

*Texas-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM)
Challenge Scholarship Program*

Frequently Asked Questions

References:

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE
Chapter 61, Subchapter GG

[Sec. 61.9791. DEFINITION.](#)
[Sec. 61.9792. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.](#)
[Sec. 61.9793. ELIGIBLE STUDENT.](#)
[Sec. 61.9794. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION.](#)
[Sec. 61.9795. AMOUNT; FUNDING.](#)

COORDINATING BOARD RULES

T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program Rules, Chapter 22, Subchapter V

[22.570. Authority, Scope, and Purpose.](#)
[22.571. Definitions.](#)
[22.572. Institutions.](#)
[22.573. Eligible Students.](#)
[22.574. Request for Application by Eligible Institutions.](#)
[22.575. Scholarship Application Process.](#)
[22.576. Award Amounts.](#)
[22.577. Reports.](#)

Funding and Institutional Eligibility:

Question: How much funding is available for scholarships in Academic Year 2013-14?

Answer: T-STEM is funded from a grant provided to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) from the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation (TG). TG committed \$8.5 million to support the program for the 2012-2013 biennium. A total of \$3 million was used in the first year of the program's operation, for a balance of \$5.5 million. The THECB will award grants up to the limit of available funds. Limitations to available funding for the support of eligible public community and technical colleges through the T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program will be proportioned based on qualifying criteria outlined in the Request for Application (RFA).

Question: How is institution eligibility for participation established? How was the number of students enrolled in a STEM program derived?

Answer: Applicant eligibility required that Texas public community/junior colleges or public technical colleges, or community college districts and systems, had more than 50 students enrolled in T-STEM programs in the previous academic year. Eligibility for the 2013 T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program is based on academic year 2011-2012 data, counting all declared majors classified in T-STEM instructional programs that were enrolled for 30 or more hours. The student count in Appendix B of the RFA is from the institutions' CBM 001 report. The student count is an estimate of the number of students that are potentially eligible.

Question: Is the number of students given in Appendix B the correct number that should be used for the application?

Answer: There is no "correct" number. When estimating the number of students an institution can serve, consider that there are merit restrictions students will have to fulfill. There are also administrative constraints an institution may want to consider for the size of its T-STEM Challenge Scholarship program. The T-STEM program is a "Challenge Scholarship" program and is intended as support for students that show promise to finish on time and are able to proceed with work or continuing education.

Question: Is an institution excluded from applying in 2013, if it was not eligible to apply for T-STEM in 2012?

Answer: No, an institution may seek to participate in the program, beginning in academic year 2013-2014. The listing of eligible institutions is in appendix B of the 2013 RFA, posted at <<http://www.THECB.state.tx.us/TSTEM>>.

Question: Would a community college district apply with one application or would each campus of a district apply separately?

Answer: A community college district shall participate as one unit for the T-STEM Challenge Scholarship program. This means, the district's eligibility is established as a unit, and it will submit one Notice of Intent (NOI), one application, and one combined report. The Coordinating Board also will execute one contract for each district. Each district will have one T-STEM Program Director who will coordinate with all the district's participating campuses and serves as the point of contact for Coordinating Board staff.

Question: Do all the funds have to be used towards tuition or can scholarship funds be given directly to students?

Answer: Funds may be received by a student or may be credited to a student's school account. (Coordinating Board Rules Chapter 22, Subchapter V, §22.572g: "The institution must maintain records to prove the receipt of program funds by the student or the crediting of such funds to the student's school account. If the Commissioner has reason for concern that an institution has disbursed funds for unauthorized purposes, the Board will notify the Program Officer and Financial Aid Officer and offer an opportunity for a hearing pursuant to the procedures outlined in Chapter 1 of this title.")

Question: Can scholarships be given to students who pursue a one-year certificate?

Answer: Yes, students can receive a scholarship while working on a certificate.

Question: If a portion of a scholarship is unused, does it roll forward into the next semester?

Answer: The institution handles how scholarships are given out. It may award a student a scholarship by semester or by academic year. Students may receive partial scholarships and awards may be reduced from the \$2,500 allowable maximum.

Part-Time Work Experience:

Question: Do T-STEM scholarship recipients have to be employed part-time by business or industry partners?

Answer: No, T-STEM business partnerships have the purpose to foster part-time employment opportunities for T-STEM students, but students would not lose their scholarships for lack of employment.

Question: What responsibility is placed upon the college to assure that a recipient remains employed during the program?

Answer: A student recipient of a scholarship does not need to remain employed. However, the institution should make sure that a student does not “work more than 15 hours a week for a business participating in the STEM program.”

Question: Does an institution have to keep records that track a student's employment? Or may the institution just keep a signed statement on file, saying a student will work no more than 15 hours a week in their chosen field, etc.?

Answer: An awarded institution will track any T-STEM related employment for the purpose of certification according to RFA sections 11.2 and 15.2, for every semester scholarships are given. It will be important for the success of the program, to have detailed records about the employment experiences offered through T-STEM. Through the partnerships with business or industry the institution would receive certification of all part-time positions held by T-STEM students. The certification would include length of employment, hours-per-week of employment, and CIP code of students employed. The certification would be part of the institution's “Report of Partnership(s) with Business and Industry”. Documentation such as pay stubs or time sheets need not be collected or kept.

Question: Why is part-time employment limited to 15 hours per week?

Answer: Students should be encouraged to gain experience in the field without being overburdened. The intent of this requirement is to allow students to have ample time to focus on their academic work.

Question: Students, in their part-time work, may be asked to work more than 15 hours. For those in patient care positions, this is often the case. Can the 15 hours per week be an average?

Answer: The statute states (TEC, Section 61.9793): “... a student must ... agree to work no more than 15 hours a week for a business participating in the STEM program.” Yes, it would be appropriate to fulfill the time-limit placed on work as an average over the scholarship duration, if, e.g., a patient care position is what a student needs and it must be arranged within the student's and the provider's schedules.

Question: Does T-STEM part-time employment have to be offered through T-STEM business or industry partners?

Answer: No. For example, institutions may choose to offer opportunities for part-time work study to its T-STEM students; such experiences would count as T-STEM employment.

Question: Must a student forgo a scholarship offer, if that student is working at a part-time job, like a restaurant or retail store, that is not in a T-STEM field?

Answer: The statute states (TEC, Section 61.9793): “... a student must ... agree to work no more than 15 hours a week for a business participating in the STEM program.” The awarded institution has no obligation to question scholarship recipients about their private employment arrangements that are not with a T-STEM business partner or in their chosen instructional program area or related field.

Question: *Can scholarship recipients participate as work study tutors and be paid for by administrative funds that an awarded institution receives?*

Answer: Yes, an institution may expend T-STEM administrative funds (up to five percent of a total award) on student work study, if the work study is within the scholarship recipient's chosen instructional program area or related field, or, if the work study relates directly to the administration of the T-STEM program. If the work study is for administrative purposes, the institution cannot count the employment as T-STEM part-time employment experience.

Question: *If a scholarship recipient works in an unpaid academic co-operative as a capstone experience, or if a recipient works in an unpaid internship as a degree requirement, would this count as partnership effort?*

Answer: Yes, capstone experiences and unpaid internships may count as part-time work experience.

Business Partnerships:

Question: *What is the purpose of the business or industry partnerships under the T-STEM program?*

Answer: As part of the business or industry partnerships, institutions have to develop and document part-time employment opportunities for T-STEM students. The component of part-time employment experience is critical for the sustainability of the program, even if there is no numerical threshold attached for an institution to receive an award.

Question: *May an institution build on existing relationships with business or industry? Does the program require a new letter of understanding?*

Answer: An institution may build on existing relationships. The partnership would need to be able to "develop" the tasks required by the program, which are (a) provide part-time work experiences and (b) establish the need for local T-STEM employment.

Question: *Does a partnering business have to provide paid employment to students in the scholarship program?*

Answer: The purpose of the community college partnerships with local business or industry is to allow students to have access to part-time work experiences in a STEM field. Yes, it is a reasonable expectation that business or industry partners provide 15 hour internships. However, there is no requirement that would prohibit an institution to partner without such offers. Another purpose of the partnerships is to establish STEM employment needs in the regions.

Question: *Must businesses or industry partners agree to employ T-STEM scholarship recipients after their graduation?*

Answer: There is no requirement that business or industry partners commit to hire T-STEM graduates.

Question: *Is there an employment provision for the T-STEM program?*

Answer: In order to be eligible to receive funding for a follow-up academic year an awarded institution must demonstrate that at least 70 percent of its graduates that participated in T-STEM, within three months after graduation, either find employment in a T-STEM field or continue their education by taking upper-division 4-year college courses, i.e. they must pursue a baccalaureate degree in STEM.

Question: Who ensures that the experience in the field is viable for students?

Answer: Institutions will ensure through their partnerships that work experiences are viable.

Question: Must there be a business partner for every CIP code for which there are students?

Answer: No, the intent is to assist T-STEM students with part-time work experiences and with success after graduation. An institution would choose its business/industry partners that can help with that goal.

Student Eligibility:

Question: Is student eligibility restricted to new, first-year students, or are second-year students eligible? Similarly, are students eligible who participated in dual credit programs?

Answer: All students may be eligible, and the eligibility conditions for T-STEM do not distinguish between students that already have higher education credits or those who do not. A student may receive an award for up to a cumulative total of two calendar years (not program years).

Question: What distinction is there for students with regards to eligibility?

Answer: The statute distinguishes between students who never had a T-STEM scholarship ("Initial Scholarship Recipient", RFA 1.1) and those who continue with a T-STEM scholarship in a second or third program year ("Continuing Scholarship Recipient", RFA 1.2).

Question: Can an institution give all its scholarships to continuing student recipients?

Answer: An institution that received a T-STEM grant for the first time would only give out initial T-STEM scholarship awards, following RFA 1.1, even if those are for second-year students. (An exception would be a transfer student who had previous T-STEM benefits elsewhere.) Only when a student continues with a scholarship during a second program year would the test follow RFA 1.2.

Question: Does the students' eligibility for T-STEM has to be verified every semester?

Answer: A student may receive an award for the entirety or a portion of the program year. The eligibility of a student for T-STEM need not be tested more than once during a program year.

Question: Does the 3.0 high school GPA in math and science courses apply to non-traditional students and other students whose high school experience was some years ago? An example might be a student who enrolled in the army just out of high school and is now returning for a degree five or ten years later.

Answer: The requirement applies to all students who receive a T-STEM scholarship for the first time ("Initial Scholarship Recipients", RFA section 11.1). The statute applies, even if a student does not enroll immediately upon graduation from high school or if a student already has completed undergraduate credits.

Question: If a student started a T-STEM scholarship in the spring semester, he/she may not have the 30 SCH required by RFA 1.2 for continuation in the fall, which would be in a different program year.

Answer: In this case the institution may check if the student has the potential of reaching the 30 SCH per year goal. In other words, the eligibility test would pro-rate the time studied. The institution would not want to deny a meritorious student a continuing scholarship.

Question: Can the institution determine criteria for student selection beyond the grant's very specific requirements?

Answer: Yes, it is the institutions' responsibility to select students. Institutions do not have an obligation to give scholarships to students that meet T-STEM eligibility. If an institution selects students for scholarships on a semester basis, it may check students' progress as one of its semester-by-semester continuation criteria.

Question: The institution does not have access to information of whether initial scholarship recipients "have graduated from high school with at least a 3.0 GPA on a four-point scale in mathematics and sciences courses." Can the institution substitute overall institutional GPA since the institution does not have the time required to disaggregate math and science grades from all grades?

Answer: This requirement is statutory, Texas Education Code, Section 61.9793. T-STEM scholarship recipients must meet all established criteria and one is that they graduate from high school with a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 on a four-point scale in mathematics and science courses. It is likely that this information may be difficult to obtain; however, it is a requirement. Students that do not fulfill this criterion are not eligible to receive a T-STEM scholarship.

Question: Can an institution use self-reported high school math and science GPA data?

Answer: The institution cannot use self-reported data. The institution has to verify it. Since there is not officially calculated math and science GPA, all awarded institutions have to go through their students' transcripts.

Question: Can students participate if they are enrolled in college based on their General Educational Development (GED) test, if their math and science scores from that test are counted?

Answer: Yes, those students may participate. Non-standard high school math and science scores, i.e., those not based on a four-point scale or those based on foreign grade-scales, must be converted with due diligence to the standard four-point scale.

Question: In calculating students' math and science GPA, can weights be taken into account for honors or AP classes, if the high school lists the weights?

Answer: Yes, the GPA calculation would follow the school's general GPA calculation.

Question: Does the 80% completion rate rule for a continuing scholarship recipient stand for each semester attended or would it be considered as an overall rate for the three semesters that the student has attended?

Answer: The statute is explicit that the student must complete at least 80 percent of all semester credit hours attempted for each semester.

Question: The RFA includes CIP Code 51.00 – Health Services/Allied Health/Health Sciences, General. Does this mean 51.00 is all encompassing, including 51.38 or 51.39 – associate degree or vocational nursing?

Answer: No. Nursing, with CIP 51.38 and 51.39 are not part of the T-STEM program. The 51.00 is part of the four digit CIP listing and while 51.38 falls under the two-digit 51, it does not fall under the four-digit 51.00.

Question: Do all students have to register with the Selective Service System and would this exclude undocumented students?

Answer: The requirement for registration is in statute ([Texas Education Code 51.9095](#)). Undocumented students can also register. They cannot do it via the internet/web, but they can fill out a form and mail it: <<http://www.sss.gov/default.htm>>.

Question: Can institutions collect FAFSA forms as part of the T-STEM student application?

Answer: The THECB does not require or collect the FAFSA form, because this scholarship is merit-based and not based on need. An institution might be able to make a case for collecting the FAFSA form from a student applicant, because it would allow consideration for other types of aid (need-based), besides the support through T-STEM.

Financial Aid:

Question: If a student is eligible for financial aid, would the amount he or she is eligible be reduced as a result of a T-STEM award? In the case of a Pell award, would the college need to reduce the T-STEM amount awarded instead, so the full Pell could be realized?

Answer: This depends on the requirements for the other programs with which the T-STEM award is being packaged. For instance, if it is packaged with Pell Grant only, the Pell Grant award amount would not be affected at all. However, if it is packaged with another need-based program (i.e., TEXAS Grant, Federal Supplemental Education Grant, Work-Study, Subsidized Loan, etc.), the other program may have to be decreased/adjusted in order to stay within the student's calculated need as required by regulation and rule.

Question: Can a T-STEM recipient also be receiving scholarship money from the college from a different scholarship program?

Answer: This depends on the requirements of the other programs awarded to the student included in the student's financial aid package.

Question: What is the meaning of the term "local sources", in reference to matching funds, under section 2.3 of the RFA?

Answer: Local sources would be any other sources than state sources. An institution cannot award more in T-STEM scholarships from state funds than it received through the T-STEM program, but may add funds from other, non-state sources.