



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

**EDUCATION**

## District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) 2023 Annual Performance Report

### **Introduction**

The District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) is a federally funded program that provides District of Columbia residents with up to \$10,000 per year toward the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition at public colleges and universities nationwide. The program also provides up to \$2,500 toward tuition at private nonprofit colleges and universities in the District of Columbia area and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide.<sup>1</sup> The DCTAG program is operated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

A 2018 audit by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended that the DCTAG program release an annual report using a performance management framework that relates program performance to DCTAG's established program goals and objectives, in addition to the Annual Data Report that provides descriptive statistics about the students served by DCTAG. As such, DCTAG created the Annual Performance Report in 2018 to outline DCTAG's goals and objectives and to provide metrics tied to these objectives. The 2023 report provides 2021, 2022, and 2023 performance metrics for the DCTAG program. This report should be viewed in conjunction with the newly expanded DCTAG Annual Data Report, available [here](#).

### **Goal and Objectives**

As established by DCTAG's authorizing legislation, the goal of DCTAG is to be a program that "enables college-bound residents of the District of Columbia to have greater choices among institutions of higher education."<sup>2</sup> To achieve this goal, DCTAG has four key objectives:

1. Conduct outreach to expand awareness of DCTAG.
2. Assess and adjust program technology, policy and procedures to enable District of Columbia residents to apply to the program with minimal burden.
3. Maintain and strengthen responsible stewardship of financial resources through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances.
4. Support District of Columbia student college-going, persistence and completion.

Acknowledging that the program has changed over time, in early 2021, the program staff reviewed and revised the program goals to build upon progress made over the past three years.

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<sup>1</sup> The DCTAG Eligible Institution List can be found [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> DCTAG was created by Congress in 1999 by the [District of Columbia College Access Act](#); PL 106-98 and amended by the [DC College Access Improvement Act of 2002](#) and the [DC College Access Improvement Act of 2007](#) to expand higher education choices for college-bound residents of the District of Columbia.

Unless otherwise noted, performance data and targets in this report reflect the calendar year (January – December).<sup>3</sup>

### **Objective 1: Conduct outreach to expand awareness of DCTAG**

Each year, DCTAG staff conduct extensive outreach to students and families to meet this objective. Efforts to build awareness are grouped into two key categories: communications and direct outreach. Direct outreach includes presentations, tables at college fairs, workshops, interviews and virtual outreach sessions.

#### Communications

##### *2022-23 Award Year*

In June-August 2023, DCTAG worked with a local advertising agency to run a media campaign focused on encouraging students who may be eligible for DCTAG or who have previously received DCTAG funding (and will reapply annually) to review the DCTAG document checklist and begin preparing the necessary application materials before the application due date (Aug. 18, 2023). The campaign utilized social media and advertisements placed in printed publications and transit locations to reach prospective and returning DCTAG applicants.

The 2023 print advertisements were placed in two publications: *El Tiempo Latino* and *The Washington Informer*. In each publication, a quarter-page advertisement and nine quarter-page advertisements were placed in addition to various digital advertisement placements on each of the publications' websites. Transit location advertisements included the following:

- Nine platform dioramas placed in the following areas of the District: Anacostia, Benning Road, Congress Heights, Georgia Avenue and Potomac Avenue.
- Ten two-sheet posters placed in the following areas of the District: Anacostia, Brookland, Deanwood, Fort Totten, Rhode Island Avenue and Southern Avenue.
- Seventy Bus King advertisements placed on buses in the Bladensburg Road and Southern Avenue bus garages.

The 2022-23 social media campaign encouraged potential and returning DCTAG applicants to compile the documents needed to apply for DCTAG funding by the deadline (Aug.18, 2023). The campaign's primary call to action — "*Start Early. Be Persistent. Ask Questions.*" — urged students to avoid submitting incomplete applications by downloading the DCTAG checklist and learning about the documents required for completion of the DCTAG application before the DCTAG application deadline. The campaign's focus on the importance of preparing documentation for the DCTAG application was a result of DCTAG staff noticing that, in prior award years, students often struggled with giving themselves enough time to gather the documentation and information required for completion of the DCTAG application.

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<sup>3</sup> These objectives were modified slightly in 2021. Prior reports are a useful resource for the previous objective wording. These objectives build upon those established in 2018, and, as such, relevant historical metrics will be aligned with the appropriate new objectives where possible.

Methods of outreach also included social media posts on OSSE's Facebook, X, and Instagram platforms, and email outreach to students by DCTAG staff. In addition to responsive and periodic email communication with students and their families, DCTAG staff sent out an informational newsletter on Feb. 22, 2023, to 7,611 students, parents/guardians, and college-access providers.

#### *2021-22 Award Year*

In 2021-22, DCTAG renewed a contract with a local advertising company to run a media campaign that continued to focus on social media and added print and other materials that were used in the past. The campaign leveraged the mayor's back-to-school and reopening media outreach between April and August 2022. The campaign in 2022 started with social media, then added print and text messaging (100 individuals opted into the texting campaign). Next, bus shelter ads were placed strategically across the city during the summer (including DC's three Wal-Mart locations, Target in Columbia Heights, nearby grocery stores, and other retailers). Prior to the deadline, the vendor added geotargeting to deliver content to residents in high-traffic areas. Geotargeting delivers content to individuals based on their location.

Additional methods of outreach included conducting social media outreach with high school students on OSSE's Facebook, X, and Instagram platforms, and conducting email outreach. DCTAG staff continued to email prior year applicants reminding them to reapply each award year and emailed 2021-22 school year high school seniors about starting DCTAG.

In the 2021-2022 award year campaign, the following advertisement metrics were recorded:

- Outdoor advertising (including bus stops, rather than Metrorail)
  - 11,752,370 total impressions
- Digital advertising on Facebook and Instagram
  - 667,702 total impressions
  - 1,978 click-throughs to the DCTAG OneApp site
- Geotargeting
  - 1,076,792 total impressions
  - 3,024 click-throughs
- Streaming outlet reported
  - 596,947 total media impressions
  - 56 clicks on the ads over six months (February 2022-August 2022)
- Radio campaign digital advertising on Facebook
  - 266,484 total impressions (February 2022-August 2022)
  - 56 clicks on social media ads in (August 1, 2022-August 19, 2022)

#### *Direct Outreach*

In addition to media outreach, the DCTAG team conducts trainings with high school counselors, college financial aid offices, and other stakeholders that support student college acceptance, enrollment, and persistence. This year, trainings were held for counselors affiliated with local

education agencies (LEAs) (public and public charter schools), nonprofits, College Board, disability services, and who support for students experiencing homelessness.

Table 1 provides information on metrics related to Objective 1 between January and December for the year indicated.

*Table 1: 2021-23 Performance for Objective 1*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
General outreach sessions	33	40	39
Students/parents reached at general outreach sessions	1,448	1,430	2,239
Spring Blitz events (public and public charter schools)*	0	0	0
Students assisted at Spring Blitz events*	0	N/A	N/A
Trainings for college counselors and support staff (represents a sub-set of the outreach sessions)	6	6	6
TAG Talk newsletter/notifications issues sent to students, guardians, and parents	3	3	3
DCTAG Completion Challenge	N/A	3,557	N/A
High schools in DCTAG Completion Challenge	N/A	39	N/A

\* The Spring Blitz event was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. In 2022 and 2023, the Spring Blitz event did not occur because the DCTAG application process was moved completely online. Students uploaded their documentation online rather than submitting it in person.

**Objective 2: Assess and adjust program technology, policy, and procedures to enable District of Columbia residents to apply to the program with minimum burden**

This objective ensures the application process is straightforward for students and families, as complicated applications can discourage students from applying for financial aid.

In 2022, OSSE continued to build on improvements to the DC OneApp, which launched in 2016. There was a temporary glitch in the DC OneApp system due to a large volume of users concurrently attempting to submit applications on the day that the application closed. This led to a reevaluation of the software used to detect viruses in the system.

From 2021 onward, the DCTAG application has allowed students, parents and guardians to upload documents online. DCTAG staff have and will continue to work to improve the payment and college transfer section of the application and make enhancements as needed. Every year, DCTAG staff aim to increase the overall number of DCTAG applicants, as well as the number and percentage of applicants deemed eligible, while limiting the number of incomplete applications. In the 2022-23 award year, DCTAG reported an increase in the number of submitted and eligible applicants and saw the percentage of applicants deemed eligible increase (see Table 2).

Table 2 provides information on metrics related to Objective 2. An overall metric for this objective is that DCTAG applicants live in all eight wards of the District. In this table, 2021 indicates 2021-22 award year application cycle, 2022 indicates the 2022-23 cycle, and 2023 indicates the 2023-24 cycle.

*Table 2: 2021-2023 Performance for Objective 2*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Applications submitted	5,530	5,678	5,812
Applicants deemed eligible <sup>4</sup>	4,312	4,320	4,344
Applicants deemed eligible (percent of applications submitted)	78%	76%	76%
Incomplete applications	1,148	1,285	1,304

Please note that there were 3,866 students awarded DCTAG during the 2020-21 award year, 3,775 students awarded DCTAG during the 2021-22 award year, and 3,747 students awarded DCTAG during the 2022-23 award year.<sup>5</sup>

**Objective 3: Maintain and strengthen responsible stewardship of financial resources through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances**

*Fraud Prevention and Monitoring*

The DCTAG Office works extensively with the District of Columbia Office of the Attorney General and OSSE’s Residency Audit Unit to conduct investigations in cases where District of Columbia domicile was in question. The DCTAG staff also conducted reviews of District of Columbia government data systems and those of other states as well to aid in a detailed review of questionable cases. When necessary, the US Department of Education’s Office of the Inspector General is also contacted if fraudulent data is reflected on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Student Aid Report or Financial Student Summary.

*Financial Efficiency*

The DCTAG team separates the roles of application approval and disbursement to institutions of higher education (IHEs) to add an additional check and balance to the disbursement process.

Table 3 provides information on metrics related to Objective 3. Given that students receive their award in the year following their application, on this table, the performance in 2021 reflects the 2020-21 academic year, the performance in 2022 reflects the 2021-22 academic year, and the performance in 2023 reflects the 2022-23 academic year.

<sup>4</sup> Includes applicants with any “Eligible” status.

<sup>5</sup> The number of students awarded DCTAG funding for the 2022-2023 award year reported here may differ slightly from the number reported to the DC Council during the Fiscal Year 2023 Performance Oversight Hearing period (January-March 2024). This is due to invoice processing timelines.

Table 3: 2021-23 Performance for Objective 3

Metric	2021	2022	2023
Total funds disbursed <sup>6</sup>	\$29,161,300.80	\$28,221,911.60	\$28,890,116.39
DCTAG/Accounting reconciliation meetings	12	12	12
Students receiving DCTAG awards	3,866	3,775	3,746

**Objective 4: Support student college-going, persistence, and completion**

The DCTAG program works with both internal and external stakeholders to help students make informed college choices. If a student selects an institution that is a good fit, they are more likely to persist and complete college. DCTAG supports these choices both before students begin college and during students’ college careers. Since DCTAG staff do not necessarily have pre-existing relationships with students and therefore do not know the full breadth of students’ academic experience, DCTAG staff have focused on using professional development to help train those who are advising students throughout their college decision-making process including high school counselors, college access program staff and financial aid staff at IHEs.

From 2021-2023, DCTAG staff have worked to support students and stakeholders who assist them in the following ways:

- From September 2022 through June 2023, OSSE supported the Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking, and the Student Loan Ombudsman with two events attended by 43 students by providing technical support in planning and content as well as one-on-one counseling.
- In July 2023, DCTAG staff hosted a training for and provided informational handouts and materials to student support staff (counselors, college access program staff, financial aid staff) focused on assisting students who are recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs (SNAP/TANF) with the application for DCTAG funding.
- In February 2023 and March 2024, DCTAG staff hosted a training titled, “The Impact of FAFSA Dependency and Homeless Questions on DCTAG Eligibility” focused on how counselors and other support staff can assist students who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness with their DCTAG application and ensure that the rights this specific group of students have been granted as a part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act are being upheld.
- From January through December 2022, Director Kenneth McGhee authored and shared four articles locally and through the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, National Association for College Admission Counseling, and College Express.

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<sup>6</sup> Note: Funds disbursed is a point-in-time metric and may be updated if requested at a later date.

- The DCTAG program continues to offer the Transfer Portal in the DC OneApp, so that students transferring mid-year (or those who attend a different university than the one listed in the DCTAG application) may update the institution in the DC OneApp system.
- During the 2021-22 award year, recognizing the changing landscape of postsecondary education both at the individual and institutional level, DCTAG surveyed past and current recipients to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on their postsecondary education plans. An overwhelming number of respondents indicated COVID-19 had negative effects on their college plans and the most frequently cited impacts related to the:
  - Inferior quality of online courses;
  - need for more financial support;
  - changes to employment; and
  - issues with class availability or course loads.

These issues included references to fewer courses being offered, increased costs to attend, reduced access to financial aid (specifically work study) and difficulty navigating college systems without being in person. There was a general sense of students being overwhelmed or taken off course from their intended path due to events outside their control. To address these issues the following policy considerations were identified to guide work in 2022:

- Maximum Award Years – Too much flexibility may hurt student completion rates
  - Consider: One year of additional eligibility for students with fewer than 30 credits to receive their degree, if they experienced hardship related to the pandemic, and only if maximum lifetime award amount is not yet reached.
- Continue advocating for Congressional increase to maximum year/lifetime award amounts.
- Outreach and awareness campaign around summer funding for students who have not received the maximum award.
- Outreach to students who have stopped out of their college enrollment (on the survey, an overwhelming majority of respondents expressed that they plan to complete college).