



Career Online High School Program Frequently Asked Questions

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What is Career Online High School?

Established in 2011, Career Online High School (COHS) is an educational program offered by Smart Horizons Career Online Education that gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and credentialed career certificate simultaneously. Over 70 California public library jurisdictions currently offer COHS to adults and non-traditional learners in their communities. The goal is to bring adults 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.

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. 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?

Some colleges, institutions, companies, and organizations require a high school diploma for admission and job placement 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 advantage 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 can be agents of transformative social engagement while actively working to better their communities. COHS is a library service 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 your library may choose to require that participants 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 local policies and procedures.

What will my library receive as part of this program?

New participating libraries will receive:

- COHS scholarships provided by the California State Library on an as-needed basis
- An individualized COHS website providing program information and a student enrollment portal
- Access to the COHS data management system
- Customized 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?

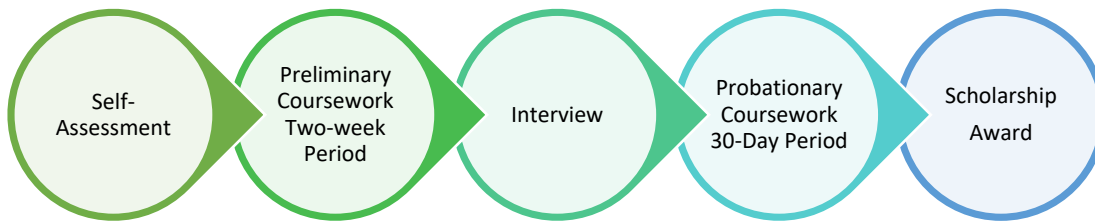
Participating COHS libraries typically contribute the following:

- If a library is managing the COHS program locally, library staff can expect to dedicate staff time and expertise to promote and manage the COHS program at your library.
- If a library is working with a partner jurisdiction or Smart Horizons Career Online Education to offer the COHS program, library staff are encouraged to undergo COHS training to adequately promote the COHS program at your library.
- Staff time and brief data collection to complete short report forms documenting the library's financial commitment and additional outputs for the COHS program. Please see "COHS Final Report Data Collection Guidelines" on the [California State Library's COHS web page](#) for more information.

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 and track time being trained on the COHS program, develop a workflow and procedures, and recruit and interview candidates. Some time may be allocated during a student's full enrollment in the program to check-in and monitor progress. Your library may also choose to host a graduation for graduates of your program. Staff time will also be dedicated to completing a brief annual report to report financial commitment and other outputs to the State Library. Please see "COHS Final Report Data Collection Guidelines" on the [California State Library's COHS web page](#) for more information.

How does the program work?

To receive a scholarship for the [Career Online High School program](#), 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.
 - Libraries who may not have the capacity to interview each individual student may opt to work with a neighboring jurisdiction who may conduct the student interview, or a library may omit the interview from their onboarding process.
- *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 can try again in the future and the tentatively awarded scholarship is returned to the available scholarship supply. No scholarships are “lost” or wasted if a student does not continue past the probationary period.

- *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 can my library apply?

Please visit the [California State Library’s COHS web page](#) to express interest in participating in the COHS program. Interest forms are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year.