



Free City College

SPOTLIGHT ON CASH GRANT RECIPIENTS

Free City Cash Grant Increases College Access and Success for Economically Disadvantaged Students

In 2024-25, 30% of program participants qualified for a Free City Cash Grant—a rate that is increasing over time.¹ If a Free City participant gets the California College Promise Grant (CCPG), CCPG pays their tuition, and Free City gives them \$46 for each unit they take to help cover college costs.

100% of Free City Cash Grant recipients are economically underserved.

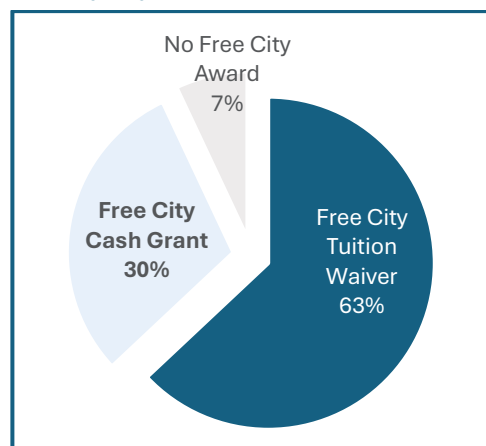
These students qualify for a cash grant through the program because they have a very low income. At present, the cash grant is the sole design mechanism to support the program's equity goals. Compared to program participants overall, students who receive a grant are disproportionately from communities facing the greatest obstacles, such as first-generation students, foster youth, vets, and CalWORKS recipients.

Under the proposed 2026-27 budget, students who would no longer receive a Free City Cash Grant are among our most financially insecure.

In 2024-25, the total cost of attendance at CCSF for an independent San Francisco resident exceeded \$38,000, covering housing, food, transportation, and course materials.

Free City Cash Grant recipients face an average annual unmet need of over \$15,000. The grant helps bridge this gap. Despite CCSF's high attendance cost—the highest in the state—students receive the same amount of federal and state financial aid as elsewhere.

Figure 1. Percent of Free City Eligible Students Receiving Program Benefits, 2024-25



100%

of Free City Cash Grant recipients are economically underserved.

\$15K+

Average unmet financial need of a Free City Cash Grant recipient.

I'm super thankful to [have the Free City cash grant] because as a single parent, it's really hard to take care of my child and myself and transportation.

-Free City Cash Grant Recipient + Transfer Candidate

¹ Students are eligible for Free City based on confirmation of a San Francisco address and qualification for in-state tuition (given California residency or non-resident exemption). Find more information at <https://www.ccsf.edu/paying-college/free-city>.

A Free City Cash Grant can be the difference between staying in school and leaving during a financial emergency.

In the [2025 Real College California survey](#), CCSF participants reported high rates of housing and food insecurity:

- Over half reported cutting the size of or skipping meals because there was not enough money for food (within the prior 30 days).
- More than one-third borrowed money to pay their bills.
- More than one-quarter underpaid their rent.

Further, in the fall [2025 Trellis Strategies national survey](#),

- 54% of undergraduates couldn't easily access \$500 for an emergency.
- 65% ran out of money at least once that year.
- Many relied on public assistance or credit cards
- A higher proportion of community college students used *buy now pay later* products.

In one of the most expensive cities in the nation, the Free City Cash Grant can help students offset unexpected financial hardships like these. These funds can be the difference maker in remaining enrolled during economic instability.

Free City Cash Grant recipients *take more units than program participants overall and pass at similar rates, helping them reach their goals sooner.*

Free City Cash Grant recipients have declared an educational goal, such as a certificate, degree, or transfer. They enroll in more units than other participants and achieve similar pass rates, helping them reach their goals sooner.

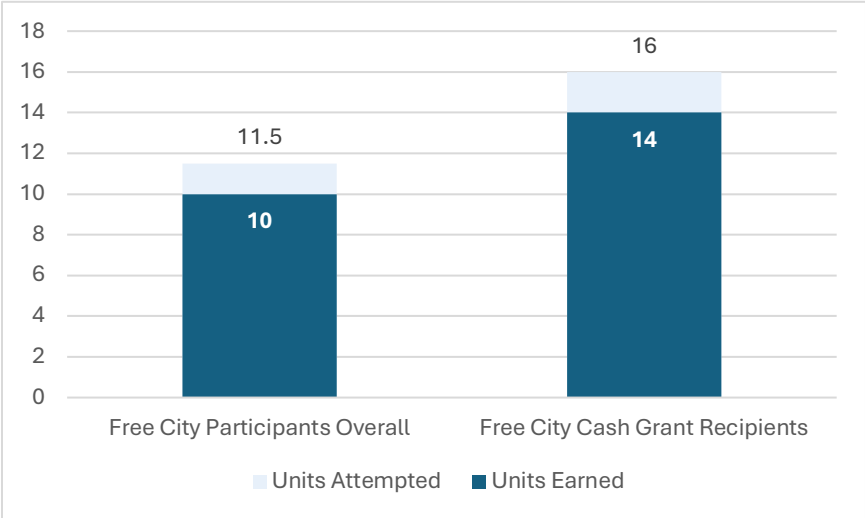


Figure 2. Average Units Attempted and Earned by Free City Program Participants, 2024-25

Bottom Line: Eliminating the Free City Cash Grant Will Make College Less Attainable for San Francisco’s Most Vulnerable Residents.

50%+

Percent of CCSF students reporting food insecurity in fall 2025.

[Free City is] the only reason why I could take that leap to go back to school.... And without Free City, I wouldn't complete my [Computer Networking and Information Technology program and transfer] because ... I've exhausted my savings. I'm barely able to make it this term.... If I didn't have Free City, I probably would've just quit my certificate, started working, and then maybe taken a class here and there.

-Free City Cash Grant Recipient + Student Worker

+5.5 Units

Additional units Free City Cash Grant recipients took on average in 2024-25 compared to program participants overall.



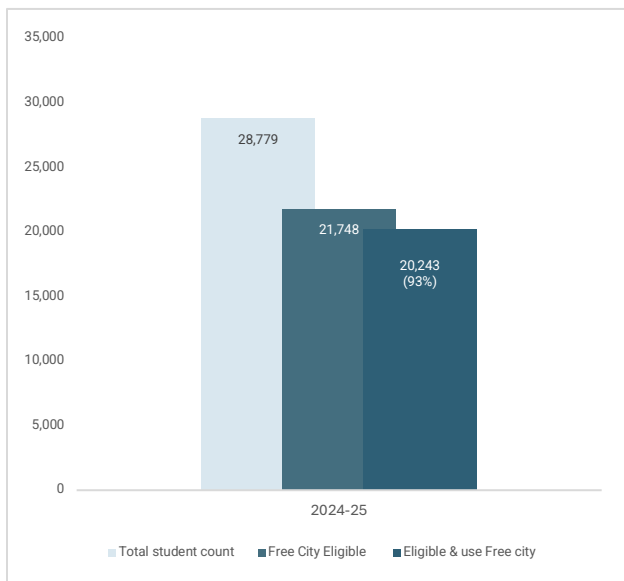
Free City College

PROGRAM IMPACT 2024-2025

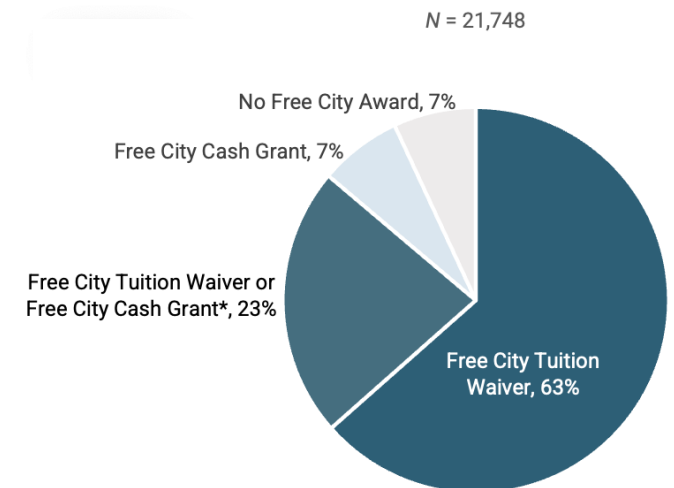
Free City offers free tuition and financial assistance for San Francisco residents taking credit courses, helping students gain economic mobility and building a strong workforce.

Participation

20,000+ San Franciscans benefitted from Free City in 2024-2025, representing a remarkable 93% annual participation rate among eligible students. Roughly 75% of the credit population qualified during that period.

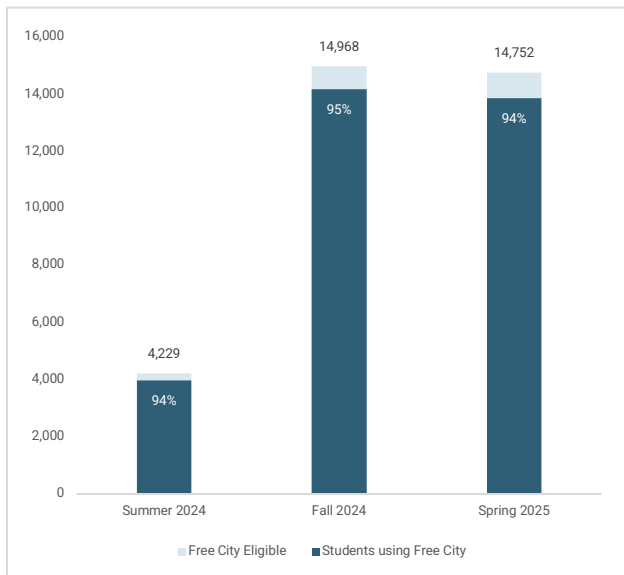


While most Free City recipients received a tuition waiver, 30% of participants qualified for a Free City Cash Grant at some point in the academic year—a rate that is increasing over time.

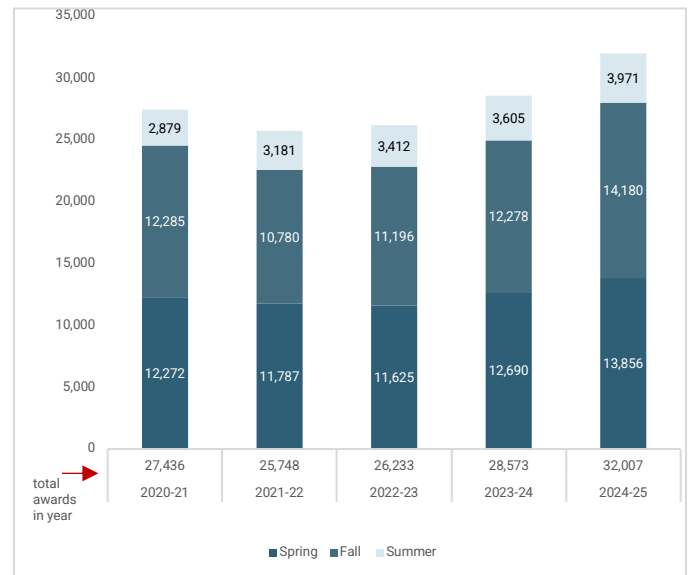


*Both awarded in academic year depending on student's CCPG status in a given term.

Free City awards totaled 32,000+ across three terms. Students apply for and receive financial support from the program each term.

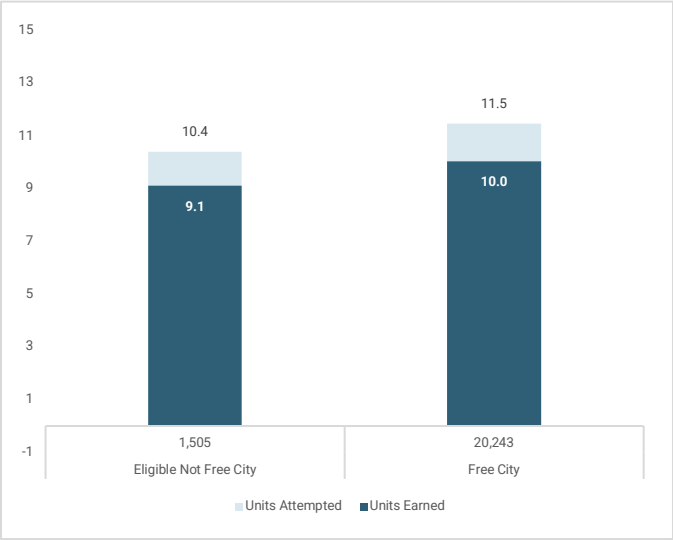


Free City participation continued trending upward, with the sum for this reporting period being the highest in the past five years.



Free City participants engage more than their peers.

They took more units than their non-program counterparts; they were also more likely to return from the fall to the spring term compared to the overall college average.



FREE CITY PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

- Funded by the City of San Francisco and backed by its voters since 2017.
- Improves college access for San Franciscans by offering residents tuition-free credit courses, regardless of income, age, or academic standing.
- **Waives tuition for eligible students** in the amount of \$46/unit each semester.
- **Provides a cash grant to California College Promise Grant (CCPG) recipients;** when CCPG funds cover the student’s tuition, program funds cover the student’s Free City Cash Grant in the amount of \$46/unit.
- Embeds program application in the online student portal for CCSF enrollment [each](#) semester, filtering for eligible students.

2024-25 Program Achievements

- **Continued amplification of Free City, both externally in the community and internally in the college:** Public campaigns led in collaboration with ASIR Visual Marketing and VOLER Strategic Advisors have featured real program recipients and focused on reaching priority populations through a mix of traditional and digital media (e.g., Google Search, geofencing, social media, busses). Additionally, the college elevated the value proposition of Free City in its campaigns, including the program’s support for job training and degree completion. As of fall 2025, the campaign has generated nearly 2.5M *impressions*, leading to nearly 25k website sessions and ultimately over 18k clicks to apply—an exceptional conversion rate (ASIR Visual Marketing, 2025).

Internal professional development held throughout the year reached nearly 400 college personnel during three *FLEX* sessions, raising the profile of the program, its relationship with financial aid, and the role students’ financial stability plays in their long-term success.

- **Optimized student use of Free City benefits:** Application support through CCSF’s Free City Coordinator, proactive outreach to eligible students who had not yet applied, simplification of application mechanics, and connection of students to the CCPG and FAFSA to determine cash grant eligibility resulted in more participants taking full advantage of Free City resources.
- **Advocated for program improvements with the Free City Oversight Committee:** Both Equity Subcommittee members and student advocates recommended elimination of program repayment requirements, which can inadvertently bar students from re-enrollment. At present, students who participate in Free City and drop classes (or are dropped by their instructor) after the full refund deadline must pay back the cost of their tuition—unlike other tuition assistance programs such as the CCPG. They also advocated for covering student fees through Free City, which currently total \$56 total/term. For the first time, CCSF quantified the fiscal impact of these changes for Oversight Committee consideration and began making the case for updates to the program’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- **Collaborated with other programs and initiatives to address Free City students’ financial stability, specifically Financial Aid,** which conducted an email campaign to 9,000 students with a Free City waiver and no FAFSA on file to promote completion and hosted 11 workshops to support FAFSA submission.