Using the WebGrants Foster Youth Verification Tool

Background

As a result of the passage of Senate Bill 12 in 2017, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) and the California Department of Social Services implemented a data-matching protocol to streamline verification of eligibility for federal and state financial aid. This match identifies students who have completed a FAFSA or CADAA who were in a foster care placement under the jurisdiction of California on or after their 13th birthday.

This information is then used to populate a verification screen within WebGrants as well as to determine eligibility for the Foster Youth Cal Grant access award, which provides a longer time frame for awards and increased funding. As of Fall 2023, the data match will also be used to award expanded funding available to foster youth through the Middle Class Scholarship program and can be used by Community College Financial Aid offices to verify eligibility for the expanded Student Success Completion Grant. A separate matching process also occurs to verify eligibility for the Chafee Grant, which is available to students who were in foster care between ages 16 – 18.

WebGrants Verification

CSAC issued Grant Special Alert (GSA) 2018-37 on November 14, 2018 that describes how financial aid staff or other staff who have access to the system can use the verification screen in WebGrants.

As eligibility for the Community College NextUp program and priority registration aligns with FAFSA/CADAA independent status, verification through WebGrants can also serve as verification of eligibility for these programs.

Reasons for Match Failure

The match between CSAC and CDSS relies on a student's social security number and date of birth and is therefore fairly accurate. When the match fails, it may be for one of the following reasons:

1. The student was in foster care under the jurisdiction of a state other than California.

2. In some cases, youth have a court order for out of home placement and are under the jurisdiction of the county juvenile probation system. While these records are supposed to be verified through the data match with CDSS, they are sometimes omitted from CDSS records and therefore these students may fail the match process with greater frequency.

3. WebGrants may be accurately reporting that the student is not eligible. The student may not qualify as a foster youth because of the nature of their legal situation – for example, they lived with a relative without a court order being in place, they transitioned to guardianship or adoption or were reunified before the age of 13, or they were subject to a probate guardianship and never were involved with the dependency system.

Reasons for Lookup Tool Failure

When using the lookup tool, whenever possible, staff should search using the CSAC ID. If this is not available, a student can be searched for by name, however, students may not appear on the lookup tool if the name used does not match the name in the CDSS record.

There are several reasons why a student may not appear on the lookup tool, including:

- The name being used in the search tool does not match the name in the CDSS file. The name must align exactly for there to be a match. Examples of errors include discrepancies in hyphenated last names, transposed letters, use of middle name on one record and not the other, use of a different parent's last name, or use of a different version of the student's name.

- The student did not complete a FAFSA/CADAA.

- The student did not list the college that is doing the search on their FAFSA/CADAA.

If a student does not appear using the search tool, for those students who qualify for a CalGrant, a financial aid officer can confirm a student's status as a foster youth by checking the CalGrant roster. If the student has been verified through the match with CDSS as having been in foster care after age 13, the letters "FY" will appear next to their name on the roster. Students who appear on the Chafee Grant roster can also be deemed as verified. [1]

Note that there may be students who qualify for NextUp who appear on neither the CalGrant nor Chafee roster because those students failed to meet other eligibility criteria for those programs. In these cases, other forms of verification will be necessary to determine eligibility for NextUp if verification using the tool fails. The Community College Chancellor's Office has provided guidance regarding the types of verification that may be utilized.

Manual Verification

If a student is not shown as verified in WebGrants but believes that they meet the eligibility for financial aid benefits, manual verification may be required to secure these benefits. Colleges can support students to submit the form below to request that their record be manually verified.

https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/chafee_foster_care_verification_form.pdf

Additional Help

For questions regarding how to complete the verification form, students can contact the California Student Aid Commission: Chafee@csac.ca.gov or (888) 224-7268, option 3.

For questions regarding the applicant's foster care eligibility or Chafee denial, students can contact the California Department of Social Services: CFSChafeeETV@dss.ca.gov or (916) 651-7465.

The California Foster Care Ombudsman's Office is also available to help support students to obtain necessary verification. They can be reached at:

- https://fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov
- (877) 846-1602
- fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov

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[1] The Chafee Grant roster includes only those who were in foster care between the ages of 16-18 but includes some students who may be excluded from the CalGrant roster due to not meeting the high school GPA requirement or submission of a FAFSA/CADAA after the September 2 deadline.