



California
Community
Colleges

TOP 10 STUDENT CENTERED USES OF FEDERAL STIMULUS RESOURCES



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The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected individuals across California — not only as a public health emergency but also a social and economic crises. California Community Colleges can serve as engines of social mobility and post-pandemic recovery — but, to do so, higher education leaders and policymakers need to redefine normal and prioritize student-focused investments. Further, as community colleges across the nation grapple with enrollment challenges, understanding the backgrounds of students from low-income families and the barriers they are facing will be critical to creating welcoming educational environments.

The American Rescue Plan presents hope and opportunity amidst a difficult year. The \$2.3 billion investment that California's community colleges will soon receive from the Federal stimulus provides leaders an opportunity to innovatively re-invest the one-time funds in much-needed systemic changes that can ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. As colleges craft spending plans aligned with federally allowable uses, we've crafted 10 ideas centered around student needs and the urgency to act in their best interest. We hope our sister colleges and colleagues will consider these ideas.

10 **Replace costs for student resources that would normally be provided by the college inside classrooms and support areas.**

Lab classes normally utilize supplies and software platforms within the classroom environment. In order to take these classes from home, institutions developed lab kits to allow students to do experiments at home. Students in classes that utilize costly software would normally access the platforms in on-campus computers. Institutions can increase the number of licenses to support students' individual in-home learning. Additionally, colleges can organized science and multi-media arts kits to be used in students' homes.

9 **Increase online student service hours to evenings and weekends**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges had to adapt and innovate around the delivery of many of their student services in order to continue to meet students' needs. Increased availability and access to student supports on evenings and weekends, without the need to drive to campus, has been one of the silver linings of the past year. Colleges have implemented Live Chat features (often staffed by student ambassadors) on their websites to

provide real-time support to prospective and current students, as they navigate college websites. Federal stimulus dollars can be used to maintain and expanded access to academic support services, including student counseling and mental health services. We anticipate that students will want services to continue to be offered online for efficiency and convenience.

8 Help close the digital divide by providing laptops and wifi hot spots

The truth is, COVID-19 did not invent the digital divide, it only exacerbated it. As leaders think about the onboarding supports students need to resume or begin their educational journey, equipping them with the technology and tools they need to succeed academically should be a major consideration.

7 Expand digital accessibility in technology procurement

The rapid shift to online learning meant that colleges had to quickly adapt courses to digital modalities. As colleges consider plans for post-pandemic learning, technology can continue to support a robust classroom experience by using platforms that address accessibility needs, provide a flipped classroom experience, or enable virtual labs. Many faculty availed themselves of understanding and using open educational resources in place of textbooks – saving students substantial resources.

6 Outreach to students with some college and no degree and encourage them to re-enroll

The new stimulus requires colleges to conduct direct outreach to student about the opportunity to receive a financial aid adjustment due to the recent unemployment of a family member or independent student, or other emergency circumstances. This presents an opportunity to conduct focused outreach. Colleges have the opportunity

to communicate (in diverse languages) to students that amidst the pandemic, we are prepared to work with them to achieve their career and academic goals. American Community Survey data suggests some of the individuals negatively affected by the pandemic are those that left college before completing a degree or credential. Outreaching to these individuals in our communities and informing them about their options for qualifying for a California College Promise Grant, a federal Pell Grant, or an emergency relief aid grant would present millions of Californians the chance to achieve educational goals once placed on hold.

5 Help meet students' financial and basic needs by guiding students through FAFSA and CalFresh applications

No academic year has reinforced the urgency to connect students to financial aid like this one. As colleges are delivering emergency grants to students, it is an opportune time to ensure they have completed the FAFSA. For those students have not completed the application, now is the time to provide the support they need and the answers to questions they may have.

Further, recent federal changes expand eligibility criteria for CalFresh food assistance benefits which enables more community college students to qualify. Leveraging the federal stimulus' emphasis on meeting basic needs and this expanded eligibility presents a perfect opportunity to support student more holistically. Colleges can align FAFSA application assistance with efforts to help more students apply for CalFresh. Coupled with efforts to expand food pantry services, these strategies provide yet another tool for addressing basic needs.



4 Partner with state, local or community health organizations to host a vaccine distribution centers on campus

As educators to California's healthcare professionals and first responders, community colleges are poised to lead vaccination efforts in our communities. Partner with local hospitals and county health officials to help distribute vaccines on campus. Whether it's a drive-through clinic through campus parking lots or one-on-one appointments in the gymnasium, community colleges can lead the state to herd immunity. Many Colleges have onsite Student Health Centers that have been adapted to serve as vaccination clinics with medical staff and nursing faculty distributing vaccines for staff, students and the community.

3 Hold professional development workshops on culturally responsive online teaching

For adult and working learners, the transition to online learning has provide a flexible option to achieve their educational goals while balancing life responsibility. The distance education environment calls for colleges to help students succeed online, while ensuring classes are culturally responsive. The federal stimulus allows colleges to invest in professional

development to enhance online teaching and student supports, with intentional focus on the impact of current conditions has on historically underrepresented communities. Colleges can invest in practices that explore strategies and initiatives for incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, providing inclusive environments that focus is on the whole student.

2 Reach out to students who took an EW to offer supports and opportunities to return

Unfortunately, the pain and effects of the Coronavirus has been concentrated in some of our most diverse communities. For community college students, that meant that many had to put their educational dreams on hold. Through both federal and state investments, colleges can bring those students back and help them re-engage on the pathway to completion. Contacting students who took an Excused Withdrawal (EW) in the last 12 months should be a priority for all of the colleges. Let's offer them emergency grants, academic guidance, and the support they need, inside and outside of the classroom.



1 Provide direct emergency grants to students in need and most affected by the pandemic

The archaic and inequitable financial aid structures, combined with the total cost of attendance for California Community Colleges already provided inadequate funding. As a result, the pandemic only exacerbated the challenges our students already faced. Over the last year, the relief emergency grants provided to students cannot be overstated. Our imperative is to get resources into the hands of students as quickly as possible while also continuing to build the case for long-term reform that finally delivers financial aid to California's community college students. Supporting our student with grants should not be a pandemic-era exception, it should be the new normal.

CLOSING POINTS

The pandemic has challenged institutions to accommodate and teach students where they are and within their individual learning environment. Community colleges have responded and risen to the challenges faced by the surge of the Coronavirus pandemic. From this, we have learned a great deal about our institutions and the resiliency of students. We must continue to support them in an equitable environment throughout their educational journey to achieve their academic and career goals. Comprehensive supports inside and outside the learning environment will continue to be pivotal to the success of our students.