

Information/Action Item

Cal-SOAP Advisory Committee

Cal-SOAP Funding Allocation Project

At its June 21, 2007 meeting, the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) directed staff to develop specific criteria for funding the Cal-SOAP projects. The Commissioners requested the criteria be presented no later than their meeting scheduled for February 2008.

The attached document will aid in a discussion of the various options and challenges involved in changing our method of funding the Cal-SOAP projects.

Action Required: Possible Development of recommendation to Commission

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Cal-SOAP Funding Allocation Project

At its June 21, 2007 meeting, the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) directed staff to develop specific criteria for funding the Cal-SOAP projects. The Commissioners requested the criteria be presented no later than their meeting scheduled for February 2008.

Currently Cal-SOAP project funding levels are based on the dollars available at the time each project was implemented. As new projects were developed and implemented their initial budgets were at a minimum level and existing projects' budgets were increased. Funding levels also reflect Commission decisions over the years to increase project budgets or establish new projects. Statewide funding increases for the program have been sporadic over the past 30 years. This historical perspective of funding has resulted in a wide distribution of funding levels among the existing 15 projects. In addition, the recent statewide budget reduction was implemented through project budget reductions that ranged from a zero percent reduction for those projects that were already the lowest funded to 25.7 percent for the highest funded projects. Mid level funded projects were reduced by 10, 15, or 24 percent. The following chart shows the funding level distribution as well as the budget reductions implemented for 2007-2008:

Cal-SOAP Funding Levels

	2006-2007 Funding levels 2006-07	2007-2008 Funding Min 300K, Max cut 25.68%	Effective cut
Central Coast	300,000	300,000	0.0%
Central Valley	370,000	311,910	15.7%
East Bay	673,683	500,546	25.7%
Greater Long Beach	300,000	300,000	0.0%
Los Angeles	850,000	631,550	25.7%
Merced	363,130	306,119	15.7%
North Valley	445,650	336,466	24.5%
North Coast	500,526	377,897	24.5%
Sacramento	455,834	344,155	24.5%
San Diego	1,250,000	928,750	25.7%
San Francisco	335,000	300,000	10.4%
So. San Joaquin	366,000	308,538	15.7%
Santa Barbara	642,833	477,625	25.7%
San Jose	620,511	461,040	25.7%
South County(Gilroy)	465,000	351,075	24.5%
Solano	628,833	131,250*	**52.3%
	8,567,000	6,366,920	

*This funding level represents a regional allocation of \$300,000 for a full year. The \$131,250 equals the RFP planning grant funded at \$75,000 and one quarter of the remaining amount of the regional allocation (\$56,250).

** Percent reduction based on a \$300,000 budget for a full year.

Current Funding Process

Cal-SOAP projects receive funding through reimbursement contracts the Student Aid Commission enters into each year with the existing consortia. A Consortium's plan of operation for its Cal-SOAP project is specified in its Annual Program Plan (APP) and included in the contract as the scope of work. Commission staff receive and review the APPs submitted in order to present to the Advisory Committee and develop a funding recommendation for the Commission, usually in May, prior to the start of the next fiscal year (July 1). After the Commission has approved project funding levels staff must wait for the California State budget to be approved (recently, delayed until late August) before the contracting process can be completed.

The current process requires that project directors know their funding levels in order to develop the plan of operation (APP) for the following year. Unless additional funding is available, the same level of funding is assumed from year to year. There has been no statewide budget increase for the past six years. The project directors are able to develop a plan for the next year because they have some idea of their state funding level.

Discussion

The Commission has expressed concern that project funding levels are widely varied and apparently not associated with measurable success. The Commission discussed several aspects it would like to see incorporated in determining funding levels for each project:

- Measurable outcomes
- Student success
- Services and activities expectations
- Reduction of duplication of services

Measurable Outcomes

Currently the Cal-SOAP projects submit information in two general areas: Student reports and Budget reports. Within each area there are four reports as follows:

Student Reports:

- Student population background
This report shows number of students who received intensive services, ethnicity, sex, and eligibility criteria.
- College Going Rate
Includes only students who received intensive services and also shows numbers, percentages, and reasons for those students who did not enroll in college (i.e., work, lack of money, low grades, and military).
- College Going Rate (County Comparison)
This report compares Cal-SOAP students to the county college going rate as published by the Commission on Postsecondary Education (CPEC).
- Activity Report
This report shows a listing of the services the project provides, including cost, and number of student and parent participants.

Budget Reports:

- Budget Report
This report is submitted once as part of the Annual Program Plan and four times during the fiscal year with the reimbursement request.
- Contribution Summary Report
Submitted once annually as part of the year-end reports; it lists the match contributions received by the consortium.
- Equipment Inventory Report
Submitted once per year as part of the year-end reports; lists equipment purchases and confirms state ID tags issues for equipment purchased during the year.
- Reimbursement Report
Submitted quarterly to request reimbursement for costs and to track expenditures.

With the exception of the college going rates, the required Cal-SOAP reports do not provide an evaluation of the program and services, but rather a description of the services and activities. The Commission has expressed concern that the Cal-SOAP data we receive does not demonstrate success in the program implementation or specifically measure student success associated with Cal-SOAP services.

Services and Activities

All Cal-SOAP projects provide student services in two general categories: academic and advising. Academic services are part of the program's statutory mission to "raise achievement levels." Academic services usually involve specific subject matter help or improving students' study skills. Cal-SOAP law requires that project tutors are college students who are eligible to receive financial aid and that a minimum 30 percent of the projects' budgets are used to fund stipends to the students for their services. For data collection purposes, services are either intensive or general. Intensive services are direct and either one-on-one or small group activities. Statute also requires that intensive services are tracked in the project's Cal-SOAP database. Each project tracks services to students who are specifically identified for Cal-SOAP eligibility. General services are not tracked in the Cal-SOAP database. These services involve larger groups (greater than 10 participants), community events, or events or activities for parents.

Academic services include tutoring, test preparation (SAT, CAHSEE, study skills, etc) in one-to-one and small group settings. Each project's tutoring program depends on the campus access policies at each school and school district. Tutoring services also depend on the number of student tutors the project is able to employ and the availability of the students, as well as distance to travel to the tutoring site. Tutoring may take place in the classroom during the day or on site after school or in other locations in the community. Cal-SOAP law further supports the tutoring services by requiring daily involvement of secondary school staff in the implementation of the project activities.

Advising services include college tours, college admissions information, college application assistance, financial aid information and application assistance, college loan counseling, and high school coursework advisement. These services are also provided in both intensive and general settings.

The Commission has suggested that each project's service level also be included in the determination for funding. It has not been determined how service level should figure in the funding level. Some projects meet a minimum for intensive services to student in order to maximize on the number of students who receive services. Some projects operate in large metropolitan areas that garner large numbers of students, while others operate in remote or rural locals where high schools have fewer students and greater distance between them. Some projects focus on in-depth and long-term services to students throughout the students' high school careers, while others provide intensive services to a selected cohort of students. The Cal-SOAP has never placed a minimum requirement on numbers of students to be served and has allowed the statutory structure of local governance to decide the approach the consortium will implement in providing services.

Student Success

As the fiscal crisis deepens for the State of California, programs funded through the State General Fund are expected to justify their continued existence. As it pertains to education and college access programs, most decision makers, including the Commission, have focused on student success. Cal-SOAP has faced criticism from the Commissioners regarding its lack of clear and measurable student success. As noted above most of the data reported by Cal-SOAP is descriptive rather than evaluative. The only data element that measures student success and is reported by Cal-SOAP is college going rates. Projects directors report the college going rates of their students who receive intensive services and they also report a county comparison percentage.

The project directors have suggested that student GPAs may provide a measure that is straight forward and easily understood. However, there are concerns that student GPAs may not be available from official sources or that collection of the GPA may be problematic.

Other Pre-College Program Availability and Reduction of Duplication

Commissioners want other available services taken into consideration in funding the projects. Some of the Cal-SOAP projects partner with other pre-college program services at their school sites. For example, Cal-SOAP may use AVID (Advancement Via Independent Determination) tutors because they are trained and service the same students. The partnership is included as an in-kind contribution to the Cal-SOAP. Other pre-college programs operating in some schools where Cal-SOAP is present include, TRIO (Upward Bound, Talent Search, etc.), GEAR UP, (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and EAOP (Early Academic Outreach Programs).

The Commission has expressed its desire to see Cal-SOAP operate in schools that have minimum service from other pre-college programs and to include this factor in project

funding. They have cited the importance of documenting that Cal-SOAP capitalizes on minimizing duplication of services at their school sites. Minimizing duplication is also a Cal-SOAP statutory directive.

Project Director Input

On October 25, 2007, staff met with members of a data committee established by the Cal-SOAP project directors. The group discussed data collection issues for the Cal-SOAP projects as well as options for changing the funding method for the program. As the Commission has been clear that it expects defined and measurable data to figure prominently in the funding decision for Cal-SOAP projects, the group felt the data committee was an appropriate setting for the discussion.

Some of the options discussed for changing the program funding methodology included using modified versions of other pre-college program funding methods. For example, Upward Bound and Talent Search, two of the federal TRIO programs are funded every four years and use a set amount for each program. Comparisons to this model are limited in that the Trio programs focus on a limited number of students in their program, usually much fewer than the Cal-SOAP.

The group also discussed establishing set levels of funding for projects. For example, \$350,000 and \$550,000 and awarding the funds based on established and consistent criteria. The group identified several problems with this model. First, a set and consistent funding level for a group of projects would need to reflect similar and consistent program implementation. The Commission would need to develop guidelines for program implementation to meet the funding level requirement. Secondly, we would need to specify the number of projects to be funded at each level. This in turn, may limit the number of projects we can fund. For example, our current statewide budget of \$6,357,000 will allow, hypothetically, 6 projects funded at \$550,000 and 8 projects funded at \$350,000. Or 11 projects funded at \$550,000 or 18 projects funded at \$350,000. We currently have 16 projects (including the Solano area). Third, this approach assumes a consistent statewide budget. If the statewide budget is reduced, as it was for the current year, this model might suggest the elimination of projects rather than an adjustment of funding levels.

The group also discussed several current issues with data collection and the Cal-SOAP database. The Cal-SOAP database was implemented six years ago and is quickly reaching maximum capacity in its current form. The database was developed by an independent contractor who owns the programming access codes. This contractor is still periodically employed by some projects to fix problems and install upgrades. To date, the Commission has not had resources to devote to the Cal-SOAP database. In addition, computer/technical support at each project office varies depending on the resources of the fiscal agent and the consortium. The project directors cited numerous database issues that will affect the ability to implement a new funding methodology based on measurable outcomes. Those issues included: timeframe for changing the database, resources for implementation of a new database, the fiscal impact of database changes, the logistics of transferring the current database contents, and the timeframe and resources for training all the project directors and their staff on the use of a new database.

Another area of concern expressed by the project directors is the collaborative nature of Cal-SOAP. Project staff and consortium members work hard to develop and maintain collaboration strategies and community support. These partnerships often gain strength over time. As Cal-SOAP project activities become institutionalized and program benefits are realized, community support increases. Support comes in the form of resources, both cash and in-kind. The continued collaboration is possible in great part because each program relies on continued funding from the state. While Cal-SOAP contracts have always been annual, that is year to year, there has always been an assumption of funding. (Once initially awarded, projects usually assume funding from year to year unless the Commission has taken action, through meetings and correspondence, to alert the consortium that their project's funding may be in jeopardy.)

Staff will continue to work with the project directors to develop a viable approach to funding the Cal-SOAP projects. A draft proposal may be presented to the Commission at its February meeting.

Additional Concerns

Following is a partial list of specific concerns identified by CSAC staff and the Cal-SOAP project directors, associated with developing and implementing a new process for awarding Cal-SOAP project allocations:

- Timeframe for developing and implementing defined and measurable criteria on which to base project funding levels;
- Determining a selection process that is timely, consistent and appropriate;
- Developing the application tool in a timeframe suitable for 2008-2009 funding;
- Standardizing data collection and reporting requirements;
- Resources and timeframe for Updating or changing the Cal-SOAP data base;
- Increasing or decreasing the number of Cal-SOAP projects based on the availability of funds;
- Determining whether the new funding method will be open to other areas of the state or continue funding existing projects; and
- The unknown statewide Cal-SOAP budget for next year.