



## **Basic Needs Technology Survey**

### **Summary Report**

Sara Goldrick-Rab and Matt Bryant

September 2025

Basic needs insecurity is widespread in higher education. While the number and types of corresponding support services are growing, staff capacity lags far behind. At most institutions, the ratio of basic needs practitioners to students is low, contributing to students' lack of awareness and use of existing services. Technology has the potential to help practitioners inform and support far more students with basic needs services. Still, the extent to which technology tools are used and are suitable for basic needs work is unknown. After learning about this informational gap from frontline practitioners, Sara Goldrick-Rab created a Basic Needs Technology survey to inform the field and identify new opportunities.

She distributed the survey via social media and professional networks between May and July 2025. Ninety basic needs practitioners at higher education institutions across 17 different states responded, with the strongest representation from Washington (28%), California (12%), and Texas (11%). Washington and California were the first in the nation to fund basic needs practitioner roles on college campuses, and thus, a disproportionate number are employed there.

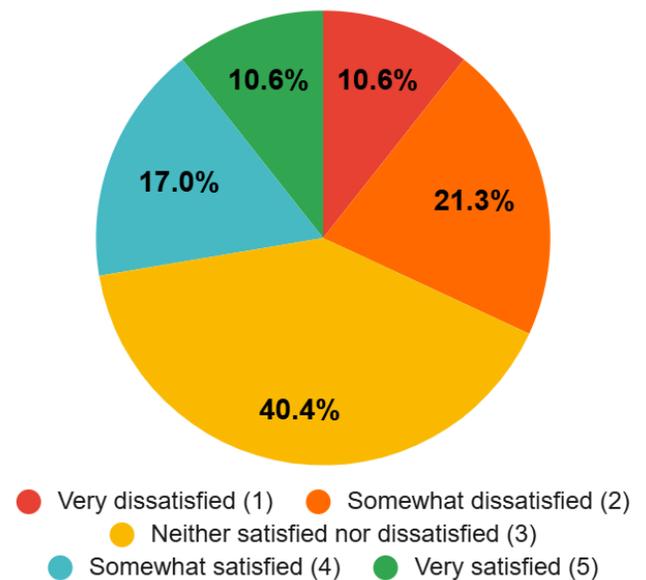
This initial report outlines the survey's primary results. Additional analyses and commentary are forthcoming in another report from Dr. Goldrick-Rab, expected by the end of the year.

## Targeted Outreach Campaigns

Most basic needs practitioners who completed the survey are actively using technology to inform students about basic needs services. Specifically, 53% of respondents are currently using software for targeted outreach, and 36% are not presently using outreach software but would like to.

- **Top Software Used:** Of the 26 different software tools currently being used by respondents for basic needs outreach, the most commonly used are Salesforce (20%), Maxient (17%), and EAB Navigate360 (15%).
- **Software Strengths:** The key strength of current tools is their ability to provide effective outreach (35%), with both email (18%) and text (18%) cited as effective modes of outreach.
- **Software Weaknesses:** Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current outreach software (32%), citing a wide variety of weaknesses across different tools – a reflection of the varying levels of functionality among the many other outreach tools being used across institutions. Less than half (46%) of respondents have administrator control over the software they use for outreach, which means the majority (54%) must rely on other departments to access advanced features such as settings and reports. Consequently, less than half (47%) of respondents are accessing reporting metrics for their outreach software, leaving the majority (53%) without data on the effectiveness of their outreach efforts.

How satisfied are you with the overall ease of use, efficiency, and effectiveness of your current software for targeted outreach?



## Student Intake and Assessment

Use of technology for student intake and assessment for basic needs services is even more prevalent than for outreach, with 76% of respondents indicating they are currently using an electronic intake form or self-assessment to direct students to support services.

- **Top Software Used:** Among the 27 different intake tools used by respondents, generic online form builders are the most common, with Google Forms and Microsoft Forms used by 46% of respondents. Among other tools, by far the most commonly used is Maxient (31%).
- **Software Strengths:** The top strengths identified for current intake tools are data integration with other software (33%), case management functionality (19%), and user experience (19%).
- **Software Weaknesses:** When asked which features would improve current intake tools, the top features identified by respondents were language translation (56%), advanced logic (53%), and AI-powered assistance (48%).

## Services and Referrals

Use of technology for services and referrals for basic needs services is also critical, with 62% of respondents indicating they are currently using software to track referrals and services students receive, and 28% indicating they are not presently using tracking software but would like to.

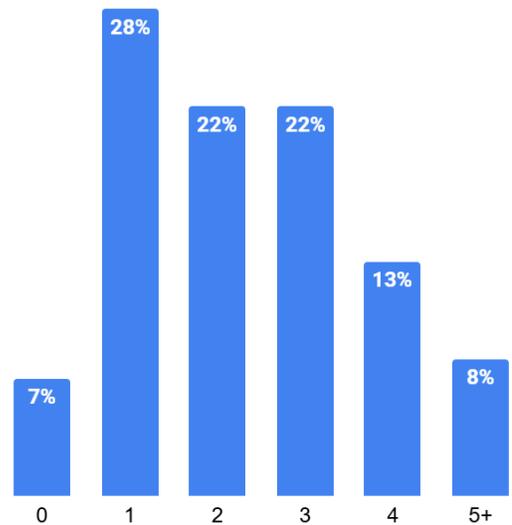
- **Top Software Used:** Of the 27 different tracking tools currently being used by respondents, the most commonly used are Maxient (41%), Microsoft Excel (23%), EAB Navigate360 (16%), and Starfish (16%).
- **Software Strengths:** The top strengths identified for current tracking tools include easily receiving referrals from faculty (73%), advisors, and other staff (71%), and tracking service use across multiple college units (59%).
- **Software Weaknesses:** When asked which features would improve current tracking tools, the top features identified by respondents were sharing service use data with external partners (57%), sending and receiving alerts when students take specific actions (57%), and sending reminders to students to encourage them to access services (53%).

## Additional Findings

The survey also revealed several cross-cutting themes that define the current state of basic needs technology.

- **Software Overload is a Reality:** 43% of respondents are using three or more different software tools to support their basic needs work, while 84% indicate they would prefer to use two or fewer different software tools.
- **A Clear Need for Training:** There is strong consensus among survey respondents that practitioners need more training to effectively use their current software, with nearly half (48%) explicitly stating this need.
- **A Desire for AI Tools:** For intake and assessment purposes, more than half (55%) of respondents indicated they wished their software had integrated AI tools (either AI assistance, AI suggestions, or both).
- **Technology Challenges Impact Work:** 45% of respondents indicated that technology challenges have a real and significant impact on their ability to serve students effectively, particularly issues with funding for technology (41%) and functionality of software (12%). Additionally, 45% of respondents indicated that challenges with basic needs technology have impacted their work and the work of their colleagues in other areas beyond basic needs, such as workforce development.

How many different software packages do you currently use in your basic needs work?



“Basic needs tech should allow for students to simply and easily share what they need help with (tech, food, housing, emergency, etc.) and how much help they need. The backend should allow for multiple-level access from all departments involved and the ability to see the student history of basic needs use, and then to build on that data – to share when students are most likely to need help, and just as importantly which students are not asking for help but might need it.” – Respondent Comment

For more information about this survey and its results, contact Sara Goldrick-Rab at [mail@saragoldrickrab.com](mailto:mail@saragoldrickrab.com)