

**Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois
FY2027 New Application**

Applicant Name _____



***FY2027 Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in
Illinois (DFI) New Fellow Application***

New Applications Due to IBHE: April 17, 2026

DFI Administrative Office
Illinois Board of Higher Education
1 N. Old State Capitol Plaza, Suite 333
Springfield, IL 62701-1377
DFI@ibhe.org

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IMPORTANT DATES

FAFSA Application Due	February 14, 2026
DFI Application due to IBHE.....	April 17, 2026
Dates of Illinois Residency.....	February 2023 to February 2026

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The **Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) Program** was established by the Illinois General Assembly and signed into law as *Public Act 104-0437*. The purpose of the DFI Program is to encourage students to enroll and complete academic programs at the post-baccalaureate level and to enhance the diversity of faculty and staff of Illinois institutions of higher education.

Program Administration and Funding

Program funding for the 2026–2027 academic year (Fiscal Year 2027) is contingent on the availability of funds appropriated by the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) provides administrative support for the DFI Program Board and distributes funds appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly in accordance with the decisions and policies of the DFI Program Board.

Program Purpose and Eligibility Overview

The DFI Program provides financial assistance, based on demonstrated financial need, for students who meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Public Act 104-0437 and this application and who are pursuing full-time enrollment in graduate or professional degree programs at eligible Illinois public institutions of higher education.

To qualify for the DFI Fellowship, applicants must:

- Be an Illinois resident for no less than three years prior to applying;
- Hold a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education authorized to operate in Illinois;
- Have been a recipient of a Federal Pell Grant as an undergraduate student; and
- Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a participating institution that meets institutional eligibility criteria.

Institutional Eligibility

Participating institutions must demonstrate that at least 45 percent (45%) of their undergraduate students were Federal Pell Grant recipients, as determined by IBHE.

If an institution later falls below the 45% Pell threshold after a fellow has been awarded, the fellow will retain eligibility for the duration of their approved fellowship period, provided all other fellowship requirements are met and the student maintains continuous enrollment and satisfactory academic progress

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Selection and Priorities

The selection of award recipients is based on a comprehensive review of application materials. All academic fields at the post-baccalaureate professional, master's, and doctoral levels will be considered. The DFI Program Board prioritizes applicants who:

- Are pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) disciplines or other high-need areas; or
- Are pursuing a doctorate or other appropriate terminal degree.

Awards and Renewals

Stipend levels are subject to legislative appropriations. Full-time enrollment is required while on fellowship. Some participating institutions also provide tuition waivers or scholarships; applicants should contact their DFI Institutional Representative for details. Awards are renewable for one additional year for master's students and up to three years for doctoral students, contingent upon satisfactory academic progress toward degree completion and continued compliance with DFI Program rules.

PART 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

Terms of the Award

Upon graduation or separation from the DFI institution, an award recipient must agree to make a good-faith effort to actively seek and accept, when offered, specified employment as outlined below.

"Good faith effort" includes actively seeking employment and maintaining quarterly contact with the institutional representative for five years post-graduation.

Conditions for acceptance of a DFI award are that the recipient shall agree to do the following:

- (1) accept a teaching or nonteaching full-time appointment at an Illinois institution of higher education; or
- (2) accept a position as an employee of this State in an administrative, educational-related position, as determined by the DFI Program Board, for the period equal to the number of years that he or she was a participant in the DFI; such positions shall include, without limitation -- administrative positions in State elementary, secondary, or higher education agencies; **or**
- (3) make a good faith effort to secure such a position for a period of no less than 5 years.

Repayment per IBHE procedures and the Illinois Grant Funds Recovery Act in the case the Fellow fails to fulfill the terms of the award.

The DFI Award is available for a maximum of:

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- Master's (2) years, Doctorate (2) years; or
- Master's/Doctorate (4) years

A Fellow can only receive two years of Master's-level funding and two years of Doctorate-level funding, or four years of Doctorate-level funding. The DFI award is available for a maximum of four years.

PLEASE NOTE: A Fellow shall be required to return funds to their institution for return to the Board in the case the Fellow fails to fulfill the terms of the award.

Participant Eligibility

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

ILLINOIS RESIDENCY: "Illinois resident" means any United States citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States who meets at least one of the following requirements:

- (1) has earned a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education authorized to operate in this State; or
- (2) 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.

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

INSTITUTION ELIGIBILITY: Applicant must be attending an Illinois public institution with a qualified level of federal Pell grant recipients as determined by IBHE.

ACADEMIC ABILITY: Applicants must possess above average academic ability as evidenced by:

1. A minimum grade point average of 2.75 (scale 4.0 = A) in the last 60 hours of undergraduate work;
2. Admission to a post-baccalaureate degree program at a qualified institution of higher education.

ACADEMIC PURSUIT: Applicants in all academic disciplines are eligible. Candidates pursuing degrees in any of the sciences, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields and other high-need areas are encouraged to apply and receive priority consideration. DFI Program Board prioritizes specific fields of study for awarding DFI funds annually. Applicants must be pursuing a doctoral, master's, or post-baccalaureate professional degree program at a qualified institution of higher education.

FINANCIAL NEED:

- (1) Applicants must demonstrate financial need. A **FAFSA must be filed** each year to maintain eligibility.
- (2) Applicants must work with their undergraduate institution to verify they **have received Pell Grant assistance at any point during their undergraduate studies.**

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PART 2: GENERAL APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. The DFI application and required attachments must be submitted directly to the DFI Institutional Representative at the institution the applicant plans to attend and certified in time to submit to IBHE no later than **April 17, 2026**. **Institutions are encouraged to set internal deadlines accordingly.**
2. Applications (or attachments) sent directly to the DFI Administrative Office in Springfield by the applicant will not be considered.
3. Applicants must respond to every item on the DFI Application Form.
4. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
5. Applicants should check with their DFI Institutional Representative for internal deadlines and any additional information on admission or application procedures.

Proof of Admission

Applicants must be unconditionally admitted to a degree-granting program at the time of application. Applicants admitted probationally or on limited status due to GPA or test scores will not be considered.

Proof of admission is demonstrated by including an official letter of admission on institutional letterhead. (Copies are acceptable.)

- **Awarded applicants are required to enroll full-time while receiving this fellowship.**
 - This applicant is a **full-time enrolled** student as verified by the institution.
 - Number of hours enrolled _____.

Financial Need

1. Applicants must read and complete the Financial Information Form, the Notification of Special Circumstances Form, and provide federal tax forms upon request.
2. Applicants must have completed a 2025-2026 FAFSA online.
3. Applicants should work with their current or undergraduate institution to verify they received the Pell Grant at any point during their undergraduate studies. This can be demonstrated by including an official letter on institutional letterhead from a financial aid official from that institution. A verified email may be accepted as well. (Copies are acceptable.)
4. **The applicant's financial need must be certified by the admitting institution.**
5. The DFI Program Board reserves the right to request additional financial documentation.

Required Essay Submission

The applicant must submit an essay. Please see the specific requirements of the essay in a later section of this application.

Three Letters of Recommendation

The applicant must submit three (3) **signed** letters of **professional** recommendation written within the past 12 months. Letters should be addressed to the DFI Institutional Representative and speak to the applicant's potential to reach his/her intended professional goal(s), including ability to complete graduate work, and

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their potential interest to secure a full-time teaching or administrative position in an educational setting in the State of Illinois, including in State elementary, secondary, or higher education agencies

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Transcripts and Grades

Only **official transcripts** will be accepted. Transcripts are considered official if received by the Institutional Representative in a sealed envelope from the attending institution. Transcripts should be sent to your Institutional Representatives, not the IBHE office. It is the Fellow's responsibility to secure copies of transcripts, not the Institutional Representative's.

Due Dates

Applications should be submitted to Institutional Representatives on the date established by the Representatives in order to be certified and ready to submit to IBHE no later than **April 17, 2026**. Contact Institutional Representatives for internal application deadline dates. Selection results will be distributed in writing via the IBHE DFI Administrative Office.

Selection Process

The DFI selection process has two major phases: institutional and statewide. The applicant initiates the first phase by submitting an application packet to a DFI institution no later than **April 17, 2026**. (The applicant must contact the institution he/she plans to attend to determine if there are internal application deadlines.)

Each campus will determine which applications to send forward to the selection committee.

In the second phase, a selection committee will review the qualified applications and select awardees.

PART 3: EXPLANATION OF REQUIRED ESSAY

One essay is required in support of the application for the DFI award.

1. In the upper right-hand corner include your name and intended institution.
2. Type a **300–500-word** essay on the following:

DFI aims to support future faculty and administrators whose backgrounds and perspectives can contribute to academia and to the academic success of all students. Describe a formative experience or challenge that has shaped your commitment to enhance academia or contribute to success in strengthening the state's education ecosystem.

- *Discuss how this experience influenced your desire to become a faculty member or administrator in an educational setting in Illinois.*
- *Please include examples of projects or related work to demonstrate how you will make contributions as a faculty member or administrator in an educational setting in the State.*

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PART 4: Checklist

The following documents constitute a complete application:

- Official acceptance letter - (for degree program for which funding is being sought).
- Certification of full-time status.
- Official letter/documentation from current or undergraduate institution Financial Aid or other institutional official on letterhead verifying the applicant received the Pell Grant as an undergraduate student at any point.
- Completed application form - All questions on application form pertain to the degree program for which funding is being sought, unless otherwise indicated.
- Completed financial form certified by the institution - (and FAFSA).
- Completed essay submission.
- Three letters of **professional** recommendation.
- Only official transcripts (**no copies**).

***All items must be responded to or submitted. Incomplete applications will not be considered and will be automatically disqualified.**

For additional information or questions, please contact:

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Springfield, IL 62701-1377
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(2) 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.

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

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

Dates (to/from)	Employer	Position Title
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____

- Are you currently employed full-time? Yes No
If yes, please explain.

- Specify Work Interest (check only one): ___ Community College; ___ Four-year (research emphasis); ___ Four-year (teaching emphasis); K-12 ___; Other (Specify) _____
- Are you willing to relocate to other parts of the State of Illinois to accept full-time employment in a faculty or staff position? Yes ___ No ___

ACADEMIC HISTORY INFORMATION

Beginning with the most recent degree completed or pursued (not including the one for which you seek funding), list all colleges/universities attended as a graduate/undergraduate student. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

<u>Institution/Location</u>	<u>Dates Attended</u> <u>From</u> <u>To</u>	<u>Degree</u> <u>Sought</u>	<u>Discipline</u>	<u>Year Degree</u> <u>Received</u> <u>or Expected</u>
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

GRADE POINT AVERAGE:

Undergraduate (indicate scale if other than A= 4.0)

Overall G.P.A. _____ G.P.A. for last two years _____ G.P.A. in major _____

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING CURRENT ACADEMIC PURSUIT:

I am seeking funding for:

- ____ Doctorate-level (answer Doctoral section below)
- ____ Master's-level (answer Master's section below)
- ____ Master's/Doctorate combo (answer both sections below)

Are you actively pursuing other scholarship opportunities? Please identify.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Doctoral-level degree seekers:

- Date of entry into doctoral program (month/year): _____
- Anticipated preliminary exam date (month/year): _____
- Are you currently writing a dissertation? Yes ____ No ____
- Anticipated defense date (month/year): _____
- Will you have completed all requirements of your program, except the dissertation before the fall semester 2026? Yes ____ No ____
- Anticipated degree conferral date (month/year): _____

Master's-level degree seekers:

- Date of entry into master's program (month/year): _____
- Are you currently writing a thesis or research paper? Yes ____ No ____
- Anticipated degree conferral date (month/year): _____

APPLICANT CERTIFICATION

I certify that the information on this application is correct. In the absence of a DFI award, I will not be financially able to pursue a graduate degree at this institution. I authorize the release of this and other important information to verify my eligibility for a DFI award. I agree to the conditions of the DFI award if one is offered and accepted. I understand that misrepresentation of any portion of this application may result in the cancellation of the financial award.

____ If awarded, I agree to forward a copy of the first two pages of my 2025 federal tax forms (if requested to do so).

Applicant's Printed Name _____

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

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***APPLICANTS MUST COMPLETE THE FAFSA** or have an SAR on file with your institution's financial aid office.

*Information obtained through www.fafsa.ed.gov.

Student FAFSA and Institutional Rep Need Certification

If you receive this award, do you intend to (indicate one):

_____ Not work this year (2026).

_____ Work part-time this year*

_____ Work full-time this year*

*If you will be working part- or full-time, list your projected income for 2026:

\$ _____

*Spouse's projected earnings for 2026: \$ _____

(RESPONSE REQUIRED)

Expected contribution from employer _____

Expected contribution from other scholarships _____

Total outstanding balance(s) on your Stafford Loan: _____

Certification:

- (1) I have filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- (2) I attest that I received a federal Pell Grant as an undergraduate student.
- (3) I understand that I may have to return funds to my institution and ultimately the Board in the event that I do not fulfill the terms of this award (see Part 1).

***All information is complete and true to the best of my knowledge. If any information is determined to be falsely reported or represented, it will result in the forfeiture of Fellowship funding. I agree to provide, upon request, proof of the information I have given on this form. I realize that this proof may require a copy of my income tax forms if requested.**

Applicant's Signature

Date

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TO BE COMPLETED ONLY BY DFI INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Total Direct Expenses*: \$ _____ - SAI: \$ _____ = Student Need: _____

**Direct expenses are educational expenses that the student will incur after the application of any waiver, scholarship, aid or assistance (other than loans) provided to the institution and/or the student and specifically designated for the sole purpose of defraying educational expenses directly related to the student's program of study.*

***"All information is complete and true to the best of my knowledge. If any information is determined to be falsely reported or represented, it will result in the forfeiture of Fellowship funding. I will recover funds provided to a student who does not meet the conditions of an award as outlined under Part 1, Terms of Award, and as part of the required Quarterly reporting for the Program and return the funds to the Board."**

Signature and Date: DFI Institutional Representative **Position:**

- *Please provide this page with each copy of the DFI application.*
- *Only applications with a student need of \$10,000 or greater will be considered.*