

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

Frequently Asked Questions

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Statute and Rules

TEXAS EDUCATION CODE (TEC)

Chapter 61, Subchapter GG. Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM)
Challenge Scholarship Program

[Sec. 61.9791. DEFINITION.](#)

[Sec. 61.9792. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.](#)

[Sec. 61.9793. ELIGIBLE STUDENT.](#)

[Sec. 61.9794. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTION.](#)

[SB 1066, Amending Sec. 61.9794](#)

[Sec. 61.9795. AMOUNT; FUNDING.](#)

COORDINATING BOARD RULES (Rule; Rules)

T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program, 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.](#)

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[22.577. Reports.](#)

Funding and Institutional Eligibility

Question: How much funding is available for scholarships in the current grant period (FY 2017 and FY2018, with extended contracts to FY 2019)?

Answer: T-STEM is funded through a grant provided to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board by the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation (TG). TG committed \$8.5 million to support the program for the 2012-2013 biennium and \$19.2 million for support in the following years. A total of \$16.3 million has been awarded to eligible institutions since Academic Year (AY) 2013. For the current grant period, \$7 million was made available for grant awards for AY 2017 and AY 2018. Available funding for the support of eligible public community and technical colleges through the T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program was apportioned based on qualifying criteria outlined in the Request for Applications (RFA). The Coordinating Board awarded grants up to the limit of available funds. In summer 2017, the Coordinating Board made available \$1.17 million to awarded institutions proportionally with their current awards. The cumulative amount available for scholarships and related programmatic administration is \$8.17 million.

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

Answer By statute, participation is limited to Texas public community/junior colleges and public technical colleges that had 50 or more students enrolled in T-STEM programs in the

previous academic year. College districts/systems with more than one campus are treated as a single entity for consideration of eligibility. Institutional eligibility is recalculated each year during development of the next year's RFA, using institutions' CBM 001 reports. Eligibility for the 2016-2018 T-STEM Challenge Scholarship Program was based on academic year 2014-2015 data and includes all declared student majors in T-STEM instructional programs who were enrolled for 30 or more hours. The list of eligible institutions appears in Appendix B of the 2016-2018 RFA, posted at <<http://www.THECB.state.tx.us/TSTEM>>.

The student count in Appendix B also serves as an estimate of the number of students who are potentially eligible to receive T-STEM scholarships.

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

Answer: No, there is no "correct" number. Institutions should consider the number of high-caliber students they can recruit for a successful T-STEM program. The T-STEM program is a "Challenge Scholarship" program intended to provide support for students who show promise of (a) graduating and entering the workforce OR (b) consistently advancing toward a certificate or degree in a T-STEM major during their two academic years of eligibility. Continued institutional eligibility is dependent upon the success rate of scholarship recipients. An institution may also want to consider administrative constraints in planning the size of its T-STEM scholarship program.

Question: How is continuing institutional eligibility established?

Answer: Senate Bill 1066 (84th Legislature) amended TEC 61.9794 regarding institutional eligibility to require that each year, beginning with the third year following implementation of a T-STEM scholarship program, an institution demonstrate that at least 70 percent of its scholarship recipients, twelve months after receiving a scholarship, were continuing in a certificate or degree program or had entered the workforce. The Coordinating Board calculates continuing institutional eligibility by analyzing the performance of an institution's reported scholarship recipients as shown by the institution's CBM reports and Texas Workforce Commission employment records.

Question: Should a college district or system with multiple campuses apply with one application or would each campus apply separately?

Answer: A college district or system must apply as one unit for the T-STEM Challenge Scholarship program, submitting one Notice of Intent (NOI) and one application, and must submit one combined report for each reporting period. The Coordinating Board will execute one contract with each district/system. Each district/system must designate one T-STEM Program Director to coordinate with all participating campuses and serve as the point of contact for Coordinating Board staff.

Question: Do all the funds have to be used toward 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. Institutions are required to maintain records to document the receipt of program funds by the student or the crediting of such funds to the student's school account (Rule 22.572(g)).

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

Answer: Each institution determines how scholarships are distributed. An institution may award a student a scholarship by semester or by academic year. Students may receive partial

scholarships, and awards may be reduced from the annual \$2,500 statutory limit. Any unused portion of a scholarship may be rolled forward or redistributed within the award year as the institution sees fit.

Part-Time Work Experience

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

Answer: No. Institutions must develop and document part-time student employment or internship opportunities for T-STEM scholarship recipients, and one purpose of T-STEM business/industry partnerships is to foster such opportunities. But T-STEM students are not required to work and do not lose their scholarships for lack of employment.

Question: Does all 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. An institution may expend T-STEM administrative funds (up to five percent of direct expenditures) 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. (Note: If the work study is for administrative purposes, the institution cannot count the employment as a T-STEM part-time employment experience.) An academic cooperative such as a capstone experience and internships that are part of degree requirements may also qualify as T-STEM employment, whether paid or unpaid.

Question: In addition to developing employment/internship opportunities, what other responsibilities do colleges have with regard to T-STEM student employment?

Answer: Institutions must make certain that T-STEM students do not "work more than 15 hours a week for a business participating in the STEM program," as doing so would affect their eligibility for subsequent awards (TEC 61.9793).

Additionally, awarded institutions must track the length of any T-STEM-related employment, the average hours worked per week, and the SOC classification code (RFA 4.2) for the part-time position. These data are reported to the Coordinating Board in the Final Student Registration Data Report for each semester and in the annual Business and Industry Partnerships Report (RFA 15.2 and 15.4). The Coordinating Board compiles and makes public the data as part of its annual report on the T-STEM Program. Institutions need not collect students' pay stubs or time sheets.

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

Answer: The intent of the limitation is that students gain experience in the field and also have ample time to focus on the quality of their academic work and graduating on time.

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: In the case of internships/clinicals required as part of a degree program, colleges may report T-STEM student employment as an average over the duration of a semester in which the student receives a scholarship.

Question: Must a student forgo a scholarship offer if the student works in a non-T-STEM part-time job such as waitress or sales clerk?

Answer: The statute states (TEC 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.

Business Partnerships

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

Answer: T-STEM institutions are required by statute to develop partnerships with business and industry to identify local employment needs and develop local employment/internship opportunities for T-STEM scholarship recipients. This component of the T-STEM program is intended to link STEM programs more closely with employers. There is no required number of partnerships to receive at T-STEM award. Institutions should partner with businesses or industries that will contribute to the specific requirements of the T-STEM program.

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. Each T-STEM partnership, whether newly acquired or building on an existing relationship, must be documented with a letter of understanding.

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, and it is a reasonable expectation that business/industry partners provide 15-hour internships. However, there is no requirement that would prohibit an institution from partnering without such offers. Another purpose of the partnerships is to establish STEM employment needs in the regions. Additionally, unpaid internships are allowable.

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

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

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 should choose business/industry partners that will contribute to that goal.

Student Eligibility

Question: Is initial 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 who meet the initial scholarship requirements are eligible, including second-year students and high school graduates who participated in dual-credit programs.

Question: What distinctions are made with regard to student eligibility?

Answer: The statute distinguishes between students who never had a T-STEM scholarship (RFA 12.1: Initial Scholarship Recipient) and those who continue with a T-STEM scholarship after completing one academic year (RFA 12.2: Continuing Scholarship Recipient).

Question: Students in some T-STEM-eligible instructional programs typically take less than 30 SCH over two semesters due to the number of contact hours and/or clinical requirements. Can the 30 SCH requirement be waived for such students?

Answer: The 30 SCH requirement is statutory and makes no allowances for the circumstance cited in the question (TEC 61.9793).

Question A: If a student received an initial T-STEM scholarship in the spring semester and doesn't have the required 30 SCH for continuation in the fall, a new academic year, is the student ineligible for continuation?

Question B: If a student received an initial T-STEM scholarship in the spring semester but requires four long semesters to earn an associate's degree, does RFA 12.3 (Student Eligibility Limit) make the student ineligible for a scholarship in his/her fourth semester, which would extend into a third fiscal year?

Answer: Students receiving an initial scholarship in the spring semester do not become ineligible under the circumstances given in these questions. The statute allows students to receive T-STEM scholarships for two academic years. Institutions may make an initial award to a student during any semester of an academic year. Students must meet eligibility requirements for a continuing (second-year) award upon completion of one academic year, as shown in the table below. A student's fourth long semester may extend into a third fiscal year provided the student's tenure as a T-STEM scholar does not exceed a cumulative total of two academic years.

Semester 1: initial award	Semester 2	Semester 3	Student must meet continuation requirements
Fall, AY1	Spring, AY1	Summer, AY1	Fall, AY2
Spring, AY1	Summer, AY1	Fall, AY2	Spring, AY2
Summer, AY1	Fall, AY2	Spring, AY2	Summer, AY2

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

Answer: A student's eligibility must be tested upon completion of one academic year. (See table above.) The eligibility of a student for T-STEM need not be tested more than once during a program year.

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

Answer: Yes, it is the institution's responsibility to select meritorious students. Institutions do not have an obligation to give scholarships to students simply because they meet T-STEM eligibility. For example, 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: Can an institution give all its scholarships to continuing student recipients?

Answer: An institution that receives a T-STEM grant for the first time would give only initial T-STEM scholarship awards, following RFA 12.1, even if the awards are given to second-year students. (An exception would be a transfer student who had a previous T-STEM scholarship elsewhere.) An institution receiving a T-STEM grant for its second or subsequent years may make a local decision to fund only continuing students. However, doing so would limit the scope of its T-STEM program.

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 enlisted in the army directly out of high school and is now returning for a degree five or ten years later.

Answer: This requirement is statutory (TEC 61.9793). T-STEM scholarship recipients must meet all established criteria, including a high school mathematics and science GPA of at least 3.0 on a four-point scale in mathematics and science courses. The requirement applies to all students who receive a T-STEM scholarship for the first time, even if a student does not enroll immediately upon graduation from high.

Question A: If an institution does not have access to information that would help it to determine whether an initial scholarship applicant has "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?

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

Answer: Documentation of a student's high school mathematics and science GPA is a statutory requirement. Students who do not or cannot provide the requisite information are not eligible to receive a T-STEM scholarship. Similarly, institutions cannot use a student's self-reported GPA. Colleges desiring to award a meritorious student a T-STEM scholarship must calculate the student's high school math-science GPA and report it to the Coordinating Board as part of its T-STEM Student Registration Data Report.

Question: Are students enrolled in college based on their General Educational Development (GED) tests eligible for T-STEM scholarships if their math and science scores from that test are counted?

Answer: Yes, GED graduates enrolled at the institution 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. By the same standard, GED graduates' math and science scores may be used to calculate a math-science GPA.

Question: In calculating a student's 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 required for a continuing scholarship apply to each semester attended, or can it be considered as the average rate for the student's first year?

Answer: The statute is explicit that a student must complete at least 80 percent of all semester credit hours attempted 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 nursing or vocational nursing?

Answer: No. Nursing, with CIP codes 51.38 and 51.39, are not part of the T-STEM program. The 51.00 is part of the four-digit CIP listings, which means that a program's CIP code number must lead with those four digits.

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

Answer: Yes, a student may receive a scholarship while working on a certificate.

Question: Do all male students have to register with the Selective Service System to be eligible for a T-STEM scholarship, and would this exclude undocumented students?

Answer: The requirement for registration with Selective Service is in statute ([Texas Education Code 51.9095](#)). Males who are older than the maximum age at which an individual is required to register or otherwise exempt under federal law from registering must document the basis for their exemption. Undocumented students can register, but may not do so via the Internet. Instead, they must fill out a form and mail it. The form is available at <http://www.sss.gov/default.htm>.

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

Answer: Institutions are required develop a T-STEM scholarship application form, make it available to all eligible students, collect forms from all applicants, and verify student eligibility. Design of the application and award process is a local decision and may include the FAFSA. For example, an institution might collect the FAFSA from student applicants in order to allow consideration of need-based aid in addition to or instead of support through T-STEM. The Coordinating Board does not require or collect the FAFSA form, as T-STEM scholarships are merit-based and not based on need.

T-STEM Scholarships and Financial Aid

Question: If a student is eligible for financial aid, would the amount he or she is eligible for 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 a Pell Grant only, the Pell Grant award amount would not be affected at all. However, if it is packaged with another need-based program, 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 for that particular program.

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

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