

FY 2022 POTUS budget boosts higher education, academic library opportunities

The Biden administration's fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget proposal for Congress, introduced on May 28, reflects a stark change in priorities from the past four years, when many programs for libraries and education were targeted for elimination. By contrast, the FY 2022 budget proposes \$102.8 billion in discretionary spending for the Department of Education—an increase of \$29.8 billion (41 percent) over FY 2021 levels.

Largely a messaging document to Congress (which makes actual funding level decisions), the budget clearly illustrates that elections have consequences. The president's budget for higher education includes calls for free community college as well as increases to student aid programs such as Pell Grants, HBCU and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI), and other programs.

Below are some highlights of the administration's budget for the higher education community. Many of these programs will address student aid concerns aiming to increase participation in higher ed programs and greater demand for library services. Libraries can also advocate for a share of the influx of federal funding for institutions in general.

Pell Grants—The budget proposes an increase to the maximum Pell grant of \$400 and calls for an overall increase to the maximum Pell grant of \$1,875. This would set the maximum Pell grant at \$8,370 for the 2022-23 award year.

Free Community College—The budget proposes \$109 billion for a federal/state partnership (as well as a federal/tribal partnership) to ensure that “first-time students and workers wanting to learn new career skills can enroll in a community college to earn a degree or credential for free.” The budget states that if all states, territories, and tribes participate, about 5.5 million students would pay \$0 in tuition and fees at community colleges.

Community College Infrastructure—The budget proposes \$2.4 billion in mandatory funding (\$12 billion over five years) for grants for community college facilities and technology. Grants would be made to states, who would be responsible for addressing both physical and technological infrastructure needs at community colleges and to expand access to community colleges in “education deserts.”

MSI Subsidized Tuition—The budget proposes funding to provide two years of subsidized tuition for eligible students attending HBCUs, HSIs, TCUs, and other MSIs from families earning less than \$125,000 a year.

Student Loan Debt and Repayment Programs—The budget states, “The Administration looks forward to working with Congress on changes to the Higher Education Act that ease the burden of student debt, including through improvements to the Income Driven Repayment (IDR) and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) programs.” Although direct funding for PSLF was not included in the FY 2022 budget, the current administration has made clear its intent to support this program outside the budget.

Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA)—After four years on the chopping block, the administration's budget calls for LSTA funding at \$197.4 million, level funding from FY 2021 levels. The bulk of LSTA funding goes to state library administrative agencies but also create opportunities for academic librarians through competitive grant programs or partnerships with public libraries.

The end of the appropriations cycle is months away. Congress is likely to miss the September 30 “due date” for a new FY budget, and many are already expecting one (or more) continuing resolutions will be needed to keep the government open beyond the current fiscal year. Cultivating relationships and collaborating with school leadership will be critical to securing funding for academic libraries. *✍*

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