



Investigating **Non-Tuition Needs** among community college **STEM** students

How to Form a Campus Basic Needs Task Force

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Introduction

According to The Hope Center's Student Basic Needs Survey, [about three in five college students experience basic needs insecurity](#). Despite the significant need for support, [over half \(52%\) of students did not apply for help, because they didn't know how](#). Furthermore, faculty, staff, and others often want to assist students but don't know where to refer them. Even though many colleges and universities have established basic needs supports, there is still a massive gap between [the number of students with basic needs insecurity and those who utilize support services](#).

One person or office can't address the utilization gap alone. Often there are many different efforts to meet students' needs happening in different units on campus or organized by student or community groups. Campus communities can come together as a task force to create a coordinated ecosystem to spread information and support students. A good ecosystem can facilitate collaboration and positive outcomes such as:

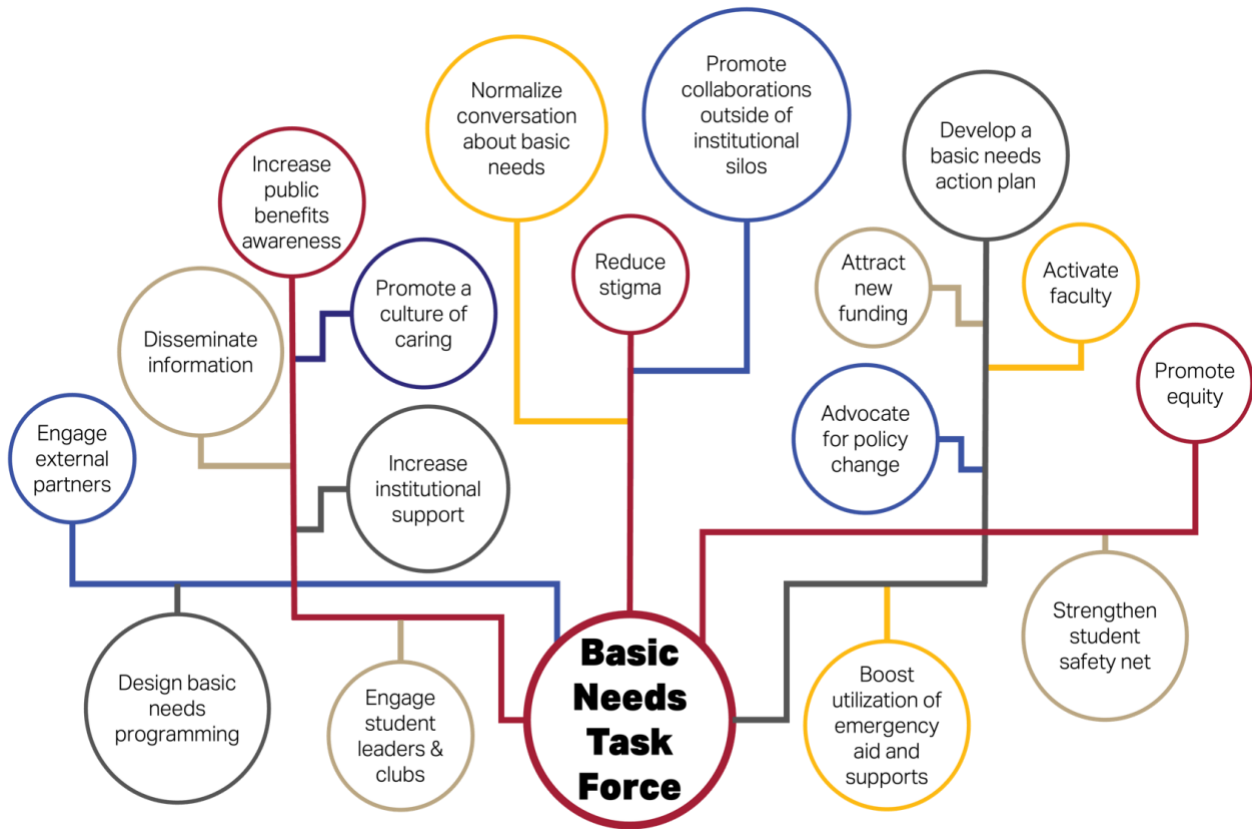
- Key players have a voice in designing strategies that support students.
- Organized, collective advocacy can influence the implementation of institutional policies and practices to meet students' basic needs.
- Sharing of information, cross-referrals, and coordinated efforts can make supports more efficient and cost-effective.

Ultimately, a coordinated ecosystem of support communicates an ethic of care on campus, helps students thrive, and cultivates a higher sense of belonging among students, faculty, and staff.

This guide provides insights and recommendations for practitioners on how to build and engage a basic needs task force that strengthens their institution's ecosystem of supports and advances systemic change.



A High-Functioning Campus Basic Needs Task Force Supports a Strong Ecosystem of Supports



How to Get Started

Identify Task Force Members

To maximize impact, a task force needs perspectives from both direct services and the administrative side at the college. Appointing a task force member from each department to co-lead the group can create strong group dynamics and make these efforts sustainable. For example, a basic needs coordinator could work with an administrator or faculty member to share responsibility for cultivating and maintaining the working group, identifying and recruiting additional members, and presenting a united front in support of basic needs initiatives. Bringing in individuals from different units and with varied individual strengths will increase the effectiveness of efforts to educate, activate, delegate, and coordinate.

In addition, having one or two upper-level administrators as advisors to the group will bring key perspectives around building buy-in, aligning basic needs goals with the school’s



strategic plan, and guiding the group around institutional “sand traps” when needed.

In terms of recruitment, consider representation of all institutional levels:

- Students (undergraduate and graduate, when applicable)
- Faculty (tenure-track, non-tenure track, and adjunct, when applicable)
- Staff
- Leadership

And key divisions and programs:

- Academic affairs
- Advising
- Basic needs staff
- Counseling and wellness
- Enrollment management
- Financial aid
- Institutional research
- Marketing and communications
- Student services
- Dining services
- Equity and diversity
- Housing services
- Institutional advancement/foundation
- Libraries
- Related academic programs (e.g., allied health, nursing, counseling, social work, culinary arts, hospitality)

Consider having multiple models of involvement so that a smaller, core group can meet more often for efficient, task-focused meetings, and a larger group can meet less often to discuss strategic goals and coordination.

Lay the Foundation

Members of the task force should all be familiar with the basic needs landscape—nationally and on their campus. Solidify the group and create buy-in by reviewing existing [evidence](#), learning about [best practices](#), and establishing a common understanding of the [resources](#) available to students on- and off-campus. That information equips the task force to disseminate information, elevate the issue, and empower others to promote a [culture of caring](#) that lifts basic needs as an academic need and human right.

Develop a Vision

Once the task force is working together from a shared understanding of the basic needs landscape, they must establish a joint vision for their work together. There are various types of basic needs task forces already present in higher education. Some task forces are staff-led and some are student-led. Task forces vary in function from outreach and advocacy to direct administration of services. For example, the University of California, Santa Barbara’s [Food Security & Basic Needs Task Force](#) has both advisory and oversight



functions related to the state basic needs and rapid rehousing funds allocated to their campus. In contrast, at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, the Minnesota Student Association's Basic Needs Task Force focuses on advocacy with university administration, collaboration with community organizations, and student-participatory events.

The task force vision should be shaped and co-created in light of additional guiding parameters like:

- Strategies to accomplish the work
- Roles and responsibilities for task force members
- How you hope to collaborate with campus and community partners
- Developing a [theory of change/theory of action](#)

A task force's vision helps members understand the value they bring to the task force and the goals they help accomplish. From creating a basic needs master plan to advocating for the implementation of policies, the group plays a fundamental role in promoting equity and dignifying students. Their role in informing the direction of basic needs efforts blended with their area of expertise ensures that these efforts are reflected in the institution's broader strategic plans, goals, and assessment.

Create a Strategic Plan

The best way to activate and deploy task force members is by setting a strategic plan. Consider the following items as foundational to your plan:

- Collect [survey](#) and focus group data to understand needs and barriers among diverse student groups.
- Conduct an inventory of basic needs programs and services or asset map to identify existing resources and gaps experienced by students.
- Develop short- and long-term strategic priorities, timelines, metrics of success, and assessment plans for continuous improvement.
- Welcome input and implement feedback from multiple constituencies (students, faculty, staff, administrators, community partners) to promote creativity and remain responsive to current needs.
- Provide guidance and tools for task force members to be ambassadors of the work.
- Share successes with students, leaders, funders, and the campus community.

The task force's strategic plan should align with the institution's strategic plan and respond to specific goals (e.g., promote student outcomes, increase retention, impact graduation rates). Systemic integration of the group's vision anticipates rather than reacts to emergent situations and should be supported by studies showing [increased persistence](#).



Conclusion

Basic needs work requires a collective effort—a group of people who can inspire and motivate others, who can develop strategies that reach students at multiple levels in ways that honor and respect their intersectional identities, who can normalize the conversation about basic needs, who can dismantle systemic barriers to access, and who can collaborate to leverage the existing assets and establish partnerships to ultimately improve the ecosystem of support and campus culture of caring.

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