



COLLEGE ACCESS  
FOUNDATION  
*of California*

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*Opportunities for Students*

## **Specific Goals for College Access and Completion – An Updated Blueprint That Guides Our Work**

**June 2011**

At College Access Foundation of California, we know that scholarships are vital to many students who pursue a college education, particularly with a difficult economy and rising costs. We aim to make college possible for students who, without our financial assistance, might not attend college or aspire to the school of their choice.

We must be strategic with our scholarship dollars to have a measurable impact on college access and success in California. In the paper [“Our Blueprint for the Future.”](#) we outlined three broad strategies that continue to guide our work today:

1. Provide scholarship grants to community organizations and education programs that offer college advice, as well as academic and financial aid support to students, including first-generation college-goers and groups that have historically low enrollment or completion rates.
2. Foster greater networking and sharing of best practices among scholarship programs in California, and offer evidence that will increase the effectiveness of scholarship giving and public financial aid.
3. Support and test new and innovative approaches to scholarship giving that have the potential to increase college enrollment and persistence.

## What We've Learned Since the Blueprint

The foundation has learned a great deal in the two years since we first issued our blueprint. In that time, we have collaborated with more than 100 grantees to collect data on individual scholarship awards and the students who received them.

We are following student progress to assess our impact on college access and success: where scholarship recipients enroll, whether they remain in school, and ultimately, how many graduate. Here's what we've learned thus far:

- ***Nine in 10 scholars are low-income.*** More than 90 percent of students who received college scholarships from our grants are low-income and eligible for federal or state financial aid. Over 75 percent are the first in their families to attend college.
- ***A majority are graduates of low-performing schools.*** Two-thirds of the scholars come from California public high schools that perform poorly – as measured by Academic Performance Index rankings - compared to other schools in the state.
- ***Most scholars are students of color and women.*** A majority of our scholarship recipients are from groups that are underrepresented at California colleges and universities. Two-thirds of scholars are women, an indicator of the challenge of recruiting males into the higher education system.
- ***Our scholars come from all regions of the state.*** Foundation dollars support students from all regions of California. Currently, a slightly higher percentage of low-income youth from the Bay Area receive scholarships than students from the Central Valley and Southern California.
- ***Eight in 10 scholars attend public postsecondary institutions in California.*** Scholars attend every UC and CSU campus and nearly all community colleges. Equally important, 70 percent of foundation scholars at the UCs and CSUs come from lower-performing high schools. They also have higher first and second year persistence rates than their classmates at similar institutions.

In sum, we find that our community partners are effectively expanding college access, by using our scholarship grants to complement efforts that prepare students for the rigors of college.

But that is only part of the story. With time, we will also learn two equally critical elements of college success - how many of these students persist in college, and what percentage will graduate relative to the larger population of college students in California.

### **Getting Specific – Detailed Goals and Targets for Our Scholarship Program**

With deeper knowledge of the demographic and enrollment patterns of our scholars and the approaches used by our grantee partners to recruit and prepare them for higher education, we can now establish more specific goals for what we want to achieve with our scholarship grants.

#### ✓ **Our Goal - Expanding Access**

We will continue to seek ways to increase college access among low-income students and those underrepresented in higher education. The data on scholars in the past two years tells us that our partners are largely reaching the mark for college access, as most are first-generation college students and two-thirds come from low-performing schools.

***Moving forward, we want to do more to increase college enrollment among males (who traditionally have higher high school dropout rates and lower college enrollment rates), and among African American and underrepresented Asian students, such as Southeast Asians and Asian-American Pacific Islanders.***

#### ✓ **Our Goal - Improving Persistence**

Improving upon the current rates of year-to-year persistence of college students in California is critical. Depending on the type of institution a student attends, first year persistence (e.g., re-enrollment for a second year) ranges from 56 percent for community college students pursuing a degree, to 80 percent for CSU students and 93 percent for those attending a UC institution. Persistence rates are lower for minorities and low-income students within each branch of the university system.

***Moving forward, we want to continue to promote year-to-year persistence rates that are higher among our scholars than the general student population at similar institutions.***

***In addition, we want to encourage a higher proportion of scholars who attend community colleges to transfer to four-year institutions, and to do so in less time than current rates of transfer among community college students generally.***

✓ **Our Goal - Increasing Graduation Rates**

California's recent history of low college graduation rates is a drain on the public higher education system and a challenge to our economic vitality.

Similar to the statistics on persistence, student graduation rates vary by the type of institution, with 40 percent of CSU students and 79 percent of UC students graduating in five years. Four-year graduation rates are considerably lower: just 16 percent of CSU students and 57 percent of UC students graduate in that time. At community colleges, less than 30 percent of students receive their certificate or associate degree, or transfer to a four-year institution.

Notably, graduation rates for low-income and first-generation students are generally six to 10 percentage points lower than the average rates at the CSUs and UCs, and roughly the same for graduation and transfer rates at community colleges.

***Moving forward, we want to see graduation rates for scholars funded through our grants that are higher than the four and five-year rates for all students attending CSU and UC institutions. In addition, we want to increase the percentage of community college students who transfer to a four-year university or receive an associate's degree.***

***This would make significant headway to closing the achievement gap in these institutions, given the lower rates of graduation for low-income and minority students at two- and four-year colleges and universities in California.***

**What This Means for Our Grant Making**

While the foundation's goals outlined here are more specific, they are targets for the totality of our grant making and are not prescriptive for individual applicants or grantees. However, we will give priority to organizations and education programs that help address areas where we are falling short.

Collecting and analyzing data on scholarship recipients will also remain a key component of our work. In 2012, we will have the first indicators on graduation rates from the group of students who received college scholarships in the 2008-9 academic year. The scholarship data has already been extremely helpful to the foundation and our partners, and it will continue to inform our grant making in the future.

Finally, we want to encourage your questions and feedback. Please feel free to email us at [info@collegeaccessfoundation.org](mailto:info@collegeaccessfoundation.org), or visit [www.collegeaccessfoundation.org](http://www.collegeaccessfoundation.org) to learn more about our work.

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