

FORMERLY INCARCERATED STUDENTS AT CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

California community colleges have been serving formerly incarcerated students (FIS) for decades, but recently efforts to ensure their targeted success have emerged on many campuses. To better understand the needs and interest among community colleges in serving this population of students, we recently conducted a statewide survey. The response rate was robust; 73 colleges completed the survey. Most respondents (60%) were Presidents or Vice Presidents. The results are summarized below.

A large majority (78%) of the colleges that responded already have a formal or informal program for FIS, or are seeking to build a program.¹ This represents half of the colleges in your system, and we can assume that some number of the colleges that did not take the survey are similarly supporting these students. Eleven colleges do not have a program for FIS and do not plan to create one.

Estimates varied for the number of FIS on campus each semester: 26% estimated between 1 and 20, 30% between 21 and 50, 22% between 51 and 100, and 22% estimated having more than 100 FIS each semester. 30 colleges estimate having 51 or more FIS each semester. Ninety percent of the colleges estimating FIS enrollment at 51 or higher, have total enrollment of 10,000 or more. Sixty percent of the colleges estimating FIS enrollment at 51 or higher have a formal or informal program for FIS, 27% do not have a program but would like to create one, and 7% do not have a program and do not plan to create one (6% answered “other”).

By a wide majority, **the top three overall challenges for all survey respondents were “lack of financial resources to compensate dedicated program staff,” “knowing who is formerly incarcerated,” and “meeting students’ non-academic needs.”** Notably, the challenge of knowing who is formerly incarcerated was identified by a larger percentage of colleges that do not yet have a program, and by a smaller percentage of colleges with an existing formal program. It can be inferred that knowing who is formerly incarcerated becomes easier as a program develops and becomes more formalized. This is consistent with the fact that the most common means by which colleges identify FIS is through informal referrals from staff and fellow students.

The **top financial need was “paying college personnel to staff the program”** (77% of colleges with existing or intended programs chose this as a top need). The top non-financial need was “securing employment opportunities for the students” (62% of colleges with existing or intended programs chose this as a top need).

The most common on-campus service for FIS is “networking and peer support from other formerly incarcerated students” (38% offer this), along with “a designated faculty or staff contact” (35%) and “partnerships with community organizations to address non-academic needs” (33%). EOPS and targeted educational advising were also common. The least common

¹ A formal program is one with a dedicated staff person or faculty member who is compensated for his or her work with formerly incarcerated students and is officially assigned to work with these students. An informal program is one that exists through a student group and/or has a staff or faculty leader who does the work but is not officially recognized as being dedicated to these students.

services were priority course admission (5%) and targeted career counseling or job placement (9%). Only 11% offer a dedicated space and only 11% offer financial support for non-academic needs.

The top three services and supports colleges do not offer but would like to are: “targeted career counseling and/or job placement,” “partnerships with community organizations to address non-academic needs,” and “direct financial support for non-academic needs.”

Half (51%) of respondents do not believe they will face resistance to a program for FIS from their college, community, or Board of Trustees. A small percent (14%) have faced or believe they will face resistance, and 21% do not know.

For colleges with a formal FIS program and dedicated staff:

- 80% have not faced resistance from their college or community.
- Even though the staff is paid, 67% identify “paying college personnel to staff the program” as a top financial need.
- 73% use a partnership with probation and/or parole to identify and recruit FIS.
- The top two biggest challenges are a “lack of financial resources to compensate dedicated program staff” and “meeting students’ non-academic needs.”

For colleges with informal programs or student groups, but no dedicated staff:

- 81% identify “lack of financial resources to compensate dedicated program staff” and “meeting students’ non-academic needs” as biggest challenges.
- 45% partner with community organizations to address students’ non-academic needs.
- 90% identify “paying college personnel to staff the program” as their biggest financial need.

For colleges that do not have a program but intend to create one:

- 87% identify “knowing who is formerly incarcerated” as their biggest challenge.
- 75% identify “paying college personnel to staff the program” and “covering students’ non-academic needs” as their biggest financial needs.
- 88% identify “professional development on serving FIS for program staff” as their biggest non-financial need.

For colleges that do not have a program and do not intend to create one:

- 67% believe there are between 1-20 FIS on their campus.
- The most-selected biggest challenge to starting a program was “knowing who is formerly incarcerated” (43%).
- 50% identified “paying college personnel to staff the program” as the biggest financial need.
- 38% have faced or believe they will face resistance from their college or community and 38% do not know if they will face resistance.

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