What Sustainable Funding Really Means for Wyoming Community Colleges

WACCT
WYOMING ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES

Wyoming's community colleges use the term **sustainable funding** to describe a long-term, predictable financial structure that allows each institution to deliver high-quality education, meet workforce needs, and plan responsibly for the future.

Sustainable funding is not about short-term fixes or one-time appropriations—it is about ensuring the colleges can operate effectively year after year, even as costs rise and local revenues fluctuate.

Why It Matters

Sustainable funding ensures Wyoming's community colleges can continue serving as the backbone of the state's workforce pipeline, economic diversification strategy, and local opportunity engine. Without a stable model, colleges face program cuts, reduced capacity, and diminished ability to meet employer demand.

Core Elements of Sustainable Funding

1. Predictable State Support

Volatility in state appropriations makes long-term planning nearly impossible. Community colleges need a funding model that provides **stable, recurring dollars** rather than episodic increases or temporary infusions. Predictability allows colleges to:

- Plan multi-year academic programs
- Hire and retain qualified faculty
- Maintain consistent services for students and employers

2. Inflationary Adjustments

The cost of delivering education rises every year—utilities, equipment, salaries, compliance, and technology. Sustainable funding includes **annual adjustments that keep pace with inflation**, ensuring colleges do not fall behind simply by operating normally.

3. Recognition of High-Cost Programs (CTE)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs—welding, nursing, diesel tech, electrical, allied health—are **significantly more expensive** to deliver than many other academic programs. Sustainable funding requires:

- A model that accounts for **actual program costs**
- Support for **equipment replacement cycles**
- Funding for **specialized faculty recruitment**

Without this, colleges are penalized for offering the very programs Wyoming employers are asking for.

4. Stable Local Revenue

Local mills provide essential operating dollars, but current property tax relief proposals could reduce this revenue dramatically. Local revenue instability directly affects staffing, class availability, and workforce training capacity. Sustainable funding means:

- Protecting a **baseline level of local support**
- Ensuring colleges are not disproportionately harmed by statewide tax policy changes

5. Support for Workforce Responsiveness

Wyoming's economy is changing quickly. Sustainable funding ensures colleges can **adapt without waiting** for special appropriations. Colleges need flexible, reliable funding to:

- Launch new programs in emerging industries
- Expand short-term training
- Partner with employers on rapid-response workforce solutions

6. Long-Term Capital and Maintenance Planning

Facilities, labs, and technology infrastructure require ongoing investment. Sustainable funding includes:

- Capital renewal support
- Regular maintenance, which is cheaper and less disruptive because repairs are made as needed, not deferred until multiple issues need addressing
- Modernization of labs and equipment
- **Safe, functional learning environments**