



## **Request for Proposals**

### **Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts**

### **Spring 2023**

The Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative is jointly sponsored by the Teagle Foundation and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations to support statewide, regional, or consortial academic partnerships between public two-year and private four-year colleges to facilitate transfer and completion of the baccalaureate in the liberal arts. This grant program aims to bring the lifelong benefits of a liberal arts education to students who historically have been excluded from higher education—including low-income students, first-generation students, students of color, and immigrant students—who now constitute the “new majority” of undergraduates and depend on community college as their gateway to higher education.

Grants up to \$25,000 over 6-12 months for planning and up to \$350,000 over 24-36 months for implementation will be made to institutions participating in this initiative. The size of the grant award will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project. Planning grants are strongly encouraged. We expect this grant program will remain open for approximately three to five years.

### **Rationale**

Community colleges now enroll roughly one-third all undergraduates nationally, most of whom aspire to transfer to four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. Yet fewer than a third of those who hope to gain a baccalaureate degree transfer-in to a four-year institution, and only 13 percent actually earn their bachelor’s degree in six years.<sup>1</sup> Policymakers have understandably focused on making provisions for transfer between two- and four-year institutions in the public sector. However, strengthening transfer pathways between public two-year colleges and private four-year liberal arts colleges remains an overlooked mechanism for enhancing access to the baccalaureate. Curricular bridge-building between public two-year colleges and private four-year colleges provides transfer students with more options to complete their education in a timely fashion. Small independent colleges in particular are especially well-suited to serve transfer students by providing personal attention to help them reach their goals. At the same time, community college students bring important benefits to private colleges in the form of diversity of background and lived experience, enhancing the educational environment for all students.

Students are often stymied by confusing curricula and guidelines on transferability that discourage them from taking the next step in their education and interfere with completing the baccalaureate on

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<sup>1</sup> Tracking Transfer: 2019 Update for the 2012 Cohort,” *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*, September 2019, [https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Sig13Update\\_Fall-2012-1.xlsx](https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Sig13Update_Fall-2012-1.xlsx).

time, if at all. The prevailing state of affairs facing community college transfer aspirants can undermine the purposes of a college education: to help students cultivate the knowledge, skills and capacity for leading considered lives, to enable and encourage them to participate effectively in our democracy, and to pursue fulfillment in their professional and personal lives.

## Goals

The Teagle Foundation and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations are jointly sponsoring the Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative to support building comprehensive curricular frameworks between community colleges and independent colleges to ensure alignment in learning objectives between lower and upper division coursework; transferability and applicability of credits; and timely completion of the baccalaureate in the liberal arts. We give priority to projects that involve multiple four-year independent colleges coming together with community college partners to develop statewide, regional, or consortial approaches to promote transfer in the liberal arts. Proposals for bilateral agreements between pairs of institutions will not be considered.

Transfer has academic, cultural, and financial dimensions. The academic dimension is paramount because it influences the other two dimensions. Nearly half of all transfer students lose more than ten percent of earned credits in the transition.<sup>2</sup> This is especially discouraging for students who cannot afford to extend their time in college in order to earn additional credits for graduation. Such students often discover belatedly that credits that have been technically accepted by their new institution toward the overall graduation requirements in the form of electives may not be counted toward requirements within the student's desired degree program. Such loss of credits prolongs time to degree, which can have a major impact on students' financial aid eligibility and can make the cost of completing the baccalaureate appear financially daunting. Lack of clarity around how credits transfer also adversely influences the quality of academic advising and blunts the impact of other cultural practices that institutions might adopt to become more transfer-friendly, such as establishing centers on campus dedicated to transfer students. This is especially true for independent colleges, which historically have had little experience with recruiting community college transfer students and have designed their curriculum on the assumption that students will be on campus for four years.

This grant program is focused on addressing obstacles students face in the academic dimension of transfer and ensuring their coursework transfers and applies towards baccalaureate degree program requirements. These issues are directly within the control of faculty and influence the cultural and financial dimensions of transfer. Focusing on the academic dimension has a useful precedent in the public sector, on which independent colleges can base their own efforts by looking to curricular mechanisms to promote transfer to four-year public institutions that have been enacted as a matter of state policy. This work in the public sector provides a model for ensuring alignment in learning outcomes between lower- and upper-division coursework. Independent sector institutions would benefit from statewide, regional, or consortial frameworks to streamline academic requirements for transfer in order to provide a competitive alternative to public four-year institutions and raise their visibility as a transfer destination in the eyes of community college students.

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<sup>2</sup> Students Need More Information to Help Reduce Challenges in Transferring College Credits," *United States Government Accountability Office*, August 2017, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/686530.pdf>.

## Criteria for Project Proposals

We welcome proposals from regional and statewide consortia or associations of independent colleges working in partnership with community colleges and other appropriate bodies (e.g., state councils for transfer) for the Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative. Implementation grants in the range of \$250,000-\$350,000 over 24-36 months will be considered under this initiative. Planning grants in the range of \$25,000 over 6-12 months are **strongly encouraged** to bring together constituents from the community college and independent college sectors and to lay the groundwork for collaborative development of statewide, regional, or consortial frameworks to promote transfer into liberal arts baccalaureate programs at independent colleges. The size of grant awards will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project.

- **A faculty-led and faculty-owned initiative**

The Teagle Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundations approach the challenges of improving teaching and learning with the conviction that faculty must lead the way. Although the support of senior leadership and trustees is essential, it is the faculty's responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and well delivered to meet the needs of students, including transfer students. Accustomed to seeing themselves as a community of scholars, faculty members are encouraged by way of this initiative to view themselves also as a community of teachers who seek a better understanding of how reshaping the curriculum influences learning and success whether students matriculate directly from high school or transfer in as community college students. We encourage faculty to work together across departments and across sectors on a shared endeavor to promote transfer pathways for community college students aspiring to study the liberal arts.

- **A consortial approach that takes advantage of existing state transfer policy**

In most states, independent colleges can look to examples of existing curricular mechanisms to promote transfer to four-year public institutions that have been enacted as a matter of state policy. Private colleges are in a position to learn from and adapt work that has already been completed in the public sector to ensure alignment in learning outcomes between lower- and upper-division coursework and provide clarity to students regarding how general education courses and courses that are pre-requisites for majors will transfer and apply towards baccalaureate degree programs. Taking a consortial approach to establishing statewide or regional frameworks for transfer raises the visibility of the independent college sector as a transfer destination from the perspective of community college students. Approaching transfer consortially also enables institutions to respond to regional patterns in transfer behavior, encourages institutions to make cultural shifts to better meet the needs of community college transfer aspirants, and promotes commitment to liberal arts transfer pathways across sectors.

- **Sustainability**

Major curricular redesign requires alignment with institutional priorities and strategic plans, attention to academic governance procedures, and reallocation of institutional resources. The factors that contribute to longer-term sustainability may vary project to project, but they are as important as the actual implementation. For example, both two- and four-year colleges should attend to the work of becoming "transfer-friendly" institutions in their practices with regard to

financial aid, orientation, and academic advising as part of establishing effective and sustainable academic partnerships with grant support to ensure that students take advantage of transfer pathways and are appropriately supported. Grants from the Teagle Foundation are made in the expectation that once the formal grant period ends, should the piloted programs be successful, the costs associated with supporting those efforts will be absorbed by the participating institutions.

- **Assessment**

Successful proposals will include clearly articulated goals and appropriate means of project assessment. Implementation grantees will be expected to participate in an external evaluation to track student success outcomes, with some follow-up possible three to five years after the conclusion of the grant period in order to assess the longer-term outcomes.

- **Dissemination**

Active dissemination efforts will be important in order to spread the effects of the knowledge gained by grantees and practices to interested and influential audiences. Implementation grantees will also be expected to participate in a grantee convening at the rough mid-points of their projects, with a modest allocation for travel (once that can safely resume) allocated from their grant budgets.

## **Submission Process**

Requests for grant support will be considered following our two-stage application process. First, we ask that prospective grantees share brief concept papers, whether they are interested in a planning grant or an implementation grant. After review of the concept papers, a limited number of applicants will then be invited to submit full proposals. Applicants are encouraged to review strategies to strengthen the academic dimension of transfer from community colleges to independent colleges offered in this [report](#).

We encourage interested consortia or associations to submit a 3-5 page concept paper that names all the campus partners, describes the project leadership team, and sketches the project description, with an eye towards meeting the criteria discussed above for faculty-led reform, a consortial approach that takes advantage of existing state policy, and a process that will be institutionalized and sustained in the post-grant period. All concept papers should be submitted electronically at [proposals@teagle.org](mailto:proposals@teagle.org).

Concept papers for this initiative will be reviewed jointly by program staff at the Teagle Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundations three times per year: on March 1, 2023, and August 25, 2023 and December 1, 2023. If a proposal is invited, program staff will confer with applicants to determine the appropriate timeline for submitting a full proposal in line for potential review by the boards of directors of the Teagle Foundation and Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. Invited applicants will be provided with instructions to develop their proposals and to submit their applications.

**Foundation Contacts:** Please contact Loni Bordoloi Pazich, program director for institutional initiatives at the Teagle Foundation ([bordoloi@teagle.org](mailto:bordoloi@teagle.org)) with questions about the Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts initiative.