JBAY

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Advocates
for Youth

2023 NEXTUP EXPANSION
Implementation Toolkit

Contents

Introduction

The 2022–23 California budget included a significant expansion of funding for the NextUp program that has allowed every college in the state to receive an allocation of funds. John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) sponsored this expansion and has worked extensively with college foster youth programs for over a decade to share best practices and support colleges in their efforts to serve students with experience in foster care. To help guide the 60 colleges that will be receiving NextUp funds for the first time in January 2023, JBAY surveyed several existing NextUp programs to better understand the elements that contribute to program success. The recommendations that follow were derived from these conversations as well as JBAY's *Campus Support Program Leadership Guide*.

The tips and recommendations in this guide are not exhaustive and are not meant to dictate how your campus support program should be run. Instead, we hope they can be valuable tools in the development of your program to best meet the needs of the students at your college and in your community who have experience in foster care. Although not every practice will be the best fit for your institution, the policies, processes, interventions, and philosophies detailed herein should serve as inspiration for crucial conversations and student-centered decision-making, as they are the result of many years of effective campus support for foster youth students throughout California and across the nation. Whether your program is in its beginning stages or has a long history at your college, the expansion of the NextUp program is an exciting new chapter in the creation of equity in education for students with experience in foster care.

Integrating NextUp with Existing Foster Youth Programs

In many cases, colleges have existing programs in place designed to support foster youth. As NextUp funds are made available at these colleges, campus staff and administration will need to determine how to integrate new services with those already offered. The recommendations below provide considerations that will help to ensure a seamless system of support for foster youth.

1. Create a single program for foster youth on your campus.

Regardless of where an institution chooses to house the NextUp program, guidance from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office) is clear: Each college must commit to "integrating newly established NextUp program services with existing campus foster youth support programs to ensure that all students receive equitable services."[1]

Colleges with established foster youth support programs must determine how to integrate the new NextUp funding with existing services. In prior iterations of NextUp funding, some colleges combined funding streams to create a single integrated foster youth program while others maintained two separate programs, one for students who met the eligibility criteria for NextUp and one for those who didn't. Colleges that pursued the latter strategy reported that maintaining two separate programs, no matter how much collaboration and communication took place, created confusion for students and diminished the effectiveness of both programs.

A variety of approaches can be used to create a seamless experience for all foster youth. Each college will need to determine the model that most effectively leverages existing infrastructure and resources; reduces or eliminates barriers; and increases access, equity, and success for foster youth students on their campus.

MODEL 1: PROGRAM HOUSED WITHIN EOPS

There are advantages to the foster youth support program being embedded within EOPS. For example, this model enables the college to leverage existing EOPS staffing and program resources for tasks and services such as computer lab/drop-in center space, front office appointment and call services, budget management, and academic counseling appointments. Leveraging staff and resources in this way expands program reach and creates an easy point of entry for students who may not wish to publicly identify as foster youth.

Note that the Education Code also requires that "program application and enrollment processes implemented by community college districts are streamlined and do not impose barriers to entry." Per Chancellor's Office guidance, programs should refrain from requiring multiple applications for students to enter NextUp (e.g., an EOPS application and a separate NextUp application), requiring students to attend multiple orientations, or imposing application deadlines for the NextUp program.

MODEL 2: STANDALONE PROGRAMS

Campuses with a well-established standalone foster youth program may already have the infrastructure in place along with a sense of community, safe/affinity space, program name recognition, and a proven model of success. It may make more sense to embed NextUp within this existing program and collaborate with EOPS for streamlined service integration.

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[1] NextUp Letter of Commitment, 12/15/22

2. Maintain a single website that hosts information for all foster youth support services.

Regardless of the program structure a college chooses, having multiple websites describing foster youth services can be confusing for students as well as campus and community stakeholders. The webpage that provides information on foster youth programming should include:

- Program eligibility criteria
- Types of benefits available
- How to access services
- Point of contact for the program and contact information for program staff
- Hours of operation

The program website can also inform students about other campus and community resources with information about how to access these supports.

Ensure that internet searches for the terms "foster youth" and "NextUp" all route to the same landing page for the campus foster youth support program. If you choose to maintain an existing program name for your foster youth services, such as Guardian Scholars, be sure to reference NextUp on your website so that students or supportive adults familiar with NextUp can easily find your program. For example, "The Guardian Scholars

Program includes services funded by the NextUp Program."

TIP: The description of services can indicate that certain benefits/services may be limited based on additional eligibility criteria including the student's current age and the age at which they exited foster care.

3. Do not supplant existing funding.

Refrain from supplanting existing staff positions, services, or student resources with NextUp funding. If a pre-existing foster youth program is utilizing, for example, Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) funding, such funding can supplement the NextUp allocation. This will allow programs to continue to serve students who need services but may not qualify for NextUp, such as students who left foster care prior to age 13 or who are entering after age 25.

4. Blend funding for staff positions as needed.

Direction from the Chancellor's Office has made clear that blending funding sources for a single position is allowable, and this can be a good way to employ staff who can serve foster youth who qualify for NextUp as well as those who do not. Blending funding can also be used to fund a portion of a full-time staff person's position—for example, blending an academic counselor with another program if NextUp does not require a full-time counselor or funding part of a financial aid technician's time to serve NextUp students.

Such blending of funding is encouraged by the Chancellor's Office per the _2022-2023 California Community Colleges Compendium of Allocations and Resources,_ which states that "[a]lthough many of the categorical programs have spending requirements and restrictions as well as reporting requirements, where allowed, colleges should acknowledge the intersecting identities of students

and consider leveraging multiple funding sources to address students' shared needs. **Leveraging funding sources not only facilitates the coordinated service delivery among programs but also maximizes resources for students with the greatest need and eliminates equity gaps.** Most importantly, cross-program conversations on funding and service delivery create opportunities for institutional leaders to engage in structural redesigns that focus on shifting burdens from students to institutions and reducing the negative impacts of social determinants of educational success have on student outcomes."

When possible, offer similar services and comparable/similar resources to all foster youth. As circumstances allow, maintain a baseline of services and resources for all participants in the foster youth support program to create parity across programming (e.g., regular check-ins, tutoring access, book grants, transportation assistance, emergency grants, etc.). The degree to which programs will be able to serve foster youth who do not meet the eligibility criteria for NextUp (e.g., students who exited foster care before the age of 13) will vary based on the availability of funding to serve these students. Programs are encouraged to

continue to leverage other resources such as SEA funding and EOPS funding (for otherwise eligible students) to align services as much as possible for all students with experience in foster care.

"Providing timely information about what is available is really important. I knew students who had to wait two to three weeks to find out what services they were eligible for. This made it hard for them to start accessing support and make the best use of the program."

– NEXTUP STUDENT

When different students will be receiving different levels of services because of varying eligibility criteria, notification of which benefits students qualify for should be delivered in an individual setting (e.g., during the intake/welcome session) rather than a group setting, such as during orientations or program events, to avoid drawing attention to differences in resource access.

Program Development

Whether a college is integrating NextUp with an existing foster youth support infrastructure or creating a new program from scratch, the development of certain practices will improve the student experience and increase the likelihood of program success.

1. Fully understand current eligibility standards.

Eligibility requirements for NextUp have changed several times since the program's inception, as recently as October 2022. The Chancellor's Office released guidance in December 2022 describing the current law. Regulations have not yet been updated to reflect these changes, so programs should refer to this guidance and Education Code for program eligibility and allowable uses of funding until regulations have been updated. Note that in California, youth under the jurisdiction of the probation department who have been placed in an out-of-home setting because the home setting is not suitable are legally considered foster youth and qualify for all the same programs and services as youth overseen by the child welfare system.

> **TIP:** In cases where language in the Education Code conflicts with language in regulations, the Education Code always takes precedence.

2. Create a comprehensive system for identifying and engaging potential program participants.

Foster youth may be reluctant to self-identify for various reasons, including the fear of the stigma associated with being in the foster care system. They also may not know about the resources that are available based on their foster care status, so a proactive effort to identify foster youth on your campus will likely be necessary. Utilizing all of the strategies below will help to ensure that no eligible students fall through the cracks.

→ **Leverage existing sources of data.** Whenever possible, access data from CCCApply, the FAFSA/CADAA, Cal Grant Foster Youth Access Award rosters, Chafee Grant rosters, your campus's Admissions and Records/Enrollment Center, and any other relevant sources to identify potentially eligible students. Once students are identified, engaging them through multiple outreach strategies will help ensure that all foster youth receive information about the foster youth support program on campus. This can include phone calls, texting, mail, email, and sending messages through the student portal. Programs should also explore working with their Information Technology department to send automated emails to these students informing them of the availability of services. Program staff should be notified when the system issues an automated email to facilitate timely opportunities for additional outreach and engagement.

→ **Ensure that information about your program is available on the campus website.** Website information should be easy to find, clear, and accessible to students, and should include information about how to contact the program. You can also get the word out about your program by using the college's social media account.

→ **Establish a system that campus and community partners can use to refer students for services.** Both on- and off-campus entities can be a valuable source of referrals for your program, and it is important to make it as easy as possible for such referrals to be made.
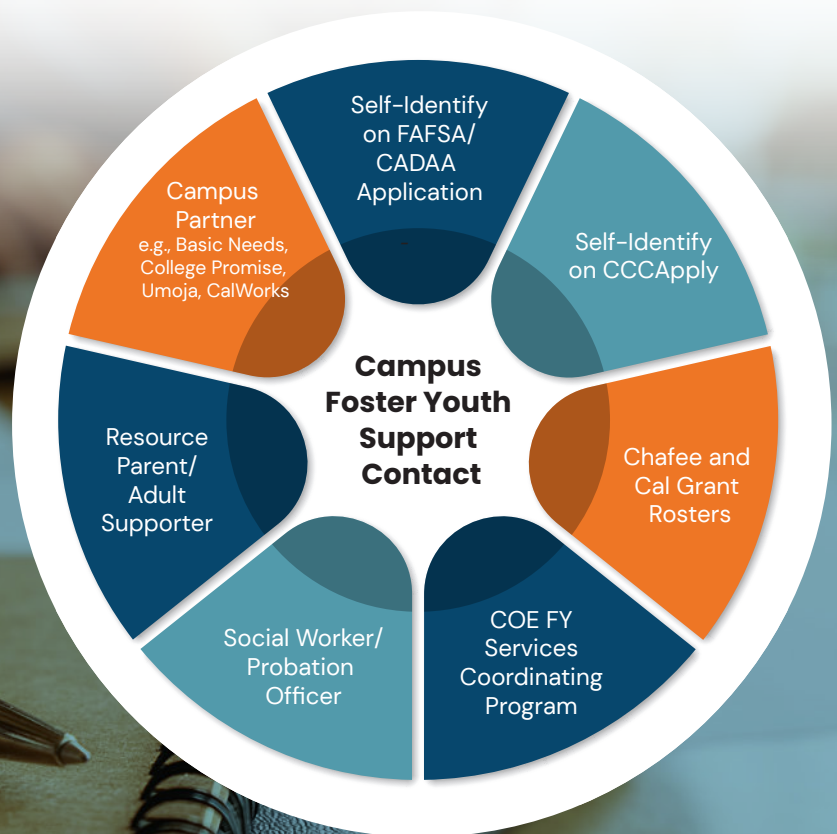
ON-CAMPUS

Ensure that other departments and programs on campus are aware of your services. You can also collaborate with other on-campus programs to include a question regarding foster youth status in their program applications and develop a system for those students to be referred to the foster youth program.

You may want to consider presenting at a Flex Day activity or other event where campus personnel are in attendance. Such a presentation can provide information about the realities that foster youth face as well as information about your program and guidance regarding how staff and faculty can play a role in supporting these students. You can also present to campus committees and constituent groups such as enrollment management, the academic and classified senates, division meetings, the President's Cabinet, the Board of Trustees, the Foundation Board, and student government. In 2020, the California Community College Success Network (3CSN) presented a webinar that can serve as an example for how to share strategies for college faculty and staff to support students who've experienced foster care or homelessness. This webinar is available at cacollegepathways.org/campus-support-tools/.

OFF-CAMPUS

Develop relationships with external stakeholders such as county child welfare and probation agencies, transitional housing providers, local high school districts, and the County Office of Education Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) to identify students with experience in foster care who are attending or considering attending your college. Outreach strategies should inform both staff and students served by these entities about the services offered by your program and how students can apply. Follow up with these stakeholders regularly to ensure that new staff are acquainted with your program.

You may want to create a program brochure describing your services that can be distributed to other campus departments and external agencies. The Chancellor's Office has created templates that are available at nextup.cccco.edu/for-administrators/.

Campus Foster Youth Support Contact

- Self-Identify on FAFSA/CADAA Application
- Self-Identify on CCCApply
- Chafee and Cal Grant Rosters
- COE FY Services Coordinating Program
- Social Worker/Probation Officer
- Resource Parent/Adult Supporter
- Campus Partner e.g., Basic Needs, College Promise, Umoja, CalWorks

3. Develop a two-year program plan.

Program development requires intentionality and foresight. At a minimum, colleges should create a two-year program plan that includes budget, staffing, and any necessary infrastructure expansion. If possible, establish a planning committee that brings together a range of representatives from different arenas to share their perspectives. The implementation of a planning body can also help develop buy-in from other departments and create program allies. The committee can include on-campus representatives from programs such as EOPS, existing foster youth programs, financial aid, and Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS), as well as off-campus partners such as representatives from the county child welfare/probation departments, FYSCP, and transitional housing providers.

Consider the following when developing your program plan:

⮕ **Funding amounts will change.** The Chancellor's Office has provided each college with an initial allocation—based on the number of identified foster youth at the institution—which will be adjusted either up or down after the first year based on updated overall foster youth numbers and then after year two based on the actual number of students served using the approved funding formula. Campuses should anticipate that funding levels may change. Once you have determined how many students are likely to enroll in your program, you can estimate the amount of funding that will be allocated to your campus in future years based on the funding formula and plan your budget accordingly.

⮕ **Carryover is authorized.** For many, the first six months of implementation will largely be spent planning and beginning the staff recruitment process. Carryover approval for unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year has been authorized by the Chancellor's Office.[2]

⮕ **Robust staffing is necessary.** The staffing model for NextUp should be significantly more robust than for most other campus-based programs. The level of interaction necessary for foster youth to be successful is, on average, much greater than for other students, including for other EOPS students, and the funding formula reflects this need. Note that NextUp funding has been established as an ongoing budget allocation, and hiring adequate staff is a crucial element of a successful program. Sample staffing models are included in Appendix A.

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[2] "For Proposition 98 funds without specific statutory or programmatic expenditure deadlines issued by the Chancellor's Office, districts are not required to spend down Proposition 98 funds within the same year of allocation. In such cases, colleges no longer need to make carryover requests for unspent funds from year to year to the Chancellor's Office." LINK

4. Prioritize hiring staff with experience working with foster youth and delivering trauma-informed services.

While there are many student populations at community colleges who benefit from support programs, the foster youth population is unique in many ways. Staff with experience working with this population or who have experience working with other individuals who require a high-touch, trauma-informed, wraparound system of support are most likely to be successful in counselor and coordinator roles. It can be helpful to go beyond traditional academic recruitment avenues to include advertising through sources targeted to those with child welfare, social work, and/or case management experience.

SAMPLE POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

» NextUp/Foster Youth Support Program Coordinator

» Coordinator, EOPS/Foster Youth Educational Support

» NextUp/FYSP Counseling Assistant

» Financial Aid NextUp/Guardian Scholars and Student Services Technician

» EOPS/CARE/NextUp Specialist

» CARE/CAFYES Specialist

» EOPS/CAFYES Counselor

» NextUp Counselor/Coordinator

"As a student who has been in foster care, it is important to me that NextUp staff understand that I did not always have the opportunity to learn certain life skills or concepts while I was in care. I need to know I can ask questions and be vulnerable without feeling judged."

—NEXTUP STUDENT

5. Use trauma-informed and student-centered practices.

Per the NextUp Letter of Commitment, colleges are strongly encouraged to take a student-centered approach to the implementation of NextUp programs that shifts the burden from students to institutions and strengthens unconditional belonging. This can be accomplished by offering trauma-informed and equitable student-centered practices that reduce or eliminate barriers to access. Examples include streamlining application and onboarding processes to reduce redundancies, structuring the foster youth support program to function as the service coordination and navigation hub for foster youth students, and institutionalizing open communication and cross-collaboration across student support programs in recognition of the multiple intersecting identities foster youth students possess.

Additional examples of such practices successfully implemented by existing NextUp programs are:

◆ **Facilitating student involvement by establishing processes to meaningfully engage foster youth in the development and ongoing management of the program.** This Human-Centered Design process creates a sense of ownership for students and ensures that the program is effectively meeting their needs. Student involvement can be achieved through peer-staff positions and regularly soliciting feedback via satisfaction surveys, "town halls," or student advisory boards.

◆ **Utilizing a student-centered staffing model that meets the holistic needs of students** (See Appendix A). NextUp is, by design, a high-touch program that provides both academic support services and comprehensive wraparound services/service coordination on a level unlike that of other campus support programs to students who typically belong to a multitude of disproportionately impacted groups. The support needs include case management services, resource and needs assessments and linkages, crisis intervention, and community-building, all of which require a robust staffing model made up of experienced professionals.

> **"It's hard to be a full-time student when I have four fires burning. I get one fire put out, but I still have three more burning while trying to go to school and survive in the real world."**
>
> **—NEXTUP STUDENT**

◆ **Shifting the responsibility to determine student eligibility to program staff by utilizing the auto-verification tool that exists in WebGrants.** This tool allows campus staff to look up any student and confirm if they meet the criteria of being in foster care at some point after the age of 13, thereby removing the burden of proof from the student. If program staff do not have access to the WebGrants system, the program may need to collaborate with the financial aid office to request that verification through the tool takes place.

◆ **Streamlining the application and onboarding process.** As noted previously, Education Code requires that "program application and enrollment processes implemented by community college districts are streamlined and do not impose barriers to entry." In keeping with guidance provided by the Chancellor's Office, programs should refrain from requiring multiple applications for students to enter NextUp (e.g., an EOPS application and a separate NextUp application), requiring students to attend multiple orientations, or imposing application deadlines for the NextUp program.

Foster youth support programs wishing to expand these efforts are encouraged to collaborate with other campus support programs to create linkages and systems that further improve access to critical resources and services, such as a common application form used by multiple programs, cross-program and/or multi-program student orientations, and "warm hand-off" referral pipelines.

> **"I am in three programs and end up saying the same thing to each program counselor. It's a lot. It would be a lot easier if I had the option to meet with just one counselor and have it count for all of my programs."**
>
> **—NEXTUP STUDENT**

- **Facilitating cross-program collaboration by establishing mutual agreements between student support programs to reduce or eliminate obstacles for students participating in multiple support programs (e.g., College Promise, EOPS, NextUp, DSPS, CalWORKs, Puente, Umoja, etc.).** Foster youth who are eligible for more than one support program often must satisfy multiple overlapping requirements for each program resulting in duplicative services and an unnecessary burden on students. A mutual agreement between programs can reduce this burden and help students maintain eligibility by accepting academic counseling contacts and education plans from other programs to meet program requirements. When students are participating in more than one program, they should be provided the choice to work with their preferred academic counselor.

6. Cultivate champions.

Identifying individuals on your campus to serve as advocates for the foster youth support program and the students it serves is vital to the success of your program. Some options to consider for cultivating such champions include:

- **Hosting a Foster Care Awareness Month event in May** and inviting campus professionals to come and learn about your program, as well

as potentially meet foster youth students at different stages in their educational journeys. You can also invite the local child welfare agency, Independent Living Program (ILP), and community-based organizations to facilitate broader campus and community collaboration.

- **Offering training to faculty and staff** about the needs of students with lived experience in the foster care system. As noted previously, you can take advantage of requirements your campus has for professional development such as a "flex day" to offer such training. If your program offers staff/faculty mentorships to students, this is a great opportunity to pass around a sign-up sheet to solicit volunteers.

- **Attending and speaking at different campus meetings** to provide information about foster youth students and the program. Opportunities may include outreach to counseling, department chairs, senior staff, Admissions and Records, DSPS, Housing Services, Financial Aid, and the Tutoring Center. These opportunities, when used well, can go beyond just informing to inspiring the creation of a network of foster youth allies across campus.

- **Involving campus administration** by including them in the planning process and inviting them to attend program events.

Programs should also consider creating a collaborative body (e.g., advisory committee, wisdom board, task force) consisting of campus partners, community stakeholders, county agencies, and student representatives with lived experience in foster care to inform programming, develop partnership opportunities, and promote awareness and advocacy for the foster youth student population. Campus partners can include, but are not limited to, Admissions and Records, Financial Aid, EOPS, Counseling Services, Career and Transfer Services, Housing Services (if applicable), DSPS, Institutional Research, and faculty. External partners can include the county child welfare and probation departments, local chapters of California Youth Connection, ILP providers, Foster Youth Services Coordinating Programs (FYSCP), and transitional housing providers. JBAY maintains contact lists for ILP providers and transitional housing agencies (THP-NMD and THP-Plus). The Department of Education maintains a list of FYSCP contacts.

7. Develop on-campus partnerships and collaboration.

Establishing partnerships with other departments to leverage existing services is essential. Such partnerships can include basic needs centers, housing services (if applicable), academic counseling, psychological services, transfer centers, College Promise, TRIO, DSPS, tutoring center, career and transfer center, financial aid, admissions and records, and student success services. Below are tips and suggestions for making the most of the existing resources on your campus.

- Encourage departments to designate a point-of-contact person to whom foster youth can be referred and eliminate practices and processes that require students to disclose their foster care status and/or sensitive personal information every time they try to access a new service. Be prepared to educate staff about the special needs of foster youth students.

- Create a referral system that supports the student in accessing the service. This can include making direct contact with a department to let them know the student

is coming and encouraging the student to schedule an appointment while in your office. At some campuses, departments offer priority to foster youth, bypassing waiting lists or other obstacles to access.

- Walk the student over to the referral office to introduce them to the appropriate point person and make sure they understand how to access the services they need.

- Track the referrals to follow up with both the student and campus department to ensure the student received the needed services. This could include creating a referral card that students have signed by the referred department, which can add a layer of accountability, or utilizing your campus's student data management system for early alerts, direct referrals, and ongoing case management.

- Develop a trigger system to ensure that staff follow up on each referral to determine if the student accessed the service and the outcome of the contact.

8. Create a welcoming space.

Having a physical location for the foster youth support program allows staff to meet with individual students and can create a sense of "home" for foster youth where they feel safe. Make sure that whatever space you provide is friendly and welcoming.

- Use the space to create a culture of community. Include things like youth-friendly art, a bulletin board of reminders and monthly updates, and a student birthday board. Engage students in decorating the space.

- If feasible, arrange the location for multi-functionality including space for studying, social interaction, student advising and counseling, and just hanging out. Include a couch or other furniture that creates a welcoming environment.

- Include private office space for sensitive conversations in addition to general program space. Conversations with students with experience in foster care regularly include such topics as child abuse, substance use, suicide and self-harm, domestic violence, and other

topics that require confidentiality and can take place with any member of the NextUp program team. As such, having space available for any staff member to utilize is crucial to ensuring that students feel safe disclosing sensitive information.

- Provide computers and printers for students to utilize.
- Create a resource library with books about career options, employment preparation, graduate school, test preparation, and other useful information.

9. Participate in regional and statewide communities of practice and professional development opportunities.

Networks are available for practitioners to remain up to date with the latest legislative updates and guidance, share and learn about best practices in the field, and access professional development opportunities. Some ways to get connected and stay informed include:

- Signing up for the NextUp email listserv to get important updates from the Chancellor's Office about the program and learn about professional development opportunities.

- Attending Foster Youth Success Initiative and NextUp regional meetings.
- Utilizing the California Community Colleges Vision Resource Center.
- Signing up for the JBAY newsletter at the bottom of this page to get important policy updates and learn about trainings hosted by JBAY.
- Attending Southern California Higher Education Foster Youth Consortium (SCHEFYC) meetings or Northern California Consortium meetings.

Some campuses have also partnered with other colleges to create opportunities for peer learning and collaboration. This has included the creation of local regional networks that not only offer opportunities for professional learning, but have also led to shared activities, creating a larger sense of community for students. For campuses starting new programs, there is no need to reinvent the wheel given the wealth of expertise already in existence.

You can find a comprehensive list of program contacts at the California College Pathways (CCP) website at cacollegepathways.org/search.

10. Evaluate your program regularly.

Using the tenets of Continuous Quality Improvement can help programs evolve and grow over time. Consider scheduling evaluation meetings at designated intervals with those involved with implementation to review program data and discuss where program changes may be warranted. Solicit feedback from students as well on a regular basis to inform program design. Some colleges have formed a relationship with their Institutional Research Department and worked with them to create customized standing reports to assess students' academic progress, completion rates, and withdrawals to improve intervention services and better understand their program outcomes. You may also want to consider hiring an outside evaluator or graduate student to interview staff, students, and others on campus who work closely with the program to develop recommendations for program improvement.

Program Implementation

The NextUp program rules were designed to be flexible to allow programs to meet students where they are and provide a robust range of programming and interventions that are necessary to support program participants to remain enrolled and achieve their academic goals. In addition to academic counseling and direct financial support such as book grants, transportation vouchers, emergency funds, and other grants, programs may want to consider offering the following:

"The NextUp program provides me with a lot of extra support through grants, counseling, health resources—and overall provides me with the guidance I need to succeed."

—NEXTUP STUDENT

1. Academic support

Foster youth will often need additional help to succeed in their classes beyond basic educational counseling services. This can include:

→ **Ensuring that students are accessing priority registration.** This may require aiding students to navigate the system on your campus, submit necessary documentation, and receive their priority registration designation in a timely manner. You will also want to notify students about key registration dates through mail, email, phone, text, social media, and flyers posted in the program office.

→ **Transfer assistance.** Beyond referring students to your college's transfer center, you can make connections to foster youth programs at four-year universities to link students to additional support. All CSUs and UCs now have a program, and contact information is available at cacollegepathways.org/search. It can be helpful

to create formal or informal relationships with local four-year campus programs to allow for a seamless transition for students. This can be accomplished with university campus tours, virtual or in-person transfer workshops hosted in partnership with university foster youth programs, and facilitating introductions for a warm handoff.

→ **Offering a foster youth student success course.** Personal development and college success courses can be offered at different stages of the students' time on campus, frequently either as part of a summer bridge experience or during the students' first semester. These may be similar to existing First Year Experience courses offered on your campus but more specifically targeted for students with lived experience in the foster care system. These courses can focus on study skills, academic etiquette, time management, organizational skills, and learning about campus support services and programs. They can also include special topics such as healthy relationships, dealing with the holidays, and positive communication skills.

→ **Using "early alert systems" to watch for students having difficulty so that just–in–time adaptive interventions can be implemented.** Create small "report cards" for the student to have their instructors complete and sign. The student then brings the card to the program office at their scheduled appointment with the academic advisor midway through the semester/quarter. Depending upon the level of involvement with faculty, some programs have created a midway email notification where a standardized email is sent to each instructor asking for a midway grade along with any additional information necessary. Alternatively, students can be asked to submit a screenshot of their midterm grades in Canvas, or midterm progress reports can be embedded into a campus-wide system like Starfish Early Alert.

- **English and math course placement support.** Students may need assistance navigating math or English course enrollment. Make sure to help students understand their options and take advantage of alternative pathways such as co-requisite courses.

- **Tutoring services.** Depending on the demand for tutoring, programs can either create a relationship with the tutoring center to make referrals or hire tutors that are dedicated to the program. Remain in contact with the tutor to check on students' progress.

2. Financial support

NextUp program rules allow programs to provide a range of direct financial support to students. This can take the form of direct cash aid or funds for specific expenses such as gas cards, food vouchers, book vouchers, emergency funds, childcare subsidies, housing assistance, etc. Programs have tremendous flexibility in how they choose to distribute and deliver direct support. All direct support must be coordinated with the financial aid office; therefore, it is imperative to develop a positive and effective working relationship characterized by responsiveness, open communication, and trust. Keep the following in mind:

- Work with the financial aid office to confirm that all program participants are receiving the maximum financial aid to which they are entitled. Oversights as simple as a difference in how a student's name is spelled on the FAFSA or CADAA and how it is spelled in child welfare records can result in thousands of dollars of lost financial aid as child welfare records are used to verify eligibility for the Chafee Grant and Cal Grant Foster Youth Access Award.

- Students who lose financial aid because of Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements may also need assistance to navigate your college's appeals process. Remember that foster youth are given special consideration when it comes to the Community College Promise Grant (tuition waiver). These students do not lose eligibility as a result of not making Satisfactory Academic Progress (CCR § 58621(a)(2)). Special rules also apply for the Chafee Grant. More information is available at jbay.org/resources/sb-150-toolkit/.

- The amount of financial aid a student can receive is limited by their total unmet need. If a student maxes out their unmet need but is still in need of additional support, consult with the financial aid office to determine if the student's circumstances warrant an adjustment to their estimated financial contribution or cost of attendance.

- It is not required that all students receive the same amount of funding. In keeping with the principles of student equity, award amounts can vary based on need.

"When I ask for financial help, I need to be able to access that resource quickly—within a week to two weeks. It is so important that programs understand this and make it a priority."

–NEXTUP STUDENT

3. Housing support

Having a safe, stable place to live year-round is essential to success in college. Recent studies have found that students impacted by foster care are twice as likely as other students to experience homelessness at rates that exceed 40 percent. For those colleges with dorms or similar on-campus housing options, foster youth residents often do not have family to go to when on-campus housing is closed, raising the challenge of where to go during school breaks. Those who must live off campus may not have developed independent living skills, jeopardizing their ability to both find and maintain stable housing. Financial constraints are a consideration as well, especially in more costly urban areas.

All community colleges are required to have a basic needs center and basic needs coordinator, and the strategies described below can be implemented in conjunction with the basic needs center to support foster youth students with housing insecurity.

- **Set-aside dorm rooms.** Campuses that have on-campus housing or are in the process of developing housing should explore setting aside units for foster youth as well as providing options for year-round housing. Current law requests that community colleges give priority for on-campus housing to current and former foster youth. Campuses that offer housing that is open during breaks are also requested to give first priority to current and former foster youth and provide this housing during breaks at no cost to students who are foster youth or homeless.

- **Leverage extended foster care options.** Youth in foster care on their 18th birthday are entitled to remain in foster care until age 21 if they are enrolled in college or meet other eligibility criteria. Create relationships with the local child welfare agency to ensure that all eligible youth are receiving any housing benefits to which they are entitled. This can include direct payments

to youth (known as a Supervised Independent Living Placement option) or transitional housing through a THP-NMD provider. Additional information is available HERE. Youth who exit foster care after the age of 18 may be eligible to enroll in transitional housing known as THP-Plus. More information is available HERE.

- **Compile resources.** In collaboration with the campus basic needs center, create a housing guide that includes emergency shelters, community-based organizations that offer affordable housing, and other local housing resources. JBAY's "Young Adult's Guide to Housing" can be a helpful tool as it provides guidance to foster youth regarding finding an apartment, evaluating roommates, budgeting, and maintaining housing.

- **Pay for summer housing.** Financial aid is not available during the summer months unless a student is enrolled in summer courses, and this can be very challenging for foster youth students. Consider making funds available to help cover summer housing costs.

4. Personal guidance and support

Most youth in foster care have faced more than their share of challenges well before they arrive at college. Foster youth are more likely to experience mental health and/or substance abuse issues, and often become teen parents. By definition, foster youth suffered abuse and/or neglect as children resulting in a removal from their biological parent(s). Many youth in foster care experience frequent changes in placement, which can lead to a general sense of instability, lack of trust in adults, and even post-traumatic stress. The strategies below can help students feel safe and welcomed and support their mental well-being.

- Create a culture of community and support within your program with periodic events, lunches, etc.

- Develop a relationship with your campus's Disability Services office and assist foster youth in establishing eligibility and accessing these services as needed.

- If your campus has counseling and psychological services and/or health services, create a relationship with key staff in order to expedite access to these services. Some colleges have negotiated special considerations for foster youth such as waiving the limit on the number of counseling appointments.

- Craft a system of referral to mental health and social services in your area as well as to other nonprofits catering to foster or transition age youth. Be prepared to make referrals to substance abuse treatment programs when necessary, as well. See the Partnering with Local Mental Health Providers to Support Foster Youth in College Toolkit for additional tips.

"My mentor helped me build a connection and a bond that made it easier for me to ask for help."

—NEXTUP STUDENT

- Assist youth in accessing all health benefits to which they are entitled. Foster youth who left care at age 18 or later are eligible to receive MediCal until they turn 26. For more information, visit Covered Til 26 and BenefitsCal.

- Learn about and make referrals to services in your area for parenting students, including childcare options and parenting classes.

- Train staff in the principles of "trauma-informed care," an approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives.

- Incorporate elements of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which emphasizes the importance of focusing on a youth's strengths instead of their risk factors, into all aspects of your program.

- Don't limit meetings with students solely to academic topics; likewise, don't accept "everything's fine" as a response to inquiries about how a student is doing more generally. Instead take the time to delve deeper so that personal issues that could lead to a student dropping out of school are identified and addressed early. One strategy is to begin these meetings with a discussion about what is going well as a way to create an environment that facilitates open and meaningful conversations.

- Produce program gear with your name and logo to promote student pride and connection.

- Develop a mentoring system: either peer-to-peer or with adult supporters. Mentors must be provided with adequate training and regular monitoring for such programs to be safe and effective.

5. Community-building activities

Students with lived experience in foster care often grow up in a revolving door of temporary placements, which may prevent them from feeling connected to a supportive community. Some may feel disempowered and unsure how they can empower themselves to impact their own life as well as that of the community around them. Making students aware of and creating opportunities for engagement is a valuable role that a foster youth program can play.

Ideas for community-building include:

- Provide information about on-campus activities such as clubs, athletics, student organizations, and student government as well as opportunities in the community such as places of worship, recreational groups, volunteering, and peer mentoring. As you get to know individual students, you can suggest activities that match their interests or personality.

- Create a connection with the associated student organization/student life department to support the creation of clubs for students impacted by foster care who want to spend time with others with foster care experience and to connect students to additional campus engagement opportunities.

- Encourage connection and participation in youth advocacy organizations such as California Youth Connection and other leadership opportunities.

- Provide opportunities for students to mentor others including younger foster youth. Outreach to high school students in foster care is one meaningful way to engage students on campus who have experienced foster care. Make sure that students receive the necessary training and support for any mentorship activities.

Sponsoring your own community-building activities can also be a way to facilitate positive peer relationships and reduce feelings of isolation, which can lead to improved academic outcomes. Holding a welcome event at the beginning of each term can be a nice starting point to orient new students to the program and introduce them to continuing students.

"Going on a service trip to New Orleans changed my life forever. Community events, speakers, field trips—these activities have provided me with opportunities to see more so that I can be more."

—NEXTUP STUDENT

Other group events can include:

- Study jams (have the office open late during midterms and final exams)

- Educational field trips (museums, community events)

- Recognition events for students' academic achievements

- Graduation/end-of-year celebrations

- Community service events

- Foster Care Awareness events and programming in May (Foster Care Awareness month) to bring awareness to the campus and create a shared experience for students organizing and attending the events

6. Student workshops

In addition to offering individualized support, group workshops can be an effective strategy for imparting information and creating community. If you choose to offer workshops, create a schedule of different workshops being offered during the term and provide this to students when they enter your program or drop by for services. Consider leveraging technology that will allow students to join in a hybrid format or recording workshops for students who are unable to to attend for future reference. To find topics that are most relevant and meaningful to students, you can engage them via surveys or during welcome sessions to identify programming that best meets their needs and interests. You can often leverage the expertise of others on campus as well as community-based organizations to deliver workshops. Examples include but are not limited to:

- **Education and Career**
  - » Employment skills: resume writing, applying for a job, interviewing skills, keeping a job
  - » Academic etiquette: study skills, test-taking, time-management, how to be a student
  - » Planning for life after graduation, including advanced degrees
  - » Transferring to a four-year university
  - » Introduction to campus: campus tour and scavenger hunt

- **Life Skills**
  - » Basics of independent living
  - » Landlord and tenant rights
  - » Money management: budgeting, banking basics, establishing credit
  - » Preparing tax returns
  - » Purchasing and maintaining a car
  - » Buying groceries and shopping on a budget

- **Health and Wellness**
  - » Healthy sexuality
  - » Communication skills
  - » Stress management
  - » Substance use and abuse

- » Managing peer pressure
- » Mental health services and referrals
- » Depression and suicide prevention
- » Parenting support
- » First aid/CPR
- » Healthy lifestyles: nutrition, healthy eating and cooking, exercise

7. Leadership opportunities

Including current and former foster youth in the development and management of your program will not only create leadership opportunities for the students, but it will also enhance your program and allow youth to create a sense of "ownership" in the program's development and evolution. Some ways to include students with lived experience in foster care in your program design and function are:

- Create peer-staff positions that are filled by current students
- Involve students in planning and decorating the program space
- Include students when advocating for your program with campus administrators or potential funders
- Include students in the process of planning events and/or workshops
- Facilitate opportunities for students to share about their experiences and expertise, such as peer mentorships, student panels, and faculty and staff training/professional development

There may also be leadership opportunities for students interested in policy change through organizations such as California Youth Connection, John Burton Advocates for Youth, and Foster Club.

"Leadership roles helped me enhance my skills and created an opportunity for younger students to see their own potential as future leaders in the program."

–NEXTUP STUDENT

"When you go to school, people may assume you have it together— you have a house and a car and can pay for daycare—which isn't always the case. Foster youth don't typically have consistent access to these resources."

–NEXTUP STUDENT

8. Linkage to benefits and resources

Students often need services beyond those that can be provided by the college. Maintaining an up-to-date list of local services and referring students to these services is a vital part of any program. Programs should collaborate with the campus basic needs center, which may already have some information readily available. This can include:

- Free or reduced cost clothing options
- Legal rights/advocacy
- Emergency needs (food banks, emergency shelter, reduced cost utility programs, etc.)
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Health care
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment
- CalFresh application support
- Free tax preparation assistance through services such as VITA.

9. Career support

In addition to helping foster youth complete their degree or certificate programs at your campus, providing help during the transition out of college and into the job market can be crucial. Using their time in college to build skills that are necessary for the workplace can be extremely valuable. Below are some ideas for creating transition and career support services.

- Create linkages to your campus's career center. Make sure students are aware of job fairs on or off campus, and training and resources offered by the campus's career center.

- Develop relationships with the county ILP, local job search centers, nonprofit agencies providing employment assistance, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs such as the American Job Centers of California.

- Provide workshops or seminars on employment-related topics such as career exploration, resume writing, mock interviewing, job search, employment readiness, and workplace expectations.

- Create a seminar to address planning for life after graduation, including securing stable housing and transportation and accessing health insurance.

- Provide one-on-one coaching regarding transitioning to employment after college.

- Collaborate with the campus and business communities to identify opportunities for career internships or mentorships.

- Work with other campus offices to establish a priority status for students with experience in foster care to gain access to on-campus jobs, work-study, and internships. The new Learning Aligned Employment Program (LAEP), which rolled out in 2022, offers subsidized employment options in a student's field of study. Foster youth, along with first-generation college students and students who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, are given priority for this program.

- Utilize resources such as this Youth Career Guide, created by the Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative, which is also available in Spanish and has an accompanying Companion Guide for adult supporters.

Conclusion

Foster Youth are a disproportionately impacted student group, with educational outcomes that lag far behind their peers and equity gaps that exceed those even of other special populations, such as low-income and first-generation college students. In California, foster youth graduate with a two- or four-year degree at rates that are less than a third of the graduation rate for general students. While close to 90 percent of foster youth express a desire to go to college, only 10 percent have completed a degree by age 23. As a result, foster youth are denied access to the opportunities available to other young adults leading to far-ranging consequences including poor job prospects, high rates of homelessness and reliance on public benefits, and a diminished quality of life.

Foster youth often arrive at college with a host of challenges stemming from their time in the foster care system, a childhood marked by instability, and the long-term impacts of the abuse or neglect that brought them to the attention of the child welfare system. And while foster youth undeniably have significant needs, they are also a population with enormous potential. California is unique in its level of commitment to support these students through their educational journey and the NextUp program is at the center of the state's promise to change these outcomes for the better. This toolkit seeks to capture the lessons learned from experienced practitioners to support newly emerging NextUp programs to function as agents of change, shifting the narrative for students with experience in foster care. With a commitment to equity and student-centered design, your program will be instrumental in helping these students to thrive.

APPENDIX A
Sample Nextup Program Models

There are many ways to set up a foster youth support program. While all programs should include a combination of services and direct financial support, some programs may choose to spend more funding on program staffing whereas others may maximize the funds going to grants for students. In addition, programs vary in size and the degree to which they can leverage other funding sources to serve students who do not meet NextUp eligibility criteria.

The following examples show sample spending models based on program size and differing choices regarding how to utilize funding. For example, the small and large "NextUp only" programs below are choosing to emphasize staffing over direct support, whereas the medium program devotes a greater proportion of funding to direct student support.

Programs are encouraged to think creatively about how they can expand capacity beyond the positions funded by NextUp. Some programs have leveraged other resources to bolster staff capacity by, for example, obtaining work-study positions or MSW interns from local universities.

1. Programs with NextUp funding only

Where positions are listed as less than full-time, programs may consider blending funding sources to create full-time positions, as noted previously. For example, an Academic Counselor can be funded as 50 percent NextUp and 50 percent EOPS. The FTEs shown below represent only the proportion of the staff member's time paid by and dedicated to NextUp.

Program Size		Small (20 students)	Medium (75 students)	Large (125 students)
Sample Operating Budget[3]	total	$160,000	$418,750	$681,250
	staffing	$130,000	$240,000	$450,000
	direct student support	$25,000	$120,000	$200,000
	outreach, events, misc.	$5,000	$58,750	$31,250
Sample Staffing Model		(EOPS Director serves as NextUp Coordinator) .75 FTE NextUp Specialist .5 FTE NextUp Technician .5 FTE NextUp Adjunct Counselor 1 CalWORKs work-study program assistant (leveraging 75% funding from CalWORKs, 25% NextUp)	1 FTE NextUp Coordinator 1 FTE NextUp Specialist .5 FTE Academic Counselor 1 MSW Intern (unpaid)	1 FTE NextUp Coordinator 1 FTE NextUp Counselor 1 FTE NextUp Specialist 1 FTE Outreach and Onboarding Technician 5 Federal Work-Study (FWS) peer mentors (leveraged FWS funding)

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[3] Operating budgets calculated using NextUp funding formula adopted in 2018.

2. Programs leveraging additional funding

While NextUp eligibility has been greatly expanded since the program's inception, some students with experience in foster care remain ineligible for the program, namely students who exited foster care before age 13 and those who do not enroll in the program prior to age 26. The examples below provide samples of program models that combine NextUp funding with other sources (Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) funding, general funds, or private funding) to serve a broader range of students with experience in foster care (or experiences with similar challenges such as the juvenile justice system and/or youth homelessness).

As noted above, these are examples only and programs should develop the funding and staffing model that works best in their local context. Also, similar to the models above, each sample uses different program assumptions. For example, in these models the large program serves a relatively small number of non–NextUp students as they have prioritized outreach to NextUp-eligible students while maintaining services only for non–NextUp students directly referred by campus and community partners. The medium and large programs are choosing to spend less on outreach and events overall in order to provide more direct student support.

Program Size		Small (20 NextUp students and 10 non–NextUp students)	Medium (75 NextUp students and 25 non–NextUp students)	Large (125 NextUp students and 20 non–NextUp students)
Operating Budget	total	$260,000 $160,000 NextUp + $100,000 SEA & private funding	$618,750 $418,750 NextUp + $200,000 SEA, private funding & General Fund	$981,250 $681,250 NextUp + $300,000 SEA, private funding & Financial Aid Dept. funding
	staffing	$200,000	$335,000	$360,000
	direct student support	$50,000	$250,000	$560,000
	outreach, events, misc.	$10,000	$33,750	$61,250
Staffing Model		.8 FTE Foster Youth (FY) Counselor/ Coordinator (67% NextUp, 33% SEA) 1 FTE FY Specialist (67% NextUp, 33% SEA) .5 FTE FY Technician (67% NextUp, 33% SEA) 10-hour FY Mental Health Counselor (Health Center Intern)	1 FTE FY Coordinator (75% NextUp, 25% SEA) 1 FTE Equity & Outreach Specialist (100% SEA) 1 FTE NextUp Specialist (75% NextUp, 25% SEA) 1 FTE Counselor (50% NextUp, 25% SEA, 25% General Fund) 2-4 Work-Study Program Assistants/Peer Mentors	1 FTE FY Coordinator (100% SEA) 1 FTE FY Academic Counselor (50% NextUp, 50% SEA) 1 FTE Special Programs Financial Aid Technician (25% NextUp, 25% EOPS, 50% Financial Aid) 1 FTE Resource Technician (25% NextUp, 25% EOPS, 50% SEA/Basic Needs) 1 FTE Student Success Specialist (50% NextUp, 50% SEA)