

Attachment A to BHE 24-01
MassReconnect Grant Program Guidelines

Background:

MassReconnect is a grant program designed to attract, incentivize, and encourage a diverse population of adults, age 25 and older, to attend college and earn a postsecondary credential or degree. MassReconnect is designed to provide “last dollar” financial assistance to ensure that eligible community college students have adequate resources to fully cover the direct costs of tuition, fees, books and supplies, towards a certificate or associate degree at a public community college. The program is intended to encourage adult learners to enroll in college to complete a program of study.

Eligible Institution:

A community college within the Massachusetts public system of higher education under Section 5 of Chapter 15A of the General Laws.

Eligible Program:

An approved certificate or associate degree program offered at a Massachusetts community college.

Eligible Student:

To be eligible for the MassReconnect Grant Program, an applicant must:

- be not less than 25 years of age as of the first day of classes for which funds are being awarded;
- physically reside in Massachusetts for at least one year, as of the start of the enrolled term, with an intent to remain in Massachusetts consistent with Board of Higher Education policy;
- be a U.S. Citizen, permanent legal resident, or non-citizen eligible under Title IV regulations; or have an approved eligibility status designated by the Board of Higher Education pursuant to Section 9 of Chapter 15A, as amended by Section 11 of Chapter XXX of the Acts of 2024;
- complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), or another state-approved equivalent form, annually for consideration of assistance by any designated deadline, as may be determined by the Department of Higher

Education, and comply with financial aid verification requirements in either the FAFSA or the alternative state-approved form, as applicable;

- not be in default on any federal or state student loans for attendance at any institution, or owe a refund for any previous state financial aid program;
- has not earned a prior associate or baccalaureate degree, or the equivalent;
- enroll, as a matriculated student, on a full-time or part-time basis (minimum of 6 credits, or the equivalent) in an approved undergraduate program of study leading to a certificate or an associate degree;
- meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) according to the institution's requirements and Federal standards; and
- Have a remaining balance owed to the institution for the costs of tuition, fees, books and supplies after all other grant and scholarship aid has been accounted for.

MassReconnect Conditions:

- Disbursement of funds: MassReconnect funds are to be appropriated to participating institutions through a formula approved by the Commissioner of Higher Education. **The formula may include installments throughout the academic year, may take into account utilization and enrollment, and may include reallocations of underutilized installments.**
- The institution is required to report recipient data to the Department of Higher Education upon request, and on an academic term basis
- The institution should facilitate access to on campus support services to students who receive assistance under MassReconnect, to promote persistence in and completion of their program of study
- The institution is responsible for verifying student eligibility, to include accurate determination of whether the student has earned a prior associate or baccalaureate degree, which may include a signed affidavit from the student after all reasonable attempts were made by the student to access prior transcripts.

- MassReconnect funds may be awarded to support trailing summer enrollment
- MassReconnect funds appropriated during an academic year must be committed by institutions and expended at the conclusion of that academic year

Award Value:

Subject to appropriation, MassReconnect assistance awarded to eligible students under this program shall not exceed the calculated cost of tuition and fees, books and supplies, as published in the institution’s annual Cost of Attendance (COA), for the academic term, during which the award is made.

MassReconnect funds may not be used to cover educational expenses not related to tuition, fees, books, and supplies, unless otherwise approved or authorized by the Commissioner of Higher Education, or his designee.

- Higher costs certificate or degree programs that exceed the institution’s average tuition and fee costs may require annual approval by the Department of Higher Education.

Students may be awarded MassReconnect funds as follows:

Associate Degree

Full-Time: Maximum of 3 years, 6 semesters for full-time (minimum of 12 enrolled credits per academic term). An additional year of assistance may be awarded based on extenuating circumstances, with approval of a written appeal.

Part-Time: Maximum of 5 years, 10 semesters for part-time (6 enrolled credits minimum per academic term). An additional year of assistance may be awarded based on extenuating circumstances, with approval of a written appeal.

Certificate Program

Full-Time: Maximum of three semesters (summer enrollment does not count toward the 3-semester maximum)

Part-Time: Maximum of six semesters (summer enrollment does not count toward the 6-semester maximum)

Award Disbursement:

Each participating institution must verify that each recipient is eligible in accordance with guidelines established for the MassReconnect Program, and that the student is enrolled in an approved certificate or associate degree program. Further, the institution is required to verify that the student has not earned a prior associate or bachelor's degree before funds are awarded and disbursed, which may be done through a signed affidavit after all reasonable attempts were made to secure prior transcripts, if any.

Institutions are required to refund any funding that is deemed to have been improperly awarded and disbursed to recipients who are later determined to be ineligible.

Participation Agreements:

All institutions receiving funds under the MassReconnect Program must have an active Massachusetts State Financial Aid Participation Agreement on file with the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA).

Audit Requirements:

- a. It shall be the responsibility of each college and university to maintain documentation of a recipient student's eligibility for the MassReconnect Program.
- b. The Commissioner shall require each campus to furnish annually to the Board of Higher Education a report detailing specific information regarding recipients of the MassReconnect Program. OSFA will coordinate specification and procedures for this report.
- c. All financial books, records and documents pertaining to this program shall, at all times, be open to inspection, review, and audit by the Commissioner, the State Auditor or their authorized representatives who shall have access to the premises wherever such books, records, and documents are located. The institution shall retain such financial books, records, and documents for seven years. An institution may retain such records for a period of five years if approval is received from the Records Conservation Board in accordance with General Laws, Chapter 30, Section 42.