



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

111 Executive Center Drive
Suite 242
Columbia, SC 29210
(803) 896-1120
info@sctuitiongrants.org

Katherine H. Stevens
Executive Director

AGENDA

Tuesday, June 16, 2026; 10:30 A.M.

Microsoft Teams Meeting: Meeting ID: 239 827 246 001 304

Passcode: DD9Tr7qJ

If needed, attendees may dial in using the number below:

(803) 454-9963

Phone Conference ID: 946 792 893#

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 1. | Welcome and Commission Roll Call..... | Katie Stevens |
| 2. | * Approval of Minutes of March 10, 2026 Commission Meeting..... | Boone Hopkins, Chair |
| 3. | Agency Updates.....
<i>Personnel and Staffing Updates, FAFSA Completion Portal,
Training Updates</i> | Katie Stevens |
| 4. | * Adoption of Updated Strategic Plan | Katie Stevens |
| 5. | Review of 2025-2026 Award Year and Update on the 2026-2027
Award Year | Zach Christian |
| 6. | Reminder of SC Tuition Grants Program Reviews..... | Zach Christian |
| 7. | Report on the Status of the 2026 Legislative Session..... | Katie Stevens |
| 8. | * Approval of the 2027-2028 Budget Request to the State Executive
Budget Office for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program..... | Katie Stevens |
| 9. | * Rotation of the Tuition Grants Commission and Election
of Officers..... | Boone Hopkins, Chair |
| 10. | Reminder: State Ethics Commission SEI Filing Requirement | Katie Stevens |
| 11. | New Business..... | Boone Hopkins, Chair |
| 12. | Adjournment..... | Boone Hopkins, Chair |

Next Scheduled Commission Meetings:

Tuesday; March 9, 2027; 10:30 AM

Tuesday; June 15, 2027; 10:30 AM

*** Commission Vote or Action Needed**

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission notified media outlets of the time and location of this meeting on June 4, 2026.



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MINUTES

South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission Meeting
Tuesday, March 10, 2026
Virtual Meeting
Columbia, South Carolina

Commission Members Participating:

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Converse University, Chair
Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College, Secretary
Dr. Stanley Pritchett, Allen University
Mr. Daniel Muller as Proxy for Dr. Bruce McAllister, Bob Jones University
Dr. Pamela Richardson-Wilks, Clinton College
Ms. Elizabeth Wallace as Proxy for Dr. Natalie Harder, Coker University
Dr. L. Jeffrey Perez, SC Commission on Higher Education, Ex-officio

Commission Members Absent:

Dr. Dwaun Warmack, Claflin University, Vice Chair
Dr. Elizabeth Davis, Furman University

Non-Commission Member College Presidents Participating:

Mr. Keith Faulkner, Charleston Southern University

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:33AM. Ms. Katie Stevens, Commission Executive Director, informed participants that the meeting is being transcribed and is being held in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. Ms. Stevens continued with the Welcome and Commission Roll Call and confirmed the participating Commission Members in attendance. Ms. Stevens noted that Mr. Daniel Muller is attending as Proxy for Dr. Bruce McAllister, Bob Jones University, Dr. Stacey Barber is attending as Proxy for Dr. Pamela Richardson-Wilks, Clinton College, for the second half of the meeting, and Ms. Elizabeth Wallace is attending as Proxy for Dr. Natalie Harder, Coker University. A quorum was established. Ms. Stevens recognized and welcomed the non-Commission members in attendance. Ms. Stevens also informed all participants of the special guests joining the meeting: Dr. Robert Lloyd, President & CEO, and Ms. Emma Reabold, Vice President for Development & Campus Services, both with South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, Inc. (SCICU).

Dr. Hopkins called for a motion to approve the June 27, 2025, Commission Minutes. Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College, moved to approve the Minutes, and Dr. Stanley Pritchett, Allen University, seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Stevens to give the Final Report on 2024-2025 Program Reviews. Ms. Stevens reported on the twenty-one participating institutions that underwent Program Reviews for the 2024-2025 year, stating all reviews were submitted by the deadline, with one deadline extension granted, and all have been closed. Ms. Stevens reported there were six schools with findings program-wide, with three of those institutions having two findings. Findings pertained to the thirty-day refund period not being met, disbursing to students who were not enrolled, and internal reconciliation discrepancies. Ms. Stevens informed attendees that one school has had internal reconciliation discrepancy findings for three consecutive years, and this institution

submitted an approved written plan of action to prevent further ramifications. Ms. Stevens encouraged collaboration and communication between departments on campus to help prevent similar findings in future years.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Stevens to also report on Review of House Legislative Oversight Process. Ms. Stevens reported that the House Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight Committee finalized its review of the Tuition Grants Commission and approved the subcommittee's final study report on January 29, 2026. Ms. Stevens noted that an email went out to school presidents on January 30, 2026, that included the full study report and a brief overview video from Rep. Tim McGinnis, Chair (District 56 – Horry).

There were no findings of operational fault, mismanagement, or compliance deficiencies found in the report. The following recommendations were included in the report:

1. Create a strategic marketing plan to better inform adult learners, working professionals, and other non-traditional students of our program.
2. Formalize a strategic plan review cycle.
3. Clarify South Carolina Code of Laws section 59-143 pertaining to how the Children's Education Endowment Funds are allocated between the Tuition Grants Commission and the Commission on Higher Education.

Ms. Stevens expanded on formalizing a strategic plan review cycle. The current strategic plan was adopted in 2020, and the Agency has made a lot of progress in the last six years in line with items included in the Strategic Plan. Items that are being discussed to be included in the new Strategic Plan include examining award methodology to ensure students with the most financial need are receiving Tuition Grant. In addition, the Agency will explore opportunities to grow the non-traditional student population. Finally, the Agency looks to continue to strengthen operational excellence while looking for opportunities for Program expansion if funding allows. Ms. Stevens informed attendees that the Agency will be hosting a state-wide training for Financial Aid Administrators at our participating institutions on April 29, 2026, and time will be spent at this training gathering input and ideas from meeting attendees regarding the Agency's Strategic Plan.

Ms. Stevens also reported more on the third recommendation pertaining to SC Code of Laws section 59-143. As a result of convoluted language that was clarified during the oversight process, the amount of funding Tuition Grants will receive from the Children's Endowment will decrease by around \$9 million moving forward due to a change in how the Tuition Grants funding amount will be calculated. For the next few fiscal years, carry-forward funds will allow the Agency to keep Tuition Grant at its current amount without requesting increased funding. The Agency anticipates that in FY30, the Commission will need to ask for an additional \$12 million from the General Assembly to be able to continue our current \$5,000 maximum annual award. Dr. L. Jeffrey Perez, SC Commission on Higher Education President and Executive Director, added that meeting attendees should continue to maintain relationships with members of the General Assembly in preparation for future budget requests to fund State programs.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Deputy Director, to give the Update on the 2025-2026 Award Year. Mr. Christian noted that as of March 4, 2026, 36,453 Tuition Grant applications have been received, which is up 9% from the 2024-2025 award year and 1.5% higher than 2023-2024 applications. Additionally, 25,805 commitments were made (up 7.18% from 2024-2025), and as of March 4, 2026, 13,075 students received Tuition Grant in the current 2025-2026 award year, which is up 100 students from 2024-2025. As of now, our show-up rate is 50.67% but subject to change due to non-traditional programs at some of our schools that have not completed 2025-2026 Certification. Mr. Christian also noted that the Agency is closely monitoring 2026-2027 data to see if Tuition Grants are indirectly impacted by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that will result in changes to federal awarding at our schools in the 2026-2027 award year.

Dr. Hopkins invited Ms. Stevens to report on Agency Updates and Initiatives. Ms. Stevens noted that Agency staff continue their involvement in state, regional, and national organizations to provide the knowledge and skills required to successfully administer the Program. Ms. Stevens highlighted that Ms. Kira Demery,

Commission Fiscal Operations Manager, continues to identify necessary procedural changes to mitigate risk and strengthen Agency's fiscal integrity. Ms. Demery also continues to streamline refund procedures by assisting schools with enabling them to return funds electronically. In addition to her work at the Agency, Ms. Demery serves as the Treasurer-Elect of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA). In this role, she has worked alongside the current SCASFAA Treasurer to recommend policy changes to the SCASFAA Executive Board.

Ms. Stevens also noted that Mr. Ross Waddell, Commission Program Operations Coordinator, continues to participate in outreach events where he provides information about Tuition Grants as well as other financial aid information. He is also on the planning committee for College and Career Decision Day, an annual event at the State House put on by the Commission on Higher Education that celebrates the accomplishments of each year's high school graduating class.

Ms. Stevens highlighted Mr. Christian's involvement in state and national organizations that included him presenting a session titled "Advocacy by the Numbers" at annual conferences. In this presentation, Mr. Christian explained the agency's internal geocoding process used to support the SCICU letter writing campaign and direct communication sent from the Agency to all members of the General Assembly. In addition, Mr. Christian presented a session at a regional conference that provided financial aid administrators with tools to work with data and reports. In October 2025, Mr. Christian began a two-year as Co-Conference Chair on the Executive Committee of the National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP).

Ms. Stevens also described her involvement in NASSGAP. She recently concluded a decade-long tenure on the Executive Committee of this organization and received the Distinguished Service Award at their October 2025 conference as a result of her service in a variety of different roles. Ms. Stevens had the privilege of meeting staff members from the offices of Senator Lindsey Graham, and Representatives Joe Wilson, James Clyburn, and Russell Fry at the recent National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) Leadership & Legislative Conference. During these meetings, she advocated for support of Pell Grant funding, elimination of student loan origination fees, and other matters of importance for South Carolina students. Ms. Stevens also recently served as a resource expert on a College Affordability panel hosted by the Hunt Institute as part of their State Policy Fellows program.

Ms. Stevens informed attendees that the Agency has a Communication and Outreach Intern for the Spring 2026 Semester named Lily Oyeade, a sophomore Business Administration major at Columbia International University. Lily has been assisting with social media, helping with communication to State legislators, and will wrap up her time with the Agency by working on a marketing and communications plan geared towards adult learners and non-completers.

Ms. Stevens reported on the Agency's FAFSA Completion Portal, an initiative that allows high school counselors to access real-time FAFSA completion information. A total of 63 high schools are currently using the portal, and as of March 3, 2026, participating schools are seeing an average FAFSA Submission Rate that is 3.43% higher than the State average and a 3.36% higher FAFSA Completion Rate than the State average.

Ms. Stevens also highlighted the Agency's online Data Center, developed by Mr. Christian, that was launched in December 2025. The Data Center brings together FAFSA completion dashboards, recent Annual and Accountability Reports, and historical Program data all in one place, with interactive tools that make trends easy to review.

Dr. Hopkins invited Mr. Christian to give SC Residency Updates. As reported in the June 25, 2025, Commission Meeting, the Agency reviewed the State Residency Determination Policy submitted by each institution. This review allowed Commission staff members to identify areas of improvement needed to align with State Residency Regulations promulgated by the SC Commission on Higher Education as well as the Tuition Grants Program Policies and Procedures Manual. Mr. Christian noted that the Commission on Higher Education also began developing proposed regulatory revisions with a final draft being circulated in the Fall 2025 semester

with the anticipation of being adopted into the Code of Regulations during this legislative cycle. Mr. Perez added that the proposed changes allow for additional flexibility when determining residency and will require institutions to collect the following four pieces of documentation to verify SC residency:

1. Proof of Domicile
2. Driver's License
3. Vehicle Registration
4. Prior Year's SC State Tax Return

Based on the proposed changes, and while ensuring compliance with the current regulations, the Tuition Grants Commission developed a model Residency Determination Policy and form, which schools could adopt as-is or incorporate the changes within their existing policies. Mr. Christian reported that all schools have submitted residency policies and forms that have been reviewed and approved by the Agency. While one institution did not meet the March 2, 2026 deadline, they submitted the required documentation on March 3, 2026, and it was approved.

Dr. Hopkins invited Ms. Stevens to give the Review of the 2026-2027 Budget Request. Ms. Stevens reported that the Commission's Budget Request did not include a request for any additional funds but asked for funds to be moved from Lottery (non-recurring) to General Fund (recurring). The Budget Request also included a \$180,000 General Fund increase to support the Agency's personnel needs and to cover increased technology fees. Ms. Stevens reported that budget debate in the House and Senate is still taking place and is tentatively scheduled to conclude when the full Senate makes its recommendations during the week of April 20, 2026.

Ms. Stevens called upon Dr. Lloyd and Ms. Reabold to provide the SCICU Update and Legislative Outlook. Ms. Reabold informed attendees Higher Ed Day taking place on April 16, 2026, at the State House, and the SCICU Legislative Conference will take place June 4, 2026, at the Convention Center. Dr. Lloyd informed attendees of current legislative topics impacting SC independent institutions, on the state and federal levels.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Stevens to present the Staff Recommendation regarding Initial 2026-2027 South Carolina Tuition Grant Maximum Award Amount. Ms. Stevens reported that based on our current carry-forward dollars, enrollment projections, the ten-year calculation formula used in the fiscal impact analysis pertaining to the Children's Endowment funding, and anticipated Legislative funding, the Agency feels comfortable keeping the maximum Grant for the 2026-2027 award year at \$5,000. Dr. Pritchett moved to set the initial maximum Grant at \$5,000. Dr. Dozier seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, and the motion was passed unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins reminded all Commission members to complete their Ethics filing by the March 30, 2026, deadline.

Dr. Hopkins asked if there was any new business. There was none.

Dr. Hopkins reminded all participants that the next meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2026, at 10:30 AM.

Dr. Hopkins adjourned the meeting at 11:56 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Ross Waddell, Program Operations Coordinator
Acting Secretary for
Dr. John Dozier, Secretary
South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission



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AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Staff Updates:

As announced at the March Commission Meeting, the Tuition Grants Commission was fortunate to have Lily Oyebade, a student from Columbia International University, serve as the Commission's Communications and Outreach Intern for the Spring 2026 semester. During her time with the Commission, Lily supported the agency's social media efforts and developed a plan Commission Staff can use to continue to strengthen reach to more students. Lily scheduled and met with staff at similar agencies in other states to learn more about how those agencies successfully reach adult learners and other non-traditional students within their respective states. During Higher Education Day at the State House, Lily sought out students at participating colleges and universities and captured quick video snippets, which were featured on the Commission's Instagram story. This summer, Lily is participating in a six-week summer program managed by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission called Black to San Francisco (B2SF). This program accepts 30 students annually and B2SF interns contribute to San Francisco's economic revitalization and help to cultivate future leaders in tech, government, education, and beyond. We are grateful for Lily's dedication and work during her time with our agency and hope to welcome her back to the Commission next academic year, should her schedule allow.

On May 26th, the Commission hired Delaney Gilliam, a senior Business Major at Newberry College, to serve as the Commission's Operations Assistant for the summer. In this position, Delaney provides essential administrative and front-line support to ensure smooth daily operations. She assists with preparing and mailing agency communications, managing filing, and supporting front-desk coverage for visitors and incoming calls. Delaney is also assisting with the general "info" email inbox, ensuring emails are routed to the appropriate staff. Her work strengthens the agency's capacity during peak operational periods and supports staff across multiple functional areas. We are grateful to have Delaney with us.

Ross Waddell, Program Operations Coordinator, recently celebrated his one-year anniversary with the Commission. During this past year, Ross has strengthened the agency's relationships with our financial aid partners, has attended several outreach events, providing critical program and general financial aid information to a variety of audiences, and represented the Commission on the College and Career Decision Day planning committee. Ross recently attended the annual New and Intermediate Aid Officers Workshop held by the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) and is eligible to sit for the Student Eligibility professional credential exam offered by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), which he hopes to take and pass in the coming weeks.

Kira Demery, Fiscal Operations Manager, is currently working through the annual year-end reporting process, ensuring the agency remains compliant with all General Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Thanks to her efforts to streamline and enhance internal financial records keeping, this process, while cumbersome and time-consuming, is already off to a smooth start. Outside of the agency's fiscal responsibilities, Kira is wrapping up the year as Treasurer-Elect for SCASFAA and will be moving into the Treasurer role starting July 1. As a voting member of the

SCASFAA Executive Board, Kira continues to represent the Commission as a leader amongst our peers statewide. Recently, Kira presented at SCASFAA's New and Intermediate Aid Officers Workshop, co-teaching the Student Eligibility credential preparation session alongside a financial aid administrator from the University of South Carolina.

Zachary Christian, Deputy Director, was recently invited to serve on a panel at the upcoming NASFAA conference, to be held June 29-July 2 in National Harbor, Maryland. The session, titled *Hot Topics in State Financial Aid Policy: What's Happening Across the States*, will highlight emerging trends and pressing issues shaping state policy, innovative state aid programs, and the role of state and regional associations in advocacy at the state level. Zach will be presenting alongside the Vice President of Federal Relations from SHEEO, the Assistant Director of Government Relations from NASFAA, and a current Director of Financial Aid. This is the second year Zach has been invited to present on this type of panel, and he will represent the Agency and our State well. Additionally, on June 30, Zach will "roll off" the SCASFAA Executive Board after a decade of service to the Association. Elected to the Board as Member at Large while still at Winthrop shortly before joining the Commission, Zach began service on the SCASFAA Board July 1, 2016, and has served in several roles, both elected and appointed, including that of President, during his decade of service to the Association.

Katie Stevens, Executive Director, has been working closely with staff from the Program Management Office and Division of Information Security at the Department of Administration, to address critical business continuity, disaster recovery, and incident response plan requirements to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Agency in the event of information security threats or natural disasters. With some assistance from Zach, Katie has successfully addressed several items and recently distributed the updated Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan to all staff. These plans, which are confidential due to the nature of the information contained within them, are to ensure little to no interruptions in service, in the unlikely event an incident takes place. Additionally, Katie has continued building relationships with legislators and staff through a variety of connections and recently participated in the SCICU Legislative Conference, providing attendees with an overview of the Tuition Grants Program's history and impact.

FAFSA Completion Updates:

The agency's FAFSA Completion Status Portal continues to be a popular tool for K-12 school counselors throughout the state to access student-level completion data for their enrolled senior classes. The Commission currently has 100 schools who are either using the portal actively or have initiated the process to obtain access. This is up from 40 schools last year and includes 85 traditional public schools, 10 public charter schools, and 5 private schools. This also includes an in-process agreement with the GEAR UP program at the University of South Carolina, which provides services to 26 public schools throughout the state.

The following chart compares the percentage of FAFSA submissions and completions statewide to those schools with access to the FAFSA Completion Status Portal. The schools using the portal tool are outperforming their counterparts statewide by 4.15% in overall submissions and by 4.13% in complete FAFSAs (those with no rejects or errors).

<i>As of June 9, 2026</i>	High Schools using FAFSA Completion Portal	Overall High School Cohort
Total Students Enrolled	13,293	55,638
# Submitted FAFSA	6,344	24,642
% Submitted FAFSA	48.44%	44.29%
# Complete FAFSA (no rejects)	6,281	24,358
% Complete FAFSA (no rejects)	47.91%	43.78%

Agency Training Initiatives:

On April 29, the agency hosted a statewide Tuition Grants training, where Financial Aid Administrators from all 21 of our partnering institutions attended. The training focused on program compliance, best practices for fiscal management, and the importance of communicating across campus when determining student eligibility for funds.

The rest of the training session focused primarily on implementation of the updated state residency regulations, which require all institutions to collect a minimum of four specific documents to verify a student's residency status. Commission Staff, in particular Zachary Christian, have been instrumental in helping our independent colleges understand the new regulations and requirements to ensure their compliance with State Law.



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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.



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Review and Update on the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 Award Years

2025-26 Review:

During the 2025-26 Award Year, there was a total of **\$60,756,469** in appropriated and allocated monies available to disburse South Carolina Tuition Grants: **\$27,558,624** in State Recurring Appropriations; **\$12,947,845** in Children's Education Endowment received from the Commission on Higher Education; **\$250,000*** in State Funds Interest earned; and **\$20,000,000** in State Lottery Allocations.

While final figures will not be made available until after the close of FY26, as of June 9, 2026, **13,064 (+0.68% change)** grants were realized out of the **25,805 (+7.18% change)** commitments made. This demonstrates a show-up rate of **50.62% (decrease of 2.15%)**. The maximum grant was \$5,000 with an average grant of \$4,607. With an application deadline of August 1, 2025, **36,453 (+9.10% change)** applications were received.

2026-27 Update:

For the 2026-27 academic year, the agency is projected to receive a total of **\$51,608,624** in appropriated and allocated monies to be made available to disburse South Carolina Tuition Grants. The two main differences in available funds will come in the form of received allocated Children's Education Endowment funds received from the CHE, to be determined based on the percentage of fall 2025 Independent College Full-Time Enrollment for South Carolina residents on the state-wide total in August 2026, along with the statutory updates to §59-143-30. Another funding change is realized in the total State Funds Interest available. For the 2026-27 Award Year, the authority to spend is set at \$250,000 regardless of the actual interest amount received or available cash on hand. Agency staff can request an increase in this authority for the 2026-27 award year, if needed, through the Executive Budget Office. While this is a decrease in appropriated and allocated funding, the agency continues to work to spend down carryover funds from several years of Lottery and Children's Endowment disbursements received late in the academic year.

As of June 9th, the Commission has received **31,363 (+6.47% change) Tuition Grants Applicants**, of which **24,236 (+12.96% change)** are currently tentatively eligible, compared to this time last year.

**The Commission's authority to spend Interest Funds was \$250,000 for 2025-26. \$476,519.65 in Interest Funds "cash on hand" available as of June 9, 2026.*



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

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Executive Director

Overview of the 2026 SC General Assembly as Related to the SC Tuition Grants Program

The South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission submitted its 2026-2027 State Budget Request last September, requesting continuation of funding of the \$10 million increase for the Tuition Grants Program first realized in FY22. The Commission's Budget Request asked for consideration of these funds being moved from Lottery (non-recurring) to General Fund (recurring). The agency also requested approximately \$170,000 in State recurring funds for operating expenses necessary for personnel expenditures and a statewide increase in Information Technology-related fees assessed to all agencies using the shared services model for technology through the SC Department of Administration.

Governor Henry McMaster released his FY27 Executive Budget in January. The Executive Budget recommended continued funding of the recent increases for both the Tuition Grants Program and CHE's Need-Based Grant Program. The Governor's Executive Budget recommended the funding source for these funds continue to be allocations from the Lottery account. The Governor's recommended budget did not include the operational expenses requested.

On January 20, 2026, the Commission appeared before the House Ways and Means Higher Education Subcommittee to present its Budget Request. The Commission thanked the legislature for the funding provided in previous years and expressed support not only for the Governor's continued support of Tuition Grants funding, but also for the increase in funding for the State Need-Based Grant Program supporting needy students attending the state's public institutions of higher education. In its final deliberations, the House Ways and Means Committee recommended and approved the continuation of the \$10 million increase in Tuition Grants funding provided through the Lottery. The House did not include the operational expenses requested.

On February 19, 2026, the Commission presented its Budget Request to the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, once again expressing support for the Need-Based Grant Program in addition to advocating for the Tuition Grant. The Subcommittee reported favorably, and the full Senate's version of the FY27 Budget recommended the continuation of an increase of \$10 million for Tuition Grants through Lottery appropriations. The Senate included the agency's operational expenses in their version of the budget.

Since the House and Senate versions of the FY27 budget differ, a conference committee is required to resolve the differences. The conference committee met on June 4 but have not finalized the budget at this time.

In May, Governor McMaster signed the CHE Clean-Up Bill into law. Related to the Tuition Grant Program, this bill amended Section 59-143-10 of the SC Code of Laws to clarify that the enrollment percentage calculation for the Children's Endowment Fund that passes through from CHE to the Tuition Grants Commission is to be applied only to the designated amount available in the Higher Education Scholarship Grants allocation. This adjustment will result in the Tuition Grants Commission receiving approximately \$9 million less annually beginning in FY27 from this funding source. It is estimated that the Tuition Grants Commission will need to request new funding to replenish this amount during the FY30 budget cycle.



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State Budget Request for Funding of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program

Each Fall, the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission must submit its Budget Request to the Executive Budget Office to be used by the Governor's Office, the House, and the Senate for funding in the next fiscal year. Because the Commission will not meet again before this request is submitted, the Budget Request for funding for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program for 2027-2028 must be approved by the Commission at the June 2026 meeting.

At this time, Commission Staff project that the Program can sustain a maximum grant of \$5,000 for the 2026-2027 year. This maximum grant was approved by the Commission at the March 2026 meeting. Currently, no new funding for the Program is needed to maintain this award amount for 2027-2028, as the agency works to spend down carryover funds from several years of Lottery and Children's Endowment disbursements received late in the academic year. Requests related to the agency's operating expenses will be determined by Executive Management and added to any Program-related requests.

The Tuition Grants Commission expects to once again be allocated a total of \$20 million in lottery funds, in addition to \$27.5 million in recurring funds for the Program. As noted in prior years, there is no guarantee that the recent increase in lottery funds for the Tuition Grant and CHE's Need-Based Grant for public colleges will be sustained going forward.

There are two different approaches the Commission can take when asking the General Assembly to maintain current funding for the Program:

- (1) Create a request for recurring general funds (State appropriations) in the requested amount. If approved, this would create a more stable source of funding; however, this request has not been approved during recent budget cycles. If the requested amount is not available in recurring funds through general State appropriations, legislators could opt to provide the funding once again through Lottery allocations.
- (2) Create an annual request for non-recurring funds in the requested amount as Lottery appropriations. According to Jake Scoggins, Senior Budget Analyst for Senate Finance, programs relying on Lottery appropriations should technically be asking for funds in this manner each year since they are considered non-recurring annual allocations. Some agencies currently take this approach while others do not. Since the Tuition Grants Commission began receiving a portion of its Program funding through Lottery allocations, it has always been considered a "given" that the Program would continue to receive a base amount in Lottery funding, although theoretically this pot of money is supposed to be treated with zero-based budget principles in mind.

The South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission needs to approve a Budget Request for 2027-2028 for Tuition Grants Program funding, determining both the amount and the source (recurring or non-recurring) of the request. A vote of the Commission is required.



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SC TUITION GRANTS COMMISSION ROTATION SCHEDULE

Effective July 1, 2026

2025-2026

ON: Furman, BJU, Claflin

OFF: NGU, PC, SWU

2026-2027

ON: SMC, Anderson

OFF: Clinton, Converse

2027-2028

ON: Benedict, CSU, Voorhees

OFF: Columbia, Allen, Coker

2028-2029

ON: Newberry, Erskine, Wofford

OFF: Furman, BJU, Claflin

2029-2030

ON: Morris, NGU

OFF: SMC, Anderson

2030-2031

ON: PC, SWU, Clinton

OFF: Benedict, CSU, Voorhees

2031-2032

ON: Converse, Columbia, Allen

OFF: Newberry, Erskine, Wofford

2032-2033

ON: Coker, Furman

OFF: Morris, NGU

2033-2034

ON: BJU, Claflin, SMC

OFF: PC, SWU, Clinton

2034-2035

ON: CIU, Anderson, Benedict

OFF: Converse, Columbia, Allen

2035-2036

ON: CSU, Voorhees

OFF: Coker, Furman

2036-2037

ON: Newberry, Erskine, Wofford

OFF: BJU, Claflin, SMC

2037-2038

ON: Morris, NGU, PC

OFF: CIU, Anderson, Benedict

2038-2039

ON: SWU, Clinton

OFF: CSU, Voorhees

2039-2040

ON: Converse, Columbia, Allen

OFF: Newberry, Erskine, Wofford



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Rotation of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

The rotation of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission occurs each year after the summer meeting and is effective July 1.

2025-2026 COMMISSION MEMBERS

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Converse University, Chair (Year 3 of 3)
Dr. Ernest McNealey/Dr. Stanley Pritchett, Allen University (Year 2 of 3)
Dr. Bruce McAllister, Bob Jones University (Year 1 of 3)
Dr. Dwaun Warmack, Claflin University (Year 1 of 3)
Dr. Pamela Richardson-Wilks, Clinton College (Year 3 of 3)
Dr. Natalie Harder, Coker University (Year 2 of 3)
Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College (Year 2 of 3)
Dr. Elizabeth Davis, Furman University (Year 1 of 3)
Dr. Jeff Perez, President and Executive Director, CHE, Ex-officio

ROTATING OFF

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Converse University, Chair
Dr. Pamela Richardson-Wilks, Clinton College

ROTATING ON

Mr. Scott Cochran, Spartanburg Methodist Col.
Dr. Evans Whitaker, Anderson University

2026-2027 COMMISSION MEMBERS

Dr. Stanley Pritchett, Allen University (Year 3 of 3)
Dr. Evans Whitaker, Anderson University (Year 1 of 3)
Dr. Bruce McAllister, Bob Jones University (Year 2 of 3)
Dr. Dwaun Warmack, Claflin University (Year 2 of 3)
Dr. Natalie Harder, Coker University (Year 3 of 3)
Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College (Year 3 of 3)
Dr. Elizabeth Davis, Furman University (Year 2 of 3)
Mr. Scott Cochran, Spartanburg Methodist College (Year 1 of 3)
Dr. Jeff Perez, President and Executive Director, CHE, Ex-officio

REQUESTED ACTION: With Dr. Boone Hopkins rotating off the Commission, a new Chair of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission will need to be elected. Should this election result in additional vacancies, other officer positions may subsequently need to be elected.