

Financing Sustainability and Scale

A Playbook for Funding the Implementation and Expansion of Student Success Initiatives

Ioana Hulbert
Bethany Lewis

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ITHAKA S+R

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Executive summary

Comprehensive postsecondary student success initiatives that deliver meaningful improvements in persistence, credit accumulation, and completion require significant investment to implement, sustain, and scale. Holistic wraparound models such as the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Academic Programs (CUNY ASAP) combine academic advising, financial assistance, career supports, and proactive student engagement to achieve these outcomes. While the model's effectiveness has a strong body of evidence behind it, replicating these models at scale requires more than demonstrating effectiveness. It requires coordinated investments, supportive policy environments, and financing strategies that enable institutions to move from pilot projects to system-wide or state-wide implementation.

For state leaders, higher education systems, and institutional partners, the central question is no longer whether comprehensive student success models broadly work, but how to build the fiscal and policy infrastructure needed to sustain and expand them. While many replication efforts begin with philanthropic or time-limited grant funding, long-term success depends on integrating these programs into recurring funding streams, aligning them with state educational priorities, and cultivating the partnerships and capacity necessary for continued growth.

To this end, Ithaka S+R, in collaboration with the CUNY ASAP Replication Team, prepared a playbook that profiles selected ASAP replication sites and comparable student success initiatives to explore how institutions and systems secured funding for implementation, transitioned to

sustainable financing, and navigated the policy and governance decisions required to expand successful models. For the purposes of this research, ASAP replications are defined as initiatives formally implementing the ASAP model with support or technical assistance from the CUNY ASAP National Replication Collaborative, while comparable student success initiatives are those that share core features (such as sustained student engagement, intensive advising, financial support) but are not ASAP replications.

By documenting these experiences, the playbook provides practical guidance for policymakers, system leaders, and institutional administrators seeking to scale comprehensive student success interventions in ways that are both financially sustainable and responsive to local contexts.

Key lessons include:

1. **Senior level support is necessary, but sustainable implementation requires leadership at multiple levels.** Across the initiatives, interviewees note that visible, credible champions at the highest levels (presidents, chancellors, boards, state legislators) are key. However, implementation appears stronger when a dedicated leader has the capacity and authority to make the initiative central to campus work, and when large-scale programs develop governance structures that encourage collaboration across campuses.

2. **Do not underestimate the infrastructure needed for quality implementation.** Several initiatives highlighted the amount of operational work required: recruitment, eligibility, financial aid coordination, incentive distribution, tutoring tracking, reporting, data systems, advisor hiring, websites, press events, and communication with faculty and program staff. These infrastructure issues lend themselves best to system-level solutions and support, when possible.

3. **National evidence opens the door, while local evidence keeps the door open.** Interviewees note that the established ASAP evidence base helps when making the case to funders or legislators. However, according to the interviewees, the most persuasive

evidence is local. Participants described how sharing early outcomes data and student success stories can be more compelling to policymakers than statistics alone.

4. **Sustainability is a financing strategy, not a single funding source.** A major cross-cutting finding is that start-up funding is powerful because it creates runway, infrastructure, and proof of concept. State innovation grants, transformation funds, and philanthropic dollars help sites launch programs, but long-term sustainability requires creative strategies. "Sustainability" is not a single funding source: it is a strategy for gradually shifting core costs, especially advisor and leadership staffing, into recurring budgets, while finding flexible funds for student-facing supports that are harder to fund with public dollars.

5. **Institutionalization is both a financial and organizational culture outcome.** The most successful examples seem to be those where initiatives moved from a discrete grant-funded program to becoming embedded within larger student success strategies. This suggests that sustainability is not just financial but also cultural. At the same time, some interviewees noted that initiative fatigue and perceived competition between initiatives are potential barriers to the work, further strengthening the argument that successful initiatives are those that become part of a larger, integrated and holistic approach to student success strategy.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, postsecondary institutions have increasingly adopted comprehensive student success interventions designed to address academic, financial, and personal barriers to student persistence and completion. The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Academic Programs (CUNY ASAP) is a prominent student success model with a substantial body of evidence demonstrating positive outcomes on increasing retention, credit accumulation, graduation rates, and return on investment.[1] Many other comprehensive student success models, including One Million Degrees, Massachusetts SUCCESS, and TRIO Student Support Service, also include some combination of proactive advising, financial support, academic support, career development, and intentional, long-term student engagement.

As evidence of the effectiveness of such models has grown, so has interest in replicating these models across diverse institutional and state contexts. The CUNY ASAP model, including both the associate and bachelor's degree pathways, have been replicated at 70 colleges across 11 states as of the publication of this playbook. These efforts reflect a broader shift in higher education from siloed, short-term student support programs, toward systematic strategies designed to improve postsecondary attainment and close gaps in outcomes. Yet this proliferation of models and initiatives has highlighted a key challenge in

[1] Susan Scrivener, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques, "Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students," *MDRC*, 2015, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED558511; Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Colleen Sommo, and Himani Gupta, "Supporting Community College Students from Start to Degree Completion: Long-Term Evidence from a Randomized Trial of CUNY's ASAP," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 11, no. 3 (2019): 253–97, https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20170430; Cynthia Miller, Lindsay Fox, Michael J. Weiss, and Michael B. C. Nelson, "Increasing Community College Graduation Rates with a Proven Model: Three-Year Results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration," *MDRC*, 2020, https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/increasing-community-college-graduation-rates-proven-model; Cynthia Miller and Michael J. Weiss, "Increasing Community College Graduation Rates: A Synthesis of Findings on the ASAP Model from Six Colleges across Two States," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 44 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737211036726.

the field: comprehensive initiatives are resource intensive and require substantial and sustained levels of financial and human investment.

As a result, the primary challenge increasingly facing many institutions is figuring out how to implement these initiatives effectively for their students and finance them at scale. Initial implementation is usually funded by philanthropic seed grants or other temporary funding sources. While these grants enable institutions to launch programs and demonstrate impact, they rarely provide a permanent foundation. This challenge becomes even more pronounced when replication efforts expand beyond individual campuses. Scaling initiatives across multiple campuses, systems, or even at the state-level requires a high level of coordination and buy-in across multiple levels of stakeholders, each operating within distinct funding, policy, and accountability environments. Although an increasing number of institutions and states are engaged in this work, relatively little practical guidance exists on how to navigate these complex decision-making processes, governance structures, and financial landscapes in order to secure sustainable funding and scale effectively.

Our research addresses this gap by highlighting the experiences of selected ASAP replication sites and comparable student success initiatives that have successfully pursued funding to implement, sustain, and scale their programs. Through a series of profiles, the playbook explores how institutional and system leaders have developed financing strategies, engaged policymakers and stakeholders, leveraged evidence to build support, and transitioned from short-term investments to more durable funding models. Rather than prescribing a single approach, the profiled initiatives illustrate a range of pathways that reflect differing state contexts, governance structures, funding environments, and institutional capacities. For more information on the selected initiatives, see the appendix.

The goal of this playbook is to equip higher education systems, state policymakers, and institutional leaders with practical insights for building sustainable financial strategies that support long-term student success. By documenting the decision-making process, funding mechanisms, partnerships, and implementation processes that have enabled successful programs to grow beyond initial pilots, this resource seeks to inform future efforts to institutionalize evidence-based student success interventions. Ultimately, improving student outcomes at scale depends

not only on identifying interventions that work, but also on creating the fiscal and policy conditions necessary for those interventions to endure and expand.

Methodology

This project was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the research team reviewed the literature on the implementation and sustainability of student success programs and initiatives that have scaled or are considering scaling. This review served as a foundation for phase two of the project: profiles of student success initiatives within the United States.

In deciding which initiatives to profile, we focused on regional diversity. We also selected states whose initiatives represent a range of maturity levels, legislative approaches, and overall governance structures. We sought to include programs that have undergone both large and smaller scale expansions and highlight those that have pursued innovative funding models. Six of the eight profiles focus on recognized ASAP replications, or programs which have received technical assistance from the ASAP Replication Collaborative to plan and implement their programming utilizing the ASAP model. The ASAP replication sites were selected in close collaboration with the ASAP Replication team, who provided some contextual information on program funding and directed our team to appropriate program contacts. We include two non-ASAP initiatives as well—the Massachusetts SUCCESS Initiative and One Million Degrees. One Million Degrees is often described as a comparable initiative to ASAP, given its similar program components and replication efforts across multiple states. The Massachusetts SUCCESS Initiative also shares some similar features to ASAP, but puts a greater emphasis on model flexibility for local adaptation. SUCCESS had also recently received funding to expand from the community college system to all nine public universities in the state, offering a prime example of a scaled initiative heavily supported by the state budget.[2]

[2] Governor Maura Healey and lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, "Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards $14 million to Increase Graduation rates at State Universities," Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, Mass.gov, December 20, 2024,

Ithaka S+R developed the interview protocols with thematic input from the CUNY ASAP replication team and approval from the Biomedical Alliance of New York's IRB board. Using a snowball sampling methodology, we conducted one to three interviews per initiative. Interview participants included program directors, grant managers, institutional and system leaders, program advisors, and state coordinating board leaders who have direct experience with the selected student success initiatives. In all, we interviewed 13 key stakeholders across the eight initiatives. For any direct references to specific interviews within our findings, we refer to participants as program leadership, rather than by their specific role or agency, to protect participants' anonymity. Ithaka S+R researchers conducted the one-hour interviews virtually over summer 2026, recording the interviews for transcription purposes, with the interviewees' consent. Two research team members then worked collaboratively to analyze the interview transcripts, undertaking a comprehensive open-coding process. The interview participants had the chance to review a draft of the playbook before this report was published.

Funding sources

The initiatives highlighted in this playbook rely on a wide variety of funding sources, both public and private. A recent internal survey by the ASAP National Research Collaborative presents a similar story for other replication sites as well; program funding is diverse and evolves over time, as grant funds and other time-bounded supports conclude and new funding streams are discovered and secured. As we will discuss further in the playbook, the range of funding sources supporting these initiatives demonstrates that there is no standard funding mechanism for programs, nor is there a perfect single funding source. Instead, as the interviewees emphasized, leaders seeking sustainable funding should get creative and pursue funding opportunities at a variety of levels and from various sources, even when they have already secured significant investments from a single source.

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https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-awards-14-million-to-increase-graduation-rates-at-state-universities.

Philanthropic investment is a significant source of funding for student success initiatives, often used as the primary seed funding for initiative planning and implementation. Arnold Ventures in particular, has invested heavily in ASAP replications across the country, including in North Carolina, Maryland, California, Colorado, Arizona, Texas, and West Virginia. Smaller, local philanthropies have also been instrumental for many initiatives. In addition, participants described the importance of institutional foundations, general institutional funds, and private donations to support initiative operations. One Million Degrees boasts a large array of private donors, including corporations like Microsoft and Allstate Insurance.[3]

Public funding, from the federal level down to county or municipality funds, is critical as well. Several initiatives included in this playbook rely heavily on local and state appropriations and grants to support their operations. CUNY ASAP is primarily supported through funds from the New York City Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and the State of New York, with an overall budget of roughly $115 million.[4] With the passage of the 2026-2027 state budget, New York is now investing approximately $20 million in the SUNY system's ASAP and ACE programming.[5] Similarly, Massachusetts has allocated $28 million in its state budget to support the SUCCESS initiatives at their community colleges and public universities.[6]

Several initiatives tightly align with current state financial aid programs. In California, San Mateo County Community College District's Promise Scholars Program builds upon the state's College Promise Grant and

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[3] "OMD Degrees of Impact Report: Reflections on 2024," One Million Degrees, 2024, https://onemilliondegrees.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Degrees-of-Impact-Report.pdf.

[4] "How is CUNY ASAP Funded?" The City University of New York, https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/student-success-initiatives/asap/about/#1676568951387-1c757297-1d70. Budget confirmed through conversation with a CUNY point of contact.

[5] "SUNY Chancellor King Announces Expansion of Nation-Leading Retention and Completion Program to 10,000 Students by Fall 2026," The State University of New York, June 16, 2026, https://www.suny.edu/suny-news/press-releases/6-26/6-16-26/asap-ace.html.

[6] Governor Maura Heley and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, "Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards $13 Million to Support State University Degree Completion," Massachusetts Governor's Office, Mass.gov, January 9, 2026, https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-awards-13-million-to-support-state-university-degree-completion.

College Promise Program, which can cover tuition, fees, and some additional expenses for eligible low-income students for a limited time, and has received multiple state innovation grants.[7] Maryland's ASAP replication sites have utilized a similar tactic, with each of the four institutions participating in the ASAP pilot aligning their programs with the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship, a last-dollar scholarship that provides up to $5,000 annually for eligible students.[8]

The Ascend program at West Virginia University's Parkersburg campus participates in a particularly innovative public funding mechanism to support operations. In October 2025, the program became a SNAP Education and Training (E&T) third-party provider. SNAP E&T is designed to provide SNAP participants with access to activities and wraparound services that help them gain in-demand skills to secure employment in critical employment sectors.[9] Program leadership explained that the university serves a large population of low-income students, many of whom they assumed could be eligible for SNAP. As a third-party provider for SNAP E&T, the university is eligible for partial or full reimbursement of qualified staff and student expenses associated with serving Ascend students who receive SNAP benefits, including emergency aid for expenses like childcare or car repair that may be impeding students' ability to attend courses. SNAP E&T funding stems from both state and federal dollars, and Ascend leadership urged other initiatives to consider whether the program could support their student services.

[7] Cecilia Rios-Aguilar and Austin Lyke, "The California College Promise: A Promise to What, for Whom, and Where?," *PACE*, March 2020, https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/california-college-promise.
[8] "Community College Promise Scholarship," Maryland Higher Education Commission, https://mhec.maryland.gov/preparing/pages/financialaid/programdescriptions/prog_mdcommunitycollegepromisescholarship.aspx.
[9] "SNAP Employment and Training," West Virginia Department of Human Services, Bureau for Family Assistance, https://bfa.wv.gov/snap-employment-and-training.

Lessons

Implementation

Across programs, interviewees emphasized how crucial it is for program leadership to think about sustainability from the very beginning of program development. To build lasting programs, leaders need to develop sound strategies for securing and maintaining stakeholder buy-in, as well as building the human and technical capacity needed to support initiative operations.

Senior level support is necessary, but sustainable implementation requires leadership at multiple levels.

Senior-level leadership is essential for launching and scaling comprehensive student success initiatives, particularly when leaders have decision-making authority over institutional priorities, budgets, or state policy. However, executive-level sponsorship alone is not sufficient. Successful implementation depends on building a broader coalition of people who understand the initiative, see it as connected to their own work and organizational missions, and can continue advancing the work when there is executive or staffing turnover. This is consistent with the broader implementation research, which identifies leadership, initiative champions, organizational readiness, and cross-unit collaboration as key factors that underscore implementation quality.[10]

Across the initiatives, interviewees note that visible, credible champions at the highest levels (presidents, chancellors, boards, state legislators) are

[10] Joseph A. Durlak and Emily P. DuPre, "Implementation Matters: A Review of Research on the Influence of Implementation on Program Outcomes and the Factors Affecting Implementation," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41, nos. 3–4 (2008): 327–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0; Laura J. Damschroder, David C. Aron, Rosalind E. Keith, Susan R. Kirsh, Jeffery A. Alexander, and Julie C. Lowery, "Fostering Implementation of Health Services Research Findings into Practice: A Consolidated Framework for Advancing Implementation Science," *Implementation Science* 4 (2009): 50, https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-4-50; Dean L. Fixsen, Sandra F. Naoom, Karen A. Blase, Robert M. Friedman, and Frances Wallace, "Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature," University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, National Implementation Research Network, 2005.

key. Initiatives need support from leaders who have the ability to influence budgets and strategic priorities, and high-level support is especially critical for initiatives seeking to scale statewide. However, local sites emphasize that a network of champions and leaders is also needed at the campus level. This is particularly important given that such student success initiatives often cut across multiple departments or units. Student success programming may be housed under a specific office or dean, but implementing these programs effectively requires engagement with a wide range of actors across the campus community. Advising, financial aid, academic affairs, institutional research, communication teams, foundations, and senior leadership may all play a role in implementation. Naturally, when programs are scaled to the system or state level, the network of actors involved also grows substantially. Given the often highly siloed nature of campus administration, coordinating such buy-in is no simple task. Implementation may appear stronger when a dedicated leader has the capacity and authority to make the initiative central to campus work, but that leader also needs partners throughout the institution, system, or state, who can advocate for the work.

In addition to identifying the champions, program leaders need to establish the governance structures that facilitate strong collaboration in program design, implementation, and continuous improvement. North Carolina's NC Boost program has taken a workforce-aligned approach to replicating ASAP, partnering with the state's attainment advocacy group, myFutureNC, to engage industry and other stakeholders.[11] In addition, NC Boost encouraged the development of regional consortia amongst community colleges participating in the second implementation cohort. Program leadership recognized that there are many community colleges, largely rural, in the state that could highly benefit from the ASAP model but that may not have the resources or capacity to support the recommended cohort sizes. The consortium model allows these institutions to pool their resources to better serve students in specific regions in the state, guided by state-level consortial agreements that outline each institutions' responsibilities. In Massachusetts, the SUCCESS initiative utilizes a variety of cross-functional teams to oversee the initiative, composed of representatives from both the colleges and state

[11] "Home," My Future NC, https://www.myfuturenc.org/.

agencies.[12] For example, the initiative hosts a Data Professionals Forum quarterly to bring together technical experts from state agencies, programs, college institutional research offices, in order to coordinate and strengthen data infrastructure so programs may better track and assess their outcomes.

Implication

Stakeholders should map the coalition of champions needed to implement and sustain the initiative before launch. They should not only identify the executive leadership whose buy-in is essential, but also the operational leaders, institutional partners, and external stakeholders whose support will determine the success of implementation. In addition, initiatives should be thoughtful about the ways in which initiative governance is structured. Consortiums, advisory groups, and task forces are just some ways that initiatives can strategically bring together key stakeholders to generate sustained buy-in and support for initiative operations, particularly for scaled initiatives that span systems, regions, or states.

Do not underestimate the infrastructure needed for quality implementation.

Program leaders repeatedly underscored the importance of planning for efficient and effective initiative implementation, as comprehensive student success initiatives are operationally intensive. For example, delivering advising support and financial payments, two of the most central program components, requires a significant amount of infrastructure. Institutions have to recruit, hire, and train staff; determine students' eligibility; coordinate with financial aid; distribute benefits; collect and report on data; and collaborate effectively across units. Institutions or systems may be eager to launch programming quickly, but interview participants cautioned patience given the potentially significant

[12] "SUCCESS: Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS)," Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, January 2025, https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/HD4285.pdf.

amount of operational work required to develop the appropriate infrastructure for program operations and tracking. Without a solid foundation, programs may struggle to recruit and retain students and demonstrate impact.

Small institutions or campuses may struggle the most with infrastructure-related challenges. Even at a single campus like WVU Parkersburg, Ascend leadership had to establish a broad advisory team to focus on high-level strategy as well as the operational team responsible for the day-to-day implementation, focusing on incentives, advising, and student tracking. In Maryland, Harford Community College quickly realized that its initiative could not operate solely under student affairs, but rather needed staff from financial aid, institutional effectiveness, admissions, and academic affairs to collaborate on implementation.

Implementation infrastructure becomes even more consequential as an initiative scales.

Yet implementation infrastructure becomes even more consequential as an initiative scales. Processes that are manageable at one campus can become difficult to coordinate across multiple institutions with different student information systems, staffing models, organizational cultures, or administrative procedures. In West Virginia, WVU Parkersburg's Ascend program leveraged SNAP Education & Training (E&T) funds for program operations, but Blue Ridge Community and Technical College's Ascend leadership argued that its staff did not have the capacity to support the bureaucratic burden associated with the federal reimbursement model. System- or state-level infrastructure can therefore play an important role in minimizing duplicative efforts and giving institutions access to the tools, shared language, and expertise that would be difficult to develop independently. In New York, the SUNY system office has centralized functions—that would be duplicative across campuses—coordinating philanthropic fundraising, implementation support, data infrastructure, and communities of practice. Even so, nearly all of our interviewees expressed needing or wishing they had more time for planning. For One Million Degrees, initiative leaders estimated that developing a scaling strategy, identifying the relevant partners, and securing funding took roughly two years, but still felt rushed.

Establishing quality data management is another critical component of program implementation. Leaders of the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship

Initiative ASAP replication (COSI ASAP) emphasized the need for initiatives to think very carefully about the data infrastructure needs of their programming, particularly for those seeking to scale across the state. COSI ASAP has been in operation at two community colleges since fall 2025, with two universities launching programs in fall 2026.[13] COSI ASAP leaders discussed how data management can be extremely complex at the campus level, requiring coordination across multiple tracking systems and stakeholders. They explained that COSI ASAP students are eligible to participate in other student support programs on campus, such as TRIO, and student visits with these services can count towards COSI ASAP requirements. However, the data systems utilized for TRIO and COSI ASAP at some campuses are different, which means the offices often rely on students' self-reported data to track engagement, exposing the data to greater inaccuracies. COSI ASAP campuses also utilize different student information systems that are difficult to reconcile for statewide analysis. COSI ASAP leaders, who oversee all replication sites in the state, developed a series of spreadsheets that each campus fills out with semester engagement reports, but they noted that they hope to develop a more sophisticated data portal in the future so institutions may submit their data directly for tracking purposes.

The expansion of SUCCESS in Massachusetts from the state's community colleges to its universities faced the same challenges as COSI ASAP. SU SUCCESS leadership described how the universities apply SUCCESS services broadly across campuses, to both SUCCESS participants and non-participants. SU SUCCESS advisors typically advise students participating in other programs as well, and the practices across programs can converge, making it impossible to establish a clear comparison group for program evaluation because the majority of students are exposed to at least one program, and SU SUCCESS participants are not identified in campus student information systems. As a result, the initiative must rely on aggregate campus measures for the near term, while working with institutions to better track student-level data within their systems to understand the relationship between SU SUCCESS participation and student outcomes over the long term.

[13] "COSI ASAP," Colorado Department of Higher Education, https://cdhe.colorado.gov/cosi-asap.

> Data are essential for measuring program impact, but initiative leaders must be confident in their accuracy.

The challenges COSI ASAP and Massachusetts SU SUCCESS are facing are not unique; instead, they represent a common challenge with scaled initiative implementation and sustainability. Data are essential for measuring program impact, but initiative leaders must be confident in their accuracy. Developing this confidence takes time and technical expertise, therefore initiatives should ensure they properly account for the potentially significant work needed to develop appropriate infrastructure prior to implementation.

Implication

Stakeholders should budget the time and resources to develop the infrastructure necessary for delivering the full model, not only its direct student-facing services. Where initiatives span multiple institutions, determine early on which functions can be standardized and centralized at a system or state level, so that campuses do not have to build the same infrastructure independently.

Sustaining and scaling

When scaling initiatives, model fidelity versus adaptation is a central tension. Seek to understand which aspects are core tenets of the model to guide decision-making.

It is almost inevitable that scaled initiatives will confront a tension between preserving the general model of their comprehensive program and adapting said model to local needs and contexts. Interviewees at ASAP replication sites noted that fidelity to the ASAP model is essential, given the evidence base and funder requirements. At the same time, nearly every site modified some aspects of the model, typically in consultation with the CUNY ASAP Replication team. Rural transportation

needs, cohort-sizes, workforce-oriented programs, part-time students, faculty advising structures, and local funding constraints all required adjustments to the model to work in local contexts. Staffing and advising, however, are seen as core to the model. Across interviews, leaders noted that more than financial incentives, the relationship between students and a dedicated advisor or faculty member is, in their view, the most important aspect of the model.

Our conversations with initiative leaders suggest that the tension between fidelity and adaptation is not a zero-sum calculus, but rather a question of distinguishing between fidelity to form versus fidelity to function. Specifically, our interviewees grappled with identifying which elements they view as representing the intervention's underlying theory of action (function), and which elements could change without undermining the former (form). Interviewees also noted that such multi-year interventions offer little flexibility and opportunity for quick adaptations, and that issues discovered during early implementation may take years to correct in a future replication cycle. This is consistent with literature that reinforces the idea that adaptation is not inherently detrimental to implementation, but rather a question of whether the core mechanism or theory of change has been preserved.[14]

Across ASAP replications, intensive sustained, and relationship-based advising emerged as a clear core function of the model. For the SOAR ASAP program at Harford Community College, case management is viewed as the critical element of the model: financial incentives like textbook and transportation supports may initially attract students, but the continuing relationship with an advisor is what keeps them engaged and on track. Blue Ridge's experience in West Virginia points in the same direction. Even as financial constraints limited some student benefits, program

[14] Jeanne Century and Amy Cassata, "Implementation Research: Finding Common Ground on What, How, Why, Where, and Who," *Review of Research in Education* 40, no. 1 (2016): 169–215, https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16665332; David M. Quinn and James S. Kim, "Scaffolding Fidelity and Adaptation in Educational Program Implementation: Experimental Evidence from a Literacy Intervention," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 6 (2017): 1187–1220, https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217717692; Terezinha Nunes, Gabriel J. Stylianides, Rosanna Lea, and Louise Matthews, "Replication in Educational Interventions: Developing a Tool to Measure and Promote Fidelity," *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 48, no. 4 (2025): 402–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2024.2420336.

leaders viewed the sustained connection between students and advisors as the element students most needed.

Context-relevant tailoring was necessary for most of the initiatives profiled in this study. The North Carolina BOOST program focuses its ASAP replication on high-demand fields such as healthcare and engineering and advanced manufacturing, and connects completion goals to state workforce needs. Yet, institutions have additional flexibility with these parameters, with leeway to set more restrictive guidelines on eligible fields of study at the campus level. BOOST leadership established a policy guidebook outlining "the shalls" and "the shoulds" of program implementation to ensure these context-specific modifications remain aligned to the general function of the ASAP model. BOOST revises the guidebook on an annual basis to stay up to date on policy changes.

For one profiled initiative, adaptation is explicitly central to the model. SUCCESS deliberately provides community college campuses with flexibility around a common set of practice—intensive advising, affinity-based mentoring, and peer support—over which campuses have a significant level of discretion in implementation. Yet, SUCCESS leadership noted that ensuring consistency across the state's 15 community colleges was the initiative's greatest challenge during the development process, as some standardization is needed to track initiative outcomes in a meaningful way. SUCCESS ultimately settled on its structure and parameters through substantial collaboration amongst campus leaders across the sector.

Implication

Systems and states should identify core components prior to implementation and make explicit where local adaptation is appropriate, in consultation with the model developer or technical assistance provider when possible. Adaptation is most useful when it solves a context-specific problem while preserving the mechanism through which the initiative is expected to improve student outcomes. Initiative leaders should carefully consider how adaptations may impact the data needed to track relevant outcomes, and for initiatives scaled across multiple institutions, compare data at different campuses, as adaptations that significantly differ by institution may limit their ability to speak to initiative-wide outcomes.

Financial incentives distributed directly to students are useful, but difficult to sustain and politically sensitive.

Many student success initiatives provide financial aid to cover students' tuition and fees. But many students still bear other costs to pursue their degree. Financial support that helps students with transportation and textbook expenses, as well as meeting their basic needs, are essential because these expenses can be significant and can keep students from completing coursework. Yet, replication partners described how these incentives are also typically the hardest elements of the model to sustain. Several sites describe difficulty finding the discrete funds for stipends, gas cards, textbook support, or monthly incentives given public funds often come with restrictions or eligibility rules around "gifts."

In West Virginia, early during the initial Ascend implementation, WVU Parkersburg decided to pursue a federal alternative to philanthropic funds to boost the amount the program could provide per student in financial incentives. As a SNAP E&T third-party provider, the institution was able to pursue reimbursement for staff time and funds used to address emergency costs such as childcare, vehicle repairs, school supplies, and other miscellaneous needs for qualifying students. Yet, program leadership still described how the institution would need to apply for additional grants to fund gas cards for students participating in the program, as initial philanthropic funding that supported these incentives is set to run out and the institution will not be able to foot the bill once those funds are depleted. Finding grants that could fill that gap and convincing the institution to prioritize these funds is challenging, leaving the future of these incentives uncertain at the campus.

When faced with navigating the challenging and politically fragile landscape of funding student incentives, San Mateo County Community College District advocated with state lawmakers for policy changes so the district could more easily support the financial incentives of the ASAP model. California's rule restricted the district's ability to use public general funds for student incentives, so district leaders worked with policymakers to carve out an exception for SMCCCD that would allow local general funds to be used to support student costs of attendance. That exception enabled the Promise Scholars program to expand beyond limited pools of discretionary funding, and laid the groundwork for the broader free-college strategy in the district.

Implication

Student financial support should be treated as a distinct sustainability issue. Leaders may need to combine or alternate institutional philanthropic, state, or federal funding sources—or in some cases even change local policy—in order to preserve these supports over time. In contexts where these incentives may be more politically difficult to sustain, initiative leaders may need to generate more evidence about which supports or specific amounts of support are essential for their program's model in order to generate continued buy-in.

National evidence opens the door, while local evidence keeps the door open.

Interviewees note that the established ASAP evidence base was useful for adoption, when making the case to funders or legislators in particular, as it gave them the confidence that the model was worth implementing. Yet interviewees consistently distinguished between the evidence needed to start an initiative, and the evidence needed to sustain or scale it. Once implementation begins, the most persuasive evidence interviewees highlight are local outcomes and student experiences. San Mateo County Community College District, Massachusetts SUCCESS, and SUNY ASAP | ACE in particular noted how sharing both early outcomes data and student success stories was more compelling to policymakers than statistics alone.

> Interviewees consistently distinguished between the evidence needed to start an initiative, and the evidence needed to sustain or scale it.

San Mateo County Community College District illustrates this progression especially clearly. Leaders described early local data as critical to building momentum: after roughly a year of implementation at Skyline College, evidence of improved outcomes helped make the case for additional state innovation funding and districtwide expansion. Over time, those results became part of the case not only for sustaining Promise Scholars but also for broader policy changes and public investment.

SUNY adds a complementary lesson: sometimes the most persuasive evidence is not just quantitative. System leaders described student stories as having a particularly powerful impact on legislators, which led them to deliberately create opportunities for students to speak at campus press events. Those events also introduced local legislators to the program and helped turn campus implementation into a broader advocacy strategy. As one interviewee noted:

> "The student stories invariably always have the greatest impact. They do better than any slide or numbers can. So as much as possible, we try to get the student voice in front of them, whether that's through video interviews, whether that's through the press events where the students get up to the podium and talk about the impact it's had on their lives, but we also do an annual student experience survey as well, and we fight to get that response rate as high as possible."

This is not to say that anecdotes should replace quantitative data, but rather that quantitative outcomes, student surveys, and individual stories perform different but complementary functions: data establish credibility and impact, while student voices make those outcomes tangible to decision-makers. This can also be tied to the maturity of an implementation. Early implementations may have to rely on broader, national evidence bases while they wait on local outcomes.

Implication

National evidence can justify a proven model, but long-term financial and political support generally requires that the initiative demonstrate that it produces local value. As such, evaluation and communications should be planned in tandem with each other. Programs need credible outcome data, but they should also develop mechanisms for systematically capturing student experiences and communicating results to institutional leaders, funders, policymakers, and communities.

Sustainability is a financing strategy, not a single funding source.

A major cross-cutting finding is that start-up funding is powerful because it creates runway, infrastructure, and proof of concept. State innovation grants, transformation funds, and philanthropic dollars helped sites launch programs that would have been difficult or impossible to start through regular operating budgets. However, sites diverge in their sustainability strategies. A clear implication is that "sustainability" is not a single funding source, but rather a process through which initiatives are able to build a portfolio that includes both recurring and flexible funding from public and private sources. The specific breakdown varies across the profiled initiatives, and is dependent on state higher education funding formulas, institutional capacity, and the maturity of the initiatives themselves. For most though, it is primarily a strategy for gradually shifting core costs, especially advisor and leadership staffing, into recurring budgets, while finding flexible funds for student-facing supports that are harder to fund with public dollars.

Some initiatives have explicitly sought out public recurring funds from the outset. SUCCESS leaders in Massachusetts developed the initiative intentionally as a statewide investment that grew from $7.5 million in 2021 to $14 million today, with leaders continuing to advocate for expansion. Other initiatives have pursued more blended funding portfolios. In New York, SUNY has secured ongoing state funding for ASAP/ACE, but continues to pursue private philanthropic funds, explicitly using the combination of the private and public investment to make the case for ASAP/ACE that much more compelling. One Million Degrees combines philanthropic funding for national expansion with a fee-for-service model in Chicago, where the college system directly supports initiative personnel, showcasing how an initiative can shift from philanthropic funds to institutional investment.

Implication

Stakeholders should explicitly plan to distinguish between costs that will need to be institutionalized and costs that can continue relying on flexible funds as part of their sustainability strategy. Rather than seeking a permanent recurring funding source, stakeholders should aim for a diversified funding portfolio and use early evidence to show value proposition, develop partnerships, and secure a network of public and private funders.

Institutionalization is both a financial and organizational culture outcome.

Lastly, the examples in this playbook suggest that the most durable initiatives do not simply secure continued funding, but they also change how institutions conceptualize and operationalize student success. Interviewees note that over time, best practices from initiatives can spill over beyond the boundaries and target group of the original initiative, and become institutionalized across campus. This suggests that sustainability is not just financial but also cultural, and that successful initiatives can become part of the institution's mission and day-to-day operation.[15]

The most successful examples seem to be those where initiatives moved from a discrete grant-funded program to becoming embedded within broader student success strategies. For example, SMCCCD's Promise Scholars Program grew from one campus to span all three colleges in the district. Program leadership described how district campuses have experienced significant leadership turnover in the years since the program's launch, but given the strong outcomes the program has produced, it has been able to weather potential budget cuts because "the Promise Scholars Program is a fundamental part of what we do as a district." The program has also created a pipeline of alumni returning as Promise counselors, and program staff moving into broader leadership

[15] Cynthia E. Coburn, "Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 6 (2003): 3–12, https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032006003.

positions within the district that provided a key network of advocates for free-college measures.

Similarly, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College leaders described how the sustained student advising component of Ascend influenced other campus initiatives, while students and alumni of Ascend developed new internship opportunities and stronger connections across campus departments by virtue of their participation in the program. These developments, in turn, increased the visibility of Ascend and highlighted that benefits extended beyond the students formally enrolled in the program. While in early stages of implementation, Harford leadership expects that the impact of ASAP replication will influence advising, case management, and referral best practices outside of ASAP, suggesting the potential for campus-wide institutional transformation. Then again, Harford leadership noted that this is in part due to the fact that ASAP was in alignment with the mission of the institution in the first place: "Everyone was on board. There was no hesitation whatsoever… It just fits right in with our strategic plan and our values and our mission…and where the foundation is focusing its energies on raising funds to support needs outside of the classroom."

These examples point towards a broader definition of scale. Scale can refer to serving more campuses or more students, but it can also refer to principles and practices of an initiative diffusing beyond the bounds of the individuals directly involved with it. Some interviewees noted, however, that initiative fatigue and perceived competition between initiatives could emerge as barriers to the work, further strengthening the argument that successful initiatives are those that become part of a larger, integrated and holistic approach to student success strategy.

Implication

Stakeholders should not only assess sustainability by whether an initiative is able to secure ongoing funding, but also by whether its practices, relationships, and student-success approach becomes embedded in larger strategy and operations. This work is supported by sustained and frequent engagement with key stakeholders from the beginning of initiative development and planning.

Conclusion

Throughout our research, interviewees highlight that scaling and sustaining comprehensive student success interventions is not an endpoint, but a process. Long-term success requires more than simply identifying a model that works and the funding to implement it; it requires ensuring the structural conditions needed such as buy-in at different leadership levels, adequate implementation infrastructure, credible evidence (both national and local), a diversified financing strategy, and aligning the initiative with broader student success missions.

The initiatives profiled in this playbook show that there is no single pathway to achieving sustainability. They represent different governance structures, funding environments, student populations and needs, institutional capacities, and approaches to scaling. Yet, they all underscore how important it is to treat building capacity, evidence, relationships, and organizational commitment as ongoing processes. A strategy that may work for an initiative supported and directed through statewide legislative efforts may look very differently from a campus-level initiative supported by a network of institutional, philanthropic, state, or even federal support.

> The strongest indication that an initiative will endure is when it becomes aligned with broader missions and goals.

Perhaps more importantly though, sustainability should not simply be reduced to funding strategies alone. As the initiatives in this playbook suggest, the strongest indication that an initiative will endure is when it becomes aligned with broader missions and goals. When practices such as intensive advising, coordinated student support, and addressing academic and financial barriers become embedded in an institution's broader strategies and operations, the initiative has achieved a form of scale and sustainability that extends beyond the continuation of the program itself. For policymakers and system or institutional leaders considering similar initiatives, this means planning for sustainability from the outset. Not simply to preserve a particular program indefinitely, but to build durable structures that embed evidence-based practices into how institutions, systems, and states support student success.

Appendix

Profiled Initiatives

ASAP Replication Sites

The City University of New York (CUNY) system launched the CUNY ASAP program in 2007 to improve the retention and completion rates of associate degree-seeking students.[16] CUNY ASAP is a comprehensive initiative that provides participating students with financial resources, including textbook and transportation assistance, structured pathways to support academic momentum, and direct support services, such as tutoring and career development planning. CUNY has since significantly expanded the program. As of fall 2025, ASAP had supported 44 percent of CUNY's first-time, full-time associate degree-seeking students and 28 percent of all associate degree-seeking students. The bachelor's degree pathway, formerly known as ACE, was launched in 2015 to replicate the success of ASAP's model at the senior colleges within CUNY.[17]

CUNY's ASAP National Replication Collaborative formally partners with institutions and state systems to help them replicate the model in their contexts.[18] The collaborative provides extensive technical assistance and support to programs to support their planning for effective, high-fidelity replications. Our analysis includes six of these ASAP replications, and we summarize the models below.

Ascend in West Virginia

In 2019, the West Virginia Community and Technical College System began the development and implementation of an ASAP replication at two community colleges in the state: West Virginia University at Parkersburg

[16] "ASAP: About," The City University of New York, https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/student-success-initiatives/asap/about/#1676568951364-3b6394f8-74bd.
[17] "How Replication Works," The City University of New York, https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/student-success-initiatives/asap/replication/about-the-collaborative/.
[18] "Replication Partner Sites," The City University of New York, https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/student-success-initiatives/asap/replication/replication-partner-profiles/.

and Blue Ridge Community and Technical College.[19] WVU at Parkersburg is located nearest the Columbus metro area, while Blue Ridge sits closer to the Baltimore metro area. The program, called Accelerating Student Completion: Encouraging New Dreams (Ascend), was launched at both institutions in fall 2020.[20] The Ascend approach has a greater focus on workforce alignment than the traditional ASAP model: Ascend students must be pursuing degrees linked to high-demand fields in the state's labor market, including advanced manufacturing and health care. In addition, the program places greater emphasis on career-readiness through applied associates degrees and technical certifications than associate of arts or sciences programs that prepare students to transfer to earn their bachelor's degree. At the launch of the program, the system framed both sites as a pilot for the state, with the hope that the program could expand system-wide in the forthcoming results from the randomized controlled trial of Ascend being conducted by the Economic Mobility Corporation.

Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative ASAP

The Colorado Department of Higher Education began its ASAP replication in 2025.[21] Participating students are eligible for the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI), which was signed into law in 2014 to help boost the postsecondary attainment rates of Colorado residents educated within the state.[22] COSI ASAP's replication is part of the Colorado Partnership for Proven Initiatives, a partnership between Arnold Venture and the Colorado Governor's office, facilitated by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy and the Colorado Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative, and intended to support and scale evidence-based programming across the state. COSI ASAP provides support for both associate and bachelor's degree-seeking students at both two- and four-year institutions.

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[19] "Expansion and Replication of the ASAP Model in West Virginia Community Colleges, Aimed at Increasing Occupationally-Focused Degree Completion," *Arnold Ventures*, June 14, 2021, https://www.arnoldventures.org/stories/expansion-and-replication-of-the-asap-model-in-west-virginia-community-colleges-aimed-at-increasing-occupationally-focused-degree-completion.

[20] Mikayla Hamrick, "Blue Ridge CTC Introduces Student Success Pilot Program Ascend," *The Journal*, July 23, 2020, https://www.journal-news.net/journal-news/blue-ridge-ctc-introduces-student-success-pilot-program-ascend/article_e4a43fc9-26af-5006-b6fc-a7419a5023dc.html.

[21] "COSI ASAP," Colorado Department of Higher Education, https://cdhe.colorado.gov/cosi-asap.

[22] "About COSI," Colorado Department of Higher Education, https://cdhe.colorado.gov/about-cosi.

Lamar Community College and Colorado Mountain College, both two-year institutions, launched their ASAP associate degree programs in fall 2025, and Adams State University and the University of Northern Colorado, both four-year institutions, launched their ASAP bachelor's degree programs in fall 2026. Colorado Mountain College also expanded its programming in fall 2026 to serve bachelor's degree-seeking students.

NC Boost

The North Carolina Community College System replicated ASAP in 2025 with the NC Boost program. NC Boost aims to improve associate degree completion in the state, and the program slightly modifies the ASAP model in two key ways. First, NC Boost is particularly focused on workforce alignment to labor market demand in North Carolina. The program is designed to take advantage of funding from the system's new Propel NC funding model, which incentivizes community colleges to strengthen pathways between postsecondary programs and high-demand, high-wage fields in the state.[23] As such, NC Boost supports students pursuing degrees in a set of eligible fields, including health care and engineering and advanced manufacturing.[24] NC Boost is also offered at individual institutions and as part of regional consortia. NC Boost first launched at eight community colleges in fall 2025. Seven more institutions launched NC Boost in fall 2026, with an emphasis on regional consortia meant to develop and strengthen regional partnerships to expand programming to more underserved areas in the state. Three consortiums are in development, with two planned to launch in fall 2026.

Promise Scholars Program

San Mateo County Community College District's ASAP replication, the Promise Scholars Program, is aimed at improving three-year certificate and associate degree completion rates and follows the ASAP model closely.[25] Located between San Francisco and Silicon Valley in California, the district consists of three colleges: Cañada College, College of San Mateo, and Skyline College. The Promise Scholars Program first launched

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[23] "Propel NC- Implementation Resources," North Carolina Community Colleges, https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/college-faculty-staff/academics/propel-nc-a-workforce-driven-business-model-for-north-carolinas-future/.
[24] "Boost," North Carolina Community Colleges, https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/boost/.
[25] "Promise Scholars Program," San Mateo County Community College District, https://smccd.edu/promise/.

at Skyline College in the 2018-2019 academic year, then was scaled to the rest of the district in less than two years. The program builds upon the state's College Promise Grant and College Promise Program, which can cover tuition, fees, and some additional expenses for eligible low-income students for a limited time.[26] The program is now supported by general funds at the district level, after initial start-up grants and from the state and philanthropic organizations.

SUNY ASAP | ACE

The State University of New York System's replication of ASAP and ACE are arguably the most prominent replication sites in the field given their scale. Twenty-three colleges offer SUNY ASAP (Advancing Success in Associate Pathways), 16 offer the bachelor's degree-focused ACE (Advancing Completion through Engagement), and five institutions offer both ASAP and ACE.[27] The SUNY system first launched its replication in 2024 with 25 institutions, after the success of a small ASAP pilot at SUNY Westchester Community College, called Viking Resources for Obtaining Associate Degrees and Success (Viking ROADS).[28] New York state heavily invests in the programs, with the most recent state budget allotting $20 million annually for SUNY ASAP|ACE, allowing the programs to serve students at 44 campuses across the state.[29]

SOAR ASAP

Harford Community College in Bel Air, Maryland launched SOAR (Student Opportunities for Achievement and Retention) ASAP in January 2026. Harford is one of four institutions in Maryland replicating the ASAP model, spurred by the Maryland Partnership for Proven Programs—a partnership between Arnold Ventures and the Maryland Governor's office to scale

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[26] "The California College Promise: A Promise to What, for Whom, and Where?" *PACE*, March 2020, https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/california-college-promise.
[27] "ASAP|ACE," The State University of New York, https://www.suny.edu/asap-ace/.
[28] "Governor Hochul Announces Expansion of Nation Leading Retention and Completion Program to Help More New Yorkers Remain in College and Earn Their Degree," New York State Governor's Office, June 3, 2025, https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-expansion-nation-leading-retention-and-completion-program-help-more.
[29] "SUNY Chancellor King Announces Expansion of Nation-Leading Retention and Completion Program to 10,000 Students by Fall 2026," The State University of New York, June 16, 2026, https://www.suny.edu/suny-news/press-releases/6-26/6-16-26/asap-ace.html.

programs that improve the economic mobility of state residents.[30] Like Colorado, this statewide initiative is also supported by the nonprofit Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy.[31] Although four institutions have developed or are developing ASAP programs as part of this statewide initiative, each replication site is implementing the model as a distinct initiative rather than a single, centrally administered replication.

Comparable Initiatives to ASAP

Massachusetts SUCCESS

When Massachusetts launched the Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS) initiative in 2021, it became the first state to create a comprehensive student support initiative in the community college sector that is systemwide and state-funded, serving all 15 community colleges in the state.[32] The initiative was established by the Massachusetts legislature, following advocacy by the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges (MACC) and college leaders across Massachusetts. MACC oversees the initiative, while operating within a shared governance structure that includes the SUCCESS Leadership Team, institutional leadership, and the Department of Higher Education. SUCCESS provides support to colleges to fund wraparound services that improve the outcomes of students facing systemic barriers, including those who are economically disadvantaged, first-generation, or from historically marginalized backgrounds. SUCCESS funds may not be used for student financial aid or financial incentives. The focus on nonfinancial services is a key distinction between the ASAP model and SUCCESS, as well as the initiative's emphasis on local adaptability, as institutions have some latitude to apply SUCCESS funds to their specific needs and context. The legislature outlined allowable supports and services, but each college can choose how to implement, whether by creating new services or investing more strongly in existing supports, as long as those services are

[30] "Governor Moore Announces Maryland Partnership for Proven Programs with Arnold Ventures," *Arnold Ventures*, February 14, 2024, https://www.arnoldventures.org/newsroom/governor-moore-announces-maryland-partnership-for-proven-programs-with-arnold-ventures.

[31] "Coalition Overview," Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, https://www.evidencebasedpolicy.org/coalition-overview.

[32] Aizat Nurshatayeva, Ellen Bryer, and Lindsay C. Page, "The Road to SUCCESS: Implementing a Comprehensive Student Support Initiative in Massachusetts Community Colleges," *Annenberg Institute*, November 2025, https://annenberg.brown.edu/publications/road-success-implementing-comprehensive-student-support-initiative-massachusetts.

evidence based and include a set of specific activities, such as proactive advising, mentoring, and peer support.[33] Funding for the initiative in the community college sector has doubled since it was first introduced from $7.5 million in FY2021 to $14 million in FY2026, with the annual budget in FY2026 coming in at $14 million.[34]

In January 2026, the state announced that it would award $13 million to Massachusetts's public universities to create the State Universities SUCCESS initiative (SU SUCCESS).[35] SU SUCCESS, while similar to SUCCESS, is not a direct replication of its predecessor. Both initiatives are aimed at improving retention and completion rates, but the services they fund differ. SU SUCCESS funds can go to student financial supports, including grants to help students cover basic needs and expenses like child care and transportation. This initiative also emphasizes using funds to cap advisor caseloads at 150 students per advisor and connecting students with social workers and other support services to improve student mental health. SU SUCCESS is overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, but like SUCCESS, operates with a shared governance structure with institutional leadership.

One Million Degrees

One Million Degrees (OMD) was founded in 2006, initially as the Illinois Education Foundation, with the purpose of accelerating community college students' progress on career pathways to economic mobility.[36] OMD utilizes a similar model to ASAP, in that it funds both financial and nonfinancial supports for students. OMD has partnered with the City

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[33] "SUCCESS: Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services, Spring 2026 Report," Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges, https://masscc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Spring-2026-SUCCESS-MACC_FINAL_accessible.pdf.

[34] Aizat Nurshatayeva, Ellen Bryer, and Lindsay C. Page, "The Road to SUCCESS: Implementing a Comprehensive Student Support Initiative in Massachusetts Community Colleges," *Annenberg Institute*, November 2025, https://annenberg.brown.edu/publications/road-success-implementing-comprehensive-student-support-initiative-massachusetts.

[35] Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, "Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards $13 Million to Support State University Degree Completion," Massachusetts Governor's Office, Mass.gov, January 9, 2026, https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-awards-13-million-to-support-state-university-degree-completion.

[36] "Mission and History," One Million Degrees, https://onemilliondegrees.org/mission-history/.

Colleges of Chicago for over two decades, and provides comprehensive support services to students, including academic advising, career development, personalized coaching, and financial assistance such as textbook and transportation stipends.[37] In 2025, OMD began to expand its reach beyond the Chicago metro area through national replication efforts.[38] OMD has partnered with institutions and systems in several states now, such as Colorado and Ohio. The organization is also extending its reach across Illinois with partnerships with the University of Illinois system and Illinois Community College Board.

[37] "Home," One Million Degrees, https://onemilliondegrees.org/.
[38] "OMD higher Education Partners," One Million Degrees, https://onemilliondegrees.org/omd-higher-education-partners/.