

**Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment (EASE)
Project
Request for Proposals**



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Summary

The Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment (EASE) Project, funded by the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation (Great Lakes), is a unique opportunity for up to ten Ohio community colleges to partner with MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, to increase summer enrollment rates among Pell Grant recipients. The project consists of two targeted interventions: a behavioral messaging campaign and a last dollar grant offer for summer tuition and fees in combination with the messaging campaign. Participating colleges will receive grant funding to cover summer tuition and fees for a sub-set of students, a messaging campaign designed by behavioral experts to encourage summer enrollment, and \$50,000 in direct payment to the institution to support research efforts. The colleges will have the opportunity to participate in a major state initiative and contribute to a study that can build rigorous evidence to inform important higher education policies, such as the reinstatement of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) for third-term enrollment in community colleges.

MDRC, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), and Great Lakes invite proposals from community colleges in Ohio to join Phase II of the project. Selected colleges will begin work with MDRC in the summer of 2017 to adapt the messaging campaign and last dollar grant to the institutional context. The colleges will launch the interventions in the spring and summer of 2018, and the partnership will continue through 2020, as MDRC will conduct an evaluation of the initiative to assess implementation and outcomes.

Project Overview

Higher education institutions in the U.S. are largely designed around a schedule that promotes fall and spring enrollment but presents summer as optional. However, if students enrolled during summer, they could substantially reduce the time it takes to earn a credential. Moreover, research indicates student enrollment during the summers *after* matriculation is linked to increased academic momentum, persistence, and graduation.¹ While some students have obligations that prevent them from taking summer courses, a sizeable portion have the ability to take summer courses but do not enroll; in fact, evidence from rigorous experimental evaluations demonstrate that summer enrollment rates can be influenced through well-designed interventions.²

This project seeks to determine whether behavioral messaging and financial support can encourage more students to make progress towards their degrees during the summer.

In cooperation with Great Lakes and OACC, MDRC

¹ Adelman (2006); Attewell, Heil, and Reisel (2011).

² Weiss et al. (2015); Mayer, Patel, Rudd, and Ratledge (2015); Scrivener et al. (2015).

launched Phase I of the EASE Project in summer 2016 with Columbus State Community College, Marion Technical College, Southern State Community College, and Stark State College. Working with these four partner colleges, MDRC conducted an in-depth behavioral diagnosis to understand barriers to summer enrollment for students who are Pell recipients and developed two interventions to address these barriers:

- (1) **Behavioral messages:** A messaging campaign that incorporates principles from behavioral science to encourage summer enrollment.
- (2) **Behavioral messages and summer scholar grant:** A messaging campaign that incorporates principles from behavioral science and the offer of a last dollar grant, titled the “Summer Scholar Grant,” which covers summer tuition and fees after federal and state grants are applied.

In order to assess whether these interventions are making a difference, MDRC is conducting a random assignment evaluation with these four colleges. Eligible students who are Pell recipients were randomly assigned into one of three groups; group one received only the behavioral messaging campaign, group two received the behavioral messaging campaign and the grant offer, group three received the college’s usual communications (control group).

MDRC, OACC, and Great Lakes invite proposals from community colleges in Ohio to join Phase II of the project. Up to six additional colleges will be selected. Each college will receive grant funding to cover summer tuition and fees for a sub-set of students, a messaging campaign designed by behavioral experts to encourage summer enrollment, and \$50,000 in direct payment to each college to support staff time and college resources used for research efforts.

Selected colleges will begin work with MDRC in the summer of 2017 to adapt the messaging campaign and last dollar grant to the institutional context. The colleges will launch the interventions in the spring and summer of 2018, and the partnership will continue through 2020, as MDRC will conduct an evaluation of the initiative to assess implementation and outcomes.

Proposed Scope of Work

Selected colleges will:

- Create a team to lead implementation and data collection efforts.
- Work with MDRC during the summer and fall 2017 planning period to prepare for the intervention launch in spring 2018
- Share data on eligible students with MDRC for random assignment.

- Implement the interventions, including sending personalized email messages, postcards, and letters, and disbursing financial incentives to students.
- Participate in evaluation activities, including on-site fieldwork and providing data on the research evaluation sample.
- Develop plans for scaling successful strategies after the project period.

Project Components

College Team

The project team is crucial to successfully implementing the intervention. The college team will be comprised of at least one representative from each of the following college departments or areas, or their equivalent:

- Enrollment – *College representative(s) who manage student registration process*
- Financial Aid – *College representative(s) who award and disburse student aid*
- Student Success – *College representative(s) who oversee initiatives in student services*
- Advising – *College representative(s) who manage and/or conduct student advising*
- Marketing – *College representative(s) who manage internal and/or external college communications*
- Institutional Research (IR), or Institutional Effectiveness – *College representative(s) who manage student data*
- Information Technology (IT) – *College representative(s) who manage college software and/or email systems.*

Each college will designate a “liaison” who will lead the team and project implementation. The liaison will be the primary point of contact between MDRC and the college and will ensure the team is making progress on the project (i.e., scheduling meetings, bringing key players to the table, and initiating next steps). The liaison will join regular (weekly or biweekly) calls with the MDRC research team. Other members of the project team will join these regular calls as needed throughout the planning and implementation phases. Each college will also have a “senior advisor” to the project, a member of college leadership who will ensure project progress is communicated to college administration, champion sustainability of successful project components, and communicate externally about the project.

Planning Period

In the summer and fall of 2017, colleges will meet regularly (weekly or biweekly calls) with MDRC to plan for implementing the intervention. These conversations will include members of the college team and will focus on adapting the intervention to the college context and working with the college team to prepare for sharing data.

Random Assignment

MDRC will use a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in order to understand the effects of the interventions. By randomly assigning eligible students to receive or not receive the intervention, an RCT provides rigorous evidence to understand the impact of the intervention. Roughly one third of the eligible students at the college will be assigned to each of the three groups: receiving only the behavioral messaging campaign, receiving the behavioral messaging campaign and the grant offer, receiving the college's usual communications (control group).

The project targets students who receive Pell Grants; only Pell recipients are eligible to receive the project interventions. To determine which students will receive the intervention, the college will provide student-level administrative data on all students enrolled at the start of the spring 2018 term. MDRC will use these data to determine which students meet the study's eligibility criteria and, using a lottery system, assign students to one of three groups as noted above.

Implementing the Intervention

As discussed above, the study includes two main interventions: a behavioral messaging campaign and a last dollar grant. Participating colleges will send roughly eleven total behavioral messages using college communication systems to students in the intervention groups over the course of the spring and summer semesters. The behavioral messaging campaign includes communication with students via email, postcard, and letter, in addition to supplemental modes of communication available by college (e.g., text messaging). The messages highlight and clarify financial aid available for summer, emphasize the benefits of taking summer classes, and streamline instructions for enrollment, among other behavioral techniques. The grant is offered to students taking summer classes as a last dollar supplemental scholarship to fill unmet student need for tuition and fees after federal and state grant aid is applied. The grant will be applied to students' accounts by the college financial aid office.

Evaluation and Data Collection

Evaluation is a key element of this project. The data generated through the evaluation process will be analyzed and disseminated by MDRC to inform the broader field on the results of the project. The evaluation seeks to address three main research questions:

- What effects do behavioral messages have on academic outcomes?
- What effects do behavioral messages and a financial incentive offer have on academic outcomes?
- What effect does a financial incentive offer have, above and beyond being given behavioral messages?

After implementing the intervention in spring and summer 2018, the college will continue its partnership with MDRC through 2020 in order to collect the data necessary for the evaluation.

For colleges to participate, they must provide student-level administrative data, including: directory information, financial aid data, transcript data, and degree data.

MDRC and its staff have a strong institutional commitment to data security and maintaining the confidentiality of the data entrusted to us as well as to protecting the rights and welfare of all subjects participating in our research. MDRC has strict confidentiality protocols for all research data collection and usage. MDRC also has an external Institutional Review Board (IRB) which reviews all projects for compliance with federal regulations governing the protection of human subjects.

Support on data collection for the project is available through OACC’s data coaching program; please contact Cody Loew (cloew@ohiocc.org) with any questions about the program.

Timeline

College Selection	
April 12, 2017	Request for Proposals released
April 18, 2017 12:00 PM ET	RFP Webinar - Webinar 1 Registration
May 4, 2017 12:00 PM ET	RFP Webinar - Webinar 2 Registration
May 15, 2017 By 12:00 PM ET	Proposal submissions due
June 30, 2017	Notification of selected colleges
Phase II Project Timeline	
July – December, 2017	Planning period: Colleges meet regularly with MDRC team
January 2018	Random assignment and intervention launch
January – August, 2018	Implementation of the intervention: Colleges send messages and disburse grants
2018 - 2020	Data collection: Colleges share follow up data with MDRC
2020	Dissemination: MDRC publishes project results; MDRC and colleges collaborate on dissemination

College Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Submitted proposals will be reviewed by a selection committee comprised of MDRC project team members, with support from OACC. Notification of selected colleges will occur in June. Only complete applications submitted by the deadline will be considered.

Based on the submissions, a diverse group of colleges will be selected with a goal of including colleges of varying sizes that span the spectrum from rural to urban. The applications will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Applicant demonstrates clear motivation for and interest in the project;
- Applicant designates a complete and coherent project team;
- The described intervention can be feasibly accomplished and evaluated at the college;
- Applicant demonstrates commitment to implementing the project through summer 2018 and partnering with MDRC (including data sharing) through 2020.
- Applicant demonstrates evidence of potential to sustain and scale the activities beyond the grant period, if successful.

Project Webinars and Other Questions

MDRC and OACC will host two webinars to share information about the project and application process and answer colleges' questions. Webinars will be held on Tuesday, April 18, at 12:00 PM ET and Thursday, May 4, at 12:00 PM ET. Attendees can register here:

[Webinar 1 Registration](#) [Webinar 2 Registration](#)

Further questions about the Request for Proposals can be directed to:

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(212) 340-8844

Bibliography

Adelman, Clifford. 2006. *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Attewell, Paul, Scott Heil, and Liza Reisel. 2011. "What is Academic Momentum? And Does It Matter?" *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 34, 1: 27-44.

Mayer, A., Patel, R., Rudd, T., & Ratledge, A. (2015). *Designing Scholarships to Improve College Success: Final Report on the Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration*. New York: MDRC.

Scrivener, Susan, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques. 2015. *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students*. New York: MDRC.

Weiss, Michael J., Alexander K. Mayer, Dan Cullinan, Alyssa Ratledge, Colleen Sommo, and John Diamond. 2015. "A Random Assignment Evaluation of Learning Communities at Kingsborough Community College - Seven Years Later." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 8, 2: 189-217.

APPLICATION TEMPLATE

Summary Statement

Please provide a brief summary of your application, including your reasons for interest in participating in the project. (250 words maximum)

Proposed College Team

Please indicate who will represent each of the following areas on your college’s site team. Include names, titles, and contact information. If your college does not have someone in a given role, please indicate who else on the site team can address the topic. Provide a brief (1-2 sentence) description of how they will contribute to the team. Indicate who will serve as the site team’s liaison; the liaison can be someone already included on the list, or a new team member.

- a. Enrollment – College representative(s) who manage student registration process
- b. Financial Aid – College representative(s) who award and disburse student aid
- c. Student Success – College representative(s) who oversee initiatives in student services
- d. Advising – College representative(s) who manage and/or conduct student advising
- e. Marketing – College representative(s) who manage internal and/or external college communications
- f. Institutional Research (IR), or Institutional Effectiveness – College representative(s) who manage student data
- g. Information Technology (IT) – College representative(s) who manage college software and/or email systems.
- h. Senior Advisor - A member of college leadership who will ensure project progress is communicated to college administration, champion sustainability of successful project components, and communicate externally about the project

College Characteristics

Please complete the following table. Please note that support in gathering the data needed for this application is available through OACC’s data coaching program; please contact Cody Loew (cloew@ohiocc.org) with any questions about the program.

<u>Type of Student</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
Total students enrolled in spring 2016	
Degree-seeking students enrolled in spring 2016	
<i>Among degree-seeking students enrolled in spring 2016, how many were Ohio residents?</i>	
Degree-seeking students enrolled in spring 2016 who received a Pell Grant for the 2015-2016 academic year	

<i>Among degree-seeking students who received a Pell Grant for the 2015-2016 academic year, how many enrolled in both spring and summer 2016?</i>	
Degree-seeking students who received a Pell Grant for the 2015-2016 academic year and were first time enrollees at the school for the 2015-2016 academic year	
<i>Among degree-seeking students who received a Pell Grant and were first-time enrollees at the school for the 2015-2016 academic year, how many enrolled in both spring and summer 2016?</i>	

Summer Semester

Briefly describe your current summer semester. Include information about the summer semester length, course offerings, and capacity (class availability, student services, and faculty). Describe any groups of students with mandatory summer attendance, if applicable. Include the pass rate. For the financial aid year, is your college a header or a trailer institution? (500 words maximum)

Communication

Briefly describe your current systems for communicating with continuing students. What email or customer relationship management (CRM) system does your institution use? Do you utilize text messages, robo calls, mailed communications, or any other systems of communication? Which department(s) and staff manage and send communications to continuing students? Do you have capabilities to send personalized messages to subsets of students? Do you currently send students any communications that specifically address summer enrollment? If so, please attach sample communications. (400 words maximum)

Data Capacity

How does your college currently handle data reporting to the Ohio Department of Higher Education? Which department(s) and staff prepare the data reports? Would these staff members have the capacity to prepare the additional data needed for the EASE project? Support on data collection for the project is available through OACC’s data coaching program; please contact Cody Loew (cloew@ohioacc.org) with any questions about the program. (250 words maximum)

Other Initiatives

What other initiatives, if any, is your institution participating in that relate to summer enrollment? Please describe briefly and explain how you see these initiatives aligning with the EASE Project. (400 words maximum)

Other Relevant Information *(optional)*

Is there any other relevant/clarifying information you would like to share? (250 words maximum)

Submission Instructions and Other Questions

Your submission must follow the above template. The deadline for submission of the application is May 15, 2017 at 12:00 PM ET. Email your submission to EASE@mdrc.org.

Further questions about the Request for Proposals can be directed to:

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EASE@mdrc.org
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