



The Aspen Institute Names Top 150 U.S. Community Colleges Eligible for the 2025 Aspen Prize

\$1 Million Prize Recognizes Excellence and Equity in Student Outcomes, in College and After Graduation


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WASHINGTON D.C., October 31, 2023 – Today, the Aspen Institute named the 150 community colleges eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among two-year colleges. The institutions selected for this honor stand out among more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide as having high and improving levels of student success as well as equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and those from lower-income backgrounds.

The Aspen Prize spotlights exemplary community colleges in order to drive attention to colleges achieving post-graduate success for all students, and is a central way Aspen researches highly effective student success strategies that are shared with the field. The 150 eligible colleges have been invited to submit student success data and narratives about strategies to achieve better and more equitable student outcomes as the next step in an intensive review process that culminates in the naming of the Aspen Prize winner in spring 2025. The eligible colleges represent the diversity and depth of the community college sector. Located in urban, rural, and suburban areas across 30 states, these colleges serve as few as 169 students and as many as 49,619.

“The Aspen Prize is rooted first and foremost in an assessment of whether colleges are walking the walk,” said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. “As community colleges face enrollment variations, enroll students with pandemic-related learning loss, and graduate students into a rapidly changing labor market, it is easy to lose track of what matters most. The best community colleges are continuing to focus on advancing the core mission: making sure as many students as possible graduate with credentials that lead to fulfilling careers and reflect the development of diverse talent that communities, states, and our nation need.”

While community colleges are an essential contributor to our nation’s success, student outcomes vary substantially among institutions. Aspen measures those variances using multiple data sources and honors colleges with outstanding achievement in six critical areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer and bachelor’s attainment,



workforce success, equitable access to the college, and equitable outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

“These 150 colleges have achieved high and improving levels of student success for all students, including those who are often failed by our institutions,” Wyner said. “We’re excited to learn over the coming months how they achieved that success so we can share the most impressive practices with others in the field.”

In this first round, eligibility for the Aspen Prize is based on publicly available data. Colleges must show strong, improving, and equitable student outcomes in first-to-second year retention, credentials awarded, and completion and transfer rates. Nationwide, about 15 percent of community colleges have been invited to apply (150 of just under 1,000 public two-year colleges assessed for Prize eligibility). The full list can be accessed on the [Prize homepage](#).

The next steps in the process include:

- April 2024: Announcement of 25 semifinalists, selected based on assessments of extensive data and strategy documents by the Prize selection panel, a group of 16 experts in community colleges, higher education, and workforce training, and interviews with institutional leadership teams
- June 2024: Announcement of 10 finalists, selected by the Prize selection panel
- Fall 2024: Site visits to each of the ten finalists, during which the Aspen Institute and partners will collect additional information, including employment and earnings data and insights about promising practices
- January 2025: Prize award decisions made by distinguished, independent Prize jury at full-day meeting
- Spring 2025: Announcement of the Aspen Prize winner and celebration of the 10 finalists in Washington DC

For a full list of the top 150 eligible institutions and to read more on the selection process, visit <https://higher.ed.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/>.

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The **Aspen Prize** is generously funded by Ascendium, the Joyce Foundation, JPMorgan Chase, and the Kresge Foundation.

Previous winners are:

- 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) and 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 supports colleges and universities in their quest to achieve a higher standard of excellence, delivering credentials that unlock life-changing careers and strengthen our economy, society, and democracy. We know it takes visionary college leaders to lead scaled, sustainable reforms, and we make it our mission to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and research-backed tools to inspire change, shift practice, and advance the capacity of colleges to deliver excellent and equitable student outcomes. For more information, visit [our website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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, DC and has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, as well as an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.