

The Equity in Action Grant Program:

Supporting a Just and Equitable Environment for California State University Students

Final Report

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Introduction

To support [middle leaders](#) in conducting equity-driven research across the California State University (CSU) system, the CSU Student Success Network (Network) launched the Equity in Action (EIA) grant program in 2021. Grant funds support actionable projects built to identify, define, and disrupt systemic and institutional inequities within the CSU system. Applicants are tasked with creating innovative, evidence-based projects that have the capacity to support underserved student groups and the potential to effect institutional change. In 2022, the Network awarded 20 EIA grants to applicants across 13 CSU campuses. Over \$386,000 in grant funding was invested into the CSU system through the Network's EIA grant awards (see the [Appendix](#) for a table of participating campuses and corresponding project descriptions).

Recipients had 20 months to implement, measure, and document the activities proposed in their applications. Grantees provided interim reports in 2023 documenting their progress, completed activities, early results, implementation challenges, and next steps. As noted in the 2023 interim grant report [info sheet](#), EIA grants supported a variety of projects, with most seeking to implement programs for specific underserved student groups (65%) or improve course and major outcomes (35%). At the time of the interim reporting period, 70 percent of grant recipients reported that projects were progressing as planned.

At the end of the grant period in 2024, recipients submitted final reporting forms that detail actions and outcomes and offer reflection on the grant process. Report summaries and full final reports for individual grant recipients can be found on [the Network's website](#). After systematically coding and theming responses to several key questions on the final reporting form, in this document we present an overview of final reports to provide a broad understanding of the collective impact of the projects completed by EIA grant recipients across the system. In this report, we present the following:

- a high-level overview of sustained impact across EIA grant projects;
- an overview of the student groups represented across projects;
- an examination of high-level project outcomes;
- an exploration of the unexpected gains and benefits grantees experienced while executing their projects;
- a description of project strategies that grantees found particularly successful;
- a reflection upon both the external and project-specific challenges that impacted project implementation; and
- highlights from recipient-reported recommendations for future iterations of the EIA grant program and the Network, broadly.



Sustained Impact of EIA Grant Projects

Across all 20 grants, recipients implemented projects that show evidence of lasting impact beyond the grant period, including continued institutional support, expanded funding sources, and establishment of new relationships.

Institutionalization

- **Five** projects and programs that began with EIA grant support are still operating as of fall 2025.
- **Three** project reports indicated strong institutional support (e.g., funding, changes to practice) for continuing some portion of the project.
- **Two** programs established through EIA grant funding continue to operate after being absorbed and adopted by a department on campus.

Additional Funding

- **Nine** recipients reported securing additional funds to augment the projects they built with EIA grant funding. Sources of funding include:
 - university, government, and CSU Chancellor's Office grants;
 - alumni and donor contributions; and
 - philanthropic foundation funding.

Relationship Development

- As a result of conducting their projects, **nine** EIA grant recipients reported building lasting relationships and partnerships across campus departments and organizations and within their local communities (e.g., surrounding school districts).

Student Group Focus across Campus

Grant applicants were tasked with building projects that worked to break down systemic inequalities while providing opportunities for students to learn, engage, progress, and complete credentials. Most grant recipients centered their projects on specific student groups, resulting in a wide spectrum of students being supported through EIA grant projects. Across the 20 projects, 13 institutions designed their project activities around defined student groups. The most represented group was traditionally underserved first year students.¹

 <p>CSU Bakersfield</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students enrolled in courses that use accessible and equitable writing assignments 	 <p>Stanislaus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ First-year URM male students 	 <p>California State University SAN MARCOS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students enrolled in first-year & lower division general education courses ✓ Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander students ✓ Latin@/x students, focused on Education, Law, Medicine, and STEM
 <p>CSUF CAL STATE FULLERTON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Transfer students with low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented backgrounds, who are parents or caretakers 	<p>CAL STATE EAST BAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ EOP Summer Bridge Residential participants ✓ General student population ✓ Historically underserved incoming freshman students 	<p>FRESNO STATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Geoscience students
 <p>CalPoly Pomona</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ First- & second-year URM students who live on campus 	 <p>Cal Poly Humboldt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students enrolled in general chemistry courses 	 <p>LONG BEACH STATE UNIVERSITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Black students interested in pursuing education careers ✓ Pregnant & parenting students
 <p>SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students with 2+ DFWS ✓ General student population 	 <p>SACRAMENTO STATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Underrepresented first-year students ✓ Southeast Asian & Pacific Islander students 	 <p>SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Students enrolled in first-year and lower division general education courses ✓ Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander students
 <p>CAL POLY SAN LUIS OBISPO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Autistic students 		

¹We prefer the term “traditionally underserved” to place the onus of student success on the institution. We reflect the use of the terms “underrepresented” or “historically underserved” where indicated in grant recipients’ project descriptions.



Overview of Project Outcomes

Recipients reported on project outcomes tied to the goals of their proposals.² Below we describe the top three project outcome themes.

41% Connections

- ✓ Peer connections
- ✓ Community partnerships
- ✓ Mentor connections
- ✓ Belongingness
- ✓ Promoting student growth

Strengthening Connections. Looking across the 73 outcomes reported across the projects, the most common theme was the establishment of connections and opportunity to facilitate connectedness across the campus and around the community. Tangible connections included establishing peer-to-peer networks, developing community partnerships, and securing mentor/mentee relationships. Captured by survey data collected by grantees, outcomes related to connectedness included fostering a sense of belongingness in students and helping students grow into their student identities.

25% Academic Outcomes

- ✓ Academic improvement
- ✓ Mixed participant outcomes
- ✓ New learning strategies

Academic Outcomes. The second most common theme included reporting on a variety of academic outcomes, such as improvement on specific student success metrics (e.g., DFW rates, retention) through project implementation and the use and development of innovative learning strategies meant to support students in the classroom.

13% Impacts on Staff and Faculty

- ✓ Faculty learning opportunities
- ✓ Course design
- ✓ Student-focused practices
- ✓ Strategies for fostering student growth

Impacts on Faculty and Staff. The third most common theme involved positive impacts on staff and faculty—both for those who participated in the implementation of the project and for those engaged in partnerships formed during the project. All descriptions related to this theme mentioned staff or faculty members benefitting from learning opportunities for role development or strategies for strengthening student support.

12% Institutional Impacts

- ✓ Insights from data collection
- ✓ Institutional change
- ✓ Institutional retention

Less than 1 percent of the total outcomes reported showed limited or mixed results (e.g., mixed academic outcomes for participants in a targeted tutoring program, little difference in academic outcomes for students using specialized textbooks).

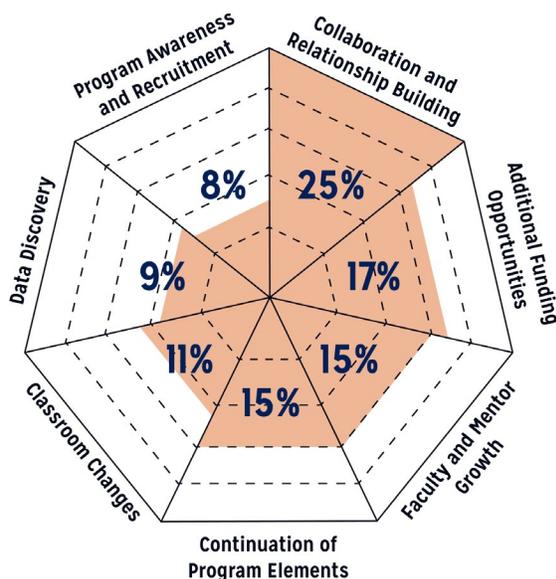
9% Program Impacts

- ✓ Report development
- ✓ Program development
- ✓ Program retention

² Two of the 20 grant recipients did not complete their projects as intended and therefore did not report any project outcomes.

Unexpected Gains and Unanticipated Outcomes

Across projects, recipients reported 53 unique unexpected gains and benefits stemming from the activities undertaken and work performed in relation to their projects.



Collaboration and Relationship Building. Opportunities for collaboration and relationship building were the most widely reported unexpected gains. Partnerships and collaborations were built between students and faculty, on-campus partners, and the wider community. Some recipients described how project work unexpectedly took them into new offices and departments across their campuses, where they ultimately found allyship and support. Other recipients described how members across various departments and organizations formed organizational relationships due to needing to work together to achieve project goals.

Additional Funding Opportunities. Recipients reported that, because the EIA grant funding allowed their projects to get off the ground, they were able to find additional funding opportunities (e.g., Chancellor's Office grants, state-funded grants, community donations) to support further development and continuation of their projects beyond the grant period.

Faculty and Mentor Growth. Recipients specifically identified that the faculty involved in conducting coursework and those across job roles who acted as mentors for students during the project period had the opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience with new strategies to guide student success (e.g., new pedagogical strategies, new approaches to student assessment).

Continuation of Program Elements. Some recipients mentioned creating additional elements beyond their proposals, such as the establishment of new courses, support groups for both students and mentors, scholarship opportunities, and additional programs related to the original projects.

Classroom Changes. Some recipients reported that practices built into their projects were later permanently incorporated into courses or inspired additional course changes.



Data Discovery. A few recipients noted how the project allowed them to dig more deeply into institutional data, both to discover patterns of inequity among specific student populations and to better understand course-level and college-wide enrollment and completion patterns.

Program Awareness and Recruitment. A few recipients mentioned that their programs created interest outside of those who were involved in the projects, including college leadership and colleagues who wanted to learn how they could support the programs and students (e.g., enrolled students, high school students) who wanted to participate in the programs.

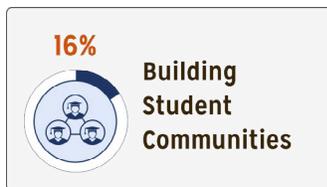
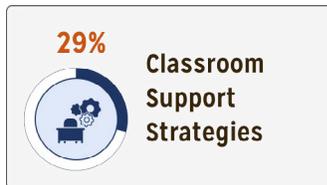
In addition to the outcomes identified in their applications, grantees also shared narratives of transformative growth and change among students and recipients, including increased community connection, skills, and confidence. One grantee noted:

“I want to thank all of you involved in this grant and the process for everything you have done to help our amazing students. They have come from a place of great vulnerability and have found community and developed important skills and vital confidence thanks to our program, which would not have been able to survive without your generous support. I also want to share that this work has helped me see how much representation really matters, and that I am someone that can help create meaningful change.”

- Luna Nombrano Larsen, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Successful Strategies

Grantees identified the successful strategies and activities used to implement their projects. Across all reports, recipients described 56 successful strategies and activities. Although scope, intent, and implementation practices varied widely across projects, patterns emerged in recipients' descriptions of successful actions. Below we describe the top four most common themes.



The most common strategy adopted by grant recipients was **providing classroom support** by engaging in focused outreach and support (e.g., meeting with students regularly throughout the semester, sending reminders to students about upcoming due dates and assignments), implementing changes within the classroom (e.g., allowing opportunities to revise assignments, including students in decisions about updating classroom policies and course materials), and ensuring students received personalized feedback when engaged in a project activity.

With equal frequency, recipients indicated that **building student communities** and **establishing partnerships** led to project success. Recipients reported that students not only built communities among themselves as a result of participating in the projects but also created connections with faculty and took advantage of networking opportunities. Reports indicated that establishing faculty partnerships and communities of practice allowed faculty to check in and provide support for each other, while encouraging opportunities for collaboration and reflection among colleagues.

For projects that involved peer mentors, recipients reported that building in time for **training and providing ongoing support for peer mentors** reinforced the aims of the project. One recipient mentioned the importance of drawing upon on-campus student groups to find and hire peer mentors.



Challenges to Implementation

While every grant recipient completed at least one goal specified in their original proposals, some recipients reported on the challenges and barriers that impeded forward progress. For some recipients, these impediments meant that various aspects of project implementation could not launch effectively, while other recipients worked to modify or completely retool the approaches laid out in their proposals. Here we provide a high-level overview of the key challenges grantees faced and, where provided, descriptions of the creative ways that grant recipients addressed their challenges. Across all reports, 44 unique issues were mentioned.



The most common implementation challenge was connected to time: **time constraints and limited capacities** for project participants (e.g., faculty, staff and faculty mentors, peer mentors, students) affected program participation, commitment to training, data collection and analysis, and consistency of meetings.

A couple of recipients posited that the lack of extra compensation for program participation led to the de-prioritization

of the time needed to fully engage in the program.

One recipient who led a project involving faculty from the same department mentioned that, because all who were involved had limited time to devote to action planning and project discussions, they collectively pivoted to devoting a portion of department meetings to project operations over the course of the grant period.

Recipients reported **institutional barriers** such as challenges in creating and establishing program components due to inconsistencies in course offerings, budget cuts, delayed payments to faculty, and inability to enroll students in project-related courses. As a result of these institutional issues, participation, including course enrollment and student involvement, fell below expectations.



One recipient reported that, when creating course schedules, accommodation for some majors was not possible as the program schedule conflicted with their major courses. These major course requirements were reevaluated and new roadmaps for the program were created.



Leadership Changes

Changes in university leadership, program faculty, and PIs led to delays in program activities and concerns with data collection

Several grant recipients mentioned that **leadership changes** in the form of turnover for staff, faculty, and leadership involved with or supporting the projects contributed to pauses or disruptions in data collection and information transfer.

Changes in university leadership led to concerns about university funding and overall support, while changes in project primary investigators (PI) led to issues with data collection and delays in program activities.

Among projects that operated in the classroom, changes to faculty assignments in project-related courses resulted in project delays and communication issues.

Student engagement was also a challenge for grantees. In addition to students not continuing on in program activities, some students were not fully aware of all program components (such as embedded tutoring in classes). Lack of socializing and collaboration among students also became a challenge for some programs.

In programs that administered surveys to students, some grantees reported issues with survey development and survey distribution. Issues included not planning for proper oversight of survey recruitment, thereby losing out on data; administering surveys that did not capture the student information needed to properly measure outcomes, while not having the ability to coordinate a new survey distribution with the same students; and not accounting for the value of incentives to boost participation. A small number of recipients noted that ineffective program marketing may have contributed to a lack of participation and survey responses.



Student Engagement

Grantees experienced difficulties maintaining student engagement, developing program awareness, and handling unresponsiveness to program components



Recommendations for the EIA Grant Program

Grant recipients reflected upon the changes they would make to the EIA grant program to better support them in meeting their project goals. Of the 19 recommendations, the two most prominent themes revolved around funding and project guidance.

Funding Changes. Recipients suggested continuing to provide funding for EIA grants and increasing funds for projects, if possible. Specific recommendations connected to funding included:

- Provide more explicit funding guidelines and examples of allowable uses of grant funds.
- Offer recipients earlier notice of funding. Funding notices were sent at the end of the spring semester. Some programs involved summer sessions or needed to engage in immediate recruiting for the fall semester, so the timing of notices affected how projects were able to proceed.

Personalized Guidance and Assistance. Grant recipients requested personalized help and guidance with project design. In addition, grantees wished for help with alignment between campus and program goals, assessment processes, and building student connections.

EIA Grant Projects and Outcomes. Several recipients stated that knowing about other EIA grant projects and their corresponding outcomes could provide some insight for grantees and any continuing or future projects.

Collaboration. Some recipients suggested offering regular opportunities for grant recipients to collaborate, share ideas and challenges, and receive feedback throughout the grant process.

Toolkits for Streamlining Data Access, Collection, and Use. Several recipients reported that data access was an issue within their programs. Some recipients recommended that the creation of a standard data succession plan for grant projects would be useful, as software or PI changes may affect data access.



Recommendations for the CSU Student Success Network

Grant recipients were asked to provide recommendations for ways the Network can support middle leaders in their efforts to identify, understand, and disrupt inequities in the CSU system. Recipients offered 27 recommendations across all reports. In order of salience, the themes are listed and described below.

Student-Focused Support. Recipients most commonly recommended that the Network increase its focus on student support through:

- promoting and supporting student-focused approaches and programs;
- raising student voices;
- addressing student-identified needs; and
- providing increased support for specific student groups.

Middle Leader-Focused Support. To support middle leaders, recipients recommended the Network provide:

- opportunities for collaboration between staff and faculty;
- professional development opportunities on culturally responsive advising; and
- support for the development and facilitation of communities of practice.

Identify Challenges within the System. Recipients recommended that the Network play a bigger role in helping to identify needs, challenges, and inequitable practices within the CSU system.

Increase Direct Communication. Recipients recommended that the Network increase its direct communication with campuses, separate from the Chancellor's Office. Recommendations included:

- sharing information on outcomes from other CSU system projects and future funding opportunities; and
- holding personalized consultations and training for teams undertaking equity-focused projects.

Focused Funding Opportunities. Recipients requested increased funding opportunities to specifically be used for:

- identifying and addressing inequalities within the CSU system;
- addressing systemic and institutional issues that affect student success; and
- creating targeted programs that support student success.



Looking Forward

Drawing upon the lessons learned from the 2022 EIA grant program process, project outcomes, and grantee recommendations, the Network has recently released a new request for proposals for another round of the EIA grant program in February 2026. The Network will use the findings from this report to shape and inform future grant opportunities and program offerings.

Appendix A: Project Titles and Focus Areas by Campus

Campus	Project Title	Project Focus Areas							
		Addressing DFW Rates and Retention	Building Community and Connections	Conducting Research	Developing and Piloting New Programs	Increasing Student Belongingness and Empowerment	Narrowing Equity Gaps	Providing Student Supports	Supporting Peer Mentorship
 CSU Bakersfield	Strengthening the Relationship between Writing Assignments and Equity	✓							
	Residential Early Start/Summer Bridge Program			✓					
	Equity Fellowship Project			✓			✓		
	INSPIRE		✓					✓	
	Unlearning Racism in the Geosciences Professional Learning Community		✓				✓		
	The Titan Scholars (TS) Grad Prep for Transfer Students Program		✓					✓	
	Does the Use of an Interactive General Chemistry Textbook Improve Student Perceptions of and Use of the Textbook and Increase Equitable Outcomes?			✓					
	Full Circle Peer to Peer Mentorship Program					✓			✓
	Establishing a Future Black Educator Network								✓
	Peer Mentorship and Educational Support Program	✓			✓			✓	✓
	CSU Network Equity in Action Grant				✓				✓
	Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander College Student Success Consortium		✓	✓		✓			
	Embedded Tutoring Pilot in SDSU's College of Professional Studies & Fine Arts (PSFA)	✓					✓		
	Mentoring Students First - Support for Students with 2+ DFWs	✓							
	Grounding Responsive Action with Community and Empathy (GRACE) Peer Mentor Program	✓			✓	✓			✓
	The Empowering Autistic Scholars (EAS) Mentoring and Research Training Program		✓			✓		✓	✓
	Early Academic Intervention Faculty Fellows				✓				
	Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Equity in Action		✓		✓				
	Unidos Leadership Program (Equity in Action)	✓							
	Brothers for Success				✓			✓	