Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) Program Overview: What we think we know

ASCCC OERI

September 26, 2022

As the system awaits complete guidelines for how the Zero-Textbook-Cost Degree Grant Program (ZTC Program) specified in [Education Code Section 78050-78052](#) will be implemented by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CO), the ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative (OERI) created this document to collect in one place the information that has been provided thus far.

The document begins with an overview of what is known based on the existing documentation from the CO. This is followed by a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs). The FAQs include questions that were explicitly answered in the information made public by the CO (i.e., the CO's presentations, meeting documents, etc.). The FAQs also include questions where the answers can be inferred based on the provided information (these questions are identified with an *). A few questions about the definition of low-cost and the XB-12 data element have been included to document the need for clarification. While these are tangential concerns, they are related to the reporting associated with the ZTC program and have been discussed in presentations and ZTC Office Hours. This document has been shared with the CO. The document will be updated as additional information becomes available.

The latest information about ZTC degrees and related textbook affordability requirements may be found on the OERI's [OER and ZTC](#)page. (tinyurl.com/OER4ZTC)

The Initial Funding Phases
The information in this section was obtained from the [Sep 15, 2022 – Consultation Council Meeting – Social Determinants of Educational Success Ecosystem: A Deep Look at Zero Textbook Cost](#) and [the ZTC Program Overview presentation](#). Additional notes, resources, and clarifications have been added in parentheses.

In the Budget Act of 2021-22, the Legislature appropriated $115 million, one-time funding to the ZTC program to reduce the overall cost of education and decrease the time to completion for California community college students ([Education Code Section 78050-78052](#)). The Chancellor's Office (CO) will distribute the program funding in phases to support colleges in developing and implementing ZTC degree and certificate programs.

Phase 1
ZTC Planning for 115 Colleges (Total disbursement – $2.3 million) — Grants in the amount of $20,000 were awarded to 115 colleges to begin planning the development and implementation of a ZTC degree or certificate program.

Phase 1 Requirements ([Slide 15](#)):

- Certify commitment to ZTC program requirements
- Identify a ZTC program for development. (Clarification – colleges should specify at least one.)
- Paid by Apportionment (No application required – per the CO, these funds have been "awarded." "Apportionment" refers to the distribution of funds to the colleges that already occurs at regular intervals. [Read more about apportionment.](#))
- ([ZTC Phase 1 in NOVA](#))

Phase 2
Expedited ZTC program development and implementation (Total disbursement – $5 million) — In this competitive request for applications, colleges are encouraged to develop and implement ZTC degree or certificate programs that are close to completion, will be ready for students by Fall 2024, and can be completed with the least amount of funding. (Competitive)

Phase 2 Requirements ([Slide 15](#)):

- Up to $200K per program
- Independent of Phase 1 grants (In contrast, Phase 3 requires a plan to be submitted as a product of Phase 1.)
- Expedited implementation (By Fall 2024)
- Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities
- Paid via Invoice

Phase 3
ZTC Implementation for 115 Colleges (Total disbursement $20.7 million) — Every college that received a Planning grant will receive $180,000 to develop and implement at least one ZTC program that was identified in Phase 1.

Subsequent grant phases will be informed by the projects developed, creation and curation of OER for courses and the needs of the district and colleges.

Phase 3 Requirements ([Slide 15](#)):

- $180,000/college (less than symbol present on the referenced slide has been removed)
- Develop work plan for ZTC program implementation after Fall 2024
- Paid by Apportionment

Key Differences Between Phases ([Slide 16](#))

Phases 1 and 3

- Every college will receive a grant (This appears to be a misstatement – all 115 accredited degree-granting colleges will receive the Phase 1 funds and all those that complete Phase 1 will then be eligible for the Phase 3 funds.)
- $200,000 total
- 3 years to implement
- Plan not required in Phase 1 but is required for Phase 3
- (Paid by Apportionment)
- (Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities? This has not been stated.)

Phase 2

- Highest scoring applications will receive funding
- Amounts vary, < $200,000 (up to)
- Implement by Fall 2024
- Plan required as part of the application
- (Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities)
- (Paid via Invoice)

ZTC General and Phase I - FAQs

1. When will colleges receive the funds?

   Phase 1 and Phase 3 are paid through apportionment on a monthly schedule: 60% by January 2023, +32% by May 2023, +8% by June 2023.

   Phase 2 RFA is paid by invoice and timed to progress reports.

2. Can colleges use the funds to...?

   Statute allows for professional development and technical assistance. Other allowable activities are local determinations but must consider sustainability of ZTC efforts and must result in the development and implementation of a ZTC degree or certificate program. (Note – Phase 1 is planning and presumably need not result in the development of anything other than a plan.)

   Expenditures must be in line with your local hiring and procurement policies and practices.

3. Can colleges carryover funds from fiscal year to fiscal year?

   Phase 1 and Phase 3 funds paid through apportionment do not have statutory or programmatic deadlines for spending and therefore districts do not need to make

carryover requests (see page 17 of the [2022-23 California Community Colleges Compendium of Allocations and Resources](#)).

Phase 2 has a programmatic deadline and will need to be spent within the performance period of the grant (by June 30, 2024).

4. *Is there an application and deadline for Phase 1 funds?

   No. Per the CO's communications, these funds have already been allocated.

5. *Is there a deadline by which "certification" Phase 1 funds must be completed in NOVA?

   November 1, 2022. (Date provided by the CO.)

6. *Phase I of the ZTC Program is a disbursement of $20,000 to each college provided via apportionment. What commitments must a college make to receive these funds and what reporting is required? And what are the timelines associated with these actions?

   Phase 1 provides $20K/college and requires "certification of participation" and "planning for ZTC development or implementation." The certification and plan are completed within NOVA. NOVA also specifies a deadline of June 30, 2023.

   Excerpt from NOVA:

   Plan Description
   Colleges may enter "TBD" but will be required to describe in the final report the ZTC program to be developed. (Note provided by the CO. It is unclear why the plan would be limited to a single program.)

   Assurances

   Statutory Requirements

   - I have read and am familiar with the ZTC Program requirements listed in Education Code Sections 78050 through 78052 and agree to all the program requirements stipulated.

   Instructional Office Approval

   - I have obtained approval from the Chief Instructional Officer/Vice President of Instruction to participate in the ZTC Program. (A resolution will be debated at ASCCC Plenary urging the CO to include the academic senate president's sign off in NOVA on any state grant, program, or initiative that falls within academic and professional matters.)

   Expenditure Reporting

- By June 30, 2023, I will complete the budget expenditure report in Nova.

Program Reporting

- By June 30, 2023, I will report in Nova on the college's proposed ZTC program(s) for development and implementation, project challenges and barriers, and technical assistance needs.

7. *NOVA is the identified mechanism for communicating with the CCCCO regarding ZTC funds. Where can those who do not have access to NOVA see what the CCCCO is asking for?

   "Read only" access to NOVA can be obtained to view what is being asked of the colleges. [Request access to NOVA](https://nova.cccco.edu/request-access). (https://nova.cccco.edu/request-access)

8. *Who has access to NOVA?

   Although not stated on the NOVA site, it may be presumed that each college controls who is able to access and submit program-related information in NOVA. In other words, this is a matter of local control. (Note provided by the CO: The ZTC Phase 1 grants includes two roles for colleges to assign, a project lead and an optional alternate.)

9. *For multi-college districts, does the college Vice President of Instruction (Chief Instructional Officer) apply through NOVA, or is there someone at the District office that would apply on behalf of ALL the colleges in the district?

   Phase 1 program information exists for each college within NOVA. Who has access to submit information on behalf of a college is a matter of local control.

10. *When a college applies, does the college administration get the percentage allotted for indirect costs or does that money go to the district?

   "Indirect costs" that are a specific percentage of the funds received by the college are another local determination.

General ZTC Funding FAQs – Under Development

1. What are the twelve ZTC Grant Implementation Requirements in [California Education Code 78052](#)?

   "...a community college district shall comply with all of the following:" (Abbreviated)

   1) Develop and implement one or more ZTC program pathways
   2) Prioritize implementation of existing ADT and existing OER before creating new content
   3) Consider sustainability after grant funds are exhausted, including how content is updated and presented

4) Ensure compliance with ADA and the federal Copyright Act of 1976
5) Develop minimum of ONE degree [or certificate]
6) Other community college districts can use or adapt degree and post it
7) Ensure faculty have flexibility to customize
8) Ensure the degree is identified in college catalogs and class schedules
9) Report to the Chancellor's Office all data, planning, progress and outcomes
10) Consult with the local academic senate
11) Use a multimember team approach to development (faculty, administrators, content-focused staff – librarians, instructional designers, technology experts, and interested CSU/UC campuses)
12) Implement within 3 years or sooner

2. According the ZTC Program legislation, what are the requirements that must be met by the Chancellor's Office?

- Ensure no duplication in development or implementation of degrees for a subject matter
- Ensure the greatest number of degrees for the benefit of the greatest number of students
- Report to the Legislature, LAO, and Department of Finance by June 30, 2027 on the development and implementation of degrees, including but not limited to:

    o Number of degrees developed and implemented by college
    o Number of open educational resources developed and curated by college
    o Number of degrees that eliminated textbook costs
    o Number of degrees that significantly lowered textbook costs
    o Estimated annual savings to students
    o Number of students who completed a ZTC program
    o Number of students who accessed open educational resources
    o Recommendations to increase, expand, or improve the offering of degrees and open educational resources
    o (The CO reporting requirements are presumably also requirements of the colleges.)

3. Can a district or college apply for multiple grants?

Yes, in Phase 2 a single district or college may apply for multiple grants. A group of colleges or districts may also apply but a single project lead would be required. (In other words, collaboration can happen – but one college would need to be the lead and fiscal agent.)

4. Does the college need to use the CC BY license for OER in the ZTC Program?

Yes. (While the answer is currently "yes", a change is anticipated.) ZTC Program statute defines OER as "...released pursuant to an

intellectual property license permitting free use and repurposing". Board of Governors Standing Order 318(g) requires that published materials use the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). (This requirement is both based on an incorrect understanding of open licenses and inherently problematic. A resource need not be CC BY to permit free use and repurposing. While it is appropriate to require that any new content created using these funds be licensed CC BY, mandating the use of CC BY more generally forces the use of a license that may not be warranted. If a faculty member wishes to modify a resource that is incompatible with CC BY, they are violating the terms associated with the original resource if they comply with the stated requirements and place a CC BY on the modified resource that they have created. Mandates from the Board of Governors or CO should not be imposed that force faculty to take inappropriate actions. The ASCCC anticipates working with the CO to address this issue.)

5. How does a college know if it is duplicating ZTC pathways?

   Search for existing ZTC program information. Coordinate with other districts and colleges. (The OERI will do what it can to support these conversations. It should be noted that information regarding existing ZTC pathways does not indicate how ZTC was achieved. Please see the OERI's curated collections to find identified OER options – OER by Discipline; OER by Transfer Model Curriculum. And please let us know if you are using a resource we have not included.)

6. *Does a ZTC degree pathway have to include general education courses?

   Yes. When submitting a proposed ZTC program include all the courses a student would need to take to earn the degree. Specifically for general education courses, include those you intend to make ZTC. There is no need to list all available general education courses. (Clarification provided by the CO.)

7. *Do all sections of a course in a ZTC pathway have to be ZTC?

   No. There is no expectation that all sections of a given course would be ZTC.

Instructional-Material-Cost Data Element (XB12)

1. What is the relationship between XB12 reporting and ZTC Grants?

   Colleges will be asked to provide the anticipated XB12 code on the courses in the proposed ZTC program. Grant awards for Phases 1 – 3 are not contingent upon XB12 reporting.

2. When does XB12 have to be implemented?

   End of Fall 2023.

3. Does "instructional materials" include calculators, paint, yoga mats (etc.)?

No, instructional supplies and equipment are distinct from instructional materials.

4. What if more than one code is possible?

   Use your judgement to select the most likely option.

5. *How is "low-cost" defined for the purpose of the data element?

   While colleges are not required to have a low textbook cost definition, those that have one can use the associated data element. At present, these definitions range from $20 - $50 ([California Community Colleges – Low-Cost Textbook Definitions](#)). The ASCCC has proposed that there should be a consistent definition and is working with the Student Senate of the California Colleges to determine what this should be. Since the concept of a low-cost textbook definition originated with faculty for the purpose of recognizing course sections that were low-cost, the ASCCC has presumed that a section that is consistent with a college's low-cost definition is one that is less than a locally established threshold. The reference to "low-cost" in the data element mirrors the ASCCC's recommendations regarding the data element and would, therefore, be aligned with low-cost as envisioned by the faculty. See [Develop Statewide Recommendation for Definition of Low-Cost Course Materials](#) and [Recognition of Course Sections with Low-Cost Course Material Options](#) for the adopted ASCCC positions on this topic.

6. *Is "inclusive access" or "equitable access" low cost for students?

   While such options may be low cost, it can't be assumed that this is the case. Instances where these options lead to over-charging students have been identified and where the cost exceeds the $50 threshold for low-cost that is presently the highest in the system.

7. *When determining what is low cost, what can be counted?

   While there is no formal definition as to what can count (used, old editions, etc.), where colleges have adopted a definition, they have generally made it clear that the cost used for this determination is the cost of a new text from the bookstore.

   Given that students who use financial aid must purchase their texts from the bookstore and both the prices and availability of used texts varies, the most equitable approach would appear to be one that bases the cost on the purchase of a new text from the bookstore.