



T E N N E S S E E

Promise

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is eligible for Tennessee Promise?

Any high school senior who graduates from a Tennessee eligible high schoolⁱ or completes a Tennessee home school programⁱⁱ can apply for the Promise. Students will apply in early fall of their high school senior year and begin working with a mentor and attending mandatory meetings in their counties by January. While the Tennessee Promise is available to all students regardless of socioeconomic status, partnering organizations will work with high school guidance counselors to target at-risk students who would otherwise not pursue any education beyond high school. The program will launch with the **graduating class of 2015**.

How many students are projected to apply and enter a community or technical college with Tennessee Promise?

More than 25,000 students are expected to apply, which represents 40 percent of graduating seniors. All applicants will receive a mentor. While more than 25,000 high schools seniors are expected to apply each year, many students will use Tennessee Promise as a safety net. In other words, they will take advantage of the resources offered by Tennessee Promise partnering organizations (e.g. FAFSA filing assistance, mentor encouragement) but pursue a college outside of Tennessee Promise eligibility. Typically, the number of students entering will be half of those applying at any given high school.

At what schools can you use Tennessee Promise?

Students can use the Tennessee Promise at any of Tennessee's 27 colleges of applied technology (TCATs), 13 community colleges or any in-state independent or four-year public university offering an associate's degree.

Why does Tennessee Promise only cover technical certificates, diplomas, and two-year degrees?

There are several reasons why we have focused the Tennessee Promise on certificate and two-year programs:

1. While we will need more of all degrees, forecasts show that much of our increased workforce demand will be in skills provided at our TCATs and community colleges.
2. TCATs and community colleges are cost effective and allow the state to offer last-dollar funds to all students. On average, annual tuition at Tennessee community colleges is \$4,000 compared to \$8,000 at four-year schools.
3. Students who earn an associate's degree and transfer to a four-year university will save up to 50 percent in tuition and fees.
4. Roughly 70 percent of first-time full-time freshmen entering Tennessee's public community colleges require remediation. TCATs and community colleges provide an effective foundation for students to complete any learning support requirements.

How will a student enroll in Tennessee Promise?

Once a partnering organization is setup in a county or LEA, it will work closely with high school counselors to heighten awareness of the program. Organizations will attend college nights and fairs to ensure all students know about Tennessee Promise and have the opportunity to apply.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

What are the student requirements?

To receive Tennessee Promise, a student must:

1. Participate and meet all requirements of a Tennessee Promise partnering organization.
2. Apply senior year and meet established application deadlines.
3. Attend all scheduled team meetings and a mandatory college orientation.

4. Begin at the postsecondary institution in the fall directly following high school graduation and remain at an eligible institution for consecutive semesters. (A student may begin at his/her postsecondary institution in the spring or summer directly following high school graduation; however, the student will be responsible for incurred tuition and fees until fall.)
5. Maintain at least 12 hours each semester.
6. Attend a postsecondary institution for consecutive semesters. (If a student withdraws from all classes during the semester, he/she will no longer be eligible.)
7. Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by February 1st of each year beginning in high school and throughout his/her postsecondary experience
8. Maintain satisfactory academic progress. At most institutions, this is the equivalent of maintaining a 2.0 GPA each semester.
9. Complete at least eight hours of community service each semester.

Failure to complete a requirement will result in **loss of eligibility**.

Do non-US citizens qualify for Tennessee Promise?

No. In order to qualify, students must be able to complete the FAFSA as well as qualify for in-state tuition.

Why isn't Tennessee Promise available for non-traditional students too?

We simply don't have the money to also provide free community college for all returning adults. Meanwhile, there are many things that we are doing for our non-traditional students now.

FUNDING

What is the cost of funding Tennessee Promise?

The estimated annual cost of Tennessee Promise is \$34 million to provide students with five consecutive semesters. The fifth semester addresses the nearly 70 percent of Tennessee high school graduates enrolling in community college who require at least one remedial class.

How will the Tennessee Promise be funded?

The Tennessee Promise will be funded within existing resources by interest from the newly established Tennessee Promise endowment and by changing the HOPE award for students attending community colleges from \$2,000 per year to \$3,000 per year, while reducing the award amount at the four-year institutions for freshmen and sophomores from \$4,000 per year to \$3,000 per year. The endowment will continue to grow as any net lottery proceeds above the general shortfall reserve will be added to the Tennessee Promise endowment.

What does Tennessee Promise fund?

Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship that funds any leftover tuition and fees at TCATs, two-year, and four-year schools offering associate's degrees once all other aid, with the exception of loans and work-study, has been applied. Tennessee Promise funds **cannot be used for books or cost of attendance fees**. Cost of attendance fees include costs like travel and gas expenses.

How will the funds be administered?

After students meet all Tennessee Promise requirements and all other financial aid, with the exception of loans and work-study has been exhausted, the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) will send the funds directly to the institutions. The process for payment will be very similar to the distribution of TSAA grants and lottery scholarships.

When does the student get the cash for the scholarship?

Students never directly receive funding from Tennessee Promise. The partnering organizations will provide a final list of Promise students to TSAC. TSAC will then send the funds directly to the colleges each semester.

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS REQUIREMENTS

What are the requirements of a partnering organization that will administer Tennessee Promise?

In order to administer Tennessee Promise funds, an organization must:

1. Operate as a college access and success program serving Tennessee students and adopt the student requirements of the Tennessee Promise scholarship.
2. Partner with Tennessee community and technical colleges.
3. Offer a mentoring program to students with a maximum 10:1 student to mentor ratio.
4. Organize local or regional advisory councils to serve as advocates for the program.
5. Sustain operations without state funding.

Partnering organizations must also have a commitment to college access and completion.

How will partnering organizations measure effectiveness?

Tennessee Promise partnering organizations will report data by high school, county, and postsecondary institution where appropriate. Below are measures TSAC will utilize to determine a partnering organization's effectiveness:

- (1) scholarship cost per student,
- (2) college-going rate,
- (3) percent first generation,
- (4) percent low-income,
- (5) ACT composite and sub-scores,
- (6) GPA,
- (7) FAFSA filing rate,
- (8) outside funding,
- (9) attempted/completed hours, and
- (10) retention rates (fall-spring; fall-fall)
- (11) transfer rates
- (12) completion rates.

MENTOR AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

How many mentors will be needed to administer Tennessee Promise?

Tennessee Promise will work with partnering organizations to secure at least 5,000 volunteer mentors to work with its applicants.

Who qualifies as a mentor?

Tennessee Promise partnering organizations determine the specifics of mentoring; however, at a minimum, a mentor must be at least 21 years old and provide information for a background check. The mentor applies online to participate with a partnering organization. The mentor will choose a high school and receive up to 10 students to mentor. The role of the mentor is to eliminate the barriers associated with college access by serving as an encourager and task master. Partnering organizations will host mandatory student meetings in each county where mentors and students will interact. All mentors must be trained by a partnering organization prior to mentoring Tennessee Promise students.

How does Tennessee Promise encourage local participation?

After meeting with local stakeholders in each county to launch Tennessee Promise, partnering organizations will establish local or regional advisory councils. Each council will consist of at least five members who will be responsible for raising awareness of the program as well as recruiting local mentors. The members on each advisory council should include a community college president, a TCAT director, a business leader, an education advocate, and an elected official.

ⁱ Tennessee Promise defines an eligible high school as TN public secondary school; private secondary school that is located in the state and is approved by the state board of ed. as a Category 1, 2, or 3; a secondary school operated by the DOD on a military base that is located in whole or part in TN; an out-of-state public secondary school located in a county bordering TN that residents are authorized to attend.

ⁱⁱ A student who completed high school in a Tennessee home school associated with a church-related school as defined by § 49-50-801 and registered with the Tennessee local school district that the student would otherwise attend or an independent home school student whose parent or guardian has given notice to the local director of a Tennessee school district under § 49-6-3050(b)(1) of intent to conduct a home school.