

Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) Process to Participate

1

Institutional Reviews and Approval

2

Data Request

3

Student Communication and Promotion

Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) Fall 2025 Participation

Checklist

1

Institutional Reviews and Approval

- **Send Letter of Intent and IRB Decision**

Complete an electronic form that provides confirmation of institutional participation in the SFWS, IRB review determination (i.e., if exempt from review, expedited review is needed, or full review is needed), and estimated sample size.

2

Data Request

- **Complete and Return the Crush FTP Form**

Your Trellis contact will provide a form to set up the secured system where the person submitting the data requests will safely upload the student data.

- **SFWS Data Request**

Send the data request via secure FTP by September 22, 2025.

3

Student Communication and Promotion

- **Decide on Whether to Provide Incentives**

Trellis provides modest survey-wide incentives, but we strongly encourage schools to provide additional incentives for only their students to improve their response rate. A decision on whether to offer an incentive and details on what the incentive is need to be provided to Trellis by September 22, 2025.

- **Promote Survey**

Promoting the survey is a great way to get higher response rates from your students. Your Trellis contact can provide best practices for marketing.

- **Schedule Outreach to Students**

We request that your institution send an email to students to inform them the survey is coming soon. In addition, we request at least one reminder email during the survey implementation period.

Timeline

By September 22, 2025

School sends SFWS Data Request to Trellis

In the Week of October 13-17, 2025

School sends students an email letting them know the survey is coming soon

October 20, 2025 (2-year schools)

October 21, 2025 (4-year schools)

Survey opens, Trellis sends survey invitation via email to students

October 28, 2025 (2-year schools)

October 29, 2025 (4-year schools)

Trellis sends list of non-responders to school

October 29, 2025 (2-year schools)

October 30, 2025 (4-year schools)

School sends reminder email to non-responders to complete the survey

November 11, 2025

Survey closes

March 2026

Schools receive their set of SFWS reports and de-identified data files

Participation Process

1

Trellis will partner with you to navigate your IRB review process

It is important to check with your institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine if a full review is necessary. Oftentimes an IRB will waive or expedite review due to the low-risk nature of the project, but some IRBs may want to review the study before approving on campus. Your Trellis contact will work with you to provide all materials necessary for IRB review and to obtain all necessary IRB documentation of waived review and/or approval.

Note for IRB approval: To encourage response rates and protect student anonymity, Trellis will not provide participating institutions student-level responses from the SFWS. Trellis will obtain student consent to potentially use their educational records in analysis of survey responses.

Please complete the letter of institutional awareness/support online at the link provided below. It should be digitally signed (by typing the name) by a senior campus official, such as President, Vice President, Dean of Students. etc. The letter will also ask for an estimate of the number of students that will be sent to Trellis in the data request. The online letter will provide ranges to choose from, as well as selecting that the full undergraduate population will be sent. This helps Trellis better gauge the full sample size earlier in the process. Schools will not be held to the size range they selected in the letter.

The letter can be completed with this [online form](#) or this [fillable PDF form](#). If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to your Trellis contact.

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to provide confirmation that [College/University] is participating in the Student Financial Wellness Survey, implemented by Trellis. I am aware that Trellis intends to conduct research at our institution by administering an online survey to a sample of our students.

As [Title], I grant Trellis permission to conduct research at [College/University], pending all necessary institutional processes and approvals. I confirm that [IRB review is not required; Exempt IRB review is required; Expedited IRB review is required; Full IRB review is required]. I also grant permission for Trellis to share publicly that [College/University] participated in the Student Financial Wellness Survey.

I estimate the sample my institution will send to Trellis for the survey will be [our full undergraduate population; less than 1,000 students; between 1,000 and 3,000 students; between 3,001 and 5,000 students; between 5,001 and 10,000 students; more than 10,000 students; other].

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact my office at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

Name

2

Sample Letter of Institutional Awareness/Support

Data needed to administer the survey

Trellis will need student contact information to send unique links to the survey and certain student data fields to reduce survey burden and track response representativeness. Institutions will provide a roster of students via secured file transfer to Trellis after the fall semester census date, but no later than September 22, 2025.

The file should contain information for enrolled undergraduates aged 18 and over. Institutions with undergraduate enrollment above 10,000 students may provide a random sampling of 5,000 undergraduate students from their population.

Please provide the contact and demographic information outlined in the table below. A data dictionary detailing the format of the data request will be provided by your Trellis contact after your institution completed the letter of institutional support. Your Trellis contact will also provide instructions to set up the secure FTP (File Transfer Protocol) system. Data files should be provided in CSV format. PLEASE DO NOT SEND ANY FILES CONTAINING STUDENT DATA THROUGH EMAIL. ONLY SEND

SFWS Data Request: Institutional Sample and Demographic Fields

FIELD NAMES	DESCRIPTION
Email 1	Institutionally assigned email address
Email 2	Secondary email address for the student
First Name	Student first name
Last Name	Student last name
Unique SFWS Student Identifier (Preferably not the official institutional student ID)	It is our preference that this not be the official student ID. A unique student identifier that can be used with a crosswalk to potentially match survey responses to future data elements provided by the institution for additional analysis. If there are issues creating a unique identifier that is not the official institutional student ID, please discuss with your Trellis contact.
Age	Age of student (Not date of birth)
Race/Ethnicity	Race/Ethnicity of student
Gender	Gender of student
Credit Hours	The number of credit hours the student had enrolled in for the semester
Total Credits Earned	Total credit hours earned at institution as of the end of the prior semester

3

FILES THROUGH OUR SECURE CRUSH FTP SYSTEM.

Effective promotion will ensure robust student participation

Trellis will work with your institution to encourage student participation in the survey. This includes:

Trellis will provide a recommended schedule and sample email language for your institution to communicate to students about the survey. This communication can improve survey response rates by legitimizing the third-party survey invitation students receive. We request that your institution send a “heads up” email to students in the week prior to the survey to inform them that it is coming, and at least one reminder email during the survey implementation.

Coordinate with Trellis any additional student incentives to participate. Promoting the survey and providing incentives are good ways to get higher response rates from your students. Trellis will provide survey-wide incentives across all participating institutions. However, providing your own incentives and educating students about the importance of completing the survey is highly encouraged and on average can increase your response rate by two to three percentage points. Your Trellis contact will consult with you about best practices for promoting and providing incentives.

Data Stewardship

Data sharing and FERPA considerations

Your Trellis contact is available to discuss Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations and how institutions that have participated in prior SFWS implementations interpreted the permissibility to provide the SFWS data requests. For additional context on data sharing, you can also visit the resources below.

- U.S Department of Education's student privacy website: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/>
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) Data Sharing Decision Tree: https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/NASFAA_Data_Sharing_Decision_Tree.pdf

Types of data and records

- **Survey response data:** Survey response data refers to all student-level information collected through Trellis' SFWS tool as a component of participation in the study.
- **Education records:** Student-level records may be used to provide context and analysis for response data making the resulting reports more decision-focused for the institution. Students will be fully informed of Trellis' data security and records retention protocol and informed of potential risks associated with sharing data with personally identifiable information. Proof of digital consent will be stored in a secure, password-protected folder on Trellis' secured servers.

Storage and destruction

Survey response data and education records will be located on Trellis' servers, will be password protected, and will be accessible only from computers connected to Trellis' internal network. All computers will be locked and password protected when not in use. Furthermore, access to the files will be limited to the research team with role-based access.

All digital copies of personally-identifiable survey response data or personally-identifiable education records from the SFWS data transfers from institutions will be deleted no later than 24 months from the survey close date. All digital copies of de-identified survey response data and education records held by the SFWS will be deleted no later than ten years from the survey implementation date

Data Security

Trellis has nearly 40 years of experience as responsible stewards of student data. Trellis adheres to a consolidated matrix of security controls that incorporates NIST Moderate Controls, GLBA, and a number of other security frameworks. Data stores are maintained on encrypted network SAN storage in compliance with NIST moderate controls. Our servers are maintained to those same controls, using CIS benchmarks. Identity and Access Management also adheres to NIST moderate controls. Access is role-based and denied by default. All data is backed up for recovery purposes and stored on encrypted media. Data will be destroyed according to the Student Financial Wellness Survey policies described previously. Trellis has a strict asset disposal procedure. All storage media, such as hard drives or tapes, are destroyed and rendered unrecoverable prior to disposal.

About Trellis Strategies

Trellis Strategies is a leading nonprofit strategic research and consulting firm focused on advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce. Our commitment is to provide unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, spanning from application through graduation. Leveraging over four decades of experience in serving higher education institutions and assisting students in navigating intricate processes, Trellis Strategies' dedicated team possesses the knowledge, insight, and expertise to empower organizations to turn data into impactful action and tangible results.

As experts in gathering and analyzing both local and national data, we identify opportunities and provide scalable, tailored solutions for our partners. Our approach involves the transformation of institutions through the enhancement of the learner experience leading to higher enrollment yields, retention rates, and improved student post-graduation outcomes.

Guided by our mission, we navigate the non-linear landscape of postsecondary education, assisting institutions in adapting policies and programs to accommodate diverse learner journeys. By dismantling barriers in policy and processes, we aim to enhance learner outcomes and rebuilding trust in the credentialing process. We are dedicated to the belief that education serves as the cornerstone for unlocking new opportunities, fostering individual economic mobility, and growing community prosperity. For more information, visit our website: www.trellisstrategies.org/about-us/