

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA SYSTEM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FIRST RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ACT



Last Updated: 8/28/2023

QUALIFYING FOR THE FIRST RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ACT

Q: How do I qualify for the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act as a First Responder?

A: If you meet the following criteria, you will be entitled to a waiver of one hundred percent of resident tuition.

- Professional Firefighter or Firefighter-Paramedic, which is defined as a resident of Nebraska who is member of a paid fire department of a municipality, rural or suburban fire protection district in the state and for whom firefighting is a full-time career; or
- Professional Law Enforcement Officer, which is defined as any resident of Nebraska who is responsible for the prevention or detection of crime or enforcement of the penal, traffic or highway laws of the State of Nebraska or any political subdivision of the state for more than 100 hours per year and who is authorized by law to make arrests.
- Maintains satisfactory performance with their law enforcement agency or fire department.
- Meets all admission standards of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska according to Regent's Policy 5.2.1. and has been admitted.
- Files documentation with the Nebraska Department of Revenue showing proof of employment and proof of residence in Nebraska each year the waiver is applied for.
- Pursues a degree that is eligible for the waiver per statute.



Q: How do I qualify for the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act as a dependent?

A: If you meet the following criteria, you will be entitled to a waiver of up to one hundred percent of resident tuition.

- Legal dependent of a professional law enforcement officer, professional firefighter or firefighter-paramedic who is a resident of Nebraska and maintains satisfactory performance within their law enforcement agency or fire department.
- Meets all admission standards of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska according to Regent's Policy 5.2.1. and has been admitted.
- Submits an application form to determine eligibility.
- Parent or Guardian files documentation with the Nebraska Department of Revenue showing proof of employment and proof of residence in Nebraska each year the waiver is applied for.
- Signs an agreement attesting that they understand they are required to stay in the State of Nebraska and file proper state tax returns for a minimum of 5 years after they receive each waiver.



Q: When does the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act take effect?

A: The Act takes effect on September 2, 2023 and applies to both returning and new undergraduate students at the University of Nebraska System. Students may begin the application process on September 2, 2023.

Q: Do non-Nebraska residents qualify?

A: Non-Nebraska residents *may* qualify for the waiver only if they are a legal dependent of a professional law enforcement officer, firefighter or firefighter paramedic who is a Nebraska resident and is in good standing with their agency or department. If approved, the waiver would only cover up to the cost of in-state tuition.

Q: Who is considered a dependent for the purposes of the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act?

A: The definition of a dependent, for the purposes of the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act, is a student who has a valid Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submitted that lists the first responder, firefighter or firefighter-paramedic as their parent or guardian each academic year. Students are required to fill out the FAFSA annually to be eligible for the waiver program.

Q: Do Federal Law Enforcement Officers in the State of Nebraska qualify?

A: No. Officers of the FBI, DEA, or other Federal Law Enforcement Officers are not eligible for the waiver.

Q: How long am I able to take advantage of the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act waiver?

A: Professional law enforcement officers, firefighters, firefighter-paramedics and their dependents are each eligible for tuition waiver for up to five years so long as they remain eligible to receive the waiver.

Q: Am I eligible for the waiver as a graduate student?

A: No. Only undergraduate degrees are eligible under the Recruitment and Retention Act.

Q: Can I utilize the waiver for multiple undergraduate degrees?

A: As long as it is within the initial 5-year time period and the student has not graduated, a student may pursue multiple undergraduate degrees using this waiver.

Q: What happens if a dependent who benefits from the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act leaves the State of Nebraska after graduating from the institution?

A: If the tuition waiver recipient fails to annually file a tax return to prove residency in the State of Nebraska for the five-year period following the use of the tuition waiver or fails to remain a resident for the five-year period following the use of the tuition waiver, the recipient agrees to repay the University of Nebraska System for the amount of tuition that was waived.

Q: How many credit hours can I take each semester or each year? If I wanted to take 18 hours per semester, would the waiver program cover it?

A: The University of Nebraska System will waive up to 36 credit hours per academic year. You may take up to 15 credit hours per fall/spring semester, and up to 6 credit hours between the winter and summer j-term.

Q: Can I apply the waiver program to the credit hours I have already completed?

A: No. The First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act only applies to future credit hours.

Q: What are the program or degree requirements for first responders?

A: A professional law enforcement officer must pursue studies leading to a degree that relates to a career in law enforcement. A professional firefighter or firefighter-paramedic must pursue studies leading to a degree in science or medicine that relates to a career in professional firefighting.

Q: Will I be able to leave the state for graduate or professional schooling?

A: Students must remain in the State of Nebraska for at least 5 years after taking advantage of the waiver. There are no exceptions that would allow someone to leave the state.

Q: What if I only receive funds for one year. Do I still have to stay in the state for five years?

A: No matter how long you receive the tuition waiver, you agree to remain in the State of Nebraska for the five-year period following the use of the tuition waiver. For more information, see Neb. Rev. Stat. § 85-2605.

CONTINUING TO QUALIFY

Q: If I take longer than four years to graduate, will I still be eligible for waiver funding?

A: The First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act allows for individuals to have their tuition waived for up to five years. The five years of tuition waiver eligibility starts once you receives the tuition waiver for the first time and is available for the next consecutive five years.

Q: Do I need to reapply each year for the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act?

A: First responders who have previously qualified for the tuition waver will still need to file documentation with the Nebraska Department of Revenue showing proof of employment and proof of residence in Nebraska each year the waiver is applied for in addition to the campus application. First responders will also need to file with the Department of Revenue annually for their dependent to receive the tuition waiver. Dependents of the first responder will need to fill out the FAFSA and campus applications annually to remain eligible.

TAX IMPLICATIONS

Q: Are there any tax implications based on my accepting this tuition waiver?

A: Although the University of Nebraska considers this waiver to be tuition remission, based on the additional requirements attached to this waiver and potential ongoing obligations, the IRS may view this as taxable income when you initially receive the waiver and/or potentially later depending on whether you remain in the State of five years or not. The University cannot provide tax advice. Please seek guidance from your tax advisor if you have any questions regarding how this waiver may affect you.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Q: I am interested in applying to the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis. Will the waiver apply to me?

A: Yes. Individuals who would like to attend NCTA—a two-year technical college within the University of Nebraska System, with programs focused on agriculture and veterinary technology—are eligible if they meet the requirements. Please contact the NCTA financial aid office for more details.

Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture

[Office of Financial Aid](#)

(308)-367-5207

nctafinancialaid@unl.edu

You can request more information on the college [here](#), and you may apply to NCTA [here](#).

Q: I am interested in applying to the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Will the waiver apply to me?

A: Undergraduate students who are seeking their bachelors degree and are eligible under the requirements of the statute are eligible for the waiver regardless of their UNMC campus location. There are several undergraduate degree options available at UNMC, including nursing, dental hygiene and several allied health fields. Graduate and professional students are not eligible for the waiver program.

Please contact the UNMC financial aid office for more details.

University of Nebraska Medical Center

[Office of Financial Aid](#)


(402)-559-4199

finaid@unmc.edu



WHAT THE FIRST RESPONDER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ACT COVERS

Q: What makes up my waiver under the First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act?

A: The University of Nebraska System will waive one hundred percent of the first responder or dependent's tuition remaining after subtracting awarded federal financial aid grants, state grants and scholarships received during the time of enrollment. 

University scholarships also contribute toward meeting your one hundred percent tuition waiver, including merit-based, college or departmental scholarships, and University of Nebraska Foundation scholarships.

There is not a line item called the “First Responder Recruitment and Retention Act” that will appear on your financial aid package. Instead, the tuition waiver is a promise that these programs combined will cover your tuition each semester for up to 15 credit hours.

Q: Why am I still charged tuition if I qualify for the tuition waiver program?

A: All students have tuition charges assessed to their university student billing account. Recipients of the tuition waiver will still see tuition charges assessed on their account.

The tuition waiver is a promise program that guarantees enough scholarships and grants to cover tuition charges for students who qualify. The waiver fulfills actual tuition charges for up to 15 credit hours per spring/fall semester and up to 6 credit hours between the winter and summer terms.

Q: Does the waiver program cover additional expenses outside of tuition?

A: Although the waiver will cover the cost of tuition, it does not mean that a university education will be entirely free from cost. Students will still need to cover costs for fees, books or room and board.

Fortunately, the waiver is just one of many financial aid options available for students. For more details, contact the financial aid office at the campus you are interested in.

University of Nebraska at Kearney

[Office of Financial Aid](#)

(308)-865-8520

finaid1@unk.edu

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

[Office of Scholarships & Financial Aid](#)

(402)-472-2030

huskerhub@unl.edu

University of Nebraska Medical Center

[Office of Financial Aid](#)

(402)-559-4199

finaid@unmc.edu

University of Nebraska at Omaha

[Office of Financial Support](#)

(402)-554-2327

unofinaid@unomaha.edu

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

Q: Why should I fill out the FAFSA?

A: The FAFSA stands for “Free Application for Federal Student Aid.” It determines a student’s eligibility for need-based federal financial aid for college, which may include grants, scholarships, work-study and loans. If you don’t fill out the FAFSA, you are likely leaving money on the table that you may have qualified for.

Every year, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) gives over \$120 billion in federal grants, loans and work-study funds to more than 13 million college students, making it the largest provider of student financial aid in the country. About two-thirds of all full-time undergraduate college students receive grant aid, or money you don’t have to repay.

Dependents must complete the FAFSA annually to remain eligible for the tuition waiver program. Without filling out the FAFSA, the University of Nebraska System has no way to know if you are considered a dependent and therefore you would not be eligible to apply for the tuition waiver.

Q: When does the FAFSA need to be completed and filed?

A: The FAFSA priority deadline for the 2024-2025 academic year is May 1.

Q: What happens after I fill out the FAFSA?

A: After you complete the [FAFSA](#), you will receive a Student Aid Report which will tell you if you’re eligible for the Federal Pell Grant and the amount of your expected family contribution. Beginning 2024-25, the Student Aid Report will become the FAFSA Submission Summary and the expected family contribution will be the Student Aid Index.

