
Emergency Aid Distribution in West Texas Community Colleges

LESSONS LEARNED FOR
STUDENT SUCCESS



Believe in Students
Empowering college students for success

beam
Formerly edquity

AUGUST 2023



Lessons Learned for Student Success

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I am so grateful for this emergency money. I've been out of work for six weeks. This money makes it possible for me to pay my bills and keep my class.

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT



Executive Summary

Emergency Aid in West Texas

Basic needs insecurity is pervasive on college campuses, with students facing real-time need due to challenges related to food and housing instability, inadequate health care and rising attendance costs. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education recently released the first-ever national estimates of food insecurity and homelessness and found that college students are more likely to face these issues than the general population. These finance-related challenges have a significant and negative impact on a student's academic performance and are associated with stopping-out and dropping-out of college - even when the financial challenge amounts to a relatively small dollar amount. Emergency Aid (EA) programs are one approach that colleges use to assist students with these unforeseen challenges.

The threats students have faced in meeting their basic needs while in college have increased significantly in the last 15 years, with less than half of all public community colleges today meeting criteria for being affordable. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded these affordability issues as the entire sector forced students out of housing, shut down dining halls, and shifted their instructional model overnight.

In response, Believe in Students and the then-startup mobile app called Edquity - now Beam - partnered with three colleges in West Texas to provide emergency aid funding over two school years, from fall of 2020 through spring of 2022, to help keep students in school as well as in their homes with their families intact. In total, \$835,750 was disseminated throughout this period to help 1,937 students address food, housing, transportation, and other expenses.

One of the partner institutions involved, Odessa College, was able to provide persistence and graduation data for the students who received emergency aid through this program. This data shows that over 90% of all aid recipients persisted in college the following semester or earned their degree. This outcome is particularly noteworthy considering the national persistence rate for public two-year institutions (students continuing their education at the same or a different institution) was 61.5% in fall 2020, while the retention rate (students returning to the same institution) was 52.4%.

This report describes the unique partnership between community colleges in West Texas, Believe in Students, and Beam, sharing information about how the dollars were used by students and how the partners adapted as a result of the project. The findings and recommendations shared here are scalable to other campuses in Texas, and the student outcomes will serve the region's workforce and help meet the state's 60X30 attainment goals and workforce needs.



Background

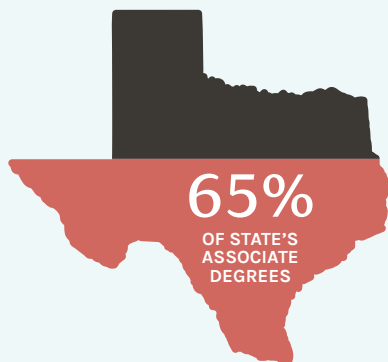
Cultivating Talent in Texas: 60x30

In 2015, Texas set an ambitious goal, commonly referred to as “60x30”— a goal for 60% of Texans ages 25-64 to receive a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030. Texas’ original strategic plan was bold; however, it focused solely on credentials for younger adults. The pandemic and future workforce needs led the state to expand its focus to meet employer needs by focusing not only on traditional-aged learners, but also mid-career professionals and adult learners.

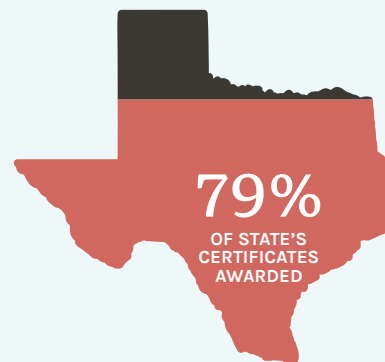
Specifically, the new plan encouraged higher education institutions to better engage students with no higher education experience, and those with some college but no degree. For the state to achieve its lofty goal, community colleges are essential.

Community colleges in Texas play a vital role in the state’s education system – providing affordability and access to traditional-aged students and adult learners, while also working with business and industry to fill the state’s evolving workforce needs. In 2019-2020, Texas community colleges awarded over 50,000 associate degrees and over 50,000 undergraduate certificates, accounting for 65% and 79% respectively.

Texas Community Colleges Fill State’s Evolving Workforce Needs



50,000 ASSOCIATE DEGREES



50,000 UNDERGRAD CERTIFICATES



Background

The West Texas Way

Because of demographic disparities, poverty, and lack of opportunity and access to higher education, not all regions and areas of the state benefit similarly from the prosperity that comes from a more formally educated workforce. In the West Texas region in particular, degree attainment and credentialing are lower than the state and national averages. Census data show that just under 25% of the population in the 26 counties that make up West Texas have an associate degree or higher – compared with 30.1% statewide and 33.1% nationally.

Poverty rates and educational attainment are closely linked. This is no different for the counties in the West Texas region. Poverty rates in West Texas are generally higher than the state, hovering closer to 20% of the population in the counties that make up West Texas—nearly 7 percentage points higher than the state average.

Therefore, students from West Texas are more likely to enroll in college with significant financial needs. Coupled with a global pandemic and an overwhelming percentage of students with dependent children, how the community colleges in the region support the educational, social, and workforce needs of its students will determine not only the individual student's success, but the continued prosperity of an important region to the state.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students at schools across the country felt stretched – paying for college, experiencing unprecedented job losses and unemployment, and family health challenges, while trying to succeed in school. Students in West Texas had an especially difficult time meeting their basic needs while enrolled. To support their students, colleges in West Texas used their federal aid funds, increased access to campus-level supports and resources, and partnered with community and philanthropic organizations to help meet student need. This initiative – a partnership between three West Texas community colleges, Believe in Students, and Beam – provided emergency aid to students currently enrolled at one of the study institutions.



Emergency Aid

Increasing Costs and the Rise of Emergency Aid

Increasing college costs have been at the forefront of the college access debate for nearly two decades. The cost of tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with college has outpaced inflation and wage growth and is not always accounted for in federal and state financial aid policy discourse. The cost burden is most severe for first-generation and lower-income families who are generally less familiar with the true and hidden costs of college, while being least equipped to address those hidden costs when they arise. While most of the cost debate focuses on expensive or private four-year institutions, lower cost community colleges are significantly impacted by declines in state and local funding and the overall purchasing power of federal grants. Because of shifting costs and increased financial need, more students find themselves stretched financially, and when life happens, they find it difficult to overcome small financial challenges that often lead to stop-out or drop-out.

Colleges and philanthropic partners have increasingly turned to emergency aid programs to assist students with acute financial need. Emergency aid programs have been around, but have recently received more attention as campuses look for low-cost (but effective) ways to retain and graduate students who otherwise may stop-out or drop-out due to a real-life financial emergency.

The 2016 Landscape Analysis of Emergency Aid Programs by NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education - identified themes campuses should consider (e.g., who funds emergency aid programs, how are programs marketed) when implementing an emergency aid program. NASPA’s analysis recommends the higher education community focus on five key areas to strengthen aid programs, and this report uses NASPA’s recommendations to understand the lessons learned from this initiative.

- A common language to describe and discuss emergency aid
- Financial aid guidance and federal regulations
- Proper guidance toolkit/best campus practices
- Better use of data for student identification
- Automated processing to meet demand



Emergency Aid

Implementation Considerations

As institutions think through how to administer emergency aid on campus, they also must think through whether to do so in-house or use a third-party vendor. There are a number of vendors that assist colleges with identifying and distributing emergency aid. Using a third-party vendor has its advantages - freeing up valuable staff time and adding analytics support, transparency, and accountability for how aid decisions are made. Additionally, in many cases, these vendors offer one of the most important variables: speed. As students navigate serious and time-sensitive life circumstances, the time it takes to receive the funds is invaluable to student retention and persistence. Institutions should consider and weigh the benefits and critiques when developing an aid program, including which third-party vendor to use, whether the aid program is sustainable, and the true cost of working with a vendor. We hope that this report adds value to institutions as they consider partnership with third-party vendors in administering emergency aid on their campus.












The Program

Emergency Aid for West Texas Students

Research shows that common barriers to accessing emergency aid or other benefits are awareness of the funding, speed of funds distribution, and stigma of applying for assistance. Believe in Students wanted to test a program whose ease of use and swift dollar delivery maximized respect and support for students, and Beam’s approach fit the bill. This pilot program tested how meeting student financial needs in a timely manner, and administering aid in a form most convenient for the student, impacts student success outcomes. This report focuses on cash assistance distributed via direct deposit or pre-paid debit cards to students across three campuses in West Texas: El Paso Community College, Odessa College, and South Plains College.

Beginning in the 2020-2021 academic term, each of the campuses received a white-labeled, customized version of the Beam app, which was made available to students on mobile and via web interface, offering a one-stop shop for their emergency needs. Beam uses a proprietary algorithm to help determine a student’s emergency need. Different from a federal Expected Family Contribution (EFC) number, calculated long before an actual emergency, Beam’s tiered approach allows institutions to focus on the students most in need.

PRIMARY CHALLENGE AREAS BY TIER							
TIERS	 CHILDCARE	 FOOD	 HOUSING	 HEALTH	 LEARNING	 SAFETY	 TRANSPORTATION
TIER 1	43.04%	88.51%	94.79%	57.07%	55.12%	19.58%	71.40%
TIER 2	24.54%	49.35%	59.56%	35.82%	44.02%	7.06%	51.63%
TIER 3	8.92%	19.85%	27.06%	24.75%	52.13%	4.53%	45.46%

As shown in Beam’s tiered challenge area distribution chart, housing and food, closely followed by transportation, are the primary drivers of insecurity and student need.

Each Tier (1-3) indicates the level of vulnerability, with Tier 1 being the most vulnerable student population. Applicants in Tier 2 face at least one barrier to persistence and become second priority, while students in Tier 3 have not demonstrated acute need for emergency aid based on the challenges captured relative to peers identified for Tiers 1 and 2. However, as life happens quickly, campuses should stay in touch with applicants as student life situations change rapidly.



The Program

Developing the Program On Campus

During the program’s initial implementation, each of the three West Texas campuses implemented one of Beam’s two approaches: Odessa College and South Plains implemented the Stretch model, while El Paso Community College implemented the Campaign approach (see next section). In the Stretch approach, each institution set a daily spending cap on how much funding was allotted to a particular day, allowing the funding to last throughout the semester. Given the challenges of the pandemic, schools remained flexible and sometimes switched campaigns midstream to fit what worked best for their campus.

PARTNER EXAMPLE: SHORT TIME HORIZON			
Partner: Edquity College			
Total Size of the Fund: \$50,000			
Award Amount: \$500 for Fall 2020			
TERM	PROGRAM DATES	AMOUNT PER PROGRAM	STUDENTS FUNDED
Program 1: Fall 2020	10/5/2020-10/8/2020	\$50,000	\$50,000 / 4 days = \$12,500 limit per day or 25 STUDENTS PER DAY

The Campaign Approach allowed for a broader reach, with the institution marketing and sending communications to students encouraging them to apply each time a new program opened. El Paso Community College implemented the Campaign Approach to its aid distribution.

PARTNER EXAMPLE: CAMPAIGN PROGRAM			
Partner: Edquity College			
Total Size of the Fund: \$50,000			
Award Amount: \$500 for Fall 2020			
TERM	PROGRAM DATES	AMOUNT PER PROGRAM	STUDENTS FUNDED
Program 1: Fall 2020	10/5/2020-10/8/2020	\$50,000	\$50,000 / \$500 or 100 STUDENTS PER DAY (UNTIL FUNDS ARE GONE)

The funding options provided flexibility to campuses in utilizing Beam’s technology. However, the approach a campus chose influenced the number of students receiving aid on a particular distribution day, the school’s marketing approach, and the timeline between when students could re-apply for additional aid. Both the Stretch and Campaign approaches have pros and cons, but institutions working with Beam had flexibility to implement whichever approach worked best for their campus.



The Program

General Student Characteristics

The students who applied to the West Texas emergency grant program were overwhelmingly students in need – 80% of applicants already received some form of financial aid. This tells us that either the current aid package was not sufficient to cover all student expenses, or the aid was not exhausted, but the process and barriers to apply for additional aid could not meet the speed of the emergency. Over the two-year period, there were 8,680 applications processed amongst the three West Texas Schools. Of those, almost 2,700 applications were funded – helping nearly 2,000 students over the grant period.

Aid recipients overwhelmingly opted to receive funds via direct deposit (86%), a testament to the speed at which Beam was able to work with institutions to process and fund student applications.

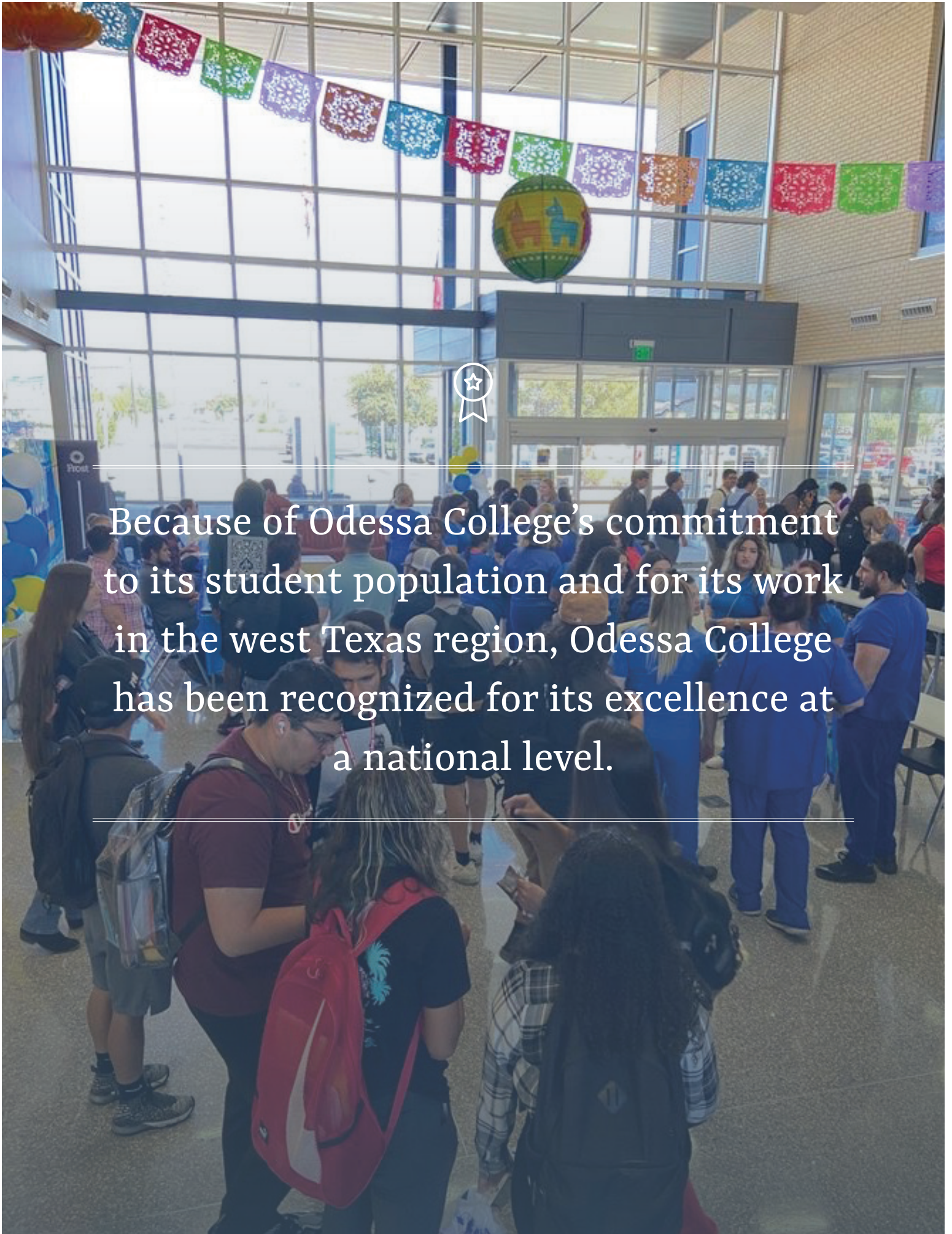


5MINS
5HRS

The average time to apply across all students was 5 minutes, while the average time to claim the award was 5-6 hours. Odessa College's claim time was only 2.5 hours, allowing students to quickly receive the financial help they needed.

For these students, this money was critical – especially given the level of poverty and lack of opportunity in the West Texas region. Over 5% of applicants have been homeless at some point and over 40% have dependents. Many applicants cite multiple challenge areas, related to food, housing insecurity, transportation, and health. According to Ascend (Aspen Institute), student parents are more likely than non-parents to experience severe stress during college, enough to affect their mental health, which leads to drop-out and stop-out. These stressors were exacerbated given the global pandemic, but the students who received this just-in-time aid demonstrate how a small dollar amount, coupled with West Texas grit, helped these students overcome the odds.

The next section of the report features a detailed look at the program at Odessa College, highlighting its student demographics and success metrics, including persistence and graduation data. Odessa College regularly surveys its students around basic needs in partnership with Trellis and the Hope Center, and the data will show the impact COVID-19 had on Odessa College's students and the vital role of this just-in-time emergency aid. Additionally, the report later highlights how South Plains College and El Paso Community College used the emergency aid program to supplement the great work already happening on its campuses.



Because of Odessa College's commitment to its student population and for its work in the west Texas region, Odessa College has been recognized for its excellence at a national level.



Case Study

The Comprehensive Approach of Odessa College



Odessa College, located in the rural Permian Basin region of West Texas, enrolls over 8,000 students, and in-state tuition and fees range anywhere from \$8,000 to \$12,000 per year for district students. Because of Odessa College's commitment to its student population and for its work in the west Texas region, Odessa College has been recognized for its excellence at a national level – being an Aspen College Excellence Finalist in 2021 and being recognized with the Rising Star Award in 2017 and 2019.

Odessa College houses several student success initiatives and has a wealth of resources to assist their students with basic needs, including its Wrangler Food Pantry, established in 2019.

Odessa College staff and administrators work diligently to dispel student myths related to the stigma of receiving help and have therefore seen an increase in students accessing the many sources of support available to them, including community resources and campus mental health services. Odessa College added a social worker in 2021 to assist with emergency aid support during the pandemic. In addition, Odessa College implemented a College Life coaching program, whereby coaches are assigned to first-year students to assist them with their college transition – specifically, directing students to necessary resources and establishing check-ins throughout the year.

Odessa College used the #RealCollege survey to monitor student experiences, coupled with information gathered from their Trellis basic needs survey to keep track of student needs on campus. The basic needs survey – given three times per semester – is used to gauge and monitor whether student basic needs are being met.



Growing Need Among Odessa College Students

Because of Odessa College's ongoing monitoring around student basic needs, the institution plans to further prioritize emergency aid within its institutional funding and increase training opportunities for faculty and staff in identifying and supporting student basic needs.

Trellis Survey Results: 2018–2020



73%

24 point increase in students worried about having funds for tuition



68%

9 point increase in students worried about running out of money



29%

8 point increase in students experiencing very low food security



62%

14 point increase in students showing signs of housing insecurity



53%

11 point increase in students who experienced overwhelming debt



72%

12 point increase in students who would have trouble getting \$500 emergency cash

#RealCollege Survey Highlights: 2020



68%

respondants who experienced some form of basic needs insecurity within the past year



49%

respondants who received public assistance due to basic needs insecurity



43%

respondants who had not applied for campus support because they were unaware



Emergency Aid Distribution at Odessa College

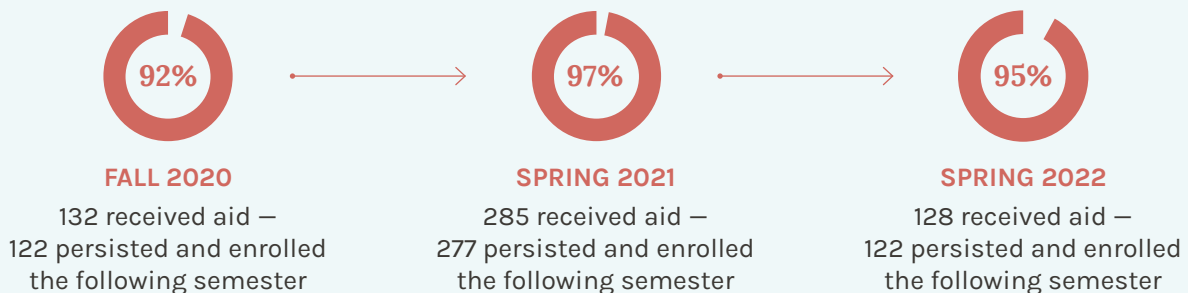
\$308,750 • **1,200** • **60%**
Funds Awarded Requests Funded Have Dependents

Because Odessa College regularly monitors the financial health of its student body, the institution has a clear sense of how important this emergency aid program was for students during the COVID pandemic. For instance, the 2020 Trellis Survey indicated that 86% of students contended with housing and food insecurity during the pandemic, adding to their levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. As such, the funding provided via this program could not have come at a better time for Odessa College students. Furthermore, because of their continued efforts to assess student needs via Trellis and Hope Center Surveys, no school was better positioned to administer this aid than Odessa College.

Odessa College awarded \$308,750 via this program between October 2020 and May 2022. This included processing 1,760 applications and funding over 1,200 requests to over 800 unique students, who mainly (80%) received funds via direct deposit. Most applicants were student-parents, with almost 60% having dependents. Of the applications who were not approved, 426 did not meet the requisite threshold to be considered for need. 63 students were denied because the school met its daily cap (a drawback of the Stretch approach that has since been remedied), and 13 students did not meet initial eligibility criteria.

Persistence At Odessa College

OVER 90%
PERSISTENCE RATE FOR AID RECIPIENTS



In addition, 146 of the aid recipients graduated the semester they received the funds.



Reflections from Odessa College Leaders

The Odessa College team believes that the partnership with Believe in Students was a success. Students quickly and easily applied for aid, were approved within minutes, and received funds within 1-2 days. Further, because of the broader campus climate focused on providing for basic needs, all applicants and recipients were also introduced to other campus supports.

STAFF AS ADVOCATES

This partnership highlights the power of campus staff. During the funding process, there were several students who – based on the algorithm and funding model – were initially denied funding. However, the staff at Odessa College worked directly with Beam staff to advocate for students. In one case, a single mom was denied aid based on the algorithm and funding model, but the staff understood the acute need, advocated for the student, and the student’s need was ultimately met.

FACULTY SERVE AS CRITICAL CONNECTORS

Odessa College faculty were integral to the success of the emergency aid initiative. A central tenet of the Odessa College campus is that faculty will refer to students by name and engage in deeper conversations to know them personally. This close-knit, familial approach not only embodies Odessa College’s values, but aligns with the West Texas creed of assisting those in need. On many campuses, faculty are seen as solely focused on a student’s academic journey and not on them as individuals. Odessa College’s approach puts faculty at the forefront of helping to improve social mobility – for the deserving students and their families.

This generous emergency aid initiative worked well because of the multiple stakeholders – the institutions, Beam, and Believe in Students. But the most important partner in the work was the institution. Because of Odessa College’s commitment to understanding student needs via their surveys and their faculty and staff’s willingness to advocate for student resources, this aid program will only help to advance future efforts to ensure students have the resources and supports needed to succeed on campus.



“

I'm a disabled veteran. I cannot work because of my disabilities, TBI and PTSD.

The VA has totally and permanently disabled me, my wife is my caregiver. So she also does not work so she can stay home and help with our kids and myself. I really just need help until I can get the rest of my financial aid, which won't be until the 1st of February. If not ... I'm not sure I will be able to even attend classes until I get help.

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT



Campus Spotlight

South Plains Community College



South Plains Community College plays an important role in West Texas and the region. Serving a diverse student population, including many first-generation and lower-income students, its affordable tuition attracts a large population of learners looking for a quality education close to home. South Plains is an economic driver for the region - partnering with local businesses and industries to provide workforce training and a skilled workforce for the region and state.

South Plains College provides a robust set of campus resources for students facing basic needs insecurity, including a food pantry, a clothing closet and dedicated funding for housing assistance. This emergency aid program further expanded on work underway at the college and helped students during the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Emergency Aid Distribution at South Plains

South Plains distributed \$233,500 to almost 600 students, approving 830 applications and processing over 1,700 applications. Almost 85% of students chose the direct deposit distribution option and the areas identified as most challenging for students were transportation, housing, and food.

Over 7% of South Plains students reported having experienced homelessness, and almost half (48%) have dependents. Although a relatively small dollar amount, the \$250 or \$500 awards were timely to assist with meeting the acute need of South Plains students.

South Plains leaders believe that helping students with basic needs emergency aid assistance goes beyond one-time funding, and are exploring opportunities to infuse further emergency aid funding as a core function of the institution. The school currently hosts a fundraising gala and is exploring how the fundraiser might use a portion of the proceeds to assist students with just-in-time emergency aid to keep them enrolled.

“I’ve been struggling greatly due to an unexpected family emergency. That left me without a job and me and my children living paycheck to paycheck. This has been a great struggle and every month my late fees for rent have increased greatly and I’m barely making ends meet for groceries or even just diapers and wipes. This has created a great burden on me, struggle to provide for my household with both my toddlers depending only on me.”

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT



Campus Spotlight

El Paso Community College



El Paso Community College's (EPCC) slogan is "the best place to start and finish," and this slogan resonates through campus and the college's approach to serving students.

EPCC is keenly aware of the financial challenges facing its students, before and during the COVID pandemic. Many of their students are one paycheck away from food insecurity, one car repair away from stopping out, and are juggling multiple jobs to cover their basic living expenses.

To address these needs, EPCC is educating donors, decision-makers, and legislators on the importance of academic and living support for student success. Additionally, EPCC is expanding community partnerships with food banks and other non-profits, health and human service organizations, and is in the process of creating a Social Service Mental Health Center to help with basic needs, which includes mental health.

Given large unemployment during the pandemic, the emergency grant aid provided through this initiative helped EPCC's students with their greatest needs - housing, food, healthcare, and childcare.



Emergency Aid Distribution at El Paso

El Paso Community College implemented the campaign approach to emergency aid distribution, running a week-long campaign at the start of each term and distributing \$250 or \$500 awards all at once. Overall, EPCC distributed \$293,500 to over 500 students.

Using the campaign approach led to a higher number of processed applications compared with the other West Texas institutions. Over 5,000 applications were processed, with 621 applications ultimately funded. Over one-third of applicants were deemed unqualified, and half of all applicants were denied due to the program having insufficient funds, which is a tradeoff of the mass outreach campaign approach. At EPCC, over 35% of applicants had a dependent and over 4% had experienced homelessness.

“I am very close to graduating, but I don’t know how I am going to pay rent in December. With the demands of the nursing program I can’t work enough to make enough. Just helping pay my rent for December would be such a huge blessing and make a huge difference towards helping me graduate.”

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT



Lessons Learned

Administering an emergency aid program should be done with care and with a trusted and engaged team committed to administering aid to the most-neediest students in a timely manner. Whether schools administer aid programs in-house or with a vendor, not everything will proceed according to plan, especially during a global pandemic. Additionally, even with advanced technology and an algorithm that allows you to administer aid quickly, how students articulate their need and how well staff know the students applying for aid factor into the program's efficacy. Across the study institutions, there were lessons learned that can be applied broadly. A few of those lessons are outlined below:

Lessons Learned and How We Can Apply Them



MAKE DECISIONS QUICKLY

Emergency aid needs are often sudden, unanticipated, and time-specific, so any time gap in applying or receiving aid necessarily prevents the aid from helping students overcome the specific hardship.



INCLUDE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students uniquely benefit from such programs. Because international students have fewer options for federal and state funds, this initiative (and analogous ones) can offer support to international students with emergency needs.



ADDRESS AFFORDABILITY BROADLY

Without tackling larger structural barriers around affordability and food and housing insecurity, emergency aid programs will only continue as a temporary stopgap for students facing basic needs insecurity. Data from Odessa College add to an evidence base that suggests that well-funded, well-executed emergency aid programs could be an effective component of an affordability strategy.



SUPPORT STUDENT PARENTS

Students caring for children or other dependents are still students. The study institutions serve large populations of students beyond "traditional" college age, and 70% of program applicants reported having a dependent. While they are eligible for general campus resources, more can be done to allocate resources for student parents.

A young woman with dark, curly hair is looking down at a laptop screen. She has a thoughtful or slightly stressed expression, with her hand resting on her head. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a library or study area. The lighting is warm and focused on her face.

“

Trouble paying my utility bill and affording groceries for this semester my expenses were more than I expected for school materials. I may need to quit school to work more.

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT



Recommendations

Across campuses, administrators discussed the context and role of the COVID pandemic on their student body and the efficacy of this philanthropic emergency aid initiative. The role that the just-in-time emergency aid played on student persistence is undeniable, but some of the tangible and measurable lessons were lost due to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, the speed at which administrators had to dole out pots of funds to needy students, and the myriad pressures coming from every direction. Still, the lessons learned across campuses align with NASPA's framework for how institutions and the field should approach implementing emergency aid programs.

Aligning NASPA's framework post-hoc, there are several lessons that can be learned from the West Texas Community College emergency aid initiative that can translate to campus practices.

- A common language to describe and discuss EA
- Financial Aid Guidance and federal regulations
- Proper Guidance toolkit/best campus practices
- Better use of Data for student identification
- Automated processing to meet demand

A COMMON LANGUAGE

Across the study institutions, how emergency aid was defined, administered, and communicated to students and staff varied by institution. Because this COVID-era aid was administered quickly during the pandemic, the speed at which the institutions administered aid to students was more important than focusing on specific details.

Defining need is difficult, and moreover, as Stan DeMerritt from South Plains College explained, "it's difficult to evaluate what's urgent during a pandemic." And while the Beam app sped up the decision-making for campus leaders, many staff and administrators felt truly needy students were left unfunded because they did not articulate on the survey their acute need relative to other students.

FINANCIAL AID GUIDANCE

During the COVID pandemic when this aid program was administered, campus administrators had to sift through multiple federal funding programs to help students in need. Further, at least one campus witnessed international students benefit most from the emergency grant aid since they were ineligible for some of the federal relief funds. Campuses implementing emergency aid programs should examine the disparate impact the emergency aid programs might have on different student populations.

PROPER GUIDANCE/TOOLKIT FOR CAMPUSES

Beam's approach allowed campuses to choose Stretch or Campaign style administrations, which provided flexibility and options. Each approach has its pros and cons and, with limited funds, campuses must choose whether to fund more students over a longer duration or fewer students during a focused campaign period. Whichever option a campus administers, the speed at which they can identify needy students and get them the needed financial resources helps students in real-time. Several national organizations (e.g., ECMC, NASPA) provide guidance on how to best implement emergency aid programs, and these tools can be used to guide the direction and, if desired, vendor selection process.

BETTER USE OF DATA

Beam’s algorithm helped campuses make crucial decisions in a timely manner, which could not have occurred without proper data and the requisite technology. The technology allowed campuses to view the areas of life where students had the most acute need, their level of perceived need relative to others, and some important demographic data for applicants and recipients (e.g., homelessness, financial aid). Whether using a third-party vendor or analyzing data in-house, administrators should examine their student population more fully to truly understand their students and their needs. Each of the campuses used the #RealCollege Survey and additional analytic tools to understand their student population and adjust their campus resources accordingly.

AUTOMATED PROCESSING

Relying on Beam’s algorithm, campuses were able to quickly identify students based on level of need, capture important application information (e.g., time to submit application, time to claim award), and tier student need into target categories. Whether campuses use an app like Beam or another third party vendor, ensuring automatic processing includes a cross-check from a dedicated staff member will be important. Several campuses mentioned appreciating the speed at which the vendor identifies needy students while simultaneously being frustrated the technology underestimates the financial emergency of students sitting in their office. There is an obvious tradeoff campus administrators must make between speed and total automation, versus cross-checking for verification purposes.

“I can’t afford the parking decal — only work two days a week, focus on school, and don’t receive financial aid either. I don’t know where else to turn.”

EMERGENCY AID RECIPIENT

A NOTE FOR POLICYMAKERS

With great support from the philanthropic community, these West Texas schools, the region, and the students they serve greatly benefited from this partnership. Given the investment return on keeping students enrolled and later gainfully employed, the state will benefit from elevating and establishing a state-wide emergency aid program for community college students and working with trusted community partners on implementation.



Acknowledgements

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THIS REPORT WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT THE FOLLOWING:

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- **Our partners at Beam, especially Melanie Butron, who worked diligently to administer the program and share data and learnings from this project.**
- **Wendell D. Hall, Ph.D., Principal, Hall EduConsulting Group, LLC., who served as chief author of this report.**
- **Our founder, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, who conceived of the project and brought the partners together to make it a reality.**

A young woman with dark hair, wearing a blue graduation cap and gown, is smiling broadly and raising her fists in a celebratory gesture. The background is a soft-focus green outdoor setting. A white quotation mark is positioned to the right of her face.

“

What we have seen time after time is that students don't realize that their needs are an emergency. They feel like someone else's challenges are more severe than their own. We have worked to debunk that myth ...

CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR

Emergency Aid Distribution in West Texas Community Colleges

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