



FUNDING GUIDE

How to Fund College Tours & College-Readiness Programs

With Money Your School or District Already Has

A plain-English guide for counselors, AVID coordinators, and directors of federal programs — covering Title I, Title IV-A, GEAR UP, Perkins/CTE, 21st CCLC, and local foundation funding.

Prepared by CE Educational Travel (CE Tours)

Turning travel into a measurable college-readiness intervention.

The budget objection is usually wrong

When a college tour or a college-readiness program gets shelved, the reason is almost always the same: *“we don’t have the budget.”* In our experience, that’s rarely true. The money exists — it’s just sitting in federal and state funding streams that most educators don’t associate with travel or programming.

This guide walks through the six most common sources schools and districts use to pay for college tours, career-pathway trips, and college-readiness workshops — what each one allows, who controls it, and how to position a request so it gets approved. Use it to find the money you already have.

How to use this guide

Match your goal to a funding source using the quick-reference table on the next page.

Read the one-page profile for that source to understand what it allows and who controls it.

Use the “hallowability” language and the three compliance rules on the final page when you write your request.

Important

This guide is a general starting point, not legal or grant-compliance advice. Allowable uses vary by state and by your district’s approved local plan, and rules change. Always confirm with your district’s federal programs office or your state education agency before committing funds. When in doubt, ask your grant coordinator — the phrase compliance officers love to hear.

Quick reference: match your goal to a source

Start here. Find the trip or program you want to run in the left column, then read the profile for the matching funding source.

What you want to fund	Best-fit source(s)	Who controls it
General college campus tours	Title I, Title IV-A, GEAR UP	Federal Programs / GEAR UP Dir.
College tours for first-gen / low-income students	GEAR UP, Title I, TRIO (if applicable)	GEAR UP / Federal Programs Dir.
Career-pathway & industry site visits	Perkins / CTE (career-tied only)	CTE Director
After-school / summer readiness programs	21st CCLC	21st CCLC / Ext. Learning Dir.
Counselor & staff PD workshops	Title II-A, Title IV-A	Prof. Learning / Federal Programs
College-readiness workshops for students	Title I, Title IV-A, GEAR UP	Federal Programs Dir.
Anything, with local flexibility	Local foundation / partner funds	Principal / Development Office

The one distinction that matters most

College tours vs. career trips are funded differently. A general “visit three campuses” tour is a *college-access* activity — fund it from Title I, Title IV-A, or GEAR UP. A trip built around a specific career field (visiting an engineering firm, a hospital, a culinary school) is a *career-development* activity — that’s where Perkins/CTE fits. Mixing these up is the fastest way to get a request denied.

The six funding sources, one at a time

SOURCE 1

Title I, Part A — Improving Basic Programs

The largest federal K-12 funding stream, aimed at schools with high percentages of low-income students. College-going culture and college-readiness activities are squarely within its purpose, which makes it one of the most flexible sources for campus tours and student workshops.

Who controls it: Director of Federal Programs / Title I Coordinator; at the school level, the principal directs school-level Title I funds.

Commonly allows:

- College campus visits and tours for eligible students
- College-readiness and FAFSA-completion workshops
- Parent engagement events tied to college-going (a college night)
- Transportation and related costs for the above

Watch out for: Funds must serve the eligible student population and align to the school's improvement plan. School-wide Title I programs have more flexibility than targeted-assistance schools.

How to position the request

Tie the trip to a goal already written in the School Improvement Plan — e.g., “increase college enrollment” or “build a college-going culture.” Frame it as an intervention with pre- and post-measurement, not a field trip. Quote the plan's own language back in your request.

SOURCE 2

Title IV-A — Student Support & Academic Enrichment (SSAE)

A flexible block grant built around three areas: a well-rounded education, safe and healthy students, and effective use of technology. College-readiness activities fit cleanly under “well-rounded education,” and counselor/staff training fits under professional development.

Who controls it: Director of Federal Programs; often the same person who administers Title I.

Commonly allows:

- College and career exploration as part of a well-rounded education
- Counselor and staff professional development (your workshops)
- Direct services for students, including readiness programming
- Personnel and supplemental activities to carry out the above

Watch out for: “Supplement, not supplant” — Title IV-A must add to what state and local funds already provide, not replace them. Districts receiving \$30,000 or more must base spending on a needs assessment.

How to position the request

Position workshops as professional development that expands current capacity (“we don’t currently offer this training”). Because up to 100% of Title IV-A can carry over year to year, target the spring carryover window (Apr–Jun) when districts are looking for allowable ways to spend down remaining funds.

SOURCE 3

GEAR UP — Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness

A federal grant designed specifically to get low-income students to and through college. College visits are not just allowed — they are core to the program’s mission. If a partner school or district has a GEAR UP grant, this is often the single best-fit source for a college tour.

Who controls it: GEAR UP Program Director / Coordinator (grant-funded, mission-aligned, and usually eager to spend on exactly this).

Commonly allows:

- College campus tours and multi-campus trips
- College-readiness workshops and summer programs
- FAFSA and financial-aid advising events
- Near-peer mentoring and college-knowledge activities

Watch out for: Availability depends on whether the school/district holds an active GEAR UP grant, and activities must serve the designated cohort of students.

How to position the request

Lead with mission alignment — GEAR UP directors are measured on college-going outcomes, which is exactly what your Impact Report demonstrates. This is your warmest conversation: you’re helping them spend money they already have on the outcomes they’re accountable for.

SOURCE 4

Perkins V — Career & Technical Education (CTE)

Federal funding dedicated to CTE programs. This is a strong source for career-pathway trips — but with an important limit: the trip must connect directly to a specific, approved CTE program. It is generally NOT a source for general college tours.

Who controls it: CTE Director / Perkins Coordinator.

Commonly allows:

- Career exploration and industry site visits tied to a CTE program
- Instructional field trips where the CTE program is going
- Professional development for CTE educators
- Career guidance and counseling activities

Watch out for: In many states, general or exploratory college tours are explicitly UNALLOWABLE under Perkins, and individual student costs (meals, entry fees) are often restricted. Everything must tie to an approved CTE program and the local needs assessment.

How to position the request

Never pitch Perkins for a general college tour. Instead, design a career-pathway trip: “health-sciences students visit a teaching hospital and a nursing program,” or “engineering pathway tours a manufacturing facility and a university lab.” Anchor it to the specific CTE program and its industry-alignment goals.

SOURCE 5

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)

Federal funding for before-school, after-school, and summer programming, primarily for students in high-poverty, low-performing schools. A natural fit for multi-day summer readiness programs and enrichment-based college exposure.

Who controls it: 21st CCLC Site Coordinator / Director of Extended Learning.

Commonly allows:

- Summer and after-school college-readiness programming
- Enrichment activities including college and career exposure
- Academic support and tutoring components
- Family engagement activities

Watch out for: Activities must occur outside regular school hours (after school, weekends, or summer) and serve the grant’s target population.

How to position the request

Package a multi-day summer college-immersion program or a Saturday workshop series rather than a school-day trip. Emphasize the academic-enrichment and family-engagement components, which map directly to 21st CCLC’s required elements.

SOURCE 6

Local Foundation & Partner Funds

The most flexible money of all, and the least paperwork. This includes district education foundations, local community foundations, corporate sponsorships, booster/PTO funds, and college-access nonprofits. Fewer federal strings mean fewer restrictions on what a trip can look like.

Who controls it: Principal, district Development/Foundation office, or a community partner.

Commonly allows:

- Effectively any component of a trip or program
- Scholarships that cover student costs federal funds can’t
- Gap funding to combine with a federal source
- Pilot programs before a district commits recurring funds

Watch out for: Amounts are smaller and less predictable, and each funder sets its own rules. Best used to fill gaps or cover the specific costs federal sources restrict (like individual student meals).

How to position the request

Use local funds to close the gaps a federal source leaves open — pairing, say, Title I for transportation with a local foundation grant for student meals. A blended-funding request also signals to a principal that you’ve done the homework and de-risked the ask.

Three rules that keep any request compliant

Whatever the source, federal reviewers apply the same underlying cost principles. Build every request around these three, and you'll clear most compliance questions before they're asked.

1. Necessary & reasonable

The cost must be needed to achieve a real educational goal, and priced fairly against the market. Ask: could I defend this price and this purpose to an auditor?

2. Allocable & aligned

The activity must directly serve the program's purpose and the students it's meant to serve, and it should align to an approved plan — the School Improvement Plan, the local Perkins/needs assessment, or the grant's goals.

3. Supplement, not supplant

Federal funds must add to what state and local dollars already provide — never replace them. If the district was already going to pay for it, federal funds generally can't. If it's a new or expanded activity, you're on much safer ground.

The outcomes advantage

Every one of these sources is easier to unlock when the trip is framed as a **measurable intervention** rather than a field trip. That's the difference between "we'd like to take students to some campuses" and "this program is projected to raise college-application and FAFSA-completion rates for our target cohort, with pre- and post-measurement." CE Tours builds that outcomes framework into every program — and it's exactly what a federal-programs director needs to justify the spend.

Illustrative program costs

Sample figures for planning conversations only — actual pricing depends on group size, destination, and duration. Replace with your quoted numbers.

Program type	Typical range	Best-fit funding
Single virtual readiness training/workshop	\$2,500 – \$5,000	Title IV-A / Title II-A
Multi-day virtual readiness training/workshop	\$5,000 - \$30,000	
On-site counselor PD day	\$8,000 – \$15,000	Title II-A / Title IV-A
Regional 1-day college tour (bus)	\$4,000 – \$9,000	Title I / GEAR UP
Multi-day college immersion trip	\$25,000 – \$100,000	GEAR UP / 21st CCLC
Career-pathway industry visit	\$3,000 – \$8,000	Perkins / CTE

Ready to build a fundable program?

CE Tours will help you match the right funding source to your goals and design a program built to satisfy it — including the outcomes framework that makes the request easy to approve. **Contact: [NAME] · [EMAIL] · [PHONE] · [WEBSITE]**