



How Federal COVID Relief Funds Support Technology in Higher Education

Post-secondary institutions can use dollars from the Education Stabilization Fund to build robust networks that support distance learning and other pandemic-related needs.

To help educators continue to serve students during the pandemic, the U.S. government created the **Education Stabilization Fund (ESF)** as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020. The original ESF provided \$30.70 billion. As of February 10, 2021, according to data on PandemicOversight.gov, about \$15 billion of that money remained unspent.

In December 2020, The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) added another \$82 billion to the ESF. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) that receive ESF funds must use part of it (the student aid portion) to make emergency grants to in-person students to help with

expenses created by COVID-19. IHEs may use the rest of the money (the institutional portion) to offset costs related to changes in education forced by the pandemic. This can include the cost of technology needed for distance learning and training faculty and staff to use that technology. Dollars from the ESF reach IHEs through two funding streams, the **Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)** and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER).

Here are some important facts about those funds:

HEERF

- **CARES Act allocation (HEERF I):** \$14 billion. The deadline for applying for this money has passed. Recipients must spend the money within 365 days of the date of the award, with a potential 12-month extension. Funds may be used for costs dating back to March 13, 2020.
- **CRSSAA allocation (HEERF II):** \$22 billion. Institutions that received CRSSAA awards under the CARES act don't need to

re-apply for supplemental funds. New applications are due by April 15, 2021. Recipients must spend this money by Sept. 30, 2023. They should spend all their HEERF I money before using any money received from HEERF II. Funds may be used for costs dating back to December 27, 2020.

GEER

Since the governor of each state determines how recipients may spend money from this fund, each IHE should check its state guidelines for permissible activities. GEER awards may be used for costs dating back to March 13, 2020.

- **CARES Act allocation:** \$3 billion for K-12 and higher education combined. Governors must award funds within one year of receiving them; deadlines for individual states range from April to June 2021. The federal government requires recipients to spend these GEER awards by Sept. 30, 2021. Governors may also set their own deadlines, earlier than the federal one.
- **CRSSAA allocation:** \$4 billion for K-12 and higher education combined. Governors must award funds by January 2022. The federal government requires recipients to spend these GEER awards by Sept. 30, 2023. Governors may also set their own deadlines, earlier than the federal one.

Opportunities for Investing ESF Funds in Technology for Higher Education

With help from the ESF, IHEs can continue to educate while also protecting the health and safety of students, faculty and staff. For example, an institution can upgrade its campus network with high-speed wired and wireless infrastructure, creating a smart campus that supports a variety of socially-distanced environments. Students can attend class in person, from their own rooms, from residence halls reserved for quarantining, from off-campus apartments, or even from thousands of miles away. Staff can work from home if need, accessing all the applications and data they need to carry out their jobs.

A commuter school might use the funds to install networks of Wi-Fi hot spots in underserved communities, ensuring all students have equal access to virtual classrooms and digital learning tools. On campus, an upgraded network might support applications such as contact tracing via phone app.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced IHEs to become extremely creative, quickly devising new ways to deliver education in the face of unprecedented obstacles. With help from the ESF, colleges and universities can implement fast, secure and reliable network technologies to help them in this work.

To learn more about how to invest this money in robust educational technology, [contact our funding support team](#).

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