

POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Helping College Students Thrive With Basic Needs Services and Resources

Partner ECMC Foundation

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Many college students struggle to afford the full cost of college attendance, which includes tuition and fees as well as food, housing, transportation, child care for student parents, school supplies, access to the internet, and other living expenses. Students experience basic needs insecurity when they lack access to what they need to survive and thrive in a postsecondary academic setting. Postsecondary institutions address these challenges by providing basic needs resources and services.

In early 2020, ECMC Foundation launched the Basic Needs Initiative (BNI), funding seven organizations to further the development and sustainability of basic needs services at postsecondary institutions through direct service, technical assistance, and research. Since 2020, ECMC Foundation has partnered with Education Northwest to evaluate the initiative and conduct a learning community for grantees.

Providing comprehensive basic needs services

Education Northwest researchers worked closely with the ECMC Foundation to understand how the BNI grantees support postsecondary institutions and how postsecondary institutions implement basic needs services.

The first [evaluation report](#) provides case studies of basic needs services at colleges and universities and lessons for sustaining basic needs services focused on four goals. The institutions surveyed have made progress on offering timely, accessible, and comprehensive basic needs services (goal 1), with about half at full implementation. However, only about a quarter had fully implemented using student-centered approaches to alleviate stigma associated with accessing services (goal 2) and providing case management to help students through this process (goal 3). Meanwhile, just 14

percent had fully implemented collecting and using data (goal 4). These findings suggest that institutions understand offering basic needs resources and services is fundamental to student success. However, the value of these offerings may be limited if students are unable or unwilling to access them, and if institutions do not effectively track the use of these services on their campuses.

The [second and final evaluation report](#) draws on student-level data from postsecondary institutions to understand who accessed basic needs services in 2020–21 and 2021–22 and the impact of accessing these services on short-term academic outcomes. This study highlights the current limitations of administrative data on basic needs services usage, its value in uncovering which students access services among the total student population (even among students not enrolled in a term and high school students), and the connection between accessing services and outcomes. Further efforts are needed to improve data capacity so that postsecondary institutions and systems can use data to improve the reach and effectiveness of basic needs services, ultimately reducing students' basic needs insecurity and improving their college success.

Basic Needs Initiative case studies

The evaluation draws on diverse student voices from five colleges and universities to provide practical actions institutions can immediately take to provide student-centered approaches that alleviate stigma and increase basic needs security.

[Arkansas Northeastern College](#) | [The University of Alabama at Birmingham](#) | [Napa Valley College](#)
[Highline College](#) | [Grand Rapids Community College](#)

Continuing the work to fulfill basic needs on campus

The evaluation also developed a basic needs services [implementation rubric](#) to help colleges and universities work toward the four goals outlined in the first evaluation report. The rubric has indicators and activities for each goal and examples of implementation practices that were developed and refined based on survey data collected in 2021 and 2022 from nearly 70 postsecondary institutions in six states.

We also conducted a formative evaluation of all 31 ECMC Foundation basic needs grantees, which included the 7 grantees in the BNI and 24 additional grantees working on basic needs. We then collaborated with the foundation to develop a theory of action to inform how it invests in this area to reduce students' basic needs insecurity. Education Northwest's evaluation work has been instrumental in helping the ECMC Foundation develop the next phase of its strategy for ensuring all college students have access to basic needs services and the opportunity to succeed.