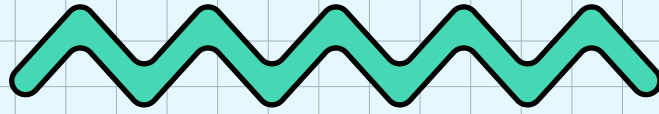


Student Success

Toolkit:

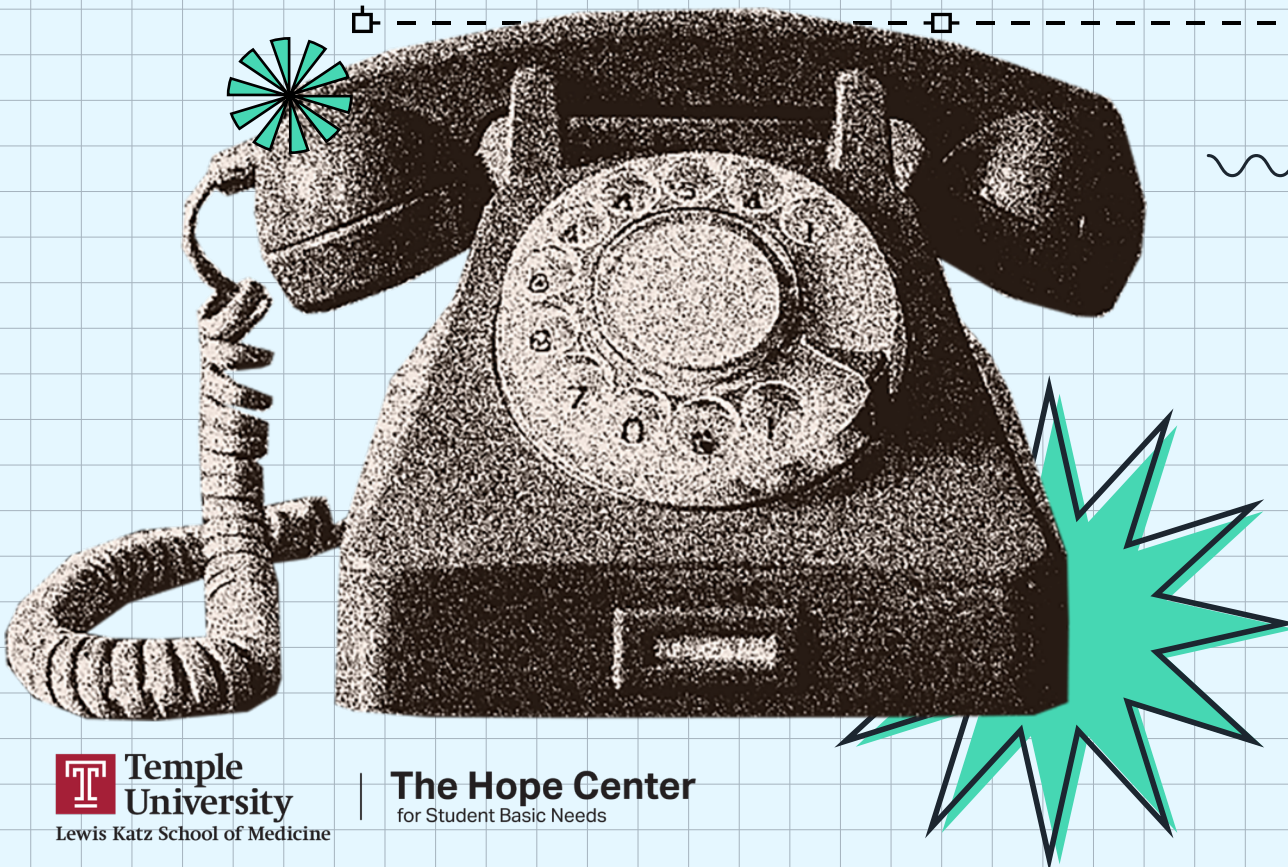


Communications Guide



Advancing Student Basic Needs Security through Narrative, Access, and Action

September 2026 | Rjaa Ahmed



About the Communications Toolkit

As part of our collaboration with the [Kentucky Student Success Collaboration](#) and the [Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education](#), The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs is supporting institutions across Kentucky to launch stigma-reducing communications and structured media campaigns to promote student resources and normalize seeking help.

We have compiled a suite of media assets for colleges and institutions to embed within your existing marketing strategies and to iterate based on emerging needs. Whether you have a dedicated communications team or not, these resources are designed to meet you where you are—they include both publication-ready assets and editable templates for your convenience:



Student Quotes:

Videos & Image Files



Assets for Informational Outreach:

Resource Slide Deck & Flyers



Basic Needs Webpage:

Wireframes and Text Blocks



Canva Templates of Editable Assets:

Different Sizes for Each Use Case



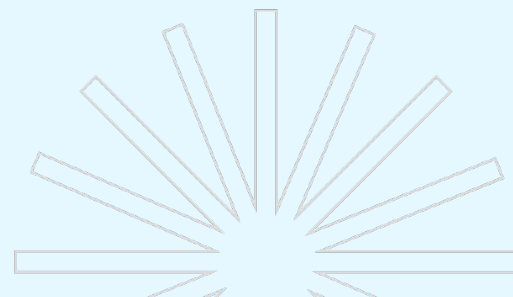
Trusted Sources Training:

Recorded Training, Slide Deck & Voiceover



Examples of Effective Outreach:

A Pinterest Board with Content & Design Ideas



About The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs

We are researchers, scholars, advocates, conveners, and storytellers who envision a world where basic needs insecurity is no longer a barrier to pursuing and completing college. To learn more about our work, visit our website at hope.temple.edu.

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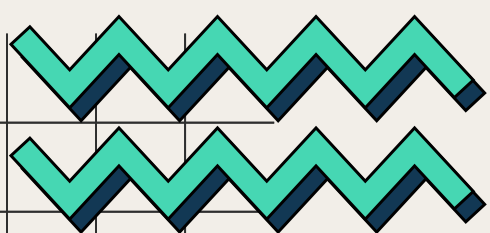
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01

Welcome & How
to Use This Guide



Across Kentucky, institutions are deeply committed to supporting students—not just academically, but as whole individuals who are navigating complex, often unseen challenges.

This Student Success Toolkit is designed to support and strengthen that work.

Inside, you'll find a set of practical communications tools that you can adapt to fit your needs—student stories, templates & resources, and design guidance—intended to help you more effectively connect students to the basic needs supports that already exist on your campus.

Taken together, these materials are designed to help you:

- * **Increase** awareness of basic needs resources across your campus ecosystem
- * **Normalize** help-seeking behavior and reduce stigma
- * **Embed** information seamlessly throughout the student experience
- * **Strengthen** trust between students and institutions
- * **Support** student retention and completion by improving access to critical resources

These are not one-off materials or a single campaign. They are designed to support a sustained, ecosystem-wide approach—one that reaches students across multiple touchpoints and moments of need.

This guide is here to help you navigate the toolkit with clarity and ease. But this guide and its accompanying toolkit are designed to do something more, too. **They are meant to help equip, empower, and energize a broader**

ecosystem of support across your campus.

We know that students don't just turn to one office when they need help. They turn to the people they trust: a professor, an advisor, a staff member, a peer.

This work is about making sure those trusted individuals feel prepared not just to care, but to connect students to the right resources with clarity and confidence.

Through these communication tools, we aim to help you:



Strengthen your role as a trusted source of support.

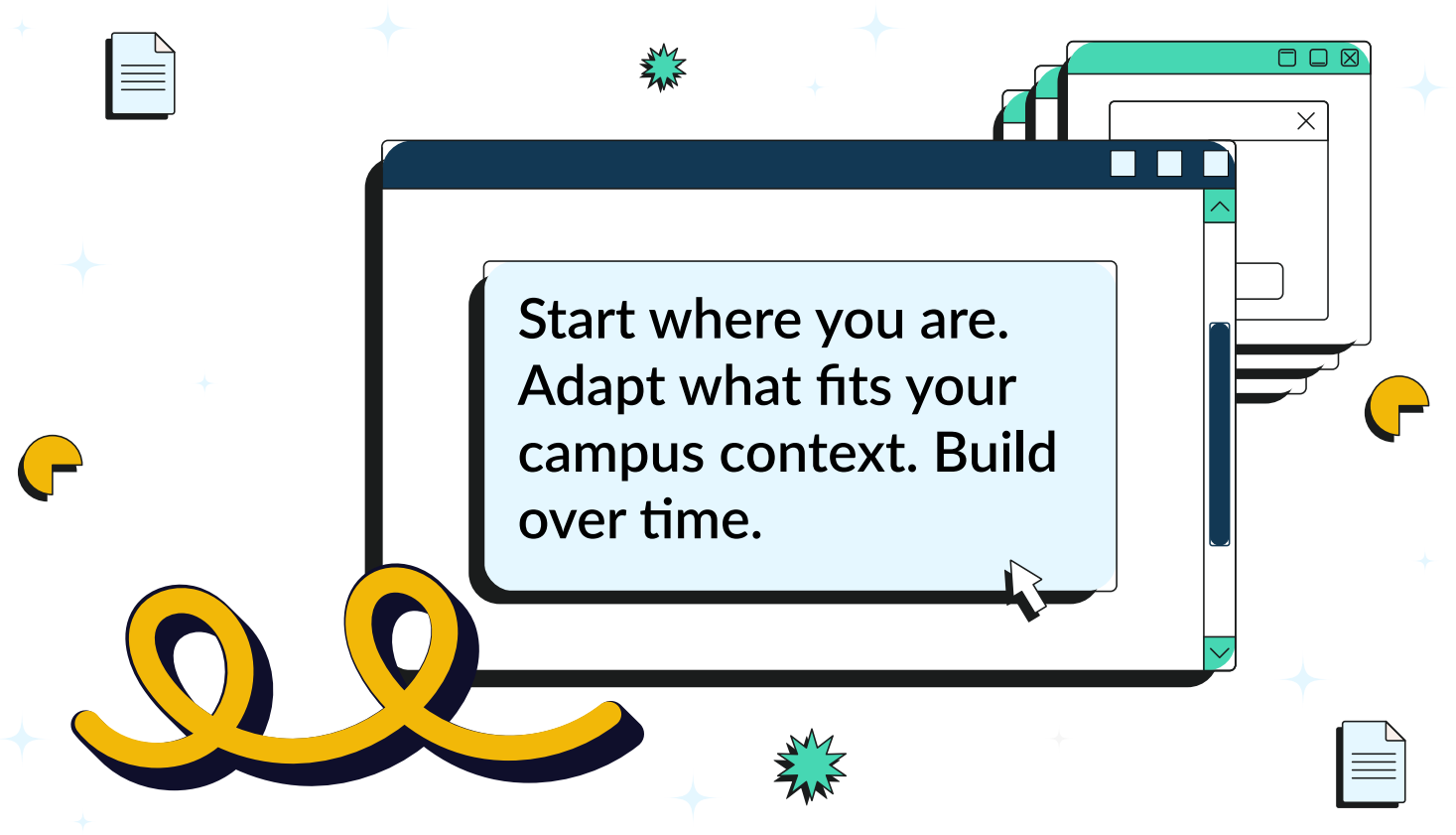


Help others across your campus do the same.



Share information in ways that are clear, accessible, and stigma-reducing.

You do not need to use everything at once. There is no single “right” way to implement these tools.

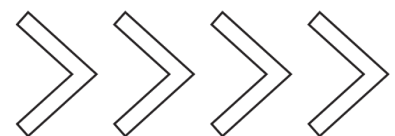


Even small shifts like using clearer language, increasing the visibility of existing resources and spotlighting student stories can meaningfully increase awareness, trust, and access.

At The Hope Center, **we don't see communications as an add-on but as essential infrastructure.** It is care in practice: **how support becomes visible, how trust takes root, and how students find their way to what they need.**

And when that care is shared across classrooms, offices, and everyday interactions, it becomes something larger: **a network of people equipped to show up for students in real and tangible ways.**

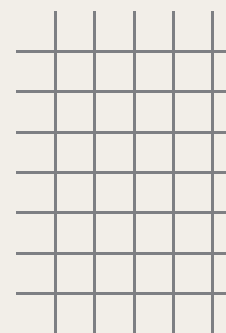
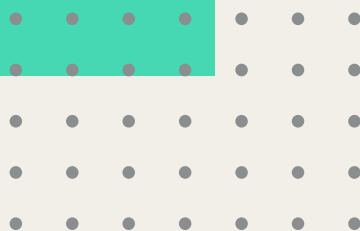
We're grateful to be in this work alongside you.





02

The Case for Effective Communications



Across the country and in Kentucky, research consistently shows that students are navigating significant basic needs insecurity. Food, housing, transportation, childcare, and mental health challenges are not peripheral to student success; they shape whether students can persist, learn, and graduate.

And yet, even where supports exist, too many students:

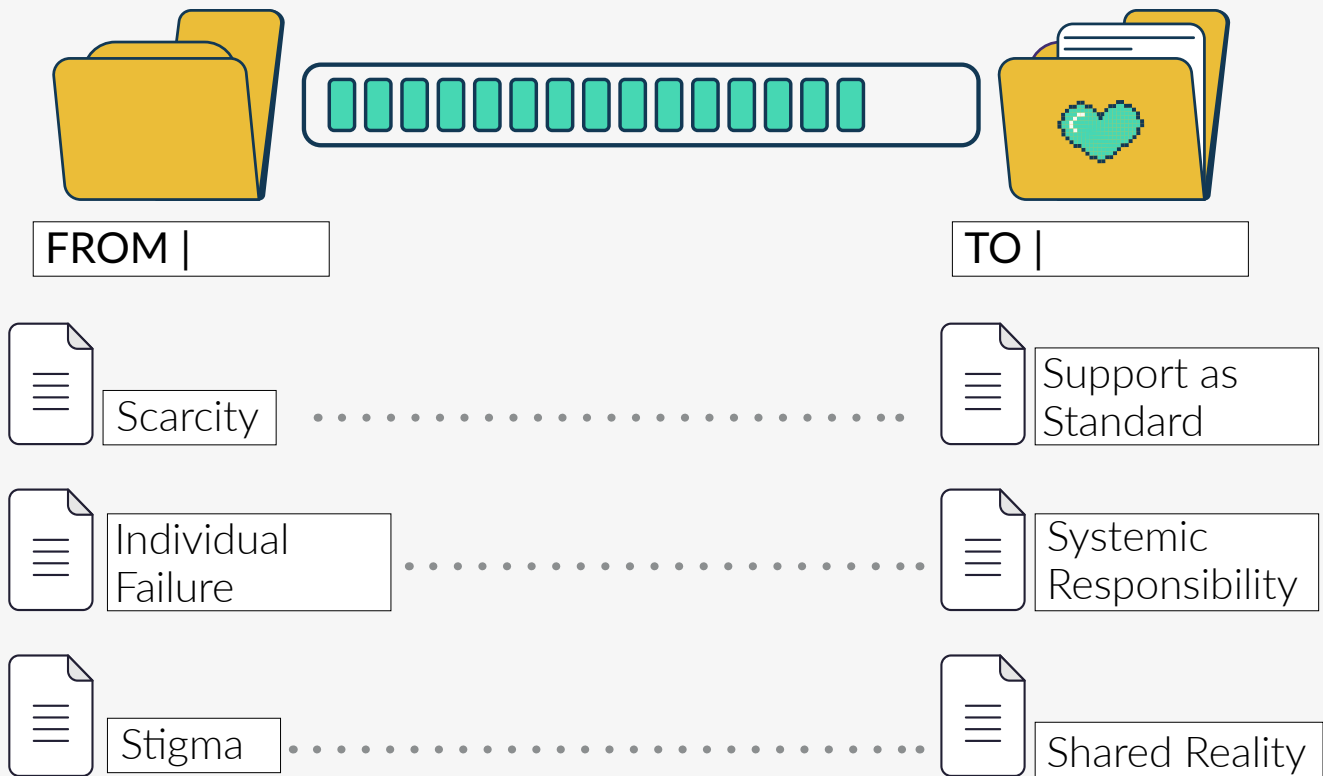
- * Don't know what's available (according to the Hope Center survey, 68% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity report that not knowing about resources is the biggest barrier to accessing the support they need).
- * Don't know if they qualify
- * Don't know how to apply or whom to reach out to
- * Don't see themselves reflected in who services are "for"
- * Feel stigma that prevents them from reaching out

This is not simply a service delivery gap. It is a **breakdown in how support is communicated, understood, and experienced by students**. When information is unclear, inaccessible, or inconsistently shared, even well-designed systems remain out of reach.

At its core, this work is about **connection**—ensuring that students can find, recognize, and trust the support designed for them. Too often, dominant narratives frame students in crises as exceptions, or position support as charity rather than normalizing it as a standard part of student success.

This is where communications moves beyond just information-sharing and becomes a tool for **narrative change**.

 This toolkit invites a narrative shift:





Language Matters: A Note on How we Talk About Students

Our belief in the power of language is central to our narrative change efforts.

The words we use—and don't use—shape how students understand themselves, how institutions understand their responsibility, and how support systems are perceived and accessed. Language creates shared meaning. It influences attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

It also reflects systems of power. The ways we talk about students and their experiences can reinforce dominant narratives that uphold the status quo—or help shift them.

In the context of basic needs, language can either:

- * Signal that **support is normal, accessible, and meant for you**;
- * Or reinforce stigma, distance, and uncertainty.

We are intentional about the language used throughout this toolkit so that it affirms students' lived experiences instead of reinforcing deficit-based frameworks and stereotypes.

We make every effort to use language that is:

- * Inclusive and asset-framed
- * Clear and accessible
- * Rooted in care
- * Grounded in respect for students as whole people

We aim to move towards a framing that:

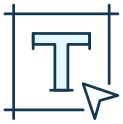
- * Recognizes basic needs challenges as widespread and systemic
- * Positions support as a standard part of student success
- * Invites students in, rather than singling them out





Language Matters: Guiding Principles for Language Use

As you adapt and apply these materials, we encourage you to approach language with care, curiosity, and intention:



Center people's humanity first.

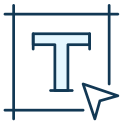
In many cases, this means using person-first language (e.g., **students from low-income backgrounds**, **students navigating basic needs challenges**), rather than defining students solely by a single characteristic (e.g. **low-income students**).

**Hungry Students**

Identity-first language that defines students' entire personhood through the lens of the characteristic(s) they lack.

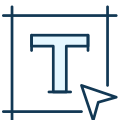
**Students Experiencing Food Insecurity**

Person-first language that honors students as whole individuals before mentioning what they "lack," making it easier to identify systemic obstacles.



Honor how individuals self-identify.

When speaking about individuals' identities, ask how they prefer to be identified and defer to their preferences whenever possible.



Be specific—and cautious—when referring to groups.

Collectivizing language can be useful shorthand, but it can also flatten important differences and obscure intersectionality. Use it thoughtfully, and avoid overgeneralizing student experiences.



Low-Income Students

While this phrase is commonly used to describe a group of students facing chronic or acute financial hardship, it flattens key nuances in students' experiences.



Students Experiencing Economic Hardship

Students from Low-Income Backgrounds

If you have a specific definition of “low-income” (e.g., households earning less than 150% of the federal poverty line), be sure to state that explicitly. Note that “low-income” should only be used if income is the relevant characteristic (as opposed to wealth, general economic challenges, etc.). Furthermore, “low-income backgrounds” should only be used if parental/guardian income is the salient characteristic. If income is not the most relevant characteristic, “students facing economic challenges” might be appropriate if general economic situation is most relevant/salient, and “students facing acute/chronic economic challenges” might be appropriate if the students' current financial situation (e.g., low account balance, an unexpected bill) is the most relevant/salient topic.



Recognize important nuances in identity-first language.

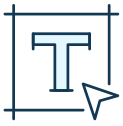
In some communities—particularly among disability rights activists—identity-first language (e.g., disabled students, blind students) is preferred as a way of affirming identity and community. When possible, follow the lead of the communities you are speaking about.



Avoid making assumptions about how students' choose to self-identify.



Seek input from specific communities about their preferences.



Use asset-framing and avoid deficit-based or victimizing language.

Asset-framing focuses on students' strengths, resilience, and full humanity—rather than defining them by challenges alone.

Language that positions students as “struggling,” “suffering,” or “afflicted” can reinforce stigma and distance. Instead, describe students as experiencing or navigating basic needs challenges, while also recognizing their agency and aspirations.

 **Suffering** **Struggling** **Afflicted**

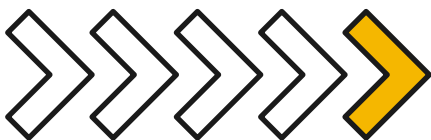
Deficit-framed language that positions students as victims.

 **Experiencing [name type(s) of insecurity]**

Use neutral verbs to describe students' experiences with basic needs insecurity without sensationalizing or evoking negative connotations.

Here is an example where we apply asset-based framing to a phrase commonly used in the basic needs space.

Small shifts in language can have a meaningful impact.



Instead of: “students who are struggling with basic needs insecurity”

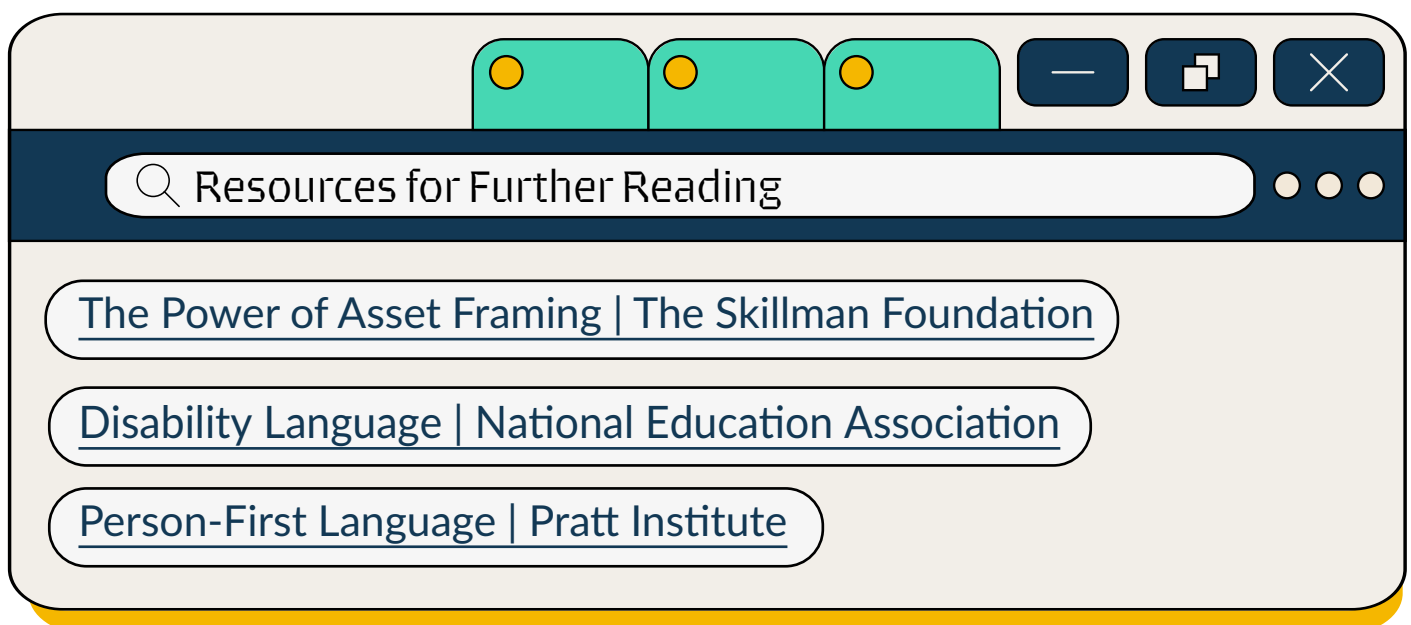
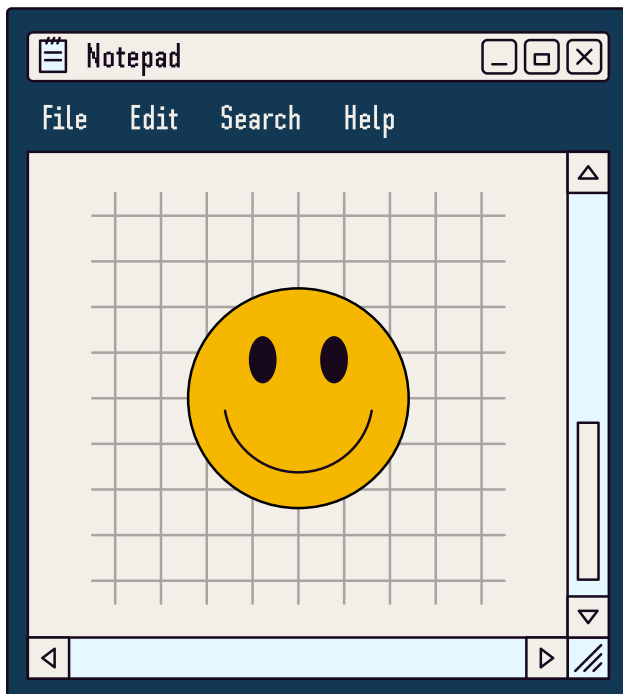
Try: “students navigating basic needs challenges”

At the same time, we recognize that language—like culture—is evolving. There is no single set of “perfect” terms.

We are committed to ongoing learning and reflection, and we invite you to do the same.

As you use this toolkit, consider what will resonate most with your students and community—and choose language that is welcoming, affirming, and contextually appropriate.

Again, language is not just descriptive—it is **a tool for connection, trust, and access.**



Visual Design Basics

Just like the words we use, the visuals, images, and colors we choose to get our point across carry immense weight. These design choices have the power to either elevate the text they accompany or undermine it. Inclusive and accessible design considers the characteristics and demographics of the audience through visual elements that evoke empathy, care, and connection. By being intentional about our design choices, we can ensure that every person across different backgrounds can enjoy and use the content we share and meaningfully engage with it.

Inclusive design aims to create experiences that extend beyond assumptions about certain

demographics, challenging both conscious and unconscious forms of bias. Each decision requires care and intention. For example, what may seem like an innocuous stock image of a graduation ceremony that you choose to use for a flyer may unintentionally marginalize parts of your audience by only portraying one particular population instead of a range of students.

Intentional design is a powerful tool for meaningful storytelling. It can solve problems, shape perceptions, facilitate communication, and foster emotional connection. Even small shifts in the way we format text and use stock images can influence how students interact with resources and supports.

Through templates and ready-to-publish digital assets included in this toolkit, we want to ensure you have several tools at your disposal to both normalize basic needs insecurity as an unacceptable but common occurrence on college campuses, and also raise awareness about local, federal and campus supports. As you adapt these materials to fit your institutional needs and branding guidelines, we invite you to consider accessibility, inclusivity, and legibility in your design choices.



At the same time, we encourage you to create your own materials and utilize visual storytelling meaningfully and intentionally to elevate student narratives. We understand that this can be daunting—we want to clarify that we don't expect you to be designers and artists. Start slow with what feels doable and keep it simple. Keep reading for some rules and best practices to help you on this journey.



HELPFUL TIP

Refer to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) to ensure that your website(s) and digital materials meet technical standards of accessibility for people with visual, auditory, speech, physical, cognitive, and other disabilities.

Public institutions have **until April 2027 to ensure their web pages and mobile apps are accessible to people with disabilities** in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.





Visual Design Basics: Accessibility

Here are some helpful tips to ensure that your design is accessible for a wide variety of audiences, including but not limited to individuals who are experiencing:

- * age-related conditions
- * visual impairment
- * health issues
- * cognitive, neurological, and learning disabilities



Use color intentionally.

Not everyone experiences color the same way. For example, users with low vision may struggle to discern differences between similar colors. Similarly, users who rely on screen readers do not receive visual-only cues like borders, background colors, and relative position. When using colors:

Avoid using color as the only means of conveying vital information.

Field Label:

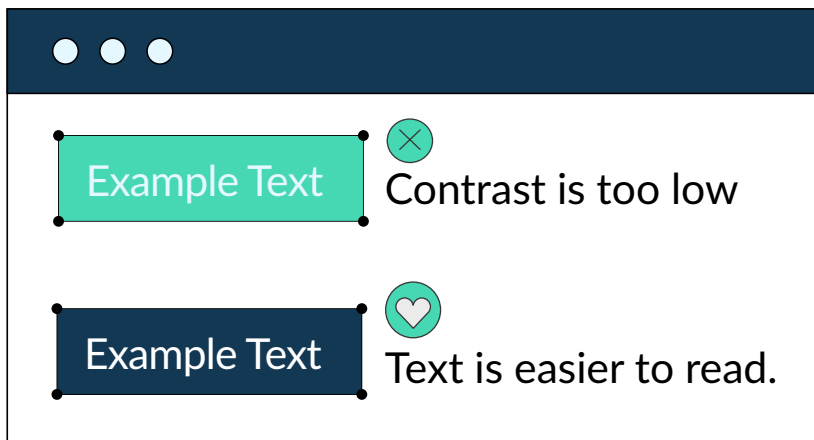
The error is only indicated by the color of the bounding box.

Field Label:

Incorrect input.

The error is indicated by the icon and the text under the field, in addition to the color of the bounding box.

Ensure sufficient color contrast.



Visual elements that need to be identified by the user must have **a contrast ratio of at least 3:1 with adjacent colors.**

Contrast **should be 4.5:1 between text and background** for text smaller than 18 pt or **14 pt bold.**

Contrast **should be 3:1 between text and background** for text larger than or equal to 18 pt or **19 pt bold.**

Tools like [Toptal](#), [Accessible-colors.com](#), and [Contrast Report](#) can help you analyze color values included in your institutions' branding guidelines to ensure that your usage of them meets content accessibility guidelines.



Use typography to enhance accessibility and visual interest.

Ensuring that the font you are using is easy to understand and its size is big enough for most users to view comfortably is a foundational aspect of effective typography. The standard font size is at least 12 points for most use cases, though you may need to make it larger depending on your audience. Below are some additional standard practices when working with text in your designs and digital assets:



Use sans serif fonts like Helvetica, Verdana, and Futura.



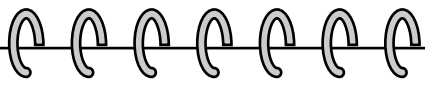
Use left aligned text with a font size of at least 12 points.



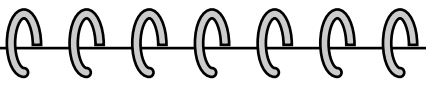
Provide clear and descriptive link text for hyperlinks.

That's not all. While using a consistent font throughout your document enhances readability and establishes visual harmony, you can guide the audience to important bits of information through intentional variations in text size and format. This is particularly useful for neurodiverse individuals—organizing text using different sizes and weights of the same font and using bolded, italicized and highlighted text strategically can significantly reduce cognitive overload by making information easier to parse through.

Which of the following text blocks do you find easier to read?



The course offered flexible learning pathways. Students completed formative assessments regularly. The faculty promoted intellectual rigor. The lesson plan supported measurable progress. Students engaged in collaborative presentations.



The course offered **flexible learning pathways**. Students completed **formative assessments** regularly.

The faculty promoted **intellectual rigor**.

The lesson plan supported measurable progress. Students engaged in **collaborative presentations**.



Spacing, bolding, and font color make text more interesting.

Even in the absence of extravagant design, simply adjusting **font weights** and **text color** can add visual variety to your design. We understand that it can be daunting and time-consuming to add graphic elements to student-facing resources and digital assets. However, we encourage you to tweak large, information dense blocks of text to be much easier to understand for audiences who have short attention spans. You can also bold and use a different color to call attention to a specific piece of information or call to action.

Using bulleted lists, headings and sub-headings, spacing, and sizing is another way you can institute a strong logical flow in your materials by establishing a clear visual hierarchy that directs users to the primary message(s) first. Categorize “walls of text” as often as you can into sections and group headings, subheadings, and body text consistently to maintain structural clarity.

A key consideration when introducing textual variety in your design is to avoid the use of all uppercase letters to add emphasis. Screen-readers often interpret capitalized letters as acronyms and spell them letter-by-letter instead of as complete words, significantly reducing reading comprehension for individuals who rely on them.



Select stock images with care and include alternate text.

When you don't have the time or bandwidth to create your own graphics, stock images can often come in handy. Not only do they enhance user interest by breaking up large chunks of text, using them is also a great way of connecting with your audience. However, this can have an opposite, alienating effect. Many commonly used stock images portray a stereotypical image of college students as young adults who are either chatting away carefree in university hallways with their peers or beaming happily with their families at graduation ceremonies.



photo.jpeg

Free Stock Image Libraries:

Unsplash

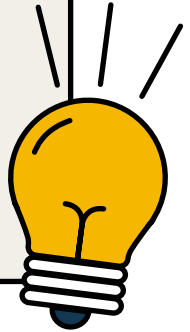
Freelimages

Complete College Library

Canva

Wikimedia Commons

Tip: When using stock libraries, use filters to exclude generative AI from your search results to access photos of real students.



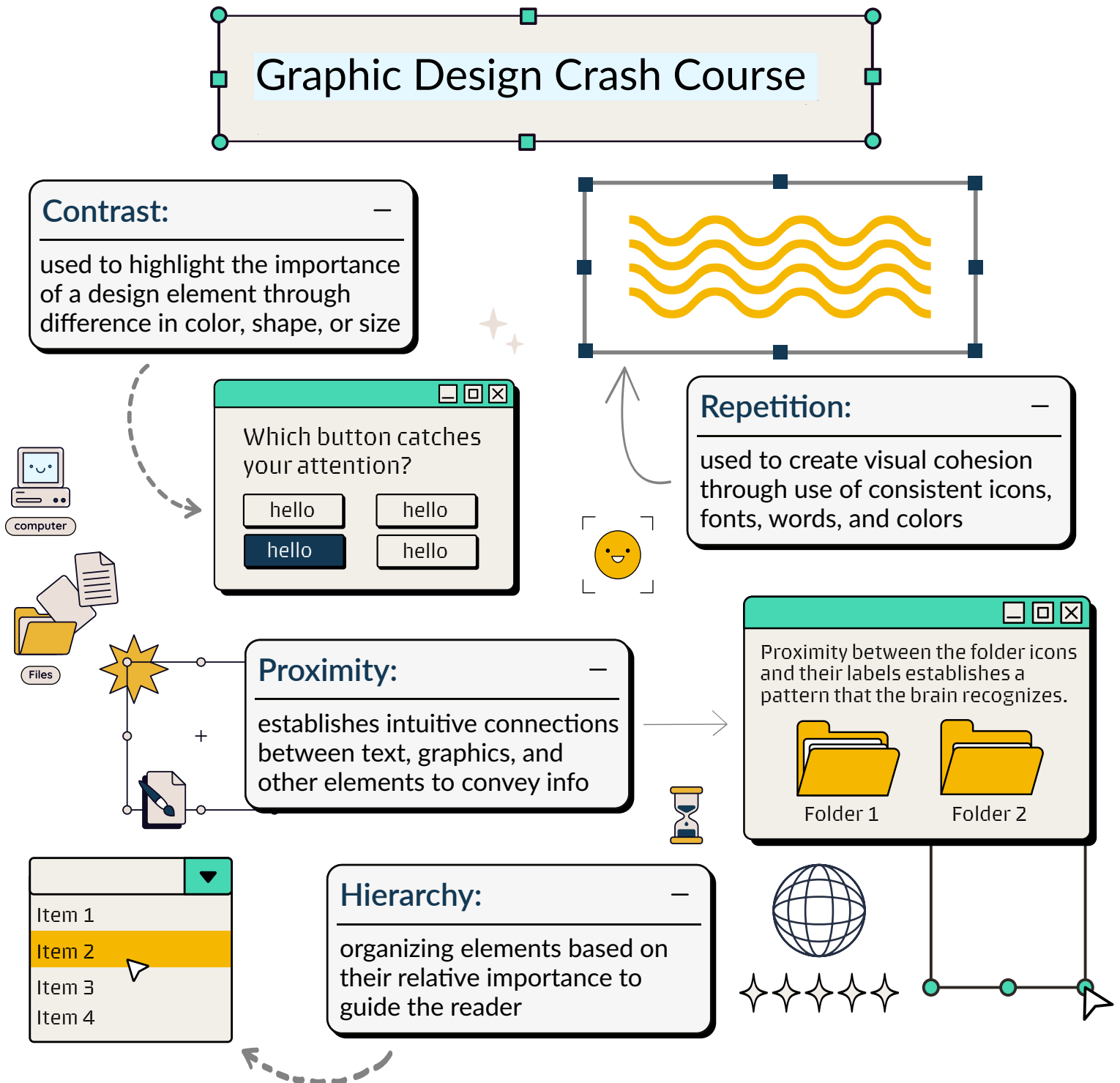
A stock depicting only one group of college-goers.



A stock photo depicting different types of students.

If not selected carefully, images can reproduce the exact outdated narratives about today's college students that we are trying to challenge through publicizing and normalizing basic needs support. They can also inadvertently promote feelings of exclusion and otherness in key student populations who don't see themselves represented in resource materials and promotional content. Thus, it is important to select images that portray a wide variety of student experiences without unconsciously stoking biases about the types of students who seek support.

Whenever you include graphics and images, please ensure that they are accompanied by alternative text with a succinct description of their contents for individuals who rely on screen readers. The [American Foundation for the Blind provides a brief set of helpful guidelines to help you compose image descriptions](#) that meet accessibility standards.





Effective Communication: Real-World Examples to Inspire You

Don't know where to start? The good news is that there is already a growing constellation of colleges and universities nationwide that are weaving student narratives into their communication strategies and finding new ways to disseminate information about available supports. We have compiled a few examples:

🔍 Communicating with Students:

Resource Fair Flyers

MONDAY SEPT 22 2025 **LUZERNE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE** **COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR**

MEET (YOUR) COMMUNITY AGENCIES READY TO SUPPORT AND HELP MAKE (YOUR) CAMPUS LIFE A BIT EASIER.

You bring the effort, we bring the support!

JAMES T. ATHERTON GYMNASIUM BUILDING 8
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

HOSTED BY THE CENTER FOR STUDENT SUPPORT & INTERVENTION

LUZERNE County Community College

Your Community. Your Campus.

Activities: POPCORN, ICE CREAM, FARMERS MARKET, COOKING DEMO, GIVEAWAYS

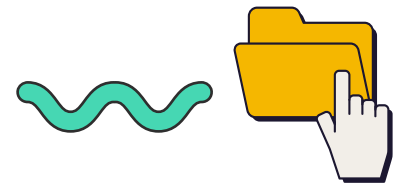
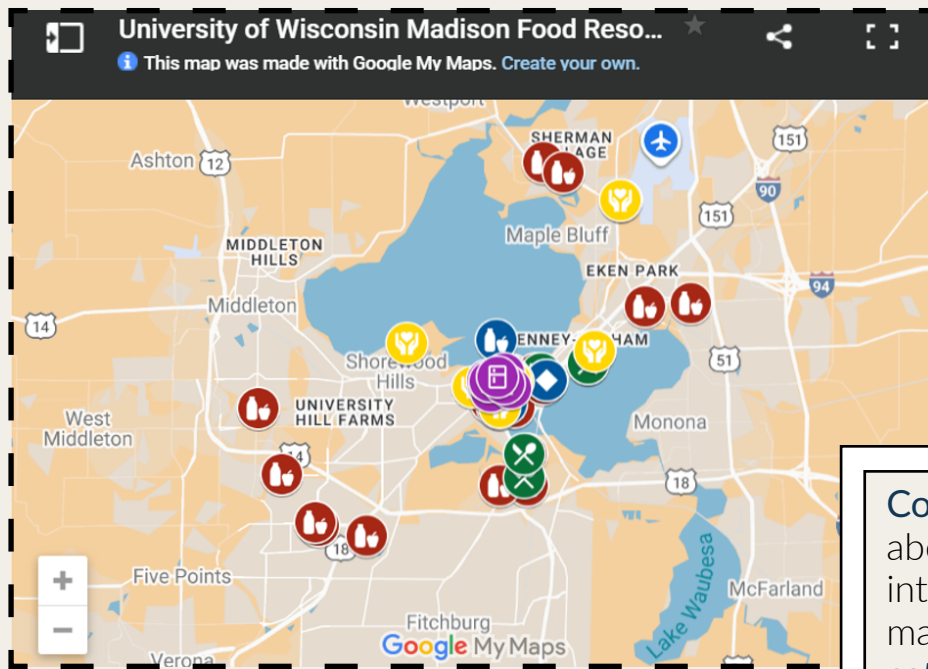
Resource fairs are a great way to **introduce students to community partners** and lay the groundwork for future warm handoffs.

Get creative: snacks or prizes for visiting all the tables make it fun!

This flyer clearly establishes an action step, along with information about location, timing, and what students can expect. Incentives for participation (popcorn, ice-cream, campus support, etc.) are highlighted via intentional design choices.

Repetition of the word “community” not only reinforces the goal of the fair, but also creates an inviting tone.

Maps & Resource Guides: Example #1



Icons depicting different types of basic needs make it easy for students to navigate this map.

Combine information about multiple resources into user-friendly guides, maps, and lists with **clear categorization** that allows students to filter services that address the need(s) they are experiencing.

Maps & Resource Guides: Example #2

Basic Needs at UCSB

#KnowYourResources

At UCSB, we want students to have the resources they need to be successful and healthy.

For more information, visit food.ucsb.edu where you can find more info and/or have a live chat with us :

basicneeds.ucsb.edu

Fill out our CalFresh Prescreen Form to see if you are eligible for CalFresh!



Food Security & Basic Needs Advising Center

The Food Security & Basic Needs Advising Center is a peer advising center where you can learn about food and housing security, technology access, as well as other basic needs resources located at the UCen. You can also reach our peer advisors at basicneeds.ucsb.edu in the chat box (lower right hand side of the screen).



A.S. Food Bank & Miramar Pantry

The A.S. Food Bank & Miramar Pantry provide registered undergraduate and graduate students with fresh food, produce, and toiletries. Both are welcome to all students; details can be found at <https://foodbank.as.ucsb.edu/>



Department of Health & Wellness

The Department of Health & Wellness promotes holistic student wellbeing through a comprehensive, preventative approach. H&W offers educational workshops, and essential resources such as mindfulness, cooking skills, sexual health, addictive behaviors/recovery, and violence prevention. Additionally, H&W provides health equity navigation to help students easily access care and hosts inclusive community spaces to foster connection across campus. <https://wellness.ucsb.edu/>



Financial Crisis Response Team (FCRT)

While many urgent financial situations can be resolved through regular Financial Aid processes, those that cannot are forwarded to FCRT for review. This advising team has access to limited emergency funds and rapid rehousing resources. Email financialcrisis@sa.ucsb.edu for more information.



CalFresh Program

CalFresh gives students more purchasing power through a federally funded nutrition assistance program. Qualify for monthly benefits up to \$298 per month. For more information, visit <https://basicneeds.ucsb.edu/resources/food/calfresh>

Website URL is clearly spelled out, and resource availability is reinforced with additional calls-to-action, including a QR code and specific links.

Strategic use of headings and icons divides resources into categories so students know what type of support is available.

Virtual Support

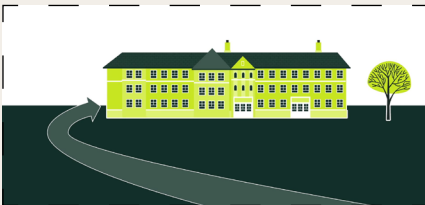
Click the link below to connect with a UH Basic Needs Café Assistant who can help UH students with locating and securing basic needs including food, housing and financial resources. Café hours are Sunday to Thursday from 8pm to midnight.

[NEW VIRTUAL BASIC NEEDS CAFE](#)

Students are also welcome to reach out via email uhsbn@hawaii.edu. Responses are provided promptly during café hours.

Virtual drop-in spaces and meetings are a great option for online students, students who visit campus infrequently, and students who are unable to attend in-person due to work or other obligations.

Campus Resource Tutorials



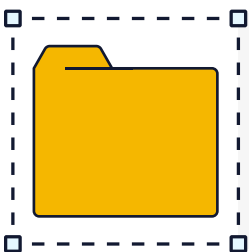
[Click Here:](#) Michigan State University Food Bank Video



Videos made by students, for students, can help introduce them to resources, so they know what to expect.

Communicating with Faculty and Staff:

As we know, students are most likely to seek help from people they already know and trust. Because of their frequent interactions, faculty and student-facing staff are also often the first to notice that a student may need support. Alongside our Trusted Sources Training, equip them with the knowledge and tools to identify signs of need and connect students with available resources.



Trusted Sources Training:

Head over to the [“Toolkit Assets and Usage Guidelines”](#) to learn more about the training and how you can implement it as part of your institution’s training resources for faculty, staff, and student workers.

Training & Professional Development Opportunities:

Dedicated training sessions are a great way to inform faculty and staff about available resources and provide tools to help them successfully connect students with support.

Examples:

[Kent State University](#)

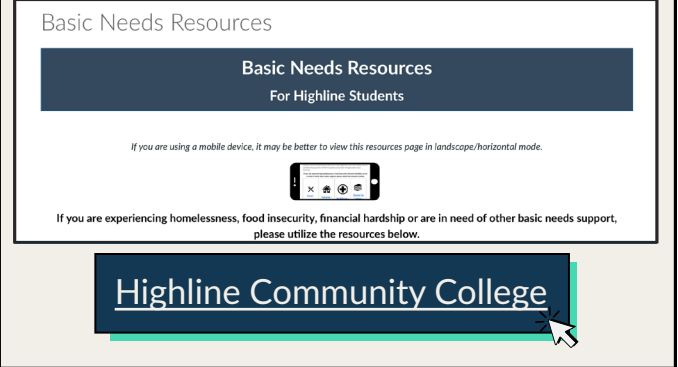
[Montana State University](#)

[California State University](#)

Learning Management System Module or Course Shell:

A basic needs course shell or learning management system page is a helpful tool that faculty can use to share resource information across all their classes. This will prevent faculty from having to memorize resource information or make updates each semester, and ensures that students are receiving consistent information.

LMS Page Example:



[Highline Community College's Canvas page](#) categorizes campus services by type of need and provides a robust list of institutional, federal, and local resources.

Resource Referral Cards & Reminder Bookmarks:

Faculty and staff can use resource referral cards to help guide their conversations with students. Reminder bookmarks are also helpful tools to refresh their memories about available resources. Both can also be handed out to students.

Examples:

[Badger Supports: UW Madison](#)

Run and led by students, Badger Supports offers referral cards highlighting specific supports.



[Milwaukee Area Technical College](#)

[University of South Florida St. Petersburg](#)

Syllabus Statements:

Faculty members have the opportunity to make a real difference for their students who may be experiencing basic needs insecurity by overtly acknowledging its existence, embedding links to resources, and encouraging students to reach out for help through their course materials, specifically syllabi. Several institutions like [Virginia Polytechnic and State University](#), [University of Colorado Boulder](#), and [California Polytechnic University](#) offer example statements for their faculty to use.

🔍 Communicating with the Community:

Outreach and consistent collaboration are the foundation of sustainable ecosystems of support. Build relationships and share resources with local businesses, agencies, and community members to build connection and create possibilities for future warm handoffs, partnerships, and donations.

Marketing Templates:

Share downloadable logos and flyers with community partners so that they can advertise your work in their spaces. Seeing your branding may help students feel more comfortable when accessing community services. It can also spark outreach from potential new partners and funders.

Example:

The [University of Utah's Basic Needs Collective](#) provides a comprehensive media kit comprised of marketing assets, news bytes, and social media links directly on its website.



Community Conversations:

Community awareness of student basic needs insecurity may be limited. Hosting conversations can build greater understanding and spark new collaborations.

Examples:

[Central Minnesota Food Insecurity Summit](#)

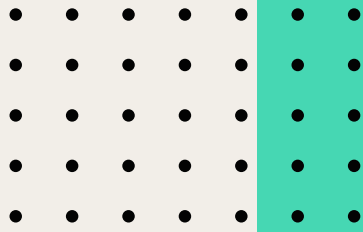
[Penn State University: Basic Needs Summit](#)

[Colorado State University: Basic Needs Summit](#)

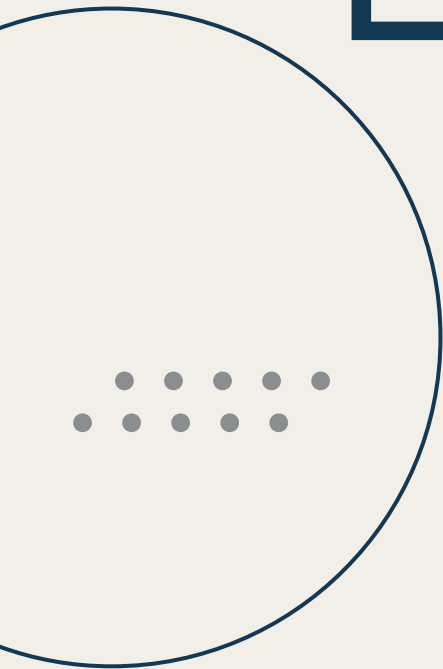


Dynamic Folder of Promising Digital Assets to Inspire You:

We created a [Pinterest board](#) where we “pinned” some of these examples, plus more, nationwide, to inspire your communications efforts. Please feel free to duplicate this board to “pin” additional campaigns and graphics you come across.

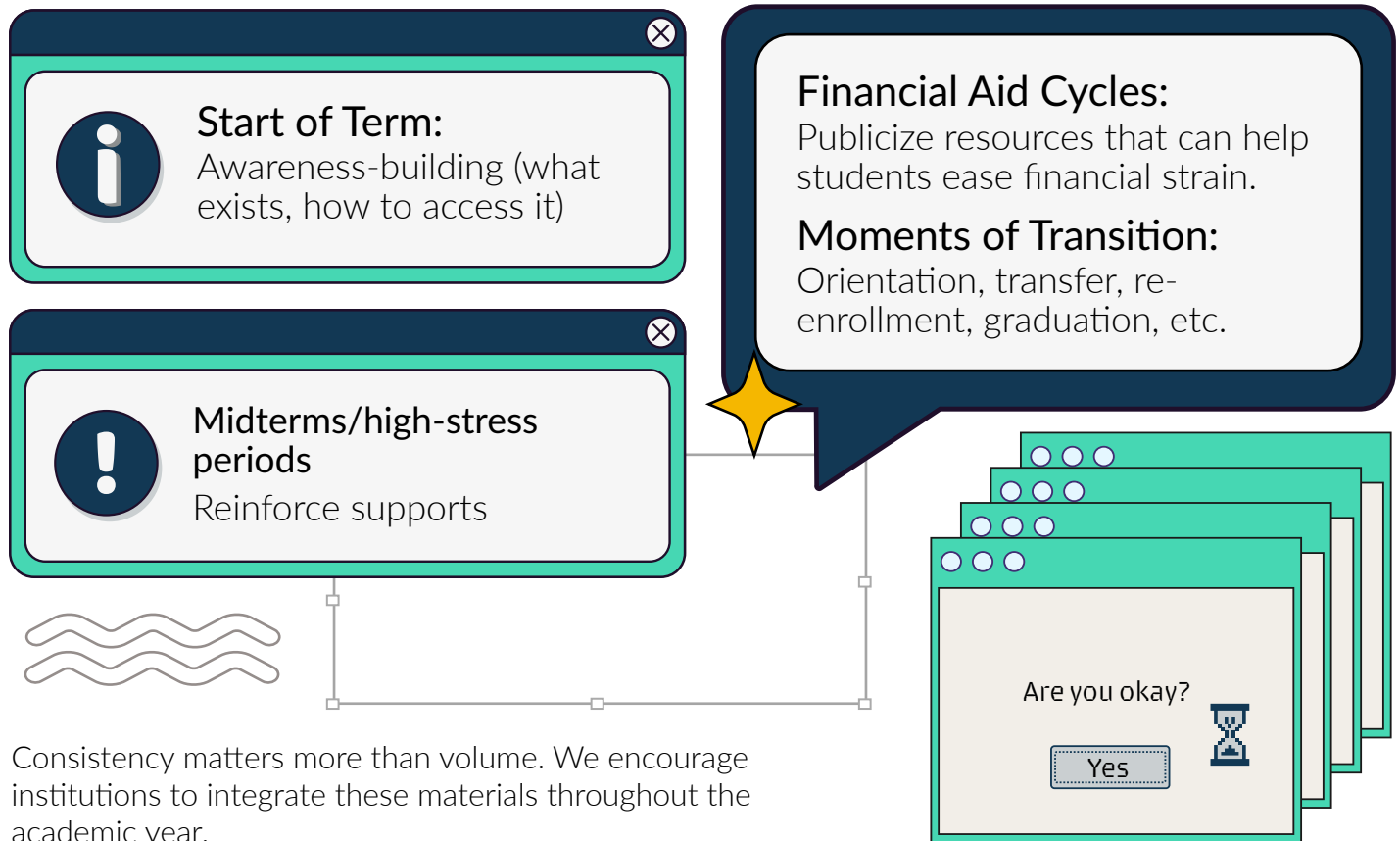


<u>03</u>	Implementing the <u>Toolkit</u>
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This toolkit is most effective when used consistently, collaboratively, and across multiple touchpoints.

Timing: When to Deploy

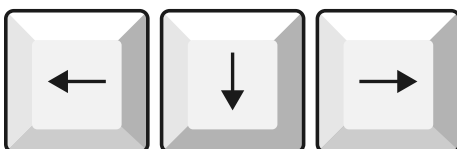


Consistency matters more than volume. We encourage institutions to integrate these materials throughout the academic year.

Placement: Where to Share

Use materials across a range of student-facing channels:

- * Social media platforms
- * Campus websites and portals
- * Email campaigns and newsletters
- * Physical spaces (flyers, residence halls, advising offices)
- * Learning management systems (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.)



The goal is **ambient awareness**—students encountering information in multiple, reinforcing ways.

Q Placement: Medium & Dissemination

Students are more likely to access support when information is visible, normalized, and consistently integrated into the environments they already navigate.

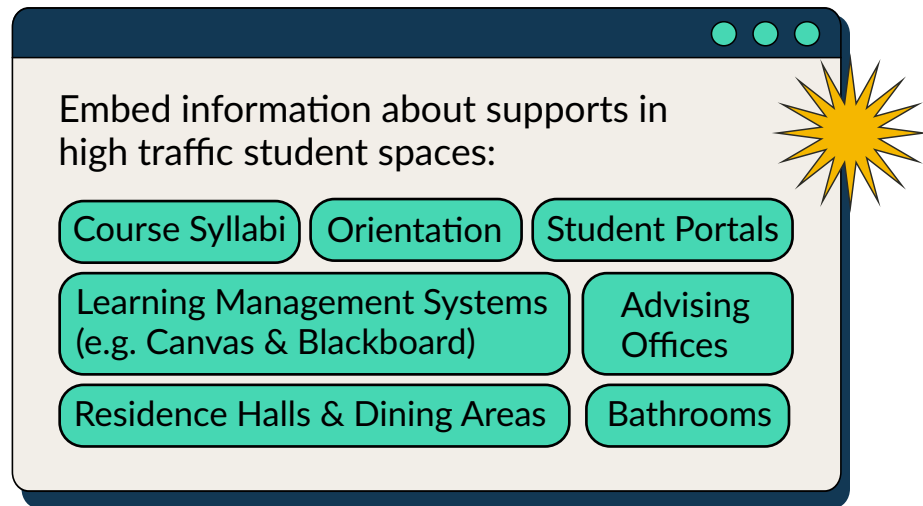
For this reason, communications about basic needs support should not live in just one office, website, or moment.

Instead, institutions should aim to embed resource visibility across multiple facets on campus life, and reinforce the existence of basic needs supports in various environments that students are likely to encounter.

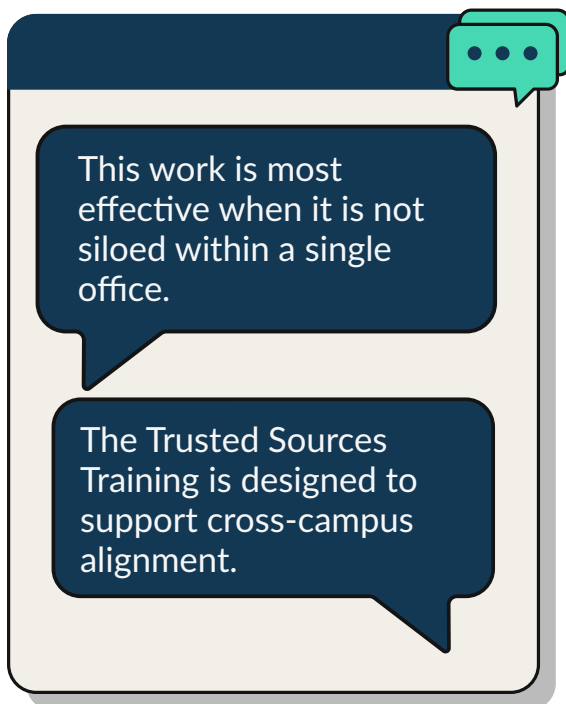
Use multiple formats and delivery methods; Students absorb information differently.

Whenever possible, provide:

- * Printed flyers and signage
- * Mobile-friendly, downloadable digital content
- * QR codes
- * Short-form video content
- * Email and text reminders
- * Social media graphics
- * Verbal reminders from trusted campus personnel



Q Internal Alignment: Who Should be Involved



We encourage collaboration across multiple institutional leaders and campus entities, including:

- * Communications teams
- * Student affairs
- * Financial aid offices
- * Academic affairs, faculty, and advising networks
- * Basic needs/resource centers
- * Health and wellness teams
- * Student government
- * Campus operations, libraries, and lecture halls
- * Campus housing
- * Student counseling and wellness services
- * Student dining
- * Student government, clubs, and student affinity groups

🔍 Voice & Framing: How to Communicate

Across all materials, we recommend:

Plain, accessible language:

Avoid jargon or bureaucratic phrasing.

“**SNAP**” may not be immediately recognizable to students unfamiliar with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

“**Food stamps**,” while more recognizable, can feel outdated or stigmatizing to some students.

Example:

Instead of saying:



“Access SNAP or food stamps to help pay for groceries.”

Try:



“Access SNAP (food assistance benefits) to help pay for groceries.”



Human-centered language:

Avoid language that sounds overly administrative or clinical.

Be specific about the mentioned resource(s) instead of using broad terminology. Where possible, use descriptors that students are likely to use in their every day speech.

Example:

Instead of saying:



“Students experiencing hardship should contact the appropriate office.”

Try:



“If you’re having trouble covering everyday essentials like food, housing, or transportation, support is available.”



Normalizing help-seeking behavior:

Our data shows that most students don't ask for support because they don't know resources are even available. But students are also hesitant to ask for help because they believe they are the only ones struggling, or that they aren't struggling enough to warrant support.

Use language that emphasizes the prevalence of basic needs insecurity among college students, and how many students have benefited from reaching out for support.



Example:

Instead of saying:



"Students in crisis may qualify for assistance." OR "Apply here to access emergency aid."

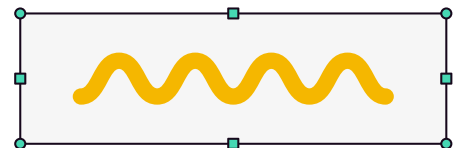
Try:



"Many students use campus resources for support with food, transportation, housing, mental health, and other everyday needs."

Reduce fear and ambiguity where possible:

Students may worry about judgment, exposure, or consequences.



Try explicitly using language like:



"Confidential support is available."



"You do not need to navigate this alone."



"Seeking support is common & encouraged."



"We're here to help connect you with resources."

Explain processes clearly:

Avoid laborious, multi-step calls-to-action that are difficult to follow.

Uncertainty can prevent students from taking the next step. Explain eligibility and application requirements clearly, and try to simplify institutional red tape where possible.

Example:

Instead of saying:

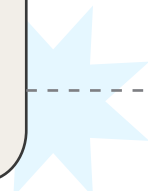


"Complete the intake process to determine next steps."

Try:



"Fill out a short form and a staff member will follow up with you to talk through available support options."



Center and honor student voice:

Whenever possible, incorporate student voice into communications efforts. Even short quotes can make communications feel more welcoming and human-centered.

Student testimonials can:



Increase relatability and develop trust.



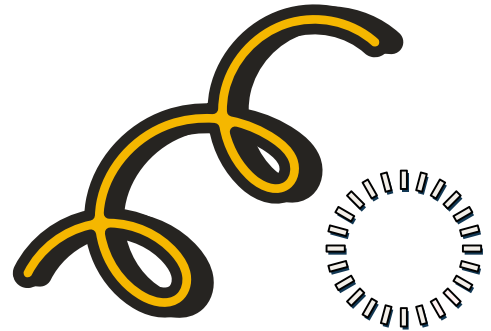
Reduce stigma around asking for help.



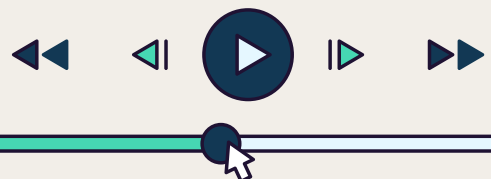
Help students visualize themselves seeking support.



Demonstrate real-world impact of support services.



Student_Voice.mp3





04

Assets & Usage Guidelines





Trusted Sources Training

The [Trusted Sources Training](#) is designed to expand the network of supporters across campus.

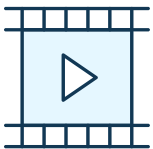
This training equips faculty, staff, and frontline personnel to:

- * Recognize signs of basic needs insecurity
- * Respond with care and clarity
- * Refer students to appropriate resources

Suggestions for Use:

This training can be:

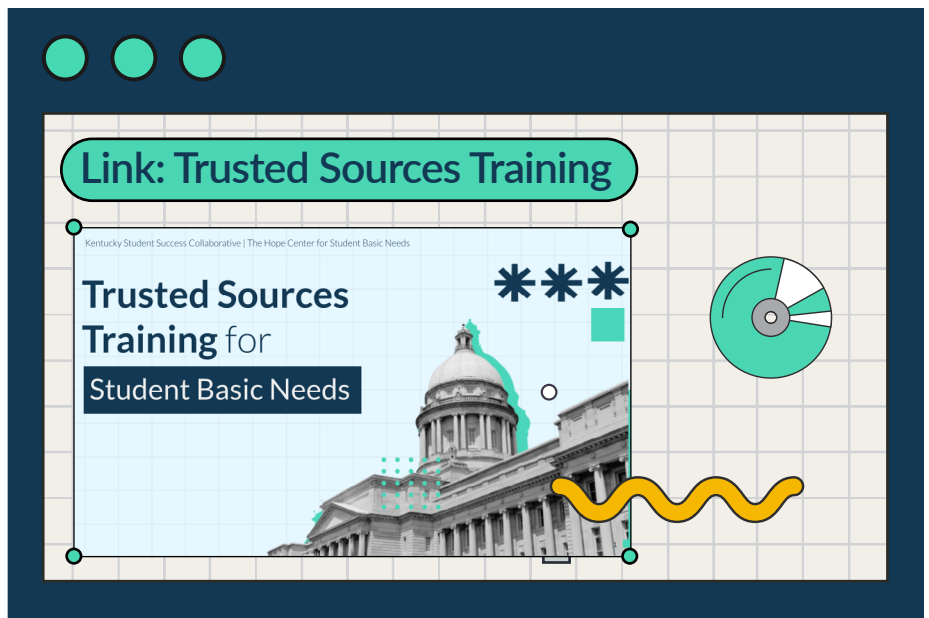
- * embedded in **faculty/staff orientation**;
- * distributed to department chairs to share in **faculty meetings**;
- * shared in **campus-wide in emails** by the Office of the President;
- * included in **training modules for student affairs staff**.



Goal: To ensure students encounter informed, supportive guidance wherever they turn.

Here's what you have available for the [Trusted Sources Training](#):

- * A [recording of the training slide deck presented by Dr. Leslie Maxie](#) from Bellarmine University.
- * The [training slide deck with speaker notes](#) for each slide.
- * The [individual videos](#) included in the slide deck
- * The [resource templates](#) included in the slide deck.



Our goal in providing all of these elements is to provide you with flexibility for deploying the training content in the way(s) that work best for a given situation/audience. This could include having faculty and/or staff watch the recording in a group setting, presenting the full training live yourself using the slide deck, incorporating the recording into your institution's existing compliance training curriculum as an asynchronous activity, conducting an in-person workshop using a portion of the slide deck and some of the template materials, and so on.



Communications Campaign

What's included:

1. Student Testimonials (Video + Graphic Assets)

This folder includes:

- * Short-form videos for digital and in-person use
- * Caption files for all provided videos
- * Social-ready quote graphics
- * Organized by themes that emerged throughout dozens of testimonials:
 - » Awareness Barriers
 - » Positive Experiences with Resources
 - » The Importance of Care-Centered Communications
 - » Peer Support & Destigmatizing Help-Seeking Behavior
 - » Basic Needs Beyond Food & Housing
 - » Today's Students



Goal: To humanize need, normalize support, and increase relatability.



[Link to Student Testimonial Assets](#)

Suggestions for Use:

A Note on Closed Captions:

Closed captioning increases the accessibility and digestibility of your content. To that end, we've done the work of transcribing the videos and providing them to you in the form of SubRip Text (.srt) files. These files tell the video software what text to display on screen and when. Most services that allow captions to be uploaded alongside a video support .srt.

We have encoded the captions into the videos via Google Drive. Local players like VLC Media Player (recommended for local playback), Windows Media Player, and QuickTime should be able to pull up captions.

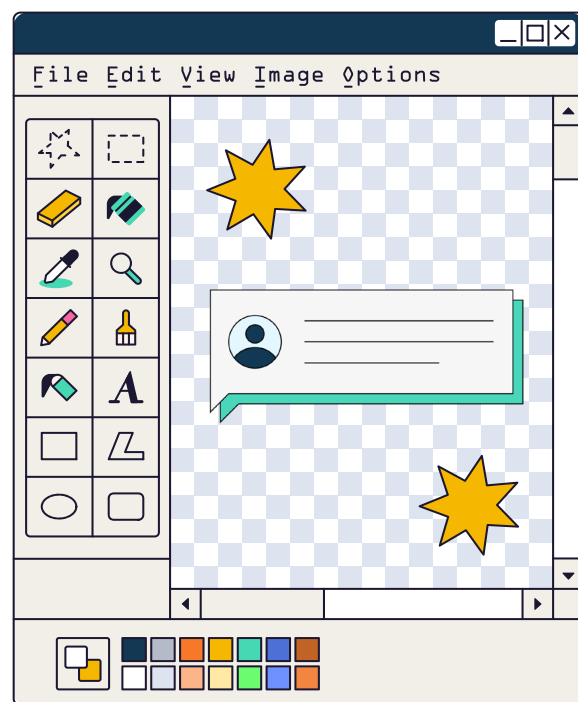
Services on the web like YouTube, Vimeo, X, and Meta will often allow you to upload the .srt caption file with the video. Other video hosting platforms like Instagram will not associate the video with the encoded captions nor allow upload of an .srt file. In these cases, we recommend turning on their automatic captioning service and editing for accuracy, if the program allows.

2. Canva Template Package

This folder includes:

* A template for designing your own student testimonials:

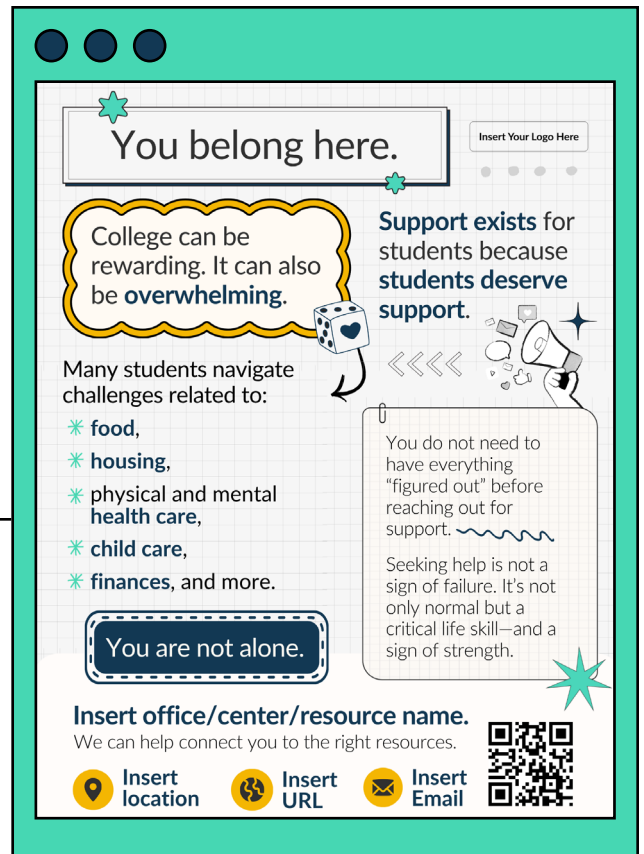
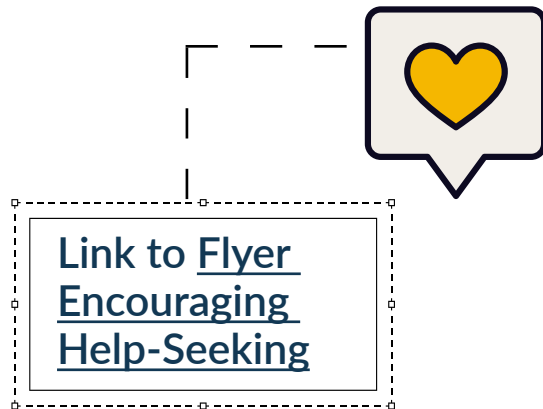
- » Depending on your capacity and/or interest, this template gives you the capability of updating our designed student testimonial assets with your institution's colors and branding.
- » We encourage institutions to regularly check in with students and collect their stories with explicit consent for publication (refer to our [production guide](#) for ethically sourcing student testimonials). You can use these templates to plug in additional student quotes, and update the photo(s) and other identifiable information.



[Link to Student Testimonial Template](#)

* **Flyer #1:** Destigmatizing help-seeking behavior among students, with the ability to customize the following fields:

- » Campus logo/colors
- » Office/resource center name
- » Specific services offered
- » QR codes
- » Contact information
- » Student imagery/testimonials
- » Language specific to campus culture

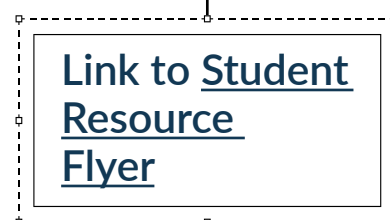


* **Flyer #2:** While the first flyer is about destigmatization (“It’s okay to seek support”) our second template is an action-oriented resource flyer with a clear call-to-action (“Here is a specific resource and how to access it.”)



And because campuses vary so widely, this second template aims to be a flexible “plug-and-play” resource promotion flyer your school can adapt for various resources to not only publicize them, but **make support visible and usable:**

- » emergency grants
- » food pantries
- » transportation support
- » counseling services
- » childcare assistance
- » benefits enrollment
- » laptop loan programs
- » housing assistance



* **Resource Slide Template:** This template's landscape orientation makes it easy for professors, staff members, and other users to insert it within their student-facing slide decks and presentations. Moreover, it can also be seamlessly embedded onto online syllabi statements and other webpages that are designed for a student audience. You can update the colors and insert your own logo, links, and QR code(s).

At [College/University name], we **understand** that being a student is just one part of your busy life. We **recognize** that having to juggle your many responsibilities can make it difficult to focus on, and pay for, college. Whatever you're going through, know that **you're not alone**. Many students lack the resources to cover food, housing, and other basics, and **it's normal to need help**.

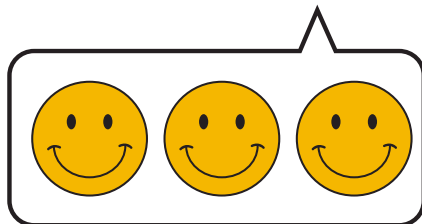
Still, we know it can be really challenging to find the right resources to help meet your needs. This [site](#) has information about resources for:

- Food
- Housing
- Physical & Mental Health Care
- Parenting Needs & Child Care
- Transportation
- Access to Technology
- Emergency & Financial Aid

A short-term crisis should not keep you from achieving your long-term goals. We are committed to helping every student find the support they need to be successful.

SCAN ME!

Insert Your Logo Here



[Link to
Resource Slide
Template](#)

Overall, in our messaging, we want to:



Suggestions for Use:

A Quick Guide to Canva Templates:

1. Open the provided Canva link
2. Select a template (testimonial, destigmatizing flyer, or service promotion)
3. Customize:
 - i. Student quotes (if applicable)
 - ii. Campus-specific resources and contact info
 - iii. Branding (logos, colors)
4. Export for:
 - i. Social media, digital usage, and inserting in slide decks (PNG/JPEG)
 - ii. Print (PDF for text-heavy assets; JPEG for high-quality visual rendering)
5. Share across your chosen channels
 - i. Ensure the aspect ratio of your upload matches the [recommended aspect ratios for each medium](#).

3. Wireframes & Suggested Language for a Basic Needs Website

A “one-stop” webpage—serving as a centralized location for students, faculty, and staff to locate information about student experiences with basic needs insecurity, find available resources, and contact basic needs staff—is key for streamlined information sharing. The goal is to simplify the process of seeking help instead of creating a labyrinth of floating links and scattered resources for the audience to wade through. This [folder](#) contains:

* A set of simple wireframe(s) to help you identify and arrange key elements to construct or update your institution’s basic needs page:

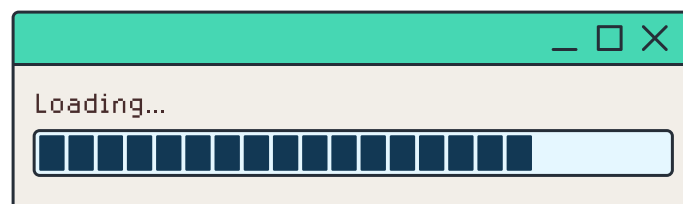
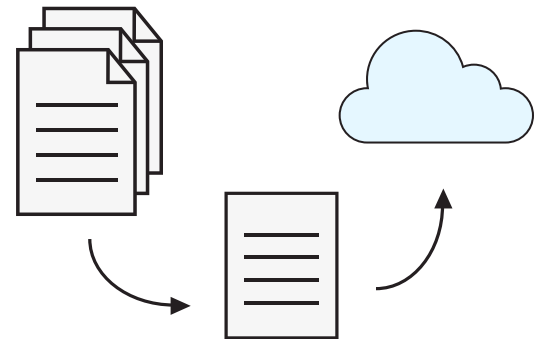
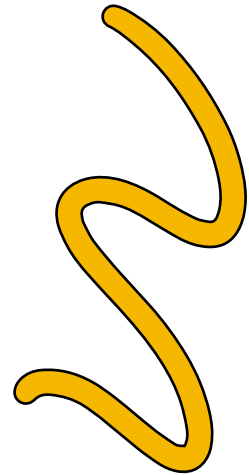
- » You may choose the “[heavy-lift](#)” or “[low-lift](#)” options, depending on capacity and/or technical ability.
- » The order, arrangement, and size of web elements within the wireframes reflects their hierarchy. For example, the “For Students” and “For Faculty” tabs are placed before anything else to immediately connect with each segment of the audience and orient them to the rest of the content. Similarly, student quotes are accentuated through using pull-out boxes for a human-centered approach.

* [Document with Suggested Language for:](#)

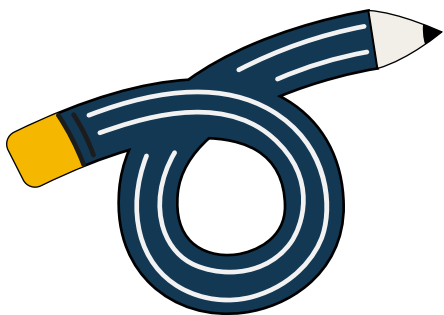
- » Communication of Care Statement
- » Statement for Faculty
- » Beacon ChatBot introduction language and Frequently Asked Questions

* [A graphic-heavy example using the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative’s Website:](#) To help you visualize how you might think of placing these elements on your website, we are also offering a more detailed wireframe we made for the basic needs resources page on the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative’s website. While this isn’t designed to be widely implemented at the institutional level due to its specific branding and advanced user interface features, feel free to use it as inspiration.

The [Kentucky Student Success Collaborative's centralized basic needs resource page](#), once live, is designed to be a centralized support webpage for students across Kentucky. While it includes some similar elements, it will also house a map of colleges and universities across the state with the contact information for their basic needs support staff, detailed instructions about accessing Beacon, as well as some core language defining the types of basic needs insecurity that students experience. We encourage you to [hyperlink the collaborative's centralized hub](#) on your institution's basic needs website as an additional resource for students, faculty, and staff to learn more.



Closing Note



Thank you for the work you are doing to support students across Kentucky.

We know this work is complex. It asks institutions to respond not only to academic needs, but to the full realities of students' lives—with care, creativity, coordination, and persistence.

We also know that meaningful change rarely happens all at once.

🔍 Often, it begins with smaller shifts:



- 🕒 A clearer pathway to support ☐
- 🕒 A student seeing themselves reflected in a story ☒
- 🕒 A faculty member knowing how to respond ☐
- 🕒 A flyer or resource shared at the right moment ☐

Over time, those moments accumulate. They help build campuses where support is more visible, more trusted, and more deeply woven into the student experience.

As you use and adapt this toolkit, we encourage you to treat it as a living resource. Start where you are. Experiment. Adjust. Build collaboratively. Share what works.

And please know: you do not have to do this work alone.

If you have questions, ideas, feedback, or examples of how you are using these materials on your campus, we would love to [hear from you](#).

We're grateful to be in this work alongside you—and excited to continue building toward a future where every student can access the support they need not just to survive, but to thrive.

Acknowledgments

As part of Kentucky's broader strategy to improve postsecondary attainment and economic mobility for students from low-income backgrounds, The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs partnered with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative to support how colleges and universities communicate about basic needs and connect students to available resources. Made possible through support from ECMC Foundation, this work advances Kentucky's efforts to help more students meet their everyday needs while pursuing their educational goals and contributes to the state's goal of ensuring that 60% of working-age adults hold a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030.

Several team members at The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs contributed to this toolkit and accompanying guide:

- * Rjaa Ahmed: Graphic design, web design, writing, visual strategy, branding, and strategic communications leadership.
- * Dr. Sara Abelson: Project identification, partnership relations, and content review.
- * Lauren Bohn: Strategic communications leadership, writing, copy-editing, and design.
- * Joshua Rudolph: Video editing support, content development.
- * David Thompson: Content development, writing, and project support.

In addition, we'd like to thank the team at the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative for their support and input:

- * Nan Harnice
- * Arion Jett-Seals
- * Dr. Lilly Massa-McKinley
- * Olivia Morris-Bush

We are also grateful to the colleges and universities across Kentucky that are part of the Student Basic Needs Action Network for submitting student testimonials and providing their feedback to inform the communications toolkit. We would especially like to thank Dr. Leslie Maxie, Dean of Students at Bellarmine University, for delivering the Trusted Sources Training.



**The Kentucky
Student Success
Collaborative**



ECMC
Foundation

About The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs

The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University is an action-oriented research, policy, and capacity-building center, removing barriers to college student success and well-being through:

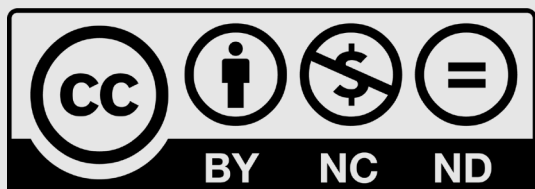
- * **Research:** investigating students' lived experiences with basic needs insecurity and evaluating interventions
- * **Policy:** informing and advocating for systemic policy change to make college more affordable and secure college students' basic needs
- * **Practice:** collaborative coaching with colleges, universities, and states on meeting students' basic needs through systems transformation

Suggested Citation

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Disclosure

No generative AI tools or AI assistance were used to prepare, revise, write, design, or create this toolkit guide or any of its components. All content was written and designed independently by the author(s).



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