



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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SOUTH CAROLINA
TUITION GRANTS COMMISSION

AGENCY STRATEGIC PLAN
2026-2031

Adopted *xx/xx/xxxx*

The South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The agency does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability, genetic information, age, or political affiliation.

Data Classification: Public

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Program represents a strategic and cost-effective investment in higher education for the State of South Carolina. Although the program receives approximately 4% of total state appropriations for higher education, independent colleges in South Carolina enroll roughly 15% of the state's full-time students and confer more than 22% of all bachelor's degrees awarded annually.

With an annual state investment exceeding \$50 million, the Tuition Grants Program supports an independent college sector that contributes more than \$1.75 billion to South Carolina's economy. The Program allows the State to leverage existing private-sector educational infrastructure to expand access to higher education without the need for significant public capital investment.

In addition to its economic impact, the Program generates substantial cost savings for the State. By enabling students to attend independent institutions, the program reduces reliance on publicly funded institutions, thereby avoiding the per-student state subsidies typically provided to public college attendees regardless of financial need or academic progression. Since its inception in 1970, this cost avoidance is estimated to have saved the State more than \$1 billion in avoided public higher education costs. These savings do not account for the additional expenses the State would have incurred to expand public higher education capacity, including the construction of academic facilities and residence halls, as well as the hiring of faculty and staff.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission administers the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, a financial aid program based on financial need, established by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1970 (South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59, Chapter 113).

The program is designed to help offset the cost differential between tuition at public institutions and independent colleges within South Carolina. By providing this financial assistance, the Commission supports South Carolina residents in accessing higher education opportunities and promotes student choice by enabling enrollment at the institution that best aligns with each student's academic goals and needs.

AGENCY MISSION

The mission of the SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is to provide access and opportunity for more South Carolinians to pursue a postsecondary education by providing need-based tuition grants to students who choose an independent higher education.

Program Goals: The primary goals associated with the agency’s mission are:

1. To provide eligible South Carolinians with the choice to attend the college that best meets their individual academic needs
2. To help offset the cost of attending an independent college or university, just as the state offsets the tuition costs of residents attending its public colleges
3. To preserve the dual system of public and private higher education in our state, which provides healthy competition and innovation among all sectors
4. To support optimal use of college facilities available at independent colleges and universities throughout the state
5. To save the state tax dollars that would otherwise be appropriated at a higher cost, via state subsidies to public colleges, if students choosing to receive an independent higher education migrated into the public college system

AGENCY VISION

Providing opportunity and promoting choice while supporting South Carolina’s postsecondary attainment goals

AGENCY SERVICE CONSTITUENCY

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission is committed to a customer service-oriented approach and is recognized statewide for providing responsive, reliable, and high-quality service.

The Commission serves a diverse group of constituents, including:

- South Carolina students and their families
- The 21 independent colleges participating in the Tuition Grants Program
- Public and private high schools across the state
- Members of the South Carolina General Assembly
- State agencies with which the Commission coordinates operations

The Commission and its staff engage regularly with these stakeholders throughout the fiscal year, providing guidance, administering program requirements, and ensuring effective communication to support the successful delivery of the Tuition Grants Program.

AGENCY OPERATIONS

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission administers a comprehensive program that supports tens of thousands of students and coordinates with numerous educational institutions and state partners.

Core operational responsibilities include:

- **Application Processing and Eligibility Determination**
Processing more than 36,000 applications annually and evaluating each for financial need and program eligibility in accordance with federal methodology, state statute, and Commission policy
- **Awarding and Disbursement of Funds**
Notifying students and institutions of eligibility determinations, processing appeals, and disbursing grant funds to eligible students through participating institutions upon verification of enrollment and academic status
- **Institutional Coordination and Oversight**
Providing guidance and secure reporting to participating independent colleges and overseeing institutional compliance through annual program reviews conducted in coordination with independent auditors
- **Constituent Communication and Outreach**
Disseminating program information to students, families, high schools, and colleges, and responding to a high volume of public inquiries across multiple communication channels
- **Interagency Coordination and Compliance**
Collaborating with state agencies and oversight entities to ensure compliance with financial, audit, human resources, and information security requirements, and fulfilling all required reporting obligations

These functions are carried out by a small staff, requiring a high degree of coordination, efficiency, and adaptability to ensure consistent and accurate program administration.

AGENCY GOALS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Goal 1: Optimize Award Methodology to Better Target Financial Need

The Commission will undertake a measured review of its award methodology to ensure funds are distributed in a way that best reflects student financial need while maintaining administrative simplicity.

Key Strategies:

- Conduct a targeted review of current award calculations and eligibility criteria
- Assess alignment with federal methodology changes (FAFSA Simplification)
- Coordinate with institutional partners to understand potential impacts

Goal 2: Expand Access Through Targeted, Manageable Growth

The Commission will pursue responsible opportunities to expand program reach without overextending administrative capacity.

Key Strategies:

- Identify barriers that prevent eligible students from receiving awards
- Focus on outreach efforts for:
 - Traditional college students

- Adult learners
- Returning students (“non-completers”)
- Leverage institutional partners to support awareness rather than building new internal outreach infrastructure
- Evaluate growth opportunities in alignment with available funding and staffing

Goal 3: Within Existing Capacity, Strengthen Data-Informed Decision Making

The Commission will enhance its use of available data to inform decisions, prioritizing practical and sustainable improvements.

Key Strategies:

- Improve internal tracking of application, award, and enrollment trends
- Use existing FAFSA-related data to identify gaps in access
- Develop simple, maintainable reporting tools (avoiding overly complex systems)
- Use data selectively to support policy and funding discussions

Goal 4: Sustain Operational Excellence

Maintaining strong day-to-day operations remains the agency’s highest priority and foundation for all other strategic efforts.

Key Strategies:

- Continue timely and accurate processing of applications and awards
- Maintain clear and consistent communication with institutions
- Identify small-scale process improvements that reduce manual workload
- Preserve flexibility to respond to external changes in financial aid policy

Goal 5: Enhance Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The Commission will continue to strengthen relationships with institutional partners and policymakers through consistent and practical engagement.

Key Strategies:

- Maintain regular communication with financial aid administrators
- Incorporate structured feedback opportunities into existing meetings and trainings
- Ensure program guidance is clear, concise, and accessible
- Continue proactive, transparent communication with policymakers

Goal 6: Advocate for Sustainable Program Funding

The Commission will continue its role as a responsible advocate for the Tuition Grant Program and need-based financial aid more broadly.

Key Strategies:

- Clearly communicate program impact using concise, relevant data

- Align funding requests with demonstrated student need and program demand
- Support broader conversations around need-based aid in South Carolina
- Maintain a consistent and credible presence in the legislative process

Goal 7: Maintain Excellence in Fiscal Stewardship

The Commission will uphold its long-standing reputation for responsible and efficient use of public funds.

Key Strategies:

- Ensure continued compliance with all state financial and audit requirements
- Maintain disciplined oversight of program expenditures
- Preserve efficient administrative operations relative to program size

Goal 8: Strengthen Information Security and Risk Management

Protecting sensitive student data remains a critical responsibility of the agency.

Key Strategies:

- Maintain compliance with state information security standards
- Conduct regular reviews of internal security practices
- Provide ongoing staff awareness of data protection responsibilities
- Implement incremental improvements as resources allow

Goal 9: Strengthen Organizational Capacity and Workforce Sustainability

To sustain current operations and support future priorities, the Commission will work to enhance staffing capacity in a measured and responsible manner.

Key Strategies:

- Advocate for funding to support the addition of one full-time equivalent (FTE) administrative support position
- Employ temporary staff, interns, or part-time assistance during peak workload periods or for projects, as resources allow
- Continue cross-training staff to reduce operational risk and ensure continuity
- Regularly assess workload distribution and identify opportunities for efficiency
- Align any expansion of responsibilities or initiatives with available staffing resources

Desired Outcomes:

- Reduced staff burden and risk of burnout
- Improved continuity of operations
- Increased capacity to support program stability and modest growth
- A more sustainable organizational structure over the long term

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Commission recognizes that meaningful stakeholder input is essential to maintaining a relevant and effective program.

To support this effort, the agency will:

- Engage financial aid administrators through existing training sessions and meetings
- Gather practical feedback on student needs and administrative challenges
- Incorporate stakeholder perspectives into policy and planning discussions

This approach ensures engagement remains intentional and manageable, without creating additional administrative strain.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

To ensure this Strategic Plan remains actionable:

- Progress will be reviewed internally on an ongoing basis
- Adjustments will be made as needed based on staffing, funding, or policy changes
- Emphasis will remain on achievable outcomes rather than rigid metrics
- Updates will be provided to the governing board (Commission) at least annually

CONCLUSION

The 2026–2031 Strategic Plan reflects a deliberate shift toward sustainable progress and balances the desire to expand access and impact with the practical realities of a small agency environment.

By maintaining operational excellence, pursuing targeted growth, and advocating for the resources necessary to support its mission, the Commission is well-positioned to continue serving South Carolina students effectively in the years ahead.