

PIMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S EFFORT TO Serve Refugees and Adult Basic Education Learners using HEERF

Postsecondary education leaders have a tremendous opportunity to reimagine current systems and uplift often underserved adult learners through strategic use of the federal stimulus provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ([CARES](#)), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations ([CRRSA](#)), and American Rescue Plan ([ARP](#)) Acts. In alignment with the Accelerating Recovery through Credentials [Rapid Response Toolkit](#) and [Adult-Ready Playbook](#), this brief focuses on Pima Community College's use of the federal higher education emergency relief funds to uplift Adult Basic Education learners, refugees, and other new majority learners.

The [American Rescue Plan](#) Act enacted in 2021 included provisions to support America's colleges and universities through a third round of the higher education emergency relief funds (HEERF) to uplift students and institutions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. After this legislation was passed, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) [updated guidance](#) to expand HEERF eligibility to non-degree seeking, non-credit, dually-enrolled, and continuing education students as well as refugee populations and persons granted asylum. While eligibility was expanded to enable institutions to support these students, few institutions made efforts to provide to these students not supported by most existing financial aid structures. However, Pima Community College used the guidance as a strategic opportunity.

Pima Community College, located in Tucson, Arizona, with a student body slightly over 19,000, used this opportunity to scale student support, particularly for refugees, English language learners, and other post-traditional students through their [Adult Basic Education for College & Career](#) (ABECC) division, Refugee Education Program (REP), and [Immigrant and Refugee Student Resource](#) (IRSR) Center. The institution's effort to support non-Title IV eligible students using the federal stimulus highlights their commitment to building a stronger, more equitable society and workforce and to supporting representative groups within their community.

Acutely aware of the equity gaps facing their students, Pima leadership prioritized use of federal stimulus funds to support underserved students through three early steps:

- 1 Prioritize directing aid to those without Title IV eligibility.** Ensuring that students had the tools and resources (including clothing, affordable childcare, mental healthcare, and aid) to be successful in the classroom was a strategic priority for Pima Community College at the start of the pandemic. This support benefitted Adult Basic Education learners, refugee populations, and English language learners newly arrived at the college. With the updated guidance from USED, which expanded HEERF eligibility to refugee populations and persons granted asylum, Pima leadership was able to increase aid disbursement by 8,633 students, doubling the number of students who would receive emergency grant aid from previous HEERF cycles. Pima worked to navigate existing financial aid structures, including building out new grantmaking processes, and conducted outreach to students to ensure all learners could receive the emergency aid provided by HEERF. Title IV eligibility was no longer an obstacle to help students receive relief and Pima leadership acted on this opportunity.
- 2 Expand access to academic tutoring.** The COVID-19 pandemic altered traditional modalities of instruction. As coursework moved online, Pima leaders invested \$130,000 to ensure students had access to online tutors and other resources to limit learning loss. This included investments in tutors focused on English language acquisition and technology for students to be successful in their coursework. As a sizable amount of coursework continues to be delivered online, ensuring that students can easily access academic support services is critical for students and the institution's long-term success.
- 3 Equip students with coaches that advocate for their success.** Pima Community College has dedicated staff who support learners in accessing college resources. Student Success Coaches in ABECC and REP played a key role in supporting learners in accessing tutoring resources, loaned technology, and emergency relief funds. The institution's [Personal Academic Coaching Experience \(PACE\)](#) also partners with the IRSR Center to serve English language learners and refugee students. Coaches assist students in developing their organizational, study, self-advocacy, communication, and time management skills and connect learners to external resources that may aid their academic success. Moreover, coaches work to hone students' post-Pima goals and career aspirations. Investing in capacity to serve students not only serves individuals, but the institution as a whole.

Pima Community College not only embraced innovative use of HEERF, but strategically expanded eligibility to reach students typically unable to receive aid under Title IV rules. Pima was one of the few colleges that embraced USED's allowance for institutions to serve all students, regardless of background or financial aid status. English language learners, refugee populations, Adult Basic Education, and other post-traditional students are critical members of our postsecondary institutions and workforce. Colleges should look at the demographics of their region and seek to leverage guidance from USED to support the education and training efforts for underserved populations.

8,633

more Pima students
received aid

TWO TIMES the number
that received aid in the
previous HEERF cycle