

Essential Steps *for* States

OVERVIEW

**COMPLETE
COLLEGE
AMERICA'S GOAL:**

**By 2020, six out of
10 young adults
in our country
will have a
college degree or
credential of value.**

Complete College America is a national nonprofit organization working with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

Five national foundations are providing multiyear support to Complete College America: the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Lumina Foundation for Education.

***Lead, Measure, Act, Innovate:** Complete College America's Essential Steps explain how states can implement systemic reforms and innovative policies to significantly increase college completion.*

U.S. students don't just need to go to college; they need to complete college. Access has improved — we are sending more students to higher education — but success rates have declined, especially at public institutions. Fewer than half of students who enter college today finish with a degree or credential. Those who do complete college are taking longer, paying more, and graduating with more debt. The current system wastes time, money, and potential for students, institutions, and states.

In just 10 years, six of 10 new jobs will require a college education, but currently, only half of all students who enter college graduate.

Complete College America has set a goal that by 2020, six out of 10 young adults in our country will have a college degree or credential of value.

Forty percent now. Sixty percent by 2020. We will not close this gap by standing still or tinkering around the edges. The following are essential steps every state should take to meaningfully improve college completion — and secure our states' and our nation's economic futures.

- **Set a state completion goal.** Establish a state commitment to a specific number of graduates by a certain date.
- **Set campus-level completion goals.** The state completion goal should be the reference point for campus-level and system-level goal setting — which is essential to ensuring everyone has a

clear understanding of their respective responsibilities for achieving their share of the states' completion goal.

- **Uniformly measure progress and success.** Collect and publicly report key data — both statewide and by campus — using common metrics that inform and drive improvement in college completion.
- **Shift to performance funding.** Create new funding models that tie funding to outcomes, thereby providing incentives for student success, not just for enrollment.
- **Reduce time-to-degree and accelerate success.** Significantly increasing college completions is possible only when states and institutions get serious about the problem of time. Simply put, the longer it takes students to graduate, the less likely they are to do so. Smarter scheduling, easier transfers, and new delivery models are just some of the ways to help.
- **Transform remediation.** In spite of best intentions, remediation most often becomes the place where students fall down and drop out, instead of catch up. New, targeted methods have proven that students can quickly address academic needs and move swiftly to more first-year success. It's time to change remediation from just another chance to a sure bet for success.

- **Count certificates.** One-year career and technical certificates can provide significant economic rewards. States should embed industry credentials, seek third-party validation, verify economic value — and count one-year certificates.
- **Restructure delivery for today's students.** Today's college students must balance school, work, and often families. To boost completions, colleges must restructure to offer courses and programs that better fit busy, complicated lives. Continuing to expect today's students to succeed at institutions designed for college students 50 years ago will only result in more of the same: nearly half of students with little to show for their efforts but debt.

These essential steps are the starting point of change. States that take these steps demonstrate that they are willing to do what it takes — shifting funding, raising expectations, restructuring programs, and rewarding innovation — to clearly signal that graduation matters most.

For details about these Essential Steps, key data related to college completion, and other information, visit www.completecollege.org.