



Career Online High School (COHS) Project Frequently Asked Questions

What is COHS?

Established in 2011, Career Online High School (COHS) is an educational program offered by Smart Horizons Career Online Education, which gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and credentialed career certificate at the same time. Over 70 California public library jurisdictions are currently offering COHS to adults and non-traditional learners in their communities. The goal is to bring adult and/or non-traditional learners back into the educational system and prepare them for jobs in growing sectors of the economy. Students graduate with the tools to take the next step in their careers or career education.

COHS is fully accredited by Cognia (formerly AdvancED). This means that COHS is recognized nationally as a quality school system that delivers an accredited high school diploma. If a student would like to further their education in a post-secondary institution, the COHS high school diploma is an accepted diploma to meet any minimum requirements a post-secondary institution may have in place.

Why is it needed in California?

The latest available data estimate that about 12% or 4,500,000 of California's population over 18 years of age has not attained a high school diploma. Among the 50 states, California has the lowest graduation rate with only about 83% of adults 25 years or older graduating with a high school diploma or high school equivalency.

Research shows that a high school graduate increases their median yearly earnings by an average \$7,436, which translates to approximately \$342,046 lifetime earnings over a 46-year period (between the ages of 18-64, the average age of retirement in California). Each year this increased earning power equates to \$376 in additional California state taxes, or about \$17,300 in additional taxes over a graduate's lifetime. Research also shows that adults without a high school diploma face the greatest social, economic, and health barriers of any educational attainment category. Adults who receive a high school diploma will also increase governmental and taxpayer savings by relying less on social services. Therefore, not only does a high school diploma increase an individual's quality of life, but the achievement of a high school diploma also impacts the larger community.



What is the difference between a high school diploma and a high school equivalency?

There are [several differences](#) between a high school diploma and completing a General Education Development Program (GED). The most significant is the fact that some colleges, institutions, companies, and organizations require a high school diploma and may not accept the GED. Research suggests that a high school diploma has far better economic outcomes than a GED. On average, those with high school diplomas end up earning an average of about \$1,500 per month more than those with GEDs. See the related [Census blog post](#) for more information.

An additional plus for COHS is that graduates receive the benefit of earning a career certificate and completing additional job preparation and training in addition to earning a high school diploma.

Why should my library apply to participate?

Public libraries are embracing new roles that has allowed many libraries to be agents of transformative social engagement while actively working to better their communities. COHS is a service that libraries can offer that can make a huge difference in people's lives and the well-being of the community. COHS is also feasible for libraries to implement, as it requires relatively few resources to manage once established.

What is the target population for this program?

The target population for this program is adults ages 19 and over. These adults should reside within your library's jurisdiction and have a library card in good standing. Potential students should be comfortable conducting lessons mostly in English. Participating library jurisdictions may set additional participation requirements that align with their jurisdictions policies and procedures.

What will my library receive as part of this program?

Successful applicants will receive:

- Career Online High School scholarships (libraries will commit to purchasing a specific number of scholarships and the State Library will match each scholarship a library purchases on a 1:1 basis)
- Outreach materials and marketing support from Smart Horizons Career Online Education
- Intensive training and ongoing technical assistance

What will my library have to contribute as part of this program?

- Staff time and expertise to promote and manage the COHS program at your library



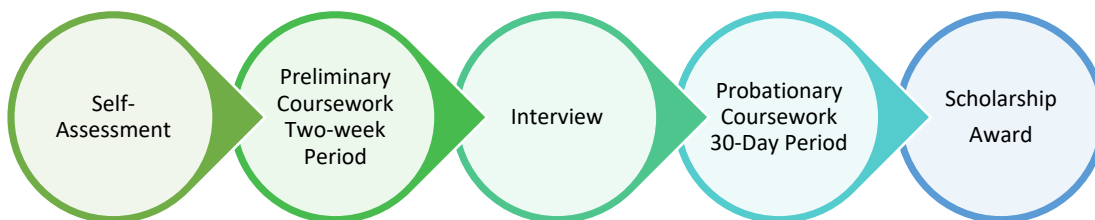
- Libraries must agree to purchase a matching scholarship for each scholarship given to your library by the State Library (each scholarship costs \$1095 per scholarship; libraries are generally expected to purchase their matching scholarships within 6 months of starting the program).

Libraries should plan to award the first round of scholarships they commit to through this program within 12 months from when they begin their services.

Most of the staff time that your library will need to contribute will be at the beginning of the project. COHS staff will need to spend time being trained on the COHS program, develop a workflow and procedures, and recruit and interview candidates.

How does the program work?

To receive a scholarship for [Career Online High School](#), students undergo a five-step vetting process. The following process helps ensure the program is a good fit for each student before full enrollment:



- *Self-assessment* – The self-assessment captures a potential student’s contact information, prior education, schedule, access to technology, and goals for obtaining a high school diploma.
- *Preliminary Coursework Two-Week Period (Prerequisite)* – After a Career Online High School library staff person reviews a potential student’s self-assessment, the potential student is then provided a link to access the library’s individualized Career Online High School enrollment website to enroll in the preliminary coursework period, also known as the “prerequisite course.” During this stage, a student will select their career path and begin a two-week prerequisite course that provides the opportunity to experience the Career Online High School program’s overall pacing and workload. The process allows the student to determine whether Career Online High School will be a good fit for



them and their lifestyle. A student must successfully complete this portion with a cumulative score of 70 percent or higher within two weeks of enrollment in the course. Depending on the library, the student may have multiple opportunities to take a prerequisite course if they do not initially meet the passing requirements.

- *Interview* – When a student successfully completes the prerequisite coursework, they then schedule an interview with the library’s Career Online High School staff person. During this stage, the staff person learns more about the student’s goals, prior education experience, and pre-requisite experience to determine whether the student will be successful moving into the probationary coursework 30-day period.
- *Probationary Coursework 30-Day Period* – If a student has a successful interview and believes the Career Online High School program model fits their needs and lifestyle, a student is tentatively awarded a scholarship and placed in the probationary coursework 30-day period. While in this period, students have a month of full access to the Career Online High School program and can begin formal coursework toward their diploma and career certificate. During this period, the student is also matched with their academic coach and begin generating a work plan they will use for the duration of the program. If a student successfully completes their assigned work within the 30-day period, they are fully awarded a scholarship. If a student does not complete their assigned work within this period, they have the opportunity to try again in the future and the tentatively awarded scholarship is returned to the library’s available scholarship supply.
- *Scholarship Award* – After a student successfully completes each of the four prior steps, they are fully awarded a scholarship to complete their high school diploma and career certificate with Career Online High School within 18 months of enrollment. The typical California adult enrollee takes 11 months to graduate.

How will you evaluate applications?

Factors we’ll consider in evaluating applicants:

- 1) local need
- 2) geography (we want this program in a variety of libraries and geographies)
- 3) library/community support for matching scholarships
- 4) adequate staff support

To determine local need for statistics by state, county, or local area, one source is the [U.S. Census American Community Survey](#).



What if I believe my library can't raise the funds to support matching scholarships?

The California State Library will consider a reduction in the matching requirement for your library on a case-by-case basis. Factors that will be considered in granting reductions include:

- library size and per capita funding
- high unemployment in service area
- low educational attainment (i.e., number of people in service area with less than a high school diploma or equivalency)
- and other relevant data

Your library must agree to fund at least one scholarship. You can request a reduction as part of the online application process.

How can my library apply?

Please visit the [California State Library's COHS web page](#) to apply. Application deadlines are March 10, June 10, September 10, and December 10 of each year.