

Transfer between institutions of higher education is a matter of equity. For every 100 students who enroll in community colleges across the country, 31 students transfer to a four-year institution and only 15 complete a bachelor's degree within six years.ⁱ Those aggregated numbers cover deep inequities by income and race and ethnicity. When disaggregated, we see that the barriers to completion are higher for Black students, Hispanic and/or Latinx students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

Multiple studies have found that college affordability is a top concern for transfer students, a finding that holds regardless of age, gender, or racial/ethnic background.ⁱⁱ However, affordability for transfer students has typically not been well understood or prioritized. For example, research shows that enrollment managers and chief financial officers at four-year institutions often are not engaged in conversations about transfer students, rendering those students "invisible and underserved."ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, only three states in the US currently have financial aid that explicitly targets transfer students (CA, MD and VA).^{iv}

To address this, TransferBOOST elevated strategic finance and affordability as a signature feature. To support technical assistance to institutions and state partners, rpk GROUP built the [TransferBOOST Affordability Financial Tool](#). This tool provides colleges and universities with the ability to evaluate the expenditures and resources needed to support building more affordable transfer pathways. The tool also provides the potential financial return on investment to colleges and universities from increased student enrollment, retention, and completion through transfer, which in turn helps institutions determine the investments they can make to support the equitable success of transfer students.¹

Take the following steps to maximize the impact of the tool:

1 **STEP 1:** Engage a transfer team that knits together expertise in transfer, academic pathways, strategic finance and affordability.

Consider which stakeholders institution-wide should be engaged. Ideally, the transfer team has the power to make decisions about investments, financial aid, and academic programs, meaning involvement of roles such as provosts, chief financial officers, enrollment managers, and financial aid leads is critical. Not all of these roles need to engage with the tool. However, engaging key stakeholders early in the effort will allow them to understand the goals, rationale, and approach to improving affordability for transfer students. Additionally, a single institution can fill out the tool, but collaboration across sending and receiving partner institutions is highly recommended; working together to consider current enrollments by program provides valuable insights on where there is room or need for growth. Partners can also work together to understand the cumulative price for students across the entire pathway.

2 **STEP 2:** Reflect on and understand your transfer student pipeline.

Understanding the data for your transfer student pipeline is critical. Step back as a team to gather data on current transfer enrollments, and consider how and why you believe new students can be attracted to your institution and your partner transfer institutions. What are your assumptions about increases in new enrollments? If you expect more students, why? Perhaps most importantly, what are you doing differently in this improved transfer pipeline that you believe will lead to increased student recruitment, enrollment, retention and completion?

With this level of analysis in hand, the team can move forward with confidence.

1. This tool is designed to capture the financial return to colleges and universities; it does not estimate the return on investment to students.

Affordability Financial Tool

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STEP 3:

Enter data as directed in the TransferBOOST Affordability Financial Tool.

The tool provides clear instructions to enable institutions to understand the cost structure of transfer pathways and provide more precise ROI estimates. The Tool provides guidance in the following areas:

- Anticipating revenue (e.g., estimate new enrollments expected as a result of this effort).
- Anticipating direct expenses (e.g., estimate staff time that is newly dedicated to this effort and will be a new cost to the institution).
- Capturing additional revenues and expenses (e.g., if relevant, capture additional revenues and expenses such as grant funding or IT costs).
- Reviewing data assumptions (such as benefit rates that are used in underlying model calculations and can be customized to reflect the rate at your institution).

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STEP 4:

With ROI in hand, direct investments to transfer students.

With an understanding of new revenue anticipated from improved and well-promoted transfer pathways, institutions can direct new investments to support transfer students. The tool will calculate anticipated new revenue and includes guidance on how institutions might think about understanding and using the ROI generated to **directly invest** in transfer students and their success. Institutions in the TransferBOOST initiative took several steps to address affordability for transfer students, such as:

- Streamlining access to transfer scholarships either by removing stringent requirements and/or promoting and automatically awarding the fund.
- Reducing cost at the four-year institution by offering a tuition discount or transfer scholarship.
- Ensuring that the order of funds in the financial aid package provided the maximum funding available to students to cover non-tuition costs.
- Offering a free summer course and/or reducing costs for books.
- Articulating applied associate's degrees to ensure all coursework counts, thus reducing time to and total cost for the bachelor's degree.

Endnotes

i. Doug Shapiro, Afet Dundar, Faye Huie, Phoebe Khasiala Wakhungu, Xin Yuan, Angel Nathan and Youngsik Hwang. (2017, updated 2021). *Tracking transfer: Measures of Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students to Complete Bachelor's Degrees* (Signature Report No. 13). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/tracking-transfer/>; see also Community College Research Center. (2015). *What We Know about Transfer*. Research Overview. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-we-know-about-transfer.pdf>

ii. See for example RP Group. (2021). *Through the Gate Transfer Initiative*. <https://rpgroup.org/through-the-gate> and Alexandra W. Logue and David Wutchiett. (February 25, 2022). "Student Views: What Can They Tell Us About Vertical Transfer?" *Beyond Transfer Blog on Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/beyond-transfer/student-views-what-can-they-tell-us-about-vertical-transfer>

iii. Alison Kadlec and Elyse Ashburn. (2021). *Understanding Incentives: Connecting the Dots for Transfer Student Success*. Sova for Tackling Transfer. <https://tackling-transfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Understanding-Incentives-Connecting-the-Dots-for-Transfer-Student-Success.pdf>

iv. Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board. (2021). *The Transfer Reset: Rethinking Equitable Policy for Today's Learners*. HCM Strategists for Tackling Transfer. http://hcmstrategists.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PAB_TransferReset_Full_Final_07_26_21.pdf

Alongside the [BOOSTING Transfer series](#), the TransferBOOST Affordability Financial Tool is designed to help institutional, system, and state leaders think more innovatively about how to create innovative, equitable, and affordable pathways for transfer students.

Learn more at: ihep.org/transfer-boost

