



## Connecting Students to Wrap-Around Services and the Workforce: Project Summary

Report by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges

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This report was prepared by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges for the League for Innovation in the Community College with support from the Garcia Family Foundation as part of the project titled “Community Colleges and Communities: Collective Impact – Workforce Development with Wrap-Around Services.” The report draws on baseline data reported in the Center’s 2022 report titled “Connecting Students to Wrap-Around Services and the Workforce: Current Efforts and Areas of Possibility” and documents the various ways in which the four participating colleges—Arizona Western College, Coconino Community College, Pima Community College, and San Carlos Apache College—have implemented new programs, processes, or structures to better connect students to wraparound services and the workforce.

The Center for the Study of Community Colleges is a nonprofit, 501(c)3 research and policy organization based in Los Angeles, California. The Center’s mission is to improve community college effectiveness and student success by engaging in and supporting research related to community college leadership, practice, and policy.

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## About the Project

From 2021 through 2024 the League for Innovation in the Community College convened four community colleges across the state of Arizona—a variety of rural, urban, and tribal institutions—to participate in a project focused on improving student connections to wrap-around services and the workforce. The project titled “Community Colleges and Communities: Collective Impact – Workforce Development with Wrap-Around Services” was generously funded by the Garcia Family Foundation. The goal of this project was to multiply the effectiveness of community resources in addressing students’ basic needs while connecting students to careers and jobs related to their academic goals. In particular, the League and its partner colleges sought to:

- Increase students’ job placement in fields related to certificate/degree completion.
- Enhance broadband access for participating colleges, students, and communities.
- Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of wraparound services to colleges in addressing students’ basic needs by creating communities of care.
- Create an evolving community of practice for sharing best practices and learnings within the project colleges and agencies that might expand across the League’s ecosystem.

The League took an innovative approach to facilitating this project work, encouraging college teams to choose to focus their efforts around one or more of the above objectives and to create unique projects that supported both institutional needs and project goals. The League paid particular attention to helping colleges better understand the unique needs of marginalized populations, including African American, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, first-generation learners, low-income students, and those struggling with mental health challenges and/or basic needs insecurities. Participating colleges included:

### San Carlos Apache College (SCAC)

SCAC is located on the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Gila County, Arizona. The college was founded in 2017 and enrolled its first 58 students in fall 2018 in an Apache language and culture program, although SCAC now offers programs in social work, Apache language and culture, and business. SCAC graduated its first 4 students in 2020; its most recent graduating class had grown to 34 students. SCAC is currently accredited through an operating agreement with Tohono O’odham College and is pursuing independent accreditation.

### Coconino Community College (CCC)

Located in Flagstaff, Arizona, CCC serves roughly 4,200 students across Coconino County. In addition to the main campus in Flagstaff, CCC operates a smaller campus in Page. Roughly 60% of CCC students attend part-time, 20% hail from indigenous communities, and 20% are Hispanic or Latinx. Poverty, unemployment, and high housing prices are a major challenge in Coconino County, especially among Navajo and Hopi communities. As such, nearly half of all CCC students receive financial aid, and about one-quarter qualify for the Pell Grant.

## Arizona Western College (AWC)

AWC serves over 12,000 students across both Yuma and La Paz Counties in western Arizona. With such a large service area—many students, faculty, and staff drive at least 30 minutes to the main campus in Yuma—accessibility is a major issue. AWC offers services at several locations across its two-county service area, including a Center in La Paz, where the population hovers around 20,000 residents. However, many learners in this and other remote areas frequently take online courses in addition to those they attend in person. Over 70% of AWC students are Latinx, and 72% are the first in their families to attend college. Many of these learners are profoundly impacted by poverty. AWC students tend to be younger than their counterparts across the nation: the average age of an AWC student is 25 years old.

## Pima Community College (PCC)

Located in Tucson, Arizona, PCC serves nearly 32,000 students across five campuses and numerous skill centers. As the largest college participating in this project, PCC has many more resources to draw upon than some of the smaller institutions, but its students face similar barriers to college persistence and completion. Indeed, roughly 59% of PCC students are from races and ethnicities historically underserved in higher education, and over one-third receive the Pell grant. Many of these learners are first in their families to attend college.

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Over the three years of this project, SCAC, CCC, AWC, and PCC worked in institutional teams to address various approaches to ameliorating students' basic needs insecurities, enhancing student support services, and connecting students to opportunities in the workforce and in their communities. In addition, project teams and League partners met periodically to discuss each college's specific areas of focus, progress toward institutional goals, iterative approaches to problem-solving, and lessons learned. Based on these conversations, as well as institutional reports, reflections from each college's CEO, and an emerging community of practice, this report summarizes participating colleges' major accomplishments, as well as persistent challenges and future areas of focus.

## Major Accomplishments

At the beginning of this project, participating colleges reflected on the major challenges their students and institutions faced and were given wide berth to focus efforts on their college's areas of greatest need and/or in ways that aligned with institutional priorities. In the Center's 2022 report, which summarized each institution's initial plans to improve connections to wrap-around services and the workforce, eight major areas of focus emerged. These included advising and tutoring, student health and mental health, food insecurity, housing insecurity, financial literacy, childcare, broadband access, and workforce connections. Major accomplishments in each of these areas—as well as in the colleges' efforts to collect and utilize data to inform institutional actions—are detailed in the sections that follow.

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Recognizing the connection between advising and tutoring and student persistence and attainment, as well as the opportunities these services provide to enhance students' sense of belonging and connect them to basic needs resources at the college or in the community, all four of the colleges participating in this project focused to some extent on enhancing their institution's tutoring or advising programs.

For example, CCC put 20 employees—including academic and career advisors as well as staff members who also advise students—through **Motivational Interviewing Training** offered by Northern Arizona College (NAU). This training combined theory and practice, included role-playing exercises, and focused on helping advisors adapt their approaches to diverse student populations, acknowledging each individual's unique needs strengths. Motivational Interviewing Training has equipped CCC advisors with empathetic engagement skills and effective questioning techniques. As CCC's new president Eric Heiser reported, "This has transformed our advising processes, enabling a deeper connection with students and fostering their success."

In addition, CCC launched a **Social Work Graduate Student Internship** program in collaboration with NAU whereby—beginning in fall 2024—NAU social work graduate students can complete their certification hours by assisting students at CCC. This collaboration not only provides professional development opportunities for NAU graduate students but enhances CCC's in-person and referral support services for students in need.

Some colleges have focused their advising and student support efforts on specific groups of students. For example, as part of this project PCC instituted a **Men of Color Achievement Program (MoCAP)** and a First Gen (Generation) Workgroup. Through the MoCAP program, 2 student success coaches identify men of color through a newly designed intake survey and mentor roughly 40 students, seeking to build "a community of learners who can support each other and hear from those with similar backgrounds who have been successful at reaching their educational goals" (Dolores Duran-Cerda, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs). MoCAP success coaches encourage student participation through interactive events, connect men of color to student support "allies" on campus, and foster a sense of

belonging and connectedness at PCC. In fall 2024 PCC reported that 100% of the students who participated in the MoCAP program persisted from fall 2023 to spring 2024. PCC is in the process of designing a MoCAP Summer Bridge Program for new-to-higher-education students, which will be implemented in in summer 2025.

Similarly, **PCC's First Gen Workgroup** focuses on establishing a sense of belonging on campus among students who are first in their families to attend college, primarily those from Hispanic or Latinx backgrounds. Much of PCC's work related to the First Gen Workgroup—including First Generation College Day Celebrations, First Generation-branded swag, and a First Generation Luncheon in which PCC leaders shared their own first generation experiences—involves reframing First Gen as something to celebrate and be proud of, as opposed to a characteristic that can be a barrier to success. The program enhances support for first-generation college students, addressing their unique assets and challenges and fostering an inclusive campus environment. The workgroup brings together staff from Student Affairs, Student Life, the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, and PCC's TRIO program to collaborate on programming, resources, and services that empower first-generation students to thrive academically and personally. As part of its First Gen Workgroup, PCC has provided success coaching training to faculty and staff and has hosted workshops for students to identify resources and strategies for success in college, as well as for parents to learn strategies to support their students' academic journeys.

After experimenting with several different approaches to student success coaching, **AWC** chose to **combine a student success coaching model with a holistic advising approach** and hired a Wraparound Services Specialist. This staff member is responsible for coordinating support for students identified through AWC's CRM Engage online platform, referrals from Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) case managers, as well as any students who seek support on their own. The Wraparound Services Specialist's office is located in AWC's newly-designed Cubby, which also houses the college's expanded food pantry and career closet (described in the sections to follow), essentially providing a one-stop-shop for wraparound services and support. AWC project managers are attempting to ensure that the college's FY26 budget includes money to support a full-time Wraparound Services Specialist.

In addition, **AWC** worked with Eureka! Ranch (a League partner on this project) to develop and test different marketing messages for the college's **tutoring services** to assess the most fruitful approach to encouraging students to ask for help and to overcoming their hesitance to utilize wrap-around services. The team tested a series of different Facebook ads and discovered that the language and style that resonated most with students were messages related to a "**Judgement Free Zone.**" This led to a larger conversation about the tone of student spaces and facilities, and as a result AWC has begun redesigning its Student Success Center to be more welcoming and inclusive. Furthermore, AWC replaced its "Student Expectations" document with a "Students' Bill of Rights" with new core values statements related to accepting students where they are. This **narrative shift from expectations to rights** aligns with messaging related to a "Judgement Free Zone" and indicates to students that all are welcome, that use of student support services is normal and is covered by students' tuition and fees, and is "something every student needs." AWC has been working to ensure that all student services promote the same "Judgement Free Zone" messages to destigmatize services and help students normalize help-seeking behavior.

Early on in this project, SCAC staff decided to lean into traditional Apache cultural teachings, as well as the college's connection with its community, to create a stronger and more meaningful approach to welcoming and supporting students. In particular, the SCAC team conceived of their efforts as building a traditional Apache home structure, called a *gową* in the Apache language. The SCAC staff wanted students to feel that the college was a second home, that it offered an extension of their heritage, and that it could provide Apache-centric support services that would allow students to reflect on their own personal journeys and make progress toward their educational and career goals in ways that remained rooted in their culture and community. SCAC's approach to supporting students thus became framed as **Building a Home for Lifelong Learning**. By centralizing the power of Apache wisdom and knowledge in its approach to supporting students, SCAC has enhanced students' sense of belonging and improved student persistence and success. For example, enrollment at SCAC has increased dramatically and led to a sharp increase in the number of graduates.

SCAC is, as one staff member shared, "too small to have silos," and thus faculty and staff have long worked together to support students and connect them to college and external resources. However, in fall 2023, SCAC hired a **Student Retention Coordinator**, which has enriched the colleges' student services and academic advising. The Student Retention Coordinator works closely with the Academic Advising Coordinator and is responsible for contacting and following up with students who are at risk in their educational journey and helps address students demonstrating poor performance and/or attendance, who are on academic probation, or who are experiencing difficulties with their courses.

The college has also adopted a new process for working with students whose GPAs are below 2.0. As Provost Lisa Eutsey described, this process involves the Retention Coordinator providing "more frequent and personalized 'nudges' to check in with and encourage students." Students also are now asked to use Calendly to schedule advising appointments, and as a part of that process must answer targeted screening questions in the meeting request link. SCAC advisors have found that having this information ahead of time allows for more productive and efficient meetings. SCAC has also added other guidance and support services to support student retention, including mental wellness consultants and partnerships with local health and mental health providers. For example, the college is currently working on a partnership to provide on-site classes and a substance abuse certification program for White Mountain Apache students.

In addition, the Building a Home for Lifelong Learning theme has improved SCAC's ability to serve its community. For example, SCAC utilized this project to envision and host **community events** which brought together students, staff, and community members for **cultural learning activities**, including an Apache Lecture Series and an Apache Storytelling Event. These activities simultaneously provided opportunities for the community to learn more about SCAC's offerings and welcome the college and its students as members of the larger Apache family. These events also demonstrated SCAC's genuine care for the community's cultural needs and interests, as well as its desire to help sustain the Apache culture and to keep the Apache family united and strong. Over time, the community has become increasingly involved in developing programming for these community cultural events.



As SCAC Provost Lisa Eutsey shared, “The cultural events offered by SCAC were particularly effective in achieving the student and institutional outcomes referenced above, especially because we addressed valuable and engaging topics and educational content on Apache Culture that had not previously been available to our students or other members of the community. As a result, the community’s interest in the cultural events has grown a lot.... Of particular significance was our commitment to hosting family gatherings, with children taking part, and with everyone being able to learn about the rich benefits of being able to attend their own local college. We were therefore given more and better opportunities to share information about SCAC’s programs and services, including how we provide laptops to our students, as well as additional community events and training, and our food pantry program.”

*Across all four participating colleges, faculty and staff learned that for advising, tutoring, and student success coaching to work best, employees should be continually updated with best practices in serving marginalized and historically underserved students; that offering services tailored to specific populations can be an effective way of supporting academic success; that integrating the community into advising and support processes can enhance students’ sense of belonging; and that messages that destigmatize or normalize use of wrap-around services can be extremely effective in helping students’ overcome a hesitancy to ask for and receive help.*



A lack of access to affordable healthcare and mental health care emerged as critical issue during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, but not every institution participating in this project focused specifically on health and mental health. PCC, for example, already had a tele-mental health service available to students before the project began, so concentrated its efforts elsewhere. Similarly, because SCAC students’ mental health is often compounded by lack of access to healthy food, safe and

consistent housing, and other basic needs insecurities, SCAC elected to focus primarily on addressing those needs, although its students do have access to a tele-mental health program through TOC.

For CCC, however, addressing students’ access to health and mental health services was a top priority, and the college partnered with two organizations to connect students to necessary resources. For example, at the start of this project CCC relied solely on community referrals for students seeking mental health services, which often resulted in long wait times and limited availability. Thus, CCC contracted with **BetterMynd**,<sup>1</sup> an online tele-mental health service which provides students with complimentary and timely access to individual counseling sessions, wellbeing workshops, a 24/7 crisis and support hotline, as well as psychiatry and medication management services. Since CCC launched BetterMynd in fall 2022, 310 students have registered and 304 counseling sessions have been completed (an average of 2.58 sessions per user). CCC

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bettermynd.com/>

students' positive response to and utilization of BetterMynd demonstrate the importance of providing free and on-demand access to mental health services.

**AWC** has similarly contracted with **BetterMynd**, and tele-mental health services are now available to all AWC learners enrolled in at least one college credit, including dually-enrolled high school students. BetterMynd is not dependent upon students' insurance, and thus offers counseling and other wellness services that may not otherwise be accessible for AWC students. **SCAC** is also exploring the possibility of utilizing BetterMynd to provide mental health support to its students.

CCC is also attempting to implement the **Contexture Community Cares' Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) tool**<sup>2</sup> to streamline access to vital community services through a closed-loop referral process that confirms when social services are delivered. Through the SDOH tool, CCC hopes to be better able to address students' basic needs insecurities related to housing, employment, transportation, and healthcare that contribute to students' overall health and well-being. As CCC President Eric Heiser wrote, "The tool has the potential to greatly improve follow-through of students when referrals are made to community health and other agencies, ensuring more effective support and resource connections."

*Addressing students' mental health is a complex issue and is directly related, in many instances, to students' basic needs insecurities, including access to sufficient and nutritious food and safe and affordable housing. Thus, providing access to tele-mental health services through the community college is a necessary and important first step, but on its own will not be sufficient to address students' alarming rates of anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness or of being overwhelmed. As such, the steps taken by colleges participating in this project to view students' mental health needs in a holistic manner—and to provide programs and resources that address underlying contributors as well as current emotional stressors, while at the same time normalizing help-seeking behaviors—serves as a model for how community colleges across the country might work to support students with mental health needs.*



In recent years nearly every community college in America has had to grapple with addressing food insecurity among students and sometimes among faculty and staff as well. Although all four participating colleges had some sort of food pantry in place prior to the start of this project, many have worked hard to expand their food assistance programs.

For example, at **SCAC**, students facing food insecurity have long been able to receive assistance through the colleges' two **food pantries**, which are grant-funded and available 24/7. Food items in the pantries are purchased in bulk at Fry's and students are encouraged to take as much as they need, even for family members at home. A microwave

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<sup>2</sup> <https://contexture.org/communitycares/>

and small refrigerator are available in the business department’s pantry. Through this project, SCAC enhanced its food pantries, sought to increase awareness of them, and took active efforts to decrease stigma related to use. In addition, the college provided **FitBits** to students to help improve their physical well-being.

Similarly, over the course of this project, **CCC** significantly expanded its food assistance program (the “**Comet Cupboard**”) through an enhanced partnership with St. Mary’s Food Bank. Each week the college collects and distributes hundreds of pounds of non-perishable food to CCC students and employees. In addition, St. Mary’s Food Bank now offers a “grab and go” drive-through service, open to the entire community, once a week at CCC’s Fourth Street Campus.

For many years, **AWC** students facing food insecurity were able to receive assistance through Andale’s Pantry—which provided food, non-perishable items, and basic toiletries to students and their families—as well as through Andale’s Apparel, which provided up to 5 free professional clothing pieces per semester to anyone enrolled in at least one college credit. However, through this project AWC began redesigning a space on the main campus to house both Andale’s Pantry and Andale’s Apparel; the new space has been rebranded as “**The Cubby**.” The Cubby is open to students daily and offers food items, career clothing, and other necessities. It also provides students with opportunities to engage with a Wraparound Services Specialist who can identify and work to support other potential areas of need. To supplement what is already offered through The Cubby, AWC is working with local farmers to include fresh produce and is considering building smaller cubbies across campus, which can function similarly to “little libraries.” The college recently received a grant from the Yuma Community Food Bank to help stock The Cubby.

*Through this project, college teams have realized that providing food assistance to students, faculty, and staff in need can best be accomplished through partnerships with community organizations. In addition, it is clear that that these services are most effective when they are intentionally integrated with advising, case management, and/or student support services and when messages that destigmatize or normalize the use of food assistance are abundant.*



Several of the colleges participating in this project focused a substantial amount of attention on addressing housing insecurity among students, faculty, and staff, although approaches to ameliorating housing challenges varied substantially due to unique community needs. For example, housing remains a major challenge for San Carlos Apache tribal members and others living within their community. As Provost Lisa Eutsey noted, “We have students moving from temporary living situations to new, temporary living situations.” Yet because the San Carlos housing authority processes housing applications from tribal members, **SCAC** elected not to focus specifically on housing insecurity through this project.

AWC's housing situation is similarly unique. Unlike most community colleges, **AWC** maintains a few **residence halls** on campus. However, these dormitories have historically served only about 200 students, most of whom are athletes, international students, or members of specific cohorts. Learners with identified housing insecurities had historically been referred to external community resources. As a result of this project, AWC began keeping its residence halls open over winter break so that students with no outside (stable) housing have a place to live when classes are not in session. In addition, AWC hopes to build new residence halls on campus, which would include kitchens for students to cook in and where the college could offer classes on healthy and economical eating.

Furthermore, in order to support unhoused students or those who must travel long distances to campus, **AWC** purchased and installed a **Sleep Pod** in their Matador Activity Center in early 2024. In the first three weeks after installation, the Sleep Pod enabled 300 rest sessions totaling over 1,200 minutes (about 20 hours), allowing students to recharge between classes and study sessions. The Sleep Pod remains a popular place for students to rest during the day and before or after classes.

Affordable housing remains a major issue and priority in Coconino County, as 40% of all available housing is a vacation rental and a great many students live on National Forest land or in other transitory circumstances. **CCC** has continued to make progress toward ameliorating housing insecurity among CCC students, faculty, staff, and the local workforce by planning to build **flexible housing on their Page campus**. This new housing project may be accomplished through a public-private partnership, which could serve as a model for future public-private collaborations to ameliorate housing insecurity among community college students, faculty, staff, and community members. In addition, CCC continues to actively consider other ways to bring affordable housing to reservation land, where water and electricity are not always accessible, and students must drive up to 2 hours to reach CCC's main campus.

*Ameliorating students' access to safe and affordable housing is essential to supporting students' success and educational attainment, yet it remains a top challenge for Arizona community colleges and one that will require multiple years, if not decades, to resolve. Although housing challenges are often unique to particular communities, one constant is the fact that addressing this issue will require close partnerships with local businesses and community organizations and a long-term vision that is grounded in community needs.*



Although addressing students' financial literacy was one possible avenue of work to better connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce, most of the colleges participating in this project elected to focus their efforts elsewhere. Nonetheless, **SCAC** staff often work with students on a one-on-one basis to help them develop **financial literacy skills**, and has recently provided

students with an opportunity to participate in Best Money Moves' **Decisions Financial Wellness Course**, which is available online.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, other colleges offer some financial literacy counseling through their institution's Financial Aid Offices and/or TRIO programs. For example, **AWC's** financial literacy counseling, offered through its Financial Aid Office, involves one-on-one counseling with students and their families (often via Zoom) to discuss financial aid eligibility and other options to cover educational expenses. In addition, in 2024 AWC piloted an additional financial literacy training program for students and staff with sessions facilitated by **Best Money Moves**.<sup>4</sup> Students from AWC's on-campus College Assistance Migrant Program—a federally funded program from students with migrant or seasonal farm-working backgrounds—participated in the training, which was also open to students, faculty, and staff. As one student shared, ““There was certainly a lot of valuable information about saving money. Now I understand that there are different reasons to start saving, such as paying for studies or retirement. A person who wants to start saving must have a lot of discipline so as not to spend those savings wrongly on things that are not essential or emergencies.”

*Improving students' financial literacy is a worthy goal, but many of the colleges participating in this project found it more important to focus on assisting students who are struggling with access to consistent and nutritious meals and/or safe and affordable housing. As colleges make strides toward addressing students' basic needs insecurities incorporating wraparound services into advising and mentoring processes, more time and effort may be devoted to helping students develop the financial literacy skills necessary to remain in and pay for college, enter the workforce, and attain some level of financial security.*



For community college students who are also parents, access to affordable and accessible childcare—on or near campus—is essential to their ability to persist towards and complete a college certificate or degree. Although few colleges are able to provide comprehensive access to childcare for student-parents, several of the institutions participating in this project sought to meet their students' childcare needs in a variety of innovative ways.

CCC aimed to address its students' childcare needs by partnering with the Women's Foundation for the State of Arizona (WFSA) to **implement wrap-around services tailored to support single mothers**. The objective of this partnership was to help these students complete a certificate program within 12-18 months, graduate successfully, and secure employment with an annual salary of \$45,000 or higher. Support services included access to childcare, a monthly stipend, a laptop, and other resources necessary to enable participants to attend full-time and make progress toward graduation. Although this initiative offered

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<sup>3</sup> <https://growthdevelopment.com/Product-Detail/online-courses/decisions-financial-wellness-course>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bestmoneymoves.com/>

meaningful assistance to single mothers, it was ultimately discontinued due to a lack of resources from the WFSA.

Although **PCC** did not utilize this project to address its students' childcare needs, it does operate a full-time **childcare center on its Desert Vista campus**. This center serves roughly 20 kids with the potential to scale to 50-60 children over time. PCC's early learning program is also housed at this center, and the campus received a federal grant to cover start-up costs and supplies, as well as for coaches to talk with parent learners about their needs. This symbiotic relationship offers PCC students a laboratory in which to gain hands-on and practical skills while also serving the needs of parent learners attending PCC full-time.

Similarly, while **AWC** did not utilize this project to address its students' childcare needs, the college's Department of Liberal Arts and Education offers a **Child Development Learning Laboratory (CDLL)** for education students to observe and work with young children as part of their course of study. Over 2,500 students have observed and worked with children at the CDLL since 2019. The CDLL is a fully accredited childcare center on AWC's main campus in Yuma, providing full-day childcare for kids between the ages of 6 months and 5 years. Unfortunately, the CDLL only enrolls children full-time and there is a waiting list, especially for infants, which means that the majority are children of AWC faculty and staff. AWC estimates that only about 5% are children of students.

*There is no doubt that community college students who are also parents would benefit from easily accessible, affordable options for drop-in childcare at their institutions, and that these services are likely to contribute to greater persistence and educational attainment among student-parents. However, most community colleges have found that if they are able to offer childcare services at all, they must prioritize access for students and others whose children can attend full-time and for the full year so that they can efficiently plan for staffing needs. Thus, those student-parents who attend part-time, or who only occasionally need help with childcare, are often left in the cold or forced to rely on family, friends, or community resources, which may or may not be affordable or accessible.*



One often overlooked basic needs insecurity, especially since 2020, is the lack of access to fast and reliable Internet service. Indeed, AWC, CCC, PCC, and SCAC's ability to connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce is largely predicated on students' ability to access health, wellness, academic, and workforce development resources via the Internet. Yet the Arizona Commerce Authority notes that almost 800,000 Arizona

households—including many Indigenous families—lack access to broadband Internet.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, several national, state, and local broadband projects are in the works, and through this project the League has

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<sup>5</sup> Arizona Commerce Authority. (2022). *Arizona Broadband Middle-Mile Strategic Plan*. Phoenix, AZ: Author.

connected the four participating colleges with several state and nonprofit agencies working to improve broadband access to more remote and rural parts of the state, including the Sun Corridor Network.

Access to fast and reliable Internet service has long been an issue on the San Carlos Apache reservation—during the COVID-19 pandemic many students were completing assignments on their cell phones—and thus **SCAC** utilized this project address the broadband needs of students and community members. In addition to bolstering its WIFI services and creating quiet and comfortable study spaces on campus, **SCAC** provided **laptops** for students to check out and retain for the entire semester. The college also partnered with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to establish a joint **San Carlos Community/SCAC Library** and hire an MLS-level librarian. These efforts involved the renovation of an old tribal building and the securing of funding for Internet upgrades and new IT equipment that is now available to all community members. Because the new library provides broadband access to the Internet, as well as student tutors and interns in the evenings, it has become a community space that provides opportunities for research and learning. For example, through the library **SCAC** has offered **Computer Literacy Classes** to all community members, as well as opportunities to obtain Google IT Support certificates, which students and community members alike can use for personal development or as an introduction to the IT field.

*Continuing to expand broadband access throughout the state of Arizona (and elsewhere) will remain a major priority for states. Community college campuses often serve as WIFI oases for their students and community members and may consider how they can continue to serve in such a capacity, as well as how they can participate in existing public-private partnerships to extend broadband to all residents.*



In addition to developing innovative solutions to better connect students to wrap-around services designed to ameliorate basic needs insecurities, the four colleges participating in this project also worked hard to improve connections to the workforce.

For example, **CCC** implemented **Pipeline AZ's white label platform**, which has been transformative in connecting students with regional employers, facilitating internships, and placing students in jobs. This career-building tool has been integrated into **CCC's** guided pathways and degree programs so that career and academic advisors can utilize it to guide students toward their desired area of study and career path. As of July 2024, nearly 250 **CCC** students and 116 Flagstaff-area employers had registered with Pipeline AZ. In addition, 333 K-12 students had registered and identified **CCC** in their postsecondary plans. During the 2023-24 academic year, student users more than doubled, and the number of employers grew by 44%. Over 160 job opportunities had been posted, 38 employers actively engaged with students, and 28 **CCC** students submitted a job application through the portal.

**SCAC** has also improved connections to the workforce in several ways. First, it **partnered with CISCO** to offer a certificate in computer networking; two students are currently enrolled in that fledgling program.



Second, it began **collaborating with the Environmental Sustainability Innovation Lab** to provide internships to students, enable opportunities for environmental data gathering, and to facilitate faculty mentorships. Third, SCAC provided mentoring to one student who received both a Cobell Scholarship and USDA Tribal Scholarship. She has a full ride to any land grant institution in the US and a guaranteed USDA job upon completion. Finally, SCAC began offering **GoogleIT certifications**; students completing the full-five course certificate have been recruited by CISCO. The college is currently expanding this program, including to local high school students.

Although **PCC** did not utilize project funds to support its efforts in this area, during the project term the college built **fast-track, non-credit training programs**, integrating them into existing departments. The college is collaborating with AZ at Work (including having co-located staff) and utilizing prior learning assessments to ensure that learners can apply credit for prior experience to these FastTrack programs. PCC also launched **micro-internship and apprenticeship programs** serving the incumbent workforce. For example, PCC and the League for Innovation are working with Future's Inc. (which implemented Pipeline AZ) and Owens Corning to pilot a 5-week Fast Track roofing program. This program will "pioneer, test, and scale training models in the construction industry. Employing a modular and stackable training approach," the program will enable students to gain the knowledge, skills, and ability necessary to quickly secure employment with Owens Corning or 3-5 other regional roofing employers. The program incorporates an employment support module to facilitate job matching and employment connections and to streamline user-friendly interviewing and hiring processes for program completers.

Although **AWC's Jobs for Matadors program** was in place before this project began, the college has continued to utilize this online career services center to help students explore and connect to available jobs and careers in the region. By mid-2022, over 3,500 approved employers had posted more than 10,000 jobs, internships, or volunteer opportunities on Jobs for Matadors. As part of this project, AWC has also implemented **Pipeline AZ** to assist college personnel in helping students explore guided pathways and career options.

In addition to workforce development efforts on their own campuses, **PCC, CCC, SCAC, and AWC** and collaborating with Mohave Community College, Northland Pioneer College, Yavapai College, the League for Innovation, and local business and industry representatives in an apprenticeship development project focused on the IT and Construction trades. Through this project, participating students will earn IT or Construction micro-credentials as they prepare for apprenticeships and, ultimately, careers in these high-demand sectors of the workforce.

*Improving students' knowledge about potential career opportunities, as well as actively connecting them to jobs, internships, and other workforce development resources, will be a perennial challenge for community colleges. However, as the four colleges participating in this project have learned, the most successful approaches involve collaborations with outside organizations such as Pipeline AZ that connect students to employers, enable career advising, and provide real-time information about local opportunities. In addition, this project has illustrated that resources such as Pipeline AZ and Jobs for Matadors are best utilized when they are integrated into the*



*colleges' existing advising and mentoring processes so that students can make education and training decisions with a career in mind as well as find a job or internship as they progress toward a degree or certificate.*

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Developing the infrastructure to collect and analyze data related to students' needs and experiences is crucial to designing and developing services that can better connect learners to wrap-around services and the workforce. As part of this project, several participating colleges readministered or implemented new surveys and data tools to better inform practice.

For example, CCC administered the **HOPE Center's Student Needs Survey, the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)** to better understand students' needs. Through these surveys, CCC learned that approximately 16% of CCC students face food insecurity and rely on the Comet Cupboard; 19% struggle with housing stability and/or affordability; 18% encounter transportation challenges; and roughly one-quarter are parents or caregivers. Furthermore, CCC's partnerships with Pipeline AZ and BetterMynd provide the college with data that can be used to enhance student support services. Together, CCC's data-informed approach has enhanced its understanding of the variables and experiences that influence student success and has strengthened the college's ability to allocate resources effectively and develop community partnerships. As CCC President Eric Heizer reported, participating in this project "facilitated valuable partnerships and highlighted the significance of making data-informed decisions."

**AWC** has similarly enhanced its collection and use of data related to students' needs and experiences. In particular, the college piloted and developed an **intake survey to assess students' awareness of and need for basic needs support**. As well, in fall 2022 AWC administered the **HOPE Survey** to its student body, finding that nearly half of all students struggled with some level of food insecurity, nearly 40% had high to very high food insecurity, and more than half cannot afford balanced meals. In addition, approximately 40% of AWC students reported some level of housing insecurity, and 40% suffered from depression and/or anxiety. As President Daniel Corr reported, these survey results support anecdotal data from AWC's BIT case managers and underscore the need for the college's new Wraparound Service Specialist. AWC is actively seeking external funds to re-administer the HOPE Survey again in the coming years.

To assess the efficacy of **PCC's** new orientation, intake, and advising programs, the district is now **collecting data** on the number of phone calls, emails, and texts made to new students and the number of **students who engage in success coaching or other student support services**. In addition, among new-to-PCC, first-generation, and men of color cohorts, PCC is tracking course withdrawal rates, activity or support service participation rates (including tutoring, advising, career counseling, first-year experience, etc.), course completion rates, semester GPA, satisfaction rates, and persistence rates.

In addition, **PCC** continues to collect substantial **data related to students' basic needs**. PCC's research department has data on learners' housing and food insecurity, students' childcare and transportation needs, and learners' need for additional WiFi, broadband, or computer access. As well, PCC's First Year Experience program conducts annual course evaluations and student surveys, which shed some light on these questions, and PCC's research department collects data about workforce placement and available careers. Finally, the college administered the **HOPE Survey** to its student body in fall 2022, which provided greater insight into the basic needs of PCC students.

Given the size of **SCAC**, roughly ten full-time faculty and staff communicate and collaborate regularly to collect data on student use of wrap-around services (such as a sign-in sheet at the food pantries). However, most of the information about students' needs are collected in the Google forms that faculty and staff use to indicate when someone is in academic or emotional distress and as of yet, there is not one dedicated staff member who can analyze data to improve how the college connects students to wraparound services and the workforce.

*As the four colleges participating in this project have learned, developing the infrastructure to collect and analyze data related to students' needs and experiences is central to designing and developing services that can better connect them to wrap-around services and the workforce. Several national surveys have proven crucial in providing these data, including the HOPE, CCSSE, and SENSE surveys, but information collected at point-of-service and through advisory processes can also be used to evaluate the success of various interventions and to better understand the scope of students' needs.*

## Persistent Challenges

Each of the four community colleges participating in this project face unique challenges and opportunities due to their geographic locations, the size and makeup of their student bodies, the availability of community and other external resources, and the existence of funds to support workforce development and student support priorities. Nonetheless, several common and persistent challenges can be identified.

### Limited Staffing and/or High Turnover

Many of the colleges participating in this project have experienced challenges related to limited staffing and/or high turnover. For example, AWC's progress toward a number of its goals was challenged by staffing issues, as well as competing priorities on campus. As President Corr wrote, "All the work had delays due to other prioritization and staffing-related pressures. Despite our team's desire to mainstream all of this work (i.e., ensure that Garcia grant projects were well-aligned with existing work), other prioritized work encroached, including the need to move student functions into a new campus facility and to host a statewide conference." These and similar challenges are not likely to disappear as the college continues its work to better connect students to wraparound services and the workforce but can most likely be managed as AWC continually seeks to improve student persistence, health, well-being, completion, and workforce placement.

CCC has been similarly challenged in attracting, hiring, and retaining faculty and staff, particularly when it comes to key professionals vital for the colleges' projects and programs. CCC has addressed these issues by providing continuous training opportunities for existing personnel, but the high cost of living in the Flagstaff area hinders the college's ability to attract the skilled talent needed by its community. As President Eric Heiser wrote, "This challenge is particularly evident in our struggles to hire essential IT professionals who are crucial for meeting our project requirements."

PCC has faced similar challenges related to staffing and turnover, in particular in relation to its First-Gen Workgroup, as contributions to this workgroup are voluntary and responsibly lies with the whole group rather than with someone who is dedicated to this initiative on a full-time basis. As PCC grows its First-Gen Initiative, it will be "faced with the challenges of sustaining the staff needed to fulfill all the exciting obligations [of the program]" (former Interim President Dolores Duran-Cerda).

Similarly, because SCAC is growing quickly but operating with a limited number of faculty and staff, they were often asked to assume additional workloads and wear multiple hats. As Provost Lisa Eutsey reported, "about half of our staff have more than one job title." Furthermore, the college has a number of unfilled positions in the President's Cabinet and in other key positions, which limits the number of community cultural events they can deliver and requires existing faculty and staff to continue to do more with less. In sum, wrote Lisa Eutsey, "Our challenge at SCAC is limited staffing and time; we simply do not have enough hours in the day and staff to optimize our great potential to promote student success!"

On a related note, three of the four participating community colleges experienced turnover at the CEO level during this three-year project. The extent to which these leadership turnovers affected progress and success toward each college's goals is unclear. While much of the work to implement new programs and services was

accomplished by faculty and VP-level administrators, college presidents play an essential role in signaling the importance of any new initiative across the institution and in institutionalizing grant funded projects into the college's budget, culture, and strategic plan.

## Student Awareness and Utilization of Services

Another challenge experienced by many of the colleges participating in this project related to increasing students' awareness and utilization of services and resources that might ameliorate some of their basic needs insecurities, as well as those that can help support them along their educational journeys. For example, PCC worked hard to more widely market its MoCAP program to current and prospective students, yet still faces challenges in awareness. PCC faculty and staff addressed this issue by increasing awareness of the program among internal stakeholders, connecting with other institutions that have similar programs to learn about marketing strategies and techniques, and by encouraging current participants to share information about the program with friends and family. PCC reports that the most successful strategy, by far, has been asking current MoCAP participants to recruit their family and friends.

As League partner Changing Perspectives noted, PCC—and its financial aid department—both have “X” accounts, which could be used to highlight available resources and market them to students. Other social media outlets, such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, or Facebook Stories, could also be utilized to highlight where resources are located and how students can access them to drive engagement and utilization of support services.

## Temporary or Insufficient Funding

The temporary nature of many funding sources that support work to improve connections to wrap-around services has also proved to be a significant challenge. For example, although CCC began to see some early positive results from its project for single mothers funded by the Women's Foundation of Arizona, when funding for that project dried up, CCC was unable to continue offering the program and related services. This example reinforces the need for sustainable and longer-term funding sources so that new programs and initiatives aimed at connecting students to wrap-around services and the workforce can have a long-term impact.

AWC has experienced delays in designing and building its new Student Success Center. In particular, while the college was able to utilize roughly \$25,000 in grant funds from this project to design and build the Student Success Center, the total cost of the project is closer to \$60,000. To fully fund the Student Success Center, AWC may have to pull from other areas of the budget, potentially including funds set aside for the newly re-designed Cubby and Wraparound Services Specialist.

## Faculty and Staff Resistance to New Advising or Tutoring Models

As this report illustrates, work to improve connections to wrap-around services and the workforce tend to be most successful when they are integrated into comprehensive and holistic advising services. However, several of the colleges participating in this project experienced concerns about added workloads from

faculty and staff and, at times, outright resistance to new initiatives. In particular, CCC had to delay implementation of a mandatory advising model for students due to staffing constraints and workload concerns from faculty and staff. In response, the college modified its current advising model to better cater to new students and trained advisors to be more skillful in motivational interviewing and utilizing Pipeline AZ to enhance students' career coaching.

## Access to Reliable and On-Demand Data

Although the majority of colleges participating in this project implemented new surveys and approaches to collecting data about students' experiences and basic needs insecurities, several noted that their efforts to leverage data-informed decisions were hindered by the fact that most employees continued to lack access to immediate, actionable data, which complicated efforts to use insights from HOPE, SENSE, and CCSSE surveys to inform day-to-day operations and strategic planning. To address this challenge, CCC has partnered with EAB/Edify to outsource the creation of data dashboards that will make real-time information about students available to all college employees and offer on-demand access to the information necessary to truly engage in data-informed decision-making.

Other colleges are making efforts to improve the reliability of data collection around certain indicators. For example, PCC has struggled to collect accurate information on students' first-generation status. The college currently collects this data from students' FAFSA applications, but because not all students complete a FAFSA, and some who do indicate "unknown" when asked if they are the first in their families to attend college, PCC believes the true population of first-generation students on campus is far closer to 50% than the 20% captured through FAFSA applications. To gain more reliable data, PCC has implemented a fairly resource-intensive procedure to pull first-generation information from students' applications for admissions. PCC hopes to fully implement this process during the 2024-25 academic year, which will not only enable a more accurate count of first-generation students, but also longitudinal reporting on first-generation students' persistence and completion.

AWC also experienced substantial setbacks related to the accuracy of lists of students identified to participate in a success coaching pilot program. In particular, AWC attempted to compile a group of students who were not already included in a specific cohort of students to test various approaches to success coaching, but the resulting list ended up including a great many high school students who were dually-enrolled at AWC. Although dual enrollment students could have benefitted from the success coaching, most did not see themselves as "significantly connected to AWC in that way" and did not respond to the college's outreach (Vice President for Advancement, Lorraine Stofft). Other factors—such as language barriers and an inability to leave voicemails on family phones—also dampened AWC's initial attempts to develop a student success coaching program.

## Opportunities and Areas of Continued Focus

Despite the substantial challenges noted in the preceding section, numerous opportunities exist to continue to innovate the ways in which AWC, CCC, PCC, and SCAC connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce and to develop a community of practice in which lessons learned and best practices can be leveraged across multiple institutions.

### Engage in Community Collaborations and Public-Private Partnerships

As the four community colleges that participated in this project continue their work to connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce, and to innovate internal processes to support these connections, collaborations with community organizations, as well as public-private partnerships, will be necessary to meet student and community needs and offset some of the costs of these ventures. CCC's planning for a housing solution at the Page campus, for example, provides an excellent example for this approach to ameliorating students' basic needs insecurities.

### Leverage Online Resources and Tools

Another area of continued focus for the four participating colleges is continuing to leverage online resources and tools that can help facilitate connections between students, colleges, employers, and community resources. Greater adoption and use of community-based basic needs support can help colleges to streamline referrals to community resources and job or internship opportunities. These tools can also help to promote available opportunities and services and provide a channel for two-way communication between students and external service providers and/or employers.

CCC has adopted both the Contexture Community Cares' SDOH and Pipeline AZ tools and is actively seeking to expand use of them, especially among Indigenous students. The college has recently received a \$150,000 supplemental grant to complement its NASNTI funding, and with this money has hired a dedicated career advisor who will build relationships with employers on the reservation and assist them in posting jobs and recruiting CCC students through Pipeline AZ, thereby improving access to careers for the colleges' Indigenous students.

In addition, CCC plans to enhance student access to essential wrap-around services by leveraging an AI-powered chatbot designed to provide Arizonans with quick, secure, and anonymous access to essential support services. This tool, called "Mia the Chatbot"<sup>6</sup> was created by Valley Leadership and has the ability to rapidly connect users with high-quality services—including academic assistance, financial aid guidance, or personal support—tailored to their individual needs.

CCC also recognizes an opportunity to centralize resources such as bus passes, mental health services, housing support, emergency funds, food pantries, medical care, and employment and career planning tools such as Pipeline AZ through a virtual basic needs hub that will make it easier for students to find the help

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<sup>6</sup> <https://botco.ai/the-power-of-the-ask-mia-chatbot/>

they need. By locating access to all these services in the same online hub, CCC hopes to more efficiently and effectively support students' overall well-being and academic success.

## Provide Financial Literacy Training

Although financial literacy training was not a primary focus for any of the community colleges participating in this project, several recognized that learning how to manage student debt and navigate everyday expenses should be considered a basic need for students. To that end, several of the colleges hope to incorporate tools to help students create and follow a budget, understand credit, and plan for their future into academic and career advising processes. The hope is that these tools will help students experience lower levels of financial stress and be empowered to make informed decisions that will contribute to their academic and financial success.

## Strengthen Advising, Tutoring, and Mentoring Services

For each of the colleges that participated in this project, enhancing student advising, tutoring, and mentoring services were key to efforts to improve connections to wraparound services and the workforce. However, work to improve these student support services—and to extend them to all students and/or tailor them to specific groups of learners—is ongoing and will require substantial human and financial resources for years to come.

Each of the four community colleges will approach this future work in different ways. For example, as a new member of the Achieving the Dream (ATD) project, CCC is working to transform its business practices and implement approaches to supporting student success that have proven effective at other ATD institutions. In particular, CCC is working to strengthen its academic and career advising model, ensure it is more personalized and responsive to student needs, and available to more students. The college is also expanding its peer mentoring program by training staff in how to effectively train new peer mentors. This will help CCC peer mentors be better equipped to foster a supportive community and help students navigate college life, connect to available resources, and build their academic confidence. In addition, CCC is streamlining its onboarding systems for students and implementing mandatory services such as New Student Orientation, Academic and Career Advising, and a college success course in students' first semester. Although all these initiatives are dependent to some extent on the college's ability to hire key personnel and implement the necessary IT infrastructure, the CCC project team sees great potential for institutionalizing many of the initiatives facilitated through this project, in the process creating sustainable mechanisms for connecting students to wrap-around services and the workforce.

PCC views the MoCAP program and First Gen Workgroup as critical strategies to attaining its goal of doubling the number of completers within African American, Indigenous, and Latinx populations. As such, PCC will continue to invest in these programs and identify new ways to scale them to more learners. For example, PCC's Office of College and Community Cultural Connection has begun collaborating with the MoCAP team to increase awareness of the program and expand its efforts to build a community of learners from similar backgrounds who can support one another and help each other reach their educational goals.

In addition, PCC will work to expand its First Gen Initiative to include student ambassadors who can serve as peer mentors, event facilitators, and advocates for the workgroup. The college also plans to host an annual First-Generation Recognition Ceremony which would highlight the academic successes, leadership roles, and community contributions of first-generation learners. As well, PCC plans to establish learning communities or cohorts of first-generation students who can take classes together, engage in peer support, and receive tailored academic advising and/or tutoring. Finally, PCC hopes to create early alert systems and targeted retention strategies to identify first-generation students who may be at risk of stopping out, providing them with additional academic resources, counseling, tutoring, and access to wrap-around services to ensure that they stay on track.

## De-Stigmatize Use of Campus and Community Resources

Through AWC's work to test various messages related to tutoring, which resulted in the widespread adoption of language and signage aiming to de-stigmatize use of campus and community resources and promote a judgement-free atmosphere, all project participants gained valuable knowledge about the impact of normalizing student use of support services. Similarly, SCAC's efforts to Build a Home for Lifelong Learning illustrated to all project participants the importance of involving the community—and, in particular, students' families—in matriculation, advising, and other important college processes and celebrations. As the colleges continue to build and enhance programs and services to connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce, they would be well-served to leverage these lessons learned and adopt language, signage, and policies that illustrate the colleges' commitments to serving students and communities in a welcoming and judgement-free manner.

## Develop Sustainability Plans to Build on Project Accomplishments

Although this project provided invaluable seed funding to develop programs and practices that can more effectively connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce, the impact of the project will only be as strong as the colleges' ability to integrate their efforts into strategic planning and annual budgeting processes. Thus, each participating college is working to institutionalize programs developed with one-time funds and incorporate the costs of services—including Pipeline AZ, BetterMynd, student surveys, and so forth—into annual budgets. Luckily, as CCC VP of Student Services Tony Williams shared, "The success of these initiatives has affirmed our commitment to making them an ongoing part of [CCC's] student support services."

Another way to build on project successes and institutionalize efforts to connect students to wrap-around services and the workforce involves implementing a regular assessment cycle to review and iteratively improve the effectiveness of various programs and strategies. Most, if not all, of the colleges involved in this project are developing processes for regular data collection, analysis, and dissemination to faculty and staff. In addition, the colleges are each leveraging their accomplishments through ongoing marketing campaigns, social media promotions and outreach, and campus events.



## Share Lessons Learned through a Community of Practice

Each of the community colleges participating in this project highlighted the invaluable role the League for Innovation in the Community College and the Garcia Family Foundation played in offering partnerships with external agencies and vendors and keeping lines of communication open among partner colleges to allow for the sharing of accomplishments, new ideas, challenges, and lessons learned. Indeed, as SCAC's Lisa Eutsey shared, "participation in this grant has given us priceless self-awareness that we are constantly changing, adapting, reflecting, and revising different scopes of work and funding, with an eye on being flexible and adapting our college to better meet its challenges and opportunities." By creating and supporting an ongoing Community of Practice, which might include additional community colleges in Arizona and beyond, the League may be able to leverage the successes of this project far beyond the timeline of the Garcia Family Foundation's grant.