

Better Odds for Today's Students: Strengthening the Competitive Cal Grant Program

The Problem: Financial aid helps students get to and through college, but just 23 percent of the lowest income students in California who apply for aid receive a Cal Grant.¹

While all eligible recent high school graduates who apply before the deadline are offered Cal Grants as an "entitlement," many otherwise eligible students miss the deadline or enroll in college well after they graduate from high school. These are particular problems for the lowest income students, who may miss out on timely application or enrollment because they are not aware financial aid can bring college within reach.

How Tough Is It to Get a Grant?

With only 22,500 competitive Cal Grants authorized each year, it is tougher for an eligible student to earn a competitive Cal Grant than it is:²

- To win in a Las Vegas casino (13%)
- To be accepted to an Ivy League college (9 %)
- For a college baseball player to get drafted into the Majors (9 %)

All eligible applicants who apply for aid late or enroll in college more than one year after completing high school must vie for only 22,500 grants.³ **In 2014-15, there were seventeen eligible applicants for every authorized award.**⁴



The hundreds of thousands of eligible applicants denied Cal Grants have very low incomes and college-ready GPAs.⁵ The odds confronting these applicants are far too long, and the contenders far too deserving, for policymakers to continue accepting the status quo.

Typical Qualified Non-Recipient

Income	\$21,000
Assets	< \$310
Family Size	3
GPA	2.9

The Solution: To better serve the hundreds of thousands of low-income students who are eligible for Cal Grants but currently shut out of the program, **state law should authorize more competitive Cal Grant awards.**

Receiving financial aid shouldn't be a crapshoot. Our ability to improve college attainment, close equity gaps, and enable more Californians to earn college degrees can only occur if we make college affordability for all – not just those transitioning straight from high school to college – a reality.

¹ Calculations by TICAS using data from NPSAS 2007-08, the most recent year for which this data is publicly available. Includes students who applied for federal aid and had an 'expected family contribution' or EFC of zero, meaning that they were not expected to be able to contribute anything financially toward college costs.

² For comparative odds cited for Las Vegas, Ivy League colleges, and Major League Baseball, see: TICAS. "Playing the Cal Grant Odds." June 6, 2014. <http://views.ticas.org/?p=1327>.

³ Given that not all applicants who are offered a Cal Grant use them, the actual number of awards paid out is smaller.

⁴ TICAS calculation of eligible competitive grant applicants per available award based on data provided in CSAC Operations Memos (May & October 2014). <http://www.csac.ca.gov/secured/operationmemos/2014/GOM%202014-15.pdf> & <http://www.csac.ca.gov/secured/operationmemos/2014/GOM%202014-31.pdf>.

⁵ Income rounded to the nearest \$1,000, assets rounded to the nearest \$10, family size rounded to the nearest whole number, and GPA rounded to nearest tenth. Data from CSAC. Cal Grant Competitive Program. Facts at Your Fingertips 2012-13. http://www.csac.ca.gov/facts/fayf_competitiveprogram_2012-13.pdf.