



Emergency Aid Grants? We Have Guidance to Share

Looking for resources to help you with your approach to the new [CARES Act authorizing more than \\$6 billion for schools](#) to provide direct emergency aid? Colleges and universities will receive this funding from the Department of Education to provide emergency cash grants to college students whose lives and educations have been disrupted by the coronavirus outbreak. Good news: the lessons Ascendium has learned through our [Emergency Grants programs](#) have resulted in great, timely resources for schools.

Since 2012, we've helped two- and four-year colleges build emergency grant programs. Equal Measure worked with Ascendium Dash Emergency Grant awardees to create a set of tools to codify the process of awarding emergency aid and identify best practices and gaps in administering emergency aid programs: [Emergency Aid for Higher Education: A Toolkit and Resource Guide for Decisionmakers](#). Our report, [A Broader View of Emergency Aid: Toward a More Holistic Approach to Helping Students Weather a Financial Crisis](#), is a short summary of Ascendium's lessons learned and best practices from the past seven years of awarding emergency grants. These two pieces are great assets for colleges launching new emergency aid grants and while they were developed as general guidelines (not as a pandemic response), the principles translate well to this current environment.



Essential Service: Tools of the Trade

During this difficult and unprecedented time in our history, the trades continue to be an essential service, but apprentices earn modest wages with limited options for financial aid during their on-the-job training and classroom instruction—which even in the best of times can last up to five years. Costs for specialized equipment, tools and clothing can present serious financial challenges to even the most motivated apprentices. Simply put, the price of steel-toe boots can stand in the way of program completion and the promise of a rewarding career. Ascendium's [Tools of the Trade](#) grant helps apprentices with the cost of specialized equipment, clothing or tools above and beyond the cost of tuition, a need that's more critical now than ever. That's why we're pleased to report 2019-2020 awards totaling \$301,500 across the Wisconsin Technical College System to 201 apprentices, each of whom received a \$1,500 scholarship. Ascendium has awarded \$1,488,000 in scholarships through the program since 2013, and colleges consistently report that 95% of Tools of the Trade scholarship recipients have either completed or continued their apprenticeships the following semester. We wish all the grant awardees success in their programs.



New Resource: Trends & Challenges in Financial Aid Awards

Making college accessible to all includes making it affordable to lower-income families. A growing policy strategy at the state level is to provide individual students with need-based financial aid to offset tuition and living expenses, which presents challenges in identifying eligible recipients and making awards. RAND Corporation and the State of Wisconsin partnered to create a new database connecting state grant aid applications to the educational attainment of applicants. Now a [new report](#) funded by Ascendium describes those trends and challenges, and how research might be used to support policy decisions for Wisconsin and other states.

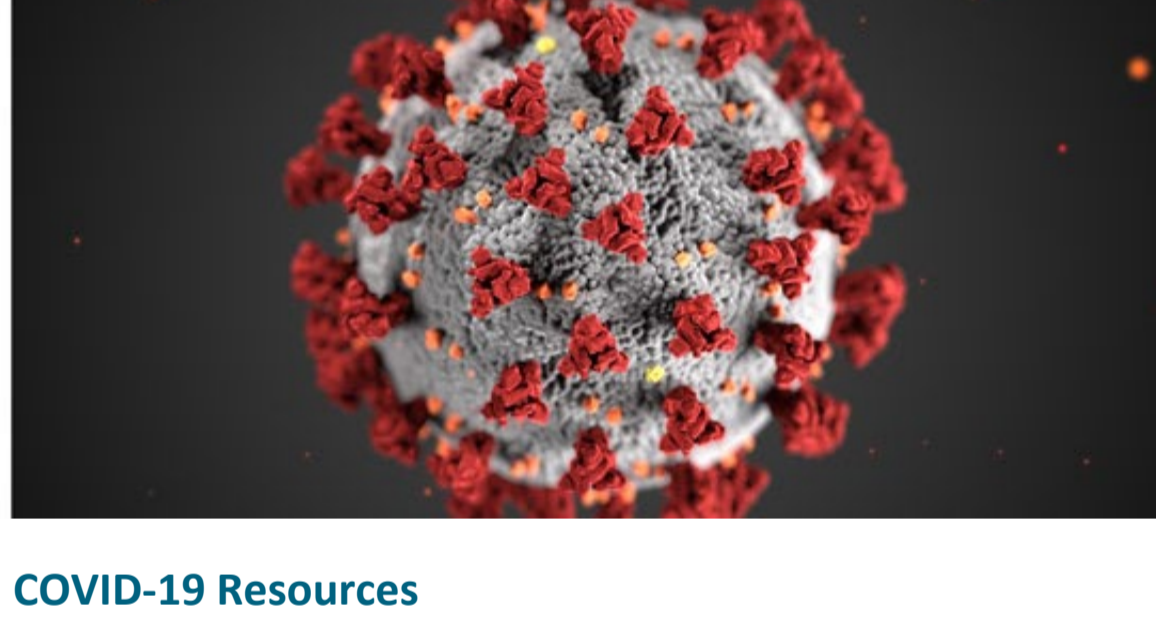
The data were provided under a data sharing agreement between RAND and the Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB). We spoke with Connie Hutchison, HEAB Executive Secretary, and Sherrie Nelson, HEAB Administrative Policy Advisor, about this project and what it meant for their work:

- Why was HEAB open to this kind of partnership and what benefit did HEAB derive?
 - Information is valuable because it can guide our decisions about the amount of aid we should be fighting for, and about how the aid is distributed. It also gives a clearer picture of how many students were able to graduate with the help of financial aid.
- What results did you find surprising or most important?
 - Most interesting was the confirmation that the students with most need are often the last to file their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), therefore losing the opportunity to receive funds because of the first-come-first-serve nature of awarding grants. This is a difficult problem to tackle.
- What could other states learn from this kind of research partnership?
 - This type of research partnership in other states might provide information about which programs and levels of funding are the most successful at helping the lowest income students achieve a college degree.

Building Data Infrastructure in Postsecondary Education in Prison

Do you want to know how many postsecondary education in prison programs exist in the United States? How many students are currently enrolled in these programs? Or which institutions are conferring credits and what pathways are available to incarcerated students?

The Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison Programs has launched! [TAKE THE SURVEY HERE](#) and help the @AllianceforHEP build the most comprehensive directory of programs. Funded by Ascendium, in partnership with ECMC and Sunshine Lady.



COVID-19 Resources

Ascendium has been working intently during this COVID-19 crisis to provide flexibility and support to our partners and their students, as well as reevaluating expectations and opportunities for work under development. While we don't currently have any dedicated funding available for needs of colleges and universities directly related to the impacts of the pandemic, [we have been working to address this issue](#) and to keep an eye out for resources shared by other organizations:

CARES Act and Government Resources

- Ascendium Education Group, [A Broader View of Emergency Aid: Toward a More Holistic Approach to Helping Students Weather a Financial Crisis](#), report of lessons learned and best practices in awarding emergency grants
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Institutions of Higher Education
- [Steptoe](#), Resources and Assistance for Institutions of Higher Education under the CARES Act
- [U.S. Department of Education, CARES awards](#), (allocations list)
- [U.S. Department of Education, COVID-19](#), Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel
- [U.S. Department of Education](#), proposed distance education/innovation regulations

National Postsecondary Education and Grantmaker Resources

- [Alliance for Higher Education in Prison](#), materials and resources created by/for higher education in prison programs
- [American Council on Education](#), Engage member platform for additional connection with peer institutions about responding to COVID-19
- [Achieving the Dream](#), COVID-19 Resources for the ATD network
- [Association of Public & Land-grant Universities](#), coronavirus portal to share advocacy efforts, the latest guidance, university communications, impacts on teaching and learning, research efforts, and more
- [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), Postsecondary Success Notes for higher ed during COVID-19
- [Candid](#), Funding for COVID-19
- [Center for First Generation Student Success](#), COVID-19 Resource List
- [Council for Higher Education Accreditation](#), COVID-19 Information
- [Community College Resource Center](#), Resources for College Advisors During the COVID-19 Crisis
- [Entangled Solutions](#), COVID-19: Higher Education Resource Center
- [Grantmakers for Education COVID-19 Rapid Response Funds](#), Member rapid response funds and select non-member funds
- [Grants Plus](#), Emergency Grant Opportunities for nonprofits during COVID-19
- [Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#), Student COVID-19 impact and assistance
- [IEBC](#), Caring Campus Guide
- [The Kresge Foundation](#), COVID-19 Resources page
- [MDRC](#), Providing Emergency Aid to College Students in a Time of Crisis
- [NASPA](#), Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education COVID-19 Resources
- [NCAN](#), COVID-19 Resources Page
- [Student Ready Strategies](#), "When the Crisis is Over: Becoming Student-Ready in a Post-Pandemic Higher Education"

Student Specific Resources

- [CourseHero](#), Emergency relief fund for students
- [Surviving COVID-19: A guide for students](#) from the Hope Center (here's a shorter [infographic](#) version)



A Sharper Focus: Ascendium Education Philanthropy 2019 Report

In case you missed it: We released our [2019 Education Philanthropy Report, A Sharper Focus](#), earlier this month, detailing a record **\$108 million** in grants. Read more about how our focus on systemic change helps learners from low-income backgrounds reach the educational goals that matter to them.

On the Go: Find Ascendium Staff in the Field

Ascendium Education Group has cancelled all staff travel plans until further notice, due to COVID-19 concerns. We hope everyone stays safe and we look forward to participating in events in the coming months.

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