Higher Education Foster Youth Program

Website Template

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Project Background

In 2018, after conducting a survey of 100 higher education programs specifically designed to assist foster youth, AOI produced a report on the services that are offered (see *AOI Higher Education Foster Youth Programs: 2018 Review*). During our review of the program websites, we identified quite a variety of website structures, particularly in how much information is provided and what type of information is provided. We found that many of the program pages are too brief and do not provide enough information for young people looking for an institution that can help them with their unique needs.

Proposed Website Template

AOI decided to develop a template for the foster youth program websites. We looked for the elements that are of most importance to foster youth, considered modern approaches to website design and user interface, and pulled together the following template. Although the visual structure can differ from what we propose, we suggest the content elements presented be included as the foundation of every foster care support program website.

LOGO NAME

SLOGAN HERE

FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAM NAME

FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAM TAG LINE OR MISSION STATEMENT

HOME PAGE

If your institution has a program that includes a set of services to support foster youth, it is helpful to have a separate website with the name of the program front and center on the program's website. This clearly delineates the program information from the general university information and helps reduce confusion for the youth. If the branding can be unique from the university (logo, colors, font, etc.), this can help minimize confusion even more.

Images are very popular on websites right now, so we recommend that you consider adding a lot of images to the website.

WHO ARE WE?

Add a description of the mission or purpose of the foster youth program at your college or university. Add a little history, such as how long the program has been in existence, and include what department manages the program.

WHO CAN APPLY?

Add an overview of the youth who can participate in the foster youth program. Include whether the youth must have spent a certain amount of time in foster care, any geographical parameters (state or country citizenship), and any age limitations. Add any additional requirements, such as a demonstrated financial need, educational accomplishments, first in family to pursue a college degree, etc.

HOME PAGE, continued

As with any website, put your mission or purpose statement right up front. Ideally, have it on the first page so it is seen on the screen when the website is pulled up ("above the fold"). Consider adding a video overview, as well.

Foster youth would like to know right away if they are eligible to apply before they start digging into the program. Put the eligibility requirements up front. (These would not include the requirements to stay in the program once they are admitted – just to be able to apply.)

SUPPORT SERVICES

ENROLLMENT

An overview of what services are in place to help foster youth apply for and be accepted into the college or university:
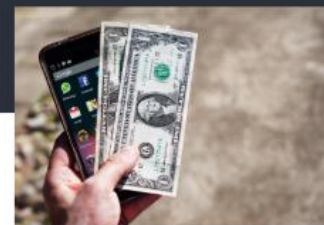
Application Assistance
Financial Aid Counseling
Priority Course Registration

HOUSING

A description of what housing is available for foster youth throughout the year. The youth looking to apply need to know what housing is or is not available so that they can plan accordingly:

Academic Year
Summer
Fall/Spring Breaks
Financial Support Available for Housing
Temporary or Emergency Housing

FINANCIAL

An overview of the various financial supports in place for foster youth:

Financial Assistance/Advising
Loans
Grants
Scholarships
Work-Study
Emergency Funds
Graduation Support

HOME PAGE, continued

On the home page of the program's website, include an overview of the support services available to foster youth. The details about each category of services should then be included in an extra page behind the home page. (We have included an example of what these pages would look like on the following pages.) Even if some of these services are offered to all students and not just those in the foster youth program, be sure to list them on your site.

In our program survey, we found that the services fell into six categories. The three categories of services listed here are of critical importance to foster youth. They are very concerned about help with the process of applying to college, whether they will have a place to stay all year, and what kind of financial aid is available.

ACADEMIC

A list of the various academic support services:

Academic Advising
Summer Orientation Program
Priority Course Registration
Tutoring

PERSONAL

A description of what services are available for foster youth to help them adjust and thrive in college:

Adult Mentoring/Coaching
Peer Mentoring
Spiritual Support
Health Insurance/Services
Psychological Services/Counseling
Community/Social Activities
Life Skills Training/Counseling
Leadership Training

CAREER

An overview of the various supports in place for foster youth to prepare for a career:

Career Counseling/Coaching
Internships

HOME PAGE, continued

The three categories of services listed here are the other three of the six that we uncovered in our foster youth program survey. These would be below the previous three, not on a separate page.

ENROLLMENT SUPPORT

Application Assistance
Explain how your institution will assist the youth with the application process, such as providing all the necessary forms, help with filling out forms, writing essays, etc.

Financial Aid Counseling
Explain how your institution will assist the youth with financial aid, such as help with identifying financial aid opportunities, guidance on filling out all the necessary forms (FAFSA, etc.), and ensuring that all deadlines are clearly understood, etc.

Priority Course Registration
Explain your institution's policy (if there is one) about enabling foster youth to have priority course registration, ensuring that they get the courses of their choice upon enrollment. Focus particularly on how this helps first year students.

If you are interested in applying, please **click here to contact us**. We will respond to you as soon as possible and connect you with an enrollment coach who will answer any questions you have and will help you get started.

Enrollment Support Page

Here is an example of what the Enrollment Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include. The contact link would take the visitor to the Contact Details section.

We believe it would be better for the youth to connect with an enrollment coach before attempting to start the enrollment process, so you may want to consider having a separate, "hidden" section of the website that contains all the enrollment instructions and forms. The link to that section would be given to the foster youth after they have contacted the institution to express an interest in enrolling and have had a chance to speak with their enrollment coach.

HOUSING SUPPORT

Academic Year
Explain the housing options available during the academic year for foster youth participating in the program.

Summer Break
Explain the housing options available over the summer break for foster youth participating in the program.

Fall & Spring Breaks
Explain the housing options available over the spring and fall breaks for foster youth participating in the program.

Financial Support for Housing
Describe the financial assistance available for housing during the academic year and over breaks.

Temporary Emergency Housing
Provide information about any temporary emergency housing that is available for youth who run into housing difficulties.

Housing Support Page

Here is an example of what the Housing Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Financial Assistance/Advising
Describe the services available to help youth identify and apply for financial aid.

Loans
Outline any loans that the youth participating in your program could apply for to help finance the youth's education.

Grants
Outline any grants that the youth participating in your program could apply for to help finance the youth's education.

Scholarships
Outline any scholarships that the youth participating in your program could apply for to help finance the youth's education.

Work-Study
Provide information about any work-study opportunities that youth could take advantage of to supplement their educational funding.

Emergency Funds
Describe any emergency funds that are available to the foster youth in your program, such as money for books, meals, living expenses, etc.

Graduation Support
Provide information on any financial support that you offer, such as paying for the cap and gown, graduation pictures, etc.

Financial Support Page

Here is an example of what the Financial Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Academic Advising
Describe the services available to help youth set their academic goals and plan their academic path.

Summer Orientation Program
Provide information about any summer orientation programs or classes that are geared to help first year students adjust to the academic rigors of college life.

Priority Course Registration
Explain your institution's policy (if there is one) about enabling foster youth to have priority course registration, ensuring that they get the courses of their choice upon enrollment. Focus on how this policy assists students after their first year.

Tutoring
Describe the tutoring services available to youth who need additional academic support.

Academic Support Page

Here is an example of what the Academic Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include.

PERSONAL SUPPORT

Mentoring
Explain any mentoring opportunities (adult or peer mentoring) that will help the youth transition into and through college life.

Spiritual Support
If applicable, provide details about any spiritual support and counseling services that you can give students.

Health Insurance/Services
Describe any health insurance that is available to foster youth, and whether there are health services at their disposal on campus.

Psychological Services/Counseling
Give an overview of the psychological support that youth can get through counseling, if needed.

Community/Social Activities
Describe the social activities that are provided to the foster youth in the program. Explain how these activities help build strong relationships and a sense of community among students and staff.

Life Skills Training/Counseling
List the various life skill building opportunities that you provide, such as workshops and one-on-one guidance.

Leadership Training
Leadership is a life skill, but many programs separate it out through specialized leadership skill building training and application opportunities.

Personal Support Page
Here is an example of what the Personal Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include.

CAREER SUPPORT

Career Counseling/Coaching

Describe the services available to help youth set their career goals and plan their career path.

Internships

Provide details about whether there are internship opportunities for the youth in your program. Many foster youth who attend college go into the human services field, so highlighting these internships would be of particular interest.

Career Support Page

Here is an example of what the Career Support page might look like and a general description of the content you would include.

TESTIMONIALS

John Smith, '17

"Testimonial sharing a positive experience or impression about the program for foster youth."

Katarina Willford, '16

"Testimonial sharing a positive experience or impression about the program for foster youth."

David Hollows, '15

"Testimonial sharing a positive experience or impression about the program for foster youth."

HOME PAGE, continued

Because of bad experiences and disappointments in their past, foster youth often have trouble trusting people and programs that claim that they have the youth's best interest in mind. However, if they see that other foster youth have had positive experiences and outcomes from participating in your program, they may be more open to trusting your program. Include a set of testimonials from current and/or former participants in your program on the home page, as well.

HOME PAGE, continued

Be sure that it is easy for youth to find how to contact the program. Either put this information at the bottom of the home page, or put a "Contact" link in the menu on the top or to the left of the home page that will take them to this information and/or or an online contact form that they can fill out.

It would be easier for the youth to have a single point of contact to help them to understand the program, have questions answered, and/or to get them started in the enrollment process. If you have an individual who can serve as this single point of contact, include his/her name in the Contact Details section.

Examples of Website Elements

Blue Ridge Community College in VA, Northwestern Michigan College, and Lansing Community College in MI all have a concise introduction to their program on their home page. Blue Ridge also includes a video overview.

https://www.brcc.edu/services/support-programs/great-expectations/

https://www.nmc.edu/student-services/student-life/your-nmc.html

https://internal.lcc.edu/supportservices/fosteringstars/

Sacramento State University has a slide show on their home page that automatically rotates from Services to Events to Supplemental Instruction. We see an opportunity for more details about each item in their bullet lists, but the slide show approach is nice because it gets a lot of information on the home page without forcing visitors to scroll down a lot.

https://www.csus.edu/gs/

If you prefer a menu approach than the category "blocks" we have suggested, we like the way that Middle Tennessee State University and Loyola Marymount University have structured their program sites with all the menu items off to the left that directs the user to a single page. If you don't have the ability to put a more detailed overview of each category of services on the home page, this would be a possible alternative. Arizona State University's website for Bridging Success utilizes a similar menu approach, but with the menu at the top of the page.

https://www.mtsu.edu/nextstep/

https://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/community/studentsuccess/guardianscholarsprogram/

https://students.asu.edu/foster-youth

The University of California, Riverside, has captured many of the elements we recommend. We see an opportunity for more details about each support service, but the fundamental information that foster youth would want to know is there – all on the home page.

https://guardianscholars.ucr.edu/