



Project Compass: The Initiative

Project Compass is a multi-year, multi-institutional initiative to increase the success and graduation of underserved minority students at public four-year institutions of higher education in New England. Funded by the [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#), Project Compass supports innovative institutional programs and strategies that strive to eliminate achievement gaps and significantly increase academic success, retention, and graduation rates for underserved minority students; proposals designed to serve first generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds will also be considered. Institutions anticipating increases in minority student populations in the near future are encouraged to apply. The initiative supports institutions that acknowledge the importance of ***bold, systemic, institution-level changes*** necessary to expand and sustain rigorous, evidence-based efforts to better retain underserved students.

The initiative is organized into two distinct, related phases:

Phase 1 – Planning and Capacity Building Year: Three to six institutions will receive grants up to \$100,000 each for the Planning and Capacity Building Year. Each of the funded institutions will engage in a structured team-based process of institutional reflection and inquiry designed to:

- Facilitate and/or refine the identification of a core population of underserved students at the institution around which it intends to create a new systemic retention and success effort;
- Analyze the history of institutional effort related to the retention and success of the core population;
- Strengthen its capacity to identify systemic opportunities and challenges related to previous efforts at retention of these core populations; and,
- Develop systemic, sustainable initiatives directed and significantly increasing academic success, retention, and graduation rates for minority and low-income undergraduate students.

Phase 2 – Implementation Years: Institutions funded during Phase I of the project that make adequate progress and demonstrate adequate institutional commitment during the planning year can apply to the Foundation for additional funding. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation will award three to six four-year implementation grants of \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually. Institutions which did not participate in the planning year will not be eligible to submit a proposal for the implementation phase of Project Compass.