

Need-based Financial Aid Programs: Evidence on Access, Participation, and Success

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Study overview & activities

The purpose of this study is to explore the landscape of financial aid programs in the state of New Jersey. The state has a patchwork of programs and policies with impacts that are not well understood. To this end, my project:

- Conducts in-depth descriptive analyses of four large, need-based financial aid programs in the state.
- Differentiates the four programs to provide insights into the state’s financial aid ecosystem.
- Determines which financial aid programs give rise to causal evaluation of downstream impacts, including college persistence, degree attainment, earnings, and employment.
- Disseminates results across various state agency stakeholders and works toward improving the implementation of financial aid programs across the state.

Research questions

1. Who participates in financial aid programs? Across each of the four programs, what are the demographic and geographic compositions of applicants and aid recipients? Does participation vary based on residency or postsecondary institution attended—whether rural, suburban, or urban?
2. What key features are included in program implementation? How do eligibility criteria vary across the programs?
3. When were programs proposed and ultimately implemented? At what point in policy development were programs suggested, voted upon by legislators, and enacted?
4. To what extent have statewide goals for implementation been met? Has data from any financial programs—especially those implemented the longest—provided evidence as to whether a sufficient percentage of aid recipients earned a college degree?

Data sources

My data partner is the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, which governs the New Jersey State Data System (NJSDS). NJSDS provides the following data sources:

- **NJ Department of Education** (NJDOE), which houses K-12 data sources.
- **NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development** (NJDOL), which maintains records related to earnings and employment.
- **Higher Education Student Assistance Authority** (HESAA), which governs financial aid records.
- **Office of the Secretary of Higher Education** (OSHE), which maintains records related to postsecondary enrollment and degree attainment.



The aid programs

- **Community College Opportunity Grants** (CCOG)
 - Part of the state’s College Promise program, for community college students only.
 - **15,099** students received **\$34m** in 2022-23.
- **Garden State Guarantee** (GSG)
 - Part of the state’s College Promise program, for juniors and seniors at 4-year colleges.
 - **15,072** students received **\$87m** in 2022-23.
- **Educational Opportunity Fund** (EOF)
 - Provides financial assistance and support services to economically disadvantaged students.
 - **13,015** students received **\$55m** in 2022-23.
- **Tuition Aid Grant** (TAG)
 - The state’s flagship 4-year college aid program, serving more than a third of all undergraduates (public and private).
 - **78,045** students received **\$458m** in 2022-23.

Eligibility

	Tier	Threshold	Value
CCOG	1	\$0-\$65K	Full tuition
	2	\$65-\$80K	Half tuition
	3	\$80-\$100K	One-third tuition
GSG	1	\$0-\$65K	Full tuition
	2	\$65-\$80K	Capped at \$7,500
	3	\$80-\$100K	Capped at \$10,000
EOF		w/in 200% of poverty	\$200-\$3,050
TAG	1	< 1500 NJEI	\$3K-\$14K
	2	1500-2499 NJEI	\$3K-\$12K
	3	2500-3499 NJEI	\$2K-\$10K
	4	3500-4499 NJEI	\$2K-\$9K
	5	4500-5499 NJEI	\$1K-\$8K
	6	5500-6499 NJEI	no CC, \$4K-\$7K
	7	6500-7499 NJEI	no CC, \$3K-\$6K
	8	7500-8499 NJEI	no CC/state, \$3K-\$5K
	9	8500-9499 NJEI	no CC/state, \$2K-\$4K
	10	9500-10499 NJEI	only indy, \$2K
	11	> 10499 NJEI	\$0

Next steps

- Disseminate preliminary findings to Heldrich Center and agency leadership to help inform the direction of financial aid policy in the state.
- Submit grant applications that will further support this project.
- Complete descriptive manuscript for peer review and identify aid program most appropriate for causal impact study.
- Complete policy brief for public distribution.

