

Frequently Asked Questions

Are there specific benefits that we should include in our project?

We expect the college to make choices tailored to their college and student body. The federally and state administered benefits we list in the invitation to submit a letter of interest (LOI invitation) is not exhaustive, nor do we expect that colleges will screen for all benefits on the list. There are a set of benefits that provide for the most immediate needs of students. These include Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for health insurance; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for food assistance; and may include child care subsidies, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and state funded cash assistance. Unless you can make a strong case for why one or more of these benefits should not be included, we expect that your college would at least screen for these public benefits since they can do the most to impact the financial situation of low-income students.

In addition, there are a separate set of more specialized public benefits that you will want to explore, depending on the composition of your college. For instance if you are in an urban area, it might make sense to offer bus passes. If your student body has many veterans, you will want to look more closely at the suite of public benefits for veterans, whereas if you have no veterans, you will want to focus on another set of benefits.

Can services be provided in multiple places?

As outlined in the LOI invitation, we do not have a prescribed theory on how or where it is best to deliver services. Therefore, offering services in multiple college offices and locations could be appropriate for your college.

Is there anything colleges cannot use initiative grant money to support?

There are some limitations. For example, we do not expect to select projects whose primary activity is to develop technology or tools, nor efforts that focus exclusively on bringing in outside partners with benefit screening tools and service delivery approaches. You might already be engaged with an outside partner with benefit screening tools. In that case, we would want you to think carefully about how and whether it would be appropriate to institutionalize that set of activities over the long term, using institutional or state funding.

The funders reserve the right to impose additional limitations on use of funds in the budget development process.

Can we refer students to other nonprofit agencies or companies?

We understand that many of you have strong partnerships with local community-based organizations. We would not expect that to change, but we will look for an explanation of how you will build on current activities. The goal is to go beyond providing brochures or referrals, and to do

whatever possible to increase access to benefits. This could include building a partnership with an outside agency to ensure more students can access benefits.

Are there any specific software packages that we have to use?

No, though we would encourage you to learn whether your state has developed software that screens or allows online application for public benefits and how widely available this software is. Sites will be required to discuss technology issues and possibilities with the state.

Nonetheless, if technology is included in the plan for a particular site, the funders will not dictate which technologies should be used.

The invitation letter emphasizes collaboration between colleges and state level agencies. In some places, local agencies also provide public benefits. Would it be possible for sites to focus on relationships with local agencies?

We understand that there are some places where decisions about benefits policies are highly localized. Thus, we expect that many sites will propose some interaction with localities. Since some decisions are made at the state level, we expect colleges to understand and monitor state level policies, too. It will be important to engage with states, even if your relationship is stronger with local entities.

Since the project does offer individualized technical assistance and CLASP will have responsibility for the portion that involves collaboration with state partners, you can continue to work through these questions once the grant period begins.

How would a college demonstrate its commitment to collaborating with state policymakers?

A commitment to collaborate with the state can be demonstrated by speaking with state level authorities and securing a commitment from them to participate in the initiative by providing a letter that would express that agreement.

How would a college demonstrate its understanding of public benefits and commitment to mobilizing faculty and staff to provide public benefits?

We are looking for LOIs to demonstrate an understanding of public benefits, and which are appropriate for the college's particular student population. For example, if you claim in your LOI that you are going to provide every student with access to TANF cash assistance, then we are going to question whether you understand TANF since, in most cases, in order to access TANF, you need to have a dependent child.

Some ways of showing commitment to these ideas at the college level are to identify previous activities the college has undertaken, key staff or offices that will participate in the initiative, and specify the activities the college may carry out. Any number of people may be involved in demonstrating commitment, as we have not specified any particular office or set of staff people to lead or carry out the initiative.

Is the grant renewable? Are colleges expected to institutionalize the activities?

These grants are envisioned as two- year grants only. The purpose of the initiative is for colleges to develop and implement a plan to institutionalize these activities by the end of the two-year grant period.

The foundations contributing to this initiative have piloted several projects to improve postsecondary retention and improve access to public benefits. At this point, they are interested in learning what it would take to institutionalize these activities. They want to identify one or a set of best practices that consist of practices and activities that would be embedded into college operations, so that once foundation funding runs out, activities continue.

What other colleges have been invited to submit a letter of interest?

A small group of colleges were selected that have demonstrated leadership either in providing access to public benefits within the community college context, or have participated in other retention and completion initiatives with the explicit focus of improving access to comprehensive student supports.

The other colleges that were selected to invite a letter of interest will not be made public at this time. Please contact us if you are considering submitting a letter, and we will answer your questions on a case by case basis. The majority of colleges that have been identified are the single college identified in the state. However, if two colleges are chosen from the same state, it would be of value for you to collaborate on state-level work.

When does our college need to submit a budget?

The college is **not** required to submit a budget with its LOI at the end of September. If your college is selected to participate, you will be expected to submit a draft budget in mid-January. Both AACC and CLASP will help you develop a final budget due in February.

What is the selection process for this project?

We have invited a select group of community colleges who are already working on improving access to public benefits or have participated in projects to improve access to comprehensive student support services to submit an LOI. CLASP and AACC will schedule site visits with up to seven finalists in October and November. We will spend the day at the college, meeting with staff from the college. The information gathered will be passed over to a group of independent reviewers that are unaffiliated with the funders or the intermediaries. They will make recommendations and ultimately up to five colleges will be chosen to participate.

Additionally, two sites have already been selected as a result of an existing partnership with one of the funders. They are Lake Michigan Community College and Macomb Community College, both in Michigan. Michigan has a large, state-level initiative to improve access to public benefits across a variety of entities, including community colleges.

When is my college expected to begin administering benefit access activities?

Final decisions about funding levels will be made in February and the initiative will begin shortly thereafter. We expect colleges to implement the initiative in a variety of ways and on different timelines. Just because the initiative may begin in late February does not mean we expect college activities to be up and running at that time. We expect many colleges will need to work with the intermediaries, develop a plan and materials, and educate staff before they initiate activities for students.