

APPROVED
March 18, 2026

Melissa Bealon
Board Secretary Melissa Bealon

Item #H-4
March 18, 2026

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**DIVERSIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY IN ILLINOIS PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2026 GRANT ALLOCATION**

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: This item recommends the allocation of anticipated Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation for grants authorized by the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Program (DFI). The DFI Program provides financial assistance to students pursuing graduate and professional degrees at eligible Illinois public universities.

The DFI Program supports the goals of IBHE's Strategic Plan, *A Thriving Illinois*, with a focus on increasing postsecondary credential and degree attainment to develop the talent that drives Illinois's economy by striving to close equity gaps for students, improve affordability, increase access, and assist with educational expenses.

The \$2,050,200 allocated for Fiscal Year 2026 will support New and Renewal Fellows from a total of 7 public universities.

Action Requested: The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby authorizes the Executive Director to allocate the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation for grants authorized by the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Act and recommended by the DFI Program Board.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**DIVERSIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY IN ILLINOIS PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2026 GRANT ALLOCATION**

The Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Program (DFI) provides financial awards to eligible students pursuing graduate and professional degrees at eligible Illinois public universities.

DFI underwent an extensive re-evaluation process in 2025, resulting in IBHE's pausing of the Program for most Fiscal Year 2026. The updated statutory language was adopted and signed into law in November of 2025, allowing for IBHE to proceed with opening of an abbreviated Fiscal Year 2026 application period.

The 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. These changes were effective as of the 2025-2026 academic year/Fiscal Year 2026. Primary updates are provided below:

Institutional/Applicant Eligibility Changes:

IBHE, in partnership with the Governor's Office, has initiated changes to the DFI Fellowship Program materials to ensure full statutory compliance. The primary changes include:

- Establishing an **undergraduate Pell Grant eligibility requirement** for all applicants and clarifying that continuing fellows remain eligible even if their institution later falls below the Pell threshold, provided all other conditions are met.
- Implementing a new institutional eligibility threshold requiring that **only public universities that have at least 45% Pell Grant recipients (3-year average) can participate.**
- Specifying **qualifying employment to include full-time faculty or staff roles at Illinois institutions of higher education or full-time state administrative positions in elementary, secondary, or higher education agencies.**
- Implementing **mandatory repayment under procedures developed by IBHE**; all grants subject to the Illinois Grant Funds Recovery Act. Defining a "good faith effort" obligation to seek qualifying employment for up to five years post-graduation.
- **Prior recipients 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 this amendment.

The application process for Fiscal Year 2026 was opened to students in December 2025. Applications from eligible public universities were due January 30, 2026; additional Renewal applications were requested from public universities and due February 20, 2026. A total of 36 applications were submitted for the year. On February 27, 2026, the DFI Board approved recommendations for Fiscal Year 2026 Fellow awards with the year's allocation.

The DFI Board recommends funding for the 36 selected DFI fellows as follows:

- \$18,500 for 4 New Fellow Master's degree candidates.
- \$19,500 for 2 Renewal Fellow Master's degree candidates.
- \$20,000 for 30 New and Renewal Doctoral Fellow candidates.

Table 1 provides an overview of participating institutions, and their Fellow breakdowns.

The staff recommends adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby authorizes the Executive Director to allocate the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation for the DFI institutional grant awards (see Table 1) as specified by the statute and recommended by the DFI Program Board.

TABLE 1
Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois
Distribution of Fiscal Year 2026 Awards

<u>Institution</u>	<u>New</u>	<u>Renewal</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Masters</u>	<u>Doctoral</u>
Eastern Illinois University	1	2	3	3	0
Northeastern Illinois University	2	0	2	2	0
Northern Illinois University	2	5	7	0	7
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	0	1	1	0	1
University of Illinois Chicago	16	6	22	1	21
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	0	1	1	0	1
Totals	21	15	36	6	30