

Action/Information Item

California Student Aid Commission

Consideration and Approval of Outreach Funding for 2006-07

In 2003, the Commission adopted a three-year comprehensive outreach plan to expand college access and opportunity through the Cal Grant Entitlement Program and set aside \$25 million from the Student Loan Operating Fund for its support. The 2006-07 academic year will be the fourth year that the Commission seeks to fund a Cal Grant public awareness campaign and to support the California Cash for College application workshop campaign.

Commission staff recommends \$2,580,000 in funding for the Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign and the California Cash for College program for the coming year. In the absence of appropriate funding, the Commission will be unable to maintain and build upon the momentum of the previous Cal Grant Campaigns and Cash for College activities.

Both the Campaign and Cash for College are significantly supported by various statewide and local efforts to expand college opportunity through the availability of financial aid. This funding proposal is matched by local and regional funding, logistic and in-kind support from state legislators, local elected government and education officials, community-based organizations, corporate sponsors, and others. The Campaign is leveraged by an estimated \$4.3 million in pro-bono activities, and supports free professional, local assistance with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Cal Grant grade point average (GPA) Verification forms to students and parents statewide.

Earlier this year, Commission staff reported an estimated balance of \$ 5 million of the initial allocation remained unspent. At this time, the Commission staff is working with ED FUND staff to provide the Commission with a final reconciliation of outreach expenditures.

Recommended Action: The Commission is asked to approve \$2,580,000 in funding for the 2006-07 public awareness campaign and California Cash for College as requested.

Responsible Staff: Steve Caldwell, Acting Chief
Outreach & Public Relations
Division

Carole Durante, Manager
Public Relations Branch

2007 CAL GRANT PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

ISSUE: SHOULD THE COMMISSION CONTINUE TO FUND A CAL GRANT PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN?

The California Student Aid Commission's primary administrative responsibility is California's largest intersegmental postsecondary education financial aid program, the Cal Grant Program. The Cal Grant Program, significantly expanded in 2000 into an entitlement program for graduating high school seniors and other students, correlates directly with the Commission's Mission: "To make education beyond high school financially accessible to all Californians." By publicizing Cal Grants and assisting students, parents and student influencers with the application forms for financial aid in general, and a Cal Grant specifically, the Commission increasingly fosters a college-going culture in California.

How does the Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign support the Commission's Mission?

- **Social Marketing/Education** – The Campaign provides a significant avenue for marketing concepts about college accessibility and affordability to students through wide-spread public relations and media activities. Among the direct products of these activities are early outreach to children and families, and strong outreach to California's diverse ethnicities. Messaging includes the concepts that financial assistance is available and that continuing with education beyond high school is accessible, attainable, and may lead to better jobs and a better life in general.
- **Program Support** – The Campaign elicits support for the Cal Grant Program by educating Legislators, community organizations, potential corporate sponsors and others on the Cal Grant opportunity for students and families. These groups assist the Commission in helping to maximize the Commission's budget for the Campaign by conducting Cal Grant workshops and other public events, disseminating Cal Grant materials, and leveraging limited resources by providing pro-bono marketing and media support, among other activities.
- **Individual Assistance** – The Campaign supports and advertises a statewide program of local workshops and other activities that offer pragmatic assistance to students, their parents and other influencers with required forms to meet financial aid application deadlines. Campaign messaging, such as "Help is available, so just apply," drives students to local high school and Cash for College workshops where they receive free, professional, hands-on assistance with the application forms, and drives them to Web sites that provide information on financial aid and the application processes.

BACKGROUND:

2000 and 2001-02 Campaigns

The legislation that expanded the Cal Grant Program in 2000 to an entitlement program did not include funding of a public awareness and outreach campaign. The initial Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign of 2001-02 was sponsored by a generous but small grant from a California educational foundation. Advertising and marketing activities were focused primarily on Los Angeles and San Diego counties, and included limited radio and print ads and a sponsorship by a major supermarket chain.

2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05 Campaigns

Realizing that substantial support from a public relations and advertising firm was necessary for statewide promotion of the newly expanded Cal Grant Program, the Commission has supported funding for a broad-based Public Awareness Campaign each year since 2002-03 from the Commission/EDFUND's Student Loan Operating Fund. In 2005-06, funding for the statewide public awareness campaign was reduced from \$3 million to \$2 million and incorporated a focus on specific priority school areas.

The annual Cal Grant Public Awareness and Outreach Campaigns for 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05 were contracted, statewide Campaigns that incorporated all aspects of public relations, media relations (including television ads), legislative outreach, corporate sponsorships, pro-bono ads by popular teen music and television stars, infusion efforts onto high school campuses, direct mail ads to teens and additional direct mailings to parents and other influencers. The Campaigns leveraged Commission funds and enjoyed increasing corporate support.

In addition, the Commission and the Campaign developed a College Cash Box of materials that was distributed statewide to high school counseling and teaching staff to assist with marketing the Cal Grant Program on high school campuses and to provide (at no cost to the schools) the tools for teaching and assisting students with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (or FAFSA) in the classroom.

During these Campaigns, the California Cash for College (previously College Goal Sunday) activities remained a coordinated, but separate effort from the Cal Grant Public Awareness and Outreach Campaign. California Cash for College began as a pilot program under the name College Goal Sunday and was funded by combined resources through the Lumina Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation, beginning in 2002 and through 2004. The Commission/EDFUND also provided funding to the pilot program, and in 2005 integrated the project into the state's outreach programs, providing total funding for the program of up to \$580,000. This year, the California Cash for College program resulted in nearly 300 workshops, close to 10,000 surveys filled out and returned and hundreds of volunteers, facilities and other resources leveraged from regional partners, community college and university campus financial aid professionals throughout California.

2005-06 Campaign

The current budget for the 2005-06 Campaign is \$2 million, a 1/3 reduction from previous years. To maximize funding, the Campaign concentrated on areas of California with strong Cal Grant award potential – or “priority schools” with low Cal Grant award levels and with students and families with economic, social and other Cal Grant award characteristics. This highly focused approach was a dramatic change from the broad public information and advertising campaigns of previous years. The Commission worked with UC ACCORD to identify priority families and to develop a list of Priority Schools that was the target of the 2005-06 Campaign.

Campaign marketing and advertising activities, such as radio spots, billboards and bus posters and posters on mall kiosks, focused on the Priority School areas rather than a statewide public advertising effort. Television spots were pro-bono opportunities rather than deliberate paid advertising. The Campaign continued its outreach to Legislators, community-based organizations and corporations for sponsorships to augment paid activities with pro-bono support. The College Cash Box continued to be distributed to high schools statewide.

The Cash for College initiative was incorporated by the Commission as a Commission program, and initial steps were taken to incorporate it into a collaborative and coordinated activity with the Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign.

RECOMMENDED 2006-07 FUNDING LEVELS:

Commission staff is recommending continuation of the Commission’s core outreach activities which have supported the expansion of college access and educational opportunity in California over the last 5 years since the Entitlement program was implemented.

Increase in New Awards

The focus of the Commission’s outreach activities has been to increase the number of eligible high school students receiving a Cal Grant Entitlement award. During the course of the public awareness campaign efforts from 2003, the number of first-time college freshmen receiving a Cal Grant Entitlement award offer has increased from 128,000 to 268,000, representing a 109 percent increase to date.

Increase in Applications

The Commission’s outreach efforts have demonstrated an increase in the number of students overall who have submitted a completed Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). In 2001, there were a reported 105,993 California resident students as well as students identifying a California school who applied for grant assistance. In 2005, that number increased to 151,264 which represents a 30 percent increase overall from 2001.

Furthermore, students who applied and were determined eligible based upon a completed application (i.e., both the FAFSA and a verified Cal Grant grade point average, or GPA) rose from 76,941 (2001) to 116,176 or 44 percent (to date). While data show that not all complete applications result in a Cal Grant award, a larger number of college-going students have qualified for other forms of federal and state financial assistance as a result of the Commission’s outreach efforts.

Impact of Outreach Activities

Commission staff considers the Commission's core outreach activities to be essential to maintain and maximize local and regional outreach efforts in order to continue student participation in the Cal Grant program. The Commission's outreach activities have been leveraged by working collaboratively with local and statewide elected officials, secondary and college educators, college and university financial aid staff, university outreach staff, community-based organizations, local chambers of commerce, corporate sponsors and others to offer free professional, local assistance with completion of the required forms.

A comparison of the number of Cal Grant applicants from the program's expansion in 2000 to date shows a consistent, significant increase of complete Cal Grant applications of 5 percent annually overall with 2005 showing the largest percent increase at 6.8 percent.

Additional Commission outreach activities have resulted in statewide recognition of the Cal Grant program, the availability of other kinds of federal and state-funded financial aid, and increased amounts of Cal Grant award offers and renewals. Such activities include the Commission's Cal-SOAP program, which provides year-round academic and student support services, and other school-based outreach activities. Additional activities (with a very limited number of staff) include staff participation in college and career fairs and large-scale expositions, high school and college training sessions, and simply going to wherever staff can help spread the word about college opportunity. The Commission's latest public relations survey found that 95 percent of California high school seniors surveyed identified the Cal Grant program as a state financial aid program for education beyond high school.

To maintain the momentum of the Commission's investment in statewide Cal Grant advertising and marketing activities that support the Commission's overall mission "**to make education beyond high school financially accessible to all Californians,**" and with the understanding that this level of funding must be weighed against other Commission priorities. As previously indicated Commission staff is working with EDFUND staff to reconcile the amount of funding available from the original \$25 million ear-marked for grantee and outreach purposes. However, we recommend that an extension of the funding of the core outreach activities at the following levels for 2006-07 be approved in the amounts indicated below:

- Cal Grant Awareness Campaign: \$2 million*
- California Cash for College: \$580,000

* Pro-bono sponsorships and activities leveraged against the Commission's \$2 million investment in the 2005-06 Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign more than doubled the Commission's investment at an estimated \$4.3 million. The amount leveraged in volunteer time, facilities, and in-kind donations greatly exceeds the \$580,000 provided for the California Cash for College project.