Campus-County Partnership Toolkit

Produced by the Completion Supports Working Group (as part of the Council for Career Education)

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For basic needs centers, and county welfare departments | Purpose of this document

This toolkit builds on resources that already exist to provide **strategies and tactics for how basic needs centers and county welfare departments can establish / maintain partnerships to improve student uptake of CalFresh**

The toolkit supports basic needs centers and county welfare directors in their joint effort to address student needs by providing…

- **Why campus-county partnership?:** Overview of available resources, guides, and reports to reference, including information on county liaisons through AB1326 *(Page 2-7)*
- **Establishing effective campus-county partnerships:** Step-by-step guide to establish campus-county partnerships and activities will help increase student CalFresh enrollment *(Page 8-13)*
- **Examples of successful partnership:** Examples of successful campus-county partnerships and key learnings from those partnerships *(Page 14-18)*

Why campus-county partnership?

Establishing and maintaining campus-county partnerships will benefit you

Benefits to Campuses

- Improve **student retention, well-being and success** by addressing food insecurity and allowing students to focus on academics
- Enhance **data collection and insights** by utilizing county data to shape campus policies and programs
- **Boost enrollment** by improving reputation around student supports

Benefits to Counties

- Improve **enrollment efficiency** by shortening application processing times
- Reduce **administrative burden** by leveraging campus capacity for application assistance
- Increase **federal/state funding** by improving enrollment rates, which may lead to receipt of additional funds

Higher education systems & Department of Social Services (CDSS) have invested to improve uptake of supports / services (e.g., CalFresh)…

Resources available (non exhaustive)

- [CCC Basic Needs Center Toolkit (Jun '22):](#) Recommendations to establish on-campus basic needs centers
- [CalFresh Outreach Resource Hub[1]:](#) Grant funding and resources (e.g., webinars, eligibility information, outreach templates) to improve campus CalFresh programs
- [UC Basic Needs Annual Report (Jan '24):](#) Report that outlines access barriers & strategies to remove barriers / improve student outcomes
- [CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook (May '24):](#) Policy guidance on student eligibility, targeted towards county welfare departments

…but silos in how campuses and counties operate have stunted student uptake of benefits, particularly CalFresh

California Policy Lab report (Aug. 2024) reported that only ~25% of eligible CCC and UC undergraduate students participate in CalFresh -- this is equivalent to ~750,000 Californian students failing to receive the food benefits they are eligible for.[2]

Conversations with California field experts, researchers, basic needs centers, and county welfare leaders, identified common obstacle as the **difficulty in fully bridging the gap between campuses & counties in how students apply for and enroll in CalFresh**

1. Created by Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) housed at CSU Chico (though all partner campuses across systems have access). 2. Only counting CCC and UC undergraduate population in '21-'22 academic year

Sources: *CalFresh Participation Among California's College Students: A 2021–22 School Year Update* (Apr. '24); *Filling the Gap: CalFresh Eligibility Among University of California and California Community College Students* (Aug. '24)

AB1326 (passed Oct '21) requires counties to designate staff liaison to support higher ed. with services enrollment; this toolkit offers strategies to enhance AB1326 implementation

AB1326 aims to boost CalFresh uptake by improving campus and county coordination…

What is AB1326?

State bill, passed in Oct. 2021, requires county human services agency to designate a liaison[1] to serve as point of contact and develop protocols for engagement with higher ed staff

What is the goal?

The bill is aimed at "expediting the connection between students in need and critical county services" like CalFresh to:

- Streamline application and eligibility determination process
- Conduct targeted outreach to inform and support students

…, but challenges remain due to lack of guidance on implementation

General guidance exists on a few topics…

Recommendations include:

- *Provide campus staff to work alongside county liaisons*
- *Aim for consistent meetings*
- *Consider inviting liaison to campus events*

…but basic needs coordinators and liaisons still struggle with implementation

> "Expectations from each campus are vastly different: some ask for assistance with triage work, some are asking for trend analysis
> - County representative

> "Even if campuses were given MOU templates, they said the main struggle is knowing how to start implementing
> - Basic needs center director

Goal of this toolkit

Build on existing guidance and learnings from field experts to share ***concrete strategies & steps for establishing effective campus-county partnerships…***

…with the ***goal of increasing student CalFresh applications and enrollment***

1. Examples of county responsibilities include facilitating communication with campus, monitoring data sharing and coordinating outreach efforts

Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Aug 2024)

Illustrative

Current State | Silos between campuses and counties limit opportunities to support students and result in lower CalFresh enrollment

Silos between campuses & counties hinder ability to provide cohesive support to students…

Illustrative student journey

Campus

Struggle to track applicants during process

Students

County office

1. **Campus** basic needs conducts blanket outreach and offers application support via **manual process that tracks applicants during eligibility determination**

2. **Students apply independently**, often through **remote processes** (e.g., phone interviews with counties)

3. **Counties** process applications, but **struggle with limited information, ways to verify student exemptions** (e.g., LPIEs[1]), and **communicating decisions** to students

… resulting in low application rates and challenges with eligibility determination

Current challenges *(non-exhaustive)*

Campus: Ability to do targeted student outreach

- Outreach is staff / resource-intensive; often done without up-to-date information on active applications
- Reminders and supporting students with recertification is difficult without list of active CalFresh enrollees

Student: Application process

- Additional student exemption requirements that change (e.g., new LPIEs) makes the application error-prone
- Multi-step application and eligibility determination across phone calls, mail, and online platforms creates delays and miscommunication

County: Eligibility determination & verification

- High rates of missed interview calls and failure to provide the right verification documents increases workload and burden on eligibility workers
- Campus-specific student exemptions (e.g., LPIEs) are not streamlined into the eligibility determination process

1. Local Programs that Increase Employability (LPIE) – approved academic and professional programs that exempt students from CalFresh eligibility rules

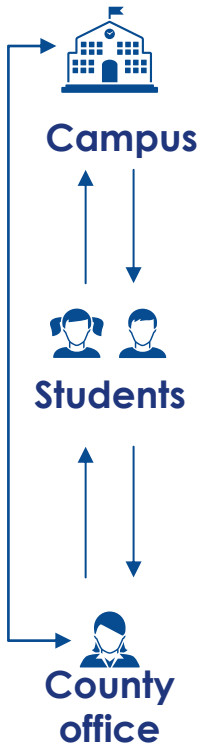
Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Target State | Effective campus-county partnerships increase student touchpoints, encourage & support enrollment, and improve the student experience

Current state | Silos limit opportunities to support students

1. **Campus** conducts blanket outreach and offers application support with **a manual process of ongoing support during**
2. **Students apply independently**, often via **remote processes**
3. **Counties** process applications, but **struggle with limited information** and **communicating decisions** to students

Target state | Coordinated and bi-directional partnerships create more student touchpoints to encourage & support student enrollment



1. **Targeted student outreach**:
   - Campuses may use financial aid program lists or CalFresh eligibility survey to **identify and support likely eligible applicants**
   - Campuses and counties **co-create marketing materials** to give students the most accurate, up-to-date guidance on CalFresh
2. Students have **many different times to apply, including in-person with eligibility workers on campus**
3. Campus & county work together to **maintain communication with the student during the interview and eligibility determination process**
4. Campus uses enrollment data from county to **better understand denials & support recertification**
5. In tandem with live case management, campuses and counties **share learnings on policy changes and common student barriers** (e.g., invalid verification forms)

Additional touchpoints can enhance student experiences / outcomes

1. Shared data to be consented by relevant stakeholders 2. During pre-screening students will not be disincentivized from applying, focus will be encouraging those that are likely eligible. Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Establishing effective campus-county partnerships

Campus-county partnerships can drive three key outcomes – improved application volume, easier application processes and reduced time to decision

Outcomes	Partnership opportunities and activities
Increase application volume	• **Increase application rates** | Campus and county co-create marketing materials with county to give students accurate, up-to-date guidance on applying for CalFresh • **Increase renewal rates** | Campus utilizes enrollment data from county to identify and support students who are due for recertification, as able
Improve ease of enrolling	• **Reduce application barriers** | Campus and county co-develop resources to address common application issues (e.g., list of valid verification documents) • **Increase application completion rates** | Campus and county reduce missed interviews through pre-set timeslots for student calls & live on-campus interviews with eligibility workers • **Minimize backlog** | County gains visibility into campus outreach and application rates, allowing better resource management to handle application surges
Reduce time to decision	• **Streamline case management** | Campus serves as a middle-man to address student questions and coordinates with dedicated county staff to resolve complex situations, as able • **Minimize avoidable denials** | Campus ensures applications include all necessary information for eligibility decision-making to reduce back-and-forth between campus, county & student • **Increase student touchpoints** | Campus leveraged as an additional channel to communicate eligibility determination updates

1. Local Programs that increase Employability (LPIE) are approved academic and professional programs that exempts students from CalFresh eligibility rule

Note: Roles and responsibilities may vary depending on region and segment, and set of outcomes and opportunities are non-exhaustive

Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Increase application volume | High-level roles and responsibilities for partnership activities

Increase application volume

Partnership activities	Roles & responsibilities
Increase application rates | Campus and county co-create marketing materials with county to give students accurate, up-to-date guidance on applying for CalFresh	• **Campus:** Prior to or at start of academic semester, use financial aid program information (as able) or collect consented eligibility data from students to identify and support applications who are likely eligible • **Campus** & **County:** Coordinate to plan events and outreach (e.g., county provides on-campus staff for application support, campus and county collaborate on marketing strategies)
Increase renewal rates | Campus utilizes enrollment data from county to identify and support students who are due for recertification, as able	• **County:** Provide campus with enrollment data to track students requiring recertification; communicate information on consistent and recurring basis • **Campus:** Reference enrollment data to identify students that are due for recertification; offer support and reminders (e.g., submit SAR 7[1] every 6 months, recertify every 12 months) • **Campus** & **County**: Jointly review recertification rates; identify potential strategies to improve benefits renewal

1. SAR 7 is an eligibility status report that CalFresh households in California must complete every six months to continue receiving benefits; Note: Roles and responsibilities may vary depending on region and segment. Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Improve ease of enrolling | High-level roles and responsibilities for partnership activities

Improve ease of enrolling

Partnership activities	Roles & responsibilities
Reduce application barriers | Campus and county co-develop resources to address common application issues (e.g., list of valid verification documents)	• **Campus:** Collect student feedback on common pain points • **County:** Identify common application mistakes that may result to denials (e.g., invalid verification forms) • **Campus** & **County:** Update resources / guidance for campus to share with students (e.g., FAQs, basic needs toolkit) • **Campus:** Conduct outreach around application support (e.g., workshop to walkthrough application process)
Increase application completion rates | Campus and county reduce missed interviews through pre-set timeslots for student calls & live on-campus interviews with eligibility workers	• **Campus:** Advertise times when eligibility workers are on campus so students can take advantage of live, in-person application and interview slots • **County:** Provide pre-set appointment slots to coordinate phone call interview scheduling
Minimize backlog | County gains visibility into campus outreach and application rates, allowing better resource management to handle application surges	• **Campus:** Identify potential spikes in application rates based on planned outreach events (e.g., orientation week, CalFresh info sessions) and share with county • **County:** Manage capacity and resources to account for anticipated spikes; communicate capacity constraints and backlog with campus

Note: Roles and responsibilities may vary depending on region and segment
Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Reduce time to decision | High-level roles and responsibilities for partnership activities

Reduce time to decision

Partnership activities	Roles & responsibilities
Streamline case management | Campus serves as a middle-man to address student questions and coordinates with dedicated county staff to resolve complex situations, as able	• **Campus:** Provide students with a structured escalation process to get questions answered after application submission (e.g., contact assigned eligibility worker for specific case information, use campus basic needs centers to address process questions) • **Campus** & **County:** Work closely to resolve more complex situations, escalating as needed
Minimize avoidable denials | Campus ensures applications include all necessary information for eligibility decision-making to reduce back-and-forth between campus, county & student	• **Campus:** Gather campus-specific information relevant to eligibility decisions (e.g., LPIEs[1], eligible student exemptions) • **County:** Streamline process for eligibility workers to leverage campus-provided exemption information • **Campus** & **County**: Share learnings on policy changes and any common student barriers (e.g., valid verification forms)
Increase student touchpoints | Campus leveraged as an additional channel to communicate eligibility determination updates	• **County:** Communicate with campus on changes in eligibility determination timeline to relay to students; in addition to notifications via mail, email, & online portal • **Campus** & **County:** Utilize existing campus channels to use for notifying students (e.g., university email, website, student portal)

1. Local Programs that Increase Employability exempt students from CalFresh eligibility rule; Note: Roles and responsibilities may vary depending on region and segment
Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Sample action plan | Four-step process to establish effective campus-county partnership

Define goals & personnel

- **Identify right county contacts**
- **Host meeting to discuss current obstacles** (e.g., confusion over student work requirements, missed interviews)
- **Identify ~2-3 partnership activities to pursue** based on capacity
- *[As able]* Identify **dedicated personnel to execute partnership**

Conduct activities to improve outreach and streamline application

Example of partnership activities could include…

- **Communicate upcoming campus outreach** to manage county capacity and avoid backlog
- **Organize joint outreach events**
- **Support with ad-hoc, ongoing case management and utilize Release of Information (RoI)** so campuses can receive application information on behalf of students
- **Share recurring student barriers / questions** to streamline student support
- **Establish channels for communicating eligibility determination** updates

Structure the process for sharing information

Create more robust partnership through formal information-sharing channels:

- Establish **dedicated email / phone line** between basic needs coordinator and county liaison
- Register as a **community-based organization (CBO)** to reduce information sharing restrictions
- *[As desired]* Develop **data-sharing MOU** to more easily gather and leverage county application data

Monitor and share progress

- **Track student success metrics** utilizing data from both campus & county (e.g., awareness survey, increase in enrollment, decrease in denials)
- **Meet periodically** to refine partnership based on progress
- **Share success data and testimonials of students supported** to incentivize new enrollees

! While these steps are intended to serve as comprehensive starting points, we encourage you to start small:
Focus on a single task that will improve the way your campus and county work together!

Source: Interviews with basic needs centers, counties and researchers (June – Sept 2024)

Examples of successful partnership

This section highlights **successful campus-county partnerships** that have increased student CalFresh uptake and streamlined both campus and county operation

It offers **specific best practices and strategies for basic needs centers and county welfare departments to consider**

Specifically, it **shares learnings around…**

- **Potential partnership models**
- **Action steps to initiate collaboration**
- **Strategies to sustain effective partnerships**
- **Outcomes and proof points**

Best practice examples provide a snapshot of **what worked with a partnership in a specific regional context**

Those interested in learning more should **reach out to listed contacts for additional details**

Example | Compton College improved student CalFresh uptake through county data-sharing partnership

Organizations involved

Compton College

Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services (LADPSS)

Partnership overview

In 2021, Compton College & LADPSS established a **data-sharing MOU to share consented student data.** Compton provides LADPSS with a list of students prescreened to meet qualifications for CalFresh benefits. LADPSS returns to Compton that list of prescreened students, flagging student's final determination of benefits. Compton utilizes the data from LADPSS for targeted outreach and outcomes tracking.

How did the partnership get started?

- **Vision alignment:** President/CEO of Compton College & LADPSS leadership identified the need to improve CalFresh uptake in the community and envisioned a mutually beneficial data sharing agreement as a foundation of the collaboration.
- **Data infrastructure:** Held meetings to understand and align on data needed to accomplish the primary goals of outreach and increased benefit utilization, as well as critical implications (e.g., data security)

How is the partnership sustained?

- **Data sharing action plan:** MOU outlines how data can be shared, frequency for sharing, and key accountable stakeholders
- **Staffing:** A full-time outreach coordinator works exclusively with students to complete benefit applications and increase food assistance awareness. Institutional research, student support services staff, and faculty collaborate on in-reach and outreach strategies
- **Communication:** Quarterly campus-county meetings to assess progress and align on evolving interests/goals

Outcomes to date

10% increase in CalFresh enrollment within first 30 days of partnership

More than 1/3 of all students supported in applying for CalFresh are meeting final county requirements and receiving benefits

Contact to learn more

The information provided is a summary of key learnings. For more information, please contact

Amari Williams
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness
awilliams22@compton.edu

Note: Outcomes not attributed exclusively to campus-county partnerships
Source: Interview with Compton College (Aug 2024); Compton College data sharing MOU template ; Compton College basic needs innovations

Example | UC Santa Barbara streamlines student applications and improves case management in close coordination with the county

Organizations involved

UC Santa Barbara (UCSB)

Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services (SBC DSS)

Partnership overview

Since 2016, UC Santa Barbara and SBC DSS partnered to **streamline CalFresh application and case management process** through:

- **Consistent and open line of communication to jointly problem solve on cases** (e.g., daily calls and weekly meetings)
- **Ad-hoc data sharing,** with approved Release of Information, for campus to confirm student status and county to get missing info
- **Coordinate outreach timelines** to manage processing capacity
- **Joint policy interpretation** to improve comms & reduce process lag
- **Basic Needs Center and Financial Aid Office partner** to deliver campus services, with Financial Aid identifying eligible students and integrating CalFresh messaging into their communications

How did the partnership get started?

Through local foodbank relationship: Campus CalFresh program was originally run by Santa Barbara County Food Bank, which had existing ties with SBC DSS, providing a starting point/contacts for UCSB

How is the partnership sustained?

- **Frequent meetings:** Daily calls & weekly meetings to resolve processing issues (e.g., denial resolutions, policy interpretation)
- **Staff and student champions:** Dedicated CalFresh coordinator and UCSB student advocates communicate with county
- **Coordinated triage:** Clear process to review/manage case load and resolve application issues

Outcomes to date

Highest UC CalFresh take-up rate among eligible population as of 2019 (37% vs UC average of 22%)

Students who apply through the UCSB basic needs centers have a 20% higher acceptance rate, compared to when they apply on their own

Contact to learn more

The information provided is a summary of key learnings. For more information, please contact

Daisy Basulto-Hernandez
CalFresh & Basic Needs Comms Coord.
daisybasulto-hernand@ucsb.edu

Note: Outcomes not attributed exclusively to campus-county partnerships
Source: Interview with UC Santa Barbara (Sept 2024), Santa Barbara Daily Nexus article, Santa Barbara Department of Social Services CalFresh website

Example | Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (SLO) and SLO County collaborate to support student CalFresh applicants via education, outreach, and community-building

Organizations involved

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (SLO)

County of San Luis Obispo Department of Social Services (SLODSS)

Partnership overview

- **The Cal Poly CalFresh Outreach program has driven strong growth in CalFresh enrollment through extensive community education and targeted outreach.** New LPIE programs (through AB 396 in 2021) and pandemic-related factors have significantly increased demand for these services.
- **Close collaboration between Cal Poly and County Dept of Social Services has facilitated communication, access to knowledge experts, and community building.** This has resulted in streamlined uptake of new guidelines (e.g., LPIEs) and fewer procedural denials.

How did the partnership get started?

In 2016, Cal Poly became one of the sites for the statewide pilot project led by CSU Chico Center for Healthy Communities funded by the CA Dept of Social Services. Cal Poly project leaders reached out to collaborate with County staff, aware that a strong partnership would be key to success

How is the partnership sustained?

- **Quarterly convenings:** Campus CalFresh team leaders and County staff meet regularly to share ideas and discuss topics such as eligibility guidelines (e.g., LPIE updates), recurring application challenges, and BenefitsCal, new state website for managing public benefits.
- **Ongoing case management:** Release of Information (ROI) form allows campus and County to facilitate resolution of pending case issues (usually within 1-2 days) on the student's behalf and with their consent.

Outcomes to date

~1,000 monthly CalFresh applications in peak months of September and October, making up ~60% of applications submitted across SLO County in Sept and Oct.

Expansion of LPIEs allows for ~**70% of Cal Poly SLO's students (~15K) to meet at least one student exemption.**[1]

Contact to learn more

The information provided is a summary of key learnings. For more information, please contact

Liv Watts *(she/her)*
CalFresh Outreach Program Manager
ojwatts@calpoly.edu

1. Does not account for other CalFresh eligibility requirements. Note: Outcomes not attributed exclusively to campus-county partnerships.
Source: Interview with Cal Poly SLO (Oct. 2024)

Appendix | Additional resources

Additional resources to support implementation of basic needs services

Non exhaustive

Resources to support basic needs centers

- CCC Basic Needs Center Toolkit (Jun '22)
- "Every Student is a Success Story: Basic Needs Innovation at Compton College" policy report
- CalFresh Outreach Resource Hub
- UC Basic Needs Annual Report (Jan '24)
- UC Santa Barbara
  - Example student resources guide
  - Example CalFresh mailing outreach
  - Example CalFresh pre-screen form
- Santa Barbara Department of Social Services CalFresh website
- UC Irvine FRESH Basic Needs Hub Fall 2021 CalFresh Outreach Report
- CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook

Resources to support campus-county partnership

- Downloadable resources in CSU Chico's dedicated campus-county partnership section
  - Guidance letter for college-county partnership
  - County and campus partners contact lists
  - Best practice exchange webinar
- Compton data-sharing MOU template