



2023 Aspen Prize FAQ

Why should my institution participate in the Aspen Prize?

1. What does my college stand to win?

The Prize comes with a monetary award: The \$1 million Prize purse is divided by the Prize Jury between the winner – which in most years has been \$600,000 – and finalists with distinction and rising star winners – which typically receive \$100,000. In addition, the Prize winner received substantial recognition in the national press, among peer colleges, and within their states. Winning colleges have reported outcomes from that recognition including substantial grants from philanthropists, increased ability to advocate for support from their state legislatures and governors, and a boost in recruiting staff and faculty.

2. Why should my college apply for the Aspen Prize?

Many colleges find that the application and evaluation processes provide a valuable opportunity for reflection about whether their institution is doing all it can to ensure student success and equity. To hear from other college presidents about what they learned from the Aspen Prize evaluation process, please watch this [video](#). Aspen also shares data reports about institutional performance on metrics used for the Prize – benchmarked to the average for the Top 150 institutions – with each college that applies. These benchmarked data will include completion outcomes, two to four-year transfer metrics from the National Student Clearinghouse, and leading indicators gathered through the application process such as retention, persistence, gateway course completion, and credit accumulation.

In addition, by applying to the Prize, colleges contribute to knowledge in the field, as Aspen uses the Prize process to understand the community college practices that foster student success and equity and incorporate that understanding through its [fellowships](#), [research](#), and presentations.

What makes an Aspen Prize college?

3. What do reviewers of our application look for?

Reviewers look for concrete examples of a college's student success strategies and evidence of their effectiveness at scale. While Aspen understands that not all promising efforts can be easily evaluated in isolation, and that implementation of change strategies may take time to show impact, we ask that wherever possible applicants share how the institution is assessing impact and making continuous improvements in key strategies.

Aspen is interested in learning:

1. The specific student success challenges that have been identified
2. What student outcome goals were set to address those challenges
3. How the institution's most significant reform efforts are aligned with those goals



4. The scale at which any strategies described are currently implemented

4. Are my student outcomes strong enough?

If you have been deemed eligible to apply, that means your student outcomes are very good relative to the field. That is why your college was chosen as only one of 150 eligible institutions out of over 1,000 community colleges.

5. Do a college's characteristics – including size and location – impact its chances of winning the Aspen Prize?

Aspen Prize finalists and winners vary widely in size, geography, urbanicity, policy landscape, and many other ways. For instance, in 2017, Lake Area Technical College – a technical college with fewer than 3,000 students – won the Aspen Prize because it has among the nation's highest graduation rates, exceptional labor market outcomes, and made great strides in serving students furthest from opportunity in their region by, for example, eliminating the large graduation-rate gap for low-income students. Then, in 2019, the Prize went to Miami Dade College, the largest in the country, which won because it achieved high and improving levels of student success in completion, transfer/bachelor's attainment, and labor market outcomes, and had done exceptional work closing equity gaps in outcomes for its students of color.

6. Can my college apply if it grants bachelor's degrees?

Yes, as long as no more than 25 percent of the degrees awarded are bachelor's degrees.

What do I need to know for the application process?

7. When is the application due?

There are two required submission dates:

- The [National Student Clearinghouse authorization form](#) is due November 9, 2021.
- The application narrative and student progress data are both due December 13, 2021.

8. Who needs to be involved in the application process?

To answer the application questions thoroughly, you may need to involve your president, provosts, advisors, faculty, institutional research department, and other staff.

9. What's the best way to get started on the application narrative?

It will be helpful to assign a point person to be in charge of the application. This point person will begin the application by inviting collaborators to fill out the form and submitting the application once finalized. The point person can also help to collect the information from the leaders, faculty, and staff involved, and write up the answers to the application questions. It may be helpful to begin drafting your answers on a separate document, like the [Word Document version of the application](#) and the [Excel workbook](#), and copy and paste the answers into the Submittable platform once complete. You can also answer the questions directly in the online platform.



10. Are there instructions for using the online platform and submitting the Prize application?

Yes, you can find instructions on using the online platform [here](#).

11. Does the word count matter?

Yes, the online system will only accept the number of words indicated below each question.

12. What should I highlight in my application?

You should highlight the biggest challenges your students face, the most important specific ways you address those challenges, and for each of those ways, how you measure impact, the number of students impacted (scale), and your work toward continuous improvement.

13. How do I collect workforce data?

Workforce data can be collected from a variety of sources, including state-run databases or institutional surveys of students. The most complete data are likely to come from unemployment insurance wage matches managed by your state's labor department. As a first step, you may check with your state's postsecondary education governing, policy, or coordinating boards, which may be able to facilitate the sharing of these data or connect you with another state agency who can. While these data do provide valuable information for the selection committee, submission is optional because we understand that there may be limitations in the availability of these data and institutional capacity to collect them.

14. What happens next?

Once you have submitted your application, a team of external experts will review your application, and the Aspen Prize team will send you a thank you email and data on student outcomes specific to your institution benchmarked to the top 150. You will be notified if your institution is asked to participate in a leadership call among the president, Aspen staff, and external experts to gain additional clarity on the application materials.

Additional questions

15. Is there a fee to participate in the Aspen Prize?

No, there is no charge to participate in the Aspen Prize. We are grant-funded, and use this process to learn about best practices in the field and create learning materials to disseminate information to the community.

16. Who can I ask for additional clarifications?

The Aspen Prize team is hosting a webinar on the application process on November 2 from 3:00-5:00 pm ET to walk through the application process and answer any questions. You can register for the webinar [here](#). You can also access instructions on using the online application platform [here](#). Additionally, you can email Rebecca Lavinson, Senior Program Associate, at rebecca.lavinson@aspeninstitute.org with any additional questions.