College Promise

College Promises to Keep

A Playbook for Achieving College Promise Financial Sustainability

SPRING 2020

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Preface

A century ago, a high school education meant the promise of a good job, a decent quality of life, and a ticket to the booming American middle class. A high school education is no longer enough to remain competitive in the 21st-century economy, and by 2020, 65% of our nation's jobs will require education beyond high school.[1] Yet less than half of Americans between the ages of 25 and 29 complete an associate's degree, technical certificate, or further levels of higher education.[2] Making college accessible and affordable is urgent—and so is making sure that students who enroll can succeed in college for productive careers and rewarding lives in their communities.

At the College Promise Campaign, we believe every student should have the opportunity to attain an accessible, affordable, quality college education, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, geography, background, or culture. Our national, non-partisan initiative aims to build broad public support for accessible, affordable, quality programs that enable hardworking students to complete a college degree or certificate, starting in America's community colleges. The Campaign empowers community colleges and their education, business, government, and philanthropic partners to enact solutions for students to graduate from college, advance in the workforce, further their education, and build rewarding lives in our nation's communities and states.

Postsecondary education and employment is critical to economic mobility, and efforts to expand college access, affordability, and success must be sustainable. States, local governments, and institutions have been implementing College Promise programs—often referred to as tuition-free—as a way to address access, affordability, and success.

A College Promise program is a **COMMITMENT** to fund a college education for every eligible hardworking student advancing on the path to earn a college degree, a certificate, and/or credits that transfer to a four-year university. Secondly, Promise programs send a clear message—**A PUBLIC ASSURANCE**—that college is attainable and vital to prepare students for the 21st-century workforce and the pursuit of the American Dream without the burden of unmanageable college debt. Finally, Promise programs are a **TRUST** to make the first two years of community college—at a minimum—as universal, free, and accessible as public high school has been in the 20th century.

As College Promise programs continue to expand, these programs must also become financially sustainable. Our work on financial sustainability is designed to facilitate partners' understanding of the current landscape, best practices, and tools for improvement. Disseminating this knowledge has become a key priority for The College Promise Campaign. To that end, the Campaign released several reports, including our initial financial sustainability report—*Design Sustainable Funding for College Promise*[3]—in 2017 with Education and Testing Service (ETS). Our 2017 report provided a research and policy framework on how to fund a Promise. In 2018, we released the *College Promise Playbook: A Guide to City and County Leaders on Building a Promise Program,*[4] alongside the National League of Cities, which was a guide for local and state leaders on the steps needed to build a Promise program. Subsequently, we released *Promise with a Purpose*[5] with Achieving the Dream and Complete College America on how institutions can design Promise programs that encourage student completion. In 2019, we released a series of policy briefs, including *Support Services that Make Promise a Reality*[6], in collaboration with MDRC, which examines research-based strategies on student supports in Promise programs that increase postsecondary outcomes.

For this report, we build upon the work we began in 2016 with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to research the financial sustainability of College Promise programs. For the first phase of our work, we convened five national design teams of distinguished scholars and Promise stakeholders to understand and describe the various approaches and models available for College Promise programs to build and maintain financial sustainability and what experts viewed as successful financing strategies. The compendium of this work—*Designing Sustainable Funding for College Promise Initiatives*[7]—was released in October 2017. During this process, we discovered that while a range of local and state College Promise leaders had specific knowledge and expertise on College Promise financing strategies, this information was not collected nor aggregated comprehensively to help College Promise practitioners, policymakers, and interested stakeholders take action to sustain their initiatives.

As a result, the College Promise Campaign conducted a national survey of local and state College Promise programs to learn about and share information about their financing strategies and administrative infrastructures. With philanthropic support from the ECMC Foundation and data analysis support from ETS, we undertook two years of research to investigate publicly available College Promise information and survey 134 College Promise programs. We are grateful to the many Promise researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who contributed to this study. The outcome of this work is *College Promises to Keep: A Playbook for College Promise Financial Sustainability*. We want this playbook to serve as a comprehensive resource of local and state strategies and considerations to help Promise programs ensure long-term financial viability and success.

As a nation, if we genuinely want to improve economic and social mobility, build a college-going culture, and expand student access and success, a College Promise made must be kept. A College Promise must be held not just for one cohort of students, but for millions more hardworking Americans as our future unfolds. In the 21st century, we must build College Promise programs that are lasting and dependable. College Promises kept are not only impacting students going to college by offering life-changing scholarships and supports, but they are also inspiring future generations to achieve their college and career goals. Vibrant and productive families, communities, and states will be the beneficiaries. By working together to build high-impact, financially sustainable College Promise programs, we will do our part in enabling a stronger, more prosperous country for the 21st century and beyond.

—Martha Kanter, CEO College Promise

SPECIAL NOTE OF THANKS

We would like to thank each of the College Promise leaders for completing this survey, with special appreciation to Dr. Michelle Miller-Adams, Senior Researcher at the W.E. Upjohn Institute of Employment Research, Kalamazoo, MI; Dr. Victoria Ballerini, Research Associate at Research for Action, Philadelphia, PA; Dr. Celeste Carruthers, Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, TN; Dr. Matt Lovesky, College Promise fellow and doctoral student at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA; Dr. Catherine Millett, Senior Research Scientist at ETS, Princeton, NJ; Dr. Mary Rauner, Senior Research Associate, WestEd, San Francisco, CA; Rosario Torres, Research Analyst, and Evan Weisman, Senior Associate at MDRC, and leading members of the College Promise Research Network, for their thorough reviews and helpful comments that informed the publication of this report.


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FROM LOCAL TO STATE, FROM THE KNOXVILLE PROMISE TO THE TENNESSEE PROMISE...

"So, I know you are wondering, how do we pay for this? The Tennessee Promise can only be a true promise if it is sustainable over time. It can't be based on year-to-year budgets, or changing legislatures, or new administrations. That's why I recommend funding it through an endowment. I propose that we transfer lottery reserve funds into the endowment, which is strategically redirecting existing resources. There will still be $110 million in the lottery reserve, which I believe is a healthy amount.

Net cost to the state, zero. Net impact on our future, priceless.

This is a bold promise. It is a promise that will speak volumes to current and prospective employers. It is a promise that will make a real difference for generations of Tennesseans. And it is a promise that we have the ability to make. I look forward to working with you, members of the General Assembly, to make the Tennessee Promise a reality for Tennessee families."[8]

—The Honorable Bill Haslam
49th Governor of the State of Tennessee (2011-2019)
Mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee (2003-2011)

SECTION 1: **Introduction**

At College Promise Campaign, we understand that building a competitive workforce and inclusive, vibrant communities across our nation requires modernizing today's education system to better serve and advance students, employers, the overall economy, and the greater society. The economic and social benefits we envision from College Promise programs cannot happen overnight; systematic economic and societal change takes time. Early results from a range of local College Promise programs underway for a decade or more are impressive, not only improving student lives but also impacting regional and state policymakers to harness the outcomes to increase the talent pipeline of college and career-ready students for hundreds of more communities across the country.

Yet, today, we know that too many of our evidence-based solutions for improving education have come and gone because we have failed to sustain what works. Our College Promise partners from the public and private sectors throughout the nation must work together to ensure their programs have the know-how and resources to become financially sustainable, to ensure that their intended benefits are met, or until student and community results, and their associated local and state policy improvements, render College Promise programs obsolete.

This playbook, *College Promises to Keep,* builds upon our previous initiatives and partnerships by surveying College Promise programs to understand and analyze key aspects of each program's financial sustainability efforts. We hope this data and analysis will build the research and practice base and support College Promise leaders throughout the country by:

- Providing a resource for programs to identify methods and tools to inform their work and practice to reach their goals.
- Expanding the understanding of what College Promise programs currently are and are not doing to maintain and ensure financial sustainability.
- Providing a national snapshot of key College Promise features, such as students served, Promise financial awards, and funding structures.

Survey Information

The College Promise Campaign created the Financial Sustainability Survey in partnership with the College Promise Research Network.[9] In the fall and winter of 2018, we sent a survey to 212 College Promise leaders and administrators and received responses from 134 College Promise programs for a response rate of 63%. The 40 survey questions (see Appendix A) covered five central areas of content:

1. General Program Data
2. Program Recipient Characteristics and Demographics
3. Program Design and Services
4. Funding Sources and Methodology
5. Sustainability Efforts

In our initial survey profile of College Promise programs, 60% of the programs were established in 2016 or later and 59% of the programs were from the Midwest and West regions.

The College Promise Financial Sustainability survey respondent file showed the movement is young and growing. Most of the responses (62%) were from College Promise programs that are less than three years old, and many (65%) of the respondents came from the Midwest and the West Coast; nearly one-third of our responses came from California.

This survey represents the first national snapshot of College Promise programs.

COLLEGE PROMISE MODELS AND MOMENTUM

In our financial sustainability survey, we asked respondents which programs they drew from when designing their own College Promise programs. Kalamazoo, a privately funded program serving residents, was the most referenced program, with College Promise programs across the country crediting Kalamazoo with influencing their program design. Among Statewide College Promises, Tennessee was the most popular model program and was cited by just under half of all Statewide programs that responded to the survey, as well as many local programs. It's important to note that the Tennessee Promise is endowed through a public financial sustainability policy.

California Promises were heavily cited as reference programs, which is unsurprising, given that 31% of survey respondents were in California. The Long Beach Promise (which has been split into two different programs—the Viking Advantage and Long Beach Promise 2.0) was the most referenced program in California. The original Long Beach Promise, established in 2008, provided Long Beach Unified School District graduates with just one semester of tuition at Long Beach Community College (LBCC) and guaranteed transfer admission to California State Long Beach for qualified students. The Promise is a last-dollar award with additional support services. However, the newly launched Long Beach Promise 2.0 leverages state funding to provide the first year of tuition-free college and also provides *an additional year* of free tuition for students from the Long Beach Unified School District as well as advisors for future students at California State Long Beach.[10] The Long Beach Promise was able to leverage a mix of public (state funds) for free tuition and fees for the first year and private funding (corporate, small business, and individual donations) for the second year. In addition, many local California programs also cited recent state-level legislative activities (AB19) that promote college affordability, access, and success.

In addition, many local California programs also cited recent state-level legislative activities that are increasingly promoting college affordability, access, and success. In 2016, the state of California renamed its Board of Governors waiver the California College Promise Grant (CCPG).[11] The grant covers per-unit enrollment fees ($46/credit) at each of California's 114 brick-and-mortar community colleges, as well as its 115th online community college.[12] However, the income level for CCPG waiver eligibility is $36,900 or less for a family of four.[13] Most California Community Colleges have opted into CCPG. In 2017, the state passed a $46 million "block" grant—the California College Promise (AB19)—which provided flexible, direct funding to eligible community colleges. The state established general student eligibility requirements for California College Promise programs: California residency, first-time college students with a high school diploma or GED, application of the FAFSA or California DREAM Act, and full-time (12 units or more) attendance. Participating AB19 institutions could use the funding to provide tuition waivers to students not covered by CCPG or could use the funding to provide supports to increase student access and success.[14]

In 2019, the California legislature expanded the program to give participating institutions the option of providing two years of free-tuition funding.[15] For the California institutions or local Promise programs that use California state funding, they can use their additional Promise-related resources to cover non-tuition expenses (such as books and living expenses) or expand eligibility beyond first-time college students.

Efforts in California are informative for several reasons. First, the partnership between state and local Promise programs and community colleges illustrate the great potential for implementation of state-level Promise policies to help sustain and supplement local-level Promise programs. Secondly, it shows how state action can accelerate and amplify Promise programs. Finally, California is a large and diverse state with a unique formula structure targeted to students and community colleges. Innovation and scale within the state will help inform national efforts to scale the Promise model.

Survey respondents also referenced examining the CUNY ASAP program, which is a system of support services and streamlined college success initiatives to help ensure underserved students succeed in obtaining their degree on time. The CUNY ASAP program provides a tuition waiver and wraparound support services (e.g., transportation voucher, advising, and career services). MDRC conducted the random control evaluation of CUNY ASAP and found that the program increased credits earned and almost doubled graduation rates for developmental education students.

MDRC has concluded that ASAP was the most efficient and impactful college intervention model that they had found.[16] While CUNY ASAP was more expensive, the model was replicated in Ohio and showed similar outcomes at a lower cost per student.[17] Recently, Detroit College Promise partnered with MDRC and developed a student support framework with coaches for Promise students. The initial results have shown that Detroit's Promise Path initiative increases credit accumulation and persistence (compared with students receiving tuition but no additional support services) at the cost of approximately $1,000 per student.[18] Other College Promise programs, such as Skyline College Promise[19] and other programs in MDRC's College Promise Success Initiative, are using lessons from the ASAP model and other effective programs to increase their student success rates. Integrating support services into a tuition waiver can have practical implications for Promise programs, especially College Promise programs that want to increase student success.

SECTION 2: **Determining College Promise Costs**

Each city, community, and state is unique. College Promise programs must make every effort to keep the individual needs of its community in mind when determining the design and implementation. The scope of a College Promise program depends on, at a minimum, the program's service area, mission, partners, and available funding. In this section, the College Promise Campaign offers this updated guidance from its *College Promise Playbook: A resource for elected city and county elected officials*[20] in addition to findings from the survey.

A key factor in determining the cost of the program will be the **number of students** covered under Promise eligibility guidelines and the College Promise partner institutions. While there is no one-size-fits-all model,[21] below are a few parameters to help guide Promise leaders, administrators, and other stakeholders in estimating the cost of their Promise program.

Define Your College Promise Program

Determine the eligible Promise institution(s)

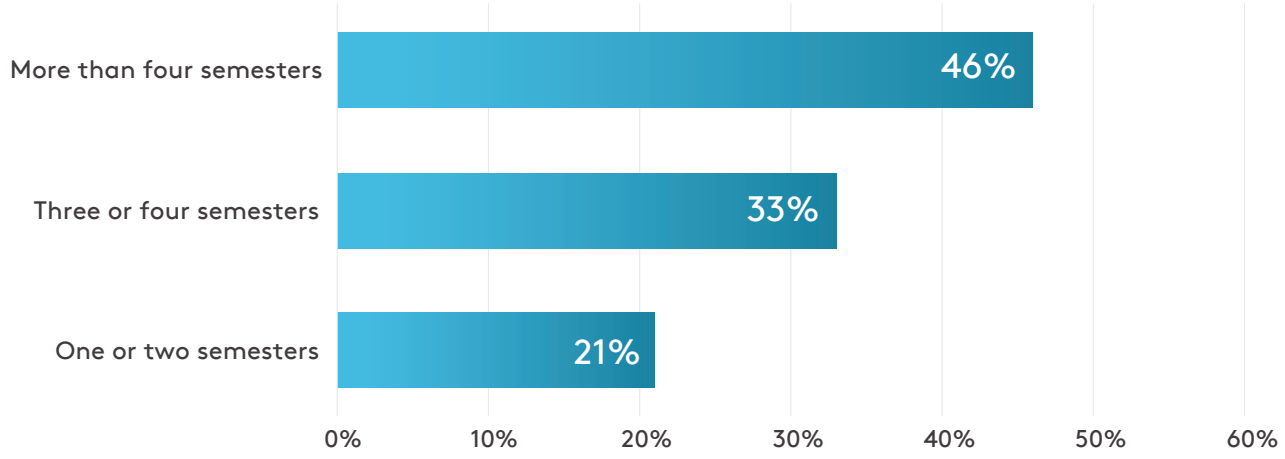
A key decision Promise stakeholders will make is partnering with an institution or group of institutions. One-third of Promise respondents partner with institutions, such as a community college,[22] while others cover a group of institutions, such as all colleges and universities in the region or state. The majority of programs cover only public institutions; however, some programs include a list of private institutions as well. Below are the types of **educational institutions** typically included in College Promise programs along with a few of the benefits of choosing each:

- **Two-year public or private nonprofit institutions**: Community colleges that offer certificates or Associate degrees, as well as career and technical schools offering certificates meeting the credit-hour requirements for federal Pell Grant eligibility. Community colleges typically have lower per-student costs, making them an attractive gateway for reaching low-income students, working adults, and other underserved populations (e.g., foster youth, students with disabilities, etc.) or quickly bolstering workforce readiness/industry-specific growth.
- **Four-year public or private nonprofit institutions:** Historically, colleges and universities that offer the Bachelor's degree have benefited from higher levels of per-student funding than the nation's community colleges, public and/or private financial support that has more directly improved educational and degree attainment. Partnering with four-year programs—some of which also offer Associate's degrees—can reduce student overall student debt and promote a college-going culture for future college students.
- **Both two- and four-year institutions:** Covering both types of institutions provides the most comprehensive access to education and encourages a college-going culture for all levels of students. Moreover, there are emerging models with four-year institutions—University of Tennessee[23] and Tennessee Promise and Seattle Pacific University[24] with Seattle Promise—that help to facilitate the transfer of Promise students to the baccalaureate level.

An additional consideration related to your institutional partnerships is the length of the benefit for College Promise students. In the financial sustainability survey, College Promise programs were asked how many semesters their Promise covered. Approximately 74% of respondents indicated that their College Promise provides at least one year (or more) of post-secondary training; 42% of respondents offer a College Promise beyond an Associate degree (more than four semesters).

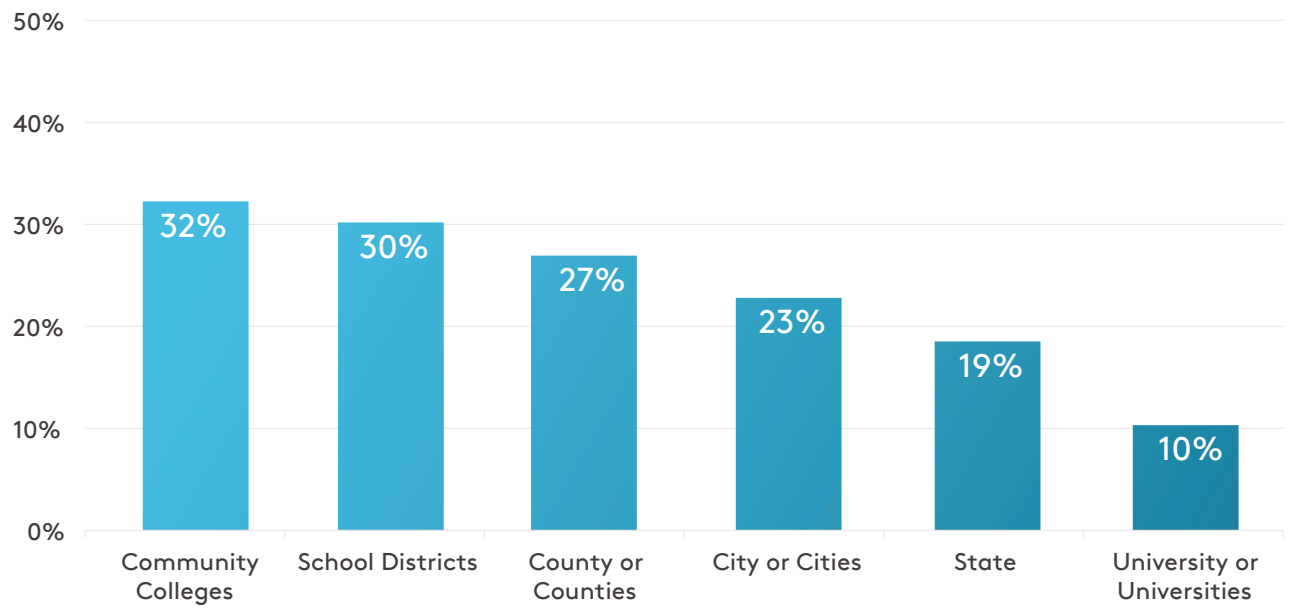
Q14. FOR HOW MANY SEMESTERS AT A POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION DOES YOUR PROGRAM OFFER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE?

79% of Programs Provide Three or More Semesters of Financial Assistance



Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=132. Response rate=98%.

Q4. AREA SERVED BY PROMISE PROGRAM?



Five percent of respondents also chose "Other" but a common example did not emerge from analyses of "Other" responses.
Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=134. Response rate=100%.

Finally, College Promise leaders, administrators, and other stakeholders will need to determine the funding structure (see definition in the Disbursement of Promise Award section on page 17) of the Promise award; specifically, if the Promise will cover tuition and fees and/or if the Promise will cover additional expenses associated with the cost of attendance.

College Promise program respondents provide a weighted average award of $2,520 and a median award of $1,700. The largest award reported was $15,452 while the smallest award reported was $185.[25]

Decide Your Service Area and College Promise Population

In addition to the choice of post-secondary educational partner(s), an equally important decision is determining eligibility to receive the College Promise. Nearly all programs indicated they served a specific area, such as a state, city, or school district.

In addition, there are student eligibility criteria that further determine the scope of students that are eligible to receive the College Promise. **Universal**[26] [27] programs are broad-based and award aid without consideration of financial need or academic achievement. **Targeted**[28] [29] Promise programs focus on awarding the Promise groups that meet specific eligibility criteria, such as age, residency, financial need, merit, or academic majors. Common criteria to target the Promise include:

- **Age:** The majority of programs serve recent high school graduates, many of which include a specific period of eligibility after high school graduation. Some programs serve only older adults (e.g., 25 years or older), while others serve people of any age.
- **Residency:** Promise programs determine a service area which their program covers, often a specific school district, city, county, or state. The residency may also include a minimum length of residency before a student is eligible for the program.
- **Financial Need:** Programs typically require students to fill out the FAFSA, or a state-based equivalent, annually. Some programs cover only students who qualify for financial aid or whose income or estimated family contribution falls within a set threshold.
- **Merit:** Many programs include merit-based criteria, such as a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) or qualifying scores on a standardized exam (i.e., SAT or ACT).
- **High School Type:** Some programs limit eligibility based on the category of high school from which a student graduates (i.e., public, charter, private, homeschool, GED, etc.).
- **Program of Study**: While most Promise programs allow students to obtain two years of general post-secondary education, there are some Promise programs that require enrollment in a certain major aligned with state workforce needs.

In addition to initial student eligibility criteria, College Promise programs can use specific **persistence and completion criteria** to determine continuing eligibility for the Promise. These requirements typically include:

- **Minimum Course Load**: Many College Promise programs require that students maintain a minimum course or credit load (i.e., full- or half-time enrollment).
- **Grade Point Average**: Grade Point Average: Many programs require satisfactory academic progress to continue to receive the Promise, which is typically defined as a GPA of 2.0 or higher.
- **Community Service**: Several programs require that students complete a specific number of community service hours per college semester or academic year.
- **Selected Support Services**: College Promise programs can require recipients to receive or participate in associated academic or student support services (i.e., counseling, mentoring, advising, tutoring, first year experience course, etc.) to encourage degree completion and enhance needed life skills.

EXAMPLES OF TARGETED PROGRAMS

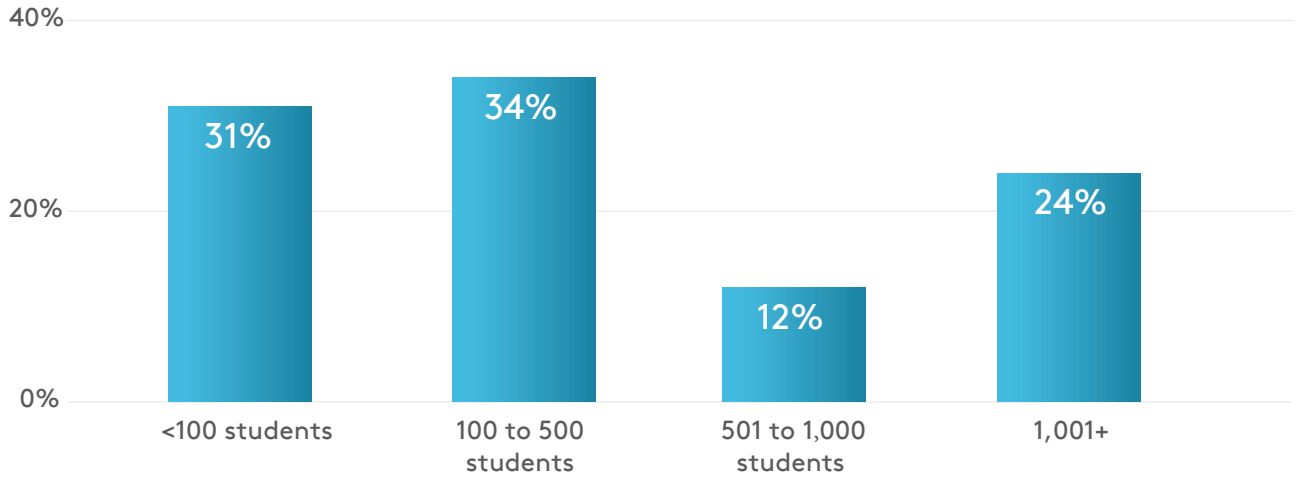
There are a variety of ways that College Promise programs can target or limit their programs. The Chicago STAR program, limits eligibility to students that have at least a GPA of 3.0. ARFutures and Kentucky Work Ready target eligibility to students with specific career interests aligned with state workforce shortages and skills needed by employers. Recently, with the support of the Lumina Foundation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, College Promise programs serving Adult Students have emerged at the state level.

The W.E. Upjohn Institute refers to eligibility parameters through a "saturation" index.[30] Programs with fewer restrictions will have a high saturation index and therefore, a broader impact on both the K-12 education system and the community at large. Restrictive Promise programs (multiple eligibility criteria and large barriers to entry) will have a smaller pool of eligible students, a low saturation index, and limited impact on the broader community. Other scholars have highlighted that Promise program design can have equity implications[31 32 33] and can limit impact.[34]

In this survey, we asked College Promise program administrators about the number of Promise students their program serves. Sixty-five percent of Promise survey respondents serve 500 or fewer students.

Q11. HOW MANY STUDENTS PER YEAR RECEIVE A PROMISE AWARD THROUGH YOUR PROGRAM?

65% OF PROGRAMS PROVIDE PROMISE AWARDS TO UP TO 500 STUDENTS ANNUALLY



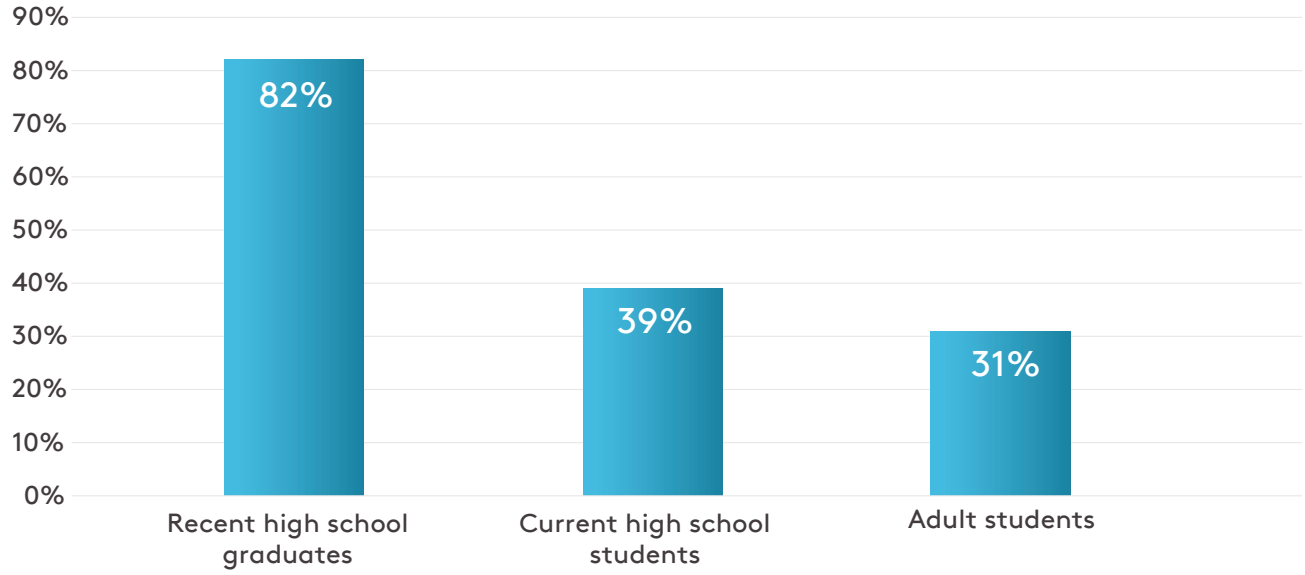
Note: Approximately 319,000 students [unweighted sum] are reported to be served by the 125 Promise Programs who responded to this question. The weighted sum is 558,830.
Additional weighted descriptive statistics are as follows: Mean=2673 Median=209; Mode=200; Minimum=3; Maximum=52,024.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=125. Response rate=93%.

The unweighted aggregate number of Promise students reported is 319,900. However, when the age of the program and region is weighted, the weighted sum is 558,839 for Promise students. The College Promise Campaign believes both of these numbers are lower bound estimates. First, 82% of Promise programs are targeted to recent high school graduates, but there has been momentum at the state level to expand the College Promise to adult students and special populations, such as DREAMERs.[35] The New York Excelsior program did not complete the survey, but they awarded 20,086 scholarships in the 2017-18 school year.[36] New York State estimates once the program is fully implemented by the end of 2019, approximately 940,000 families and individuals will have access to the Excelsior program.[37]

In addition, there is underreporting in California. Over two million students[38] attend one of the state's 114 brick-and-mortar community colleges and 42% are eligible for the California College Promise Grant (CCPG, formerly the California Community Colleges Board of Governor's waiver).[39] While most of California's community colleges take advantage of statewide California College Promise funding (AB19)[40] and other local Promise initiatives, these initiatives and funding sources have different Promise student eligibility criteria. For example, the California College Promise Grant (BOG waiver) has a threshold on income while the California College Promise initiative (AB19/AB2) is targeted to first-time full-time students and many other local programs in California have requirements on residency or high school attendance. To date, there is no data from California on the total number of students benefiting from local Promise initiatives. Nevertheless, the Financial Sustainability survey is the first national survey of College Promise programs and the students served; 319,900 Promise students is a benchmark estimate. In future surveys and initiatives, the College Promise Campaign will measure scale and impact on the numbers of students accessing and completing their postsecondary degrees and certificates through College Promise initiatives.

The Financial Sustainability Survey also asked questions about eligibility criteria, or restrictions to the College Promise. Respondents were given the option to select all that apply, and over 80% of Promise programs serve recent high school graduates. Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they served "current high school students," which are programs that do an early outreach on college affordability at the secondary level (less frequently at the elementary level). El Dorado in Arkansas is an example of a College Promise program that serves "current" high school students. The El Dorado Promise (see case study) makes students aware of the Promise benefit starting in elementary school and has a tiered benefit based on years enrolled in the El Dorado public school system. Another example is the Pittsburgh Promise; it has a dual enrollment program. Pittsburgh Promise students can use their Promise funding to attend a local community college when they are still in high school.[41] In the survey, we had a broad definition of Adult students, which include military/veterans and the formerly incarcerated. KentuckyWork Ready, ARFutures, and the New Jersey Promise are all examples of College Promise programs available to adult learners in addition to recent high school graduates.

Q9. WHAT POPULATIONS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR YOUR PROGRAMS? 82% OF PROGRAMS SERVE RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES



Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Eighteen percent of respondents reported "Other." High School Equivalency was a common example reported to describe "Other."
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=134. Response rate=100%.

The main characteristic of College Promise students, according to survey respondents, are that they must meet residency and other student eligibility requirements. Nearly all (91%) of respondents had administrative (i.e., completing the FAFSA) and academic requirements (i.e., minimum GPA). Six survey respondents indicated that their eligibility requirements were universal to the community. The Kalamazoo Promise in Michigan and Free City in San Francisco are both examples of programs with universal eligibility. Almost one-third of respondents had some sort of behavior requirements, such as community service or class attendance rules.[42]

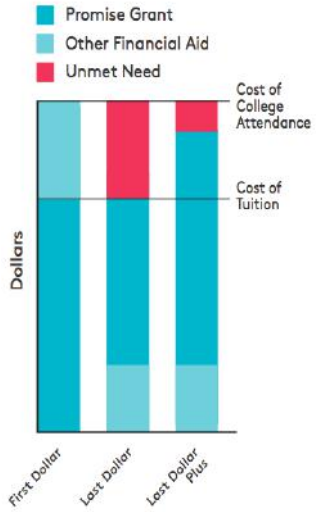
When deciding program design and scope, keep in mind the community, region, education system, or specific institution's desired outcomes, demographics, and target populations. The type of criteria, such as being a recent high school graduate or study at a specific institution and within a specific field, can limit coverage. Including more institutions and few eligibility criteria will make a program more inclusive and broadly impactful, but also more costly and potentially challenging to directly manage. A more targeted program with a few key partner institutions and limited eligibility criteria is easier to manage and measure for optimal success. However, an increasingly narrow scope may impact relatively few individuals and yield fewer systemic benefits.

Finally, when defining your Promise population and estimated expenses, Promise stakeholders need to factor in emerging research that shows the value of clear messaging and simple program design. Research has shown that the simple message of "free" garners interest in postsecondary education[43] and clear student eligibility requirements can produce behavioral change[44], and an increase in a college-going culture at the elementary[45] [46] and secondary[47] [48] [49] levels. Many Promise programs have shown double-digit increases in college enrollment, as well as increased persistence, retention, and completion rates.[50] [51]

Disbursement of Promise Award

The goal of any College Promise program is to make higher education more affordable and accessible for students. Models for Promise programs vary depending on the amount of College Promise funding available, the number of semesters covered, and the number of students who will meet the program's eligibility and persistence criteria. Understanding both the current costs of higher education and financial needs in your service area can help determine which funding model can have the most impact.

There are several ways in which Promise programs can disburse awards. The **"first-dollar"** Promise award covers the costs before other student financial aid is awarded. When combined with other sources of aid, primarily Pell Grants for low-income students, this program structure can help students pay for additional costs, such as textbooks, child care, and transportation, that can inhibit student success. **Last-dollar** models assume that other aid (federal and state) will be used first and the Promise program will fund any remaining gap between these resources) and the cost of college. The total amount of funds distributed will vary from student to student, with Pell-eligible students often receiving fewer resources than middle-income students. **"Last-dollar plus funds"** are similar to last-dollar models in that they require students to apply other sources of aid first, but then they provide additional resources, sometimes in the form of a targeted stipend (e.g., money can only be used on books or transportation) or a fixed amount to bring new resources to low-income students.



Sixty-one percent of College Promise programs award funding after a student has exhausted available financial aid from the federal government and/or the state. But a number of local and state Promise programs cover expenses above and beyond tuition and fees, seeking to address the challenge that many students struggle to fund (e.g., textbooks, transportation, food, housing, etc.), even while working full-time.

From this survey, the average weighted Promise award is $2,520, but first-dollar Promise programs are more generous than last dollar programs.

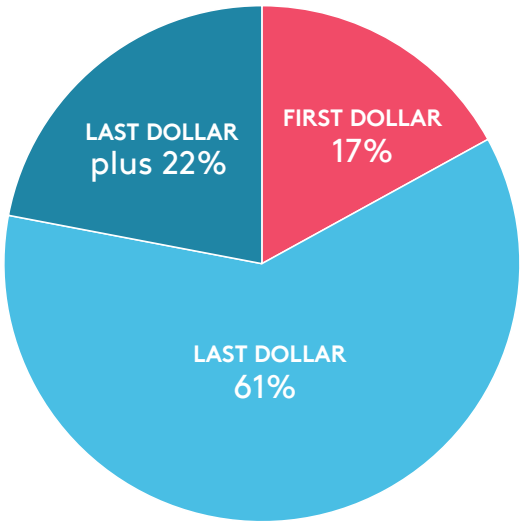
Average Last Dollar Plus Award = $2,920

Average Last Dollar Award = $1,953

Average First Dollar Award = $3,858

N = 115

Q13. WHAT KIND OF FUNDING DOES YOUR PROGRAM PROVIDE? 60% OF PROMISE PROGRAMS ARE LAST DOLLAR



Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=134. Response rate=100%.

Related Expenses

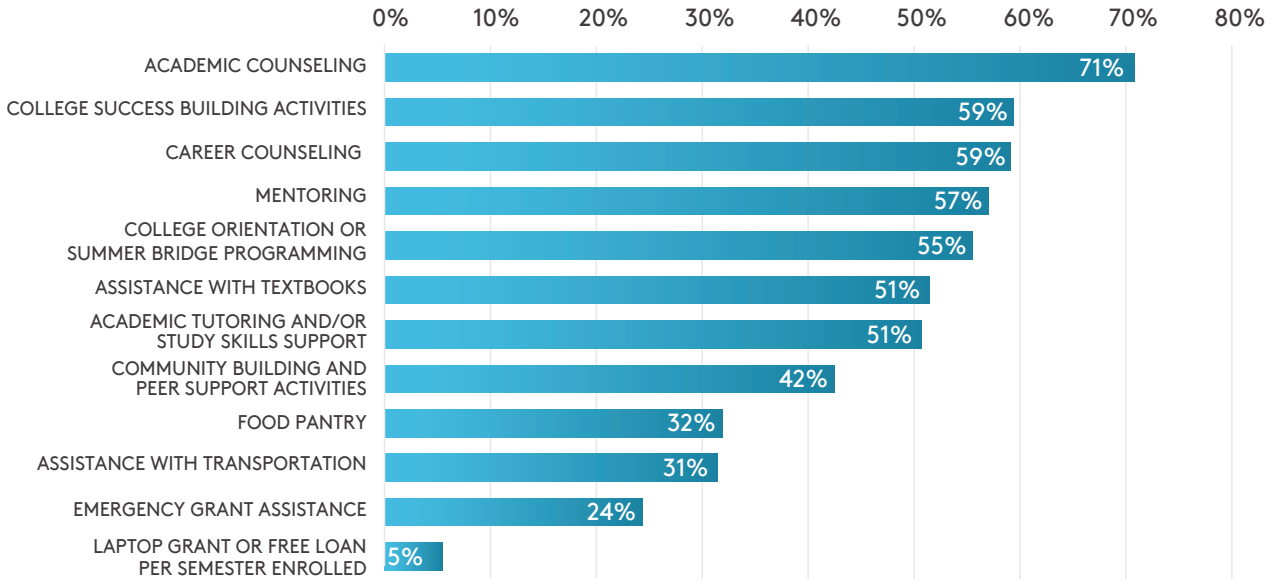
Additional Supports

Finally, a College Promise must be driven by a purpose if cross-sector leaders at the local or state level commit to design, implementation, and sustainability.[52] Students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds earn their postsecondary certificates and degrees at rates far below their wealthier peers. Often, these students do not have a college-educated parent or mentor to help them navigate complex college application, enrollment, and financial aid processes, which makes the student support services—student advising, counseling, coaching, and communication—offered by Promise programs essential to closing equity gaps in postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and attainment rates.

The College Promise is not only about student access but also student success. A key strategy to student success is providing additional student supports beyond the financial award.

Over 70% of our survey respondents offered support services. Respondents could check all that apply, but the most frequently selected were additional academic counseling (71%), college success building and career counseling (59%), mentoring (57%), and summer orientation or bridge programs (55%).

Q16. WHICH ADDITIONAL SERVICES OR STUDENT SUPPORTS ARE OFFERED?



Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Twenty-six percent of respondents reported "Other." "Providing other financial supports" and "leveraging supports provided by other sources" were two examples reported to describe "Other."
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=103. Response rate=77%.

Other support services offered by some College Promise programs include financial assistance with textbooks, transportation, and laptops as well as access to food pantries, emergency grants and targeted summer bridge/orientation programs. Distinguishing between the additional supports provided by Promise programs and services offered to all students is a topic for further study.

There is a growing body of research showing similar results consistent with our survey findings. WestEd surveyed California Promise programs and found the most common support services were academic advising, career counseling, and summer orientation programs.[53] MDRC works with six different Promise programs in their College Promise Success Initiative network[54] and has found that coaching and advising, student communication, and use of data and metrics are key strategies for supporting Promise students.[55] The emerging evidence base shows that successful College Promise programs with support services have significantly increased rates of student retention and persistence over and above what would have been achieved with tuitions supports alone.[56]

As part of this survey, we sought to understand how Promise programs are funding these additional services. Thirty-two (30%) said the program itself pays for the services, and 27 (25%) said they contribute no funds toward student supports, but rely on referrals and partnerships for additional services. Nearly half (46%) of the respondents told us their funds came from a combination of self-financed supports and outside partnerships, including philanthropy.[57]

Some survey respondents (n=44) provided estimates on the costs of their support services. Responses ranged from a median of $150,000 and mean of $547,595; one program reported spending $15 million on student support services.[58]

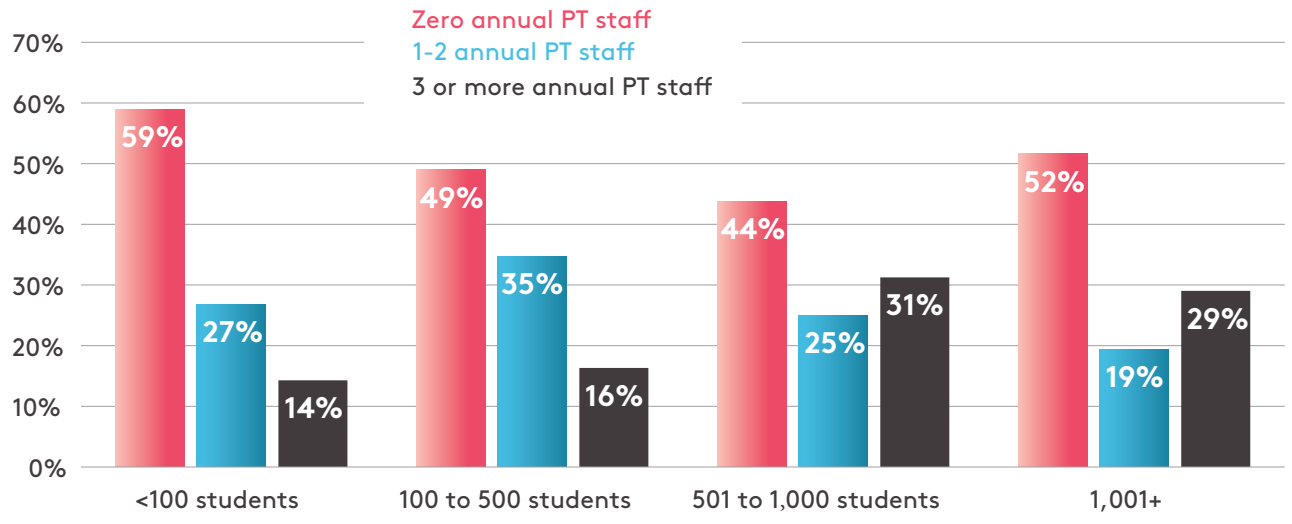
Overhead/Administration

Implementing, managing, and evaluating your College Promise program will likely require staff and infrastructure funds. In order to ensure participation in the program, students, their families, schools, universities, nonprofit organizations like United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, and other partners must be made aware of the program, its eligibility criteria, and its funding and support needs. Disseminating this information requires some administrative and communications efforts.

In addition, to show your program is making an impact, you will need to collect and analyze student data and outcomes each year to demonstrate the impact of your program, identify barriers, and make improvements in design and execution as the program evolves. Local university professors and national research organizations studying Promise programs, including the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, WestEd, University of Pennsylvania Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, Columbia Teachers College Community College Research Center, MDRC, and others can be helpful resources as you plan and implement your program. For example, as part of its College Promise Success Initiative, MDRC has created a benchmarking tool to help guide College Promise programs.[59]

For programmatic staffing support, 70% of respondents reported having more than one full-time annual staff. Fifty-two percent of respondents reported having no annual part-time staff, while 48% reported have staff support of one or more staff members.[60] Programs were less likely to have seasonal staff; 95% reported no seasonal full-time staff, and 86% reported no part-time staff. Staffing does appear related to the size of the program as larger Promise programs were more likely to have reported more full-time staff support.

HOW DOES PROGRAM SIZE ALIGN WITH ANNUAL PT STAFFING? Q22 BY Q11



Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=89. Response rate=66%.

Fewer than half of the programs (46%) have their overhead and infrastructure costs contributed in-kind.[61] For programs that are responsible for paying all or part of infrastructure and administrative costs, the three most commonly cited expenses were salary and benefits (96%), supplies/office equipment (43%), and fundraising costs (42%).[62]

Only about half of the survey respondents (n=70) provided specific financial data on their operational and administrative expenses; the median amount spent per program was over $140,000.[63]

Program design, institutional partnerships, student population and eligibility requirements, the financing of the Promise award, and related expenses to support the Promise and its students are the costs associated with starting a Promise. When examining costs, there are two publicly available tools which may be useful to Promise stakeholders (in addition to this Playbook): WestEd has created a College Promise Project Cost Estimator Tool for California College Promise programs, but it also provides helpful guidance for all College Promise programs on estimating costs and financial support.[64] In addition, MDRC has a College Promise Cost Calculator for Promise and similar programs nationwide.

SECTION 3: **College Promise Revenue Sources**

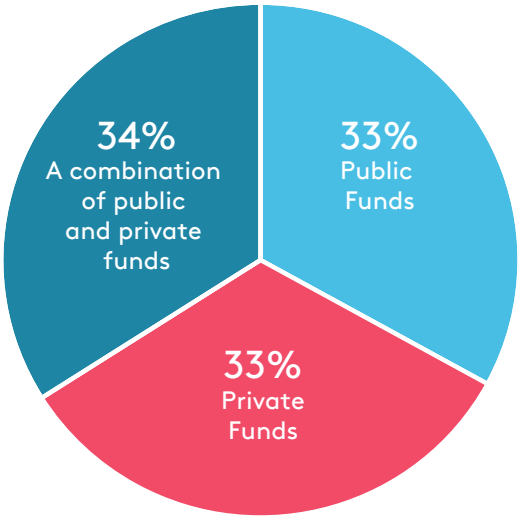
College Promises across the country utilize many different streams of revenue in order to finance programs that pay for tuition and other supports for college students. What programs decide to use as their primary funding source varies based on many factors, including program service area, location, and tax base. Funding streams can be a combination of both public and private funding. Public funding can be from revenues or appropriations from the local or state level, or Promise programs can leverage federal grants or tax incentives to fund their program. Private funding streams can originate from institutional endowments, philanthropy, corporations, local businesses, and individuals. Most often, Promise programs are public-private partnerships and leverage the use of mixed funding sources, which diversify the funding pool for these programs.

The location or program area impacts funding options and the available revenue base. For example, California's community colleges can now benefit from three state allocations: 1) the California College Promise Grant (CCPG, formerly the Board of Governors Fee Waiver authorized in 1985), first-dollar state financial aid for California residents who meet income thresholds (i.e., $37,000 for a family of four); 2) Assembly Bill 19, the California College Promise passed in 2017, providing $46 million in funding[65] for community colleges to improve college readiness, increase persistence and completion rates, and close achievement gaps for participating community colleges to cover one year of tuition and fees for first-time, full-time Californians who meet the one-year residency requirement;[66] and 3) Assembly Bill 2 passed in 2019, which covers the second year of community college tuition and fees for students who meet the same AB19 eligibility requirements. California Promise programs can now fund two years of tuition and fees for eligible students, and fund additional supports with other local funds if available, such as a textbook or transportation stipend, or additional support services (advising, mentoring, etc.).

Other programs like the El Dorado Promise and the Kalamazoo Promise are notable because they are entirely funded and made sustainable by private donors.

We asked survey respondents about the source of their revenues, and the chart to the right shows that College Promise programs fund their programs through a mix of revenue sources.

Q23. HOW IS YOUR PROGRAM FUNDED?



Note: If a combination, respondents were asked to break down funding sources by percent private and percent public. Of the programs reporting a combination of public and private funding, 42% were majority public, 38% were majority private, and 19% were a 50/50 mix.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=134. Response rate=100%.

Public Funding (Local, State, and Federal)

One-third of College Promise program respondents indicated that they were funded with the public revenue sources. At the local level, Promise programs obtain funding from local government city and/or county allocations, which can both provide a stable source of revenue and ground their programs in their communities. This can include appropriations, line items in the city or county budget, and/or using portions of sales and property taxes. To be able to achieve this, the major stakeholders involved would be city council members, aldermen, the board of supervisors, county judges, or other local government officials. Free City in San Francisco is a College Promise funded by a tax on local real estate transactions. The program was initiated in 2017 and while it is completely funded by city resources, there was a need for more money[67] to meet student demand. With almost 4,000 new students since the inception of the program, Free City was seeking more money through the city's board of supervisors.[68] However, funding resulting from the passage of California's College Promise legislation (AB19 and AB2) is helping to resolve this challenge.

In the last few years, College Promise programs have scaled to the state level, thereby leveraging a broader tax base. Statewide College Promise programs can receive statewide funding through appropriations, which is partly how the Hawai'i Promise is funding their program. Appropriations, especially those that are categorized as "permanent" or "mandatory" in the budget, can help address concerns about financial sustainability. Currently, the University of Hawai'i Community College system is lobbying the Hawaiian legislature to ensure that $700,000 of the base $1.8 million for the Hawai'i Promise is made mandatory.[69] While this initiative did not pass during this legislative session, it illustrates the need for stable funding, such as an endowment for Promise programs. Michigan's 15 Promise Zones rely on a tax-increment financing structure that directs a portion of the increase in the State Education Tax to local communities with College Promise programs. In contrast to appropriated funds, this unique funding structure is embedded in the state tax code and is not subject to periodic budgetary discussions or cutbacks.

At the federal level, predominantly through the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor, there are multiple revenue sources that College Promise programs leverage to fund their programs.

States can also use lottery funds that have not been appropriated to pay for Promise programs. Many states used lottery funds to finance their student aid programs, such as the A+ Program in Missouri, which the College Promise Campaign identifies as a Promise. The Tennessee Promise is funded by endowed interest from lottery funds. Washington's early college Promise program, the College Bound Scholarship[70], is also partially covered by lottery funding. This can be an alternative or supplemental way to fund Promise programs, especially if there are unallocated portions of the fund available in the state. In Georgia, the state uses lottery funds to fund the five different types of scholarships and grants to help Georgia students pursue higher education. The availability of lottery funds offers a potential funding stream that Promise programs can leverage. For the Tennessee Promise, the legislature approved the transfer of unallocated lottery funds for an endowment. Other states, including Kentucky, Florida, and Washington are examining better ways to leverage lottery funds to expand access to higher education.[71]

At the federal level, predominantly through the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor, there are multiple revenue sources that College Promise programs leverage to fund their programs. These

funding sources are diverse and include financial support for student financial aid (e.g., Pell, Work Study, and SEOG grants) as well as for programmatic activities to improve institutional capacity, quality, and success. It is important to note that funding for building capacity and improving the quality of the educational experience share the purpose and goals of student financial aid: to positively impact student enrollment, progression, completion, and workforce preparedness.

The U.S. Department of Labor has several programs that align education and training to employer needs, as well as improve quality and produce better outcomes for students. In 2008, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career (TAACCCT) is a grant program that was enacted to lessen the deepening effects of the Great Recession. Independent TAACCCT grant evaluations[72] have documented improved quality of programs, and many College Promise programs students have benefited from the modernized career programs from these multiyear federal TAACCCT grants.

In addition, Perkins V is the newest iteration of the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Public Law No: 115-224)* that is meant to bolster career and technical education (CTE) at the state level. Funds have been used to create internship opportunities for students, develop CTE student organizations, and align curricula to industry standards. Colleges and universities can also utilize Perkins funds to acquire new equipment and improve existing facilities.[73] Along with Perkins, schools can use the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to increase the capacity of their vocational programs. WIOA has created one-stop centers for adults to find employment and job training opportunities, with over 3,000 one-stop centers across the country.[74] Some community colleges and universities have become operators of these one-stop centers, which has helped with integration and making sure students use the centers to their advantage. WIOA also utilizes a formula to allocate money to states based on their unified workforce plan to increase the capacity of the workforce and attainment of postsecondary credentials. These federal funding streams, subject to appropriation, are ways that College Promise programs can bolster their programs to improve student and workforce outcomes.

Finally, at the federal level, the majority of College Promise programs rely on student financial aid—specifically Pell Grants—as the cornerstone on which to build their College Promise. Pell Grants are targeted to low-income students and, when some local and/or state Promises decide to fund some or all of tuition and fee costs, Pell Grants may be used to cover costs beyond tuition and fees (i.e., cost of attendance), such as textbooks, rent, food, transportation, child care, etc. Over 80% of Pell Grants go to students from families making $40,000 or less; the maximum Pell award is $6,095[75] and the federal government invests $30 billion annually[76] to make college more affordable for low-income students. Efforts to reallocate or reduce funding for Pell Grants would make postsecondary access and success less equitable and negatively impact the financing of hundreds of local and state College Promise programs across the country.

Private Funding (Private Donors, Fundraising, & Endowments)

One-third of survey respondents indicated that they are funded through private sector contributions. The Harper Promise in Illinois, the Kalamazoo Promise in Michigan, and the El Dorado Promise in Arkansas are examples of generous donors from the private sector contributing scholarship dollars to fund their local promise. Fundraising for Promise in the community is an important strategy to engage and give local residents a direct stake in the design and delivery of a quality education. Individual donations can help fill fundraising gaps and serve as a reliable, diversified funding stream for Promise programs.

The College Promise Campaign financial sustainability survey has also seen corporate donations work in a twofold manner, funding the Promise program, but also attempting to, on a large scale, remedy skill gaps in order to ready the next generation of students for the workforce. Following this survey but not reported herein, the Dallas County Promise received a $3 million donation from JPMorgan Chase. With growing student loan debt and the increasing cost of college, corporations are donating to higher education in order to lessen the economic burdens of their current and future workforce. The Dallas County Promise is an example of a comprehensive effort across the government, higher education stakeholders, and the business community working together to increase student outcomes for the sake of their city.

Endowments are donations of money put into an account with the interest that is accrued from that account allocated to specific functions. For College Promise programs, these endowments can help stabilize and sustain all or a portion of the program's cost. To varying degrees, 23% of programs[77] reported using endowments to finance their College Promise programs. The El Dorado Promise has a privately funded endowment while the Santa Ana Promise leverages both public and private funds to support their endowment.

Public-Private Partnerships (P3s, including Philanthropy)

Finally, over one-third of survey respondents indicated that their Promise program was enabled by a "mix" of private and public funding, oftentimes called a public/private partnership. This funding structure provides Promise programs that do not receive enough money from one source the ability to mitigate the difference from another source of funding. Additionally, public/private Promise programs with mixed funding can utilize funds in a way that is targeted to meet local needs. Some examples include Michigan Promise Zones, which are funded by both private donations and state tax dollars that are locally allocated. Another example is the intersection of funds within a community college or university. A college foundation can provide additional support to meet student needs where local or state Promise funding covers tuition and fees. Some institutions may also consider shifting institutional aid to fund book or transportation stipends if Promise funds are used for tuition and fees. Multiple funding streams from public and private sources can offer Promise leaders flexibility to address the most pressing student needs.

Recently, through philanthropy, foundations are creating opportunities for states to design Promise programs targeted to adults.

Recently, through philanthropy, foundations are creating opportunities for states to design Promise programs targeted to adults. In higher education, adult learners represent a growing and significant proportion of the undergraduate student body, making up over eight million (41%) college enrollees.[78] The need for flexibility to develop and implement adult Promise programs is important, since adult learners must balance school, work, and family commitments. The Lumina Foundation and the State Higher Education Executives created a grant program for states to create or improve upon their postsecondary programs and strategies for adults. The grantees focus their efforts on improving communication strategies, student engagement, and tailoring the college experience to the circumstances of adult learners. The first cohort of grant recipients included Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington. In 2018, a new cohort was announced, with grants to California (California Community Colleges), North Carolina (University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Community College System), and Hawai'i (University of Hawai'i System). The Lumina Foundation has invested nearly $6.5 million in the adult Promise grant program to date.

Public and private funding streams help to diversify revenue streams and provide multiple fund development opportunities for both new and continuing Promise programs. In a previous College Promise report, *Designing Sustainable Funding for College Promise Initiatives*, public and privately funded Promise programs "tend to be targeted to local needs, as a result of their design and development by local actors."[79] The benefit of a blended model, usually utilized by local programs, is that it helps create a sustainably funded Promise that has the support of multiple sectors and stakeholders in the community invested in Promise outcomes.[80] It is not just about the money provided, but the support that students see on a day-to-day basis, which translates to positive outcomes. College Promise programs that take advantage of these public/private funding models have the opportunity to catalyze positive change through education for their communities on a grassroots level, which is impactful for students.

In-Kind

As mentioned in a previous section, an important and often overlooked source of funding for Promise programs is through in-kind contributions from partners. Respondents indicated 46% of programmatic administration is provided in-kind.[81] In addition, Promise programs leverage in-kind resources to provide student support services: 25% of responses noted that they did not pay directly for supports and almost 45% use a combination of both paid and outside supports.[82] Supports include academic advising or coaching, career counseling, assistance with books/transportation/housing, or orientation/summer bridge programs.

The Tennessee Promise partners with a non-profit organization, tnAchieves, to provide mentorship, community service opportunities, and other support resources to scholarship recipients. The partnerships between the Tennessee Promise and tnAchieves, which is funded with private and philanthropic resources, led Tennessee to have one of the nation's highest FAFSA completion rates. The "Drive to 55" completion goal, student supports, and the Tennessee Promise have helped to increase student success.[83] Another program that has robust student services—provided in-kind through institutional partnerships—is the Detroit Promise Path. Students meet regularly with their academic coaches, and they are incentivized to do so because they will gain monetary benefits in the form of gift cards that can go towards school expenses.[84] Initiatives like these are reporting increases in student retention and credit accumulation and anticipate subsequent increases in postsecondary degree or certificate attainment.[85]

SECTION 4: **Ensuring Financial Sustainability**

Last year, the College Promise Campaign launched a "Promise Playbook for Local Elected Officials," which detailed the basic steps to build a College Promise program. Building and designing a Promise, however, is just the first step. Promise programs carry the potential to have a long-lasting and meaningful impact on their community, but require significant financial investment and sustained operations for the future. Unfortunately, some programs end up going inactive, usually because they have used up an initial pool of funds and/or lack sufficiently strong leadership to secure ongoing financial support. In this section of *Keeping the College Promise,* we go deeper into a key aspect of Promise: what actions are survey respondents taking to ensure financial sustainability.

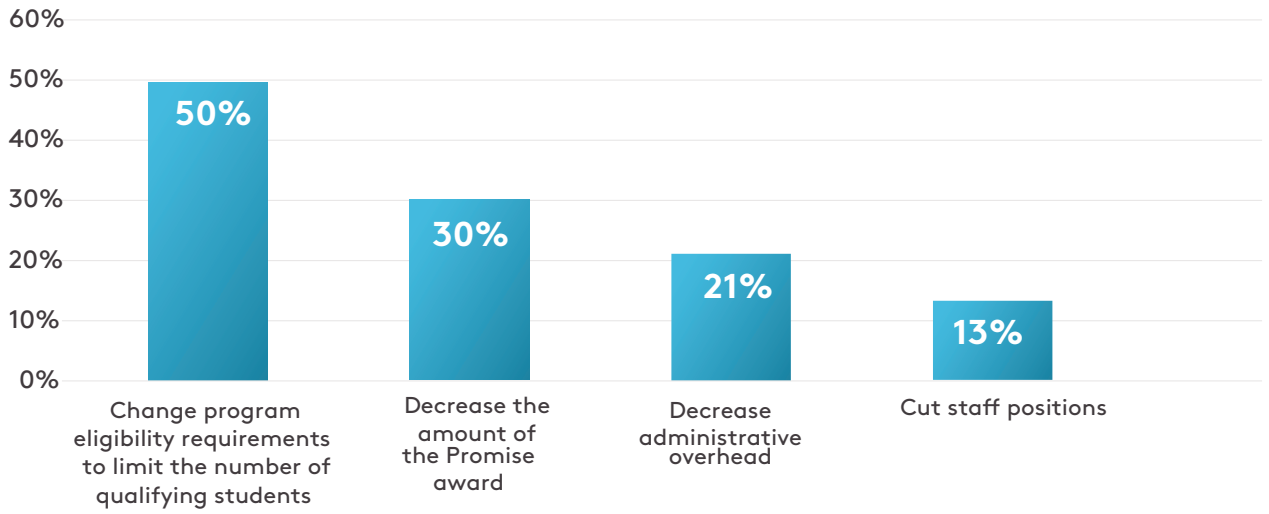
The previous sections of this Playbook have reviewed how to estimate the costs of a Promise program based on your desired program features and described potential revenue streams that can be utilized in order to cover all of your anticipated costs. But a truly sustainable Promise should engage in financial planning not only in the design phase, but throughout program implementation and management. While 61% of survey respondents indicated that there was enough College Promise funding to meet community needs,[86] 50% of survey respondents indicated they had financial sustainability concerns and another 27% were unsure whether financial sustainability would be an issue or not.[87] It is important that College Promise leaders identify financial sustainability as a central goal early on, and implement policies and strategies for continuous improvement to achieve sustainability.

A central tool for continuous improvement of College Promise programs will be effective program management and evaluation. Over 80% of survey respondents collected metrics for at least Promise student enrollment, retention, and completion.[88] By building in program evaluation from the very start, it becomes possible to identify not only how effective a program is, but also any areas of improvement or potential causes for concern. One resource for evaluation is a Promise Monitoring and Evaluation Framework[89] that provides a list of indicators that Promise communities can track. Especially with regards to monetary issues, it is essential to address problems as early as possible, as any interruptions in services or funding streams can be detrimental to both stakeholder and student confidence and make future funding acquisition more difficult.

We asked College Promise programs if they had made programmatic adjustments based on financial constraints. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that they have not made any adjustments, but of the 37% of programs[90] that did make changes, the changes primarily affected students.[91] Respondents were able to indicate other cuts, which included cuts to student benefits or supports, indicating that fewer students receive less support when a Promise program is not financially sustainable.

If it is not possible to raise all the funds needed to sustainably fund your desired College Promise program features or design from the outset, a good option would be to start with a pilot program or a more limited program as a proof of concept. A good example of an "inactive" College Promise program is the 13th Year Promise at South Seattle Community College. Established in 2008 as a last-dollar Promise scholarship for area high school students, the 13th Year program was eventually subsumed by a city-wide Promise initiative in 2018: the Seattle Promise.[92]

Q38. WHAT ADJUSTMENTS HAS YOUR PROGRAM MADE BECAUSE OF FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS?



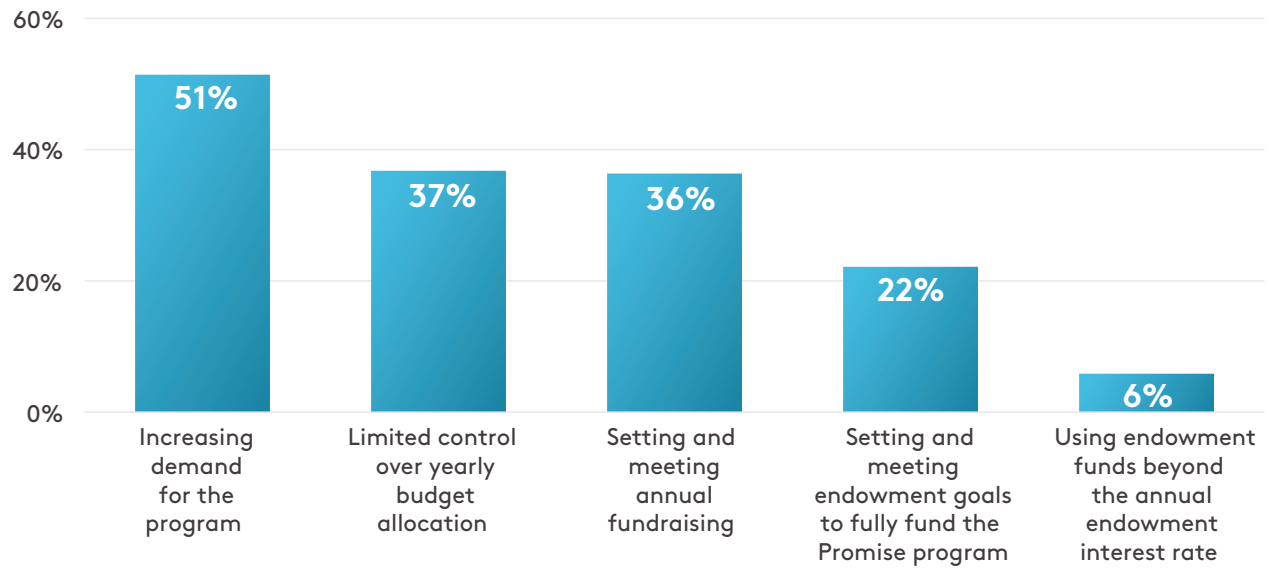
Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Of the 43% of respondents who reported "Other," "Modified supports or benefits" was a common example cited.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=45. Response rate=34% (6%=Missing, 60%=Skip due to Q37 response of "No").

Another option is to draft a strategy for scaling (e.g., consider implementing a maturity model), outlining key features that can be added and then scaled over time. Building a Promise with an expectation of growth and maturation is preferable to funding a more full-fledged Promise for a handful of years and then closing the program. This strategy also provides time to adjust to mistakes and develop stakeholder support. A "failed" Promise program not only fails students, but it will also fail to inspire a significant college-going mentality in the community and catalyze long-term, systemwide changes in existing educational structures, both of which are the intended benefits of the College Promise. Slowly scaling up a College Promise also allows the early years of a program's implementation to focus on generating initial outcomes as well as identifying and counteracting any miscalculations or unforeseen issues. Not only will this give programs some leeway in funding and time to mitigate should problems arise, it could generate data that encourages future investment or continued funding for the College Promise.

A major challenge some Promises have been forced to address is underestimating the need in their community and realizing after a program has been marketed and launched, that their projected budgets are insufficient to achieve their goals. Programs such as the statewide Oregon Promise[93] and Free City (San Francisco) have had to run deficits, tighten eligibility restrictions, reduce the Promise award, or cap the number of students served or credits eligible for the Promise, all of which can ultimately lessen the potential impact of a program and can undermine a community's faith in a Promise.[94]

Overall, nearly all College Promise programs, regardless of service area or administrative structure, indicated that the biggest sustainability challenges arose from increased student demand for the Promise. Additional responses included limited control over yearly budgets (i.e., externally set budgets), and trouble setting and meeting annual fundraising goals.[95]

Q35. WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES THAT YOUR PROGRAM FACES?



Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Eighteen percent of respondents reported "Other," with "Anticipated tuition cost increases" cited as an example.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=91. Response rate=68%.

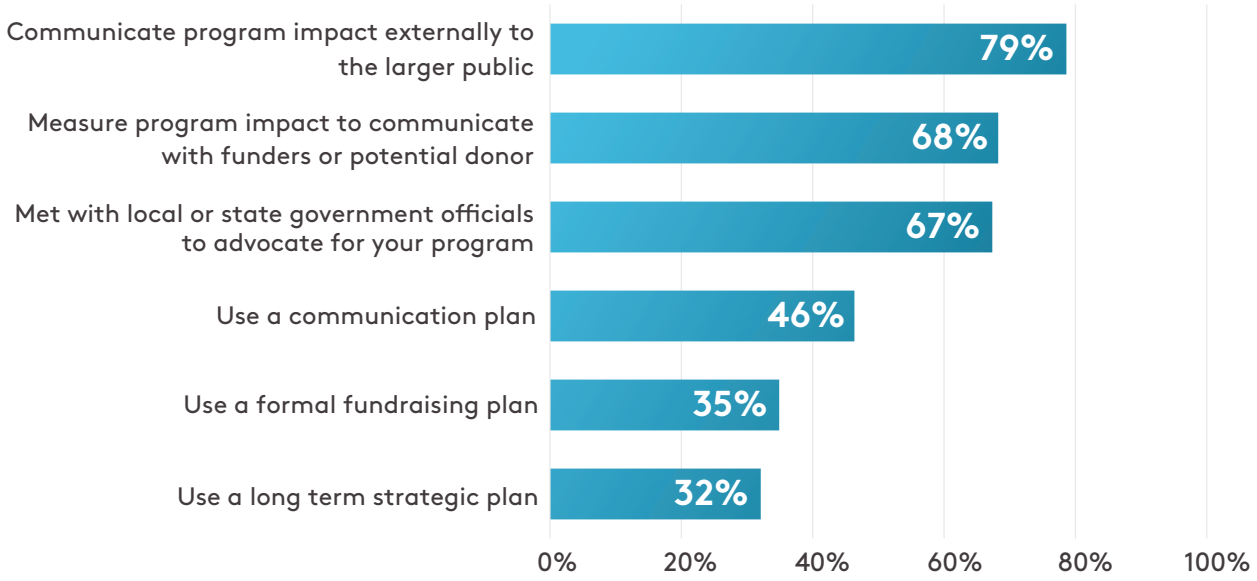
There are strategies programs can pursue to address their funding concerns and help ensure financial sustainability. A key strategy would involve examining the emerging research and evidence base of Promise, and the best practices (e.g., providing student supports, scaling evidence-based models like CUNY's ASAP[96]) for Promise student success. Through reviewing the research and evidence on Promise, programs can more accurately estimate student enrollment, persistence and success. From this work, Promise programs can develop long-term strategic plans to guide their fundraising and communications efforts. Ultimately, Promise leaders have the responsibility and opportunity to ensure that student supports are sufficient, in addition to the Promise scholarships.

Over one-third of programs surveyed indicated they had limited control over their yearly budget and concerns about meeting annual fund-raising goals.[97] One strategy is to establish a large, stable, and committed revenue source such as a trust, a dedicated appropriation or tax-increment stream, or a gift offered in perpetuity from a foundation, corporation, or group of donors. Another strategy involves maintaining a dedicated fundraising staff

to continuously manage active revenue streams and pursue new donors and expanded avenues of funding. While the endowment strategy is certainly more stable and involves less administrative overhead, not every Promise will have the opportunity or resources to secure a single, large, guaranteed funding stream. Fortunately, 61% of Promise programs surveyed indicated that within their community, they were confident that there was sufficient funding available to achieve their Promise goals.[98]

Of the 39% of programs that did not believe there was sufficient funding, many had secured a significant pool of funds but anticipated that within a few years, their resources would run out. A sufficiently large initial investment, particularly one that will fully fund a program for a number of years, can help get a College Promise started and builds the opportunity for Promise leaders to attract additional potential donors and corporate sponsors. College Promise leaders must be proactive in seeking and securing ongoing funding. The best way to do so is to prepare a fundraising plan to be carried out by fundraising staff.

Q32. DOES YOUR PROGRAM PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS?

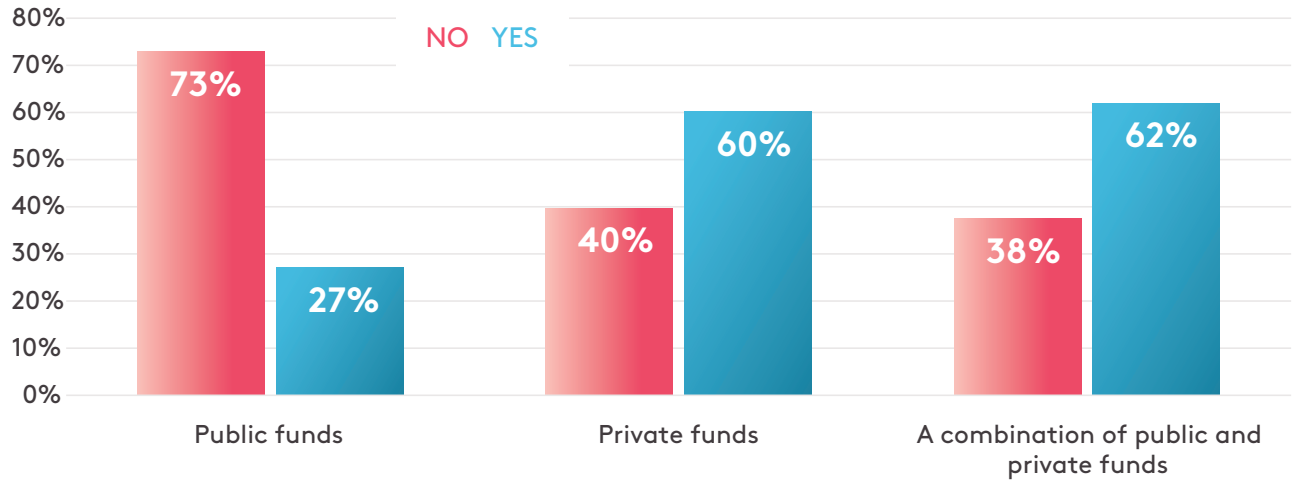


Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=106. Response rate=79%.

Nearly 80% of programs[99] indicated taking steps toward financial sustainability, but only about a third of those programs utilized long-term strategic plans or formal fundraising plans and fewer than half had established communications and or marketing plans to market the College Promise program to prospective students, and

inform the community about the Promise opportunity.. However, survey respondents indicated that they were developing a communications plan (73%), a long-term strategic plan (49%), and a funding-raising plan (46%).[100] The bulk of sustainability efforts went toward communicating impacts to the public, measuring program performance to share with funders, and meeting with government officials to advocate for a Promise program—all actions which are external facing and require some level of staffing and executive leadership for effective implementation. Half of surveyed programs indicated they had staff devoted specifically to fundraising.[101] The likelihood of a program having fundraising staff was closely aligned with the funding source—most privately funded programs had fundraising staff and most publicly funded programs did not.

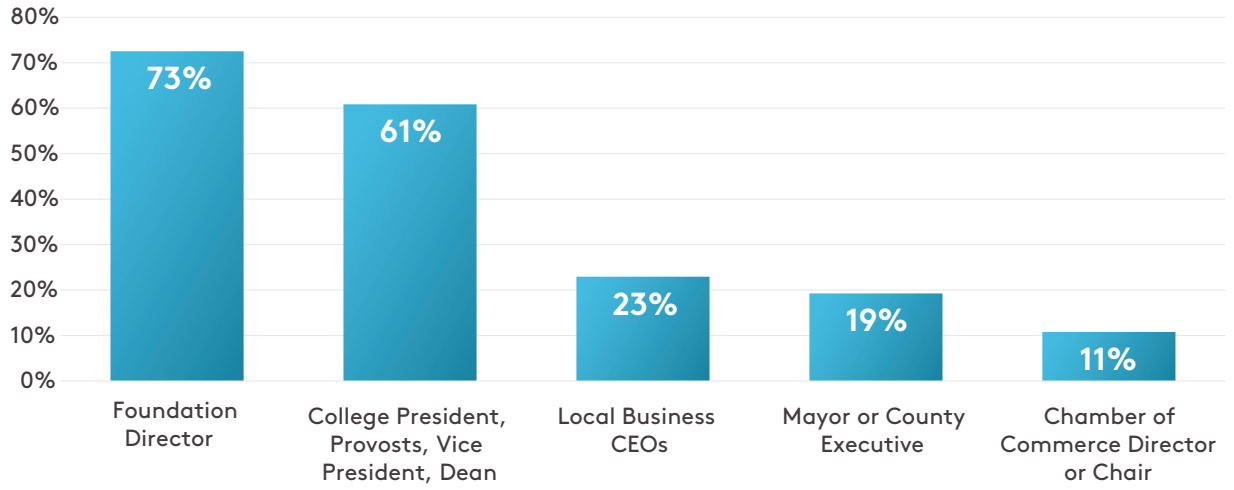
HOW DOES FUNDING SOURCE ALIGN WITH FUNDRAISING STAFFING? Q29BYQ23



Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=131. Response rate=98%.

Interestingly, while over half of College Promise programs indicated that they intended to use (52%)[102] and secure (60%)[103] corporate and foundation funding over the next fiscal year, only 39%[104] of respondents indicated that they plan to engage in local business fundraising but reported that local business CEOs or Chambers of Commerce are not as involved in the fundraising process as a Promise Foundation Director or College President.

Q30. WHO IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IS INVOLVED IN THE FUNDRAISING PROCESS FOR YOUR PROGRAM?



24% of respondents reported "Other" with Promise Leaders and Board of Directors as two examples cited.
Note: Respondents were given the option to Check All that Apply.
Source: College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey, ETS analysis of weighted data. Unweighted n=100. Response rate=75%.

Local business executives and Chambers of Commerce can be an overlooked and underutilized stakeholder resource that can help Promise programs build broad-based community support and long-term financial sustainability. As Promise programs consider and build their long-term strategic plans and set their fundraising goals to ensure financial sustainability, it is critically important to engage the local business community.

Two-thirds of programs utilize some sort of public funding stream; however, in order for many programs to become truly sustainable, they should be aware that publicly funded allocations are susceptible to being rescinded if local government administrations change, which can create uncertainty and instability. Short of legislating a tax-increment financial stream or guaranteed appropriation of public funds (i.e., an endowment), as states such as Michigan and Tennessee have done, the best way to ensure public money is reliably put toward a College Promise is to have strong community collaboration, stakeholder buy-in, and public-facing communications strategies. The state of Minnesota is an example of a lesson learned from a failed Promise pilot. Minnesota experimented with a statewide Promise program in 2016. Despite encouraging progression, retention, and credit accumulation data,[105] the pilot program failed to be sustained after two years because the program was confusing to students,[106] and there was insufficient stakeholder support and funding. Promoting a College Promise and its benefits heavily within a community and/or state not only improves the likelihood that eligible students will seek out and receive the Promise, but also encourages community members from business, education, government, nonprofits, and philanthropy to identify with and actively support what they see as *their* Promise program. By promoting a sense of ownership and pride in local residents and stakeholder groups, College Promise programs become an integral part of a community's identity and are much more resistant to shifts in political power or special interests.

SECTION 5: **Conclusion**

Hundreds of communities across the country have shown us that by leading and utilizing all the resources at their disposal, they are willing and able to make and keep the College Promise for our nation's students. The Promise model has scaled to the state level to address statewide educational access and attainment goals and workforce shortages. In order to truly capture all the benefits of a Promise, programs must be financially sustainable for the long run. While the initial cost of starting and keeping a Promise may seem like a challenge, the larger challenge is to our national economy, civic infrastructure, democratic society, and global position if we fail to act.

As most Promise scholarships are place-based in nature, no two programs are designed or funded in exactly the same way, but by gathering lessons learned from the ever-growing Promise movement, we can gain critical insights into the best paths to take toward financial sustainability. By securing the future of a program, a Promise becomes far more than a scholarship. It fulfills its namesake by becoming a *promise* to a community, state, and ultimately our entire nation that higher education is for everyone and that a degree or certificate is always accessible, affordable, and attainable.

College Promises to Keep is a foundational step to understanding the national landscape of the Promise movement, the students served, and how communities and states are administering, financing, and sustaining their Promise programs for the long term. As College Promise programs mature and scale, the College Promise Campaign looks forward to building upon these initial survey results.

The College Promise Campaign is eager to help new and established programs move forward to build and keep the College Promise for your region's students. We support new and emerging Promise programs and their leaders in the following ways:

- Connecting to the national network of College Promise leaders, experts, scholars, and practitioners.
- Providing research, advice, and support to plan, launch, expand, or improve a College Promise program.
- Identifying exemplars in Promise institutions, communities, and states to promote and improve the quality of the student experience, attainment rates, workforce preparedness, and community development.
- Working to engage education, business, government, philanthropy, non-profits, and student leaders to support and invest in local and/or statewide College Promise programs.
- Supporting digital and earned media coverage about the College Promise in local communities and states.

We invite you to reach out to our team for further advice or guidance to develop your College Promise program. You can access further information about Promise policy, research, tools, and information at CollegePromise.org.

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Most importantly, College Promise would like to thank the survey respondents that responded to our Financial Sustainability survey in the summer and fall of 2018.

APPENDIX A: **Methodology**

This section describes the assessment design, sampling, data collection, and data cleaning for the financial sustainability survey. The survey was created and analyzed by the College Promise Campaign in collaboration with ETS to describe the national landscape of Promise funding acquisition and utilization, and enable both national level comparison as well as program level evaluation of financial sustainability.

Assessment Design

As the survey tool aimed to assess the long-term financial sustainability of Promise programs across the country, the data to be collected spanned retroactive information on program creation, current information on program design, and prospective information on administrative intentions and planned actions. This survey questions were written to cover five central areas of content:

- **Program Information:** General information including program name and location, area served, year of start, and description of stakeholders who were involved in program design.
- **Who Receives the Promise Award:** Questions about the characteristics of students who receive the award and student eligibility requirements for the Promise award.
- **What Does the Promise Fund?** How Promise program funds are used and what they pay for across three domains: the Promise financial award, other student support services, and program operational expenses such as administrative costs.
- **How Is the Promise Funded?** Questions on what funding streams are utilized to pay for the Promise and how program budgets are determined.
- **Sustainability Efforts:** Information to determine a program's financial sustainability, including plans to secure additional funding, efforts made to ensure long-term success, and self-assessment of future financial concerns.

Survey Sample Methodology

The initial adjusted sample size is 225 Promise programs. Before the start of the survey, as of May 2018, the College Promise Campaign was tracking 209 programs that we had verified, but over the course of the survey, we received responses for 16 further programs that we had not been aware of or that had just started. Altogether, we considered the known breadth of programs at the time to be 225.

Of those 225 programs, we were able to initially obtain valid email contacts for 187 programs as well as 10 email contacts that were defunct. The questions were administered via a Google survey, which was emailed out to the 177 valid email contacts with instructions to provide the requested information or forward the survey to the Promise affiliated person most likely have the financial knowledge necessary to fill out the survey. The respondents were given two weeks to respond, after which our first round of follow-up calls and emails began.

Two more mass email batches were sent out in early June and then early July, with continuous follow-up calls to non-respondents between each batch.

Over the course of the survey follow-up, our survey was widely shared throughout the Promise community, and as a result we received responses from 25 programs that were not in the group of 177, which we initially reached out to by email. This group of 25 programs was made up of the 16 programs previously mentioned, which we had not been aware of at the start of survey administration, as well as nine programs that we could not initially find an active email for but managed to reach through phone calls or community sharing of the survey. Ultimately, our survey garnered 147 responses.

Among the responses we received, 12 were duplicates in which multiple individuals filled out the survey for a single Promise program. To resolve the duplicates, additional follow-up phone calls to the respondents were made to verify which response would have the most accurate information, and the less accurate response was removed. With the removal of duplicates and the removal of one incomplete response, we had a total of 134 unique responses.

The final response rate of all programs the survey was distributed to, including the programs that received the survey through phone follow-up or community sharing. The weighted response rate for all known programs at the start of the survey, with programs that could not be reliably contacted counted as non-respondents, was 63%.

APPENDIX B: **Survey Instrument**

College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey

Welcome to the College Promise Financial Sustainability Survey!

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important survey to understand the financial sustainability models of existing College Promise programs. As a College Promise program leader, you have unique insight into the daily operations of Promise programs.

We will be gaining your experience and knowledge about funding sources, allocation decisions, and plans for ensuring long-term viability. Your insights will inform the knowledge base to strengthen the financial sustainability of the more than 200 College Promise programs underway across the nation as well as informing existing and upcoming statewide College Promise initiatives.

This survey should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete, assuming your familiarity with some of the financial details. Be assured that all answers you provide will be kept confidential.

* Required

Email address *

Respondent Information
Please tell us about yourself
First and Last Name *
Position (Title and Organization) *

Program Information
1. Program Name *

2. Program State * *Mark only one oval. (50 State drop-down)*

3. Program City

4. Area served by Promise Program* *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ State
- ❏ County or Counties (list below)
- ❏ City or Cities (list below)
- ❏ School District(s)(list below)
- ❏ Community Colleges(s)(list below)
- ❏ University or Universities (list below)
- ❏ Other: Please List

5. In what year did your program begin providing the Promise financial award/scholarship? *
Mark only one oval. (1985-2018)

6. Who informed the design of your program? Select all partners that apply
Check all that apply.

- ❏ Local elected officials
- ❏ State officials
- ❏ K-12 educational leaders
- ❏ Higher Ed. leaders
- ❏ Business leaders
- ❏ Philanthropic leaders
- ❏ Other Promise leaders
- ❏ Other:

7. What local and/or state College Promise programs did you draw from in your design meetings?

Who Receives the Promise Award
This section of the survey asks about both characteristics of students who receive the award and student eligibility requirements for the Promise award.

8. What are the main characteristics of the students in your program? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Our program serves the general population within our service area
- ❏ Our program primarily serves low-income students
- ❏ Our program primarily serves underserved/minority students
- ❏ Our program primarily serves first-generation students
- ❏ Our program serves any student who meets the residency and other eligibility requirements
- ❏ Other:

9. What populations are eligible for your program? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Current High School Students (i.e., Promise award covers dual enrollment)
- ❏ Recent High School Graduates
- ❏ Adult Students (i.e., non-traditional students, veterans, and/or the re-entry population)
- ❏ Other:

10. Does your program have any of the following eligibility requirements?
Check all that apply.

- ❏ Administrative Requirements (i.e., postsecondary entry time limits, completion of the FAFSA)
- ❏ Academic Requirements (i.e., minimum GPA or course-work requirements)
- ❏ Behavior Requirements (i.e., participation in community service, school attendance thresholds, absence of school discipline record)
- ❏ Family-income requirements (i.e., program limited to students whose family's make less than a specified amount)
- ❏ No eligibility requirements beyond student residency within program service area.
- ❏ Other:

What Does Your Promise Program Fund?
This section of the survey explores how Promise program funds are used and what they pay for across three domains. These include the Promise financial award, other student support services, and program operational expenses, including administrative costs.

Promise Financial Award

11. How many students per year receive a Promise award through your program?

12. How much is the average annual Promise award per student?

13. What type of funding does your program provide?* *Check one.*

- ❏ First Dollar (funds are fully awarded regardless of student's other financial aid—including Pell Grants, state aid, institutional aid)
- ❏ Last Dollar (funds are awarded to fill unmet tuition needs, after student's financial aid is taken into account)
- ❏ Last Dollar Plus (last dollar aid with supplemental funding for college costs beyond tuition and fees)

14. For how many semesters at a postsecondary institution does your program offer financial assistance? *Check one.*

- ❏ One semester
- ❏ Two semesters
- ❏ Three semesters
- ❏ Four semesters
- ❏ More than four semesters

Other Student Supports

15. Does your program offer additional services or student supports beyond the Promise award? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No

16. Which additional services or student supports are offered? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Academic counseling
- ❏ Career counseling (i.e., use of guided pathways defining clear paths through college coursework, degree completion, and careers)
- ❏ Mentoring
- ❏ Assistance with textbooks
- ❏ Assistance with transportation
- ❏ Emergency grant assistance
- ❏ Food pantry
- ❏ College success building activities
- ❏ Community building and peer support activities
- ❏ College orientation or Summer Bridge programming
- ❏ Academic tutoring and/or study skills support
- ❏ Laptop Grant or free loan per semester enrolled
- ❏ Other:

17. What is the annual approximate cost of the support services funded by your program?

18. Does your program directly pay for these additional services or student supports? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes, we pay for all the services.
- ❏ No, we rely on partnerships and referrals for additional services.
- ❏ Combination; we fund some of the supports directly but rely on partnerships and referrals for others.

Program Operations and Administration

19. Operational expenses support the daily maintenance and administration your program. What is the annual approximate cost of your program's operational and administrative expenses?

20. Is your program responsible for paying for its infrastructure and operational overhead? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No, our overhead is offered in-kind as part of our parent organization or external funder.
- ❏ Combination; our program directly pays for some, but not all, of our administrative overhead.

21. What are your top three program operational and administrative expenses? (Please select only three) *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Staff salaries and benefits
- ❏ Cost of space (rent or mortgage expenses)
- ❏ Office equipment and supplies
- ❏ Utilities and services
- ❏ Fundraising efforts

22. How many annual full-time staff members does your program have?

Annual part-time staff? _____
Seasonal full-time staff? _____
Seasonal part-time staff? _____

How Is Your Program Funded

This section of the survey explores how your program is funded and how your budget is determined.

23. How is your program funded? * *Check one.*

- ❏ Public Funds
- ❏ Private Funds
- ❏ A combination of public and private funds (See follow up below)

If a combination, please list the breakdown of funding sources by percent private and percent public:

24. Does your program receive funding from any of the following funding sources? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Local government funds (specify below)
- ❏ State funds (specify below)
- ❏ Other private funds (e.g., individual donors, corporations, LLCs, etc.) (specify below)
- ❏ Endowments (e.g., interest used to augment funds)
- ❏ Foundation funds (e.g., community, state, college, or family foundations)
- ❏ Public-private partnership funds (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, economic development initiative, etc.)

Please specify which local government funds your program receives. *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ No local government funding
- ❏ City funds
- ❏ County funds
- ❏ Sales tax
- ❏ Property tax
- ❏ Levy
- ❏ Other:

Please specify which state funds your program receives. *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ No state funds
- ❏ Appropriations
- ❏ Lottery funds
- ❏ Other:

Please specify which private funds your program receives. *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ No private funds
- ❏ Individual donors
- ❏ Small business donors (i.e., LLCs)
- ❏ Corporate donors
- ❏ Other:

25. Is your program budget determined externally? For instance, is your annual budget limited to money your funder allocates to the program? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No
- ❏ Somewhat

If your budget is somewhat determined externally, please explain further:

Sustainability Efforts

This section of the survey asks about your program's financial sustainability, including your plans, efforts made, and any concerns for the future.

26. What financial resources does your program intend to use over the next fiscal year? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Local government allocated funds
- ❏ State government allocated funds
- ❏ Designated Public Endowment
- ❏ Designated Private Endowment
- ❏ Foundation/Corporate grant funds
- ❏ Money from our fundraising efforts
- ❏ Other:

27. What financial resources does your program plan to try to secure over the next fiscal year? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Local government allocated funds
- ❏ State government allocated funds
- ❏ Designated Public Endowment
- ❏ Designated Private Endowment
- ❏ Foundation/Corporate grant proposals
- ❏ Year-round fundraising
- ❏ Other:

28. What types of fundraising do you engage in or plan to engage in? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Local business fundraising
- ❏ College fundraising
- ❏ Community event fundraising
- ❏ Community foundation fundraising
- ❏ State Foundation/Corporate fundraising
- ❏ Do not utilize fundraising
- ❏ Other:

29. Does your program have staff devoted to fundraising and grant writing? *Check one..*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No
- ❏ If yes, who is responsible for fundraising at your program?*

30. Who in the local community is involved in the fundraising process for your program? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ College President/Provosts/Vice President/Dean
- ❏ Mayor or County Executive
- ❏ Chamber of Commerce Director or Chair
- ❏ Local Business CEO(s)
- ❏ Foundation Director(s)
- ❏ Other:

31. Has your program developed any of the following: *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ A long-term strategic plan
- ❏ A formal fundraising plan
- ❏ A communication plan

32. Does your program participate in any of the following sustainability efforts? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Use a long-term strategic plan
- ❏ Use a formal fundraising plan
- ❏ Use a communication plan (i.e., to ensure donors are aware of giving opportunities)
- ❏ Measure program impact to communicate with funders or potential donor
- ❏ Communicate program impact externally to the larger public
- ❏ Met with local or state government officials to advocate for your program

33. What metrics, if any, does your program use to measure success and impact? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ No metrics collected
- ❏ Access (Promise specific enrollment)
- ❏ Persistence/retention amongst Promise students
- ❏ Completion amongst Promise students
- ❏ Affordability and debt reduction amongst Promise students
- ❏ Employment outcomes amongst Promise students
- ❏ Other:

34. Does your program have financial sustainability concerns? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No (Skip to question 36)
- ❏ Maybe

35. What are the biggest financial sustainability challenges that your program faces? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ a. Setting and meeting annual fundraising
- ❏ b. Limited control over yearly budget allocation (i.e., budget set externally)
- ❏ c. Setting and meeting endowment goals to fully fund the Promise proggram
- ❏ d. Using endowment funds beyond the annual endowment interest rate
- ❏ e. Increasing demand for the program
- ❏ Other:

If overuse of endowment funds is a challenge, please list annual interest rate and endowment percent distribution.

36. Is there an adequate supply of Promise funding to meet the demand in your community? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No

If no, please explain and describe the gap to reach full funding based on anticipated demand:

37. Has your program made adjustments based on financial constraints? *Check one..*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No (skip to Question 39)

38. What adjustments has your program made because of financial constraints? *Check all that apply.*

- ❏ Decrease the amount of the Promise award
- ❏ Change program eligibility requirements to limit the number of qualifying students
- ❏ Cut staff positions
- ❏ Decrease administrative overhead
- ❏ Other:

39. Would you or someone from your program be interested in participating in follow-up discussions regarding College Promise financing and sustainability? *Check one.*

- ❏ Yes
- ❏ No

40. Who is the best point of contact to find out more information regarding your program?

Name and Title:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY

Your answers will be used to help college Promise programs increase their financial sustainability and improve program designs and operations for successful implementation. We will send you a report of the findings once they are collected and analyzed.

APPENDIX C: **Case Studies**

Recognizing that College Promise programs are uniquely designed for the community they are built to serve, the College Promise Campaign has assembled four diverse case studies to describe financially sustainable College Promise programs.

In selecting and drafting these case studies, we considered only programs that responded to our Financial Sustainability survey, and in particular programs that consistently answered questions on how their College Promise program is funded (Questions 23-25) and their ongoing efforts to ensure Financial Sustainability (Questions 26-28).

Specifically, our selection hinged on the responses to a few key questions related to keeping the College Promise. First, the selected case studies responded that that they had not made any programmatic adjustments (i.e., answered "No" to Question 37) to their Promise. Second, since many programs are concerned with increasing demand associated with the College Promise, the respondents indicated that they felt that there was an adequate supply of funding (Question 36) for their program. Third, only one program, the University of Washington's Husky Promise, indicated that they *might* have financial sustainability concerns (Question 34) due to uncertainty with federal and state financial aid award levels (Question 35).

While the case studies have different funding structures, institutional partnerships, service area and other programmatic designs, the model programs engaged in activities to sustain their activities over the long-term. The featured College Promise programs collect data related to their Promise students (Question 33) to communicate impact to funders and the general public. In addition, they engage in long-term planning activities—developing a communication and/or a fundraising plan—to sustain their Promise (Question 32).

University of Washington Husky Promise (Institution-based)

The University of Washington's Husky Promise coordinates with state and federal student aid, thereby generating opportunities for interesting, layered financial structures that increase affordability for students.

Program Design

The Husky Promise builds upon and extends Washington's commitment to make college affordable. The State Need Grant (SNG), established in 1969 and renamed the Washington College Grant in 2019 (hereafter WCG), is the primary need-based student aid grant. The WCG is a first dollar need-based grant; over 90,000 students are eligible for the grant. The WCG maximum awards are related to tuition and fees by institutional sector[107]and are determined annually. The maximum award for a student attending the University of Washington in academic year 2019-20 is $10,748.

In addition to a generous need-based student grant, Washington has an early Promise initiative: the College Bound Scholarship. This statewide college access initiative targets low-income students while they are still enrolled in the K-12 system. The program starts with an early commitment of state funding to reduce information and financial barriers that would otherwise prevent students from considering higher education as a possibility. Throughout high school, a variety of campaigns exist to engage students and ultimately assist them in enrolling in postsecondary education. The program partners with other state financial aid to cover average tuition, some additional fees and a small book allowance ($500) for income-eligible students.[108] The award is determined annually and is related to WCG. This program enhances the WCG by covering any remaining unmet need related to tuition and fees, thereby allowing other aid (Pell Grants, institutional, or private aid) to be applied to the other expenses related to cost of attendance.[109] An annual cohort of about 20,000 students are eligible to receive this early and enhanced Promise award.

Finally, Washington state law requires that public institutions allocate 3.5% of their tuition and fee revenue to need-based financial aid.[110] The Husky Promise builds upon a strong need-based student financial aid foundation established by the state and allows the University of Washington to support low- and middle-income students.

Administration

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) administers both WCG and the College Bound Scholarship. In administering state financial aid programs, WSAC leverages state resources and internal infrastructure to improve management, budget forecasting, reporting, and communications networks amongst stakeholders (state, industry, schools, and the general public).

At the University of Washington, the Husky Promise is a last dollar Promise which uses institutional funds to make up the difference if state and federal grants do not fully cover the cost of tuition and fees. Pell or Washington College Grant residents who submit a FAFSA (or Washington Application for State Aid) and pursue their first bachelor's degree at any of the three campuses at the University of Washington (Seattle, Tacoma, and Bothell) are eligible for the Husky Promise. In order to maintain a scholarship, students must be enrolled full-time (12 credit hours), maintain satisfactory academic performance, and meet a priority filing deadline. Students are eligible to continue receiving the scholarship for up to 12 quarters (or four years, excluding summer quarters).[111]

Funding

Washington's State Need Grant (i.e., Washington College Grant) serves 68,000 students and costs the state $299 million for academic years 2017-2018.[112] But these figures underrepresent the demand for the grant; since 2009, the state financial aid has been underfunded. Increased enrollments during the Great Recession and when state budgets were tight led to underfunding; approximately 25% of eligible state need grant recipients are wait-listed and do not receive the award. The


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state has prioritized College Bound students for its state grant,[113] but an estimated 20,000 eligible students did not receive the grant. The shortfall of state funds reduced college affordability for eligible Pell and state need grant students and increased the demand for the Husky Promise.

In 2019, the state of Washington addressed this insufficient funding challenge for the state need grant through the Washington College Grant. The governor proposed eliminating the waitlist, fully-funding the state need grant and making it a guarantee. A broad coalition of businesses, higher education leaders, state legislators, and philanthropy made and kept a Promise to low-income Washington students. The Washington College Promise coalition[114] supported increased funding through a tax on companies that employ highly skilled workers (e.g., Microsoft and Amazon),[115] arguing that the initiative will help the state achieve its 70% college attainment rate and fill the 740,000 job openings expected in the state.[116] The tax is expected to raise $1 billion over four years.[117] The funding goes into a trust meant to supplement current federal, state, and local funding and revenue raised can only be used mostly for higher education activities, including state financial aid. The state legislature passed the Workforce Education Investment Account,[118] guaranteeing that the lowest income students ($50,000 or less) will have free tuition with partial awards for families making $90,000 or more.

Summary

The Husky Promise served students that were underserved by the state need grant. But the passage of Workforce Education Investment Account fulfills a promise: it addresses the shortfall of state financial aid funding, guarantees free tuition and fees for the lowest income students, and expands student eligibility.[119] The funding is meant to supplement—not supplant—existing funding for students, creating opportunities for the Husky Promise to further improve college affordability, reduce college attainment equity gaps and student loan debt for low-income students.

West Sacramento Promise (City/County)

The West Sacramento Promise program in California provides two years of fee-free postsecondary education to city residents. The West Sacramento College Promise is part of a broader program called the West Sacramento Home Run. The Home Run program is a cradle to career initiative that starts with universal preschool and culminates with the College Promise program.

Program Design

The Home Run initiative is a comprehensive program that seeks to "strengthen early childhood education opportunities, drive work skills acquisition, increase college attendance and completion, and improve workforce readiness" by progressing children of the city through a series of bases.[120]

First base includes universal access to preschool by providing high-quality yet affordable child care and preschool; young children with universal access to high-quality preschool have positive educational outcomes throughout their lives. Children who attend a certified high-quality preschool and later enroll in Washington Unified School District kindergarten become eligible to open a city's college savings account, with a seed investment of $50 from the city to promote a college-going mindset for the child and family.[121]

The second base for the Home Run initiative includes opportunities for high school juniors and seniors to participate in paid internships in the college and career pathways program.[122] These paid internships expose students to potential career options, high wage and high demand jobs, and gives them the opportunity to earn "digital badges." Digital badges show a student's skills, abilities, and proficiencies that may be hard to capture in a traditional classroom setting. In addition, local employers have "skin-in-the-game" to ensure they are developing an educated workforce as they are able to design the "badges" with content they believe is required for the jobs available.

The West Sacramento Promise is the third base: a last dollar scholarship that provides two years of fee-free postsecondary education[123] to graduates of the Washington Unified School District who enroll at one of the qualifying colleges.[124] To assess financial need, a student must file a FAFSA (or CA DREAM Act) to determine if they qualify for Federal Pell Grant as well as California College Promise grant monies. West Sacramento funds are distributed to the students after these other financial aid monies are taken into account; the average West Sacramento Promise award to students is approximately $1,200.

The West Sacramento Promise program is geared toward improving college affordability at the local community college for the general population of the city. Students must be recent graduates (graduated within six months) of the Washington Unified School District to be eligible for application and must be residents of West Sacramento. Additionally, students must enroll full-time (at least 12 units/semester) at one of Sacramento City's three campuses to be eligible for the Promise. The Promise leverages institutional partnerships and resources to provide in-kind student support services.

Administration

Three employees are dedicated to supporting and administering the West Sacramento Promise through the Mayor's office. The program is a partnership between the city, Washington Unified School District, and Sacramento City College and is coordinated centrally through the Mayor's office. To ensure a seamless integration, there are three dedicated employees administering a cradle-to-career program. West Sacramento Home Run and Promise relies on a communication plan to ensure all partners are up to date on programmatic details.

Mayor Cabaldon was talking about free college tuition years before he had a formal plan or the funding to pay for a Promise. Cabaldon, as the programs champion, would publicly stress the importance of post-secondary education as a way to promote economic vitality for the city itself as well as its residents. Through various public forums, widespread communication about the Promise and Home Run started to become a

©Courtesy of West Sacramento Home Run

movement and its brand was to bring people "home." Bringing people home entails giving residents the opportunity to have access to high-quality education all the way through postsecondary education, which should result in college completion. Having an educated population should allow residents to obtain high-paying, high-skilled jobs and make the city an attractive hub for employers and industry.

Funding

A key feature of any Promise program is that it needs to be stable and available year over year. A stable funding opportunity for the Home Run and Promise program arose in 2016, when a state sales tax was about to expire. West Sacramento voters supported an extension of the tax at the city level, resulting in a net zero increase in tax burden to residents of the city.

The 0.25% sales tax extension (Measure E) passed by city residents has no expiration and will bring in about $3.3 million annually;[125] an estimated $400,000 will be set aside for the Promise program specifically.[126] [127] The Promise funding will go to providing two years of fee-free community college for eligible residents, and in the fall of 2020, the program will also provide a scholarship incentive of up to $1,000 to complete certain prerequisite programs and digital badge requirements.[128]

Summary

West Sacramento has a comprehensive "cradle to career" education program for its residents. As of Summer 2018, West Sacramento awarded the Promise to 66 residents in its opening year and served over 164 students in Fall 2018. The Home Run and Promise programs have a stable revenue source through the passage of Measure E and can take advantage of additional state College Promise resources (AB19 & AB2) for their residents. The city leverages central administration and communications plans to coordinate their Promise. The next step for the program will be further evaluation of its successes, challenges, and implementation strategies, with the goal to integrate all of the Home Run bases to maximize college completion. By funding and making good on their Promise, city residents are creating a college-going culture for West Sacramento with a sustainable funding stream they collectively enabled for their city.

Tennessee Promise (State)

The Tennessee Promise provides free tuition and mandatory fees for recent Tennessee high school graduates who meet eligibility criteria, complete a multistep process and attend a qualifying institution. The Tennessee Promise was the first universal statewide program to be implemented, and through its first three cohorts, it has benefitted over 51,000 recent high school graduates in the state.[129] As Governor Haslam stated in his 2015 State of the State address, "a Promise is not a Promise unless it is financially sustainable" and this case study will examine state laws and financing associated with designing and sustaining the Tennessee Promise.

Program Design

The Tennessee Promise is a last-dollar scholarship for all recent high school graduates in Tennessee who attend one of the state's 13 community colleges, 27 TCATs, or any other public or private colleges that offer an eligible associate degree program.[130] Being a last-dollar scholarship means that all other sources of gift aid must be applied to the student's tuition and fees before the Promise scholarship is awarded. In Tennessee, that means that whatever the Federal Pell Grant, Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship, and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award doesn't cover for a student's tuition and mandatory fees, the Promise Scholarship will provide the remaining cost.

Additionally, students in the Tennessee Promise have robust support services such as summer bridge, relationship coaching, and weekly communications to students and their parents. Mentorship is a key feature of Tennessee Promise; students are required to meet with a mentor who will help them with the application and enrollment process for financial aid and college. They serve as role models, supporters, and motivators for the students, which is equally important, since the application process can be cumbersome. Having someone that knows the ropes and can also show genuine interest in the student at the individual level is one of the hallmarks of the Tennessee Promise and it is one of the reasons for the higher than average retention rate of Promise students as opposed to non-Promise students. Tennessee is the volunteer state; another requirement of the Tennessee Promise is that students receiving the Promise must engage in eight hours of community service per academic semester. This novel idea gets Promise students engaged in their communities, and since inception 2,200,000 volunteer hours were logged.[131] Both the mentorship and the community service programs are operated by nonprofits who are partners with the Promise Program and its administrative agency, the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC). The nonprofits that partner with the Promise include tnAchieves (which the Promise is modeled after), and the Ayers Foundation.

To remain eligible for the Promise from year to year, students must complete community service requirements, file a new FAFSA every academic year, and also maintain a satisfactory 2.0 grade point average. A student will continue to be eligible for the Promise scholarship until they have either earned their degree or credential or have completed five semesters at their qualifying institution, whichever comes first.[132]

In 2017, in an attempt to get the state closer to its "Drive to 55" goal, the state created a program for adult students called Tennessee Reconnect. Building off of a 2015 TCAT Reconnect initiative, which saw 70% certificate or degree completion rates,[133] the state expanded the program and saw 17.4%[134]enrollment increases at community colleges. The Reconnect program is also a last dollar scholarship and offers counseling and advising to promote degree completion among adult learners in Tennessee. Tennessee Reconnect can be used at state's 13 community colleges, 27 TCATs, or any other public or private colleges that offer an eligible associate degree program.[135] In addition, students can attend part-time (six credit hours) and Reconnect highlights key features—competency-based education and prior learning assessments—to appeal to adults and decrease the time-to-degree.

Administration

The Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) is the administrative agency for the Promise and Reconnect programs. TSAC administers over 20 different

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financial aid programs in Tennessee and has the broad focus of increasing the number of state residents who attain a secondary degree or credential.[136] In addition, the agency develops and administers state-level policies that support the Drive to 55 initiative. Tennessee used the implementation of its Tennessee Promise as an opportunity to rethink and update its remediation model and financial aid offerings, which subsequently set the stage to make Promise sustainable and more affordable. It reformed its HOPE scholarship for students at both the two-year and four-year institutions, which reduced the direct costs of the Tennessee Promise program.[137] In addition, the bipartisan statewide master plan and policy framework—the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010[138]—eases college transitions and transfers through a state articulation and transfer agreement between public two-year and four-year institutions in Tennessee.[139]

With respect to program-level administration, there are certain timelines that students must abide by in order to be eligible for the Promise, which are outlined in the table below (Table 1).[140] In the spring prior to enrollment, one of the partner organizations (tnAchieves or the Ayers Foundation) will host a mandatory meeting that the prospective Promise students must attend and apply to one of the Tennessee Promise eligible institutions. Upon completion of the eight hours of community service, Promise students are eligible to enroll at a qualifying institution.

TABLE 1: TENNESSEE PROMISE DEADLINES AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION (2017)

Deadlines	Number of Students
Apply for Tennessee Promise (November 1st)	57,660
Complete and file the FAFSA (February 1st)	45,744
Complete community service hours (July 5th)	22,718
Enroll in participating institution	16,206

Notes: TN Promise is mostly used at public colleges, but students can also use Promise at several private 4-year colleges with associate programs.[141]

Funding

Although the Tennessee Promise is statewide in scope in its current form, it started at a much smaller scale in Knox County Tennessee in 2008. The program, knoxAchieves, was a privately funded with the support of the local business community as a county-level last-dollar scholarship that provided free tuition and fees to community and technical colleges for recent high school graduates. The Knoxville mayor who helped start knoxAchieves, Bill Haslam (R), was elected governor of Tennessee in 2010. With Governor Haslam's support of postsecondary education and alongside prominent business leaders, he expanded the regional knoxAchieves scholarship into a statewide program. In 2014, Haslam proclaimed a "Drive to 55" campaign to the residents of Tennessee, which challenged the state to have 55% of its working adults equipped with a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2025. The signature program of "Drive to 55" was the expansion of Tennessee Achieves from 27 counties in 2014, to a statewide (95 counties) "Tennessee Promise" program with the first cohort of students entering in 2015.

The Tennessee Promise was made possible by an investment in postsecondary education at the state level. In 2014, when the program was gearing up for its launch, the state approved the "Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act of 2014". This act not only defined the scholarship and its eligibility requirements, but also transferred over $300 million from the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship reserve account into the Tennessee Promise trust. The trust operated under the terms approved by the state attorney general, but the fund itself is administered by the state treasurer. The trust affords the program (and its participants) some certainty for the Promise program unless it is altered by action by the governor or general assembly. The principal of the trust cannot be spent for any purpose, and income from the trust can only be spent to fund the Promise program or to pay administrative fees for the administration of the program. A special reserve account for the Promise trust houses any trust income not allocated or distributed for the Promise program.

The total cost of the Promise program was $15.2 million in its inaugural academic year, and in its second year (16-17) jumped up to $25.2 million (THEC, 2018). Individual-level Promise awards currently average about $1,037 per person. However, if you exclude any program participants that receive $0 from the Promise program (e.g., student is fully covered by all other aid), the average goes up to about $1,151 per person. These amounts exclude the in-kind support the state relies on from its not-for-profit partners—tnAchieves and the Ayers Foundation—to help coordinate mentoring, community service, and summer bridge programs.

As time moves on and the program matures and starts to reach its full operating capacity, the total cost of the program will grow. However, it does not appear that there will be financial sustainability concerns between the net lottery proceeds and interest revenue from the Promise trust.

Summary

Tennessee has key features that have made the program financially sustainable over the last five years. From the very beginning, the business community was engaged and supported the knoxAchieves initiative, and later the Tennessee Promise. Philanthropy and the nonprofit community help to sustain the program by providing mentors and other student supports to Promise students. The state also engaged in a long-term strategic plan through its Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010[142] and increased public awareness through a broad public outreach in its "Drive to 55" communications campaign. All of these strategic initiatives allowed the state to establish trust for the Tennessee Promise, to ensure that Promise is kept for future generations.

El Dorado Promise (Universal access in El Dorado, Arkansas)

Members of the El Dorado Chamber of Commerce read about the Kalamazoo Promise in 2005 and approached a local employer—Murphy Oil—about starting a similar partnership with the El Dorado School District.[143] In 2007, the El Dorado Promise program began with a $50 million endowment from the company to students in the El Dorado School District.[144]

Program Design

The El Dorado Promise is a universal Promise program. It has few eligibility requirements other than attending El Dorado Public Schools for at least four consecutive years by the time of graduation. El Dorado Promise students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average and enroll in a minimum of 12 credits per semester (24 credits annually) while in college. The Promise cannot be used toward summer classes or vocational programs.

The program gives each eligible graduate of El Dorado High School a scholarship for up to five years at any accredited U.S. public or private college.[145] The amount of funding available to each student is tiered based on their length of attendance in the El Dorado Public School District. High school graduates who attend all 13 years at EPS will receive 100 percent of the Promise; graduates that entered in the ninth grade would receive 65 percent of the Promise.

Prior to the Promise, enrollment in the El Dorado School District had been on a steady decline. The El Dorado Promise reversed those trends by bringing families into the district who hope to take advantage of the program. The district reviewed curriculum, implemented more rigorous courses, and added 16 new Advanced Placement classes to better prepare students for college access and success. El Dorado now introduces students to pre-AP classes and saw a 164% increase in AP enrollments between 2007 and 2017.[146]

Administration

The administration, promotion, and sustainability of the Promise created a culture shift in El Dorado schools. Students no longer wonder if they will go to college and instead begin comparing and contrasting their college options well before they enter high school. In every classroom in the El Dorado public school system, posters hang on the walls promoting the Promise scholarship.[147] On Wednesdays, faculty and students are encouraged to wear apparel from their favorite college or the one they plan to attend. Additionally, El Dorado High School celebrates all of its college-going students at an annual Academic Signing Day.[148] As of 2017, approximately 84% of El Dorado graduates enrolled in college, making the district's college-going rate about 35 percentage points higher than the Arkansas state average (50%) and 19 percentage points higher than the national rate (66%).[149]

While students across the country start to think about college in their high school years, the El Dorado Promise program places the idea of college in the minds of students much earlier. Sylvia Thompson, the Executive Director of the El Dorado Promise, maintains an office in El Dorado High School. Thompson's presence from kindergarten onward provides students with an awareness of the Promise program, and she offers daily support and information to help families prepare for college.[150] Programmatic administration, communication, and awareness integrated as part of the school district has provided students the comfort of knowing the community will help reduce the financial burden of college.

Funding

Murphy Oil has been a strong support of education through its corporate philanthropy. In 1997, it established the Murphy Education Program to provide monetary awards to achieving students in the public-school system. The company also established the El Dorado Education Foundation and provided a $1.6 million endowment to improve teaching.

In 2007, Murphy Oil created another partnership with El Dorado Schools when it announced the El Dorado Promise in 2007.[151] Funded entirely by $50 million in private funds from Murphy Oil, the program is set up as an endowment, and does not rely on state or local tax dollars to support the long-term financial sustainability of the scholarship.


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LENGTH OF ATTENDANCE	BENEFIT
K-12	100%
1-12	95%
2-12	95%
3-12	95%
4-12	90%
5-12	85%
6-12	80%
7-12	75%
8-12	70%
9-12	65%
10-12	NONE
11-12	NONE
12	NONE

El Dorado Promise students who attend all 13 years at EPS will receive 100 percent of the scholarship (see chart), a rate equal to Arkansas's highest in-state public tuition, which is currently about $300 per credit hour (Arkansas Tech University).[152] The funds are first-dollar, and not dependent upon a student's other scholarship or grants. Funds can be combined with other national and statewide aid such as the ArFuture Grant or the Arkansas Lottery Challenge Scholarship to pay for additional college expenses such as books, room and board, meal plans, and transportation. Since 2007, the El Dorado Promise has provided funding to 2,500 Promise Scholars (roughly 550 receive the scholarship annually), who have attended 131 different colleges and universities in 30 states.[153]

Murphy Oil's investment in the Promise spurred additional resources within the El Dorado community. Three months after the announcement of the Promise, local voters approved a new sales tax to spur economic development and help support the community as well as to rebuild part of the South Arkansas Community College campus (which opened in 2011).[154] In addition, the town voted to increase property taxes for the first time since the 1970s to fund the construction of a new state-of-the-art high school. The new El Dorado High School, which includes updated technology, security systems, lab facilities, a performing arts center, and athletic facilities was completed in 2011.[155]

Summary

The El Dorado Promise is a first dollar, universal Promise program for graduates of the El Dorado School District. It is funded through an endowment established by Murphy Oil, a local company with a desire to expand educational and economic opportunity for local students. The El Dorado Promise program has improved educational outcomes and is administered in close collaboration with the local school district.

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