



# Scholarship America and Achieve Atlanta: *Facing Emergencies Together*



## The Key to Effective Emergency Aid

As part of our research into what makes emergency aid effective, Scholarship America worked with consultants at Reos Partners to develop an **Emergency Aid Roadmap**. The roadmap outlines key principles and clear, practitioner-tested guidance for supporting students with emergency needs efficiently and sustainably. These core principles include:

- A clear process for inviting and processing requests for aid
  - that minimizes the burden to students
- An equally clear process for teams to be responsive to changing student needs
- A communications plan that reaches out to students in need
- Funding, data and review strategies that focus on sustainability and ongoing growth

Based on these core principles, we established a partnership with [Achieve Atlanta](#), a nonprofit who was looking for ways to meet the most urgent needs of their students: graduates of Atlanta Public Schools pursuing their college goals.

## A Growing Need for Emergency Grants

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Achieve Atlanta saw students facing unexpected transportation, housing and technology needs, and wanted to help students address these needs so they could stay focused on school. With this in mind, we worked together on a pilot program designed to bring emergency funds to students who need them.

The pilot implements best practices around delivery of emergency grants including:

- Regular communication with students through email and text reminding them about the availability of emergency grants
- An informative landing page that clearly outlines what types of emergencies are and are not eligible for grants
- A streamlined, mobile-capable application that collects only the most critical data and gives applicants easy ways to provide information (such as uploading a picture or document)
- Electronic payment of emergency funds
- Multiple paths to connect students to additional resources, including a communication pipeline between Scholarship America and Achieve Atlanta to help identify students who need additional support
- Regular updates on number of applications, awards and available funds
- The ability to monitor student needs and application trends, and to be flexible with requirements

The initial launch of the small-scale, targeted pilot program in January 2020 was promising, awarding students with almost \$10,000 in emergency grants. Around 60% of the emergency needs were for help with housing needs like rent and utility payments.

When COVID-19 struck, however, the program suddenly had a new focus, and expanded to serve more than 2,000 students. With campus closures across the country, students were forced back home and many lost their jobs. The urgent needs of Achieve Atlanta Scholars were growing and changing daily. Achieve Atlanta immediately responded by making emergency funds available to a larger group of students and securing additional funding.

**Because of our streamlined application process, we were able to start awarding these new funds to students almost immediately as they came in.** Working in close partnership with Achieve Atlanta, we also developed a new system to prioritize student needs and expedite the delivery of funds.

The first wave of grants helped students who needed assistance moving off campus and finding alternative housing or travel to their hometowns. The second wave assisted those who needed technology (such as a laptop or Wi-Fi access) to transition to online coursework. Between March 15 and June 30, 2020, around a third of eligible Scholars applied for an emergency grant; Achieve Atlanta has awarded over \$190,000, allowing students to focus less on finances and more on the changing demands of remote learning.

Going forward, while emergency grants have helped hundreds of students with their most urgent needs, we also recognized the need for ongoing support. To sustain the success of the program and its participants, we are working with Achieve Atlanta to connect those students with campus representatives, social service providers and other sources of help.

### From a recipient:

*“The emergency grant is important because it has allowed for me to have an easier transition from my college life—where I had housing and meals provided by scholarships—to my at-home life, where I no longer had a job due to COVID-19. Thanks to the emergency grant, I was able to get my car repaired so I could start working for Instacart delivering groceries.”*

The difference is really adding up.  
**Learn more at [ScholarshipAmerica.org](https://www.ScholarshipAmerica.org)**

