

January 5, 2023

TO: Financial Aid Administrators

FROM: Becky Thompson, Director of Student Financial Assistance

SUBJECT: Use of consistent information for financial aid package award (letters) offers

This guidance has been developed in consultation with the State Financial Aid Workgroup, which consists of representation from all sectors, State Board for Community & Technical College staff, Council of Presidents staff, Independent Colleges of Washington staff, and WSAC staff.

In alignment with the current practice of the U.S. Department of Education, the term ‘financial aid package award letters’ are now referred to as ‘financial aid offers.’ WSAC recognizes that financial aid offers are provided to students in various forms including electronically.

We recognize that most colleges have implemented standard practices discussed below because of the work being done at the national level on this subject. However, in our state, RCW 28B.77.290 creates the two requirements outlined below. The intent is to provide clear consistent language and templates for financial aid offers to assist students in comparing and understanding the offers while staying consistent with Department of Education requirements and industry best practices.

The purpose of this memo is two-fold.

- The first requirement is that financial aid offices follow an approved financial aid offer template. Currently WSAC allows the following nationally recognized template sources provided by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), which can be found at https://www.nasfaa.org/offer_examples, or the College Financing Plan template as provided by the Office of Postsecondary Education in General-22-75 published on October 6, 2022, (<https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2022-10-06/2023-2024-college-financing-plan>).
- The second requirement is to provide clear, consistent definitions for institutions of higher education to adopt regarding financial aid offers.

The Financial Aid Offer

Institutional financial aid offers and/or other institutionally provided materials, shall include the following:

- Breakdown of estimated individual Cost of Attendance components. When possible and known, indicating which costs are direct - billed by the institution versus indirect – not billed by the institution is encouraged.
- Clear identification and proper grouping of each type of aid offered indicating whether the aid is a grant, scholarship, loan, or work program.
- Estimated net price.
- Standard terminology and definitions, using the attached NASFAA glossary of terms or the Washington state glossary of financial aid terms available at wsac.wa.gov/.
- Renewal requirements for each aid type being offered as well as next steps and financial aid office contact information should be included in financial aid information if not on the actual financial aid offer.

Colleges are requested to use a standardized template containing the elements above, and to use the standardized definitions provided in Appendix A – the NASFAA glossary and/or Appendix B – Washington State Financial Aid Glossary. These tools are intended to enable students the ability to easily understand and compare offers. One option for the Washington state terms is to refer to the Opportunity Pathways – State Financial Aid program page where Appendix B – Washington State terms will be linked.