

Next Steps at Vanderbilt Summer Institute (NSSI) Frequently Asked Questions (Including Scholarship Info)

Q: What is the purpose of the Institute?

A: There are two primary purposes of the Institute, depending on a student's situation:

- The Institute serves as orientation for those who have been accepted into our 4-year certificate program.
- For those who are interested in learning more about inclusive higher education opportunities for young adults with intellectual disability, students will emerge from the Institute with a better understanding of the kind of available opportunities and what college life is like.

Q: Can I just sign my student up for the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Summer Institute?

A: There is an online application process for the Institute. Applying for the Institute does not guarantee enrollment.

Q: Does my student meet the criteria for attending the Institute?

A: *Criteria for students applying to NSSI are:

- Diagnosed intellectual disability (ID)
- Age: Rising high school junior (minimum age = 17) through age 25
- Student must possess the following:
 - Desire to be as independent as possible.
 - Desire for post-high school education and training.
 - Interest in having a college experience.
 - Ability to stay away from home for a week and able to learn and socialize well with other teens and adults with ID.
 - Needs to be relatively independent with no aggressive or wandering behaviors.
 - Possess the physical stamina and medical clearance for long days (approx. 7am-10pm) and walking long distances in Tennessee summer heat.
- Required skills of independence needed for acceptance include the ability to INDEPENDENTLY:
 - Take care of all personal hygiene.
 - Self-administer medications.
 - Get themselves up and dressed at the start of the day.
 - Basic use of cell phone (answer and make calls, texting is good if verbal/auditory skills are a challenge).
- *Meeting criteria does not guarantee admission.

Q: My son or daughter has a developmental disability - are they eligible to apply?

A: The Next Steps program's primary charge is to prioritize serving students with intellectual disability. That said, students with developmental disabilities that are comfortable being placed on a waitlist for consideration to both NSSI and/or the Next Steps 4-Year Certificate program are still welcome to apply.

Q: How much does the Institute cost?

A: The full tuition cost has historically been \$1,250.00. This is determined each year dependent on program and partner expenses. The tuition includes room, meals, and all activities. Students only need additional money if they hope to purchase additional snacks or souvenirs.

Q: What if we cannot afford the tuition?

A: Limited, need-based scholarships are available to students who have a documented intellectual disability (ID) diagnosis, an annual household income of less than or equal to \$75,000, and have not previously attended NSSI. These scholarships are for tuition only. Scholarships awarded will be either 25%, 50%, or 75% of the total tuition cost. Each family is responsible for arranging for and paying to get their child to and from Nashville.

Note: The previous year's tax return is required as supporting documentation for the scholarship application.

Q: Does our household income effect my son or daughter's NSSI admission decision? How does this process unfold?

A: Household income has no effect on a student's NSSI admission decision. Staff who review student applications and make admissions decisions do not view any scholarship information. It is only after admissions decisions that the NSSI Scholarship Committee meets to discuss award amounts, if any, for those accepted students.

Families will be notified of admissions decisions and scholarship awards simultaneously via email so they can make a fully informed decision.

Q: Are the scholarships automatically awarded to those who meet the qualifications?

A: Unfortunately, no. Scholarship funds are limited and so not everyone who meets qualifications will necessarily receive a scholarship.

Students who qualify, but are not awarded an NSSI scholarship, may still be offered admission.

Q: Why are the scholarships limited to students with intellectual disability?

A: Next Steps at Vanderbilt is a 4-year certificate program for students with intellectual disability. As such, we must limit our scholarship funds to prospective and incoming students who meet this criterion who also demonstrate financial need.

Q: Do you have scholarships available for students who do NOT have an intellectual disability diagnosis?

A: In rare cases, if scholarship funds are still available, we may consider students whose scores reflect intellectual disability (IQ & Adaptive Behavior scores under 75), even if their documentation does not officially state the diagnosis.

Q: What kind of documentation do you need for scholarship consideration?

A: We accept several kinds of assessments or evaluations, as long as it include the student's diagnosis and his or her IQ and Adaptive Behavior scores. Examples of documentation are IEPs or a psychosocial assessment.

Please contact [Tammy Day](#), Next Steps Program Director, if you have questions regarding acceptable documentation.

Q: Do you have a payment plan?

A: NSSI does not have a formal payment plan; however, families are able to pay down their balance so long as it is fully paid off by the deadline, which is typically 60 days prior to the start date.

Q: What payment methods do you accept?

A: We accept credit and debit card online payments and/or checks. If your student is accepted, you will receive an email with further instructions for how to make the payment.

Q: What are the Institute's primary activities?

A: Activities vary widely, but are focused on either independence, self-advocacy, social skills, or campus life. Feel free to view the sample schedule on our [NSSI webpage](#) to get an idea of the different activities in which students engage.

Q: What is the student/counselor ratio?

A: The Institute hires roughly 1 counselor for every 3 or 4 students. Next Steps full-time program staff support is also provided during each day.

Q: Is the staff support sufficient for my son/daughter?

A: Counselors are typically Vanderbilt (VU) graduate students, doctoral candidates, full-time teachers (VU alumni), or undergraduates. They typically study or studied Special Education, Clinical Psychology, Neuroscience, or other related fields, and also complete thorough training specific to NSSI.

That said, students should be independent and need little help with daily activities, such as dressing and self-care. They should be able to participate in group activities with little redirection. NSSI is an empowering and fun week but can also be taxing. Students start the day roughly by 7am and go to bed around 10pm. The schedule is full of activities between those hours that will require enough stamina to get around campus in the summer heat.

Students who have medical conditions that might disrupt any aspect of their participation during the week (e.g., seizure disorder) should consider applying to NSSI after it has been addressed with a medical professional, to the extent that the condition has low likelihood of occurring at NSSI.

Q: What will the student's residential experience be like?

A: The students stay at a dormitory on the Vanderbilt University campus. Only NSSI staff, University staff, and students have access to the dorm. Because the dorms are on an access card system, people have to get special permission in order to get an access card and get into the building. Students enjoy a typical dorm experience, which includes having a roommate(s). Counselors stay on the same floor as the students.

Q: Can I visit my student during the Institute?

A: One of the goals of the Institute is to promote independent living skills. In order to work towards that goal, we ask that family members let their son/daughter enjoy the Institute experience on their own. Family members are asked to attend a brief Family Meeting, on the first day of the Institute, an Information Workshop on the final day, and the closing ceremony that also occurs the final day.

Q: Can my son or daughter attend the Next Steps Summer Institute more than once?

A: Students who have already attended NSSI once will be placed on a waitlist. They will be notified whether there are open spots for them to return after the rest of the group has been solidified. The rationale behind this is so that more students with ID can be introduced to college.

Still Have Questions?

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