



NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Dr. William S. Carver, II

Interim President

NUMBERED MEMO CC22-044

TO: Presidents

FROM: James Kelley, AVP Student Services

SUBJECT: Finish Line Grants Program Transition

DATE: August 26, 2022

Effective from October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023, the Finish Line Grants (FLG) Program administration will transition to the System Office and the funding source will change to Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) contingent upon the award and signed NCPRO agreement. The Governor's Office is planning to award additional federal funds for a second year through September 30, 2024.

On September 8th from 9:30 am to 10:30 am, a webinar will be facilitated to cover policy and process guidelines, Colleague workflows, and time for questions and answers. The FLG Guidelines are attached to this memorandum. Colleague workflows are targeted to be published by September 1, 2022. Further, an informational FLG webpage is active and will be updated as information becomes available ([Finish Line Grants | NC Community Colleges](#)). Lastly, we will welcome Allison Gahrmann (finishlinegrants@nccommunitycolleges.edu) to the System Office who will serve as the FLG manager starting September 1, 2022.

The State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) approved the allocation of \$3,750,000 to support the FLG program, including \$3,113,500 for emergency grants for students, \$524,000 to support college program implementation and outreach, and \$112,500 for the System Office to administer the program. More information regarding the funding to support college program implementation and outreach is forthcoming. The SBCC item with college allocations may be found on the NCCCS webpage ([Microsoft Word - FC 02 - Allocation for Finish Line Grants July 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023 \(REVISED 08-20-2022\) \(nccommunitycolleges.edu\)](#)).

To be eligible, students must be enrolled in a North Carolina community college, in good academic standing as defined by the college, and have completed at least 50% of their degree or credential program. These grants may help cover costs such as transportation, childcare or dependent care, housing assistance, utility bills (including internet), medical needs,

accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and assistance with tuition, fees, or books. Each community college that participates in the Finish Line Grant program will receive a budgeted award of \$20,000 plus additional funding based on 2022-23 budget FTE. If a college does not participate in the program, their available funds will be redistributed to participating colleges.

The Finish Line Grant program was managed by the Department of Commerce and operated as a partnership between community colleges and local workforce development boards since 2018. With SBCC approval, the administration of this program shifts from the Department of Commerce to the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS).

On July 12, 2018, Governor Cooper announced the Finish Line Grants program to help community college students complete their education when facing unforeseen financial challenges. Initially funded with \$7 million federal funding (Governor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act WIOA Discretionary Fund), the program provided community college students that are 50% of the way to completing a credential with emergency aid up to \$1,000 per semester for an unanticipated financial hardship. The program had operated as a partnership between community colleges and workforce development boards where eligible students enrolled in the workforce system and workforce boards paid for allowable expenses. Students applied for aid at the college but were referred to a local workforce board that determined final eligibility and paid the emergency costs on the student's behalf. As of April 30, 2022, 8,300 students had received \$4.6 million in emergency aid.

A process evaluation of the FLG program was conducted by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management's Office of Strategic Partnerships in 2021 and 2022 ([flg recommended practices 07.12.22.pdf \(nccommunitycolleges.edu\)](#)). After conducting interviews with students, staff at community colleges, and local workforce boards, they developed a set of recommendations for streamlining the program and simplifying the awarding of grants to students. One of the elements of the program identified in the report as a barrier for some students is that students are required to complete applications and provide documentation at both the community college and the local workforce board. By changing the source of funds and moving the program to the NCCCS the requirement to register with the workforce system is removed. This will simplify the program and should help students receive emergency aid more quickly.

JWK/jwk

CC:
Chief Academic Officers
Chief Student Development Administrators



Helping Students Cross the Finish Line

Finish Line Grants Guide and O&A as of October 1, 2022

The following document answers frequently asked questions about the revised Finish Line Grants program. This document will be updated regularly with changes and further questions. Please read through the entire document or use the topics list to find the section related to your specific question. The North Carolina Community College System office continues to refine materials and processes. If you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about the Finish Line Grants program that are not addressed below, please contact the Finish Line Grants Coordinator, Allison Gahrman at finishlinegrants@nccommunitycolleges.edu.

Topics:

- A. Finish Line Grants General Information
- B. Student Eligibility for Finish Line Grants
- C. Covered Costs Under the Finish Line Grants Program
- D. Implementation and Processes

A. Finish Line Grants General Information

1) What are Finish Line Grants?

*Finish Line Grants are grants of up to \$1,000 awarded to community college students who are on the cusp of completing their education or training and are faced with an **unanticipated financial hardship** that may prevent them from doing so. Too often, financial emergencies—like unexpected healthcare costs, childcare expenses, or car breakdowns—prevent students from completing their programs. Finish Line Grants are awarded to eligible students facing these unforeseen challenges. Grants can be used for course materials, housing, medical needs, dependent care, or other financial hardships that students face through no fault of their own.*

2) When did the program launch?

The first Finish Line Grants were available to community college students in Fall 2018. The program transitioned to the North Carolina Community College System and the requirement to enroll in the workforce system in order to receive funding was eliminated effective October 1, 2022.

3) Are Finish Line Grants available at all community colleges?

All 58 community colleges are eligible to receive an allocation approved by the State Board of Community Colleges with funding from Emergency Assistance to non-Public Schools (EANS). Previously, North Carolina community colleges partnered with their local Workforce Development Board to apply for funding. The community college, Workforce Development Board staff, and NCWorks Career Center staff—the “Partnership”—worked together to administer the Finish Line Grants program.

4) Why does this program only apply to community college students?

Governor Cooper identified a new funding source of Emergency Assistance to non-Public Schools (EANS) effective the Fall semester of 2022 to specifically serve community college students. Historically, he proposed budgets in both 2018 and 2019 with funding for Finish Line Grants to be made available for students at four-year public and private institutions, in addition to community college students. However, the General Assembly did not fund the Finish Line Grants program resulting in Governor Cooper making available federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds.

5) How quickly will a student be able to get a Finish Line Grant?

Students should be able to receive a Finish Line Grant within three business days upon submitting all documentation required by the college. Colleges should structure the student application and review process to ensure grants are distributed as soon as possible after it is determined that a student is eligible to receive the grant.

6) Which entity will receive and disburse this funding?

The local college receives funding and serves to oversee applicable disbursements as soon as possible after approval of the request and is responsible for disbursing the grants on behalf of the students.

7) How much money is available to fund the Finish Line Grants Program?

The Governor's Office made available \$3.1 million sourced from the Emergency Assistance to non-Public Schools (EANS) fund through September 30, 2023 and is planning to award additional federal funds to support the program for an additional year ending September 30, 2024.

8) What is the source of this funding?

Funding for the Finish Line Grants program comes from the Emergency Assistance to non-Public Schools (EANS).

9) Is this funding recurring?

In the past, Governor Cooper has proposed recurring funding to make the Finish Line Grants program ongoing, including funding for students in four-year college and university programs, which did not pass the General Assembly. Therefore, the Governor's Office made available \$3.1 million from the Emergency Assistance to non-Public Schools (EANS) fund through September 30, 2023, and he is planning to award additional federal funds to support the program for an additional year ending September 30, 2024.

10) How much funding will be available for individual students?

The maximum grant per student per semester is \$1,000. At the community college's discretion, students may be eligible for grant awards in more than one semester. Colleges may choose to use other available funds to provide additional support to students who receive Finish Line Grants.

11) Is there a designated amount of Finish Line Grants funds per community college?

Yes. The State Board of Community Colleges approved allocations to each community college with a base award of \$20,000 and additional amounts based upon each community college's curriculum student full-time equivalency.

12) How does a student apply for funding?

Students can contact the main point of contact listed for their community college here: [Finish Line Grants | NC Community Colleges](#). Additionally, students can contact their financial aid office.

B. Student Eligibility

1) Who is eligible for Finish Line Grants?

In order to be eligible for a Finish Line Grant, a student must:

- Be enrolled in a North Carolina community college in a curriculum program or an eligible workforce continuing education course leading to an industry-recognized credential;
- Be in good academic standing as defined by the community college. Threshold may not be higher than a 2.0 grade point average; **and**
- Have completed at least 50% of the degree or credential program (or be enrolled in the courses that will constitute 50% completion).

2) Can Finish Line Grant funds be used to pay the student account debt of a person attempting to return to college?

No. The purpose of the Finish Line Grants program is to assist current students who have completed (or are enrolled in) at least 50% of their degree or credential program. (See Item #14 in B. Student Eligibility which defines “an enrolled student”). Finish Line Grants are not awarded to pay outstanding debt nor late fees incurred.

3) Can someone from out-of-state who attends a North Carolina Community College be eligible?

Yes.

4) Are students enrolled in college transfer programs eligible for Finish Line Grants?

Yes.

5) Does the 50% completion requirement include the current enrolled semester?

Yes. Community colleges count the current semester classes in which a student is enrolled toward the 50% completion requirement.

6) If a student applicant is pursuing a double major, does that student have to be 50% of the way through both majors to be eligible for Finish Line Grants?

No. If the student has completed 50% of one of the programs or majors, the student is eligible to apply for Finish Line Grants.

7) If a student already has a degree and is enrolled in another program, is this student eligible for Finish Line Grants?

Yes, this student is eligible. Having an existing degree is not a disqualification.

8) Are students enrolled in short-term programs that lead to a credential, and likely employment, eligible?

Yes. Students in short-term workforce-continuing education programs leading to an industry-recognized credential are eligible.

9) Are students enrolled in more than one community college eligible?

Yes. Students enrolled in more than one community college are eligible.

10) What happens when students have valid financial hardships and need but have not completed 50% of their program?

Unfortunately, these students are not eligible for Finish Line Grants. They should receive referrals for available assistance at their community colleges. Whenever Finish Line Grants cannot be granted to a student, staff should connect students with other options at the community college or elsewhere.

11) Is the 2.0 GPA based on the major or is it a cumulative GPA?

This should be a local decision. Decisions should be made in the best interest of the student.

12) What is considered an ‘enrolled student’?

For Finish Line Grant eligibility, students are considered enrolled after they have registered and have paid for or have arranged for payment (e.g., financial aid, payment plan, etc.) of tuition/registration fees. For example, can a student registered for upcoming classes apply now for Finish Line Grants if school is not currently in session? If a student has registered and paid for, or arranged payment for, upcoming classes, this student can apply and receive Finish Line Grants assistance before the start of next semester classes.

13) Will students enrolled in summer classes be eligible for Finish Line Grants?

Yes. Though the “summer term” is considered a “semester” for Finish Line Grants purposes, the amount a student can receive is limited to \$2,000 in an academic year (Fall – Spring); however, colleges may determine there are extenuating circumstances that would allow the student to receive up to \$3,000 for the 3 terms (Fall, Spring, and Summer). With the average of the distributed grants being much less than \$1,000, most eligible students could receive a grant in each of the three terms if needed and not reach the \$2,000 limit.

14) Do outstanding fees such as library fines need to be paid before a student can receive Finish Line Grants?

No. Student eligibility for Finish Line Grants is not dependent on the status of other outstanding payments. (See Item #2 in B. Student Eligibility regarding outstanding debt.)

15) If a student applies for a Finish Line Grant because money is needed to pay a bill, does there have to be an unanticipated hardship associated with qualifying for a Finish Line Grant award?

Yes, explanation must be given in the student’s application detailing an unexpected circumstance occurred and the nature of that unexpected circumstance. Students can attest to the emergency, for example, “spouse’s job hours were cut back this month,” without having spouse’s employer provide a letter.

16) Month after month during the semester, we have students returning for the same type of request. At what point is this no longer an emergency?

The intent of Finish Line Grants is to assist with unanticipated hardships. Care must be given to be sure that the expenditure solves a short-term problem. Local staff working with students are in the best position to assess the total situation. When Finish Line Grants are not the appropriate resource, local partnerships are encouraged to work with students through referrals and connections with other avenues of assistance.

C. Covered Costs Under Finish Line Grants Program

1) What is the Finish Line Grants definition of a qualifying emergency?

A Finish Line Grants emergency is defined as: Any unforeseen circumstance that occurs resulting in the potential disruption of a student's ability to complete a degree/certification.

Finish Line Grants are for unanticipated financial hardships that impede a student's ability to stay enrolled in a community college. Finish Line Grants are intended to assist as many students as possible without imposing restrictive interpretations of what constitutes an emergency. Staff directly working with each individual student can best assess that student's situation with the goal of putting the student first.

2) Can Finish Line Grant funds be used to pay the student's tuition, fees, or books?

Maybe. Tuition, fees, or books are not an unanticipated hardship. If an eligible unanticipated hardship occurs and has negatively impacted the student's ability to pay for tuition, fees, or books, then the college may approve the use of a Finish Line Grant for tuition, fees, or books. However, it is not the intent of Finish Line Grants to function as scholarships.

Example 1: if a current student is within 50% of completing a credential and has established a payment plan for tuition, yet the student's car needs a repair resulting in not having sufficient money to make a tuition payment, a Finish Line Grant could be used to pay the tuition due at that time.

Example 2: if a current student is within 50% of completing a credential and does not qualify for the Pell Grant, then a Finish Line Grant should not be used as a scholarship.

3) Please elaborate on medical needs that are appropriate for Finish Line Grants.

Finish Line Grants are appropriate for medical needs that jeopardize a student's ability to complete a degree/certification. When medical needs are long-term and require additional financial resources, the staff working with the student should identify other resources that may be available for ongoing medical issues.

4) Can Finish Line Grants be used for student family members?

In some circumstances, yes. For example, if a dependent child of a student encounters an unanticipated event like a broken arm resulting in an emergency hospital bill thereby affecting the student's ability to complete a degree/certification, a Finish Line Grant may be used to help with that hardship.

- 5) Can Finish Line Grants be used for a current rental housing payment or a utility bill with no past due balance, no disconnection, and no eviction notice?**

Yes, a Finish Line Grant can be used for a current rent payment or other bills, if the eligible student has experienced an unanticipated hardship that impacts the student's ability to complete a degree/certification.

- 6) If a student has applied for a Finish Line Grant to assist with a utility bill that is not in the student's name, but is in the spouse's name, can a Finish Line Grant be utilized for the student?**

Yes, if the bill is for services at the student's residence, it is valid for Finish Line Grants consideration regardless of whether the spouse, parent, or student is listed on the utility record.

- 7) A car repair is needed for student's primary transportation due to an unexpected event/accident and there is a \$500 insurance deductible, can a Finish Line Grant pay for the insurance deductible portion to keep the car on the road and enable the student to go to class?**

Yes. This is an unexpected event.

- 8) A student has been determined eligible for a Finish Line Grant, but his repair bill is for more than the \$1,000 available from Finish Line Grants. May \$1,000 be awarded to apply towards the total cost of repair.**

Yes. The Finish Line Grant does not need to cover the entire cost of an emergency. It is intended to help with any eligible cost up to \$1,000 per semester. The staff working with the student should ensure that other resources have been identified for the repair balance and that the repair entity completes the repair and accepts the Finish Line Grants payment along with the remaining payment from another source.

- 9) Can licensure exams be funded through Finish Line Grants?**

Yes. Finish Line Grants may be used for required testing related to obtaining licensure, certification, and/or completion if student is eligible for Finish Line Grants and if local, state, and federal policies are followed. Prior to graduation, the licensure exam is considered a continuation of the course of study.

- 10) Is paying for internet an allowable cost through Finish Line Grants?**

Yes. If a local determination is made that an unforeseen event prevents a student from paying a month of internet service or setting up internet service needed for current coursework, a Finish Line Grant may be awarded. "Bundled services" should be itemized to isolate any internet amount payment due.

- 11) Can a Finish Line Grant be used to pay for a non-certified daycare provider?**

Yes.

- 12) Will Finish Line Grants pay for renter insurance?**

No.

13) Is payment for towing a vehicle to a repair shop allowed through Finish Line Grants?

This is allowed if the vehicle is the only means of transportation for the participant and the only way to get the vehicle to a repair shop.

14) Can Finish Line Grants pay for home repairs and/or purchases such as roof, windows, heater, air conditioning, hot water heater, washing machine, dryer, and other appliance repair and replacement?

Maybe. These repairs and replacements are for personal property. Means other than Finish Line Grants should be explored. Call for guidance.

15) Is dependent care/childcare an expense payable with a Finish Line Grant?

Dependent care/childcare expenses can be covered if the student is participating in clinicals, labs, in-class instruction, or worksite learning.

16) Can a student apply for more than one semester and/or non-sequential semesters?

Yes. An unanticipated hardship is not planned, so there is no way to know when assistance may be needed. Students may apply whenever needed provided all the qualifying criteria is met.

D. Implementation and Processes

1) Is there a state-wide logo for Finish Line Grants?



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Please use the name “Finish Line Grants” as the statewide identifier in materials.

2) Does funding go directly to students?

Maybe. As colleges follow their local policies, common practice appears to be that in most situations funds should not be distributed directly to students. For example, if a student applies for a Finish Line Grant to pay for a car repair, the approved payment will go to the car repair entity; if a student applies for a Finish Line Grant to cover an unexpected medical expense, the approved payment will go to the healthcare entity. Alternatively, grants for gas may be distributed through fuel cards given directly to the student as determined by the college. In a situation where funds are given directly to a student, it is the college’s responsibility to ensure that the funds are used for allowable expenses addressing the unexpected financial hardship.

3) How will grant decisions be made?

The community college will establish a standardized process for reviewing funding requests and deciding who will be awarded a Finish Line Grant. Decisions should be made in the best interest of the student.

4) Who is responsible for the funding?

The NC Community College System Office is responsible for reviewing and monitoring college Finish Line Grants and reserves the right to take necessary actions to ensure compliance. The college is responsible for compliance with this guidance document and any other published material to include email correspondence, required reporting, and established standardize Colleague workflows. Further, colleges should regularly conduct internal audits and reconciliation between the financial aid office, business office, and any other pertinent office.

5) What happens if a student receives a Finish Line Grant and still fails to complete the training?

Grants will not be conditioned on students completing any additional requirements (e.g., community service hours) but every effort should be made to support students to be highly likely to continue their training. There will be no payback requirement unless it is determined that the student fraudulently acted to obtain or use the Finish Line Grant. Community colleges may want to adjust their processes of determining eligibility if it is found that a student receiving Finish Line Grants frequently fails to complete training.

6) Will there be tracking of student success and completion?

Yes. As a part of required reporting, colleges may need to provide student success and completion data not available at the system office.

7) Will there be additional funding to colleges for administrative expenses?

Maybe. The Governor's Office allowed \$524,000 to support college program implementation and outreach. System Office staff is developing the criteria and allowable uses for those funds.

8) May a Finish Line Grants Partnership purchase fuel cards in advance?

Yes. Colleges may purchase fuel cards in advance to expedite the service to students, if permissible under the purchasing entity's financial policies. As fuel cards are, in effect, cash on hand, appropriate care should be taken to safeguard the cards, to require recipients to sign for the card value they receive, and to hold a limited number of cards on hand (as cards purchased in the current program year cannot be carried over into the next program year).

9) Are all details of Finish Line Grants procedures final?

Finish Line Grants procedures may be updated periodically. Please make suggestions for improvements to Finish Line Grants Coordinator, Allison Gahrman at finishlinegrants@nccommunitycolleges.edu.

10) Is there flexibility in the 72-hour requirement to fulfill requests?

The purpose of Finish Line Grants is to meet student financial needs in true emergency situations. To do so, program staff must evaluate and determine responses to students' requests within three business days. Students should be able to receive a Finish Line Grant within three business days upon submitting all documentation required by the college.

11) Should financial aid offices vet potential awards for people receiving student aid (e.g., Pell Grant, student loans, etc.)?

Yes, financial aid officers should review potential Finish Line Grants awards because receiving an award could impact the cost of attendance and the un-met need of the student. The scenarios are complex and are best evaluated by financial aid officers.

12) Can colleges conduct a public relations campaign regarding the Finish Line Grants?

Yes. Outreach to inform students about Finish Line Grants may be conducted using other available funds. The Governor's Office allowed \$524,000 to support college program implementation and outreach. System Office staff is developing the criteria and allowable uses for those funds.

13) What are the standards for vetting requests? Is there a standard rubric across the state?

A process evaluation of the Finish Line Grants program was conducted by the North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships. That document, "Recommended Practices for Local Partnerships administering Finish Line Grants," can be found at [Finish Line Grants | NC Community Colleges](#) and includes a template for an eligibility check and for an application. Colleges are encouraged to review this document when developing local policies.