STUDENTS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can donations be directed to a certain school or individual?

Individuals may direct donations to a particular school or subset of schools, but NOT to an individual student or group of students. Corporate donors cannot restrict their donations.

What is a Scholarship Granting Organization?

A Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose primary aim is to give scholarships to students. Among SGO responsibilities are:

- Receiving donations from individuals and corporations;

- Receiving and processing scholarship applications from students/families; and

- Distributing scholarships to eligible students/families in accordance with the law.

- SGOs must determine whether students meet the income eligibility requirements to receive a scholarship and must distribute scholarships to eligible students on a first-come, first-served basis. SGOs must honor restrictions placed on donations from individuals, if any.

Who is eligible to receive a scholarship?

Students (K-12) from families with limited financial resources, up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, are eligible to receive a tax credit scholarship. From January 1 to April 1, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- Students who received a scholarship from an SGO during the previous school year;

- Students who are members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level ($45,510 for a family of 4);

- Students who reside within a focus district; and

- Students who are siblings of students currently receiving a scholarship.

After April 1, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships.

What is a "focus district?"

Focus districts are public school districts which have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10% statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60%. A list of focus districts in can be found here.

Will Empower Illinois give additional priority/weighting to those students who fulfill more than one of the priority categories?

No. Completed applications will be date-and-time stamped and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

How will multi-sibling families be considered?

State regulations exclude siblings as a priority group in Year 1 (i.e. 2018-2019). Multi-sibling family applications will be accepted, but these applications will not receive their place in line until all required documentation for all students is provided and complete. A parent/guardian may also choose to fill out separate applications for each of their children if one child's information is available sooner.

In Year 2 (i.e. scholarships for 2019-2020), Empower Illinois will consider providing additional preference to continuing students subject to availability of funds. State regulations requiring regional designation of donations could make this more difficult, however.

What happens if there is not enough funding to support all scholarship applications?

Completed applications will be date-and-time stamped and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds.

If after April 1 there are existing 'priority group' students/applications who applied before April 1 and have not yet received scholarships, state regulations require that these students be served (subject to availability of funds) before non-priority group students and/or priority group students who applied after April 1.

If funding runs out when a family with multiple children applies and is next in line, Empower Illinois will contact the family to decide how to proceed.

How is the amount of a scholarship determined? What is the maximum scholarship a student can receive?

In order to qualify for a scholarship, a student's family will have to give official documentation of their household income.

- For students whose household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, the scholarship will be 100% of tuition and necessary fees;

- For students whose household income is between 185% and 250%, scholarships will be 75% of tuition and necessary fees; and

- For students whose household income is between 250% and 300%, scholarships will be 50% of tuition and necessary fees.

The maximum scholarship equals tuition and necessary fees or the statewide average operating expense per student, whichever is lower.

- For the 2018-2019 school year, the statewide average operating expense per student is $12,973.

- Students identified as gifted and talented can receive up to $14,270 annually.

- Students identified as English Language Learners can receive up to $15,567 annually.

- Students identified as eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can receive up to $25,946 annually.

- The scholarships are commitments for 1 year and will follow the student to a new school, subject to the availability of funds.

Is the scholarship based on academic performance or financial need?

Tax Credit Scholarships are need based and do not take academic performance into consideration.

How is household income calculated? What are the household income limits?

For 2018-2019 scholarships, 2016 federal adjusted gross income is the basis. This amount does not include the income of children under 18 attending elementary or secondary school on a full-time basis. Foster children are deemed to have a household income that does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level. We will provide additional information regarding situations where the 1040 is unavailable.

2017 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Chart

Household Members	185% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL
1	$22,311	$30,150	$36,180
2	$30,044	$40,600	$48,720
3	$37,777	$51,050	$61,260
4	$45,510	$61,500	$73,800
5	$53,243	$71,950	$86,340
6	$60,976	$82,400	$98,880
7	$68,709	$92,850	$111,420
8	$76,442	$103,300	$123,960

Note: If more than eight people in your household, add $4,180 for each additional person.

How will program benefits be monitored and assessed?

All students who receive scholarships will be required to take the state assessment. ISBE will select an independent research organization to conduct an annual study examining the year-to-year learning gains of students receiving scholarships and a comparison of these learning gains to public school students with similar demographic backgrounds.

When are the scholarships available?

Scholarships are for the 2018-2019 academic year and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Scholarships will be awarded to priority students February — April. After April 1, additional awards will be sent.

Will the SGOs' application materials be available in Spanish? Will paper applications be available?

Yes, applications will be available in Spanish.

The application process will be conducted online only. Our contact center will be available to assist parents with navigating the online application. Support will likely also be provided through local schools.

What type of expenses are covered through Tax Credit Scholarships?

Tuition and necessary fees for any non-public school in Illinois are covered through tax credit scholarships.

Can the scholarship be used to cover transportation expenses?

No.

When will students/families be notified if they have been granted a scholarship?

SGOs will be responsible for notifying families. The law presently requires SGOs to process applications received before April 1 within ten business days of receipt of a completed application package that includes all required documentation. The law does not impose an application processing deadline for applications received after April 1. However, we would anticipate that the processing timelines will be similar for all applications.

How is a scholarship payment made?

The SGOs will manage scholarship payments directly to the qualified school where the student is enrolled. Payment schedules will be determined. We will share more information on this process as soon as it is available.

If a student decides to transfer schools mid-year, will the scholarship transfer with the student?

The scholarships are commitments for 1 year and will follow the student to a new school.

What are the terms of the scholarship? Will students have to apply annually?

Scholarships are awarded for 1 school year and students will have to reapply annually. Renewing scholarship recipients will be priorities for additional school years.

Do students need to be accepted to a participating school before they can apply for a scholarship?

Students may begin the scholarship application process prior to gaining acceptance to the school of their choice. Students however will be required to confirm enrollment at a participating school within 30 days of receiving an award commitment.

What if a student is already receiving a scholarship from a school or another scholarship program? Should the student be encouraged to apply for a Tax Credit Scholarship?

Yes. We encourage any student/family who thinks they may be eligible for Tax Credit Scholarship to apply.

Can students apply to more than 1 SGO?

Students can apply to multiple SGOs but are not allowed to be granted more than 1 scholarship through this program. Students are encouraged to learn which SGO their target schools are working with and apply directly to that SGO.

Are these scholarships only for Catholic schools?

No. The scholarships can be used to cover the tuition and necessary fees for any participating non-public school in Illinois recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education.

If a student does not receive a Tax Credit Scholarship, what should the family do?

The family should work with their local school to determine what other scholarships may be available to them.

How many SGOs are there in Illinois? Who are they?

The SGOs in Illinois are still being established. There will likely be several SGOs, all of which may operate independently.

How do I get help with the application process?

You may contact Empower Illinois directly at info@empowerillinois.org or contact your school.