



For College, Community, and Justice

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Beyond the Food Pantry: Getting Started Addressing Basic Needs Insecurity on Campus

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High school graduates are heading to college in smaller numbers and the completion rates of those who do continue their education are lagging. Given these trends—plus tight budgets and high costs—all colleges and universities would benefit from assuring their students' basic needs are met head on. This work will be highly cost-effective for the following reasons:

1. It will boost academic performance, helping your institution and your students retain federal financial aid.
2. It will promote retention and degree completion, allowing your institution to generate more tuition dollars and to improve outcomes that matter to legislators responsible for funding.
3. It will reduce the barriers faced by adults returning to school, boosting enrollment.
4. It will make students more focused on learning, easing the job of faculty and staff.
5. It will build bridges between your institution and community organizations, creating new relationships and resources.
6. It will foster a productive opportunity for the private sector to engage with your institution, resulting in graduates that everyone will want to hire.
7. It will generate new philanthropic giving, engaging alumni who don't normally donate but who might feel moved to contribute to emergency aid.
8. It will equip your institution with the data required to compete for federal funding, leading the way as basic needs legislation passes in Congress.
9. It will allow your institution more robust membership in the growing nationwide #RealCollege movement.
10. It will position your institution as a key partner in statewide efforts to ensure that no student is too hungry to learn.

Based on The Hope Center's extensive experience working with colleges and universities across the country, we recommend the following priorities. If your institution seeks a partner to assist in these efforts, we would be pleased to be considered.

1. Establish a baseline. Survey your institution to establish the prevalence of food and housing insecurity among students. These numbers will be useful for informing leadership, educating practitioners and the public on the big picture, and raising money to address the problem.
2. Appoint a basic needs coordinator. Hold town halls for listening and learning, from students, staff, and faculty. Work on increasing capacity to connect students to public benefits (especially SNAP).

3. Assess the landscape of existing supports on campus, including food pantries, emergency aid programs, public benefits access, and case managers. Pay close attention to the approaches to outreach, requirements for eligibility, data collected on numbers served, and capacity (in dollars, staffing, hours, etc.) of these efforts. Please see our [survey](#) of campus food pantries for an example.
4. Examine the implementation of your institution's emergency aid program. Here are the main problems to look for:
 - Insufficient funds relative to demand;
 - A lack of a student-friendly application process that minimizes hassles for both students and their colleges;
 - Limited bandwidth and resources to do effective outreach;
 - Challenges in moving quickly from selection to distribution of emergency aid;
 - Difficulty selecting recipients in an equitable and efficient manner while recognizing the implicit bias compromising the interviews and interactions with students that are usually part of the process;
 - Difficulty navigating the interactions of emergency aid with Title IV financial aid rules and regulations;
 - Struggles maintaining strong positive relationships with students while necessarily denying many requests;
 - Insufficient resources to address particularly expensive needs such as rent and childcare;
 - Difficulty integrating the provision of emergency aid with direction to other supports, including social services and public benefits programs;
 - Challenges providing quality financial management tools to accompany emergency aid and prevent the need for future support.

Consider centralizing fundraising for and distribution of emergency aid across the institution, increasing both efficiency and effectiveness and relieving campuses of unnecessary burdens.

5. Support efforts to expand SNAP access for students, apply for [federal support](#) for those efforts, and work to [accept EBT on campus](#). Encourage your local government to pursue [Hunger-Free Campus](#) legislation.
6. Encourage faculty to add a [basic needs security statement](#) to their syllabus in order to inform their students of supports.
7. Convene the campus dining hall service provider, the VP of finance, and those in charge of student retention. Discuss the current business model for meal plans, and whether the approach might be shifted to enhance retention rather than undermine it. Be sure to consider whether a [Swipe Out Hunger](#) model might be feasible.
8. Create a basic needs website listing available supports. Such a website should include:
 - How to access SNAP, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the ACA, and similar supports;
 - Information about how to reduce the cost of utilities;
 - How to secure emergency aid;
 - Where to find free food, including any swipe out hunger programs;
 - Who to call if more comprehensive support is needed.
9. Offer your staff, faculty, and students the opportunity to learn from leaders across the country at the annual #RealCollege conference.
10. Hold a campus convening to discuss basic needs insecurity and plan for additional actions. Use the event to drive a new fundraising campaign for emergency aid and engage community, private sector, and philanthropic partners.