Emergency & Opportunity Funding
Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL
What kinds of needs are included in emergency funding?
Emergency funding is meant to cover one-time, unexpected expenses such as a technology need, clothing need, minor medical expense, emergency travel, etc. It is not intended for ongoing expenses such as regular medical expenses, rent, utilities, or tuition.

How do you define opportunity funding?
Opportunities that qualify for this type of funding should reinforce applicants’ academic pursuits during their present degree programs, such as training, academic conferences, professional school entrance exams, test prep, etc.

Are all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students eligible?
Yes, all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students are eligible and encouraged to apply.

Are international students eligible? Undocumented or DACA?
Yes, international, undocumented, and DACA students are eligible and encouraged to apply.

Do I have to be highly aided/FGLI to be eligible?
No, you do not have to be highly aided/FGLI to be eligible.

Can I get funding even if I don’t receive financial aid or if I get minimal aid?
Yes. However, we do highly recommend you contact Student Registration and Financial Services as a first step to address your financial concerns and needs for comprehensive support.

How much funding can I get?
Grants from this award process typically range from $200 to 1000. The average amount received is $500.

Is this funding taxable?
Additional grant funding awarded to you through your student account is tax reportable if it is intended for non-qualified expenses (i.e. anything other than tuition, fees, books, and supplies). This funding is reported on your annual 1098-T form, which you can use to help you file your taxes each year. For specific questions about your personal tax situation, you will need to consult with a tax professional, as Penn cannot provide personal tax advice.
Will emergency funding affect my financial aid or work-study?
This grant may affect your financial aid package or work-study award, and we strongly encourage you to contact your assigned financial aid counselor to discuss any award you may receive.

Where does the funding come from?
Our funding comes from several sources, including alumni groups and other donor grants. We are very grateful for their support, and we ask grant recipients to write a note of thanks that we can share with our donors.

Can I qualify for a grant if I am married or living with a partner who earns an income?
Yes, you can qualify for funding if you are married or living with a partner who earns an income. This funding was made available to help enrolled students pursuing their academic goals. In other words, funding will not be awarded to help your partner or family members’ financial challenges. We do suggest that you and your partner seek alternative sources (e.g. governmental resources) for their needs and support if that serves the purpose for them.

Why don’t you fund my off-campus housing?
This funding process was established with the intention to provide short-term and one-time relief for emergency financial circumstances. Housing funding is an ongoing expense that requires a larger and more comprehensive solution.

Why don’t you fund personal/recreational travel? Isn’t that an opportunity?
While personal travel is an opportunity, funding is limited to opportunities that are directly related to an applicant’s current degree. Personal or recreational travel likely will not fit this category.

Why would anyone be rejected for funding if they presented a pressing need/emergency?
Each application will be reviewed fully by the committee. Sometimes, we cannot provide a grant because of the limits on financial aid packages or the scope of what our grants can support. Even if a student is not assisted with a grant, our team will always try to work with a student to find resources or solutions for their particular situation if possible; this can include loan options.

PROCESS
I already told you my problem/need in the application. Why do I have to meet with someone from Student Intervention Services?
Student Intervention Services provides support and advocacy for students and their communities. A staff person from Student Intervention Services will work with you collaboratively to further provide advocacy to the review committee with your application. In addition, the staff from Student Intervention Services might be able to identify resources or support to assist you in additional ways.

This document was last updated on August 31, 2020
You ask a lot of personal questions. Why?
We understand that your personal situation is sensitive, and we respect your privacy. The questions we ask are necessary for accountability in the distribution of our limited source of funding. We also try to understand your situation as fully as possible so we can identify any additional resources or support that may be helpful for you.

How does the evaluation work? Who decides?
A committee of staff members from Student Intervention Services, Penn First Plus, Student Financial Services, and VPUL reviews each application. We try to exhaust every avenue of support we have available to a student, whether financial or otherwise, in the outcome of a case.

How soon will I get my answer?
The average time from application to notification of a decision is 2 weeks. Student Intervention Services will do the best to meet with applicants within 5 business days of their application submission to prepare to advocate for each applicant in the committee review. The committee reviews applications weekly. If a student’s case is particularly complex or comes at a particularly high-volume time of year (such as the beginning of a semester), this process might take longer.

I received an emergency grant last year. Can I still apply for an opportunity grant?
Yes. You may contact your assigned Student Intervention Services case manager and/or SRFS counselor as a first step for their guidance.

RESULTS
I was awarded funding, but not as much as I need. Why?
The committee assesses the reasonable amount of funding for the requested items (e.g. laptop, winter clothing, food expenses). We must also consider applicants’ financial aid packages to comply with federal regulations. If federal regulations prohibit us from awarding a grant, our team will counsel applications about other options (i.e. loans, reviewing refund use).

Can I appeal the decision or amount of my award?
It is not likely that the awarded amount will be adjusted after the committee’s decision. However, you may discuss your concerns about the amount of the award with your assigned Student Intervention Services case manager.

How do I get the money? How long will it take?
Funding should be reflected on your student account and disbursed via direct deposit (if you have signed up for direct deposit with SRFS) within several business days upon your receipt of the award letter issued by Student Intervention Services. If you need an expedited process for the funding distribution, you should contact Student Intervention Services.
Why do I have to write a thank you/testimonial for receiving funding? Is my information kept private?
You do not have to write a thank you/testimonial but are encouraged to do so. Testimonials have direct impact in helping the University secure future funding help your fellow students who might be experiencing similar challenges. Your name and other identifiers are not included when testimonials are shared. University administrators are required to complete trainings on privacy and handling of your personal information. Also, University administrators will NOT ask for your personal information, including but not limited to Social Security number or bank account number via e-mail or over the phone. Please be extra careful of phishing or scamming in general.

What, if any, other funding sources does Penn have if I need to try to find additional money to cover my need or opportunity?
You should always consult with your assigned SRFS counselor as a first step for discussing financial concerns. We do coordinate with other sources of emergency financial assistance, such as funds based in the schools, to direct students’ requests to the single most appropriate fund and maximize the number of students we can help.