency Financial Aid Grants to students under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act is **1,418**.

5. Number of Student Recipients

As previously reported, 361 students applied for an Emergency Financial Aid Grant under Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act through June 26, 2020. Through Rounds 1 and 2, grants totaling **\$182,824** were disbursed to **352 students** via direct deposit or check according to the

student's preference. Eight students were asked to submit additional information and one student declined the grant.

As described below, a third round of funding based on a formula was completed in July 2020 to distribute the remaining **\$756,951** allocated to Whittier College for student emergency financial aid. All funds were disbursed by March 31, 2021.

- New first-time grants totaling \$686,150 were remitted to 1,066 students who had not applied in Round 1 or 2 but who qualified for relief based on Pell grant status and Expected Family Contribution (EFC).
- A total of 309 students who received emergency relief grants in Rounds 1 or 2 qualified for additional funding under the formula. These additional grants totaled \$70,756 and ranged from \$10-\$225.
- Forty-three students from Rounds 1 or 2 had already received their maximum grant (2) or had been awarded a grant through the need-based application process that exceeded the new formula-based grant cap (41).
- As of 12/31/20, 38 CARES Act grant checks were outstanding. The College made numerous attempts to reach the student grantees, the majority of whom had graduated or did not re-enroll. By 3/31/21, six checks remained outstanding. We contacted HEERF and received permission to void the checks and reallocate the funds to other students in need as part of the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act* distribution of emergency student relief.

6. Methods Used to Determine which Students Receive Emergency Aid and How Much

Whittier College initially opted to create a secure online application process for eligible students to request an Emergency Financial Aid Grant. Students were asked to indicate how they have been financially impacted by the coronavirus and the amount of relief being sought in the eligible expense categories stipulated in the Certification and Agreement. Supporting documentation was requested where available. In order to prioritize students with the greatest financial need as recommended by the Secretary of Education, the first round of applications that began on May 13, 2020 was restricted to Whittier College Pell Grant recipients. The second round of applications that began on May 27, 2020 was open to all eligible students. Applicants were asked to report their actual need, but initial grants were capped at \$575 to ensure meaningful grants could be distributed as widely as possible to all eligible students. A student-centered Review Committee evaluated the applications and recommended funding levels. The Project Director approved actual grant amounts.

Because only 25% of all eligible students applied and received CARES Act Emergency Financial Aid Grants, senior administrators comprising the Whittier College CARES Act Committee opted to employ a formula-based approach to disburse the remaining **\$756,951** allocated for student emergency financial aid. Five tiers were established based on Pell grant status and Expected Family Contribution (EFC) as follows. The funds were disbursed in July 2020.

TIER	GRANT CAP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1) EFC \$0-\$5,542 Pell Recipients	\$800	617
2a) EFC \$0-\$5,542 Non-Pell	\$650	34
2b) EFC \$5,602-\$24,999	\$650	428
3) EFC \$25,000-\$49,999	\$500	173
4) EFC \$50,000-\$99,999	\$350	77
5) EFC \$100,000-\$999,999	\$200	46

7. Outreach and Instructions to Students

In order to streamline communications with students and their families and provide timely updates after the disruption of campus operations resulting from the coronavirus, Whittier College initiated an email newsletter distributed twice weekly. The College also created a COVID-19 Response webpage where information regarding the CARES Act Emergency Financial Aid Grants was subsequently added. A dedicated email CARESRelief@whittier.edu was also established to respond to individual questions and concerns from students and parents.

The May 12, 2020 newsletter announced the application process for the Emergency Financial Aid Grants with a link to the College’s [CARES Act webpage](#). The webpage includes information regarding the purpose of funding, eligibility criteria, allowable use of funds, application deadlines, a link to the online application, anticipated questions and answers (FAQs), contact information for questions, acknowledgment of federal funds awarded, and assurance that funds will be properly disbursed in accordance with Section 18004(a)(1) of the CARES Act.

In addition, students enrolled in Spring 2020 who received Pell grants for the 2019-2020 academic year received a direct email on May 13, 2020 informing them of their eligibility for the Emergency Financial Aid Grants with instructions to apply. The open rate for the email was 81.1% and the link to the application received 361 clicks. Likewise, an email was sent to all eligible students enrolled in Spring 2020 on May 28, 2020 for the second round of applications. The open rate for the email was 67.8% and the link to the application received 438 clicks.

On July 6, 2020 the POET Update newsletter featured information about the final disbursement of CARES Act Emergency Financial Aid Grants. The Update was sent to all students, faculty, and staff. The open rate was 81.3%. In addition, a hard copy letter explaining the formula was included with the remittance to all students receiving checks and the same information was conveyed via direct email to students receiving their funds through direct deposit. Questions and requests for additional information were addressed through the CARESRelief@whittier.edu email.