



2016 Project Degree Completion Award

Application Packet

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities 2016 Project Degree Completion Award Application Guidelines

Purpose

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) established the Project Degree Completion Award to achieve the following:

- Reward and bolster the current efforts of public universities that are successfully improving the retention and graduation of students;
- Collect effective campus-based models from successful public universities for other institutions to use to increase student retention and graduation; and
- Mobilize all colleges and universities to prioritize improving student retention and graduation outcomes.

The award, which includes a \$15,000 monetary prize for the winning institution to further its work, is open only to APLU institutions and serves to advance Project Degree Completion (PDC), a joint effort between APLU and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in which nearly 500 public colleges and universities have pledged to collectively award 3.8 million more degrees by 2025. Together, this increase will represent the public four-year institutions' contribution toward the national goal of having 60 percent of working age adults in the U.S. possess a college degree.

Application and Award Timeline

March 3	Applications distributed to all institutions.
April 1	Letter of Intent to apply due by 5pm EDT
May 2	Applications due by 5pm EDT
May & June	Review of applications
July 15	Up to five finalists announced.
November 13-15	Finalists recognized* and award recipient announced at the APLU Annual Meeting in Austin, TX.

*Finalists and award recipient are required to have institutional representatives, including the president or chancellor, at the APLU Annual Meeting.

General Information, Review Process, & Prizes

A seven member panel representing APLU member institutions, higher education, and other partners will review applications to select up to five finalists for the 2016 PDC Award. Finalists will be announced by July 15th and highlighted at the 2016 Commission on Access, Diversity, and Excellence's summer meeting.

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Each finalist will receive a plaque of recognition and will be showcased at a prominent session during the APLU Annual Meeting (November 13-15) in Austin, TX. A representative from each of the finalist institutions will present an overview of their work at APLU's Annual Meeting. Additionally, APLU will highlight the innovative degree completion strategies of each finalist within APLU's website.

The winner of the 2016 Project Degree Completion Award and recipient of a \$15,000 prize and will be announced at the 2016 APLU Annual Meeting. APLU recognizes the generous support of the Lumina Foundation for making the PDC Award possible.

While access is a significant milestone, the PDC Award draws attention to improvements in retention and graduation outcomes for bachelor's degree seeking students. Initiatives and programs that have increased the institution's retention and/or graduation outcomes at any time in the last three academic years (2012-2013, 2013-2014, or 2014-2015) will be considered. Outcomes can be measured in multiple ways including: decreases in achievement gaps, increases in retention rates, graduation rates for all students, or graduation rates of specific groups of students. In an effort to encourage institutions to apply who have sought to address particularly vexing challenges within higher education, the review panel will give special consideration to initiatives in line with the following three competitive preferences. Initiatives beyond these competitive preferences are also eligible for consideration.

- *Competitive Preference A:* Increasing the persistence rate of historically underserved student populations.
- *Competitive Preference B:* The use of integrated data systems to cultivate early warning systems and increased student services.
- *Competitive Preference C:* Decreasing time to degree for low-income students and first-generation college students (e.g., Federal TRIO initiatives).

Applications will be judged according to the following criteria and weighting scheme.

- Institutional Context, Problem Statement, and Significance of Effort (10%)
- Overview of Initiatives and Programs (10%)
- Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy (10%)
- Results of Initiatives and Programs (40%)
- Sustainability of Initiatives and Programs and Lessons Learned (30%)

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Eligibility

All APLU member institutions are eligible and invited to submit an application for the 2016 PDC Award. Initiatives (or programs) that have improved the institution's retention and/or graduation outcomes at any time in the last three academic years (i.e., 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014) will be considered. Previous award recipients are not eligible to apply in the two years immediately following receipt of the PDC Award (formerly the MVP Trailblazer and Opportunity Awards).

Submission Requirements

Letter of intent to apply (Due Friday, April 1, 2016, 5pm EDT) - Applicants are strongly encouraged, though not required, to submit a letter of intent to apply. This non-binding letter should be signed by the institution's president or chancellor and identify the primary contact person for the application (including name, title, email address, and phone number). The letter can be brief, but may include information regarding the institution's mission, student success goals, or overall strategy related to improving retention and graduation outcomes. The letter of intent to apply should be submitted electronically (PDF) to pdca@aplu.org.

Application (Due Monday, May 2, 2016, 5pm EDT) – The PDC Award application must be submitted electronically to pdca@aplu.org. Only one application per institution is allowed. Applications should provide clear and compelling information about the institution's efforts toward improving student retention and/or graduation outcomes. For detailed instructions on completing the application, see the PDC Award Application Packet available in following pages.

Questions?

Please direct all inquiries to:

Travis T. York, Ph.D.
Director of Student Success,
Research, & Policy
tyork@aplu.org (202) 478-6047

Christine Keller, Ph.D.
Vice President of
Research & Policy
ckeller@aplu.org (202) 478-6043

Project Degree Completion Steering Committee Members

- ❖ Jared Avery, Ph.D., Associate Director, Office of Access and Success, APLU
- ❖ RoSusan D. Bartee, Ph.D., Interim Vice President of Office of Access & Success, APLU
- ❖ David Edelson, Associate Director of Public Affairs, APLU
- ❖ Christine Keller, Ph.D., Vice President of Research & Policy Analysis, APLU
- ❖ Jeff Lieberman, Vice President of Public Affairs, APLU
- ❖ Travis T. York, Ph.D., Director of Student Success, Research, & Policy, APLU

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Submission Instructions

- A letter expressing an institution's intent to apply is strongly encouraged and should be submitted to pdca@aplu.org.
- The complete PDC Award application must be submitted electronically to pdca@aplu.org as a single PDF file
- Applications should be formatted as specified below are not to exceed 15 pages (excluding tables, charts, and/or images within the appendix).

Application Checklist

Assemble the required sections in the following order:

- ___ Institution Contact Information and Abstract Cover Page
- ___ Table of Contents
- ___ Sec. 1: Institutional Context, Problem Statement, and Significance of Effort
- ___ Sec. 2: Overview of Initiative
- ___ Sect.3: Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy
- ___ Sec. 4: Results of Initiative
- ___ Sec. 5: Sustainability of Initiative and Lessons Learned
- ___ Letter of Intent *OR* Letter of Endorsement from President/Chancellor*
- ___ Appendix (optional)

If an institution did **not submit a letter of intent, then the application packet must include a letter of endorsement from the president or chancellor.*

Formatting Guidelines

The application should adhere to the following formatting guidelines.

- Font/Type style: Times New Roman, 12-point
- Margins: 1" all around (left-hand, right-hand, top and bottom)
- Line Spacing: Double-spaced
- Page Number Placement: Bottom center

This Application Packet is formatted to the above specifications and can be used as a template for entering the application information. The submission requirements and instructions within the Application Packet can be removed as appropriate.

PDC Award Application Packet

Cover Page

Institutional Contact Information

Date Submitted: mm/dd/yyyy

Name of Institution:

Name of Initiative/Program:

Primary Institution Contacts: Full Name,
Title of the Primary Contact Person,
Address,
Phone Number,
and Email Address

Abstract

Provide an overview of the initiative/program being submitted for consideration. Abstracts must be 350 words or less, double-spacing throughout. Abstracts may be used on APLU websites and publications.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Institutional Context, Problem Statement, and Significance of Effort

Section 2: Overview of Initiative

Section 3: Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy

Section 4: Results of Initiative

Section 5: Sustainability of Initiative and Lessons Learned

Letter of Intent *OR* Endorsement from President/Chancellor

Appendix (optional)

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Section 1: Institutional Context, Problem Statement, and Significance of Effort (10%)

Describe the institutional context and significance of the retention and/or graduation effort at the institution. Indicate and demonstrate the problem intended to be addressed by the initiative and discuss its significance. Include the following information.

- Descriptions of the institutional context, such as:
 - Mission of institution – Historically Black College or University, Hispanic-Serving Institution, Land-Grant University, etc.
 - Student body characteristics – racial/ethnic composition, number/percent low income or Pell-grant students, etc.
 - Admissions criteria – standardized test scores, average high school GPA, etc.
 - Institution’s level of community engagement – local, state, national, international.
 - Other relevant contextual information
- Demonstrate the problem being addressed with supporting evidence, such as:
 - Size and characteristics of the targeted student population - low income, first generation, underserved group, student veteran, etc.
 - Explain the barriers experienced by the population and how said barriers affected their retention or graduation.
- Discuss the retention/graduation outcomes selected for improvement (e.g., year to year retention rate, degrees awarded, time to degree, achievement gaps) and the rationale for this choice.

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Section 2: Overview of Initiative (10%)

Describe the initiative that resulted in improvements in student retention and/or graduation outcomes at any time in the last three academic years (i.e., 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015). Include the following information:

- The goals and objectives of the initiative.
- How the initiative changed or augmented any previous efforts to improve retention and/or graduation outcomes.
- How the objectives of the initiative align to the demonstrated problem experienced by students (Identified in Section 1).
- How the results of the initiative were assessed, including the identification of the data or metrics used to determine effectiveness, comparative impact (either by benchmarked data or a comparable control group), and achievement of objectives.
- Initial investment or start-up costs as well as ongoing costs to continue the initiative or program. A budget may be included in the Appendix.

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Section 3: Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy (10%)

Summarize the implementation and institutional buy-in strategy, focusing on the implementation process and how the commitment of the university community and additional stakeholders were achieved. Include the following information.

- An overview of the implementation plan and timeline.
- The role and importance of technology in the implementation of initiative/program, if applicable.
- How were key stakeholders identified and then engaged in the implementation of the initiative/program?
 - Key Stakeholders include those within the institution and may include those within the wider community.
 - How was buy-in accomplished for these groups (e.g., communication strategies, etc.)?

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Section 4: Results of Initiative (40%)

Describe the outcomes of the initiative that improved the retention and/or graduation outcomes of the targeted student group during any time in the last three academic years (i.e., 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014). Briefly restate the retention/graduation goals (as detailed in Section 1) and provide detailed discussion of the outcomes associated with each goal.

Evidence may include both quantitative and qualitative measures, but should include, at a minimum, metrics for the target population that show improvement in retention and/or graduation outcomes that can be reasonably attributed to the initiative or program. To demonstrate the outcomes achieved, trend data for periods before, during, and after the implementation of the initiatives or programs should be provided. Institutions are encouraged to submit data from peer institutions or national data as points of comparison. If initiatives or programs targeted a subset of students at the institutions, also provide parallel metrics for an appropriate comparison group of students at the institution. Graduation rates may be reported using the traditional federal graduation rates (IPEDS) or the Student Achievement Measure (SAM).

Examples of evidence include, but are not limited, to the following:

- Trend data indicating changes in retention rates.
- Trend data indicating changes in graduation rates.
- Trend data indicating changes in the number of bachelor's degrees awarded.
- Trend data indicating changes in the time-to-degree.
- Closing of retention and/or graduation gaps between student groups.
- Other metrics as appropriate.

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Section 5: Sustainability of Initiative and Lessons Learned (30%)

Explain how the institution plans to sustain, modify, or expand the initiative being recommended for the PDC award. Include an overview of lessons learned during program implementation and considerations for broader scalability. Other information may include the following:

- Sustainability
 - Outline the future goals and objectives of the initiative.
 - Describe the structures, systems, people, and/or financial models in place to support the continuation of the initiative.
 - Describe the process that will be used to evaluate the ongoing success and/or effectiveness of the initiative.
 - What was the impact of the initiative on institutional policies or practices?
Institutional culture? Faculty, staff, and students?
- Scalability & Replicability
 - If applicable, how do you plan to increase the scale of the initiative?
 - Do you believe the initiative can be successfully replicated or transferred to other institutions? Why or why not?
- Lessons Learned
 - What was the biggest challenge in implementing the initiative, and how was the challenge overcome or mitigated?
 - What are the most important considerations for an institution wanting to replicate the initiative?

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Letter of Intent *OR* Letter of Endorsement from President/Chancellor

If your institution submitted a letter of intent to apply by April 1, 2016, please include it here. If your institution did not submit a letter of intent to apply, please provide a letter of endorsement from the institution's president or chancellor.

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Appendix

Optional section that may include references (APA citation format), tables, charts, images, letters of support, etc.