



Kim Cook
Executive Director
National College Attainment Network

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
260 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt,

Thank you for your continued leadership in past funding cycles to reinforce investments in the federal programs that support students in their pursuit of higher education. Today, we write to respectfully request that federal student aid funding be a high priority for the Subcommittee. Without the statutory discretionary spending caps for Fiscal Year 2022, we hope that total discretionary funding can rise to provide strong support for our nation's higher education system and students.

With this goal in mind for FY22, NCAN recommends these specific funding levels for the U.S. Department of Education programs:

- NCAN recommends the requisite funding in FY22 so that the maximum Pell Grant award can be increased to \$12,990, double the current maximum award.
- Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grant funding of \$1.061 billion.
- Federal Work-Study funding of \$1.48 billion.
- TRIO program funding of \$1.316 billion.
- GEAR UP funding of \$435 million.
- \$200 million increase in administrative funding for federal student aid management.

Additionally, we request that the Corporation for National and Community Service receive \$1.21 billion in funding for FY22 – and that the AmeriCorps program, that allows some college access programs to provide near-peer mentors for their students, receive \$501 million in funding.

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN), founded in 1995, represents more than 600 members across the country that all work toward NCAN's mission to build, strengthen, and empower communities and stakeholders to close equity gaps in postsecondary attainment for all students. Collectively, we are committed to college access and success so that all students, especially those underrepresented in postsecondary education, can achieve their educational dreams. NCAN's members span a broad range of the education, nonprofit, government, and civic sectors, including national and community-based nonprofit organizations, federally funded TRIO and GEAR UP programs, school districts, colleges and universities, foundations, and corporations.

Drawing on the expertise of our hundreds of organizational members in every U.S. state, NCAN is dedicated to improving the quality and quantity of support that underrepresented students receive to apply to, enter, and succeed in postsecondary education. Students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and those who are the first in their family to attend college experience disproportionately lower rates of postsecondary success. For example, a low-income student is 29% less likely to enroll in postsecondary education directly after high school than a high-income student. Ultimately, only 35% of low-income high school students obtain a postsecondary credential by age 26, compared to 72% of high-income students.

The federal investments that would most bolster the goal of closing attainment gaps include the following:

Pell Grant Investments

NCAN recommends that the maximum Pell Grant award be increased to \$12,990, double the current maximum award. The Pell Grant has served as the cornerstone of financial aid for students from low-income backgrounds pursuing higher education since its creation in 1972. This need-based grant provides crucial support for around 7 million students each year, or about one-third of undergraduates. Without this need-based grant funding, an even smaller portion of students from low-income backgrounds would be able to access higher education. Congress has recognized the importance of the Pell Grant over the past five years by investing in annual increases of, on average, about \$140 to the maximum award.

Given that the previously required automatic inflationary increases have expired, these annual investments by Congress have been essential for the nation's students who do not have the means to pay for college from falling farther behind in their pursuit of higher education. Even with these investments, the purchasing power of the Pell Grant for a four-year college degree from a public institution is holding at a historic low of 29% of the cost of attendance. At its peak in 1975-76, the maximum Pell Grant award covered more than three-fourths of the average cost of attendance – tuition, fees, and living expenses – for a four-year public university.

To address the long-term purchasing power of the Pell Grant, and to have the Pell Grant be increased so that it covers at least half of the cost of a four-year public higher education, the maximum award should be doubled.

In President Biden's budget for FY22, the administration has requested that Congress consider a Pell Grant increase of \$1,875, through discretionary and mandatory funding, to bring the maximum award to \$8,370 for the 2022-23 award year. If Congress adopted the President's request, raising the maximum Pell Grant to \$8,370, its purchasing power would significantly increase to 36%. NCAN applauds this historic investment, referred to in the budget as a "down payment on the President's commitment to doubling the grant in future years." NCAN encourages Congress to consider a plan for future increases that would achieve a doubling of the Pell Grant, such as is outlined in the bicameral Pell Grant Preservation and Expansion Act of 2021 – which would achieve this goal, over a five-year timeframe.

To reach this goal, NCAN requests the requisite funding in FY22 so that the maximum individual Pell Grant award can be increased to \$12,990, double the current maximum award.

FAFSA Simplification

In President Biden's budget for FY22, the administration requests a \$200 million increase in administrative funding for federal student aid management. These funds are necessary to help with the implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act and FUTURE Act – two laws that will achieve the goal of simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, a top priority for NCAN. With the Office of Federal Student Aid announcing a phased implementation plan for FAFSA simplification, to take full effect one year later than originally anticipated, NCAN supports this funding request to ensure that the timeline is not further delayed. The urgency for students to access need-based aid has only grown since passage of the legislation.

Campus-Based Aid

As low-income students piece together resources from a variety of sources to support their postsecondary education pursuits, every dollar and type of aid is significant. For most low-income students, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study help to fill unmet need in their financial aid packages.

The SEOG program should be increased for FY22 so that institutions of higher education to support a greater percentage of the country's lowest-income students. For FY22, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress fund the SEOG program at a total of \$1.061 billion.

Sixty-four percent of today's students work while enrolled in school. The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program allows students to work in a flexible environment, learn important skills, and minimize the amount of time they spend commuting between work and campus. For FY22, NCAN respectfully requests that Congress increase the FWS program budget for a total of \$1.48 billion.

Federally Funded College Access Programs –TRIO and GEAR UP

Annually, approximately 1.8 million high school seniors are defined as students from low-income backgrounds. A variety of programs are needed to meet all their needs as they pursue their options for education beyond high school. The NCAN community serves approximately 2 million students annually from middle school through college graduation. To reach all the students needing services nationwide, our members build important partnerships both with TRIO and GEAR UP programs. NCAN respectfully requests that Congress continue its investment in federally funded college access programs at the amounts requested by their communities: \$1.316 billion for TRIO and \$435 million for GEAR UP.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

For every dollar spent on national service, the country sees a return on investment that is almost fourfold. Service also plays an important role in the college access movement. Many of NCAN's largest members can maximize their impact on underrepresented students by participating in the AmeriCorps public-private partnership. Continuing support for CNCS, and specifically the AmeriCorps program, will enable additional volunteers to work with low-income students, students of color, and students who are first in their family to attend college.

NCAN respectfully requests of that the Corporation for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps program receive \$1.21 billion and \$501 million, respectively, for FY22.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our funding priorities for the fiscal year 2022. Through continued supports – both financial and programmatic – our country can work together to close gaps in attainment, where a low-income student is about half as likely to complete a postsecondary degree or credential as a high-income student. Thank you for your support of this important goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Cook".

Kim Cook
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