The Michigan Center for Student Success hosted the CARES Act Town Hall on May 6, 2020 to facilitate discussion between community colleges and how they are distributing emergency assistance funds to students from the federal CARES Act resources. We identified 8 topic areas that have emerged as areas of concern for college. They included:

- Planning and strategizing
- Identifying eligible students
- Contacting students
- Communicating and requesting information
- Identifying needs and establishing funding priorities
- Distribution of funds
- Documenting college decisions and distributions
- Integration with other resources and services

Participants voted on their top three items for discussion at the beginning of the town hall. The top 4 topics included:

- Identifying needs and establishing funding priorities
- Identifying eligible students
- Integration with other resources and services
- Documenting college decisions and distributions

Once we identified the top priority areas, colleges shared their plans in each of these areas. Before we discussed plans, colleges recognize that the lack of clarity in federal regulation makes it difficult to establish institutional policies and practices. Several institutions previously had a well-establish emergency assistance fund and built policies for the CARES Act funds on that existing infrastructure.

Colleges noted that the priority is to make the application as simple as possible students. Colleges are using the existing emergency assistance application process, or a new application process integrated with the student information system. Among institutions that have implemented an application process, the priority is to keep the process as simple as possible. Other institutions are implementing a process to “push” resources to students by querying the data system for eligible students. Instead of asking students to apply, they are identifying eligible students and distributing resources in the simplest way possible. At one institution, the amount of aid is based on the number of credits in winter/spring term.

Colleges discussed the integration with other resources and emphasized that it is important to ensure that colleges are taking a holistic approach to their support. Integrating the CARES Act resources with other resources including college-resources, unemployment benefits, MiBridges, and community-based resources are an important component of meeting the needs of students. Colleges will continue to reach out to students to ensure that they have the resources available to be successful.

Colleges continue to have some questions about identifying eligible students. Specifically, how to deal with students who graduated in Spring term and students who dropped classes.

Colleges are clearly focused on documenting the decisions and processes. Many colleges are consulting with attorneys and auditors to ensure that they are making decisions that comply with federal policy although there continues to be some uncertainty about the federal reporting requirements. Colleges will meet again on Wednesday, May 13 for additional discussion.