



GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

SMALL DOLLARS FOR BIG IMPACT:

How Texas Community Colleges are Creating Effective Models for Emergency Aid

Campuses across the country are looking beyond academic support to holistic student services and interventions that keep financially vulnerable students enrolled in school. With funding from Greater Texas Foundation, the **Texas Emergency Aid Roadmap** program is helping 10 community colleges develop efficient, equitable, and sustainable emergency aid programs. This report shares lessons learned in the first year of the Roadmap program and highlights the progress at two participating schools.

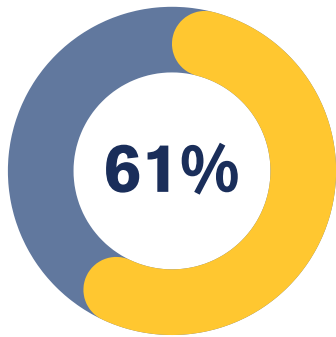
FEATURED SCHOOLS

Panola College
Carthage, TX
Enrollment 2,469

Northeast Texas Community College
Mt. Pleasant, TX
Enrollment 2,823

The Challenge

A short-term financial emergency can become an insurmountable hurdle for a college student trying to complete a degree. Whether the student's emergency is brought about by a hurricane, a pandemic, the loss of a part-time job, or an unexpected car repair bill, timely and targeted emergency aid can help them stay in school and earn the credential they need for a brighter future. While institutions understand this reality and want to direct financial resources to students in need, they don't always have the systems to administer emergency aid efficiently or effectively.



61% of Texas public two-year college students say they would have trouble getting \$500 in cash or credit to meet an unexpected need within the next month.*

Emergency Aid Helps Students Succeed in School

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 93% of students who received emergency aid through a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board fund re-enrolled the following semester.



“Approximately 3 million U.S. students drop out of college each year due to a small, unexpected expense—such as a medical bill or car breakdown.”

- Reos Partners

A Better Solution to Keep Students on Track

By resolving crises quickly, well-designed emergency aid programs can improve the odds that financially vulnerable students will stay in school and complete a credential.


Created in 2021, the **Texas Emergency Aid Roadmap** program is a three-year, \$1.5 million grant program funded by Greater Texas Foundation to develop efficient, equitable, sustainable emergency aid programs at ten community colleges across Texas.

Each participating college receives \$122,500 over three years to be awarded to students as emergency aid.

A cross-campus team of staff from each college also takes part in **professional development** led by Reos Partners to help ensure their program demonstrates the hallmarks of effective emergency aid. Reos Partners helps institutions overcome barriers such as silos between campus departments and communication gaps with students.

These institutions were chosen for the program through a competitive Request for Proposal process:

- College of the Mainland
- Galveston College
- Lee College
- McLennan Community College
- North Central Texas College
- Northeast Texas Community College
- Panola College
- Texas Southmost College
- Vernon College
- Victoria College

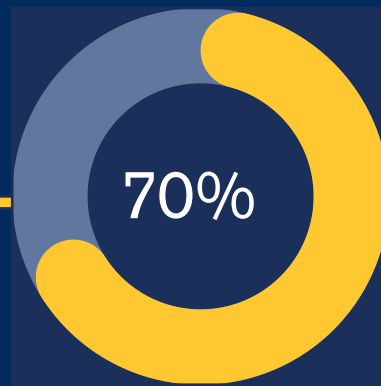


“An effective emergency aid program signals to students that the institution cares about them and their success by having a response in place to support them in times of unanticipated financial shortfall.”

- *Monica Pohlman, Reos Partners*

The Goal

Develop efficient, equitable, sustainable emergency aid programs at ten Texas community colleges.



“While 70% of colleges provide some form of emergency aid, few have robust programs that offer maximum potential for impact on student success.”

- *Reos Partners*



Reos Partners: Hallmarks of an Effective Emergency Aid Program

- A team comprised of staff from key departments across campus
- An application on the college website that is easy to find and easy to fill out
- A prompt and efficient response process (a person or team who can assess and respond to applications within 24-48 hours)
- A communications plan for student, staff, and faculty audiences
- A data collection and impact reporting plan
- A fund development plan



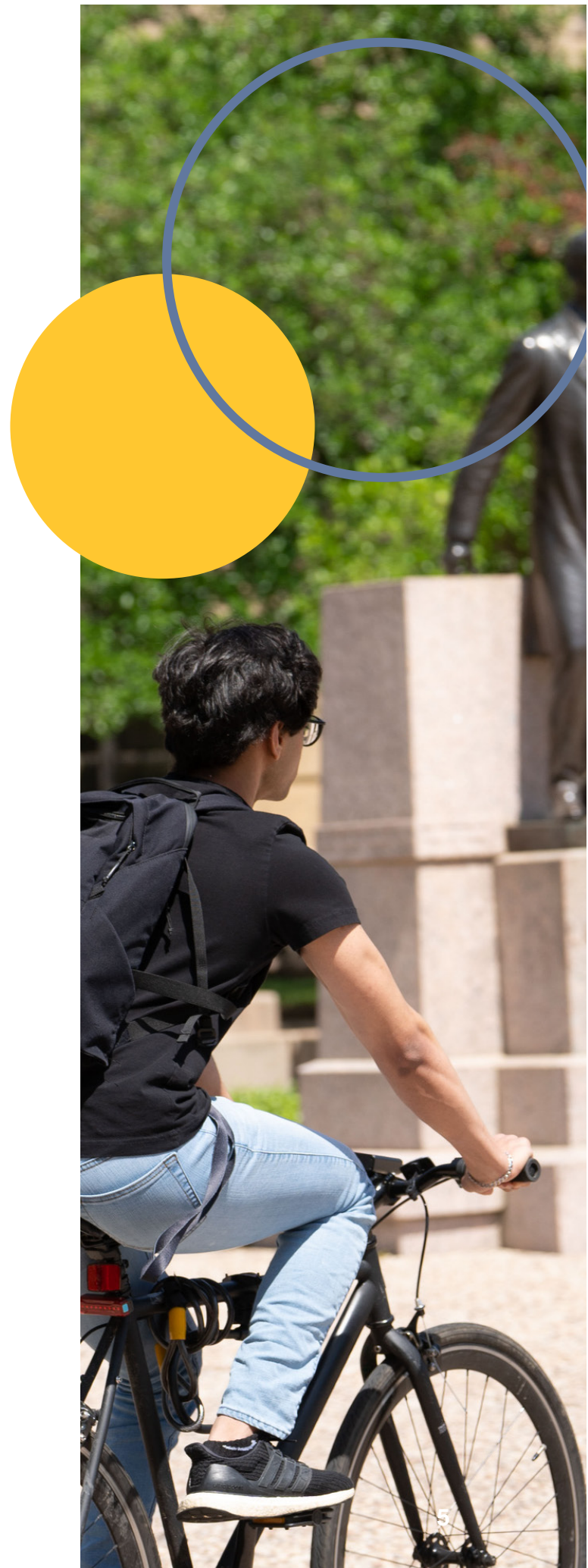
Understanding the Need

Trellis Company. 2020.
State of Student Aid in Texas.
trelliscompany.org/state-of-student-aid-2022/

Lessons Learned in Building a Successful Emergency Aid Program

Some themes that have been helpful to institutions in implementing their programs are:

- Start with a Yes rather than a No. Embracing this philosophy allows schools to help more students through positive, creative solutions to student challenges.
- Build a multi-departmental team. Teams that include financial aid staff (to maximize and package the best form of aid), business office staff (to process checks), and case management (to connect students to community resources and address root causes of need) are essential to success.
- Understand the staffing time required. The time commitment to establish and sustain an effective program is significant.
- Learn to define “emergency” from the student's point of view. Understand the very real consequences that unforeseen expenses can have on their lives.
- Strive for flexible systems and processes and evolve them when they do not serve students well.
- Create a lean application process involving fewer people and fewer approvals that is easily accessible to students through a concise online form.





Carthage, TX
2,469 Enrollment in Fall 2021
31% Pell Eligible in 2020
\$270 Average Emergency Aid Grant
222 Emergency Aid Grants

Participating in the Roadmap program allowed Panola College to evolve and enhance its existing systems for student emergency aid. By making minor adjustments to existing policies and procedures, Panola is now able to respond to student requests for emergency aid in **4 hours or less**. The college highlights their success in helping students in 2021 in this [short video](#).

In the first year, we refined our program policies and procedures to move towards replicable awarding policies and sustainable award amounts. Working with Reos Partners also allowed us to bring together a robust team of staff from across campus to improve communication and buy-in from all departments." - *Jessica Pace, Panola College*

Efficiencies Achieved

- A one-person review process is consistent and streamlined.
- Walmart gift cards proved to be the fastest way to provide financial relief.
- All awards for food or basic needs are accompanied by a bag of personal care items from the “Feed the Need” comfort closet.
- When campus care team meetings are needed, they are held as working lunches to speed collaboration.
- Faculty promote the availability of emergency funding in class.

Student Impact

- One recipient who received a cancer diagnosis in the fall semester requested fuel assistance due to the increased travel to her treatments.
- One student requested a blanket because nights were getting colder in her car, and she could not afford to run her car all night.
- One student had recently given birth and could not work for two weeks. She ran out of money to purchase food and formula for her baby.

I think this program is so helpful to so many, including myself. I've never been to a college that assisted in this way.” - *Panola Student*

What's Next

In year 2, our main priority is to find sustainable funding for our EA program. We have seen the significant impact our EA program has on helping our students complete their degrees. Our team is working with faculty, staff, and student clubs to conduct awareness and fundraising campaigns to provide small immediate funds for our EA program. We are also researching foundations and possible future grant opportunities.” - *Jessica Pace*

Mt. Pleasant, TX
2,823 Enrollment in Fall 2021
54% Pell Eligible in 2020-2021
\$212 Average Emergency Aid Award
20 Emergency Aid Awards made

Prior to enrolling in the Roadmap program, Northeast Texas Community College had no formal emergency aid program, no dedicated funding, no response team, and no application process to award dollars to students with emergency expenses unrelated to tuition or other school-related expenses. With funding from Greater Texas Foundation and guidance from Reos Partners, NTCC created an emergency aid program from the ground up.

I went into this process with very little knowledge about the extent of our student needs and emergency aid funding. Reos Partners provided a tremendous amount of support and training to help us organize our processes and develop a core team on our campus.”

- Nita May, Northeast Texas Community College

Making the Most of Each Dollar

- A holistic review of student needs allows the college to apply financial resources in a way to make the biggest impact. The first assessment is whether the student qualifies for additional financial aid.
- Student support can take many forms including emergency aid funds, grocery or gas gift cards, access to the campus pantry services, connections to mental health and medical benefits, or other services in the community.
- The NTCC Foundation committed to use annual donations from an existing, private royalty source to serve as matching funds for the emergency aid program.
- After a review of procedures, the college made changes that allowed students to make advanced payments toward tuition and fees to help manage their cash flow.

Student Impact

- In the middle of a semester, one student lost everything in a house fire. Emergency aid quickly replaced his books and computer so he could complete his coursework. He also got support from the CARE Center Advocate and pantry services.
- A student needed funds to replace her ill-fitting gear with appropriate boots and protective clothing to help her succeed in her welding class.
- In the face of a medical crisis, the CARE Center advocate helped one student enroll in health insurance, find a doctor, and receive ongoing medication.

“It takes time and a fair amount of trial and error to establish a program like this. Each step we made forward required adjustments to our processes to try to benefit the students.”

- Nita May

What's Next

- NTCC has identified peak periods during the semester when emergency aid response times can be slower given the small staff at the college. They are working on a solution to help with these periods.
- They are also fundraising to sustain the program beyond the initial grant from Greater Texas Foundation. For example, participating in the East Texas Day of Giving allows NTCC to raise regional awareness of student need and source funds from the local community.

Anticipating Future Need. Supporting Student Success.

Greater Texas Foundation began studying emergency aid programs as far back as Hurricane Harvey. Even as relief money poured in to help students displaced by the hurricane, many schools did not have the infrastructure to get those funds to students. More recently, some students who received emergency funding during the COVID pandemic continue to struggle financially and they look to their colleges for support.

The need continues: In Fall 2022, one participating community college received 60 applications for emergency aid on the first day their application was open to students.

By funding the Texas Emergency Aid Roadmap, we want to support Texas institutions in building the systems they need to respond to students in crisis and to anticipate new ways to use timely and targeted emergency aid to keep students from dropping out of college.

We are thankful to Reos Partners for their collaboration on this program and for their guidance to the participating community colleges.





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greater texas foundation.org

For more information about the Texas Emergency Aid Roadmap grant, contact Dr. Andrea Robledo, Programs & Strategy Officer.