

Recovery with Equity in Outreach

ICanGoToCollege.com
Enrollment and Retention
Efforts



California
Community
Colleges

I CAN
go to college



The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on college enrollment are not unique to California as the rest of the nation grapples with similar challenges, especially within our most vulnerable communities. In 2021, the state awarded nearly \$120 million to the California Community Colleges system to help recover enrollment and promote the retention of existing students. Of that total, \$11.9 million went to the ICanGoToCollege.com (I CAN) statewide awareness and enrollment campaign to conduct statewide marketing and outreach efforts. \$108 million went to California community college campuses to provide support to the statewide campaign with localized efforts on their campuses and in their communities. With this additional funding, the campaign supported efforts to help address declines in enrollment by those impacted the most: underserved communities and communities of color, including American Indian Alaskan Native (AIAN), Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black and African American, and Hispanic. Declines in enrollment among male and older students were also identified as areas of focus for the campaign.

The pandemic also played a role in a decline in financial aid application submissions. Twenty-six percent of prospective students in a recent survey conducted by the Chancellor's Office cited the need to work full-time as a barrier to enrollment, and a similar amount (24%) cited the cost of college as a barrier. Other factors, such as childcare, continue to be barriers to enrollment and student success. As a result, our students have been the most vulnerable and highly impacted by the pandemic relative to their peers at four-year colleges and universities.





Current Landscape

Nationally, from fall 2019 through fall 2021, enrollment at public two-year colleges fell 14.8%, the highest decline among postsecondary schools during that period, according to National Student Clearinghouse Research Center data. By comparison, undergraduate enrollment declined 4% at public four-year institutions. Public two-year colleges are also at their lowest level of enrollment in nearly 20 years (7.7 million students), according to the National Center for Education Statistics. California has been hit especially hard, with declines in enrollment at California community colleges between 20 – 24%.

The emergency funding became a crucial element in the efforts to amplify enrollment, allowing the campaign to execute many tactics previously deemed “out of reach” due to budgetary constraints and augmentation of existing strategies with proven success.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office used a portion of the funding to conduct statewide research. The research helped guide all aspects of the enrollment campaign including message development, media placements, website improvements and partnerships. The findings were also shared with colleges/districts and the Chancellor's Office actively encouraged them to use the information to help shape local college advertising and outreach efforts, with an emphasis on re-enrolling students who stopped out during the pandemic and retaining current students. In coordination with the college efforts, the I CAN statewide campaign focused on enrollment messaging to new students, with an emphasis on older and returning students ages 35 – 60, and high school juniors and seniors. Ninety percent of the enrollment funds allocated to the system went to the individual colleges for their local enrollment efforts, and 10% went to the Chancellor's Office for statewide campaign activities.

The campaign's funding also provided the opportunity to make advertising and outreach materials promoting awareness about enrollment, customizable for use by the colleges in their local efforts and further fostering synergy with the statewide campaign messaging and outreach.

Enrollment Blitz Campaigns

As part of the largest media buy in the history of the California Community Colleges, comprehensive “Enrollment Blitz” campaigns took place in August and December 2021, and January 2022, to stress the importance of enrolling or reenrolling at a community college. These timeframes were chosen in consultation with college Public Information Officers to determine the most appropriate timing to deploy enrollment messaging for the fall 2021 and spring and summer 2022 terms. More than 50 million digital impressions were captured during these blitz periods, with a 4th blitz planned for July 2022.

Student populations that saw the steepest enrollment declines due to the pandemic were the primary focus of the enrollment blitz efforts. During these timeframes, media ran at a higher-than-usual frequency, driving prospective students to ICanGoToCollege.com, our statewide, student-facing awareness and enrollment website. The I CAN campaign partnered with iHeartMedia to raise awareness about the value of a California community college education and encourage enrollment. As part of the substantial added value provided to the campaign, iHeartMedia held a sweepstake with a \$5,000 scholarship award for students to help pay for college costs and to incentivize Californians to pursue their academic and career training goals at a California community college. iHeartMedia continues to provide radio production and their network of on-air influencer talent to serve as ambassadors of the community college system in communities of color, at no cost to the campaign.

The enrollment and retention dollars have allowed us to reach more students than ever before through our paid media efforts.

Broadcast television, a robust out-of-home plan and in-language ads were previously utilized sparingly or were completely out of reach for the campaign due to budget constraints and the rising costs of advertising in California. During the 2021-22 academic year, these became regular components of our media buys. These changes in the media buy are critical to reaching parents and influencers of traditional college-aged students, and to reach older students who experienced particularly steep declines in enrollment during the pandemic. All of these elements came together to produce an effective, and synergistic media plan. Potential students were exposed to enrollment messages on campus, TV, streaming and terrestrial radio, social media and through online advertising. The more Californians are exposed to our messages, the more likely they are to take action and enroll.



New Audiences

A California community college campus is incredibly diverse. People from all walks of life comprise a unique student body requiring a thoughtful, and intentional effort to understand and connect with them.

Prior to the enrollment and retention resources being awarded, the campaign was focused on multicultural English-speaking communities, with an emphasis on Hispanic and Black and African American households. In addition, Spanish and Chinese in-language outreach and advertising were conducted throughout the state. The additional enrollment dollars allowed the campaign to expand outreach and advertising in language to Vietnamese audiences, and to American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) communities in 2021-22.

Directly addressing these audiences in their own voice and with trusted partners is critical to enrollment efforts. If messages, imagery and outreach activities are not carefully curated for each audience, there is minimal chance of resonating and leading to action. For example, through our research efforts, we found that it's important for Hispanic students to go to college close to their homes and families. For AIAN students, visual representation is extremely important. Through our research, critical insights were gained for all ethnic audiences that continue to inform our enrollment and retention efforts across all media and outreach channels.

The I CAN campaign is proud to partner with the following ethnic subcontractors to help ensure all communications resonate and are culturally relevant:

Naqmayam Communications (Naqcom)	American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) advertising and outreach
T&T Public Relations	Black and African American advertising and outreach
Imprenta Communications	Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Hispanic advertising and outreach
Digna Roque, DignaRoque.com	Hispanic advertising and outreach



American Indian Alaska Native Creative, Outreach and Advertising

For the first time, AIAN creative and media placements were included as part of the I CAN Awareness and Enrollment campaign. Ad-hoc meetings to discuss the state of AIAN recruitment and retention have been conducted to help build trust between the community colleges and the AIAN community. Additionally, informal reviews and advising from AIAN faculty on all AIAN advertising and marketing materials have been administered internally within the Chancellor's Office.

American Indian Alaska Native Photoshoot

Visual representation is extremely important to the AIAN audience. In order to see themselves at a California community college, they need to see themselves in the ads. To address this, a photoshoot was conducted at Cuyamaca College so the campaign has authentic imagery to enable authentic communication with this audience.

American Indian Alaska Native Podcast

California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Oakley was joined by Stanley Rodriguez, EdD (Kumeyaay Santa Ysabel Band of the Lipay Nation) from Cuyamaca Community College, and Marissa Hemstreet (Navajo), a Student at San Jose City College to discuss the concerted efforts to reach out to the State's tribal and Urban Indian populations, bringing much-needed awareness to the benefits of attending one of our 116 community colleges as well as information on available financial assistance to help cover the cost associated with education. The podcast was shared with 145 tribal organizations and groups to share via social media and e-newsletters.

Assemblymember James Ramos PSAs

Assemblymember James Ramos, the first California Indian elected to the California State Assembly recorded video and radio PSAs encouraging AIAN student enrollment. Three videos and one radio PSA were produced and distributed to 145 tribal organizations

and groups to share via social media and e-newsletters. To date, the radio PSA has run on Pala Rez Radio, Hoopa Tribal Radio and statewide as part of the radio buy with iHeartMedia. The radio PSA is slated to run again statewide the entire month of July to coincide with the next enrollment blitz.

Billboards

Three billboards placed near I-10 and I-15 in Rancho Cucamonga and San Bernardino feature AIAN student imagery to encourage enrollment among communities in seven tribal areas near these locations.

CBO Outreach

The campaign began partnering with the California Indian Museum & Cultural Center, Owens Valley Career Development Center and Pukú Cultural Community Services to encourage enrollment at California community colleges. Additional partners are planned for outreach and the campaign is in the process of onboarding additional community and tribal-based organizations.

Land Acknowledgment Statement

In the spring of 2022, the campaign developed a land acknowledgment statement in collaboration with tribal leaders for use by the Chancellor's Office, along with a toolkit and training for the 116 colleges to provide them with relevant information and guidance needed to work with local tribes to develop their own land acknowledgment statements. The California Community Colleges' land acknowledgment statement will encourage enrollment of AIAN students at California community colleges by fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment that honors and respects Native students and their ancestors.

The Land Acknowledgment statement and upcoming training are slated to be officially announced in August.



Vietnamese Creative, Outreach and Advertising

The enrollment funding allowed the campaign to create and launch an in-language campaign website and corresponding creative for Vietnamese communities. Joining English, Spanish and Chinese, Vietnamese officially became the fourth language of the I CAN campaign. In October 2021 the Vietnamese version of the I CAN website was launched. This language was chosen due to the large population of Vietnamese speakers in the state. With more than 540,000 people speaking Vietnamese at home, it's the third largest non-English language spoken in California. It is important to provide information in language because overall community college enrollment is on the decline, and research shows that parents and influencers often prefer to receive information in their native language and they play a critical role in students' decisions about college.

Through years of research and focus group testing with the AAPI community, we know that consulting with parents and guardians is extremely important. Oftentimes, English is a second language for AAPI parents, so making materials available to them in-language is critical. Students will continue to receive the messaging in English as it is generally their preferred language. By providing in-language information for parents and influencers we can create synergy with our collateral development across all languages.

Billboards

Vietnamese-language boards were in market from 11/8 – 12/5/2021 and again from 4/4 – 5/1/22 in neighborhoods across California with high-indexing Vietnamese populations in the following counties: Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego, Orange and Santa Clara. The purpose of these boards was to promote the Vietnamese language version of ICanGoToCollege.com and to drive them towards the site for information about programs and to enroll at a community college.

Media Relations

With Vietnamese advertising assets being a new component of the campaign, a concerted effort was made to establish relationships with Vietnamese media sources for future placements and pitching to share crucial enrollment information.

Statewide Partnerships



In April 2021 the I CAN campaign had 12 community and faith-based partners committed to sharing information about the value of community colleges and the availability of financial aid, career education programs and guaranteed transfer to four-year universities. **With the influx of the additional enrollment dollars, the campaign has increased the number of partners to 33 and is in the process of onboarding an additional seven partners by June 2022.**

Community and faith-based partners are onboarded with a thorough vetting and application process to understand how they uniquely serve vulnerable populations across the state. Relationship building and disseminating California community college information via community-trusted partners is critical to addressing the systemic racial inequities that play a significant role in enrollment decline.

Outreach partners are promoting campaign messaging via presentations, community events, one-on-one meetings, website demonstrations, YouTube videos, social media posts, community events, newsletters, and email blasts. These activities reach a variety of target audiences including: Black and African American, Hispanic, AIAN and AAPI communities; youth and young adults; formerly incarcerated persons; current and former foster youth; LGBTQ+ communities; older adults; people in recovery from mental health and substance use challenges; refugees; and recently immigrated youth and families.

Since the Phase 3 outreach program launched (Dec 2021-Feb 2022), 167,372 people have seen our messages; engagements (including likes, follows and reposts on social media, and interactions with staff at events and meetings) for the same time period were reported as 21,144 people.

As a direct result of the enrollment funding, the campaign has not only expanded statewide partnerships but also developed relationships with the partners and the communities they serve.

This allows the campaign to establish credibility, accessibility and trust. If the campaign was to no longer be around, these trusted and informed messengers within our community partner organizations can continue to spread the word about the benefits of a California community college education.

Media Relations

A core campaign strategy has always been an ongoing media relations effort with a focus on the general market, Hispanic, Black and African American and Chinese media. The additional enrollment funding allowed for expanded media relations efforts for each of these audiences as well as adding in-language outreach to Vietnamese outlets. Key placements from our expanded media relations outreach included enrollment news coverage with Univision affiliates across the state, Spectrum News, Sing Tao Daily, ONME and more.

In addition, the Chancellor's Office worked to inform student media from local California community colleges about the enrollment effort via virtual media briefings with California community college student newspaper reporters and Chancellor Oakley in December 2021 and February 2022. The Chancellor shared information on the status of enrollment, the impact on Black, African American, American Indian Alaskan Native and Hispanic students and the need to double down on helping all students succeed. Student journalists then wrote stories for their college newspapers, helping to spread the word among students, faculty and staff.

Earned media outreach is still underway, and to date, more than 60 placements have generated more than 37.3 million media impressions.



Expanded media relations efforts generated coverage around enrollment and facilitated the development of important relationships with in-language media and the Chancellor's Office, which will further support reaching the ethnic communities hit hardest during the pandemic. A recent Economic Impact Report found that on average, students who graduate from California community colleges with an associate degree will see an increase in earnings of \$11,100 each year compared to a person with a high school diploma or equivalent working in California. By ensuring members of ethnic communities have these opportunities and obtain diplomas, we can positively impact the economic vitality of the state.

Website Improvements

The [ICanGoToCollege.com](https://icangettextocollege.com) site is the backbone of the I CAN campaign. Serving as a one-stop-shop for all things California community colleges, the site contains all the information a current or prospective student, parent, guardian or influencer would need for their community college journey. Visitors to the site can find events in their area, connect directly to the college of their choice, or find information on degrees or certificates, financial aid, transfer, and Career Education programs. Enrollment messaging is woven throughout, with calls to action and links out to CCCApply driving students to enroll and providing a warm handoff to their local campus. Applying for college is difficult, and applicants don't want to feel like they're unsupported when going through the process. By connecting students to 1-on-1 assistance on their local campus, students can get the in-person support they need to complete forms, find out what aid is available, and learn more about programs. By providing this "warm handoff," students feel supported every step of the way as they embark on their higher education journey.

Usability testing lead to insights that further improved the site, making it user-friendly and easy to find information. For example, seeing diversity in imagery was important to students. As such, a conscious effort was made to show real students of all backgrounds or in non-traditional roles (ie an African American female studying computer science).

As a direct result of the enrollment funding, numerous updates were made to the site. The most noteworthy update was the launch of a Vietnamese version of the site in October 2021. The availability of the site in multiple languages ensures that parents and influencers, or older students whose primary language isn't English can still get the information they need to enroll or to understand the value of attending a California community college.

Reporting period:	7/12/21 (website launch date) – May 2022
Sessions:	924,242
New users:	805,789
New users per month:	80,579
Clicks to "Enroll now" button leading to CCCApply:	42,921
Average clicks to "Enroll now" per month:	4,292
Page views:	1,302,729



Financial Aid Workshops

Expansion of the Train the Trainer and Cash for College workshops

The I CAN campaign partnered with the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to develop specific Train the Trainer and Cash for College events to help get into our ethnic communities. Through research, we've heard time and time again that finances are the largest barrier facing ethnic communities when trying to attend college. Oftentimes, students assume they won't qualify for financial aid and automatically disqualify themselves by not applying. In some instances, students aren't even aware financial aid is available to help them pay for college expenses. These same points were raised by the Black and African American Advisory panel as well, which led to us piloting these workshops with the Black and African American community. Since then, we've expanded to include specific workshops for the Latino and Hispanic, AIAN, and AAPI communities.

To date, 12 workshops have been held with 990 attendees.



“I heard the words FAFSA and also for Black students... I was like, I’ll be there.”

- Caleb Green, Student,
Cash for College event attendee

Upcoming Activity



Enrollment Blitz

- Our enrollment push will be a dedicated, ongoing effort. Building off of the more than 50 million digital impressions captured during the August, December and January blitz periods, a 4th blitz running the entire month of July 2022 has been identified to help with summer and fall enrollment.

AIAN Quantitative Research

- The purpose of this research is to identify barriers and motivations to first-time enrollment in a community college for American Indian/Alaska Native students.
- The research will also isolate the reason for not returning to college among AIAN students who disenroll without completing a credential and characterize key messages that incorporate tribal traditions, cultures, and expectations with AIAN students to increase consideration, motivation and enrollment in community colleges.

Live Chat/Chatbot addition to [ICanGoToCollege.com](#)

- The idea for a live chat/chatbot feature came out of user testing to make the website more engaging and responsive to student needs.
- This is an important resource that allows for a more impactful user experience by providing a persistent level of responsiveness. With this feature, students can get their questions answered 24/7.
- Enrolling in classes can be difficult and overwhelming. The live chat/chatbot feature helps to break down barriers to enrollment by always being available to provide support and make the process smoother.

In Summary

The historic decline in enrollment will require sustained action to address; however, this timely enrollment fund allocation and the quick action by the I CAN campaign has meant that essential information and resources have rapidly reached the intended audiences. Feedback from these communities points to a confluence of factors impacting potential students and their decision to enroll—from increased economic hardships to mental health crises driven by the COVID-19 pandemic—all of which will require dedicated, ongoing and long term efforts to mitigate.

Repetition is critical for the messaging to have a chance to sink in and eventually lead to action by enrolling at a California community college. On average, a prospect needs to hear a message 7 – 8 times before they're likely to act on it. As the campaign is promoting a major life decision rather than a consumer product, the number of times a prospect needs to be exposed to our messages before taking action is even greater.

An extended effort is necessary to continue the activities described in this report. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has been an ongoing challenge, the campaign's response will need to be ongoing as well.

The Vision for Success aims to make sure students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities, eliminating achievement gaps once and for all. The students we're trying to reach as outlined in the Vision for Success were the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

California community colleges are not just a benefit to the students that enroll, but to the state as a whole. In FY 2018-19, California's community colleges added **\$128.2 billion** in income to the California economy, a value approximately equal to **4.2%** of the state's total gross state product (GSP) according to a recent economic impact report by Emsi-Burning Glass. Expressed in terms of jobs, California's community colleges supported **1.5 million jobs**. For perspective, the activities of the colleges and their students support **one out of every 16 jobs** in California. For every dollar of public money invested in California's community colleges, taxpayers will receive **\$2.10** in return over the course of students' working lives. The average annual rate of return for taxpayers is **5.4%**. An investment in California Community Colleges is an investment in everyone in the state.

As barriers caused by the pandemic continue to evolve, the I CAN campaign will continue to be nimble in its response to meet the needs of whatever challenges arise. To that end, the campaign is fully committed to meeting these new challenges head-on.