



SHEEO

State Higher Education
Executive Officers Association



**NATIONAL REPLICATION
COLLABORATIVE**

Exploring a New Frontier for National ASAP Replication Scaling

SHEEO|ASAP COLLEGE COMPLETION
COALITION LEARNING COMMUNITY

Sakshee Chawla and Katherine J. Giardello

November 2024



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Academic Programs (ASAP) National Replication Collaborative are grateful to the state teams from Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Washington for participating in the [SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community](#). The learning community states joined us in exploring the replication of the CUNY ASAP model in their states and systems. The reflections from their ongoing work have been highlighted in this white paper. We value our continued partnership and the states' ongoing work to close equity gaps in college completion rates.

The authors value the contributions of our colleagues to this report, especially Christine Brongniart, Constance Barnes, and Diana Strumbos with CUNY ASAP as well as John Lane and Thomas Harnisch from SHEEO.

The SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community was generously funded by a grant from the PwC Foundation, Inc., between July 2023 - December 2024.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Chawla, S., Giardello, K. (2024) *Exploring a New Frontier for National ASAP Replication Scaling: SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/asaplearningcommunity.pdf

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) serves the executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs. Founded in 1954, SHEEO promotes an environment that values higher education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors. Together with its members, SHEEO aims to achieve this vision by equipping state higher education executive officers and their staffs with the tools to effectively advance the value of higher education, promoting public policies and academic practices that enable all Americans to achieve success in the 21st century, and serving as an advocate for state higher education leadership. For more information, visit sheeo.org.

The City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Academic Program (ASAP) National Replication Collaborative includes professionals affiliated with CUNY ASAP, replication programs, and adjacent advocacy groups in a peer learning network that regularly engages around a range of salient topics: holistic supports and advisement practices, program management, executive leadership, policy advocacy, research and evaluation, and data management efforts. Colleges and organizational partners of the replication collaborative receive intensive technical assistance to establish, refine, expand, scale, and sustain the ASAP models in their institutional context. These partners participate in an ongoing peer learning network committed to increasing graduation rates through the implementation and sustenance of the ASAP model. For more information, visit www.cuny.edu/asapreplication.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION TO CUNY ASAP	4
NATIONAL SCALING OF ASAP ACE	5
EXPLORING A NEW FRONTIER FOR NATIONAL ASAP REPLICATION SCALING	6
PRIORITY AREA I: COALITION BUILDING AND MAKING THE ROI CASE	7
PRIORITY AREA II: ALIGNING ASAP REPLICATION TO STATE HIGHER EDUCATION PRIORITIES	11
PRIORITY AREA III: PLANNING FOR EQUITY-BASED, SYSTEMS-SCALED REPLICATION PROJECTS	13
PRIORITY AREA IV: SUSTAINABLE BUDGETING AND PRODUCTIVE FUNDING MODELS	15
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community was launched in August 2023 as a partnership between the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and the CUNY ASAP National Replication Collaborative to address racial equity gaps in college completion. Five state teams – **Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Washington** – explored strategies to scale the CUNY ASAP model in their respective contexts. This report summarizes their progress, lessons learned, and key insights across priority areas: coalition building, aligning replication efforts with state priorities, planning for equity, and establishing sustainable funding models. The experiences of these states offer valuable lessons for others aiming to implement the proven ASAP model to improve college completion rates.

INTRODUCTION TO CUNY ASAP

The Accelerated Study in Academic Programs (ASAP) model, launched in 2007 at the City University of New York (CUNY), has proven highly effective in improving college completion rates, particularly for underserved students. With a comprehensive array of financial, academic, and advisement support, ASAP has demonstrated the potential to more than double graduation rates for community college students. As the nation's largest urban public university, CUNY serves as a transformative engine of social mobility and the lifeblood of New York City serving 275,000 degree-seeking students of all ages and awarding 55,000 degrees each year.

ASAP focuses on removing institutional barriers to degree completion, aiming to graduate at least 50% of associate-degree-seeking students within three years by providing structured, comprehensive, and integrated wraparound support services that promote academic momentum and student success. These supports include financial assistance, such as tuition and fee scholarships for students with unmet financial aid needs, textbook stipends, and New York City Transit MetroCards. To further ensure academic progress, ASAP provides structured pathways that promote full-time enrollment, block scheduling for first-year courses, continuous enrollment in developmental education, and opportunities for winter and summer courses. ASAP also offers personalized advisement, tutoring, career development services, and early engagement initiatives to foster a strong, connected community among students. Today, ASAP is offered at six of CUNY's community colleges and three of CUNY's comprehensive colleges. The program has served over 100,000 students across 18 cohorts, with the first cohort entering in fall 2007. ASAP mirrors the rich diversity of CUNY's community college population: 50% are Hispanic/Latinx, 25% are Black, 88% are 19 or younger, and 82% receive needs-based federal or state aid. ASAP was adapted to support timely baccalaureate completion as the Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) program in 2015. ACE is now found across seven CUNY colleges and boosts four-year bachelor's degree completion rates for both first-time freshmen and associate degree-holding transfer students.

As the ASAP and ACE programs scaled throughout the system, CUNY developed a consortia model where individual campuses autonomously operate their ASAP and ACE programs while receiving oversight and administrative support from CUNY's central Office of Academic Affairs. This centralized team provides necessary support in the areas of evaluation and data management; outreach, marketing, and communications; program administration and policy setting; staff professional development; and purchasing and provision of student financial resources.

While the central office ensures consistency and quality across the system, individual campuses retain responsibility for all other aspects of program management, including localized recruitment, direct service delivery to students, monitoring of student progress, and coordination across campus departments.

NATIONAL SCALING OF ASAP|ACE

CUNY's success with the ASAP and ACE programs has generated significant national interest in replicating the model. Although there have been gains in national college completion rates over the past decade, post-COVID trends reveal stagnation in six-year completion rates across all sectors. Community college students, in particular, continue to face lower completion rates compared to their peers at four-year institutions, with more pronounced disparities among racially marginalized populations (Lee & Shapiro, 2023). These persistent inequities have fueled discussions in academic and policy-making circles about the potential for scaling the proven ASAP model nationwide to improve college completion rates. The Biden Administration (2023) and the U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#) have both recognized ASAP as an exemplary, evidence-based model well-suited for expansion.

Since 2014, CUNY ASAP has supported high-fidelity replications of the model that expand the evidence base and explore the adaptivity of the model across the country. To date, 39 replication programs have been developed across seven states – Ohio, California, New York (within the SUNY system), North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Initial replication efforts primarily focused on single-campus programs or small pilot cohorts, often lacking sustained state-level coordination or comprehensive scaling plans. Even still, evaluations of these early replication programs have shown outcomes comparable to those of the original CUNY ASAP model. Notably, new longitudinal data from a six-year follow-up on the Ohio demonstration programs, the first ASAP replication project, showed program graduates' average earnings reaching 11% more than the control group. Ithaca S&R and CUNY's [collaborative effort](#) to design a replication strategy revealed that the ASAP model scaled at the state level would be the most efficient and effective in dramatically improving completion rates.

The ASAP national replication team launched its first system-level replication project in 2022 with the University System of North Carolina's (UNC) TrACE (Transfer, Accelerate, Complete, Engage) program. In 2024, CUNY supported the replication of ASAP and ACE on 25 State University of New York (SUNY) campuses. Supported by a \$75 million Transformation Fund from New York Governor Kathy Hochul, the SUNY replication efforts mark a significant milestone in the national expansion of the ASAP|ACE model.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

EXPLORING A NEW FRONTIER FOR NATIONAL ASAP REPLICATION SCALING

To expand the reach and initiate a national strategy for system-wide replication of the ASAP model, the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association and CUNY ASAP National Replication Collaborative launched the College Completion Coalition Learning Community in the summer of 2023. Five state teams – Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Washington – were selected after a competitive request for proposal process. The primary objective of the project was to collaborate with state higher education teams to address racial equity gaps in community college attainment rates, with a particular focus on Black and Latinx students, by exploring strategic approaches to scaling the ASAP model.

Working closely with SHEEO and the CUNY ASAP National Replication Collaborative, the state teams engaged in technical assistance, peer learning, and strategic planning exercises that empowered them to deeply consider how to scale the ASAP model within their unique contexts. The learning community's journey began with a dynamic in-person convening in New York City where **reflections** underscored the transformative potential of authentic partnerships in replicating the proven ASAP model. In the following months, the teams participated in virtual activities, including comprehensive technical assistance workshops and tailored state consultations. These efforts focused on topics that guided state teams in exploring the feasibility of and strategies for scaled ASAP replication projects. This brief reports on the key insights and lessons learned from the state teams that participated in the SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

PRIORITY AREA I: COALITION BUILDING AND MAKING THE ROI CASE

Building a strong coalition and making a compelling return on investment (ROI) case are important steps in the successful replication of the CUNY ASAP model at the state level. Each of the five states participating in the SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community approached these tasks with distinct strategies, shaped by their unique higher education landscapes and policy environments. The coalition building efforts and ROI advocacy in the five states reveal the complexities of scaling the ASAP model across diverse higher education landscapes. While each state faced unique challenges, the importance of early and broad-based engagement, strategic alignment with existing state priorities, and the need for tailored ROI arguments emerged as common themes.

“This project provided a meaningful opportunity for **SBCTC** (State Board for Community and Technical Colleges) and **WSAC** (Washington Student Achievement Council) to better understand shared work across agencies, representing two different governance structures within the state. From a state perspective, this project helped broaden the student success and completion conversation across these two agencies.” - Washington

A successful state-scaled ASAP replication project requires a coalition of organizations with a shared vision for intensive high-impact change that, when strategically scaled, has the potential to raise college completion rates in states and across the country. Thus, a key element of this work involved state teams coalescing influential organizations with a commitment to closing racial equity gaps in completion rates. State higher education agencies, advocacy groups, state association staff, community college leaders, philanthropic partners, and researchers formed diverse teams that participated in learning community activities. States also identified national partners for peer learning and advocacy support.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

ENGAGING DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

The most critical lesson in coalition building was the need to authentically engage colleges early in the process. State teams took different approaches to the timing and method for engagement with colleges with some teams waiting to engage colleges until later stages of the work, while others, like Colorado and Washington, involved colleges from the start. Colorado, in particular, placed a strong emphasis on including rural institutions in its ASAP replication efforts, recognizing that these colleges often face unique challenges such as limited staff capacity and financial constraints. By actively engaging rural colleges like Lamar Community College and Colorado Mountain College early in the process, the [Colorado Department of Higher Education \(CDHE\)](#) ensured that these institutions were not only part of the coalition but also had their specific needs addressed from the outset. This focus on rural inclusion was crucial for tailoring the ASAP model to fit the diverse educational landscape of the state, ensuring that even the most geographically isolated institutions could benefit from the program's comprehensive support structure. Washington, too, focused its coalition building on early, active involvement from within system institutions and staff. This approach builds trust and facilitates essential discussions on financial feasibility, institutional culture, staffing, and potential challenges from both institutional and system perspectives.

“The inclusion of rural institutions in our coalition was essential to ensuring that the unique challenges they face – such as limited staff capacity – were addressed from the outset.” - Colorado

As state teams began engaging institutional leaders, it became clear that institutional interest and readiness were essential to the success of scaled ASAP replication. New Jersey highlighted the extensive cross-departmental impact of implementing an ASAP replication, noting that the model's comprehensive nature necessitates input from various institutional functional areas, including academic affairs, student affairs, financial aid, the registrar's office, and institutional research. The Colorado Department of Higher Education facilitated site visits to existing ASAP replication sites that allowed its team to see firsthand the benefits and challenges associated with implementing the model. These visits were instrumental in generating buy-in from college leaders and staff.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

However, institutional capacity constraints emerged as a significant challenge, especially for rural colleges. Many state teams identified resource limitations, initiative fatigue, and hesitation about replicating a program from a distinctly urban environment like CUNY. In states like Michigan, New Jersey, and Washington, where colleges operate under autonomous governance structures, there was a strong preference for implementing reforms over which colleges felt ownership. The decentralized system in Washington raised challenges associated with institutions adopting only parts of the ASAP model, such as reducing advising caseloads or enhancing orientation, instead of fully implementing the comprehensive approach.

Overall, key institutional factors that indicate readiness for ASAP replication include strong, all-in commitment from top leadership, ensuring long-term financial and operational sustainability, the existing use of some student support components from the ASAP model, and the capability to effectively track and utilize data for reporting, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Given the variability in institutional readiness across a state, it is important for coalition teams to focus on understanding and enhancing the capacity of their institutions to implement the program.

THE ROI CASE FOR ASAP REPLICATION

Making a compelling return on investment (ROI) case was a key element in advancing the ASAP replication efforts across the five states. Each state approached the ROI argument by tailoring it to its unique contexts, focusing on financial benefits and the potential for improved student outcomes. A central component of making the ROI case is the potential of ASAP replication to boost student retention and completion rates, thereby contributing to broader economic and workforce development goals. The New Jersey coalition made the argument that higher completion rates directly support the development of a skilled workforce and address significant labor market needs in sectors like health care and teacher preparation.

Aligning ASAP with existing state funding models and educational initiatives was another key strategy in making the ROI case. In Colorado, the CDHE highlighted how ASAP could be integrated into the state's performance-based funding formula, which rewards institutions for improving student completion and retention rates. By demonstrating that ASAP could help colleges achieve these metrics, Colorado made a strong financial case for the program. Likewise, in North Carolina, funding for a scaled ASAP replication pilot was strategically tied to a new state funding model that aims to produce more graduates in high-demand fields. This focus on workforce readiness resonated with state policymakers, particularly as it aligned with existing state priorities around economic growth and job creation and enabled the North Carolina team to secure buy-in from both state legislators and institutional leaders.

"Despite concerns about the high cost of implementing ASAP, we emphasized the potential for long-term savings and economic benefits through higher completion rates." - Michigan

The financial sustainability of ASAP replication emerged as an outstanding concern, particularly in states with limited resources or recent large-scale investments in postsecondary education. In Michigan, the coalition faced challenges in convincing stakeholders of the program's value, given the high cost of implementation – estimated at \$3,000+ per student per year. To address this, the Michigan team emphasized the long-term savings associated with higher completion rates, such as reduced spending on remedial education and the economic benefits of having more graduates enter the workforce. These arguments had some success, but the untested longer-term financial ROI arguments contributed to hesitation from institutions regarding the high upfront costs associated with ASAP replication.



Despite the strong arguments in favor of ASAP, many states encountered resistance from institutions concerned about the program's cost and feasibility. Michigan faced challenges in making the ROI case, particularly due to skepticism about the program's adaptability to the state's diverse educational landscape. To address this, the Michigan team emphasized the alignment of ASAP with existing initiatives like the Community College Guarantee (CCG), arguing that the program could build on these foundations to deliver even greater benefits.

In making the ROI case for ASAP replication, learning community states effectively tailored their arguments to align with their unique contexts and priorities. By emphasizing the potential for increased completion rates, long-term economic benefits, alignment with state funding models, and the evidence-based success of the model, states built a compelling case for how investment in the ASAP model yields significant returns for students and the broader community. The evidence-based success of the model, as recognized by external authorities such as the What Works Clearinghouse, has provided a powerful argument for stakeholders. The lessons learned from these efforts provide valuable insights for other states considering similar initiatives.

PRIORITY AREA II: ALIGNING ASAP REPLICATION TO STATE HIGHER EDUCATION PRIORITIES

Aligning the ASAP replication with state higher education priorities was a pivotal step for each of the participating states. By integrating ASAP with existing strategic goals and initiatives, the states sought to maximize the impact of the program while ensuring its sustainability and relevance within their unique educational landscapes.

The New Jersey team, led by the state's **Office of the Secretary of Higher Education**, considered integrating the ASAP model with existing programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) that already provides comprehensive support to students from low-income backgrounds. This integration would make it easier to build a coalition around ASAP, as stakeholders could see how the new model would complement and enhance existing efforts rather than replace them. The success of the EOF program provided a strong foundation for New Jersey to make the ROI case for ASAP. The coalition argued that by building on the proven success of EOF, the ASAP model could further improve retention and graduation rates, particularly among students from underrepresented backgrounds. This argument resonated with both institutional leaders and policymakers, who saw the potential for ASAP to amplify the impact of existing investments in student success.

"In aligning ASAP replication to state higher education priorities, it's important to inventory current programs and priorities across agencies and organizations involved. This inventory helps to establish what already exists that could be utilized, particularly when we are determining future budget prospects and sustainability." - New Jersey

ASAP REPLICATION AS A WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

While prior ASAP replication programs have targeted a variety of academic programs and student subgroups, only **West Virginia Ascend** has deliberately focused its ASAP replication effort on high-need workforce programs thus far. Throughout this learning community, nearly all state teams noted workforce initiatives as a high priority for their community college sectors with strong potential for strategic alignment with ASAP replication plans.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

The [North Carolina Community College System](#) (NCCCS), in partnership with the University of North Carolina System, the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, and the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents (NCACCP), strategically framed ASAP replication as a workforce development initiative. By aligning it with the state’s newly proposed funding model, PropelNC, which provides financial incentives for colleges to focus on high-demand, high-wage fields, the coalition was able to build strong support from both institutional leaders and policymakers. This alignment was crucial in generating enthusiasm for ASAP, as it tied the program directly to the state’s economic development goals, and advanced advocacy efforts. This alignment also enhanced the possibility of a collaborative funding request to the General Assembly by NCCCS and the University of North Carolina (UNC) System for their shared ASAP|ACE replication efforts.

“Aligning ASAP with the PropelNC funding model allowed us to frame the program not just as an educational initiative but as a strategic investment in the state’s economic future.” - North Carolina

ASAP ALIGNMENT WITH GUIDED PATHWAYS EFFORTS

Convergence with the [Guided Pathways](#) framework, a widely adopted initiative aimed at streamlining students’ academic journeys and improving completion rates, has long been noted as a factor in ASAP replication. In particular, a [2016 brief from MDRC](#) highlighted the complementary nature of Guided Pathways with the ASAP model. In our learning community states, too, ASAP was seen as a natural complement to Guided Pathways, providing the wraparound support needed to help students navigate their academic programs more effectively.

In Michigan, for instance, the ASAP model was aligned with the state’s existing Guided Pathways work, which had been a focus of the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) from 2016 to 2020. The state recognized that by integrating ASAP’s structured advisement, financial support, and academic planning with the Guided Pathways framework, it could create a more comprehensive and cohesive approach to student success. This alignment was particularly important for institutions that had already invested in Guided Pathways, as it allowed ASAP to be implemented without requiring a complete overhaul of existing practices.

New Jersey and Washington also highlighted the compatibility between ASAP and Guided Pathways, noting that both initiatives emphasize clear academic planning, proactive advising, and support systems designed to keep students on track to graduation. The implication of this, however, differed between the two states. By aligning the two initiatives, New Jersey was able to build a stronger case for ASAP replication, demonstrating how it could enhance and extend the benefits of Guided Pathways. In Washington, in comparison, recent historic legislative investments in Guided Pathways reform may be contributing to hesitation to adopt an additional large state investment in scaled ASAP replication.

PRIORITY AREA III: PLANNING FOR EQUITY-BASED, SYSTEMS-SCALED REPLICATION PROJECTS

Planning for equity-based, systems-scaled replication of the ASAP model was a focus for all five states involved in the SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community. Each state recognized that successful replication not only required scaling the program across diverse institutions but also ensuring the replication efforts effectively addressed the equity gaps in college completion rates, particularly for historically underserved populations such as Black, Latinx, and low-income students. While racial equity was an expressed priority for all state teams throughout the learning community, discussions on racial equity gaps were highly contextualized to each state's unique environment. This section outlines how each state approached the challenge of equity-driven, system-wide replication.

TARGETING UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS AND ADDRESSING EQUITY GAPS

Each state's approach to equity varied based on its demographic and institutional landscape. In Colorado, the growing Latinx population faced significant educational disparities compared to other ethnic groups, making this demographic a central focus of the state's equity-driven planning. New Jersey, on the other hand, identified both Black and Latinx students as key groups where completion rates lagged significantly behind those of White and Asian students, driving the state's efforts to tailor ASAP replication to address these disparities.

In states where many community colleges are small and located in rural areas with less racially diverse populations, the focus on racial equity was more challenging. These states had to consider other factors, such as geographic location, income levels, full/part-time enrollment status, and workforce needs, to address equity gaps effectively. For example, Michigan and Colorado recognized that their community colleges, which serve largely rural and less racially diverse populations, needed to focus on closing gaps for students in high-need workforce areas and adult learners with some college but no degree. This broadened view of equity allowed these states to incorporate ASAP into their strategies for improving outcomes for a wider range of underserved student groups. Michigan also targeted Community College Guarantee students, many of whom are from low-income backgrounds and often first-generation college students, as a way to address equity through a broader lens that includes socio-economic status.

"In a national landscape wherein support for underserved populations has come under fire, ASAP's ability to achieve and maintain these [completion] gains is laudable and compelling in a space that values equity." - New Jersey

NAVIGATING POLITICAL AND POLICY SHIFTS

Some states also had to navigate changing political landscapes that impacted their equity-focused work. Despite these shifts, the states maintained a strong commitment to eliminating educational attainment gaps across various demographic factors, including race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, and geography. This adaptability highlights the importance of being responsive to evolving political contexts while remaining focused on equity goals.

ENSURING STATEWIDE CONSISTENCY AND LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

The balance between statewide consistency and local flexibility was essential for equity-driven, system-scaled replication. Washington faced unique challenges due to the decentralized nature of its higher education system, which gave individual institutions significant autonomy to serve these student populations appropriately. The Washington team recognized the importance of level-setting and joint information gathering to build a shared understanding of equity goals across institutions. This realization underscored the need for more upfront work to build shared language and agreement on equity objectives, ensuring that the ASAP model could be adapted to meet the specific needs of historically underserved students, particularly students of color.

LEVERAGING DATA AND EVALUATION FOR CONTINUOUS SUPPORT

Despite the differences across states and political shifts, participating states reported gains in their awareness of completion disparities among racially minoritized groups and improved methods for disaggregating data to understand and address these gaps. For example, New Jersey and Michigan prioritized building the capacity of their community colleges to collect and analyze data on student outcomes, which was essential for monitoring the impact of ASAP and refining the implementation strategy to better serve underserved students. This data-driven approach was pivotal for ensuring that equity remained central to the replication efforts and that the model could be continuously improved to meet the evolving needs of diverse student populations.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

PRIORITY AREA IV: SUSTAINABLE BUDGETING AND PRODUCTIVE FUNDING MODELS

The sustainability of ASAP replication efforts across the five states in the SHEEO|ASAP learning community hinged on developing robust budgeting strategies and securing productive funding models. A key goal was to guide state teams in exploring how to fund the scaled replication of the ASAP model through a combination of public funding, institutional resources, and philanthropic investments. Given the complexities and variability in costs associated with ASAP replication, states needed to develop realistic, adaptable funding strategies that could support the program beyond initial grants and pilot phases.



Source: November 2023 SHEEO|CUNY Convening

UNDERSTANDING AND ESTIMATING COSTS FOR ASAP REPLICATION

The first step for each state was to gain a clear understanding of the comprehensive costs involved in successfully replicating the ASAP model. This included covering direct student financial support such as tuition and fee gaps, textbooks, and high-value incentives similar to the NYC MetroCard, which encourage student engagement with ASAP's intensive advising and support structures. Additionally, costs associated with staffing were significant, particularly the need for dedicated advising personnel to maintain a student-to-advisor ratio of no more than 150:1, along with program leadership and other essential support staff.

However, cost estimation varied widely depending on local contexts, existing infrastructure, and complementary funding initiatives. For example, while smaller pilot projects might require around \$4 million, more extensive, state-scaled replication efforts could cost upwards of \$40 million. Adding to the complexity, ASAP's focus on full-time enrollment, which generally leads to increased course loads, retention, and graduation rates, could enhance tuition revenue and state allocations for institutions over time. Despite this potential for increased revenue, projecting these gains proved challenging, particularly when considering the dynamic nature of costs, which are unlikely to remain fixed over time.

LEVERAGING BRAIDED FUNDING MODELS

Given the substantial upfront investment required for ASAP replication, states recognized the necessity of braided funding models – combining institutional dollars, philanthropic investments, and public funding lines – that have proven successful in other settings. This approach allows for greater flexibility and sustainability by diversifying funding sources and reducing reliance on any single stream of revenue.

“The cost of scaling ASAP statewide requires a braided funding model that includes public fund lines, institutional dollars, and philanthropic investments.” - Colorado

For instance, in Colorado, the state team identified the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) as a complementary program with an existing state funding line that could be leveraged to support ASAP replication. Similarly, New Jersey considered aligning ASAP with its robust Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program and the New Jersey College Promise, both of which provide substantial financial aid to students. In Michigan, early discussions focused on integrating ASAP with the Michigan Reconnect scholarship and Promise Zone scholarships. However, with the recent passage of the Community College Guarantee in 2024, which effectively provides free community college across Michigan, this new initiative was seen as a more natural alignment for supporting ASAP.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES IN STATE FUNDING AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

Despite the potential to align ASAP with existing state financial aid programs, several state teams expressed reluctance to pursue additional state investments. This hesitancy stemmed from various factors, including already high levels of investment in state-based financial aid, competing legislative priorities, and shifting political environments that made securing new state funds challenging. Moreover, as the project unfolded, it became clear that longer-term cost estimation of ASAP replication involves complexities such as the lesser-known economies of scale that may emerge as programs expand. Additionally, states noted the need for more tactical data on the long-term financial return on investment from ASAP, considering recent research showing that the model increases graduates’ earnings, which in turn boosts tax revenues and provides other social benefits.

To address these challenges, some states looked to emerging state funding models that incentivize colleges to improve student retention, graduation rates, and course-taking patterns – all outcomes that ASAP is designed to enhance. Washington, for example, indicated exploring how its performance funding model, the Student Achievement Initiative, could be leveraged to further advance student success metrics in alignment with ASAP principles. Meanwhile, North Carolina developed a robust plan to align ASAP replication with PropelNC, a new initiative providing financial incentives for colleges that participate by ensuring that ASAP replication programs correspond with eligible programs under PropelNC.

THE ROLE OF SHORT-TERM FUNDING AND PHILANTHROPY

While long-term state support remains the ultimate goal, state teams acknowledged that initiating an ASAP replication project often requires short-term funding to cover the significant initial investment. In several instances, recent replication programs were kick-started with short-term pandemic relief funds, while in others, philanthropic investments played an important role in actualizing ASAP replication plans. For instance, toward the end of the learning community project, the North Carolina team was approached by a funder interested in investing in scaled ASAP replication which accelerated their planning process and moved them to action on scaling ASAP more quickly.

There was a consensus among the states, however, that institutional capacity and commitment needed to be secured before engaging in serious conversations or advocacy for more sustained state funding. This prudent approach reflects the understanding that without a clear path to sustainability, launching a state-scaled program could lead to financial instability and diminished long-term impact.

“Sustainability will depend on the ability to secure short-term funding while building institutional capacity and commitment.” - Michigan

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community has made significant strides in exploring the potential for scaling the ASAP model across diverse state contexts. This project has not only garnered national attention but also facilitated meaningful progress in addressing equity gaps and improving college completion rates through the replication of the ASAP model.

Through a robust peer learning community, the five states – Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Washington – engaged in important discussions, shared insights, and developed tailored strategies to align ASAP replication with their unique higher education landscapes. While each state faced its own set of challenges, from budget constraints to political dynamics, the collective efforts have paved the way for innovative solutions that could serve as models for other states. The state teams also benefited from working through particular challenges together, even meeting outside of learning community events to talk further as their planning progressed.

Although the future of scaled ASAP replication projects in these states remains to be seen, the groundwork laid through this learning community is promising. Several states have recognized the need for further infrastructure-building and capacity development before fully pursuing ASAP replication, while others are actively scoping new projects aligned with state priorities and philanthropic support, particularly in North Carolina and Colorado. This momentum signals a strong potential for continued scaling of the ASAP model, with the ultimate goal of improving student success and closing equity gaps nationwide.

As these states continue to refine their approaches and explore new opportunities for replication, the lessons learned from this project will be invaluable in guiding future efforts. The collaboration and shared learning within the SHEEO|ASAP College Completion Coalition Learning Community has strengthened the resolve of participating states and contributed to the broader conversation on how to effectively scale proven models like ASAP to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes in higher education. The promise of continued scaling and the potential impact on student success across the country make this work a critical contribution to the future of higher education.