



2015  
PROJECT  
DEGREE  
COMPLETION  
AWARD

APPLICATION PACKET



## **Association of Public and Land-grant Universities 2015 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**

<b>Monday, May 4</b>	Applications distributed to all institutions.
<b>Friday, May 29</b>	Letter of Intent to apply due by 5pm EDT
<b>Tuesday, June 30</b>	Applications due by 5pm EDT
<b>July</b>	Review of applications
<b>July 30-August 1</b>	Up to five finalists announced at National Access, Diversity, and Excellence Summit
<b>November 15-17</b>	Finalists recognized* and award recipient announced at the APLU Annual Meeting

\*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 2015 PDC Award. Finalists

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will be announced at the 2015 National Access, Diversity, and Excellence Summit on July 30-August 1, 2015 in Miami, Florida. Each finalist will receive a plaque of recognition and will be showcased at a prominent session during the APLU Annual Meeting (November 15-17 in Indianapolis) at which a representative from each institution will present an overview of their work and sit on a panel to discuss innovative degree completion practices.

The winner of the 2015 Project Degree Completion Award and recipient of the \$15,000 prize will be announced at the 2015 APLU Annual Meeting. APLU recognizes the Lumina Foundation for making the PDC Award possible through its generous support.

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 (2011-2012, 2012-2013, or 2013-2014) will be considered. Outcomes can be measured in decreases in achievement gaps, and/or increases in retention and graduation outcomes for all students or a specific group of students at an institution.

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

- Institutional Mission and Significance of Retention/Graduation Effort (15%)
- Overview of Initiatives and Programs (10%)
- Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy (5%)
- Results of Initiatives and Programs (40%)
- Sustainability of Initiatives and Programs and Lessons Learned (30%)

### **Eligibility**

All APLU member institutions are eligible and invited to submit an application for the 2015 PDC Award. Initiatives and 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, May 29, 5pm EDT).** All applicants are strongly encouraged 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 it may include

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some information about the institution's mission, student success goals, or overall strategy related to improving retention and graduation outcomes. The letter of intent to apply, which is not required but is strongly encouraged, should be submitted electronically (in PDF) to [fdc@aplu.org](mailto:fdc@aplu.org).

**Applications (Due Tuesday, June 30, 2015, 5pm EDT).** The PDC Award application must be submitted electronically to [fdc@aplu.org](mailto:fdc@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 beginning on the following page.

### Questions?

Please direct all inquiries to:

Jared Avery, Ph.D.  
Associate Director  
APLU Office of Access and Success  
[javery@aplu.org](mailto:javery@aplu.org) or 202-478-6034

RoSusan D. Bartee, Ph.D.  
Interim Vice President  
APLU Office of Access and Success  
[rbartee@aplu.org](mailto:rbartee@aplu.org) or 202-478-6056

## PDC Award Application Packet

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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](mailto:pdca@aplu.org) by Friday, May 29, 5pm EDT.
- The complete PDC Award application must be submitted electronically to [pdca@aplu.org](mailto:pdca@aplu.org) by 5pm EDT Tuesday, June 30, 2015. For your convenience, to download this file as a Word document so you can enter your award information directly into this application template, [click here](#).
- Applications submissions should be in a single PDF file and should not 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
- \_\_\_ Table of Contents
- \_\_\_ Section 1: Institutional Mission/Significance of Retention/Graduation Effort
- \_\_\_ Section 2: Overview of Initiative/Program
- \_\_\_ Section 3: Description of Implementation and Institutional Buy-In Strategy
- \_\_\_ Section 4: Results of Initiative/Program
- \_\_\_ Section 5: Sustainability of Initiative/Program and Lessons
- \_\_\_ 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: 1.5" left-hand, 1.25" right-hand, 1" 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*

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*instructions within the Application Packet can be removed as appropriate.*

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- Date Submitted:** *Date*
- Name of Institution:** *Type the name of the institution.*
- Name of Initiative/Program:** *Type the name of the retention/graduation initiative/program.*
- Primary Institution Contacts:** *Type the Full Name(s) and Title(s) of the Primary Contact Person(s), Address(es), Phone Number(s), and Email Address(es)*

### **Abstract**

Provide an overview of the initiative/program being submitted for consideration.

Abstracts must be 350 words or less, double-spacing throughout. Abstracts will be used on websites and in publications.

# PDC Award Application Packet

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## Table of Contents

Section 1: Institutional Mission and Significance of Retention or Graduation Effort

Section 2: Overview of Initiative or Program

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

Section 4: Results of Initiative or Program

Section 5: Sustainability of Initiative or Program and Lessons Learned

Letter of Intent or Letter of Endorsement

Appendix (optional)



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### **Section 1: Institutional Mission and Significance of Retention or Graduation**

#### **Effort (15%)**

Describe the institutional context and significance of the retention and/or graduation effort at the institution. Include the following information.

- Description of the institutional context, such as:
  - Mission of institution – historically Black college or university, Hispanic-serving institution, land-grant university, etc.
  - Characteristics of student body – racial/ethnic composition, number/percent low income or Pell-grant students, etc.
  - Admissions criteria – standardized test scores, average high school grade point, etc.
  - Institution’s level of community engagement – local, state, national, international.
  - Other relevant contextual information
- The retention/graduation outcomes selected for improvement (e.g. year to year retention rate, degrees awarded, time to degree, achievement gaps) and the reason for the choice.
- The size and characteristics of the student population whose retention or graduation outcomes were targeted for improvement (e.g., low income, first generation, underrepresented minority group, student veteran, etc.). Explain the barriers experienced by the students that adversely affected their retention or graduation.

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### **Section 2: Overview of Initiative or Program (10%)**

Describe the initiative or program, which resulted in improvements in student retention and/or graduation outcomes at any time in the last three academic years (i.e., 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014). Include the following information:

- The goals and objectives of the program/initiative.
- How the initiative/program changed or augmented any previous efforts to improve retention and/or graduation outcomes.
- How the objectives of the initiative/program align to the barriers experienced by students (as identified in Section 1).
- How the results of the initiative/program were assessed, including the identification of the data or metrics used to determine effectiveness, impact, 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 (5%)**

Summarize the implementation and institutional buy-in strategy, focusing on the implementation process and how the commitment of the university community was 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? How was buy-in accomplished for these groups (e.g., communication strategies, etc.)?

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### **Section 4: Results of Initiative or Program (40%)**

Describe the outcomes of the initiative/program that improved the retention and/or graduation outcomes of the selected student group at 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 list 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 or graduation outcomes that can be reasonably attributed to the initiative or program. To demonstrate the improvements achieved, data for periods before, during, and after the implementation of the initiatives or programs should be provided. Institutions are also 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 all undergraduate students at the institution. Graduation rates may be reporting using the traditional federal graduation rates (IPEDS) or the Student Achievement Measure (SAM).

Examples of evidence include 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.
- Other metrics as appropriate.

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### **Section 5: Sustainability of Initiative or Program and Lessons Learned (30%)**

Explain how the institution plans to sustain, modify, or expand the initiative/program 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:

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

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

Unless a letter of intent to apply was submitted by May 29, 2015, please include a letter of endorsement from the institution's president or chancellor.

### **Appendix (optional)**

May include tables, charts, images, letters of support, etc.