

Brighter Star Funding Guidelines

What is Brighter Star funding?

Brighter Star is the name of Wisconsin's Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. Brighter Star funding is money that the federal government provides, and states distribute to help eligible youth pay for college, career programs, or training programs after high school. You can find more information about Brighter Star and what it can pay for in the information below, as well as on the DCF Paying for College webpage: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youthservices/college>.

Wisconsin used to provide this type of funding through its DCF Scholarship. As of January 2019, Brighter Star replaces this scholarship and includes a new process. See the Brighter Star two-page overview document for more information on this change and how to access funds: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5483.pdf>.

Am I eligible?

Brighter Star funds are intended to help the following youth:

- Students who are at least 17.5 years old and are likely to remain in court-ordered out-of-home care placement (foster care) until the age of 18 or older; or
- Students who were adopted or entered Chapter 48.977 guardianship at age 16 or older following time in a court-ordered out-of-home care placement; or
- Students between 18 and 23 years old who "aged out" of the foster care system (left at age 18 or older).

Students may access funds up to the age of 23 or for five academic years, whichever comes first. They must be enrolled in an approved institution of higher education and be making satisfactory progress. See the following page for what qualifies as an approved institution.

Brighter Star funds **cannot** be used for activities related to college search, completing high school coursework, or earning high school credit. However, students may receive Brighter Star funds prior to high school graduation IF they are enrolled in a certificate program that is directly connected to employment that can be obtained without a high school diploma such as a Certified Nursing Assistant program, OR the student is dually enrolled in high school and a postsecondary program. A student must have senior standing to receive funding.

How much Brighter Star funding can I get?

Students can receive up to \$5,000 per academic year up to their school's total cost of attendance and based on available funds.

How do I apply for Brighter Star funding?

Visit <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youthservices/pdf/brighterstarcontacts.pdf> to identify the point of contact for the county in which you were in care and their contact information.

Students may already be working on their independent living needs with a worker in one of Wisconsin's seven service regions (see <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/map/il-r>). If so, talk to that worker about Brighter Star!

Each regional agency will have their own process for applying for and receiving funds. This will include, but is not limited to, the student providing proof of enrollment in a school or program.

When are Brighter Star funds renewable?

- A student may access funds up to the age of 23 or for five academic years, whichever comes first.
- A student may apply funds up to and including graduate-level degrees (e.g. Master's, PhD, law, medical degrees) so long as they continue to meet all eligibility criteria, including being less than 23 years of age.
- A student may transfer schools or programs but must continue to be enrolled in an approved institution of higher education and meet fund eligibility criteria.

Program Requirements

Brighter Star funds must be used to help establish, expand, or strengthen eligible students' success in an academic, career, or training program after high school. The following must apply:

1. Each student must have an education focus included in their independent living plan. The student must be involved in designing their plan and program activities. The education section of the plan should include:
 - A plan for successful completion of education or training after high school;
 - Links/communication with school counselors, officials, and/or support persons;
 - A plan for completing required applications, tests, and other financial aid forms;
 - A plan for supporting school or training attendance; and
 - A plan for completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)) and applying for other available financial aid.
2. Students receiving assistance accept responsibility for doing what is needed to maintain funding. For example, being responsive to the regional agency, meeting deadline, and/or providing needed documentation.
3. The total amount of Brighter Star funds a student receives in an academic year cannot exceed the cost of their attendance and must not surpass \$5,000.

4. A student must be enrolled in an approved institution of higher education, whether in Wisconsin or out of state. An approved institution of higher education is defined as one that:
 - Is accredited or pre-accredited; and
 - Admits only students with a high school diploma or equivalent OR admits students who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (age 18 in Wisconsin); and
 - Meets one of the following thresholds:
 - ✓ Awards a bachelor's degree or offers no less than a two-year program that provides credit towards a degree; or
 - ✓ Provides no less than one year of training towards gainful employment; or
 - ✓ Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.
5. Expenditures for "cost of attendance" may include, but are not limited to:

Tier 1 Expenses

- Tuition.
- Balances due at school.
- On-campus room and board.
- Meal cards.
- Books and school supplies (such as uniforms, tools, equipment).
- Offset or pay off federal student loans.
 - ✓ *Note: Loans must be provided in the same academic year for which the student receives Brighter Star funds.*
- Study abroad through qualifying schools.

Tier 2 Expenses

- Rent, security deposit, and utilities.
- Food.
- Transportation.
- Health insurance premium costs.
- Disability services.
- Dependent childcare expenses to licensed childcare providers.
- Testing required for entry to program (e.g., ACT test), if cost is not already waived.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.