



ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC &
LAND-GRANT
UNIVERSITIES

EXCELLENCE IN STUDENT SUCCESS AWARD





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Overview of the Award

The Excellence in Student Success Award recognizes APLU member institutions that demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to improving student outcomes through intentional, coordinated, and sustainable strategies. This award celebrates institutions that are advancing student success as a systemic priority that align leadership, policy, and practice to ensure students thrive academically, professionally, and personally.

The award recognizes systems of practice, not individual programs. Successful applicants will demonstrate how multiple dimensions of the student experience are addressed through coordinated institutional action and supported by leadership, data, and sustained organizational commitment.

Purpose

The Excellence in Student Success Award aims to:

- Recognize institutions demonstrating leadership and innovation in student success
- Highlight comprehensive strategies that address multiple dimensions of the student experience
- Showcase how institutions align leadership, policy, and resources to improve outcomes
- Generate collective learning about effective institutional approaches to student success

Who Should Apply?

Applications are welcome from all APLU member institutions that:

- Have implemented institution-wide student success strategies
- Can demonstrate measurable and sustained outcomes
- Are working across multiple domains of student experience
- Are willing to share insights with the broader higher education community

Eligibility

Institutional finalists are ineligible for the award for one academic year. Institutional winners are ineligible for the award for two academic years.

How to Apply?

The Excellence in Student Success Award must be submitted through our Application Portal

Key Dates

Full Application Opens	April 3, 2026
Final Application Deadline	July 3, 2026
Finalist Notification	September 1, 2026
Winner Announced at the APLU Annual Meeting	November 2026

Award Benefits

Institutions recognized as finalists or award recipients will receive:

- National recognition through APLU communications and events
- Opportunities to share strategies with peer institutions

- Visibility at the APLU Annual Meeting
- Inclusion in APLU case studies and national reports

Questions?

If you need assistance, please contact ESS@aplu.org

Section 1: How to Apply

The Excellence in Student Success Award recognizes comprehensive institutional strategies, not isolated programs. Institutions are expected to demonstrate how their student success efforts operate as a coordinated system supported by leadership, policy, and sustained organizational practice.

Application Components:

Institutions may submit an application consisting of the following elements:

- **Institutional Focus Areas**
Institutions will identify up to three primary areas where their student success strategy is most concentrated and provide supporting narratives describing the institutional strategies and outcomes.
- **Institutional Levers**
Institutions will identify up to four organizational practices or conditions that most strongly enable their student success work, and provide supporting narratives describing how institutional structures, policies, and practices support student success.
- **Integrated Strategy Narrative**
A synthesis narrative describing how these elements work together as a coherent, institution-wide strategy.
- **Evidence of Impact**
Quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrating sustained improvements in student outcomes.
- **Letter of Support**
A one-page letter from a senior institutional leader (preferably the president or chancellor).

Submission Instructions:

All applications must be submitted by July 3, 2026, to be considered for the award.

Follow Up:

Finalists will be notified by September 1, 2026, and may be invited to provide additional context, content, or information. Selected applications may be developed into shareable case studies to benefit the broader APLU community.

Section 2: Evaluation Process Overview

Evaluation Approach:

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of higher education leaders and practitioners. Reviewers will assess applications holistically, with particular attention to:

- Breadth of student success domains addressed
- Coherence and intentionality of institutional strategy
- Strength of leadership and organizational alignment
- Evidence of sustained student outcomes

Scoring Rubric:

Applications will be evaluated using the following weighted categories:

1. **Comprehensive Coverage of Student Success (25%)**
The extent to which the institution demonstrates coordinated progress across multiple dimensions of the student experience.
2. **Institutional Levers and Alignment (20%)**
Strength of leadership, governance, faculty and staff engagement, student partnership, technology use, and evidence-informed practice.
3. **Design Quality and Intentionality (20%)**
Clarity, coherence, and strategic integration of institutional student success efforts.
4. **Demonstrated Impact (25%)**
Evidence of sustained improvements in student outcomes aligned with institutional goals.
5. **Scaled Design and Replicability (10%)**
Durability, scalability, and relevance of practices for peer institutions.

Review Stages:

1. **Initial Screening:** Applications will be screened to ensure they meet submission requirements and provide all necessary materials.
2. **Review Panel:** The panel will review and score eligible applications based on the scoring rubric.
3. **Finalist Selection:** The highest-scoring applications will advance as finalists, and a maximum of four institutions will be selected.
4. **Winner Selections:** The panel will deliberate on selecting one winner from the finalists based on the strength of their application and additional materials.

Section 3: Application Instructions

The application must be submitted through the web portal. Each section is divided into submission pages to ensure clarity and ease of use.

Instructions:

Please complete the application by July 3, 2026. This is an extensive application requiring detailed institutional information and some long-form responses. Before beginning, we strongly suggest that applicants:

- Coordinate responses across academic affairs, student affairs, institutional research, and senior leadership.
- Prepare responses offline prior to submission.
- Gather supporting institutional data in advance.
- Only one submission will be accepted per institution.
- The submitters' information will be collected and used as the primary contact for all subsequent Award communications.

Technical Notes:

Applications are to be submitted only through the [GivePulse](#) platform.

Creating an Account and Logging In

If you do not already have a GivePulse account, click the grey person icon in the upper right-hand corner and select the 'Sign Up' button. Follow the prompts to create your account. Once completed, you will be redirected back to the APLU landing page. If you already have an account, simply click that same grey person icon, select 'Log In,' and enter your credentials.

Starting the Application

1. From the landing page on APLU's website, navigate to GivePulse through the "Application Portal" button.
2. Select the [Excellence in Student Success Award](#).
3. On the new page, the application will load and open.
4. Please fill out all required sections. Note that each narrative section has an assigned word count that you must follow.
5. Ensure all fields marked with a red asterisk are completed.

Saving Your Progress

If you would like to save your progress scroll to the bottom of the page and select “Save Draft”. Please note if you plan to complete your application over multiple sessions, you will need to save your progress.

Locating a Saved Draft

To find a draft you’ve previously saved:

1. Log in to your account.
2. Hover your cursor over the 'My Activity' tab in the upper right corner.
3. From the drop-down menu, select 'Surveys.'
4. You will be taken to your survey dashboard where you can see your draft. Click it to resume your application.

Submission

When all required fields are complete, select the 'Submit' button at the bottom of the page. You will see a confirmation screen and receive an automated email from GivePulse confirming your submission. Please note that you will not be able to update your application once submitted. If you have questions or concerns after your submission, please contact **ESS@aplu.org**.

Consent:

When submitting the application, you will consent to APLU’s use of the responses. The data collected through the application is only accessible to APLU staff and external reviewers to determine the winner of the award. APLU will make all reasonable efforts to obtain agreement from external reviewers not to disclose information sent as part of this award to other parties. If applicable, APLU may present overall trends and combined results to advance understandings of student success practices across member institutions. If an institution is named in any subsequent report, explicit permission to disclose institution-specific information will be sought from the individual named in the application.

Section 4: Application Prompts

1. Institutional Focus Areas

Select up to three areas that best reflect where your institution has focused its student success efforts. These should represent the strongest and most developed components of your institutional strategy. (Select up to three)

- **Improving access to essential services and affordability**
(e.g., financial support, advising access, simplified processes, proactive outreach)
- **Strengthening students' sense of belonging and community**
(e.g., mentoring, campus climate, wellbeing, student-centered learning environments)
- **Supporting career readiness and workforce preparation**
(e.g., internships, career advising, employer partnerships, experiential learning)
- **Advancing timely degree completion and academic progression**
(e.g., curricular redesign, guided pathways, retention initiatives)
- **Connecting learning to civic and public purpose**
(e.g., community engagement, service learning, public mission initiatives)

2. Institutional Focus Area Narratives

Recommended Word Count (~300 words per selected area)

For each selected focus area, describe:

- The primary institutional strategies, programs, or initiatives in this area.
- How these efforts address student needs and institutional priorities
- How outcomes in this domain have improved over time

3. Institutional Levers

Select up to four organizational practices or conditions that most strongly enable your student success strategy. (Select up to four)

- **Alignment of senior leadership and institutional priorities**
- **Use of data and evidence to guide decision-making**
- **Engagement and development of faculty and staff**
- **Use of technology to support student success**
- **Partnerships with students in designing solutions**
- **Ability to scale and sustain initiatives over time**

4. Institutional Lever Narratives

Recommended Word Count (~150 words per selected Driver)

For each selected lever, describe:

- The structures, policies, or practices in place
- How this condition supports coordination, sustainability, and scale

5. Integrated Strategy Narrative

Recommended Word Count (~400 words)

Describe how your selected focus areas and institutional levers work together as an intentional, coordinated institutional strategy for advancing student success. This narrative should address leadership alignment, governance structures, and strategic coherence.

6. Evidence of Impact

Recommended Word Count (~400 words)

Describe the key outcomes associated with your student success strategy. Include:

- Quantitative metrics (Note: APLU will pull IPEDS data following your submission)
- Qualitative evidence where appropriate
- Baseline comparisons and trends over time

6b. Impact Data Upload

(Optional, but Recommended)

- **File Type:** PDF, DOC, EXCEL
- **Maximum File Size:** 25 MB
- **File Naming:** InstitutionName_Data (e.g., APLU_Data)

7. Letter of Support

Recommended Word Count (~200 words)

A one-page letter from a senior institutional leader (preferably president or chancellor) affirming the institution's commitment to student success.

- **File Type:** PDF only
- **Maximum File Size:** 25MB
- **File Naming:** InstitutionName_Letter (e.g., APLU_Letter)

Additional Guidance (Questions 6 and 7)

Supporting materials may be submitted via SharePoint, Google Drive, or Dropbox links. Do not submit PowerPoint files, but folders are permitted. Please use your institution's official name in all file and folder titles.

Following Submission

After institutional applications are submitted, the individual who applied will receive a confirmation email. Submission also notifies APLU to retrieve enrollment, retention, and graduation data across federally identified demographics from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Technical Support

For technical assistance with the application, portal, or submission questions, please contact ESS@aplu.org. *We look forward to learning more about the great work happening at your institution!*