



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

DC Tuition Assistance Grant 2018 Annual Performance Report

Introduction

The District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) is a federally-funded program that provides DC 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 Washington, DC area and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide. The DCTAG program is operated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). This document supplements the [Annual Data Report](#) and outlines DCTAG's goal and objectives, provides baseline metrics tied to these objectives, and establishes targets for these metrics moving forward. Future iterations of this report will link the previous year's targets to actual performance.

Goal and Objectives

As established by DCTAG's authorizing legislation, the goal of DCTAG is to "[enable] college-bound residents of the District of Columbia to have greater choices among institutions of higher education." To achieve this goal, DCTAG has four key objectives:

1. Ensure DC residents are aware of DCTAG;¹
2. Enable DC residents to apply to the program with ease;
3. Ensure that the program meets its financial obligations through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances; and
4. Help students make smarter college choices.

This report dives deeper into DCTAG's work to meet each of these objectives, including 2018 performance and 2019 targets. Unless otherwise noted, performance data and targets reflect the calendar year (January – December).

Objective 1: Ensure DC residents are aware of DCTAG

Each year, DCTAG staff conduct extensive outreach to students and families including presentations, tabling at college fairs, workshops, and media interviews as well as a separate Spring Blitz where staff members provide on-site support to applicants at high schools. In 2018, DCTAG also entered into a contract with Campbell and Company DC to run a ten-week media campaign, including print ads, targeted social media ads, and tabletop displays in key public spaces such as health centers, recreation centers, churches, and stores. In 2019, this contract was renewed with a smaller scope and a focus on increasing DCTAG's social media metrics. Other methods of outreach included displaying posters in every District public high school, conducting social media outreach, distributing giveaway materials such as pens and flash drives, distributing brochures, and conducting email outreach. This outreach helps the program reach students in all eight wards of the District.

¹ Note: This objective was originally, "Ensure residents are aware of and apply to DCTAG." To clarify the distinction between Objectives 1 and 2 for stakeholders, it has been slightly modified.

In 2019, DCTAG aims to improve its outreach through new avenues. For the first time, DCTAG staff held a webinar for private high school counselors to provide training on DCTAG requirements. Additionally, the DCTAG program aims to increase the number of times its TAG Talk newsletter is published from three to four times in 2019, and it will use 2019 statistics to establish a baseline for the rate at which the newsletter is opened and read by recipients. Table 1 provides information on metrics related to Objective 1.

Table 1: 2018 Performance and 2019 Targets for Objective 1

Metric	2018 Performance	2019 Target
Number of general outreach sessions	67	74
Number of students/parents reached at general outreach sessions	5,383	5,920
Number of Spring Blitz events (public and public charter schools)	30	33
Number of students assisted at Spring Blitz	310	350
Number of DC Wards where DCTAG outreach events are held	8	8
Total media campaign impressions	6,853,159	N/A ²
Total number of Twitter impressions	N/A	81,000
Private school counselors webinar	N/A	1 webinar
Number of TAG Talk newsletter publications	3	4 (establish baseline open rate)

Objective 2: Enable DC residents to apply to the program with ease

This objective speaks to ensuring that the application process is straightforward as complicated applications can discourage students from applying for financial aid. Based on feedback from applicants and other stakeholders, the DCTAG program launched a new, more streamlined version of its application, the DC OneApp, in 2016. Staff continue to improve the application, adding new modules related to payment and college transfer in 2017 and 2018, respectively. In order to track progress on this objective, DCTAG staff aim to increase the overall number of applicants, as well as the number and percentage of applicants deemed eligible, while limiting the number of incomplete applications. Additionally, in October 2018, OSSE staff redesigned the DCTAG website pages to be more user-friendly. This involved major content and framing revisions to make information about the application process more easily digestible for students and families.

In 2019, DCTAG plans to update the DC OneApp, by upgrading the backend database structure, which will change the user-facing design. DCTAG also aims to revise all of the standard communications that students receive (e.g., application reminders, award letters) to make them more user-friendly. Additionally, the DCTAG program will update the survey that students and families can complete after they submit their application and work to increase the response rate, establishing a representative sample of respondents. After the 2019 redesign of the survey, the hope is that an increased response rate for the survey in 2020 will provide a baseline level of user satisfaction to help the program determine the

² Because of the 2019 media campaign's general focus on improved social media, DCTAG has not identified a target number of impressions for 2019.

extent to which students can apply to the program with ease. Table 2 provides information on metrics related to Objective 2.

Table 2: 2018 Performance and 2019 Targets for Objective 2

Metric	2018 Performance	2019 Target
Number of applications submitted	6,961	7,119
Number of applicants deemed eligible ³	5,378	5,553
Percent of applicants deemed eligible	77.2%	78%
Number of incomplete applications	1,302	1,172
Number of DC wards where DCTAG applicants reside	8	8
DC OneApp updates	100% Complete	100% complete
Website redesign	100% Complete	N/A
Revise student communications	N/A	100% complete
Redesign survey	N/A	100% complete

Objective 3: Ensure that the program meets its financial obligations through a payment process with sufficient checks and balances

In 2014, DCTAG entered into a contract with F.S. Taylor & Associates to review DCTAG payments, policies, and procedures. As a result of this review, DCTAG enhanced internal controls to ensure that payments made through the DC OneApp are in alignment with the records of payments made through the District’s accounting and reporting system, SOAR. Part of this process is a reconciliation meeting between program and accounting staff, to review, monitor, and balance program funds within the two systems on an at-least monthly basis. Additionally, DCTAG staff provided training to college and university partners on how to use the DC OneApp in advance of the 2017-18 academic year and provided email updates and reminders in advance of the 2018-19 academic year. Table 3 provides information on metrics related to Objective 3.

Table 3: 2018 Performance and 2019 Targets for Objective 3

Metric	2018 Performance	2019 Target
Total funds disbursed	\$32,524,066 (2017-18 academic year)	\$35,053,963 (2018-19 academic year) ⁴
Number of accounting reconciliation meetings	14	12
Number of students receiving DCTAG awards	4,571 (2017-18 academic year)	4,700 (2018-19 academic year)
DC OneApp training and email reminders	100% Complete	100% Complete

Objective 4: Help students make smarter college choices

The DCTAG program works with both internal and external stakeholders to help students make smarter college choices. If a student picks an institution that is a good fit, he or she is more likely to persist and complete college. DCTAG supports these choices both before

³ Includes applicants with a status of Eligible or Eligible – Ineligible Institution

⁴ Based on target number of students receiving DCTAG awards and projected average cost per student

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 has focused on using professional development to help train those who are advising students throughout their college decision-making process. In 2018, DCTAG staff designed and facilitated workshops to train counselors and community based organization staff on ways to help students make their college decisions: "Comparing Financial Aid Award Letters" and "The Scholarship Essay and Application Process."

Additionally, DCTAG staff worked with the National Association for College Admissions Counseling to publish articles on financial aid, which were used as resources for students, guardians, and high school counselors. The article topics were "Six Ways Colleges and Universities Award Financial Aid," "Do Your Research on Financial Aid," and "Completing a Dependency Appeal." DCTAG staff also trained high school counselors at the College Access and Success Symposium. In addition, many of the school visits and outreach events discussed in Objective 1 also included information for students about making college decisions. To assist students who have already started college, DCTAG launched a new Transfer Portal in the DC OneApp, so that students who are transferring mid-year (or those who end up attending a different university than the one listed on their application) can easily update the institution they are attending in the DC OneApp system. In 2019, DCTAG will track usage of this Transfer Portal to help establish a baseline number of transfers completed. Table 4 provides information on metrics related to Objective 4.

Table 4: 2018 Performance and 2019 Targets for Objective 4

Metric	2018 Performance	2019 Target
Number of "smarter college choices" workshops and panel presentations	4	6
Number of "smarter college choices" articles published	3	3
Transfer Portal	100% Complete	Establish baseline number of transfers