

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE STATE-LEVEL STUDENT SUCCESS CENTERS
WITH SUPPORT FROM THE KRESGE FOUNDATION AND
THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION**

A Request for Proposals

August 2015

SUMMARY

To improve the coordination, alignment, scale, and effectiveness of community college completion and success initiatives, Jobs for the Future, with support from The Kresge Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, invite state-level community college entities to apply to participate in an initiative to strengthen a growing network of Student Success Centers. Applicants will propose to create an organizational home and the staff capacity needed to mobilize the state's community colleges around common action to accelerate their efforts to improve persistence and completion. The goal is to increase the number of credentials earned by community college students in the state, particularly among students from underserved groups. This funding will provide two years of start-up funding to up to four statewide Student Success Centers. Funded Centers will also join the national Student Success Center Network that Jobs for the Future manages.

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges offer great potential to help more students achieve their aspirations for education and economic mobility, particularly for low-income students, students of color, and underprepared students—students who historically have not been well served by the nation's system of postsecondary education. However, community colleges cannot reach that potential without doing a far better job of meeting the academic and career-focused needs of today's students who juggle jobs, families, and college, and for whom earning a credential is essential to climbing into or staying in the middle class. Evidence is mounting from institutions and states around the country that significant redesign of college delivery systems, instruction, and supports is required if community colleges are to serve lower-income youth and adults effectively and efficiently and to help more at-risk students achieve their aspirations for credentials that set them on a path to success. The need for improvements in college completion is compelling. Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the United States more than doubled, while the completion rate has remained virtually unchanged.

This is an exciting, pivotal moment for community colleges. There is a lot of appetite for and experimentation with redesign and reform. Research on what works—and what doesn't—is gaining traction as data systems become more sophisticated and robust. A growing number of colleges are implementing new models and delivery structures that are more cost effective, can be implemented at scale rather than as pilots, produce far more completions and transfers more quickly, and are well-integrated into regional labor markets.

Too often, however, innovators and reformers are isolated in their efforts. Exciting innovations are underway, but would benefit from deeper alignment with other initiatives across the state, efforts to unite community college innovators at the state level, and

integration with policy and advocacy efforts to change state and system policy in ways that promote what works and accelerate their scaling and sustainability. There is no silver bullet that will redesign community colleges and catapult student outcomes to dramatically higher levels. Rather, institutional and state leaders must commit to working together—steadily, creatively, boldly—to address the multiple critical points along the postsecondary education pipeline where students need a very different academic and support experience if they are to engage, persist, and earn a credential with value in the labor market or for transfer.

Seven states have created Student Success Centers (Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas) to tackle this challenge and help unify the state's colleges around a common agenda and learning program. The Centers combine a laser-like focus on sharing and spreading evidence-based innovations at the institution level with a commitment to aligning myriad success initiatives across the state into a clear statewide completion agenda. Designed to strengthen the voice and effectiveness of community colleges and their stakeholders, Student Success Centers are emerging as a powerful infrastructure for change and innovation in states where they have launched.

To increase the number of Student Success Centers in the country, assess the power of these institutions to accelerate needed completion-focused reforms, and strengthen the existing national network of Centers, Jobs for the Future will manage the process of soliciting applications for funding and assistance for up to four new state-level Student Success Centers, and then provide technical assistance to new and existing Centers. The Kresge Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are partnering to support this opportunity.

Successful applicants will receive two years of start-up funding to support the planning and launch of a Student Success Center that can strengthen capacity and improve student completion in the state's community colleges. Each successful applicant will receive technical assistance with onboarding the Center executive director, orienting the advisory board, and planning for issues related to organizational development, strategy, launch communications, and priority activities. This support will be grounded in part on lessons learned from working with and supporting existing Centers. Selected Centers will be required to participate in the national network of Student Success Centers and will have access to tools and expertise that will sharpen their plan and execution for their first few years.

WHAT IS A STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER?

Key Functions and Core Competencies

Student Success Centers organize a state's community colleges around common action to leverage and accelerate efforts to improve student persistence and completion. These Centers, which have been launched in seven states, provide the vision, support, and a shared venue for a state's community colleges as they work in partnership on a collective student success agenda. For more information about the existing Student Success Centers and additional details about the model, please review the resources found at this link: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/postsecondary-state-policy/student-success-center-network>

Student Success Centers take the lead in communicating to institutional stakeholders the components of a broad completion agenda and in building a coherent strategic approach to engagement, learning, and policy advocacy across the state's two-year institutions. Based on the experience of the current Centers, the primary functions of a statewide Student Success Center include:

- **Convening and engagement:** Bring colleges together around reform; develop faculty leadership; create in-state networks and communities of practice; advance cross-sector alignment and collaboration; attend national convenings.
- **Student success strategy alignment and coherence:** Map and align institutional, state, and national student success initiatives relevant to the state and its community colleges; create an umbrella framework and marshal necessary resources to accelerate the completion agenda.
- **Data use to guide priorities and investments:** Improve data usage through work including establishing coherent metrics across initiatives, sharing data, improving transparency, and increasing institutional research capacity.
- **Research and knowledge management:** Organize and synthesize evidence on models and their performance from in-state and national sources and make that information easily accessible to college innovators; map and make visible institutional strategies and their outcomes; develop newsletters, policy briefs, and overviews of individual or multi-college initiatives.
- **Policy development and advocacy:** Help specify and sharpen agendas for system and legislative changes that promote completion; identify and coordinate policy research needs; deepen state-level capacity for reform through mobilization of evidence and college voices; assist institutions with assessments of needed policy changes at the institution, system, and state levels in light of their completion goals and strategies.

SERVICES PROVIDED TO SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Jobs for the Future will provide technical assistance and support to states selected to receive funding through this RFP to launch a Student Success Center. The technical assistance will build upon the existing foundation among the state's community colleges for a collective student success agenda and will support the creation of a robust, viable, and sustainable success/completion-focused infrastructure in the state.

Jobs for the Future will support each Student Success Center and its host organization to:

- Orient the newly hired executive director of the Center and the Center's advisory board.
- Convene the newly funded Student Success Center leadership with representatives of the existing Centers to discuss strategic planning, the Center's overall vision, details to consider as part of the launch process, and the Center's financial model and sustainability.
- Build on existing organizational capacity and efforts to articulate a coherent student success vision for the state's community college sector.
- Map the existing student success initiatives in the state and identify key points of leverage.
- Align the community college student success initiatives operating in the state under a common completion framework.
- Undertake a process of strategic planning, agenda development, engagement of colleges and other stakeholders, and implementation of the key components of a Student Success Center agenda for change.
- Increase state- and institution-level capacity to use student data to establish or build on improvement and reform priorities, identify exemplary college practices, and support the scaling of innovations across multiple institutions.
- Participate in a cross-state learning community among Center leaders and staff to share exemplary strategies and lessons learned.

JFF developed a toolkit for the Student Success Centers that simplifies and supports the launch and growth of a new Center. Based on the experience of existing Centers, the toolkit includes job descriptions, materials on governance and advisory partners, policy frameworks, funding strategies, and other tools that can help Center leadership to identify the highest points of leverage and efficient ways to organize its activities and add value to the state completion agenda. The toolkit can be found at the following address:

<http://www.jff.org/publications/student-success-center-toolkit>

JFF's Student Success Center Network, comprised of funded Student Success Centers, creates linkages across Centers through in-person convenings that allow Center executive directors to learn from each other and other experts; regular discussions and webinars on critical topics; access to the publications, tools, membership, and expertise of JFF's Postsecondary State Policy Network; and customized technical assistance. Teams from the new Student Success Centers are required to be active participants in the national Student Success Center Network.

APPLICANT COMMITMENTS

To be eligible to apply under this Request for Proposals solicitation, the respondent must:

- Be a two-year college system, community college association, or other statewide entity in any of the 50 United States with sufficient access to and trust of the state's community college leaders (excluding those seven states with existing Student Success Centers—AR, CA, CT, MI, NJ, OH, TX).
- Be committed to building institutional and statewide capacity to better support student success efforts across the state's community colleges.
- Demonstrate that student success is an established priority for the state's community colleges, their leadership, and the statewide organization seeking to establish the new Student Success Center.
- Demonstrate that the state's community colleges both need and want an infrastructure to increase coherence across multiple student success and completion initiatives (federal, state, local, and philanthropic).
- Document the commitment of a coalition of the state's community colleges to support innovative models to increase completion and the diffusion of those models statewide.
- Raise leveraged funding for the Student Success Center from the colleges, state organization, or other local/national philanthropies.
- Articulate a set of statewide policy priorities that will strengthen and advance completion initiatives across all of the state's community colleges.
- Designate a Student Success Center executive director whose sole job is leading and managing the Center's initiatives.
- Assemble a broadly representative planning team to ensure that the Center's launch and rollout is successful.
- Assemble a broadly representative advisory board to ensure that the Center is successful and sustainable.

- Commit to joining a cross-state learning community with leaders of other new and existing Student Success Centers.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Successful proposals must include a narrative that addresses the organization's capacity in the six areas listed below. While we do not expect there to be existing coherent statewide infrastructure for advancing the community college completion agenda across all six priorities below, the proposal narrative should clearly describe the existing institutional and statewide infrastructure, the organization's plans to expand moving forward, and how Student Success Center funding will support the implementation and execution of the proposed Center's vision and approach.

- 1. Analysis of Policy Environment:** A robust analysis of the state's engagement in and readiness for a statewide community college success initiative. The applicant should highlight existing success initiatives and the capacity for and commitment to collective action by the state's community colleges to advance a statewide student success and completion agenda.

Selection Criteria: Proposals should include an outline of the major student success initiatives underway in the state, the organizational lead for those initiatives, and the potential role of the Center in moving the initiative(s) forward. The analysis should include a description of gubernatorial, legislative, and board policy support for student success and completion efforts. The narrative should highlight the role of the community colleges in the state's higher education policy agenda, the level of community college commitment to and interest in joint activity to accelerate the scaling of student success innovations in their colleges and statewide, and the success-focused policy priorities of the state's community colleges, both at the higher education system level and in anticipation of the next state legislative session. Applicants should also provide a robust overview of the state's community college population that demonstrates the potential impact of improved community college outcomes on underrepresented populations. This information (which can be provided in chart form), should include: community college enrollments; enrollments disaggregated to highlight the number of underserved community college students (e.g., race/ethnicity, first generation, socioeconomic status); a comparison of the community college student demographics and the overall state population; and statewide community college degree and certificate completion rates, disaggregated by population groups. Applicants should also provide a brief mention of the state's sizable cities, and note any major known cross-sector collaborations in place in those cities to boost college attainment.

- 2. Strategic Vision:** Applicant vision and priorities for building a coherent student success agenda among the community colleges in the state. The organization must demonstrate commitment from the institutions to the vision outlined in the application and the willingness of the presidents to support the work of the Center through their participation in planning, strategic implementation, and learning across institutions.

Selection Criteria: The organization must have a clearly and publicly articulated vision for student success and improved completion for the community college sector. It should also demonstrate that there is a multiyear plan for the execution of the vision. The proposal must outline the organization's capacity to convene representatives from the colleges, in order to move a collective vision and agenda forward in a state. The application should include any specific statewide goals for improving outcomes for all students, particularly low-income and other underrepresented students, by both increasing completion rates of credentials with labor market value and successful transfer to four-year institutions. Explain in broad terms the strategies that the Center would employ to implement the vision and achieve student success goals.

- 3. Stakeholder Commitment:** Demonstration of commitment from leadership of community colleges in the state as well as broader stakeholder support, which may include K-12, the workforce system, legislative and governor's office, and business and economic development leaders. Applicants must propose to scale up and/or sustain cross-sector partnerships focused on increasing community college completion rates.

Selection Criteria: In order to successfully implement a statewide student success and completion agenda, multiple stakeholders must be engaged and committed to the outcome. A letter of support from college presidents (and any formal community college leadership group) should be included in the application materials; these can be individual letters or a single letter signed by all of the college presidents. A sample letter is included in Appendix II and may be used as a template for the proposal submission. The application should include letters of commitment from a number of stakeholder groups, outlining support for the launch of a Center and specific and clear roles in assisting with the community colleges' completion initiatives.

- 4. Data Infrastructure:** Applicant commitment to gathering multi-institutional student success and progression data and willingness, on behalf of the state's community colleges, to report or share student outcome and performance data across institutions. The organization must also demonstrate the staff capacity to support cross-institution analysis of student data and use for setting completion priorities and strategies.

Selection Criteria: Very often institutional and student data is collected and housed at a state agency for accountability purposes. In order to foster an environment of data-informed and evidence-based improvement, the applicant must forge strong partnerships with the state's data repository and develop agreements for data sharing and data use. There must also be agreement across the state's community colleges to analyze and share data in a comparative format so that the impact of innovations on the institutions can be identified.

An important function of an effective Student Success Center is to help support increased institutional research capacity at the community colleges. Centers are working to help colleges organize their institutional research/institutional effectiveness efforts to support institutional improvement. The goal is to use data and inquiry to improve student outcomes, with a broader vision than the traditional accountability and reporting role. Proposals should include a description of how the organization will help support and expand community colleges' institutional research and effectiveness capacity.

- 5. Shared Legislative/Policy Agenda:** Demonstration of ability and commitment to articulate and pursue a shared student success legislative and policy agenda in partnership with the state's community colleges.

Selection Criteria: Proposals should outline specific vehicles, plans, and capacity to achieve local, regional, and state policy change and systems impact that strengthen and sustain completion reforms. Proposals should describe how the community colleges will collaborate on crafting and advocating for a policy agenda, including strategies to develop a collective voice on a number of student success policy reforms.

- 6. Funding and Sustainability Plan:** Identification of existing and potential funding from local and national sources for the initial two years and then beyond the start-up period.

Selection Criteria: Proposals should include a top-level projected annual budget for the Student Success Center that includes leveraged funding from local, state, federal, and/or philanthropic sources. This funding can come from the institutions, the state, stakeholder groups, community foundations, corporate sponsors, as well as state and national foundations. The proposal should include information about funding sources for existing student success initiatives in the state. The budget must include designated funding for a Center executive director, as well as a sustainability plan for beyond the initial two years after the funding ends. Competitive proposals will include leveraged funding support from colleges, state agencies or systems, other state organizations, and/or local/national philanthropy.

EVALUATION

Please describe plans for engaging an objective third party to assess annual progress toward Center goals, provide recommendations on structure and change, and help develop future priorities. The evaluation should be framed as a “critical friend” evaluation that focuses on continuous improvement during the first two years of the initiative. Deliverables should emphasize recommendations highlighting ways the Center could improve practices and increase the impact for the institutions and the students that they serve. A rough estimate of evaluation costs should be included in the budget.

AWARDS

Based on the quality of the submitted proposals, JFF may fund the creation and launch of *up to* four Student Success Centers. Successful applicants will be eligible for up to \$250,000 annually for two years, for a maximum grant award of \$500,000. Jobs for the Future, with assistance from the foundations, will evaluate proposals and their proposed budgets, and decide on funding levels commensurate with need and qualifications. The proposed budgets may be submitted for more than \$250,000 per year, but should indicate the source of the additional funding beyond this support. Funding will support Center operations, activities, and participation in the national JFF-managed Student Success Center Network.

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Adequate funding must be allocated in the Center budget to hire an executive director at the equivalent salary level of a college vice president. It is essential that the executive director have the professional experience to be able to interact regularly with the college presidents, provide leadership at statewide convenings of college faculty, staff, and administrators, and be the voice for the Center with leadership from other partner stakeholder groups.

STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER ADVISORY BOARD

Within the first six months, the Student Success Center should identify membership for the Student Success Center advisory board. The purpose of the advisory board is to provide strategic direction and input on the Center's priorities as well as feedback on the operations of the Center and its staff. Advisory board members will serve as ambassadors for the Center, connecting the work of the Center to the stakeholder groups that the board members represent and providing feedback and guidance from the field. Potential membership for the advisory board includes college leadership, college faculty, community college student representatives, K-12 representatives, workforce representatives, legislative representatives, representatives from the Governor's office, and representatives from philanthropic entities.

PROPOSAL PROCESS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals

In no more than 12 pages, using 12-point font and 1-inch margins, applicants should describe their eligibility, respond to the best of their ability to each of the specific selection criteria, and describe their plans for third-party evaluation. Any attachments (e.g., letters of commitment) should be compiled and submitted in one document.

Please submit proposals via email to Chris Baldwin at cbaldwin@jff.org. Please indicate "Student Success Center Proposal Submission" in the subject line of your email.

RFP Released	August 31, 2015
Webinar for Potential Applicants	September 14, 2015, 2 p.m. EST
Proposals Submitted	October 9, 2015
Funding Decisions Announced	December 4, 2015

Jobs for the Future will hold a webinar to address questions from potential applicants on September 14, 2015 at 2 p.m. EST. To register for the webinar, please email Lindsay Newman at lnewman@jff.org. A recorded version of the webinar will be posted after September 14th at the following link: <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/postsecondary-state-policy/student-success-center-network>

SCORING RUBRIC FOR APPLICATIONS

Reviewing Proposals and Selecting Grantees

Reviewers will use a standardized evaluation tool that asks each reviewer to assign a score of between 0 and 4 to evaluate the quality of applicant responses to six specific application components that have been weighted to reflect their relative importance.

Rating System

Applicant does not have necessary support in the area	= 0
Applicant has minimal capacity in the area	= 1
Applicant has moderate capacity in the area	= 2
Applicant has ability to strengthen capacity in the area	= 3
Applicant has strong capacity in the area	= 4

Section	Weight	Rating (0-4)	Total Score (Weight x Rating)
1. Analysis of Policy Environment	15		
2. Strategic Vision	15		
3. Stakeholder Commitment	25		
4. Data Infrastructure	15		
5. Shared Legislative/Policy Agenda	10		
6. Funding and Sustainability Plan	20		

ABOUT JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future is a national nonprofit that works to ensure educational and economic opportunity for all. We develop innovative career pathways, educational resources, and public policies that increase college readiness and career success, and build a more highly skilled workforce. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is the national leader in bridging education and work to increase mobility and strengthen our economy. To learn more, visit www.jff.org.

ABOUT THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities for low-income people in America's cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and community development in Detroit. In 2014, the Board of Trustees approved 408 awards totaling \$242.5 million. That included a \$100 million award to the Foundation for Detroit's Future, a fund created to soften the impact of the city's bankruptcy on pensioners and safeguard cultural assets at the Detroit Institute of Arts. A total of \$138.1 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. In addition, the Social Investment Practice made commitments totaling \$20.4 million in 2014. For more information, visit www.kresge.org.

ABOUT THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

APPENDIX I: PROPOSAL ELEMENTS SUMMARY SHEET

Applicants should address all of the following criteria in their proposals. Supporting documentation is welcome.

1. A robust analysis of the state's engagement in and readiness for a statewide community college success initiative.
 - An outline of current student success initiatives underway, including a listing of the success-focused policy priorities of the state's community colleges.
 - A robust overview of the state's community college population, including student demographics, a comparison of the community college student demographics and the overall state population, the number of underserved students (e.g., race/ethnicity, first generation, socioeconomic status), and college attainment rates disaggregated by population.
 - A description of gubernatorial, legislative, and board policy support for student success and completion efforts.
 - An overview of the role of the community colleges in the state's higher education policy agenda.
 - An analysis of the level of community college commitment to and interest in joint activity to accelerate the scaling of student success innovations in their colleges and statewide.
2. A strategic vision for building a coherent, aligned student success agenda among the community colleges in the state.
 - An articulated student success and completion vision for the community college sector and a multiyear plan for the execution of that vision.
 - A description of the organization's capacity to convene representatives from the colleges.
 - A list of goals and strategies for improving outcomes for all students, particularly low-income and other underrepresented students, by both increasing completion rates of credentials with labor market value but also successful transfer to four-year institutions.
3. Demonstrated broad stakeholder commitment including the community colleges in the state as well as K-12, the workforce system, legislative and governor's office, and business and economic development.
 - A letter of support from each of the college presidents or a single letter signed by all of the presidents.

- Letters of commitment from a number of stakeholder groups, outlining specific and clear roles in assisting with the community colleges' completion initiatives.
4. A data infrastructure that includes a commitment to gather multi-institutional data and willingness on behalf of the colleges to report or share data across institutions.
 - Demonstrated partnerships with the data repository and/or a willingness to create agreements for data sharing and data use.
 - Documented agreement by the community colleges to analyze and share data in a comparative format so that the impact of innovations on the institutions can be identified.
 5. The ability to articulate and pursue a shared legislative and policy agenda in partnership with the state's community colleges.
 - A summary of how the community colleges will collaborate on a policy agenda, including strategies to develop a collective voice on a number of student success policy reforms.
 6. A funding and sustainability plan that includes an overview of existing and potential funding from local and national sources must be identified along with duration of funding commitment.
 - A projected annual budget for the Student Success Center that outlines leveraged funding from local, state, federal, and/or philanthropic sources.
 - Identification of leveraged funds for the Student Success Center outside of this potential investment.
 - Identification of state, regional, and local funding opportunities for student success initiatives.
 - The budget must include designated funding for a Center executive director (at the salary equivalent of at least a college vice president) and a sustainability plan for continuing the funding after this funding ends.

APPENDIX II: SAMPLE LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM COLLEGE PRESIDENT(S)

October 9, 2015

Chris Baldwin
Senior Director
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street; 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write this letter in support of _____'s application for funding to create a Student Success Center in our state. The community colleges in our state have made a commitment to improving student outcomes and increasing student completion rates. Having a strong, sustainable Student Success Center in our state would help our institutions work together strategically to accelerate institutional and student progress on the completion agenda.

Our college is engaged in the following completion-focused initiatives. (*NOTE: describe the most important national, state, and institutional initiatives in which the college participates*). Launching a Student Success Center in our state would help maximize the impact in our institution and statewide of these efforts.

A Student Success Center in STATE would provide a common framework for aligning and prioritizing completion strategies and initiatives and would help ensure effective dissemination and diffusion of positive practices and lessons learned across institutions. It would provide an identifiable venue for development of a common strategic vision and policy agenda for community college student success that would engage leadership and frontline personnel across our colleges.

We understand that effective Student Success Centers have expectations of the colleges they represent. Student outcomes data, collected and organized for use in institutional and statewide conversations about improvement, play an essential role in determining and scaling what is working for our students. To that end, _____ College agrees to share our student outcomes data with the Student Success Center and we support the sharing of our data with other institutions in our state.

A major role for a Student Success Center is to develop a set of common policy and legislative priorities that will advance the completion agenda for all of the students we serve. We will work with our colleagues from the other institutions in the state, alongside

the Student Success Center, to identify, refine, and promote key policy priorities. Through our institution's stakeholder network and through our partner organizations, we will inform and engage other voices in this agenda-setting effort, including our local K-12 and workforce and economic development groups.

There is a critical need in our state for the infrastructure provided by a Student Success Center. Thank you for considering the grant application. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

President

_____ College