Powered by Publics Learning Memo:
The Urban Cluster

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Each cluster in APLU's Powered by Publics initiative is working to refine, implement, and scale innovative practices that address shared challenges among the participating institutions. This Powered by Publics learning memo highlights universities in the Urban Cluster **(a list of institutions in this cluster is included at the end of this memo)**.

The cluster is led by Wayne State University President M. Roy Wilson. The Urban Cluster is comprised of 11 urban-serving universities that serve many of our nation's underrepresented, low-income, and adult learners, while advancing high-quality teaching, research, and community-engagement.

The cluster agreed upon the following purpose statement to guide its work: "Our aim is to work collaboratively to spur innovation at our institutions by identifying and implementing equitable practices promoting college affordability, improving financial aid practices and policies, and shortening time to degree." As the work of the cluster continues to develop, each step is evaluated to align with this mission.

After contributing to a multi-institutional inventory of in progress or successful practices, the cluster institutions created a "heat map" to indicate momentum and common interest in exploring mission-related topics. The inventory revealed how much cluster institutions have already done around creative financial aid solutions and the impact they've had on student success. Below is a sampling of some of these practices.

Wayne State University – DetroitEd411
Using a regional approach to boosting degree attainment for adult learners, Wayne State University, along with the Detroit Regional Chamber launched DetroitEd411, an artificial intelligence solution providing on-demand answers to enrollment, financial aid, and other needs-related assistance questions to prospective students via Facebook Messenger. DetroitEd411 was launched after success from Wayne State's bot, W the Warrior, which focused on current students, navigating deadlines, and other barriers that prevent students from progressing through college.

University of South Alabama – Scholarship Earn Back Program
The Scholarship Earn Back Program targets students who lost a university scholarship due to poor academic performance. Students have the opportunity to earn back their scholarship as early as the

following semester by participating in a series of learning activities and reaching eligibility thresholds. Program participants attend a workshop highlighting metacognitive skills and self-checking; prioritization and goal setting; and programming on campus resources. Each participant meets individually with a graduate assistant coach and discusses their progress and plan for scholarship recovery. Approximately one-third of students who participated in the program earned back their scholarships, and were in good academic standing entering the subsequent semester.

University of Toledo – Rocket Recovery Emergency Grant
The Rocket Recovery Emergency Grant assists low-income undergraduate students who experience a financial emergency, such as sudden housing and transportation related costs. For students with an expected family contribution of $7,000 or less, experiencing an emergency can force them to choose between continuing to enroll in school or paying for these unexpected and crippling costs. Too many are forced to stop-out of college as a result. Students can apply to receive up to $1,000 to meet their emergency needs.

Cleveland State University – Last Mile Grant
The Last Mile grant provides up to $3,000 per semester to cover tuition and expenses for students who have exhausted their financial aid options and are within two semesters of graduating. Recipients are required to attend supplemental learning activities such as workshops and academic coaching addressing common academic success barriers. Over 90 percent of students receiving grants have graduated in the two years since the program's inception.

Looking Ahead to 2020

To advance its work, the cluster divided into three subcommittees exploring prioritized focus areas: completion grants, one-stop services, and expanding need-based aid. The subcommittees met throughout the summer to explore promising practices, share experiences, and begin designing topic-specific tools/resources that address affordability, financial aid, and reducing time to degree.
In year two of cluster work, the institutions will act upon the recommendations of the subcommittees and implement deliverables from a uniquely urban lens. They will also explore change management, change leadership, and systems orientation in order to infuse these principles into their student success work.

Institutions in the Urban Cluster:

- Cleveland State University
- Florida International University
- Jackson State University
- Morgan State University
- University of Colorado Denver
- University of Memphis
- University of New Orleans
- University of South Alabama
- University of Toledo
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- Wayne State University