

MYTHS

EA Roadmap Addresses Common Myths about Emergency Aid

The Roadmap to Effective Emergency Aid is based on the learnings from a pilot that was conducted by Reos Partners on five campuses from 2017-2018. The following is a sampling of “myths”, or misconceptions, that teams held at the start of the pilot and “truths” they uncovered while working on the EA Roadmap.

Resources for Your EA program

MYTH: We do not have enough resources to run an effective, ongoing EA program.

TRUTH: Campuses have more resources than may be obvious at first glance.

- Once campuses began demonstrating EA impact on student success, as well as the financial benefit of retaining students, resources were made available.
- Once a viable value proposition for EA is articulated, donor solicitation is not a hard ask—and has been made with success.
- “We actually increased efficiency by better coordinating existing staff and financial resources....A robust EA program is not necessarily a whole new thing; it’s just a reorientation of existing resources.” —*Financial Aid Director*



MYTH: EA resources include only grants or loans.

TRUTH: EA may include grants (restricted & unrestricted), loans, vouchers, completion scholarships, financial aid package revisions, and referrals to campus food pantries and community resources.

MYTH: Fundraising for EA will draw resources away from other needs.

TRUTH: “EA actually helped us to expand resources. We targeted our current donors first, with whom we were able to show a value proposition that they found compelling using the impact data we have compiled so far.”—*Associate Vice Chancellor for Advancement*

MYTH: Students should drop out if they encounter a financial shortfall and come back when they can.

TRUTH:

- The return on the investment (ROI) in EA is higher than the ROI of investing in a second round of recruitment when students drop out.
- Students who drop out often don’t come back, particularly if funding post-secondary education has stretched their (and their family’s) resources.

The Role of Financial Aid (FA)

MYTH: FA staff do not need to be part of the EA program development team.

TRUTH: FA staff are important members of the cross-functional EA program development team. They understand student financial challenges and options, including making revisions to financial aid packages, where applicable.

MYTH: All institutional FA rules and guidelines are determined by state and federal policies.

TRUTH: Institutions also have their own FA policies and have some flexibility in how they disburse financial aid.

MYTH: Sometimes non-FA staff don't inform FA when they give out EA because they fear that the aid won't be in compliance with rules and federal guidelines.

TRUTH: FA staff know the rules and will use their experience to ensure that the EA program is in compliance. "EA is perfectly possible with easy compliance if it is designed using the wisdom and capacity of Financial Aid staff." —*Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment, Director of Financial Aid*

Student Characteristics and Needs

MYTH: Only low-income students will use EA, so EA should be focused solely on these students.

TRUTH: Emergencies happen to everyone regardless of background, income, etc. The program should be available to all students, and outreach should be conducted to ensure that students who may be at highest risk are aware of the program.

MYTH: All students know that they can ask for assistance.

TRUTH: Many students don't know that they can request assistance, and stigma can impede some from asking for help.

MYTH: Students will take advantage or abuse the program.

TRUTH: "This risk is exceedingly rare and we haven't seen it. The proportion of students with that intent is very low." —*Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management*

MYTH: Today's students should be able to support themselves, as previous generations have.

TRUTH: Tuition, housing, food, transportation, and living expenses have increased dramatically in recent decades, making it much more challenging to afford higher education, even with a part-time job or financial aid.

Faculty Interest in Supporting Students

MYTH: Faculty don't think it is their role to help students with financial emergencies.

TRUTH: Faculty want to help with outreach, as long as the guidance they are asked to give students is straight-forward and useful. Tools, such as draft emails, suggestions on how to talk with students, and a statement about EA to be included in syllabi, have helped with faculty engagement.

For more information on the Roadmap to Effective Emergency Aid, contact: Monica Pohlmann, Principal, Reos Partners, at: pohlmann@reospartners.com.