Higher education institutions responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the health of students, faculty, and staff and to ensure that courses can continue. These measures included converting to a strictly virtual space (for those not already active in that arena); implementing health and safety measures and purchasing equipment; and supporting students with financial aid and technology. Colleges and universities adapted to changing health mandates and economic environments through the pandemic and are still experiencing the impacts of declines in enrollment and cost pressures on their budgets.

To help higher education institutions and students through this difficult period, the federal government provided financial support through the three COVID-19 relief acts—the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplement Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). In California, nearly $10.1 billion in COVID-19 relief aid was awarded to higher education institutions and students via the HEER Fund. Of this total statewide amount, 85.6% has been spent as of November 30, 2022. This report provides a high-level summary of the disbursement of CARES Act HEERF for institutions and students.

**HEERF and ICCUs**
Looking at the independent California colleges and universities (ICCUs)—specifically, 104 WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) accredited, four-year and above, nonprofit institutions—across the three COVID-19 relief acts:

- $880,677,919 was awarded to ICCUs
- 93.2% of awarded HEERF aid have been spent, or $820,471,716
- On average, individual ICCUs have spent 95.5% of their total awarded HEERF aid

**CARES Act and ICCUs**
As of the publication of this report, only the details of HEERF disbursed under the CARES Act have been made public by the U.S. Department of Education, specifically the timeframe between March 2020 to December 2020. Per the CARES Act, at least half had to be spent to support students, though institutions had the flexibility to provide additional aid to students from their institutional portion or other programs. The data on the following page looks at WSCUC-accredited ICCUs that received HEERF under the CARES Act. For more information, please contact Thomas Vu, vice president for policy, and Pamela Ong, research manager.
HEERF Awarded to ICCUs, by Program

$160M was awarded to ICCUs

Average HEERF Disbursed to Students

97,000 students received HEERF support

$88,105,119 was disbursed to students through all HEERF programs

$73,341,002 was disbursed directly to students as Emergency Financial Aid

HEERF Institutional Spending

80% of institutional aid went back to directly support students in the forms of additional student grants or tuition discounts and reimbursements


Notes: Data collection was limited to WSCUC-accredited, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. The intent is to provide a wide scope to capture the diversity of the ICCU sector but also to recognize the high standards of accreditation by WSCUC; of this subset, the CARES Act data included only institutions that were required to complete the Annual Performance Report.