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*Toward Affordability:  
Policy Recommendations  
for Virginia Higher Education*



State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

*Advancing Virginia through Higher Education*

**TOWARD AFFORDABILITY:  
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION**

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## INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its 2007-13 strategic plan, Advancing Virginia: Access, Alignment, Investment, the State Council highlighted 12 strategic higher education initiatives that it believed were necessary to ensure Virginia's future. Key among these goals was improvement of the affordability of a college education in the Commonwealth.

Recent events have reinforced the importance of affordability in higher education. The economic downturn the nation is currently experiencing is forcing Virginia to make unwanted cuts in higher education funds already appropriated, while at the same time parents and students are finding it harder to afford the rising tuition that reduced state funding engenders.

In the recent Measuring Up 2008 report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Virginia was one of 49 states graded "F" for affordability. The report noted that poor and working-class families in the Commonwealth must devote 31% of their income, even after receiving aid, to pay the costs of a two-year public college.

At a time when the economic success of a citizen, a state, or a nation is more and more directly tied to educational attainment, the U.S. – despite its high rates of participation in higher education – has the worst degree-completion rate among developed nations. While about 55% of young people in other developed countries have earned at least an associate's degree, the U.S. attainment percentage is only 42%.

Moreover, information recently presented to the Council on Virginia's Future indicates that, in order to be competitive with the best-performing nations by 2025, the Commonwealth's higher education system will need to increase its annual degree production by 28%, with the public sector needing to increase degrees by 34% annually. Given that students cannot achieve what they cannot afford, improving (or at least maintaining) the affordability of higher education is central not only to achieving economic competitiveness, but also simply maintaining economic viability.

Therefore, in order to advance public understanding of the need to improve affordability in higher education, the Council created an ad hoc committee in early 2008 to explore the subject. This document reflects the Council's perceptions of the various factors that impact affordability – both those within its control and influence as well as those outside – and outlines strategies and recommendations that the Council believes it and/or others should consider in addressing the various factors.

### Recommendations

- 1. While recognizing that tuition increases at Virginia' public colleges and universities may be necessary to offset general fund budget reductions, the State Council recommends that public institutions be required to dedicate between 5% and 30% of tuition increases (depending on each institution's circumstances) to need-based financial aid for in-state students.**

- 2. The State Council recommends that public institutions be financially rewarded for improving student retention, timely completion, and graduation rates.**
- 3. The State Council recommends that a financial plan be developed to address the growing imbalance in the higher education cost-sharing policy between the Commonwealth and in-state students and parents.**
- 4. The State Council recommends that the Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) be promoted through the development of a comprehensive marketing plan supported in partnership with the Commonwealth, private industry, and foundations.**
- 5. The State Council recommends that locally- or regionally-focused pilot “access” programs be created in currently-underserved urban and/or rural areas via public-private partnerships.**

## TOWARD AFFORDABILITY

For students and their families, higher-education **affordability** is a function of: (a) the actual cost of education; (b) availability of grants, scholarships, and loans to subsidize the costs; (c) their perceptions of the costs and benefits of a college education; and (d) their ability to pay the net costs. (A fuller discussion of the components and complexities of affordability appears in Appendix A, pps. 8-11.)

The State Council has concluded that, by focusing the various cost components of higher education and the public's perceptions of costs, the Commonwealth can positively impact Virginians' ability to pay for higher education.

Many factors impact the **cost** of higher education. For public higher education, the amount of state (general fund) support is key. Of the numerous other drivers of cost, some – such as federal aid and loan programs – are factors over which the State Council has no influence. For various other factors, the Council has limited or indirect impact. At the institutional level, such factors include: the amount of tuition and fees; the quantity and quality of academic programs, extracurricular programs, and campus amenities; the efficiency of operations; the size and pay-out rate of endowments and other gift support; and the availability of institutional aid, grant, and loan programs.

### **Institutional Costs**

The State Council encourages the boards of visitors of Virginia's public colleges and universities to seriously address the cost factors that individually and cumulatively impact the total cost of a student's education and to consider the overall affordability of their institutions as they take action on matters related to these factors. In early 2008, the Council approved a performance measure and reporting guidelines for institutions' efforts to meet the affordability goal of the Restructuring Act. The State Council looks forward to working with the institutions and their boards to achieve this new affordability target.

In late 2008, the Council adopted a budget resolution that called for a state policy, similar to a number of other states, requiring public institutions to dedicate a proportion of tuition increases to need-based financial aid for in-state students. (While the new Tuition Moderation Incentive Fund contains stipulations requiring such linkages in certain cases, institutional participation in the Fund is voluntary).

**Recommendation 1: While recognizing that tuition increases at Virginia' public colleges and universities may be necessary to offset general fund budget reductions, the State Council recommends that public institutions be required to dedicate between 5% and 30% of tuition increases (depending on each institution's circumstances) to need-based financial aid for in-state students.**

### **Institutional Productivity (Student Success)**

Given the declining educational-attainment rates in the U.S. and the potential impact on our global competitiveness, the Council also believes that incentives should be provided to encourage institutional productivity as it relates to student retention and graduation

rates. While the Restructuring Act is a start, more can be done to financially reward public institutions to: (a) retain admitted students (especially those who are from low-income and/or underrepresented populations); (b) facilitate students' timely completion; and (c) graduate larger numbers/percentages of students. Some states (e.g., Ohio) reward institutions with additional funds distributed according to institutions' proportional share of students retained, graduated on-time, and/or graduated in larger numbers (improved graduation rates). Other states, Kentucky among them, are considering such programs. The Council recommends that Virginia do so as well.

**Recommendation 2: The State Council recommends that public institutions be financially rewarded for improving student retention, timely completion, and graduation rates.**

### **Institutional Support**

Another factor that the State Council finds to be a key to preserving, if not improving, higher education affordability is the level of state support from the General Assembly, specifically the funding of base adequacy and student financial aid. While the amount of public dollars going to higher education continues to increase, expenditures for higher education continue to decline as a percentage of state expenditures and are far below the Council's biennial recommendations for what is needed and/or warranted by the state's own formulas.

As a result, institutions must cover their costs by increasing tuition and fees, which directly impacts families' ability to pay. The state should work to reconcile the fact that, while it ranks comparatively high nationally in per capita income, it ranks comparatively low nationally – and has for some time – in state support per student.

The State Council understands that the Governor and the legislature have finite dollars in the state budget for seemingly infinite expectations, and that the per capita income and expenditure rankings are mitigated by the state's tax rate; nonetheless, the Council pledges to continue to advocate for strong financial support for higher education and to continue to work with the executive and legislative branches to ensure that the state meets its own targets for adequate institutional and student support. Efforts such as Maryland's new Higher Education Investment Fund may represent innovative funding models worth considering by Virginia and other states.

**Recommendation 3: The State Council recommends that a financial plan be developed to address the growing imbalance in the higher education cost-sharing policy between the Commonwealth and in-state students and parents.**

### **Financial Aid**

Student financial aid is a key factor in affordability. Aspects of student aid, such as federal programs and loans, institutional programs and loans, and endowments, are beyond SCHEV's control. Those aspects within the purview of the State Council include the types, amounts, and proportions of state aid that go to needy students and the

mechanisms that the state employs to: (a) ensure that increases in institutional aid keep pace with increases in tuition; and (b) encourage K-12 students and their families to prepare academically and financially for college.

The State Council has investigated additional ways to encourage needy students to consider and pursue higher education. The Council has been impressed by the guarantees made to students and their families by states with early-commitment programs such as Wisconsin Covenant, Indiana 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars, and Oklahoma Promise. (For more information on these programs, see Appendix B, p. 12).

To reap these programs' benefits, high school students must formally "commit" (e.g., sign pledges) to meeting and maintaining the programs' academic and social (student conduct) criteria, expectations, and standards. In Wisconsin, the benefit is guaranteed admission to certain institutions; in Indiana and Oklahoma, guaranteed financial assistance, up to full tuition and fees at designated institutions. As a result, these "early commitment" programs compel secondary-school students and their families to think about and plan – academically, socially, and financially – for higher education.

The Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) resembles these programs in form, but not in substance. No commitment of a student is required and no commitment of the state is guaranteed. The philosophy of the Wisconsin, Indiana and Oklahoma programs is that as a student enters high school, the state makes, in effect, a bargain with the student (and by implication the parents) that if the student attains a pre-specified grade point average and stays out of trouble (as defined) the state will provide either guaranteed access and/or a guaranteed scholarship, at some level, regardless of need.

Guaranteed access is more difficult in a decentralized system such as Virginia, where every four year institution makes its own admissions decisions. However, access to the Community College system is guaranteed to every high school graduate, and transfer after two years is facilitated by recent developments. Virginia should be able to provide a high school graduate with good grades and a clean record reasonable assurance of access to four years of higher education.

In addition, other states assure a qualified student a scholarship not necessarily based on need. Ideally, SCHEV believes that a minimum of \$1000 per year for four years would be a tangible inducement to students to get good grades in high school and a useful tool for parents to insure persistence and good study habits for their children, and such a program should be developed in concept by 2010 while the state strives to meet fully its obligations for need-based aid.

Moreover, these other states publicize and celebrate their programs to induce kids to stay in school and go to college. However, it is noteworthy that because Virginia residents' eligibility under VGAP is automatically reviewed by public institutions, few students are aware of the program until after they apply to college and hence make no effort to meet its criteria. Thus, students who do not perform well are not motivated to improve their grades or behavior, and students who do get good grades are unaware of the assistance they are due. The Council, therefore, recommends a comprehensive marketing approach to promote the incentives and benefits of VGAP.

**Recommendation 4: Consistent with the language above, the State Council recommends that the Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) be promoted through the development of a comprehensive marketing plan supported in partnership with the Commonwealth, private industry, and foundations.**

**Access and Affordability**

While affordability is an important “end” in-and-of itself, the State Council is also interested in affordability as a “means” to promote and ensure access. In fact, the enhancement of access and affordability are two of the main themes and goals of the Council’s statewide strategic plan. Because the State Council and its staff are statutorily barred from involvement in public institutions’ admission standards and processes, the Council promotes the enhancement of access through working with partners and stakeholders to: (a) provide information, awareness, and encouragement to Virginians about higher education and its benefits; and (b) better prepare Virginia’s K-12 students for higher education.

Toward the goal of more and better information and encouragement to citizens about higher education and its benefits, Governor Kaine designated SCHEV as the lead agency in seeking a federal College Access Challenge Grant. Virginia’s application was successful, and as a result, SCHEV and its partners, over the next two years, will use the \$1.1 million received to demystify postsecondary education for underrepresented groups, especially students and families living below the poverty line. Specifically, the grant will assist SCHEV in providing information on: the importance of education beyond high school; career planning and choices; and how to apply for, finance, enroll, and succeed in a postsecondary setting.

To better prepare K-12 students, the State Council has sought to be a partner on various secondary-education-based ways of enhancing access. For example, the State Council applauds the Virginia P-16 Council’s efforts to enhance student preparation by better aligning high school standards with the expectations of colleges and employers. The Council encourages the P-16 Council to continue to explore means of improving linkages between high school graduation requirements and college admissions requirements, and between high school end-of-course/exit exams and college entrance/placement exams.

The State Council also applauds the efforts of the Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to fulfill Governor Kaine’s December 2007 request that middle and high school students develop personal learning plans to guide their academic and career preparation. The State Council has encouraged the P-16 Council to support these efforts, as well as any future legislation regarding formalization of requirements for these personal learning plans. The State Council requests that the P-16 Council and the Board of Education consider additional strategies that would encourage Virginia youths’ eventual participation in higher education, as well as their awareness of its possibilities for their lives and their futures.

Finally, the State Council believes that additional strategies are needed to create more targeted impacts on Virginians' awareness of higher education's costs and benefits, on their perceptions of their ability to meet these costs and achieve these benefits, and on their academic and financial preparations for furthering their education and/or training beyond high school. Toward this end, the State Council has reviewed regional programs such as the ACCESS College Foundation (South Hampton Roads), the Patrick County Educational Foundation, the Greater Richmond Area Scholarship Program (GRASP), the Appalachian Inter-Mountain Scholars Program (AIMS), and Project Discovery (various communities across Virginia), as well as statewide programs such as the UVA College Guides and the VCCS Career Coaches. (Additional information on these direct-intervention efforts and their impacts appears in Appendix C-1, p. 15.)

Each of these projects can serve as models for additional efforts in underserved areas and offer important lessons for those interested in establishing similar programs (see Appendix C-2, p.16.)

**Recommendation 5: The State Council recommends that locally- or regionally-focused pilot “access” programs be created in currently-underserved urban and/or rural areas via public-private partnerships.**

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. currently faces greater financial uncertainty and economic insecurity than at any time since the Great Depression. As a result, ***over one-third (34%) of parents*** surveyed recently by Fidelity Investments indicated that, within the past year, they have either ***“decreased the amount they are saving or have stopped saving completely for their children's future college education.”*** In these difficult times, it is the duty of the State Council and state leaders to ensure that higher education in the Commonwealth remains a viable, affordable, and accessible option for Virginia citizens. To do otherwise, the Council firmly believes, would be to further jeopardize our collective futures.

## APPENDIX A: UNDERSTANDING AFFORDABILITY

### The Enigma of Affordability

The affordability of higher education has been a popular topic of study for over a decade. Much of this research has looked at affordability in a *comparative* sense, measuring a student demographic, an institution, or a state against another of the same kind; or a demographic, institution, or state compared to itself over time; or a state's effort against federal effort; or a similar comparison.

These studies have been useful in identifying possible shortcomings in the higher education system, but none has arrived at a conclusive definition of affordability nor has any made a definitive statement of whether or not education is affordable. Just because one institution or state is more affordable than another does not necessarily mean that the higher ranked entity has achieved affordability or that the lower ranked institution or state is unaffordable. Put another way, other than trying to stay ahead of the competition or its own history, no state or institution seems to have a firm affordability destination in mind, and research studies have offered no alternative way of thinking.

A universally accepted definition of affordability is elusive. Some have claimed that it is in the "eye of the beholder," with a different meaning or context for every individual. Similar to the concept of beauty, it may be difficult to explain or describe, but many claim to recognize it when they see it.

Affordability is not as simple as determining whether or not a person has the resources available to purchase an item. Different items have differing utilities, expected life spans, and overall values; therefore, the price one is willing to pay may also be dramatically different. Thus, affordability is not simply a matter of "ability to pay;" it is more a matter of whether the value one places on an item is deemed to be worth its cost. Also, recent studies have reported that a person with a bachelor's degree will earn about \$1 million more in his or her lifetime than a person with a high school diploma. If true, then any cost of higher education that is something below \$1 million could be defined as "affordable;" however, one does not obtain higher education simply for the sake of being able to pay for it.

What might be affordable for one person might be deemed unaffordable by another, even if both people are in the same economic cohort. Therein lies part of the problem. Higher education is intangible and so it has differing meanings and values for different people. Some see it as an ends, while most see it as a means. Some see it as a necessity, much like a lifesaving medical procedure in that the cost may be high, but the alternative is unthinkable. Others view higher education as one option among many equals, including military service, taking over a family business, accepting a simpler lifestyle, etc. Some even view higher education negatively. Noting that most who went to college from their impoverished community never returned, a respondent to a recent survey concluded that higher education was a threat to the delicate and disintegrating fabric of their community and/or a disrespectful rejection of their parent's or hometown's traditional lifestyle.

**Understanding Affordability: Different Perceptions, Different Realities**

Whether and to what extent something is perceived as affordable varies by individual depending upon the perceived benefit of an item as compared to the cost of attainment. This holds true even for a government’s definition of affordability.

The costs and benefits extend beyond purely objective financial terms into subjective measures, such as the benefits of improved social conscience, personal satisfaction, costs of time/effort to prepare for college, and separation from family or familiar surroundings. While affordability is typically discussed in pure financial terms, these other measures also have a significant impact in affordability decisions because they are intrinsic in the process of assigning value or worth.

| <b>Benefits</b>   |  |
|---|--|
| <b><u>Societal</u></b>  | <b><u>Individual</u></b>   |
| Economic Potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase tax revenues</li> <li>• Greater productivity</li> <li>• Increased consumption</li> <li>• Increased workforce flexibility</li> <li>• Decreased reliance on government financial support</li> <li>• Decreased unemployment</li> </ul>      | Economic Potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased expected earnings level</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Higher savings levels</li> <li>• Improved working conditions</li> <li>• Personal/professional mobility</li> </ul>   |
| Social Correlations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced crime</li> <li>• Increased charitable giving / community service</li> <li>• Increased quality of civic life</li> <li>• Social cohesion / appreciation of diversity</li> <li>• Improved ability to adapt to and use technology</li> </ul> | Social Correlations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved health / life expectancy</li> <li>• Improved quality of life for offspring</li> <li>• Better consumer decision making</li> <li>• Increased personal status</li> <li>• More hobbies leisure activities</li> <li>• Improved self-esteem</li> <li>• Improved fulfillment</li> </ul> |
| <b>Costs</b>  |  |
| <b><u>Societal</u></b>  | <b><u>Individual</u></b>   |
| Economic Potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital outlay</li> <li>• Student subsidy</li> <li>• Opportunity costs</li> </ul>   | Economic Potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Past savings</li> <li>• Current out-of-pocket</li> <li>• Future earnings (if using loans)</li> <li>• Opportunity costs</li> <li>• Indirect costs of education (room &amp; board, travel, etc.)</li> <li>• Giving up current social subsidies</li> </ul>                                    |
| Social Correlations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher social expectations                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Arts</li> <li>○ Libraries</li> <li>○ Museums</li> <li>○ Protection / health</li> <li>○ K-12 quality</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                       | Social Correlations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and effort</li> <li>• Risk of trying / failing</li> <li>• Risk of negative family and peer pressure</li> <li>• Academic preparation</li> <li>• Time / distance away from family and familiar environment</li> </ul>  |

Gathered in part from The Institute for Higher Education Policy, “*The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*,” 2005. <http://www.ihep.org/Publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=43>

## **State-government Challenges in Addressing Affordability**

**Cost and Resources.** Affordability is not simply a matter of resources available to the student and family; rather, affordability is determined after resources are subtracted from cost. Therefore decisions affecting the cost of education impact affordability in much the same way as decisions regarding student subsidies and assistance. Too often, these issues are dealt with as discrete questions rather than reflecting the interrelated nature of both higher education cost and student subsidy policies. A holistic approach to systemic and individual affordability must address the impact of cost policies as well as resources available to the student.

**Shared Responsibility.** Affordability is measured differently for the student, the institution, the state, and the public. A further complication is that affordability is primarily a conceptual construct subject to personal perceptions rather than a defined, measured one. As such, what may be deemed as affordable and reasonable for one stakeholder may be viewed as unaffordable by another in a similar economic situation. In this environment, the state cannot rely on individual definitions, but must develop a reasonable standardized cost model in which every stakeholder has a defined and shared ownership and accountability in maintaining an affordable system of higher education.

**Decentralized System.** Affordability is more easily achieved and maintained under uniform guidelines and central control that consistently support systemic policies and goals; however, Virginia's decentralized system has many advantages and is unlikely to change. The state's affordability goals must be balanced against and support an appropriate level of autonomy in a decentralized system that provides institutional ownership of its product while still achieving overall systemic and institutional goals for affordability.

**Competing Priorities.** Affordability cannot be the state's primary goal for higher education. Rather, it is considered during the process by which the state achieves its overall goals for quality, accessibility, accountability, and productivity. Appropriate systemic educational goals in these areas must be balanced by the state to ensure that progress is achieved in an efficient and responsible manner that also makes a quality competitive education available to as many people as possible.

**Global Environment.** Affordability is a national issue that is changing quickly as competition between colleges and universities becomes global in nature. In this "arms race" environment, institutions continue to compete for the best faculty and students by pouring increasingly greater dollars into educational facilities and non-educational amenities. This competition results in upward pressure on operational, administrative, and educational costs. Institutions that do not keep up with rising student expectations run the risk of losing position and prestige. Therefore, the state's ability to impact individual student affordability may be limited and must be measured against potential competitive consequences.

### **Individual Affordability**

Individual affordability is achieved when the costs of entering, pursuing, and attaining higher education fall within an acceptable level for the individual student or family. Under this definition, affordability is defined uniquely by each individual student; however, in order for a state to have a meaningful measure of individual affordability, it would need a uniform standard.

In an effort to define affordability, a number of different measures have been used for various research studies. These measures include, but are not limited to:

- Student debt levels
- “Net price” paid by students as a percent of a measure of income
- Participation rates for designated sub-groups of students as compared to the institutions’ general population
- Graduation rates for designated sub-groups of students as compared to the institutions’ general population

Each of these measures isolates a portion of the educational process, but none provides a final statement on a state’s success in providing an affordable college education to all families. Participation rates provide some measure of *access* to higher education, while graduation rates make a statement about *attainment*, but only for those who enter into college. Since affordability decisions vary by individual, measures that track student behavior / activity represent the best means of assessing the decisions the families have made; however, many non-financial factors are also involved. The other two measures provide information about the impact on students as they move through the educational process but little is known about the thresholds at which these measures make a definitive statement concerning affordability being lost or gained.

For Virginia to identify whether affordability has been achieved, the state should first determine the goal of the state’s higher education system in terms of the *public needs* that the system is intended to meet. By setting clear, identifiable goals for participation and attainment, it can then measure the success of the system and whether or not public funds are being utilized efficiently.

For individual student affordability, the state has established a combination of measures that track student participation, loan debt, net price, and graduation rates within the Restructuring Act. Tracking over time, systemic and institutional goals could be set for each of these measures. Progress towards meeting these goals or negative movement away from the goals, individually or in combination, would signal the need for more attention and resources, as well as help guide policy and discussion.

## **APPENDIX B: EARLY COMMITMENT PROGRAMS**

The State Council reviewed various state-level student assistance programs, including Wisconsin Covenant, Oklahoma Promise, and Indiana's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars. These programs use financial aid and/or guaranteed admission in unique ways to reach students early in high school and secure a proactive commitment from them to plan for higher education. In return, the state provides a guaranteed placement or financial assurance for students planning to attend college. These programs have become known as Early Commitment Programs.

The Oklahoma Promise and Indiana 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars programs make guaranties that each student will receive a combination of grants that cover tuition and fees at designated institutions. In exchange, the student promises to take appropriate college-prep courses, maintain a minimum high school grade point average, avoid inappropriate behavior, and otherwise make proactive plans to attend college. While the Wisconsin Covenant does not provide a financial guaranty, the program does promise admission into a designated college or university.

While the student eligibility criteria and the program benefits may differ among such programs, the magic of an Early Commitment Program is in its name. Securing an intentional commitment from a ninth-grader to proactively plan for college by meeting certain basic steps effectively changes the family conversation from thinking that college "might" be possible to an "expectation" that the student will go to college. Having the state make a commitment – financial or academic – provides a sense of security years in advance and encourages postsecondary planning at the family level.

Virginia developed a similar program – the Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) - in the early 1990s. This program is intended to encourage students to do well in high school in exchange for additional financial aid, but it falls short of its potential and the impact realized by an Early Commitment Program. The lack of a marketing presence, visibility, direct student contact early in high school, and a specific state guaranty render VGAP no different than most standard need-based programs. In many cases, recipients of VGAP are not even aware the program exists until after receiving their award letter from the institution listing the federal, state, and institutional grants awarded.

## APPENDIX C-1: DIRECT-INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

A number of programs are currently operating in Virginia to provide postsecondary-related guidance and assistance to K-12 students. The recently received federal College Access Challenge Grant will facilitate the first statewide inventory of such efforts. Among the programs that were reviewed by the State Council during 2008 were the ACCESS College Foundation, the Patrick County Education Foundation, the Greater Richmond Area Scholarship Program/GRASP, Project Discovery, the UVA College Guide Program, and the VCCS Career Coach Program.

The common element of these efforts is the provision of information about higher education to Virginia's K-12 students. The Patrick County Education Foundation (PCEF), Project Discovery, and the Career Coach Program also provide information on employment. The ACCESS College Foundation (ACF), the PCEF, and GRASP not only provide information on financial aid, but also leverage it directly for served students.

These programs vary according to their foci and targets.

- Targets:
  - While most of the reviewed programs serve only high school students, the PCEF and Project Discovery serve students in high school and below.
- Foci:
  - The PCEF works with one high school;
  - GRASP, with students in the Richmond area;
  - The ACF, with all 29 public high schools in South Hampton Roads;
  - The other programs have statewide foci, but are not in every high school.
    - The UVA College Guide program places university graduates in about two dozen public high schools (similar to the AmeriCorps program).
    - With assistance from SCHEV's GEAR UP Program, the VCCS Career Coach Program currently has coaches/mentors in over 130 high schools.
    - Project Discovery is offered through 19 local partner agencies and three pilot programs across the state and, uniquely, is targeted primarily at economically disadvantaged youths who would be first-generation college students.

The efforts operated by the PCEF, UVA, and VCCS are comparably new and small-scale, but the early results are positive in terms of more and better one-on-one advising of potential undergraduates about academic and financial preparation for college. Project Discovery, GRASP, and the ACF are each over 20 years old and have served tens of thousands of students. Over time, the ACF has leveraged over \$175 million in public and private financial aid sources. The PCEF and GRASP also provide direct "last dollar" scholarships to needy students, and the PCEF has agreements with nine private institutions whereby Patrick County students are eligible for additional institutional aid. The PCEF also offers a student-agreement program similar to the early commitment programs discussed previously.

## **APPENDIX C-2: GUIDANCE FOR CREATING PILOT PROJECTS**

The State Council believes that additional localities could benefit from the creation of access-promotion programs supported by public-private partnerships. Toward that end, an inventory of the Commonwealth's existing efforts will be developed through the aforementioned College Access Challenge Grant, with the goal of identifying areas that lack access-promotion programs.

Nonetheless, the Council does not believe that interested localities, public and private entities, or the state should wait for conclusion of this inventory to start considering new direct-intervention programs in underserved areas. Based on its review of select successful programs, the Council concludes that the following points of "best practice" and "lessons learned" guidance would facilitate any locality's considerations and strategies toward the creation and implementation of such a program.

### **Start with the Problem, Not the Solution**

One theme that emerged from the State Council's discussions both with national experts and Virginia program leaders was that efforts to address access and affordability issues should be tailored to those specific issues rather than borrowed or transplanted from other efforts. That which works in one place and on one set of issues/problems should not be expected to work in another place and/or on another set of issues/problems.

1. Investigate the access and affordability issues faced by students and their families in the area/region. The issues faced by rural areas will likely be different from those of urban areas, and some issues will be unique to the area/region.
2. Articulate the identified access and affordability issues to business, civic, education, and government leaders in the community.
3. In consultation with community leaders, develop a set of informed, locally tailored strategies for addressing the area's access and affordability issues. These strategies may include information/awareness campaigns, academic and/or financial counseling, mentoring, assistance in completing admission, financial aid, and scholarship forms, and direct provision of aid/scholarships. A combination of these strategies appears to achieve optimal results.
4. Allow the strategies that have been developed (and the area/number of students to be served) to dictate the form, function, focus, and process(es) of the program / organization / entity that is developed.
5. Once the nature, scope, and intended activities of the program/organization have been determined, begin to build on the set of community leaders above to create a cadre of public (local, state, and federal government agencies) and private (community, corporate, and philanthropic entities) partners to provide the financial funding and in-kind services necessary to start and maintain the entity.

### **Don't Reinvent the Wheel**

Another theme that emerged from the State Council's considerations was that efforts should complement, enhance, and/or build on – but not tread on – already existing efforts and networks. Much can be gained from working with the leaders of ongoing activities. School and school-district personnel can be especially valuable resources in helping to understand what has been tried, what has worked/is working, and what has failed. They also have the best perspective on the locale's overall educational environment, opportunities, and challenges. Educational personnel at the secondary and postsecondary levels can also be key allies in developing and carrying out the initiative(s). New efforts should not conflict or compete with existing efforts; an environment of cooperation and shared purpose should permeate the program and its activities. Co-locating, co-sponsoring, and/or co-funding activities and even personnel can build effective bridges to schools and other entities.