

What is the community challenge?

Improving college access and completion is critical to reducing economic inequality within the United States; yet planning, applying, attending and succeeding in college are not easy tasks for many families. Despite their best intentions, students and their families may lack information or need help with the multitude of forms and steps. Schools may not have the financial and staff resources to support non-academic barriers to college access.

What is the promising solution?

College Advising Corps (CAC) strives to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented students entering and completing higher education. They do this by matching recent college graduates from partnering colleges and universities to high schools to serve as near peer advisers. Typically, CAC advisers also overcame barriers to attend college.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of the CAC program by Stanford University and Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education, LLC, began in academic year 2011-12 and finished reporting in 2017. The study was a randomized control trial that included 111 high schools across Texas, 36 of which participated in CAC. The primary research questions were: What is the program's impact on college enrollment? To what extent have CAC advisers increase the likelihood that students attend any college once they complete high school? Have CAC advisers increased the likelihood that students attend two- or four-year colleges relative to what they would have done in the absence of the program?

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, New Profit engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate CAC. The randomized control study found the following:

- CAC had a two-percentage point effect on college enrollment among all students in its first year (p-value < 0.103), concentrated among Hispanic (2.2 percentage points, p-value < 0.05) and low-income students (3.8 percentage points, p < 0.01), when other factors were not accounted for in the model.
- CAC increased two-year college enrollment by 2.4 percentage points among all students (p-value < 0.05) in its first year with larger effects for Hispanic students of 3.4 percentage points (p < 0.05), when other factors were not accounted for in the model.
- There was no statistically significant impact of the program on college enrollment (overall and two-year) after controlling for other factors (gender, race, age, and FRPL status).
- In the first year, there were no significant differences in four-year college enrollment rates.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: College Advising Corps near peer advisers

Subgrantee: College Advising Corps

Intermediary: New Profit

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Low-income, first-generation-college, and underrepresented high school students

Communities Served: The evaluation focuses on 111 high schools in Texas (although CAC operates in 15 states)

Notes on the evaluation

Although the study used an RCT design, there were substantial problems with compliance and contamination that likely contributed to the attenuation of potential effects, especially after the first year. Furthermore, after controlling for baseline demographic differences between the treatment and comparison group, the impacts observed for college enrollment in the first year of the study were no longer statistically significant. In the second and third years, there were null or negative effects in college enrollment (both with and without covariates); however, these findings may be due to compliance issues in the study. By 2015-16, 20 of the original 36 schools were no longer part of CAC, and 20 of the control schools were participating in the treatment because they had CAC advisers. In addition, some control schools pursued other college advising programs after the first year. Over time, cost considerations led CAC to shift away from smaller schools, and school size may be related to treatment effect size.



How is CAC using the evaluation findings to improve?

The evaluation showed evidence that the experimental conditions change after the first two years of implementation, providing lessons to CAC in scaling up and maintaining long-running relationships with schools. During the grant period, CAC doubled its size and expanded its internal evaluation staff and capabilities. CAC continued to partner with EASE and other evaluators to identify best practices and other ways to strengthen the program. During 2017-18, CAC planned to conduct new evaluations focused on parental involvement and partnerships, the creation of a two-adviser model in large high schools, and virtual advising with high achieving, low-income students.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact evaluation

Study Population: High school students/schools in Texas

(Independent) Evaluator(s): Evaluation and Assessment Solutions for Education, LLC (EASE)

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary*

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.