

Action/Information Item

Outreach Committee

Cal-SOAP Update

From June 2005 through July 2006, CSAC Compliance Manager and Outreach Manager conducted site visits to each Cal-SOAP Consortium. The site visits provided an opportunity to gather information to assess the statewide program implementation and develop recommendations for improvement. A preliminary report on this information is enclosed.

Recommended Action: For information only. No action is required.

Responsible Staff: Steve Caldwell, Chief, Governmental Affairs and Research, Acting Chief, Outreach and Public Relations Division

Kim Taylor, Manager
Outreach Unit

Cal-SOAP Site Visits Preliminary Information

With the 2006-2007 award year, the California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) will enter its 28th year of operation. The program continues to operate through reimbursement contracts with the Student Aid Commission and each of the current 16 regional consortia is administered by a local governing board. State contracts for the Cal-SOAP program currently total \$8,567,000 annually. In addition, each Cal-SOAP project solicits required matching resources. These matching resources can be cash or in-kind. For the 2004-2005 award year, matching resources for the Cal-SOAP program totaled \$14,850,000.

At the request of Cal-SOAP Project Directors and as follow up to the Cal-SOAP compliance reviews, staff has completed a visit to each Cal-SOAP project location. In addition to the compliance review follow-up, each Project Director was interviewed along with various project staff or consortium members who joined the interview meeting. Through these interviews, the Project Directors provided detailed information about the operation and implementation of their projects. Information gathered in the site visits will help determine project implementation in areas including:

- Student access strategies
- Models of student contact in providing services
- Types of student and program data
- Data collection capabilities
- Staffing resources
- Governing Board participation and support
- Regional collaboration and resources

While each project submits an Annual Program Plan to request funding each year, the written plan is an insufficient source for understanding the physical and unique conditions under which each project operates. From the project perspective, the visits from CSAC staff (apart from the compliance aspect) were a visible act of continued support and interest in their programs and the challenges each project faces in their operations.

The site visits are the first step in gathering information to assess the statewide program implementation and develop recommendations for improvement. In consultation with the Cal-SOAP Advisory Committee and with input from the Project Directors, staff will develop recommendations to clarify the statutory requirements of the program, develop criteria for continued program monitoring and evaluation, develop guidelines for consistent and pertinent program services, and assess project funding.

Recommendations for any changes to the Cal-SOAP program will be brought to the Commission's Outreach Committee for discussion and approval.

In addition, Cal-SOAP fiscal agents have consistently, from year to year, required Cal-SOAP budgets to include cost of living adjustments to staff salaries and benefits. Because the state funding level has remained the same for the past five years, Cal-SOAP projects have reduced staffing and program activities and services in order to accommodate the budget increase adjustments. Staff will address this issue with the Commission's Fiscal Policy and Long Range Planning Committee, and discuss a proposal to submit a BCP to increase the Cal-SOAP baseline funding amount. A request for increase will initially address the cost of living adjustments the Cal-SOAP fiscal agents have required but may also include program services.