



The Aspen Institute Names Top 200 U.S. Community Colleges Eligible for the 2027 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence

\$1 Million Prize Honors Colleges Achieving Strong Student Results, Both in College and After Graduation

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WASHINGTON D.C., October 28, 2025 – Today, the Aspen Institute named 200 community colleges eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation’s premier recognition of high achievement and performance among two-year colleges. The 200 colleges were selected based on their student outcomes data, including retention, completion, transfer, and bachelor’s attainment rates. Started in 2010, this is the ninth cycle of the Aspen Prize.

Together, these 200 colleges represent the breadth and diversity of the community college sector. They are located in urban, rural, and suburban areas across the country and serve anywhere from a few hundred students to tens of thousands. Some of these colleges focus primarily on workforce programs, while others focus on transfer and bachelor’s attainment or a combination of the two.

“The Aspen Prize rewards colleges that achieve the kind of outcomes that actually matter to students—completing college degree programs that, in turn, lead to lifelong success,” said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. “Aspen Prize winners offer a powerful message: Community colleges can deliver the kind of life-changing education that makes the American Dream real.”

Community colleges educate nearly six million students. Yet community college student outcomes fall short in both the rate at which students graduate and the percentage of students who achieve success after graduation. The Aspen Prize process identifies and celebrates community colleges that demonstrate that achieving stronger outcomes is possible, providing a roadmap of effective practices and strategies for other colleges to follow.

The 200 eligible colleges have been invited to submit an application and participate in a rigorous review process that will culminate in the naming of the Aspen Prize winner in spring 2027. Over the coming 20 months, the colleges that apply for the Aspen Prize will be assessed based on (1) student outcomes data, ranging from student transfer and completion rates to employment and wages after graduation and (2) whether they have engaged in scaled practices that led to high and improving student outcomes.



“Among these 200 colleges are some really special places that deliver strong and improving outcomes for students across the board,” Wyner said. “Our job over the coming 20 months is to gather a lot more data and work with a deep bench of field experts to assess which of these 200 stand out so we can not only honor them with a monetary award, but drive attention to the most effective field practices that other colleges can replicate.”

This is the first time since the inception of the Aspen Prize that 200 colleges are eligible to apply, growing from 150. This year, in addition to publicly available federal data, over 600 colleges authorized the use of National Student Clearinghouse data on their institution’s degree completion, transfer, and bachelor’s attainment rates for full- and part-time students.

The full list can be accessed on the [Aspen Prize homepage](#).

The next steps in the process include:

- November 13/December 9, 2025: Application deadlines for the 2027 Prize
- April 2026: Announcement of 25 semifinalists, selected based on assessments of extensive data and the application by a group of 11 experts in community colleges, higher education, and workforce
- June 2026: Announcement of 10 finalists, selected by the same group of experts
- Fall 2026: Collection of additional data from the 10 finalists, including employment and earnings data for graduates from 2020 and 2025, as well as qualitative assessments of practices by field experts during multi-day site visits to each of the 10 finalists
- February 2027: The Aspen Prize winner selected by a distinguished, independent jury
- Spring 2027: Announcement of the Aspen Prize winner and celebration of the 10 finalists at an event in Washington, D.C.

To read more about the selection process, visit [as.pn/prize](#).

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The Aspen Prize is generously funded by Ascendium Education Philanthropy and the Joyce Foundation.

Previous winners are:

- 2025: Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (WI)
- 2023: Amarillo College (TX) and Imperial Valley College (CA)
- 2021: San Antonio College (TX)
- 2019: Indian River State College (FL) and Miami Dade College (FL)
- 2017: Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)
- 2015: Santa Fe College (FL)

- 2013: Santa Barbara City College (CA) & Walla Walla Community College (WA)
- 2011: Valencia College (FL)

Note: Colleges that have won the Aspen Prize are not eligible to apply in subsequent years

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program aims to strengthen higher education leadership and practice to improve student outcomes—with the ultimate goal of advancing economic mobility and developing talent for the good of each individual and society as a whole. For more information, visit [our website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Bluesky](#), and [X](#).

The **Aspen Institute** is a global nonprofit organization whose purpose is to ignite human potential to build understanding and create new possibilities for a better world. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve society's greatest challenges. It is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, as well as an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.