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.
EXCLUDING SUMMARY

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Program is a sound and intelligent investment for the State of South Carolina. Although the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program receives only about 4% of the total state appropriations going to higher education, South Carolina independent colleges educate about 15% of our state's full-time students and graduate annually over 22% of the state's bachelor’s degree recipients. The state's current annual investment of over $40 million in the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, at a minimum, supports an independent colleges industry whose economic impact to the state exceeds $1.75 billion.

In addition to leveraging available private facilities with this modest investment of funds, the Tuition Grants Program saves the State of South Carolina millions of dollars each year. The savings result from attracting South Carolina students into the South Carolina independent college sector, thereby saving the automatic per student state subsidy that goes to all students attending South Carolina public colleges regardless of financial need and regardless of academic progress towards graduation. Since its inception in 1970, it is estimated that the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program has saved the State almost $900 million that tax payers would have spent through direct subsidies to educate these same students in the State's public colleges. These savings amount do not include the additional state dollars that would have been needed since 1970 to build public college classrooms and dormitories and to hire additional faculty or staff members.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

The South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is responsible for the administration of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, a need-based grant program that was enacted in 1970 by the South Carolina General Assembly (South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59, Chapter 113). The Tuition Grants Program is designed to offset the differences between the State's public colleges’ tuition and South Carolina based independent colleges’ tuition, enabling the Tuition Grants Commission to provide South Carolina students the opportunity to afford to pursue a higher education while promoting the choice to attend the South Carolina college that best meets each student’s academic needs.

AGENCY MISSION

The mission of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is to administer a state-funded, need-based tuition grants program for the State of South Carolina designed to:

- Gain maximum usage of the available independent college facilities located in every region of our state by assisting eligible South Carolina residents to afford
the cost of the independent colleges and thereby helping to educate our state citizenry;

- Help offset the higher education costs of attending South Carolina independent colleges for South Carolina students just as the state offsets the higher education costs of state residents attending South Carolina public colleges;
- Preserve the dual system of public and independent college higher education in South Carolina which provides healthy competition between the two sectors;
- Save the state tax dollars that would be appropriated via the automatic per student state subsidy that would go, regardless of financial need or progress towards graduation, to all South Carolina independent college students if they migrated into the South Carolina public college system;
- Give eligible South Carolina residents the opportunity to choose the in-state college that best meets their individual academic needs and preferences.

**AGENCY VISION**

Provide increased state economic benefits and a more educated citizenry by enabling more South Carolinians to obtain a college education by providing financial assistance in the form of need-based state tuition grants to qualified South Carolina residents electing to attend eligible accredited South Carolina independent junior and senior colleges on a full-time basis.

**AGENCY SERVICE CONSTITUENCY**

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission and staff will continue exercising its customer service-oriented philosophy for which it is recognized statewide with an excellent public reputation for providing outstanding customer service. The constituents served by the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program are the students of South Carolina and their families, the 21 South Carolina independent colleges participating through statutory eligibility in the grants program, all public and private high schools located throughout the state, the members of the South Carolina General Assembly, and the various state agencies with which the Commission coordinates its operations. The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission interacts with each of these constituents throughout the normal operating cycle of a fiscal year.

**AGENCY OPERATIONS**

- Process all applications (over 36,000 in the most recent processing cycle) that are submitted annually for South Carolina Tuition Grant assistance;
- Analyze all applications for financial need using a combination of a need analysis methodology approved by Congress and Commission-approved adjustments to that methodology;
- Analyze all applications to determine if they meet all Program eligibility requirements according to statute and policy;
Notify all students and their colleges of their eligibility orinelibility for grant funds;
Process all individual appeals (between 250 and 300 annually) of eligibility from students who do not initially meet program eligibility requirements;
Disburse Tuition Grant funds each semester to each individual student at his/her college once full-time enrollment status and academic eligibility are verified by their college;
Securely issue various electronic reports to the participating independent colleges regarding grant eligibility of their South Carolina students to assist with Program administration;
Extensively disseminate South Carolina Tuition Grants Program information to the general public, to South Carolina high schools, to high school counselors, and to all eligible colleges;
Respond to all written, telephone, and electronic communications from the public concerning general Program information and Program eligibility requirements;
Provide an annual Program Review Guide, coordinate with, and direct the work of independent auditors at each eligible college for the annual review of each college’s administration to ensure the college’s compliance with Program Statues and Policies.
Communicate with, coordinate with, and provide all necessary and required reports to the State Treasurer’s Office, the Comptroller General’s Office, the State Auditor’s Office, the State Executive Budget Office, the State Department of Technology Operations, the State Division of Information Security, the State Human Resources Office, the Commission on Higher Education, the State Lottery Commission, the Governor’s Office, the South Carolina General Assembly and its various committees, and all other state agencies involved with administering a state program.

AGENCY GOALS AND PLANS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM SUCCESS

1) Since the creation of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program in 1970, over 450,000 Tuition Grants valued at over $1 billion have been made, assisting South Carolina students to attain their academic and career goals enabling them to contribute economically and educationally to the State of South Carolina. The Commission will continue to effectively and efficiently process student applications and award eligible students according to statute and approved policy.
2) To streamline and modernize student-related application processes, the Commission began moving some student-based forms relating to the Tuition Grants Program online. The Commission will continue to review and update this functionality so that students can access the Commission’s website from any computer or mobile device to fill out and submit required forms immediately, decreasing the burden on students to have to print and submit forms by mail to the Commission office.
3) The Commission will continue to provide to each state legislator a listing of Tuition Grants Recipients from his/her district along with a notice of the total
aggregate amount of Tuition Grants funding disbursed to students in that legislative district. These listings demonstrate the importance of the Tuition Grants Program, enabling the legislature to understand the significant value and impact of their continued support of the Program. This is accomplished through a secure section on the Commission’s website which is used to house the files for each House and Senate District. Although the files only contain directory information and no sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is shared, in accordance with the Commission’s information security procedures, each file is encrypted with a password specific to each legislative district.

4) The Commission will continue to use all possible fiscal efficiencies enabling the agency to administer the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program on less than 1% of the annual agency budget, including salaries, benefits and required information security expenses ensuring that 99% of the state funds allocated to the agency go directly to South Carolina students in the form of need-based South Carolina Tuition Grants.

5) The Commission will continue to advocate for increases in grants funding enabling the Maximum Grant to be increased regularly, preferably annually, ensuring college affordability for the neediest South Carolinians whose academic success leads to a prosperous future South Carolina economy.

6) By continuing to provide this need-based grant to South Carolina students who choose to attend an eligible independent institution, the Commission will ensure the ability of the State to save taxpayer dollars in the form of the automatic per student state subsidy that goes to all students attending South Carolina public colleges regardless of financial need and regardless of academic progress towards graduation.

7) The Commission will continue to advocate for greater increases in state funding for need-based aid as the amount allocated in the annual State Budget for needy students is far less than and is very unequal to that for merit-based/scholarship assistance. This is especially critical for the State’s minority student population which receives a far less portion of the State’s merit-based aid to pay for college tuition.

8) The Commission will work diligently and make it a high priority to ensure absolute security of the critical personally identifiable information (PII) for parents and students that it uses to award Tuition Grants. This will require regular updating of hardware and software including a close working relationship with the Department of Technology Operations. This will also require that the Commission advocate for increased funding from the State Legislature to protect the PII of South Carolina citizens who trust the State to protect them.