

Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) Program Overview: What we think we know, Version 2 ASCCC OERI, May 8, 2023

As the system waits for the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CO) to publish implementation guidelines for the Zero-Textbook-Cost Degree Grant Program (ZTC Program) specified in [Education Code Section 78050-78052](#), the ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative (OERI) developed this document to compile information that has been provided thus far.

At present, official written information regarding the ZTC Program can be found in [California Education Code 78052](#), the July 29, 2022 "[Zero Textbook Cost Program – Overview and Guidance](#)" memo, the February 23, 2023 "[Zero Textbook Cost Program Updates](#)" memo, and in [NOVA](#), a platform for grant reporting. It should be noted that the February 23 memo explicitly states that it provides "updated ZTC grant program information that supersedes information provided in the previous memo." Most notably, the titles of the funding phases have been revised as follows:

- ZTC Planning Grants (Formerly Phase 1); \$20,000 disbursed to all degree-granting colleges.
- ZTC Implementation Grants (Formerly Phase 3): \$180,000 disbursed to all degree-granting colleges.
- ZTC Acceleration Grants (Formerly Phase 2): A competitive funding phase, providing "up to \$200,000 for each degree development and implemented." Note that throughout the memo reference is made to degree development, but the intent of the legislation (and the CO) is to fund both the development of ZTC associate degrees and career technical education (CTE) certificates.

This document begins with an overview of what is known based on the existing resources noted above 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, office hours, etc.). The FAQs also include questions where the answers may be inferred based on information provided by the CO through the various channels noted above (these questions are identified with an asterisk). A few questions about the definition of low-cost and the XB12 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, but not endorsed by, 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 originally 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. This section has been revised to reflect the information provided in the February 23, 2023 memo.

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) is charged with distributing the program funding in phases to support colleges in developing and implementing ZTC degree and certificate programs.

ZTC Planning Grants (formerly 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.

ZTC Planning Grant Requirements

- Certify commitment to ZTC program requirements
- Identify a ZTC program for development. (While identifying a ZTC program for development is a stated outcome of this funding phase, the mechanism for reporting this information has not been formally communicated.)
- 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 Planning Grants/"Phase 1" in NOVA](#))

ZTC Implementation Grants (formerly Phase 3)

ZTC Implementation for 115 Colleges (Total disbursement \$20.7 million). Grants of \$180,000 awarded to 115 colleges to develop and implement at least one ZTC program that was identified during the planning phase.

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.

ZTC Implementation Grant Requirements

- \$180,000/college
- A ZTC work plan will be due in Fall of 2023 (October 31, 2023)
- Paid by Apportionment

ZTC Acceleration Grants (formerly Phase 2)

Expedited ZTC program development and implementation (Total disbursement \$5 million). In this competitive request for applications (RFA), colleges are encouraged to develop and implement ZTC degree or CTE certificate programs that are close to completion and can be finalized with the least amount of funding. Per the February memo, "the RFA will be released in Fall 2023." (Competitive)

ZTC Acceleration Grant Requirements

- Up to \$200K per program
- Independent of prior phases
- Expedited implementation
- Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities
- Paid via Invoice

Key Differences Between Phases

ZTC Planning and Implementation Grants (formerly Phase 1 and 3)

- All 115 degree-granting colleges will receive both the Planning and Implementation Grant funds. Most of the funds have already been disbursed and received.
- \$200,000 total
- 3 years to implement
- (Paid by Apportionment)
- (Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities? This has not been stated.)
- Planning Grant Expenditure Report (funds spent to date) due June 30, 2023; funds do not need to be encumbered until June 30, 2026.

ZTC Acceleration Grants (formerly Phase 2)

- Highest scoring applications will receive funding
- Amounts vary, < \$200,000 (up to)
- RFA to be released in Fall 2023
- Timeline requirements are yet to be determined
- Plan required as part of the application
- (Meets ZTC requirements and CO priorities)
- (Paid via Invoice)

ZTC General and Initial Funding FAQs

1. When will colleges receive the funds?

The first two phases (Planning and Implementation) are paid through apportionment on a pre-determined schedule. Most importantly, the total sum that will be received by the district can be verified.

The \$20,000 disbursement to each college of the Planning Grant funds can be found in the “2022-23 Zero Textbook Costs Allocation Table” beginning on page 356 of the [February 17, 2023: 2022-23 California Community Colleges Compendium of Allocations and Resources](#). If you are concerned about when you must spend these funds, you will find on page 381 that despite the need to provide a “budget expenditure report” by June 30, 2023, you only need to “Encumber by June 30, 2026.” In other words, you do not need to have spent the money by June 30, 2023 as you still have another three years to expend the funds.

[Documentation to confirm the \\$180,000 can be found by](#) accessing [the 2022-2023 First Period Apportionment](#). In this document, you can find how much and when funds were disbursed through May of 2023. This information is found on the 2nd page of the information for your district – as of May, single college districts have received \$18,400 of the \$20,000 over 5 payments and \$165,600 of the \$180,000 over 3. Presumably, upcoming disbursements will provide the remaining funds.

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. Because the initial \$20,000 disbursement is to be used for planning, it is presumed that it 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?

The planning and implementation funds paid through apportionment do not have statutory or programmatic deadlines for spending and therefore districts do not need to make carryover requests.

ZTC Accelerations Grants will have a programmatic deadline and will need to be spent within the performance period of the grant. The RFA for these grants is expected to be published in Fall, 2023.

4. *The ZTC Planning Grants consist of 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?

This first phase of funding provides \$20K/college and requires “certification of participation” and “planning for ZTC development or implementation.” The certification process was completed within NOVA and NOVA also specifies a deadline of June 30, 2023 for expenditure and program reporting. The reference to a program reporting deadline of June 30, 2023 is an error in NOVA that will be corrected.

At the April 28, 2023 ZTC Monthly Office Hour, attendees were informed that there is no “Program Reporting” due on June 30, 2023.

Excerpt from NOVA (notes in parentheses):

Plan Description

(“Plan Description” is a required default field in NOVA. This is not where the required “program reporting” will be submitted.)

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. 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. (Program Reporting, per the CO, is not required by June 30, 2023. This error in NOVA will be corrected.)

5. *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)

6. *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 Planning Grants include two roles for colleges to assign in NOVA, a project lead and an optional alternate.)

7. *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?

ZTC Planning Grant information exists for each college within NOVA. Who has access to submit information on behalf of a college is a matter of local control.

8. *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

9. 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)

- Develop and implement one or more ZTC program pathways
- Prioritize implementation of existing ADT and existing OER before creating new content
- Consider sustainability after grant funds are exhausted, including how content is updated and presented
- Ensure compliance with ADA and the federal Copyright Act of 1976
- Develop minimum of ONE degree [or certificate]
- Other community college districts can use or adapt degree and post it
- Ensure faculty have flexibility to customize
- Ensure the degree is identified in college catalogs and class schedules
- Report to the Chancellor’s Office all data, planning, progress and outcomes
- Consult with the local academic senate
- Use a multimember team approach to development (faculty, administrators, content-focused staff – librarians, instructional designers, technology experts, and interested CSU/UC campuses)
- Implement within 3 years or sooner

10. 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:
 - Number of degrees developed and implemented by college
 - Number of open educational resources developed and curated by college
 - Number of degrees that eliminated textbook costs
 - Number of degrees that significantly lowered textbook costs
 - Estimated annual savings to students
 - Number of students who completed a ZTC program
 - Number of students who accessed open educational resources
 - Recommendations to increase, expand, or improve the offering of degrees and open educational resources
 - (The CO reporting requirements are presumably also requirements of the colleges.)

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

Yes, it is anticipated that future competitive funding phases will allow a single district or college to 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.)

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

If original work is developed that has no other licensing restrictions, it must be licensed CC BY. If work is a derivative of another work that has an incompatible license (e.g., CC BY-SA or CC BY-NC-SA), the least restrictive and compatible license should be used. [Read more about Creative Commons licenses.](#)

13. 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 the information the OER has provided regarding existing ZTC pathways does not indicate how ZTC was achieved (available at the bottom of the OERI's [OER and ZTC](#) page). 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.)

14. *Must a ZTC degree pathway include ZTC options for 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.)

15. *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. While there is no expectation that all sections of a course would be ZTC, there is an expectation that students will be able to complete an existing ZTC certificate or degree with no associated textbook costs. This can be achieved by ensuring transparency with respect to the availability of ZTC sections, detailing the availability of ZTC sections.

Instructional-Material-Cost Data Element ([XB12](#))

16. What is the relationship between XB 12 reporting and the ZTC Program?

Colleges will be asked to provide the anticipated XB12 code on the courses in the proposed ZTC program. ZTC Planning and Implementation Grants are not contingent upon XB12 reporting.

17. When does XB12 have to be implemented?

End of Fall 2023.

18. Does “instructional materials” in this context include calculators, paint, yoga mats (etc.)?

No, instructional supplies and equipment are not the focus of the data element. At present, the title of the data element is inconsistent with its focus. The data element is intended to capture the cost of textbooks and supplemental materials, not other supplies that are not an element of California Education Code §66406.9 (commonly referred to as SB 1359 which established the requirement that the colleges mark their no-cost sections) or the focus of the prior and current ZTC program. The origin of the data element is an ASCCC resolution, [Advocate for Development of a ZTC Data Element](#), that specifically sought a mechanism to track ZTC course sections. Please see [Establishing Consistent Definitions for Course Resources](#) for more information.

19. What if more than one code is possible?

Use your judgement to select the most likely option.

20. *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 the Student Senate of the California Colleges has determined that the threshold should be \$30 (see [Adopt Student Senate for California Community Colleges Low-Cost Recommendation](#) for more information). 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.

16. *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. There have been instances where these options lead to over-charging students and where the cost exceeds the \$50 threshold for low-cost that is presently the highest in the system.

17. *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.

At it Spring 2023 ASCCC Plenary Session, the ASCCC adopted [Resolution 13.06, Establishing Low-Cost Textbook Parameters](#) recommending that local low-cost course material definitions specify that the price point be based on the costs of textbooks and supplemental materials—e.g., homework systems—that are available to all students (i.e., new) at or through the college bookstore. It was also recommended that the price point be based on the costs of textbooks and supplemental materials that students will own or have access to permanently.

18. We’re really confused about many aspects of the data element. Where can we get help?

ASCCC has received many questions about the data element and is working with the CO to address the identified issues, including the mis-naming of the data element. See [Clarify Components of XB12, the Instructional-Material-Cost Section-Level Data Element](#) for more information. The ASCCC has met with the CO to explain the issues and offer solutions. The CO is working internally to make the necessary recommended changes by ASCCC, but no changes have been made to date.