



EMERGENCY AID

for Higher Education

A TOOLKIT AND RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR DECISION-MAKERS

ABOUT THE EMERGENCY AID TOOLKIT

Ascendium Education Group (formerly known as Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates) has invested heavily to advance postsecondary success for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students. Since 2012, Ascendium has awarded over \$10.2 million in Dash Emergency Grants to 63 two- and four-year institutions. Through Dash, colleges administer emergency aid (EA) grants to meet students' unanticipated expenses so that more of these students stay on track for completion.

These small grants, often \$500 or less, can make the difference in whether a student is able to remain in school.

Ascendium contracted with Equal Measure in late 2017 to create a set of tools to help the field codify the process of awarding emergency aid. *Emergency Aid for Higher Education: A Toolkit and Resource Guide for Decision-Makers* is the result of more than 10 months of research, interviews, focus groups, and webinars with Dash Emergency Grant recipients that elucidated current best practices, and gaps, in administering EA programs.

“[Support] didn’t just stop with the Dash grant. Program staff continuously helped. If I popped into the office, they would ask how it was going, if I needed other resources, and [they] offered other resources.”

—Emergency Aid Recipient

VISION

Emergency aid is aid that is provided for students in one-time emergency situations. Additionally, emergency grants or financial awards provide a way to help support college students quickly; and in a form in which they do not incur more debt.¹ As noted in a 2016 Landscape Analysis of Emergency Aid Programs conducted by NASPA, supports “such as grants, loans, food pantries, and vouchers, offer critical support that could in some instances help students stay enrolled at their institutions.”²

EA programs often must make difficult decisions about how best to support students and maximize limited campus and community resources.

This Emergency Aid toolkit offers tools and resources to help EA practitioners understand the broader context and complexity of situations that lead students to apply for emergency aid.

The tools, and associated resources to guide such tool use, offer direction to EA practitioners for limiting prejudicial or biased judgments in the decision-making process. The toolkit includes:

Tools for Decision-Making: These tools are for use when working with students through the often-challenging EA award decisions.

Resources for Program Capacity Building: These resources offer guidance on using the Tools for Decision-Making, with the aim to bolster EA program staff capacity through promoting opportunities for shared learning and reflection on program design, practices, and competencies.

1 See similar rationale for emergency aid from Sara Goldrick-Rab and Clare Cady in *Distributing Emergency Aid to College Students: Recommendations and Sample Distribution Protocol* <https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/emergency-aid-distribution-sample-protocol.pdf>

2 https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Emergency_Aid_Report.pdf

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

We recommend EA program staff review the complete toolkit in full at least once before implementation to understand how the tools and resources complement each other.

EA program staff can use the following framework — with icons to denote tools and resources — as a guide to use this toolkit to fit their needs. For instance, as a package, or using individual tools or resources to augment existing processes.

As programs mature, staff should reconsider and/or edit the materials as necessary to promote a more tailored fit—a practice which can be used for additional reflection on program elements.

The Emergency Aid Journey: A FRAMEWORK FOR TOOL USE



COMMUNICATIONS/MARKETING ABOUT EA ON CAMPUS



Emergency Aid Messaging Placement Assessment

Student reaches out for support

COLLECTING INFORMATION TO GET TO THE “ROOT CAUSE”



Getting to the “Root Cause”



Root Causes Analysis and Motivational Interviewing



Understanding Campus Population



Implicit Bias Test



Emergency Aid Student Scenarios

MAKING THE AWARD DECISION



Emergency Aid Awarding Prioritization



Decision-Making Road Map



Competency Mapping













EA Team Staff Self-Assessment

REACH THE EA AWARD DECISION

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The following table provides overviews of the relevant tools and resources to guide staff through the Emergency Aid (EA) awarding process.

Tools and Resources	Purpose
COMMUNICATIONS/MARKETING ABOUT EA	
 Emergency Aid Messaging Placement Assessment	This resource is intended to help EA practitioners communicate about EA awards to as many students as possible.
COLLECTING INFORMATION TO GET TO THE “ROOT CAUSE”	
 Getting to the Root Cause  Root Cause Analysis and Motivational Interviewing	This resource and tool provides a means for EA staff to gather consistent information from students, including the root cause of the student applicant’s emergency situation.
Navigating Student Situations and Recognizing Implicit Bias  Understanding Your Campus Population  Implicit Bias Test  Student Scenarios	These resources provide an opportunity for individual staff and teams to come together and share strategies for eliminating bias from EA intake and decision-making processes.
MAKING THE EA AWARD DECISION	
Decision-Making Support  Emergency Aid Award Prioritization  Decision-Making Roadmap	The Prioritization tool provides a common scale for assessing the needs of student applicants, based on the individual awarding criteria of individual campuses. The Roadmap tool provides a means for EA staff to have an efficient process for awarding aid, addressing the unique needs of each student applicant.
Reflection and Recalibration  Competency Mapping  Emergency Aid Team Self-Assessment	These resources provide EA staff an opportunity to implement reflection and continuous quality improvement approaches into their work.

COMMUNICATIONS/MARKETING

Often only a small segment of students, faculty, and staff are aware of the full suite of resources available to students on a college campus, including emergency aid (EA). The 2016 NASPA report Landscape Analysis of Emergency Aid Programs, and interview data from colleges, confirm that the chief way most students learn about EA programs is through word-of-mouth when students ask for help during an emergency. But, emergencies are stressful and time-sensitive, so it is important for students to know about the program before they need it.

A range of outreach tactics will help students, and/or faculty or staff who may refer students, learn how to reach the EA program in a time of need. Ensuring that all students are aware of EA opportunities may increase the likelihood more students apply and are connected to the EA program, and become aware of a system of support from Student Services, Financial Aid, and other program partners.

“I had a job that pays \$10/hr. I have a family at home, it wasn’t cutting it, and paying bills was really hard. I kept seeing stuff about the EA fund. I was seeing posters about it. I kept walking by, and wondered whether I should or shouldn’t talk to them.”

—Student

“Putting it [messaging] out there more, for those who are quiet. I don’t know if everyone is brave enough to speak up. It took a lot of energy to persuade myself to tell them I needed help. Emergency aid – these are resources available in a pinch... [for] college students, traditional and non-traditional. No-one can prepare themselves for life. So understanding that all hope is not lost. That you have this ace in your pocket you can use.”

—Student



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID MESSAGING PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT

This resource can help you determine how to effectively “spread the word” to increase awareness of the program among students, staff, faculty, and other relevant audiences (e.g., donors).

ASSESSMENT:

Conduct an assessment with your emergency aid (EA) program team using the following guiding questions and practices. You should review and update this resource—taking into consideration current data collected from students about how they learned of the emergency aid program—every year.

Guiding Questions:

- What marketing approaches do you consider effective from your own life? (e.g., how did you learn about events or resources while you were a student?)
- Are there existing programs on campus that can offer/ share insights on program marketing (e.g., Student Health Services; Campus Communications)?
- How do students find out about emergency aid? Does feedback from students about the program support existing marketing methods, suggest amendments, or offer new strategies? What messages resonate with students?
- Do students hear about emergency aid through word-of-mouth? Who shares the information (staff, students, faculty/instructors, etc.)?

Practices to Inform the Process:

- Survey students and/or host focus groups to learn where they go for school-related information to explore efficacy of existing outreach efforts.
- Survey and/or host focus groups of faculty and staff for their perspectives on outreach efforts.
- Engage students from Communications; Marketing; Design; Behavioral Psychology; Public Health; or related fields to help plan an outreach and marketing strategy.
- Conduct a campus walk-through (also consider virtual space) with program staff to gather new ideas.



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID MESSAGING PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT

Message Placement	Rationale
On-site Locations	
Virtual Locations	

See examples on next page



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID MESSAGING PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT

EXAMPLES

Message Placement	Rationale
On-site Locations	
Course syllabus ³	Students regularly review syllabi for coursework, and faculty include and review information about emergency aid; should be accessible in physical and virtual formats
Classroom presentations	Program staff can present an overview of emergency aid, and introduce themselves to students
Flyers in restroom stalls	High probability of visibility and potential for frequency of viewing
Messages displayed in common areas (e.g., bulletin boards; on-campus television)	Locations with high traffic may increase visibility (e.g., student centers; cafeterias/dining halls; residential life; commuter lounges)
Mixed signage: handouts, brochures, posters	Students seeking other types of assistance can learn about emergency aid as a potential support option (e.g., financial aid offices; student health centers; counseling)
Promotional materials	Tangible takeaways students can keep as reminders (e.g., pens; magnets; stress balls)
Virtual Locations	
School website (e.g., Admissions; Financial Aid; Student Services pages)	Repeated prompting can encourage students to take note of emergency aid program as one of many resources available at school
Banners/headers on course registration screens	Students will engage with this screen multiple times, and the beginning and end of terms are typically times of increased need for emergency aid
Mass and targeted emails	Messages can be paced as a general welcome at the commencement of terms; and/or then as more targeted messages based on information from early alert or other student need identification systems
Social media group pages	These are locations that students already access for classwork or school related information
Learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard; Canvas)	Students will acquire familiarity with these systems while in school, and these are locations students are required to frequent
Campus radio, newspaper, or television stations	Information about emergency aid programs can be shared as promotional announcements; or as the content for stories of other students' experiences, or conversations with program staff
Automated text reminders	Schools should identify trends related to timing of increased need/applications for emergency aid to set up predictive reminders (e.g., prior to the start of a semester before loan disbursements; towards the end of a semester when students run lower on funds)

³ Jillian Berman describes similar strategies that college faculty use including using the course syllabus in, Why college professors are offering to help students get food and shelter see <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/guid/80B01C34-8CF9-11E7-807D-1E6895EF225D>)

COLLECTING INFORMATION TO GET TO THE ROOT CAUSE

The Root Cause section is designed to help you more deeply understand the origin of a student's circumstance. This exploration often includes working with students to develop a shared understanding of the root cause of their emergency. You can use data collected from students (e.g., how they were referred to the program) for continuous learning and program quality improvement. You can also consider these resources at all stages of interactions with students, from increasing awareness of the program and getting them into the office, through discussions with a potential award candidate.

Understanding the “Root Cause”

A student experiencing stress in the midst of academic and social pressures may not fully understand or articulate the underlying factors leading to their emergent need. College students often navigate financial pressures, academic pressures, and social isolation. EA program staff should be skilled in identifying these underlying concerns, to help them consider whether a financial award is an appropriate way to support the student.

EA awards are intended to help resolve short-term emergencies. However, for greater impact on longer-term goals such as persistence and graduation, EA awards must focus on the wider range of underlying issues that may keep occurring if a student does not develop strategies for addressing them. This resource is intended to help you work with student applicants to unearth and address some of these underlying issues.

“They [the students] appreciate the support and empathy and listening. Students come in just to meet with the people who have lent a listening ear and [because they] are feeling supported and have someone trying to help them.”

—EA Staff

“When [my colleagues] approach the interactions with students, they are very thoughtful in building this rapport [...] to get to the root of the problem and keep them [the students] coming back again.”

—EA Staff



RESOURCE: GETTING TO THE ROOT CAUSE^{4, 5}

What do you do when you have a problem at work or at home? Do you jump in and treat the symptoms, or do you consider whether there's a deeper problem that requires your attention? Root Cause Analysis helps you get to the “root” of the concern, or where the issue truly originates.

This approach of identifying the root cause during intake helps students, in partnership with emergency aid staff, answer the question of why an emergency occurred, and to consider actions to limit the likelihood that the same issue occurs again.⁶

When exploring the root cause of the student's situation, consider the principles of motivational interviewing. The overarching goal of motivational interviewing is to understand the circumstance with which the student is dealing from their perspective.

These three principles, drawn from motivational interviewing practice, can help get to the what, why, and how:

1. Seek to understand the student's feelings and express empathy through **compassionate listening**,⁷ which requires asking non-adversarial questions and hearing without judgment.
2. Be **aware of bias** or showing inclination against someone or their situation, and develop a distinction between students' goals or values and their presenting problem.
3. Support **self-efficacy**, the student's belief in their own capacity to achieve, and **optimism** by being hopeful about their future and ability to get through their current situation.

Using these principles will help you build rapport and trust with the student, and enable you to discover the necessary information to identify and support the student's needs. The approach becomes more informal over time, as you become increasingly proficient with this technique.

4 For a foundational text on motivational interviewing, see Miller W.R., Rollnick S. *Motivation Interviewing: Preparing people to address addictive behaviour*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 1991

5 We are indebted to Sara Goldrick-Rab and her colleagues at the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (formerly the HOPE Lab) for their work identifying key elements of the application process in: https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Investing-in-Student-Completion-WI-Hope_Lab.pdf

6 https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_80.htm

7 <https://www.compassionatelistening.org/about-us>



RESOURCE: GETTING TO THE ROOT CAUSE

The steps below can help guide you toward identifying the root, or underlying causes of students' situations through a motivational interviewing process.

Developing motivational interviewing skills is an area of interest expressed by emergency aid (EA) program staff, because this approach encourages the use of asset-based framing, while facilitating your ability to obtain more in-depth information from a student. It is important to note that the motivational interviewing process is not only about the techniques, but also the spirit with which the approach is deployed.⁸

The motivational interviewing process is structured as follows:

WHAT: Determine what happened

- Acknowledge and appreciate that the student is asking for help, despite a stressful situation, and ask questions to understand the issue at hand

WHY: Determine why the situation occurred

- Take time to understand what is happening in the student's life
- Ask questions to understand the emergency, the causal/contributing factors, and the impact on the student

HOW: Identify action steps

- Work with the student to develop an action plan to resolve the problem and mitigate the likelihood of re-occurrence
- Ask the student to identify assets in their life, and define what they envision as a resolution

“We need to be that champion for the student—we have students from all walks of life. Students are sometimes 75 years old and need help. We must meet that student wherever they are.”

—EA Staff

“We tell them our role and what we can do, and that we have tons of other supports we can connect you with, and we may get into other issues that are causing you problems, and that is okay. We might not be able to do everything for them, but the more they share, the greater the possibility we can connect them with other resources.”

—EA Staff

⁸ For a foundational text on motivational interviewing, see Miller W.R., Rollnick S. *Motivation Interviewing: Preparing people to address addictive behaviour*. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 1991.



MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

In working to get to the “root cause,” consider using motivational interviewing techniques.

OPEN-ENDED:

- What brought you here today?
- Can you describe your emergency and what led up to this event?
- What was that like for you?

AFFIRMATIONS:

- You showed a lot of [the person’s trait, such as determination] by doing that.
- Despite what happened last week, it’s clear you’re concerned about changing your [challenge/circumstance].

ADVICE/FEEDBACK:

- Do you mind if we spend a few minutes talking about...? [Followed by]
- Are you interested in learning more about...?

REFLECTIVE LISTENING:

- It sounds like...
 - It seems as if...
 - What I hear you saying...
 - I get the sense that...
-

Questions to Keep in Mind:

- What assumptions or judgments are you making about this student?
- What can you do to put yourself in the shoes of this student to understand what they are going through?
- Are there other internal or external supports beyond EA to assist this student?
- What else might you want to understand about this student’s situation to protect against this issue or another happening again in the future?
- What other questions might you ask the student to get a clearer understanding of any issues they are experiencing?
- What steps were involved in or contributed to the event?
- Other than applying for EA, what, if any, steps is the student taking to mitigate their emergency?
- What might happen to the student if they do not receive EA funds?
- Is the student at risk for dropping out of school if they do not receive EA funds?



TOOL: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS AND MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

After reviewing qualifying criteria for your school's emergency aid program (e.g., GPA requirements, matriculation status, income eligibility, etc.), get to know the student applying for emergency aid by reviewing their information. This can offer you a point of reference to begin a conversation with a student.

For instance:

Review of attendance data shows the student recently missed classes in a course required for their major. This could be an area to probe for underlying relevant information related to the root cause of this student's situation.

When engaging in a conversation with the student, the goal is to get to the what, why, and how of the root cause.

Pause, take a breath, and ask,

“Am I thinking about this situation from the student's perspective?”

Below are some questions to get you started on the conversation:

1. What: Determine what happened

- What brought you here today?
- What was that [insert experience] like for you and how are you doing?
- What other factors might have contributed to the emergency that I may be able to help you with?

2. Why: Determine why the situation occurred

- When did the emergency occur? What sequence of events led to this problem?
- What do you think contributed to the emergency, either inside or outside your control?
- Beyond this situation, how is your semester going in general?
- What other stressors are you experiencing in your life?
- Has this emergency affected your academics, family/home life, or job?
- How else have you or others close to you been affected?

3. How: Identify action steps

- What are the strengths/resources/supports you have access to at school as well as at home? (e.g., friends, on-campus organizations you may participate in, family, church)
- How would an EA grant help? What will happen if you don't receive EA funds?
- What are possible actions you can take to eliminate the root cause of the problem?

Navigating Student Situations and Recognizing Implicit Bias

Everyone brings their own biases to interactions and engagements with others. Emergency aid (EA) program staff recognize everyone brings their own biases that can affect the EA decision-making process, and can ultimately determine who receives aid and who does not. This is especially true in cases where you may not share similar backgrounds or cultures as the students you serve. These situations can present thorny situations for both staff and students.

You can better serve students by increasing your awareness of implicit bias, and by understanding how to assess preconceptions you may have about students you support. The resources in this section are intended to help you begin to understand and strategize around any potential implicit biases you might unknowingly bring to your EA work. The resources help you identify internal and external expertise in instances where you may need support in assisting students in an empathetic manner.



RESOURCE: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CAMPUS POPULATION

This resource will help you understand the student demographics of your campus, and can enable you to gain a better sense of the context in which students may apply for emergency aid funding. This resource was selected as a result of conversations with EA program staff, who mentioned the critical importance of faculty and staff understanding the make-up of the student body.

Such knowledge is a key part of the cultural change on campus necessary for staff to see the critical importance of EA. Collecting these data can also help you connect your program's objectives to larger campus goals around student retention and success.

What are the demographics of our student population? Be sure to examine factors such as total size of student population, gender, average age, race, socioeconomic status, commuter/on-campus, disability status, etc.

Where is our school located? Consider the geography (urban/rural/suburban) as well as where students live and the distance they travel to school. Please consider items such as transportation and internet access for students.

What do our data tell us about who comes with emergency aid needs?

What are the initial strengths we can identify in our staff/services/supports/ process based on what we know about our students?

What are the initial challenges we can identify in our staff/services/supports/ process based on what we know about our students?



RESOURCE: IMPLICIT BIAS TEST

Everyone has biases shaped by their background and experience. Often, we do not even realize we harbor these biases, as they are “implicit” or unconscious. We may deploy them in our daily interactions automatically or without noticing. Your conversations with students to discuss their case for emergency aid funding may be another area where biases rise to the surface, even for the most experienced emergency aid (EA) staff.

It is important to recognize and overcome biases—or initial judgments—before meeting with a student in order to better understand their situation, uncover the root cause of their emergency, and provide them with the support they need.

You can gauge the types of implicit biases that you might bring into a student interaction by using Implicit Association Tests (IATs). These tests can tap those hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. [Project Implicit](#)—a collaborative research effort between the researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and University of Washington—offers dozens of such tests.⁹

The IAT procedure may be useful in helping your team understand the biases they hold, and the ways those biases may appear when working with students, such as through the language used, physical behavior or mannerisms, and the decisions made. It may be a tool that can jumpstart your thinking about hidden biases: Where do they come from? How do they influence our actions? What can we do about them to mitigate their potential to lead to harmful behaviors or actions toward others?

One EA counselor shared his experience with bias to help other staff members recognize that they don't really know a student who walks into their office until they talk to them. He cautions from his experience realizing his mistaken assumptions, based on appearance and dress, about how a student spends money. You never know until you talk to them and understand their story.

Decide as a group on 1-2 tests of interest using the link above, and then take time to debrief and discuss as a team.

- What was a circumstance in your life when you felt treated differently due to bias directed at you? What did you learn about yourself?
- How might your biases show up in your interactions with students?
With staff?
- What are 1-2 steps you can take to become more mindful of your biases?
- Understanding your biases, what are 1-2 action steps you can take to modify your behavior? How about reframing your thinking? How can your team support you?

⁹ <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>



RESOURCE: STUDENT SCENARIOS

Whether your program team is new to working on emergency aid (EA), or has been involved in this work for years, it is always good to make sure your team is aligned when making EA award decisions. These student scenarios can help your team consider and reflect on EA award decisions. You may also create your own scenario. In addition, you can use these scenarios to orient new staff to the program by allowing them to work through some of the challenges students may bring to the interviews.

Consider and reflect upon these scenarios as a group:

SCENARIO 1

Lia has come to your office in need of support for rent. She is in an abusive relationship and must move with her three school-age children to another apartment in town. Her immediate need is money to pay rent. She attends school part-time and has been working to pay for her education, but she now needs to do her clinicals to complete her degree. Clinicals are 32 hours a week, leaving little time for a part-time job while caring for her children and going to school.

- How do you approach this situation?
- Does Lia qualify for emergency aid?
- What other needs does Lia present that you might consider?
- What internal/external supports might she need?
- What might happen to Lia if she does not receive EA funds?

NOTES

SCENARIO 2

Juan has experienced a recent death in the family—his grandmother who lives a significant distance from the school passed away suddenly, and Juan needs money to pay for a flight to her funeral. Given that her death was unexpected, the cost of the flight is \$750. Additionally, Juan does not have anything appropriate to wear to her funeral, and asked for help with that as well.

- How do you approach this situation?
- Does Juan qualify for emergency aid?
- What other supports might Juan need?
- Do you need to consider bundling resources to assist?
- What other questions might you ask Juan to more clearly understand issues he might be experiencing?
- What might happen to Juan if he does not receive EA funds?

NOTES



RESOURCE: STUDENT SCENARIOS

SCENARIO 3

Jay has been to your office twice in the past two years and received emergency aid both times— once for rent and once to pay a medical bill. Now his laptop no longer works and he must pay for its repair or buy a new one. Jay only is enrolled in online courses and has a paper due at the end of the week.

- How do you approach this situation?
- What assumptions are you making about Jay?
- Does Jay qualify for emergency aid?
- Are there other internal or external supports to assist?
- What else might you want to understand about Jay's situation?
- What might happen to Jay if he does not receive EA funds?

NOTES

CREATE YOUR OWN SCENARIO

Prompts:

- Considering your own experiences, draw from situations that presented challenging decisions: What elements made them fit into this “grey area?”
- What if team members perceive a student's situation differently? How does the team move forward towards a decision?
- Are there examples of “obvious” or immediately assumed situations (about students; or that team members have experienced themselves) that turned out to be much more nuanced?

MY SCENARIO

MAKING THE EA AWARD DECISION

The Making the Emergency Aid Award Decision section includes resources to help build your capacity to process information gathered from a student, and use these data to make a decision that considers the full context of the student’s emergency aid (EA) needs. Since these decisions are often made in teams, these resources promote discussion and exploration of opportunities to strengthen the program’s decision-making process.

Decision-Making Support

Making EA award decisions is challenging, as program staff are often presented with unique scenarios for which there is limited decision-making precedent to offer consistent guidance. Further, these situations must be considered in tandem with the realities of program capacity (e.g., budget), which influence awarding.

This section provides background on decision-making tools, while encouraging teams to work together to develop, reflect, and refine the content and process of these tools. The goal is to increase confidence in the use of the tools as customized for your program.

“I don’t like to say ‘no.’ I’d rather say ‘no, but...’ and they [students] can be connected elsewhere.”

—EA Staff



TOOL: EMERGENCY AID AWARD PRIORITIZATION

To create a package of support for a student, it is necessary to consider factors relevant to their need when they apply for an EA award, while also accounting for the program’s operational constraints.

This *Emergency Aid Award Prioritization* tool offers guidance on how students’ needs intersect with program funding, operational, and administrative capacity. You can review these data in coordination with information from the Getting to the “Root Cause” motivational interviewing techniques, the Decision-Making Roadmap for reviewing additional monetary/non-monetary resources, and/or other existing comparably focused tools.

You are encouraged to brainstorm about all resources at your disposal to meet a student’s need, and to think creatively about other ways to connect the student to additional supports, if need is beyond the financial scope of the program. **It is important to note that the intent of this tool is not to rate the student, but to indicate where a student’s need sits within a continuum.**

For each statement below, enter a number from 1 to 5.



STUDENT NEED

Root cause analysis suggests student has qualifying need	
Student’s need is time sensitive	
Student may drop out of school/program without receipt of EA award	
EA program staff and student jointly determine need is an unexpected and substantive challenge unlikely to resurface as an ongoing concern	
Receipt of EA award may prevent student’s need from becoming exacerbated and causing undue harm or stress (e.g., requiring more resources from student and/or surpassing program capability to effectively help)	

PROGRAM CAPACITY

Campus or community resources alone will not sufficiently meet student’s need	
The coordination of EA, non-EA campus, and non-EA program resources allow for an award allocation to meet the full demand of the EA need (e.g., a student will not only obtain a grocery store gift card, but also receive information about food pantries or other resources available to prevent food insecurity)	

Add the values for an overall total.

Overall Column Totals	
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SCALE DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE:

To establish numerical ranges for priority categories of EA awards (low priority, mid-range priority, and high priority), you should reflect on your program's available resources and your students' reliance on the program to address an emergency that can lead to dropping out.

It is highly recommended that you reexamine these ranges regularly for necessary adjustments. For example, if a school has a program with sizable budget over the long-term for sustainable funding to serve more students, a wider "High Priority" range may be used. This review process can help your program stay current with the needs of your students, remain aligned with your available resources, and offer an opportunity to reflect on trends that surface during review. Suggested ranges are offered as an example, but should be personalized for a stronger program fit.

AWARDING PRIORITY RANGES

LOW Priority Range for EA Award

Example Range: 7 - 15

Range:

It appears the issue of concern presented by this student may be a low priority for an EA financial award at this time. Other campus or community resources could provide the assistance needed and should be discussed with the student. Staff should consider additional information beyond the student score on this tool when making the final EA award decision. The Decision-Making Roadmap can help forge a plan to obtain additional financial support.

MID-RANGE Priority for EA Award

Example Range: 16 - 24

Range:

It appears this student's circumstance should be reconsidered before a final awarding decision. Conduct an additional review of their materials, follow-up with the student for more information, and check-in with other EA program staff for further discussion about the decision. As with the Low Priority case, the Decision-Making Roadmap may be useful for assessing how to coordinate resources and/or establish if an EA award is appropriate.

HIGH Priority Range for EA Award

Example Range: 25 - 35

Range:

It appears the issue presented by this student is a high priority for an EA award. The situation readily qualifies for this program's EA awarding criteria, and the student is likely at risk for dropping out if they were not to receive the funds. Furthermore, there are no other campus or community supports in place to sufficiently assist the student with the presented need, though they may be important to incorporate into longer-term planning with the student as resources for less acute non-monetary concerns.



TOOL: DECISION-MAKING ROADMAP¹⁰

Information from this tool can help you understand the full context of the student's financial situation by incorporating the student's life experiences and emergency needs into the decision-making process, along with the resource capacity of the emergency aid (EA) program.

Some of these factors may come from what you learn from the Getting to the Root Cause and Emergency Aid Award Prioritization tools. You should use this roadmap in the final stage of the decision-making process to address the student's need.

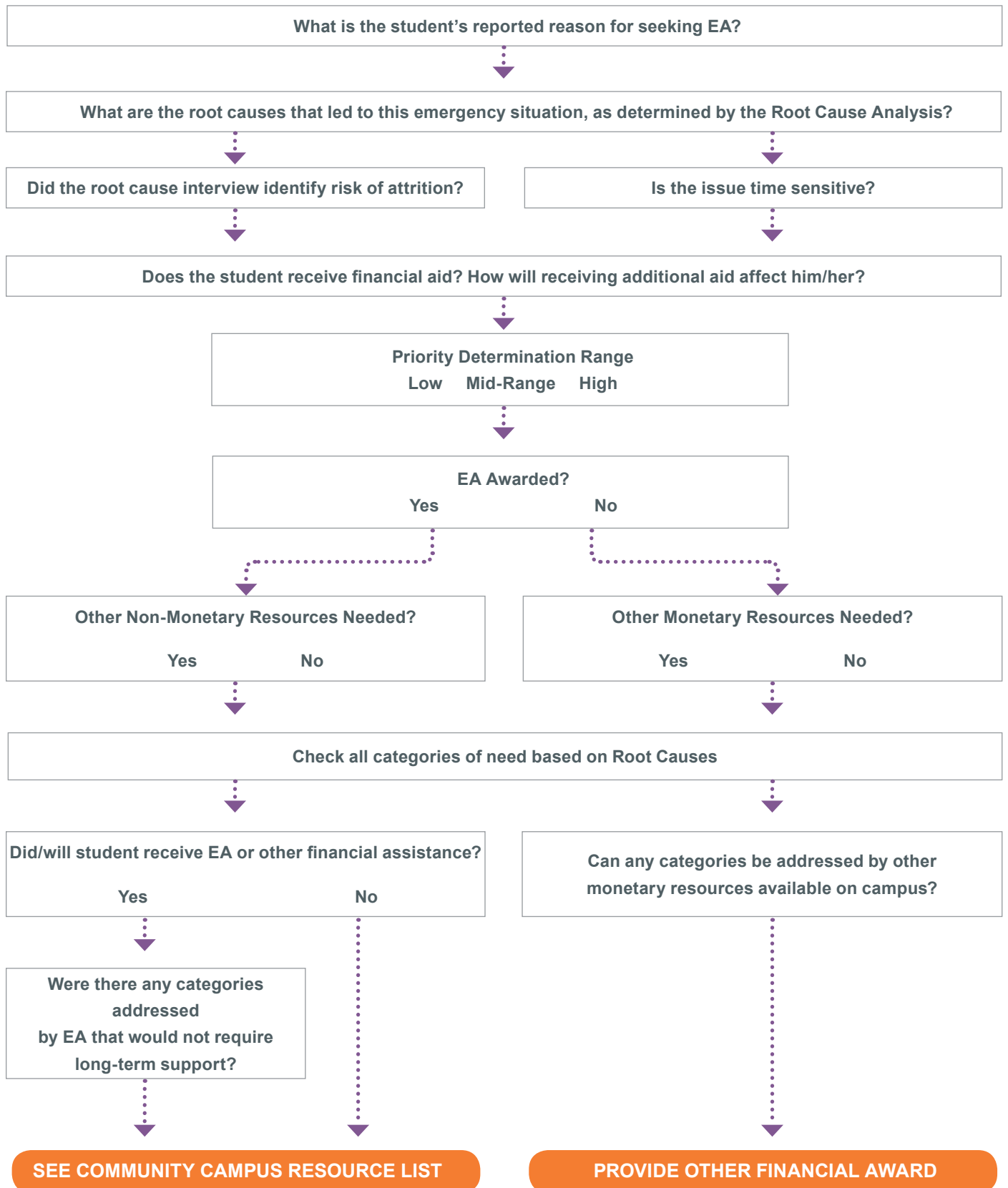
This tool is organized to represent the process that EA staff undertake when awarding aid, first through a visual depiction, followed by a worksheet that can be used to directly capture information. The tool can help you navigate the awarding process in a way that is consistent across cases, while accounting for the unique experiences of each student applicant. The tool also provides a consistent means of follow up with colleagues in other departments on campus, to ensure students receive their awards in a timely manner.

¹⁰ Individual health and wellness needs are collapsed into one category in this tool, with the understanding that emergency aid counselors will discover specific needs during their conversations with students at intake. Programs should also refer to their college's guidelines about mandatory reporting, if any information reported by the student suggests that they, or anyone else, is at risk of imminent danger.



TOOL: DECISION-MAKING ROADMAP

A Visual Guide





TOOL: DECISION-MAKING ROADMAP

What is the student's reported reason for seeking EA? (write below:)



What are the root causes that led to this emergency situation, and the categories they fall into (e.g., food; health/wellness; utilities; financial counseling; transportation; family services; academic needs; other needs)? (write below:)



Did the root cause interview identify risk of attrition?

Yes

No

Is the issue time sensitive?

Yes

No



Does the student receive financial aid? Consider how receiving financial aid will affect the student. (write below:)



Priority Determination Range (From EA Award Prioritization)

Low

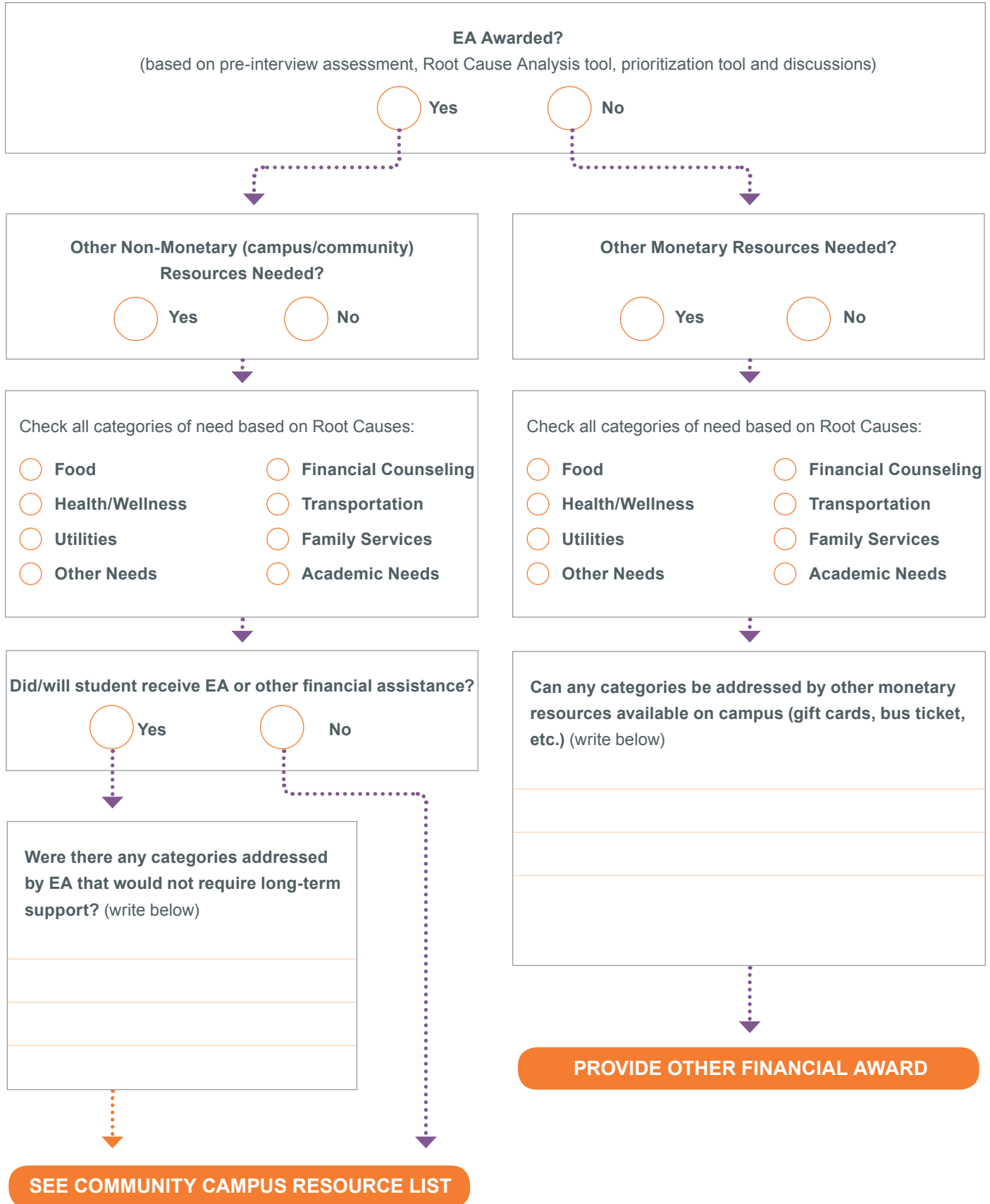
Mid-Range

High





TOOL: DECISION-MAKING ROADMAP



Reflection and Recalibration

Emergency aid (EA) program staff are busy, and often lack ample time to reflect on their decision-making process to better support students while drawing from the full range of resources available.

It may be necessary for department or section heads to create professional development opportunities for staff to reflect on all steps of the EA process and recalibrate on a regular basis.



RESOURCE: COMPETENCY MAPPING

Competency mapping can be an important exercise to help you understand and reflect on strengths and gaps in staff capacity. These competencies should align with the skills outlined in the job description for EA staff.

To address these competencies, you should:

- Discuss with your team why these skills are the right ones and that none are missing. This discussion can be difficult, and should be coordinated in conjunction with a college's Human Resources department, as necessary.
- Develop a three-part or five-part scale to assess individual team member competencies across areas that are pertinent to one's position and, more specifically, to the work individuals conduct as part of the emergency aid process. Consider including space to capture individual skills and competencies reflected outside the job description, such as expertise or experience in counseling, transportation, housing, legal matters, etc.

After completing the competency mapping, ensure teams from across the college have time to come together to share and reflect upon what they have learned about themselves. You can address questions such as:

- What is something new you learned about a colleague that can help you or the students you serve with the emergency aid process?
- What is a new skill or area of development that you learned about yourself?
- What are the core strengths of the team as a whole?
- What areas might the team address through professional development?

“I would just encourage anyone to do this work in the beginning, before you publicize to the students. Have the people know the procedures and how to do it. [Know your requirements because], it is heartbreaking to have a student go through the process and then find out they are not eligible.”

—Program Administrator



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

This resource will help the emergency aid (EA) team gain an understanding of their individual as well as collective strengths. These findings can then be translated to inform how the team works with students (e.g., who might be better suited for speaking with students who are parents; or are struggling with housing insecurity), and with each other.

Going through this resource as a team will also help identify competencies in which they may need to invest more training time. As such, this resource provides an opportunity for the EA team to reflect on the EA process to help identify small changes that could be made to better support students who need EA.

The components of self-assessment align with the process of engaging a student and appropriately addressing their needs in collaboration with other college staff. These components are:

- Intake
- Communications
- Staff Cultural Competence
- Staff Collaboration and Support

DIRECTIONS:

- Provide each participant with the *Emergency Aid Team Self-Assessment* (see next page).
- Allow everyone 10-15 minutes to read and answer the questions.
- Distribute the Discussion Guide and allow participants 5-10 minutes to review the information.
- Spend time as a group discussing these questions:
 - What resonated for folks?
 - What was an area of strength?
 - How about an area of opportunity?
- Designate one staff member to distribute information, facilitate the conversation, and record identified changes or immediate and long-term steps to make those changes.
- If possible, identify a future date to come together again as a team to report back on activities, progress, and impact—such as at the beginning or end of terms.



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please indicate the presence or absence of the following activities, values, and practices at your institution as they relate to the emergency aid process

Well-developed practice

Practice needs to be strengthened

Not applicable

1. INTAKE

EA staff use an intake form to collect information on students in need

EA staff have appropriate mechanisms to identify the root cause of need

EA staff regularly use motivational interviewing techniques in conversations with students about emergency aid

EA staff have received the appropriate training to identify the root cause of need

EA staff have the necessary soft skills to develop relationships with students in need (e.g., active listening and critical thinking)

EA staff meet in-person or over the phone with students when a need is first shared

EA staff understand and relay any criteria-based guidelines to students

EA staff share other campus resources with students

EA staff share community resources with students

EA staff understand and communicate documentation that students need

EA staff work with students to share/upload documentation as needed

EA staff understand reporting lines and where to send students in cases of EA

EA staff understand reporting lines and where to send students for other campus support services

EA staff understand reporting lines and where to send students for academic services

EA staff understand where to send students for external/community support services



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please indicate the presence or absence of the following activities, values, and practices at your institution as they relate to the emergency aid process

Well-developed practice

Practice needs to be strengthened

Not applicable

2. COMMUNICATIONS

Emergency aid programs are communicated through social media

Emergency aid programs are communicated through faculty/instructors in class

Emergency aid programs are communicated through college workshops

Emergency aid programs are communicated through campus brochures

Emergency aid programs are communicated through posters/white boards

Emergency aid programs are communicated through strategically placed locations (e.g., restrooms, website banners, etc.)

Faculty and instructors are aware of emergency aid resources

Adjunct faculty are aware of emergency aid resources

College staff in other departments (financial aid, faculty, etc.) are invited to meet with emergency aid staff to learn how they can participate in the emergency aid process

Other college staff are aware of emergency aid resources

EA staff use a whole-student approach to prioritize the student experience and reduce potential stigma that comes with emergency aid

The college has centralized location/designated personnel for emergency aid

EA staff have relationships with external/community resource agencies

EA staff continue to build and develop new relationships with external/community resource agencies



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please indicate the presence or absence of the following activities, values, and practices at your institution as they relate to the emergency aid process

**Well-
developed
practice**

**Practice
needs to be
strengthened**

**Not
applicable**

3. STAFF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

EA staff share the same definition of student success

EA staff have a shared understanding of the emergency aid program as a retention/persistence strategy

EA staff routinely encourage students in the pursuit of educational goals

EA staff reflect the diversity of the student body

EA staff use a strengths-based approach¹¹

EA staff are knowledgeable about community resources

EA staff are knowledgeable about college resources

EA staff are knowledgeable about how to bundle resources to meet student need

11 <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please indicate the presence or absence of the following activities, values, and practices at your institution as they relate to the emergency aid process

Well-developed practice

Practice needs to be strengthened

Not applicable

4. STAFF COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT

EA staff have dedicated time to come together to discuss EA cases

EA staff feel they are in an environment where they can respectfully share different points of view to encourage meaningful conversation about EA cases

EA staff feel supported among members of their team

There are systems in place to mitigate issues of burn out and fatigue

EA staff have opportunities to ameliorate issues related to workload

EA staff feel supported by other departments engaged with the EA process

EA staff have regular opportunities to connect with other college staff about the EA program

EA staff have regular opportunities to connect with faculty/instructors about the EA program

EA staff have regular opportunities to connect with adjunct faculty about the EA program

EA staff can attend professional development trainings to assist with EA administration

EA staff have committed resources for successfully integrating peer staff into the EA process

EA staff have opportunities to present their work, including with school leadership, foundation staff, alumni networks, or community leaders



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Notes

Which items stand out to your team, either because you have made strong progress or because additional work is needed?

Which of the domains (intake, communications, cultural competence, or collaboration and support) are currently of most interest to your college?

What strengths have you identified from items on the assessment that you can build on in your ongoing transformation efforts?

Which additional leaders, if any, need to be engaged in the process?

In what ways does your school's culture still need to change to more fully support the work of students in need of emergency aid?



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

ACTION PLAN

Individually and as a group, consider ideas from the self-assessment and group discussion that you can put into action. Identify 2-3 strategies that you can implement over the next few months. These strategies do not need to result in major changes, but they should move you closer to your collective goals in support of students.

STRATEGY 1:	Why did you choose this strategy?	
	What are your SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) or CLEAR (Collaborative, Limited, Emotional, Appreciable, Refinable) goals?	
	What strengths currently exist in this domain? What items can you build upon to get you closer to your goal?	
	What will help you know along the way that you are advancing toward your goals?	
	What challenges currently exist in this domain? Are these challenges related to individuals, policies, practices, or something else?	
	What do you consider the immediate next steps to take?	
Timeline:		
Internal/External Resources Needed (please include in-kind and financial resources):		
Implications for you and your way of working:		
Implications for staff—what will staff need to do differently to support this strategy?		
What will have changed because of this effort?		



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

STRATEGY 2:	Why did you choose this strategy?	
	What are your SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) or CLEAR (Collaborative, Limited, Emotional, Appreciable, Refinable) goals?	
	What strengths currently exist in this domain? What items can you build upon to get you closer to your goal?	
	What will help you know along the way that you are advancing toward your goals?	
	What challenges currently exist in this domain? Are these challenges related to individuals, policies, practices, or something else?	
	What do you consider the immediate next steps to take?	
Timeline:		
Internal/External Resources Needed (please include in-kind and financial resources):		
Implications for you and your way of working:		
Implications for staff—what will staff need to do differently to support this strategy?		
What will have changed because of this effort?		



RESOURCE: EMERGENCY AID TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

STRATEGY 3:	Why did you choose this strategy?	
	What are your SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) or CLEAR (Collaborative, Limited, Emotional, Appreciable, Refinable) goals?	
	What strengths currently exist in this domain? What items can you build upon to get you closer to your goal?	
	What will help you know along the way that you are advancing toward your goals?	
	What challenges currently exist in this domain? Are these challenges related to individuals, policies, practices, or something else?	
	What do you consider the immediate next steps to take?	
Timeline:		
Internal/External Resources Needed (please include in-kind and financial resources):		
Implications for you and your way of working:		
Implications for staff—what will staff need to do differently to support this strategy?		
What will have changed because of this effort?		

DEDICATION AND THANKS

Emergency Aid for Higher Education: A Toolkit and Resource Guide for Decision-Makers is the result of more than 10 months of research, interviews, focus groups, and webinars that elucidated current best practices, and gaps, in administering EA programs. The Equal Measure team would like to extend a special thanks to Ascendium Education Group for remaining an engaged thought partner throughout the process.

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Inver Hills Community College
Iowa Western Community College
Lorain County Community College
Mercy College of Health Sciences
Milwaukee Area Technical College
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
Northwest Iowa Community College
Ohio University
Reos Partners
Southwest Wisconsin Technical College
University of Arkansas at Fort Smith
University of Akron
University of Central Arkansas
University of Mary
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