

Northwest Iowa Community College named as One of the Best 120 Community Colleges in the Nation

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program has named Northwest Iowa Community College to its [list](#) of what they consider the 120 “[best](#)” community colleges in the country Monday. This kicks off a multistep, data-driven process for identifying a single institution to receive its \$1 million award for “community college excellence.”

“We recognize that there are many community colleges around the country that are employing innovative strategies and achieving excellent results for their students. The bar for the Aspen Prize was intentionally set high in order to identify those institutions that have demonstrated high levels of student success.” The Aspen Institute said in its introduction of the *Top 120 Best Community Colleges* list.

“In a comprehensive review of publicly available data, these 120 two-year institutions—from 32 states—have demonstrated strong outcomes considering three areas of student success: student success in persistence and completion, consistent improvement in outcomes over time and equity in outcomes for students of all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.”

Dr. William Giddings, President of Northwest Iowa Community College, stated, “NCC offers a variety of programs that lead to high-wage, high-growth jobs in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, business, electrical, and the automotive industries. The College has developed numerous transfer agreements with four year institutions that enable students to transfer smoothly to a four-year college. This national recognition shows that the college provides excellence in its educational programs. A major goal of the college is to change lives as well as provide educational excellence in the region,” Giddings continued, “Being recognized as one of the top 120 community colleges in the nation confirms that we are a leading institution in the programs we offer, not only regionally, but nationally. The challenge to the College and communities we serve is to maintain that level of excellence.”

The Aspen Institute has created a four step process to award the \$1 million dollars: Evaluation of Public Data, Collection of New Data, Qualitative Data and Expert Judgment and finally Post-Award Knowledge-Sharing.

Round one, to be completed in April 2011, of the million dollar prize was an evaluation of public data. Publicly available data about student outcomes were analyzed to narrow the field in an initial cut by determining the 120 community colleges around the country that have demonstrated the highest levels of performance.

NCC has made the initial top 120 cut, so the College will continue to round two, to be completed by September 2011. For Round two, the top 120 community colleges will be invited to submit additional data on student completion, learning, and workforce outcomes, and other contextual information. These measures will include more refined student completion rates, transfer rates, employment outcomes, as well as narrative descriptions of the contextual factors that colleges believe have influenced or contributed to the demonstrated outcomes.

For Round three, to be completed by December 2011, information will be gathered during site visits designed to examine data submitted in the round two application. They will explore practices that enabled finalists to achieve exceptional student outcomes. These practices will serve as the basis for post-award knowledge sharing, aiming to deepen understanding among all community colleges about how to improve student success. A winner and a runner-up will be announced at the completion of this round.

Round four will be a post-award knowledge-sharing phase. Identifying exemplars is just the start. In addition to celebrating the winners and finalists, the award event will serve as a launching pad for learning from leading colleges and networking among education leaders with similar challenges and concerns. Participating community colleges will generate an unprecedented database of the characteristics of excellence across institutions, creating the opportunity for learning and knowledge-sharing.

To view the entire list of The Aspen Institute’s *College Excellence Program – 120 “Best” Community Colleges* go to: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/eligibleinstitutions>.