

Policy Brief

COLLEGE PROMISE

SEPTEMBER 2022

Shaping Equitable and Sustainable College Promise Programs: The Kresge Foundation and College Promise host the first annual CoPro2.0 Grantee Convening



CoPro2.0

CoPro 2.0: Overview

CoPro 2.0 is a \$2.5 million funding initiative through which The Kresge Foundation awarded 11 multi-year grants to support College Promise programs that incorporate equitable, sustainable practices into their design. It also funds additional research into financial sustainability structures and helps local programs implement the Biden-Harris Administration's free-college program proposal.

In November 2021, the following organizations were awarded CoPro2.0. The organization name and the title of the grant work are listed:

Program Innovation and Redesign

- Detroit Regional Chamber Foundation: Partnering to Create Student-Ready Institutions for the Detroit Promise.
- Growing Inland Achievement: Beyond Free Tuition: The California Challenge.
- HOPE Toledo: A Two-Generation College Scholarship Program: Scaling Hope Toledo Promise to Reduce Racial Inequities across the City.
- Richmond Promise: Changing the Odds: Building Pathways to Equity & Opportunity for Community College Students in Richmond, CA.
- Tennessee College Access and Success Network: Nashville Flex.



Research on Financial Sustainability

- [Bipartisan Policy Center](#): Mitigating State Higher Education Funding Challenges During Recessions.
- [WestEd](#): Exploring Funding models for Equitable and Sustainable College Promise Programs in California.



Strategic Local Implementation

- [Institute for College Access and Success, Inc.](#): Strategic, Local, and State Implementation Guidance: To support the Biden-Harris Administration's proposed national tuition-free community college program.
- [Rise Education Fund](#): Scaling Up Student Leadership for College Promise Equity & Innovation.
- [State Higher Education Executive Officers Association](#) & [National Conference of State Legislatures](#): Leading the National Conversation about Tuition-Free Program Options to Best Serve Today's College Students.
- [W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research](#): The Free-College Playbook: Evidence-based Guidance for Policymakers and Practitioners.



Questions Discussed

On Friday, May 13th, 2022, CoPro2.0 grantees met at the beautiful Army and Navy Club in Washington, D.C. to discuss early observations, insights, challenges, and pivots in their grant work. Through a series of breakout sessions and prompts, grantees discussed:

1. What are some early observations or insights on your grant projects?
2. Pivots or challenges?
3. What can you teach or learn from others in the cohort?
4. What impact has COVID continued to have on your project?
5. What do you hope to gain from this experience?

Responses and discussions ranged as widely as grant topics and methodologies. Many grantees began by complementing how the CoPro2.0 funding made it possible to formalize or solidify work that the organizations had already tried, wanted to try, or wanted to scale up. For example, the Tennessee College Access and Success Network has been able to offer stipends, support dollars, and comprehensive support to part-time students to increase the persistence rates of low-income students and students of color at Nashville State Community College. Grantees discussed emergency stipends, academic supports (e.g., early alert systems, case management, academic coaching), high school to college transition programs, stipends, and emergency funds to increase persistence in high-risk populations.

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Acknowledging the challenges of COVID, grantees discussed staff turnovers, low enrollment at community colleges, difficulties in getting in touch with students and parents, and the challenges of advocacy when organizational work has moved to personal homes. In addition, grantees discussed growing beliefs that discourage college attendance, such as the notion that college degrees do not matter in the workplace, college degrees are not as important to employers, or that, because of the expense, there is no return on investment in a college degree.

Program directors came together in a discussion about the relationship between students and parents. HOPE Toledo's early evaluation work indicates that the relationship between the parent and the child drives personal decision-making for both. The child may stay in college for fear of disappointing the parent; conversely, the parent may stay in college believing that will ensure the child continues to degree completion. Their two-generation approach is proving a powerful model for promoting college completion.

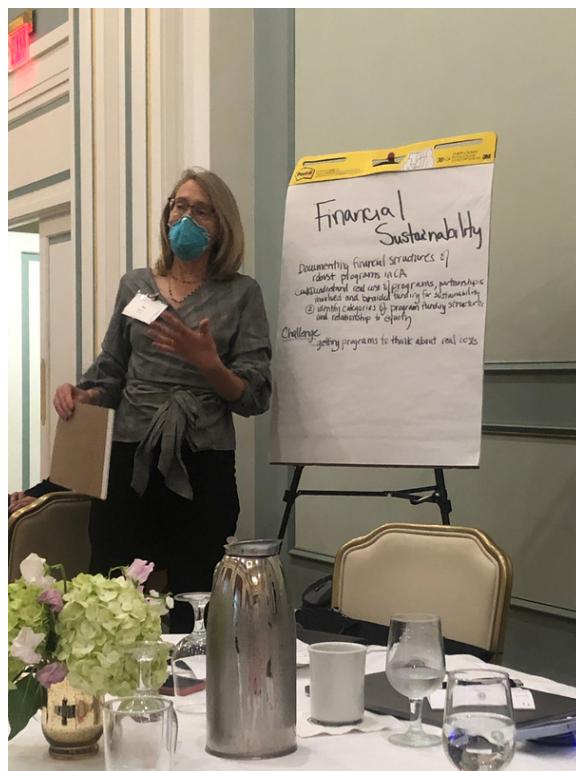
Building working relationships between programs, community colleges, and high schools was a central concern for Richmond Promise. Richmond Promise will use its grant money and public funds to address geographic and historic place-based inequities and clear a path for the Contra Costa Community College District (4CD). By offering support for basic needs – like technology, emergency funds, financial aid support, academic support, and coaching – they are developing an ecosystem to disrupt systemic inequity.

With the removal of the free college program from the Build Back Better legislation, grantees discussed the next steps. Grantees strongly expressed the belief that local communities and states will continue to fund, grow, and develop CP programs to support college attainment. To this end, the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research is using its CoPro2.0 grant to develop an online playbook that will provide implementation guidance to policymakers and practitioners for the next generation of free college programs.



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Multiple grantees are working on braided funding and finding it challenging to describe how they support the development of College Promise Programs. Grantees envisioned a resource map of CP programs and types across the country with a clear definition of what a Promise program is and does. Grantees discussed sharing outcomes data and evaluation data with existing and new programs. Grantees spent considerable time during breakout sessions discussing what data they collect from students, high schools, and colleges, how they collect this data, and how the data is used to inform decision-making.



Finance

Grantees working on CP funding structures (e.g., UpJohn, SHEEO, Bipartisan Policy Center) iterated and reiterated the importance of:

1. Knowing the real cost of Promise programs
2. Documenting the financial structures of robust programs
3. Understanding braided funding with sustainability in mind
4. Developing a typology of Promise program models that can be replicated

In Conclusion

Grantees expressed their conviction that CP programs will transform the educational landscape in the United States. They believe that they will promote the development of positive ecosystems that span from early childhood education to later community health concerns. College Promise programs create opportunities for all students to seek, search, and know the value of education, thereby becoming lifelong learners.

Early planning for the 2023 convening is already well underway.