California State University, Chico

Division of Student Affairs
Basic Needs
Annual Report 2025-26

I. Mission Statement

Chico State Basic Needs advances student success by recognizing that access to food, safe and stable housing, and financial stability are basic human rights and foundational to educational opportunity. Through equitable, asset-based, and student-centered practices, we partner with students to build on their strengths, remove barriers, and create opportunities to persist, graduate, and thrive.

II. Accomplishments

Proudly Owning Who We Are: Advancing a Prevention-Focused Model of Student Support

- During 2025–26, Basic Needs intentionally shifted from primarily responding to student crises toward preventing them. Using Institutional Research and Strategic Analytics (IRSA) data, Student Aid Index information, and equity dashboards, the department expanded proactive outreach to students who may be at greater risk of food and housing insecurity before those challenges impact academic success. This work included expanding Student Housing Navigation Services, launching WISE Wildcats Housing Stability Coaching, and strengthening proactive outreach in partnership with Financial Aid. These initiatives reflect a shift toward reducing barriers before students experience crisis while improving equitable access to campus resources.

Leveraging Our Strengths in What We Do: Expanding Access Through Innovation and Process Improvement

- As demand for services increased significantly, Basic Needs redesigned several core processes to improve efficiency, equity, and student access. A major accomplishment was the implementation of an **Equity Award Rubric** for emergency financial assistance. The rubric created a more transparent and equitable award process while significantly reducing administrative burden for both students and case managers. This system improvement enabled the department to nearly double the number of applications reviewed while increasing direct financial assistance distributed to students.
- Highlights and results from implementing the new rubric include:
  - 67% increase in amount of direct aid awarded to students.
  - 69% increase in number of students approved and assisted through Rapid Rehousing.

Advancing Our Influence by How We Do Our Work: Building a Culture of Assessment and Continuous Improvement

- Basic Needs made a significant investment in building capacity for assessment and data-informed decision-making. Through the federal BREAD grant, the department added a **faculty Research and Assessment Coordinator** and **a Graduate Student Assessment Coordinator, strengthening its ability to conduct rigorous program evaluation and translate** findings into continuous improvement. The BREAD grant itself integrates research and assessment as a core component of Chico State's Basic Needs model. In partnership with IRSA, Basic Needs also began developing longitudinal dashboards to examine service utilization, persistence, GPA, demographic trends, and equity gaps over time. Rather than using data solely for reporting, this infrastructure helps the department understand who is accessing services, identify populations that may not be accessing available support, inform proactive interventions, and guide future resource allocation.

Let's Dance!: CalFresh Benefit Delay: A Coordinated Campus Response

- When CalFresh benefits were delayed in November 2025, Basic Needs led a rapid cross-campus response with campus and community partners. Together, the campus processed **619 emergency aid applications**, provided **469 students with $61,000 in emergency aid**, distributed **2,238 free dining hall meals**, and supported **3,092 pantry visits in one week**. Assessment confirmed the impact: **100%** of post-survey respondents reported that emergency funding eased food insecurity, **89%** reported reduced stress, and **67%** reported improved ability to focus academically. The response demonstrated Chico State's collaborative culture and strengthened systems for future emergency response.

III. Program Statistics and Assessment for Past Year

Basic Needs at a Glance

2024–25 vs. 2025–26

Measure	2024–25	2025–26	Change
Basic Needs Applications	854	1,790	▲ 110%
Direct Student Aid Distributed	$416,000	$693,210	▲ 67%
Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry Visits	63,990	82,236	▲ 29%
Unique Student Pantry Users	5,576	6,504	▲ 17%
Housing Navigation Services	116	308	▲ 166%
Rapid Rehousing Participants	201	339	▲ 69%
Student Parent Diaper Assistance	57	81	▲ 42%

Pantry utilization reflects sustained growth rather than a single-year increase. Annual visits have grown from **44,063 in 2023–24 to 82,236 in 2025–26**

- **This equates to an 87% increase in two years.**

Student Success and Well-Being

Assessment findings demonstrate a strong relationship between access to Basic Needs resources and students' ability to remain engaged in their education. Of the **339 students receiving Rapid Rehousing support in 2025–26, 321 (94.7%) either persisted to the following academic year or graduated**.

Post-participation survey findings also demonstrate meaningful student outcomes. Among respondents:

- **96%** reported that access to Basic Needs resources supported them in achieving their academic goals.
- **93%** reported improved stress levels.
- **86%** reported that resources eased food insecurity.
- **81%** reported improvement in their academics.
- **78%** reported that resources eased housing insecurity.

In partnership with IRSA, Basic Needs is also examining longitudinal student success outcomes. Current analyses indicate higher persistence and GPA among Basic Needs users. Dashboards under development will enable the department to track these outcomes over time and disaggregate data to better understand equity gaps and service utilization patterns.

Equity and BREAD Grant Outcomes (Findings based on 2025 Calendar Year)

Year-one findings from the federally funded BREAD Project demonstrate significant progress in expanding access among underserved students. In 2025:

- **4,080 underserved students** accessed the Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry, an **8% increase over baseline**.
- **814 underserved students** received housing or emergency assistance, a **116% increase over baseline**, exceeding the project's three-year target during the first year.
- **1,628 underserved students** were referred to CalFresh, a **56% increase over baseline** and above the project's three-year goal.
- **94% of underserved pantry and emergency grant participants** either remained enrolled or graduated.

These findings demonstrate that expanded access is reaching the populations the grant was designed to serve while also providing early evidence of positive persistence and stability outcomes.

Fall 2025 Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry Assessment

Basic Needs completed a comprehensive mixed-methods assessment of the Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry in Fall 2025, including approximately **650 student survey responses**, paper surveys in affinity spaces, focus groups with culturally affiliated student organizations, and feedback from student pantry employees.

Key findings included:

- **94%** of respondents reported feeling welcome and that they belong when visiting the pantry.
- **79%** of pantry users reported visiting at least weekly, demonstrating that the pantry functions as a consistent food resource rather than solely an emergency service.
- **84%** identified fresh fruits and vegetables as items they regularly seek.
- **68%** requested additional cooking basics such as oils and spices.
- Students emphasized the importance of culturally familiar foods, fresh proteins, staple ingredients, dietary-specific options, and foods that can be prepared within the constraints of student schedules and living situations.

Focus groups further demonstrated that culturally responsive food access is connected to **dignity, comfort, belonging, and students' ability to prepare familiar meals**, rather than simply to food preference. Findings are being made to inform purchasing decisions and continued improvements to the pantry experience.

Assessment-Informed Continuous Improvement

The department's assessment strategy is intentionally designed to move from **data collection to action**. Findings from IRSA, student surveys, focus groups, Salesforce, pantry utilization data, and grant evaluation have informed program and systems changes, including the Equity Award Rubric, culturally responsive pantry purchasing, proactive outreach, Student Housing Navigation Services, and WISE Wildcats.

This approach allows Basic Needs to evaluate not only **how many students access services**, but also **who is being reached, what changes after students participate, where equity gaps remain, and how programs and systems can be improved**.

IV. Integrate Unit Objectives with Strategic Action Plan in 2026-27

Proudly Owning Who We Are

- Outcome: Evaluate participation and student success outcomes (persistence and GPA) in prevention-focused programs, including WISE Wildcats and Student Housing Navigation Services.

Leveraging Our Strengths in What We Do

- Outcome: Implement Salesforce Case Management functionality by January 2027 to streamline student support, reduce administrative burden, and improve coordination across Basic Needs programs.

Advancing Our Influence by How We Do Our Work

- Outcome: Work with the assessment team and IRSA to expand longitudinal assessment dashboards measuring utilization, persistence, GPA, graduation, and equity outcomes, using findings to guide annual program improvements and strategic planning by January 2027.

Let's Dance!

- Outcome: Implement recommendations from the Hungry Wildcat Food Pantry Assessment to further strengthen students' sense of belonging through culturally responsive food offerings and continued stigma reduction efforts. Conduct a second assessment of the Pantry in Spring of 2027 to measure improvements.

Assessment Topic:

- In 2026–27, Basic Needs will implement a pre- and post-survey for all student employees to assess growth in career-readiness competencies. This aligns with CSU Forward and will demonstrate that student employment with Basic Needs helps students gain real-world skills and contributes to experiential learning.

V. Identify at least one goal/objective that supports the Chico State Playbook in 2026-27

Goal: Reduce administrative barriers and improve access to Basic Needs services.

- In 2026–27, Basic Needs will hire an **Administrative Support Coordinator I** and develop systems to better track applications, manage appointments, provide front-desk navigation, and identify emergency situations requiring immediate drop-in support. This new triage function will address a critical capacity gap as student applications for support continue to grow. Success will be measured by tracking application follow-up and the number of urgent cases elevated to case management. This supports the Chico State Playbook's emphasis on **streamlined processes and a welcoming university culture,** as well as the CSU Promise's commitment to a **personalized, streamlined student experience**.