

What is 'free college'?

"Free college" programs are generally last dollar scholarship programs that cover tuition for undergraduates after all other grants or scholarships have been applied. Examples of "free college" programs include the Tennessee Promise, the Hawaii College Promise, and the New York Excelsior Scholarship. Although aspects of each "free college" program may vary, plans typically include some combination of the following program components:

- FAFSA completion requirement
- Family income¹ limit
- Eligibility limited to recent high school graduates
- Limits by institution type (e.g. public 2-year colleges only)
- Full-time enrollment
- Community service requirements
- Mentoring for students
- Students sign pledges in middle or high school
- Grade point average minimum to receiving funding
- Maximum number of semesters or years during which a student can receive funding
- State residency requirement
- Must work in state after leaving college

What costs are covered?

Although program language suggests that college is "free" for undergraduates, often these programs cover less than half of the costs to students and their families. "Free college" programs cover tuition, but may not cover fees, and typically do not cover other non-tuition costs such as books, transportation, and living expenses. A comparison of the components of "free college" programs by state and information on costs covered is included at the end of this report (See table below).

¹ States determine income eligibility in a variety of ways. "Income" refers to the family's Adjusted Gross Income used in tax filing, and does not account for any items that are taken out of a family's paycheck on a pre-tax basis, such as health care, that may reduce their Adjusted Gross Income.

Summary of 'Free College' Program Components by State

State	Program Name	Extras	Covers at least 4 years of college	Covers tuition at 4-year colleges	Adult and returning students are eligible	Students with a 2.0 GPA are eligible	Students enrolling half time are eligible	Stays a grant forever	Has other requirements	Has income cap
Alabama	Birmingham Promise	Career Services	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Arizona	Arizona Promise	None	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Pell Eligible
Arkansas	Arkansas Future Grant	Mentoring	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
California	California Promise	None	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pell Eligible
Hawaii	Hawa'i Promise	None	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Must have unmet need
Idaho	Idaho Opportunity Scholarship	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Indiana	Indiana 21st Century Scholars	None	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Varies by household size
Iowa	Iowa Future Ready Iowa Last Dollar Scholarship	None	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	EFC of \$20,000 or less
Kansas	Kansas Promise Scholarship	None	68 credit hours/\$20,000 in tuition	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	\$100,000 AGI for families with 2 or fewer dependent children, limit varies by family size

State	Program Name	Extras	Covers at least 4 years of college	Covers tuition at 4-year colleges	Adult and returning students are eligible	Students with a 2.0 GPA are eligible	Students enrolling half time are eligible	Stays a grant forever	Has other requirements	Has income cap
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship Program	None	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Louisiana	TOPS Opportunity Award	None	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Maine	Free College Scholarship	None	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Maryland	Howard P Rawlings Guaranteed Access Grant	None	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	135% of the poverty guideline or less
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship	None	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	\$100,000 for single parent households; \$150,000 for two parent households
Minnesota	North Star Promise	Pell-eligible students are eligible for an additional grant, as funds allow	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	\$80,000 AGI
Minnesota	U Promise Plus	None	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	\$50,000 AGI

State	Program Name	Extras	Covers at least 4 years of college	Covers tuition at 4-year colleges	Adult and returning students are eligible	Students with a 2.0 GPA are eligible	Students enrolling half time are eligible	Stays a grant forever	Has other requirements	Has income cap
	Scholarship Program									
Nevada	Nevada Promise Scholarship	None	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
New Hampshire	Work Ready New Hampshire	None	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
New Hampshire	CCSNH Promise Program	None	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
New Mexico	New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship	None	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
New Mexico	New Mexico Legislative Lottery Scholarship	None	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	\$125,000 AGI or less
Oklahoma	Oklahoma's Promise	None	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	\$60,000 AGI for families with 2 or fewer dependent children, limit varies by family size
Oregon	Oregon Promise	None	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Varies by year, subject to available funding

State	Program Name	Extras	Covers at least 4 years of college	Covers tuition at 4-year colleges	Adult and returning students are eligible	Students with a 2.0 GPA are eligible	Students enrolling half time are eligible	Stays a grant forever	Has other requirements	Has income cap
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	None	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	Mentoring	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Utah	Utah Promise		No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Demonstrate financial need
Virginia	Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program	Books	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Demonstrate financial need
Washington	Washington Opportunity Grant	Many	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	AGI of 125% of state median income or lower
West Virginia	West Virginia Promise	None	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Wisconsin	Badger Promise	None	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Pell Eligible
Wisconsin	Bucky's Tuition Promise	None	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	\$60,000 AGI