

DIVERSIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY
2025 Illinois Legislative Session Amendments
Amendment to Sections 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8,
10, and 11; Adding Sections 7.5, 8.5, 11.10, and 11.15

Revises Language FAQs

The Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program provides **financial assistance** to successful applicants in pursuing a graduate or professional degree and to assist program graduates in finding employment at an Illinois institution of higher education, including a community college, in a faculty or staff position.

Amendments to DFI Act

The 2025 amendments to the DFI Act make comprehensive changes to the Act, including revisions to definitions, grant eligibility, the structure and functions of the Program Board, institutional representative responsibilities, award conditions, and overall program policy and eligibility.

When will the changes take effect?

The changes made to the Act shall first apply beginning with awards made for the 2025-2026 academic year.

How has the definition of “Illinois resident” changed?

The new definition of “Illinois resident” for the implementation of the DFI program is any United States citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States who meets at least one of the following requirements:

- Has earned a degree from an institution of higher education authorized to operate in this State; or
- Is a registered voter in this State and has lived in this State for a period of at least 3 years prior to applying for a grant under this Act.

What is the duration of the status of “Illinois resident” for DFI participants?

The status of Illinois residency of a student at the time of initial matriculation in the DFI shall hold for their entire duration of graduate or professional study at the DFI institution.

Who is an institutional representative for DFI program implementation?

“Institutional representative” means the designated individual who is responsible for coordinating DFI activities at each qualified institution of higher education.

What changes have been made to the definition of “Qualified Institution of Higher Education”?

To be a qualified institution of higher education, an institution must be a publicly operated educational institution in Illinois and meet the following criteria:

- Offers instruction leading toward or prerequisite to an academic or professional degree beyond the baccalaureate degree, excluding theological schools
- Authorized to operate in the State of Illinois.
- Have at least 45% of students receive federal Pell Grants, which shall be based on the 3-year average proportion of federal Pell Grant recipients at Illinois public universities using the most recent data available to the Board.

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What changes have been made to the selection of DFI program Board?

The Board shall name the chairperson of the Program Board. The Program Board shall name the vice chairperson of the Program Board and make any necessary subcommittee appointments. All public institutions are required to participate in the IAI, per the Act. Eligible Private Institutions may, and do, participate.

What additional changes are included in the amended Act for Program Board responsibilities?

In addition to established responsibilities of the DFI Program Board, the amended language provides that the Program Board shall be responsible for:

- Disseminating information regarding the DFI to qualified institutions of higher education for distribution.
- Prioritizing fields of study for awarding DFI funds annually.
- Meeting at least 3 times per year.

Who is responsible for verifying eligibility for DFI participation?

Institutions of higher education shall verify that student applicants meet the eligibility requirements for DFI grants.

What changes were made to the eligibility criteria for DFI grant?

Qualification based on academic eligibility:

- That the individual has an above average academic ability to pursue a graduate or professional degree, as evidenced by the following:
 - a minimum grade point average of a C+ (2.75 on a grade scale of 4.00 = A) in the last 60 hours of undergraduate work; and
 - admission to a post-baccalaureate degree program at a qualified institution of higher education.

Qualification based on financial resources:

- That the individual was a federal Pell Grant recipient at any point while earning a baccalaureate degree;

Other criteria:

- That the individual is admitted as a full-time student, as defined by the institution of higher education, for at least 9 months of the year while pursuing a doctoral, master's, or post-baccalaureate professional degree program at a qualified institution of higher education
- That the individual has signed an agreement to meet this Act's employment conditions if a DFI award is accepted; and
- In order to maintain eligibility in the DFI and in order to be considered for subsequent DFI grants, that the individual meets the scholastic requirements and eligibility for financial assistance required by the institution of higher education in which he or she is enrolled as a DFI participant.

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What are the responsibilities of a qualified institution and an institutional representative?

- A DFI institution shall:
 - be a qualified institution of higher education;
 - commit to providing leadership, information, and placement opportunities for DFI fellows;
 - designate an institutional representative; and
 - recover funds provided to a student who does not meet the conditions of an award under Section 10 of this Act and return the funds to the Board.
- A DFI representative shall:
 - actively recruit students who will be eligible for DFI awards and verify to the Program Board that applicants for DFI financial assistance meet all eligibility requirements;
 - maintain records for award recipients, including DFI application materials, contracts, and records of award payments;
 - provide award recipients with academic and support services, such as mentoring, counseling, and other activities that would enhance the chances for degree completion and success in achieving the goals of the DFI;
 - supervise the payment of awards from funds awarded by the Program Board;
 - collect, process, and forward to the Program Board, by the announced deadline each spring, all new applications and renewal forms from eligible students; and
 - assist award recipients who complete their program of study in seeking a full-time teaching or administrative position at an Illinois institution of higher education or a full-time position as an employee of this State in an educational-related capacity; such positions may include, without limitation, administrative positions in State elementary, secondary, or higher education agencies.

How will a DFI applicant submit an application?

- A student shall apply directly to the qualified institution of higher education that he or she plans to attend. All new applications and renewal forms shall be submitted by the institution of higher education on behalf of the student to the Program Board, with the institution's verification and endorsement.

How will the DFI award be determined?

The following shall be considered in determining DFI award:

- In determining the recipients of awards, the Program Board shall favor recipients who received awards in previous years and who maintain conditions of eligibility and have made satisfactory academic progress toward a degree, as determined by each institution of higher education, as long as no student receives assistance for more than four years. In administering awards, the Program Board shall:
 - determine the award amount annually;



- direct the Board to deliver the awards to the institution of higher education to disburse to the recipients, conditioned upon the recipients' satisfactory academic progress; and
- attempt to achieve distribution of the awards among qualified institutions of higher education so that the awards are distributed equitably within fields of study.
- A recipient who received an award in a previous year may not be disqualified from receiving a subsequent award if the applicant's qualified institution of higher education no longer meets the Pell Grant criteria, as long as the applicant and the qualified institution of higher education maintain all other conditions of eligibility.
- Grant funds shall be distributed by an institution of higher education to grantees during the period of DFI enrollment, not to exceed 12 months per award.

What is “Good faith effort” in fulfilling DFI award conditions of employment?

- “Good faith effort” includes actively seeking employment and maintaining contact with the institutional representative and the Program Board
- Positions required for employment for DFI recipients:
 - Positions shall include, without limitation, administrative positions in State elementary, secondary, or higher education agencies; or
 - A recipient shall make a good faith effort to secure such a position for a time period of no less than five years.

What exemption from penalty from fulfilling conditions of the DFI award does the amended Act specify?

- A recipient of an award may not be penalized if the failure to fulfill the conditions of the award is because the recipient is no longer eligible due to changes made by the amendment.

What is the recovery process for failing to fulfill conditions of employment for DFI award?

- All grants under this Act are subject to the Illinois Grant Funds Recovery Act.