CEJA POLICY: ENERGY TRANSITION BARRIER REDUCTION PROGRAM

VERSION NUMBER: **CEJA 02-PL-24**
EFFECTIVE DATE: OCTOBER 15, 2024 **LAST UPDATE:** N/A

I. ISSUANCES AFFECTED

References:

Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), Public Act 102-0662
Climate and Equitable Jobs Act: Administrative Rule
Climate Works Pre-apprenticeship Program Manual (Chapters 2, 5, 6)
Clean Jobs Workforce Network Hubs Program Manual (Chapters 2, 5, 6)

Rescissions:

None

II. POLICY

Barrier reduction funds help achieve equitable access to essential services by assisting individuals in overcoming challenges that hinder them from attaining financial stability. These funds are designed to be versatile, supporting both non-academic and academic requirements. Grantees will follow the policy guidance contained here and within the 2024 CEJA Climate Works and the 2024 CEJA Workforce Network Hubs Program Manuals.

1. Grantee Requirements
   a. Grantees must implement policies and procedures that align with this state policy on barrier reduction funds.
   b. Services provided with barrier reduction funds must align with the specific needs identified through the Service Needs Assessment in the CEJA Reporting System.
   c. Administrative procedures must be developed and implemented to account for barrier reduction expenditures while minimizing administrative burdens on program participants. In cases where documentation is not feasible, participants may submit a signed affidavit outlining the expense and its purpose.
   d. Any requests for services not described in the Service Needs Assessment must be submitted to the assigned Grant Manager for approval.
   e. Grantees must develop and implement administrative procedures for securing valuable items, such as gas or pre-loaded debit cards. Securing items onsite in a locked location will allow participants to access these supportive services easily. Procedures must ensure proper tracking, including what has been distributed to the participant. These procedures must also be in place for any subrecipients of the grantee who will keep items on hand for barrier reduction services.

2. Initial Needs Assessment
    a. Outreach and Recruitment staff or an Energy Transition Navigator must complete a **service needs assessment** with participants to identify any barriers that need to be addressed through barrier reduction supports (wrap-around, student support, transition support).
    b. The service needs assessment can be done at the time of the application or during a follow-up appointment. This assessment to determine barrier reduction services must be conducted face-to-face with the individual designated as the Barrier Reduction staff member.
        1) If the service needs assessment is conducted at a follow-up appointment, it should be done before enrolling in the occupational training part of the program or within five days of completing the service needs assessment.

3. Fund Uses
    a. Barrier reduction funds offer flexible, individualized, and timely assistance to address various barriers, including those not covered by traditional supportive services or other workforce and education funding sources. This includes higher reimbursement for emergency needs.
    b. Participants must opt-in to receive these services. Expenses not explicitly listed may be considered case-by-case if the program participant can demonstrate how the expense addresses an emergency or employment barrier. The grantee must develop procedures for reviewing, approving, or denying emergency requests.
    c. Participants must be provided with resources, referrals, and information about programs and agencies that can assist them in addressing their specific barriers.
    d. Grantees should leverage other funding for barrier reduction services as appropriate. For example, the LIHEAP program is available to offset utility bills. In this example, barrier reduction funds would cover those costs not picked up by the LIHEAP program.
    e. Funds can be used for up to one year after the participant completes the program. Services should be provided based on an individualized assessment of the participant's needs.
    f. Barrier reduction funds are not subject to the performance-based repayment options in grant agreements.

4. Funding Limits
    a. The Grantee's policy and procedures should establish the funding guidelines, including the set funding limits per participant and/or barrier reduction cost category.
    b. The Grantee's policy and procedures should include methods for requesting additional funds beyond the established limits, including providing the justification and reasoning to the Grantee's management team.

5. Authorized Uses for Funds
    a. Authorized uses for Barrier Reduction Funds include but aren't limited to the following:
        1) Access to Technology: Laptops, tablets, modems, routers, wireless hotspots, and in-home internet access.
        2) Childcare: Support for childcare gaps while awaiting state assistance.
        3) Communication and Personal Needs: Cell phone costs for job searches, PO Box costs, translation or interpretation services for job searches, and personal hygiene items.

4) Education/Training Costs: Mandatory entrance fees, tools, books, uniforms, medical services, tuition, fees, and costs for post-secondary education.
5) Emergency Housing Costs: Rent arrears, first month's rent, security deposit, application fees, utility bills, relocation expenses, state ID or driver's license fees, storage unit rental.
6) Employment/Training Barriers: Transportation costs, including fuel, EV charging, car repairs, auto insurance, driver's license fees, public transportation fares, taxi/rideshare costs, ticket fines, and bike repairs.
7) Food assistance: Emergency food support, groceries, and meal vouchers.
8) Health Care Costs: Mental health services, substance use treatment, drug testing, and uninsured healthcare expenses (e.g., emergency dental work, immunizations, eye exams, and eyeglasses).
9) Legal Barriers: Background check fees, criminal record sealing fees, court fines, occupational licensing fees, and legal services fees.
10) Transitional Support: Direct cash assistance to mitigate benefits cliffs during initial employment.

b. If there is a need for a service not described in the Service Needs Assessment, the support service must first be submitted to the grantee’s assigned Grant Manager for approval. Only after approval can the grantee add the service to the CEJA Reporting System and provide the service to the participant.

6. Ongoing Participant Support and Needs Assessment
   a. Staff providing direct service to participants must maintain regular contact and reassess the participant barrier reduction service needs during training and afterward.
   b. At each 30-day check-in, staff must reassess participants' needs and enter the needs into the appropriate tab in the CEJA Reporting System.
   c. After each check-in, staff must enter a case note in the participant’s CEJA Reporting System profile to record what was discussed and coordinate services with other staff. A case note must be entered even if no additional support is needed.
   d. When excessive absences or poor academic performance are noted, a meeting must be held with the participant to identify what has caused attendance or performance to fall below expected standards.
      1) If a participant has excessive absences, misses, fails post-assessments, or struggles with lessons, the barrier reduction staff must work with the participant to develop an action plan to regain good standing in the program.
      2) If a participant’s excessive absences or academic performance are related to non-academic barriers, Barrier Reduction staff must address any obstacles preventing the participant from successfully engaging in the program.
      3) Referrals and needed services, along with corresponding case notes, must be entered into the CEJA Reporting System

III. IMPLEMENTATION

1. Administrative Procedures
   a. Grantees shall establish and utilize appropriate checks and balances necessary to guarantee the integrity of the barrier reduction funding.

   b. Grantee shall ensure systems are in place for the review, approval, and payment of Barrier Reduction funding under the Uniform Administrative Guidelines

2. Separation of Duties
   a. Staff duties for dispersing barrier reduction payments must be separated so that no one individual has complete authority or control over an entire financial transaction.
   b. Participant and financial records about barrier reduction payments must be available for monitoring.

3. Procedural Considerations: Grantees must address the following questions when developing and implementing the policies and procedures for barrier reduction funds.
   a. How will funds be disbursed? Whenever possible, direct payments should be made to service providers (e.g., landlords and childcare providers).
   b. When will funds be disbursed? Grantees must process applications and disburse funds promptly to address urgent needs, typically within a few days.
   c. Where will detailed records of fund usage be stored? Efforts should be made to minimize administrative burdens.
   d. Who will approve requests for services not described in the Service Needs Assessment?
   e. What will the process be for collecting feedback from recipients to improve the program and address any issues?

IV. INQUIRIES

Inquiries should be directed to the appropriate OET CEJA Regional Administrator, Larry Dawson at Larry.Dawson@illinois.gov for the Northern Region, Nate Keener at Nate.Keener@illinois.gov for the Central Region, or Michelle Cerutti at Michelle.Cerutti@illinois.gov for the Southern Region.

V. ATTACHMENTS

None

Sincerely,

Julio Rodriguez, Deputy Director
Office of Employment and Training

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