



SUPPORTING INNOVATION AND SCALING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING COMPLETION

Research from The Education Trust has consistently shown that the choices made by leaders of higher education institutions have a significant impact on who graduates and who doesn't. Institutions that prioritize student success graduate more students, and those who are committed to improving graduation rates of students who face barriers due to affordability and other socioeconomic factors can do just that.

In a reauthorized HEA, Congress should establish a **completion innovation fund** to spur institutions to prioritize student success by adopting practices that improve degree completion and reduce the amount of time it takes students to earn degrees.

This fund should invest in studying promising practices, such as emergency aid and micro-grant programs, and in scaling practices that show evidence of putting vulnerable students on the path to success, like CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which provides targeted supports to students. Evaluations of the programs should examine the long- and short-term impact of interventions on various types of students, disaggregated by race, income, and other relevant student characteristics.

Congress should use the following guidelines to ensure this fund focuses on improving outcomes for vulnerable students:

Content

- Programs should strive to provide comprehensive services, such as academic counseling and mentoring, and help to cover non-tuition costs of attendance, such as transportation, books, food, and housing, for historically underserved students.
- Programs should incentivize states and institutions to re-evaluate practices (e.g., remediation approaches), policies (e.g., credit accumulation requirements), and charges (e.g., transcript fees); identify the impact on low-income students and students of color; and strive to adopt reforms and remove unnecessary barriers to enrollment and completion for such students.

Structure

- The fund should have a three-tiered structure: development, evaluation, and scaling.
- The list of completion strategies worthy of testing in the development phase should be expansive and include promising strategies that haven't yet been tested rigorously or on a large scale.
- Only programs with clear evidence of effectiveness should be eligible for grants to scale.

Evaluation

- Program outcomes including impacts on retention and completion should be rigorously evaluated including, where appropriate, through randomized control trials.
- Evaluation results should be disaggregated by race and income.

Prioritize institutions that serve high proportions of historically disadvantaged students:

- Grants should be for at least four years to ensure campuses are able to see the interventions through the life-cycle of a student and to generate more meaningful and replicable results.
- Grants should be tiered by sector and institution type to ensure under-resourced institutions are able to compete.
- The fund should provide the technical assistance, and support with technology and human capital, needed for scaling existing promising practices at low-resourced campuses.