



Supporting the American Dream and Economic Competitiveness: Enhancing College Completion

In the 21st century economy, a college degree is in greater demand than ever. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of academically qualified high school graduates are unable to go on to postsecondary education every year because of barriers such as rising tuition and confusion about complex college admission and financial aid processes. Many of those who do enroll face additional challenges finding the support they need to graduate.

By 2025, we face a shortage of 23 million college-educated adults in the U.S. workforce. To fill this shortfall, 60% of working-age Americans must earn a credential or two- or four-year degree. At our current trajectory, however, only 49% of Americans will have the education needed by 2025. For our citizens to continue to have access to the American Dream and secure economic futures, we must address the barriers to degree completion.

The National College Access Network works to reverse the growing college opportunity gap, especially for students historically underrepresented in higher education.

NCAN Members = College Completion

NCAN is a membership and advocacy network uniting the most important organizations and sectors in the college access and success field. We represent hundreds of members from across the U.S., including community-based nonprofits, TRIO and GEAR UP programs, college admissions and financial aid offices, government agencies, foundations, corporations, school districts, charter schools, and others. Our members provide services such as early awareness programs, college advising, financial aid counseling, need-based scholarships, and postsecondary support that are crucial to producing more college graduates.

What Areas Can Policymakers Address?

Financial Aid: The cornerstone of the federal student aid program, the Pell Grant, has not kept up with the cost of higher education. Additionally, Congress made frequent eligibility cuts during the recession. Further, the financial aid application process is still overly complicated for many students.

Consumer Information: Students apply to colleges without knowing which colleges have graduation attainment gaps for various groups of students. Information about institutional outcomes is not widely available in a student-friendly format.

Public-Private Partnerships: Research shows that public-private partnerships strengthen college access programs, and come in many forms including near-peer mentors, professional advisors, and college access centers.



For More Information:

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Policies That Make a Difference

Policymakers can help increase college graduation rates in several ways.

Financial Aid

Our federal financial aid system must remain focused on need-based aid programs such as the Pell Grant while also simplifying the aid application process to ensure all students access to the crucial funding needed for higher education.

- **Strengthen the Pell Grant Program:** authorize mandatory funding, adjust the award amount by the rate of inflation, and allow students year-round flexibility.
- **Simplify the Application Process:** use the second prior year tax information and eliminate the FAFSA form.
- **Improve Student Loans:** enhance financial counseling and make income-driven repayment more easily accessible.
- **Incent States and Institutions to Prioritize Need-Based Aid.**

Consumer Information

Policymakers can also ensure that students get improved consumer information about institutional outcomes so students can make informed choices about where they are most likely to succeed.

- **Provide Greater Transparency:** require public disclosure of graduation rates for “students like me” (Pell recipients, transfer/part-time/adult/veteran students).
- **Standardize Financial Aid Award Letters:** require all institutions to use a standard financial aid award format.
- **Employ Early Awareness Strategies:** notify low-income students of their likely qualification for federal student aid through the schools and other public benefit programs.
- **Improve Accountability:** develop a consumer-facing college rating system that focuses on how well an institution serves low-income students.

Public-Private Partnerships

The federal government can improve college access and success by supporting public-private partnerships that provide the college admissions and financial aid advising lower-income students need to succeed.

- **Incent Innovation:** encourage federal partnerships with states, institutions of higher education, and non-profit programs.

