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Front cover photo: A young, Black man sits on an outdoor bench wearing a mortarboard and gold sash. (Pexels)

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We believe that the forthright sharing of information among foundations and nonprofits builds a knowledge base that strengthens their ability to effectively address critical social issues. We encourage foundation donors, boards, and staff to honor this transparency in their own practices and to support others who do so.

Editorial

Dear readers,

The need for postsecondary education or training in order to secure a living wage job has become increasingly clear; indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it painfully so. Those who work in low-wage, low-skill service jobs are especially vulnerable during a crisis. While philanthropy has long supported college scholarships, many education funders have expanded their focus to support a broader range of postsecondary credentialling and to fund the supportive services and outreach needed for those who are seeking a traditional college degree.

Rural communities where it is harder to reach students and families in a cost-effective way require creative strategies to enable accesss. **Kellogg, Hendrick, Dufour, and Steele** describe Get2College, a model by the Woodward Hines Education Foundation to provide financial aid counseling to Mississippi high school students, focused on increasing the number of students who complete the FAFSA. Get2College's approach to scaling involved a partnership with the state's rurally based community colleges to increase FAFSA completion rates among that population.

The level of attainment of postsecondary credentials is increasingly being considered as part of larger strategies for community well-being. **Eggen, Jennings, O'Keefe, Kelly Pryor, and Clements** share the work of the Humana Foundation. As they shifted the focus of their work to the social determinants of health and promoting health equity, they created a Strategic Community Investment Program, which includes an emphasis on postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. This article shares key learnings and suggestions for other foundations interested in addressing postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities they serve.

While multi-faceted strategies are needed to address complex issues, such as reforming education policy or practice, coordinating multiple prongs of work is difficult. **McCambly and Anderson** introduce a tool, rooted in organizational research, to understand and predict the circumstances under which different combinations of strategies are likely to lead to lasting change. The intellectual work of integrating multiple strategies is daunting, and tools that support this work are sorely needed.

One part of many education funders' toolkits is advocacy and policy work. **AlQaisi and Warick** describe a recent grantmaking initiative designed to improve education advocacy efforts through financial and capacity-building support. They also detail the key conditions conducive to policy change and the supports needed for different conditions.

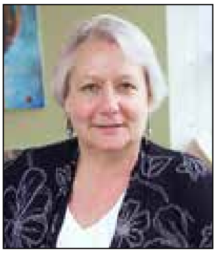
Learning and adaptation as policy environments and local conditions change is critical. This journal has previously published several articles related to emergent learning

(e.g., Darling, Gruber, Smith & Stiles, 2016; Chubinski, Adcock & Sprigg, 2019). **Hanauer, Sneed, and DeBaun** reflect on how an emergent learning framework contributed to the continued development of the Get2College Pilot School Program.

Organizational policies are an important and often under-emphasized part of the policy mix. **Strickland and McCallum** share their reflections on the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's Community Scholarship Program, which shifted from the traditional scholarship programs operated by the foundation to one that provides multi-year scholarships to students who are first generation, from low-income families, and youth of color. This shift in the foundation's approach to managing scholarships is an example of the potential impact of organizational policy.

Working with the right partners is another key aspect of organizational policy. **Pennington** reflects on lessons learned by foundation staff and their rural partners to expand access to postsecondary education.

At this writing, we are looking at a major shift in national education policy with a new administration in Washington arriving in 2021. These articles offer some examples of programs, tools, and local policies to consider as this shift occurs.



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Scaling Rural Access: One Foundation's Partnership to Expand FAFSA Completion Across Mississippi

B. Tait Kellogg, Ph.D., Higher Ed Insight; Ann Hendrick, M.S., and Kierstan Dufour, M.S., Woodward Hines Education Foundation; and Patricia Steele, Ph.D., Higher Ed Insight

Keywords: *College access, FAFSA, financial aid, financial aid counseling, rural, Mississippi, rural higher education, partnerships, foundations, scaling*

Introduction

Education foundations often wrestle with where to invest for the most meaningful change while also serving as many students as possible. Since reaching students in areas with a concentrated population is generally more cost-effective, rural students are frequently excluded from scaling strategies for college-access programs. This article outlines the Get2College program, a model by the Woodward Hines Education Foundation, and its efforts in partnership with community colleges to provide financial aid counseling in rural Mississippi high schools with an emphasis in increasing the number of students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

When nonprofits consider scaling an initiative, the focus is often on quantitative results. But Coburn (2003) argues that the dimensions of an effective scaling strategy extend beyond numbers, and include:

1. the depth of change, which requires evaluation and reflection to understand,
2. the sustainability of the results,
3. the "spread" from diffusing an innovation to larger numbers of users,
4. ownership by or commitment from others once the change becomes decentralized, and
5. evolution, or the willingness to redesign the approach in response to shifting circumstances.

Key Points

- This article highlights Get2College, a program by the Woodward Hines Education Foundation that provide financial aid counseling to Mississippi high school students, and outlines a study that assessed efforts to scale the FAFSA completion initiative to increase the number of students statewide who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Get2College's approach to scaling involved a partnership with the state's rurally based community colleges and leveraged their established support networks to expand its outreach to the state's often underserved students and increase FAFSA completion rates among that population.
- In rural states like Mississippi, under-resourced groups are sometimes left behind when quantitative scaling strategies involve a more cost-effective focus on areas with a concentrated population. As foundations seek to support nonprofits with scaling their initiatives, they should consider models appropriate to each context. A key question to consider when choosing an approach should always be: Who might be excluded?

Get2College's initial scaling intent was to increase FAFSA completion numbers across the state. By choosing to scale through partnership, however, the program had to grapple with different dimensions of scaling, especially which student populations might be excluded if the chief focus was on overall completion numbers.

A new Index of Deep Disadvantage, which goes beyond income-based measures of poverty to include disparities in health, social mobility, and other community factors, identifies the 100 most disadvantaged communities in the U.S. The top 10 of those communities are rural, and five of those 10 are in Mississippi.

Rural College Access and Attainment

Gaps in college attainment between rural students and their urban and suburban peers have existed for decades (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012). Despite these disparities, much of the research, policy debates, and programs aimed at college access and success have not considered geography or have excluded rural areas (Prins & Kassab, 2017). Research suggests that colleges are more likely to target recruitment efforts to higher-income regions, thus often neglecting students who live in areas served by rural high schools, where the median income is lower (Bishaw & Posey, 2016; Han, Jaquette, & Salazar, 2019). Other barriers to college attendance for rural students include low-performing secondary schools and traditionally lower rates of college attendance in their communities (Miller, Morris, & Scott, 2016).

Technological barriers are particularly problematic for rural students: The digital divide separating rural and nonrural communities persists (Gallardo, 2016; Salemink, Strijker, & Bosworth, 2017), and rural adults are less likely to have access to broadband internet and computer or tablet technology (Perrin, 2019). As the role of online information and programming continues to expand, so do barriers to education for rural schools and households.

A substantial challenge for all high school students is obtaining accurate information on and effective assistance with the financial aid process. While there is relatively little research on rural students and financial aid paperwork, one study by Prins and Kassab (2017) found that rural students were underrepresented in FAFSA completion rates due in part to higher transportation costs and more limited access to postsecondary institutions. Addressing this information gap in college aid for rural students is of principal importance for many states that are primarily rural — including Mississippi.

Intersectional Inequities in Mississippi

A new Index of Deep Disadvantage, which goes beyond income-based measures of poverty to include disparities in health, social mobility, and other community factors, identifies the 100 most disadvantaged communities in the U.S. (Shaefer, Edin, & Nelson, 2020). The top 10 of those communities are rural, and five of those 10 are in Mississippi. The state is one of only three where, as of 2015, more than 30% of the population lacked access to quality broadband internet (Gallardo, 2016). While 47% percent of public school students in the U.S. qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, in Mississippi that figure is 75% — the highest among the states. It also has the largest percentage — 49% — of public school students who identify as Black/African American (Robson, O'Neal Schiess, & Trinidad, 2019).

A recent report by the Rural School and Community Trust and the College Board (Showalter, Hartman, Johnson, & Klein, 2017) ranked Mississippi as a high-priority state for improving rural education, noting that:

- half of its schools are classified as rural;
- about 235,000 students attend those schools;
- nearly 25% of those students live below the poverty line; and

- education outcomes for rural students are the second lowest in the nation, with low high school graduation rates and few options for Advanced Placement (AP) or dual enrollment credits.

Yet, Mississippi education has some positive momentum. The state made significant gains in fourth-grade reading scores on the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Report Card (2019); it was the only state in the country to do so and, as a result, closed its achievement gap against the national average. Moreover, since 2002 Mississippi realized a net gain of 22 and 35 points in the reading scores among African American students and students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, respectively. Participation and performance in AP studies has nearly doubled since 2013, and the AP pass rate reached an all-time high of 34% in 2019, with the greatest increase among African American and Hispanic students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020). From 2014 to 2020, graduation rates in Mississippi increased for all sub-groups, and the state has seen improvement in higher education attainment as well: The latest data published by the Lumina Foundation (2020) cite a nearly 1.5% increase in degree attainment among Mississippi adults between 2016 and 2018.

Woodward Hines Education Foundation

The Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF) was established in 1995 to help more Mississippians obtain the postsecondary degrees, certifications, or credentials that will allow them to improve their quality of life, strengthen their communities, and contribute to a vibrant and prosperous future. It provides grant funding to partner organizations that share its goal of making higher education more accessible to more Mississippians, and operates Get2College, a statewide college access program.

The foundation's funding comes primarily from its parent nonprofit, the Mississippi Higher Education Assistance Corporation (MHEAC), which was formed in 1980. For 30 years, MHEAC operated a successful program to fund federally guaranteed student loans and provided loan-related benefits to Mississippi students and their parents. Due to changes in federal law in 2010, MHEAC has been unwinding its student loan program, and this has allowed it to contribute significant funding to WHEF. Nearly 40 percent of WHEF's overall budget is devoted to the Get2College program.[1]

Get2College

Get2College helps students in Mississippi plan and pay for college. The three Get2College centers are based in areas with the largest populations. In addition to offering free one-on-one college counseling for students and families, Get2College provides outreach to high schools and professional development for educators. In 2019, 4,225 students visited the centers; 74% of them self-identified as either low-income first-generation college students or students of color, and 29,410 students and parents were served in statewide outreach.

Get2College staff have long recognized the barriers posed by the complicated financial aid system and the lack of accessible information for Mississippi high school students. Since 2006, Get2College has organized and staffed FAFSA Days, events where students (and ideally parents) come to their high school for assistance in completing the FAFSA and state aid applications. The Get2College model was built on the knowledge gained through center-based counseling of students as Get2College staff became aware that many of them had no previous access to this type of detailed, personalized help.

The Get2College approach gradually took the form of 30-minute, one-on-one scheduled appointments that allow dedicated time for students to learn about financial aid terms and funding options, and to seek individualized information from a knowledgeable counselor.

[1] While WHEF has provided grant money to Mississippi community colleges in other forms, funding for this partnership was not direct funding to the colleges. In addition, funding for WHEF's Get2College Corps program allowed students to work directly in community college financial aid offices.

This statewide effort has resulted in high FAFSA completion rates for Mississippi high school graduates. In 2019, the state ranked third in the nation for completion by August 31 (DeBaun, 2019).

Maintaining these numbers is a heavy lift, considering the rural location of so many of the state's high schools and the fact that Mississippi has the highest percentage of FAFSA completers eligible for need-based Pell Grants (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). FAFSA Days are resource intensive, particularly in terms of staff time, and they vary in scope; larger events can last for as long as nine hours and they often take place simultaneously in different areas of the state. In the 2016–2017 school year, Get2College hosted 262 FAFSA Days — a staggering number given the program's staff size of 15. Other Get2College services, including presentations on college planning, have been downsized to meet FAFSA Day requirements.

Scaling FAFSA Days

To sustain FAFSA completion rates and maintain Get2College's personalized, one-on-one approach, staff recognized the need to scale the program and created a partnership model built on working with the state's 15 community colleges. Mississippi's community college system grew out of agricultural high schools; a college is assigned to each county and the main campus is in a rural community. By offering an established support network connected to every high school in the state, these colleges were a natural partner for Get2College and its FAFSA Days initiative.

The partnership was phased in over three years, which proved an important factor in its success. In 2016–2017, the first year, five community colleges were onboarded; by 2020, all 15 were involved to some degree. In that first year, Get2College staff managed the time-intensive scheduling and co-staffing of FAFSA Days; by the partnership's third year, each community college managed the FAFSA Day event in its county's high schools.

Get2College's continued partnership with these community colleges features four forms of ongoing support:

1. Training: Annual FAFSA update trainings are held at each community college campus. Using a "train the trainer" approach, Get2College staff introduce the FAFSA Days model — a one-on-one appointment as an opportunity not only to complete the FAFSA and state aid applications, but also for conversations about school selection and fit, the application process, affordability options, and the next steps to enrollment.

2. Toolkit: Get2College designed the FAFSA Toolkit, a comprehensive packet of digital program materials, as a resource for partners to maintain the model of one-on-one appointments at the high school with students and parents. The toolkit also includes event-planning materials for the high schools, such as appointment scheduling sheets, FAQs about the FAFSA, student reminder cards, and promotional posters.

3. Data sharing: Get2College shares FAFSA completion data with community college partners at regular intervals. Even though this information is openly accessible, sharing data that are broken down by high school in each college's district facilitates a clearer understanding of successes and of which schools need additional help.

4. Capacity building: The Get2College Corps program was created to build capacity among community colleges for their sponsorship of FAFSA completion efforts. Funded directly by WHEF, the program partnered with the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Honor Society for community college students to offer annual internship scholarships of $5,000 to support FAFSA completion. During the 2018–2019 academic year, WHEF funded 16 PTK interns from 11 community colleges; they contributed over 3,000 hours of completion assistance and participated in 1,200 FAFSA appointments across Mississippi.

Study Methodology and Findings

This study of the Get2College counseling partnership is based on interviews with community

college leaders and a survey of high school counselors. Nine community college partner leaders, most of whom were financial aid directors (and, in one case, a leader in the recruitment office), were interviewed. The average length of the semi-structured interviews, conducted in Spring 2019 by the lead author, was 45 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using a content analysis approach (Patton, 2001).

High school counselors have historically been Get2College's main partners for FAFSA Day planning, and their perspectives are key to the ongoing success of the statewide completion initiative. A survey of these counselors was developed to obtain feedback about the quality of FAFSA Days throughout the implementation of the new partnership. With the exception of districts in the three Get2College Center areas, all high school counselors in districts served by Get2College or a community college partner were included in the sampling frame. The survey had a response rate of 35%, with 73 respondents.

A Systematic Approach

Prior to partnering with Get2College, many community college staff were already helping students to some degree with financial aid counseling and FAFSA completion. Their approaches varied widely, however, from what they described as a "hands off" approach that required students to come to the college's campus, to gathering an entire high school class and leading the assembled students through the application.

Several community college leaders were trying to partner with local high schools, but admitted that their efforts, as one interviewee said, "weren't that organized." Most of the college leaders mentioned that their initial involvement in high school partnering efforts was as part of College Goal Sunday, a nationwide FAFSA completion initiative, and some were still following a similar model. That initiative did not include the type of thorough training offered under the Get2College approach, and often consisted of a one-day event held at the sponsoring community college or another location outside of the high school.

Get2College's model allowed the community colleges to implement FAFSA Days systematically, using the toolkit materials as a support. One partner said that the FAFSA Days model was better organized than the college's earlier efforts and likely led to an increase in FAFSA completions[.]

Get2College's model allowed the community colleges to implement FAFSA Days systematically, using the toolkit materials as a support. One partner said that the FAFSA Days model was better organized than the college's earlier efforts and likely led to an increase in FAFSA completions:

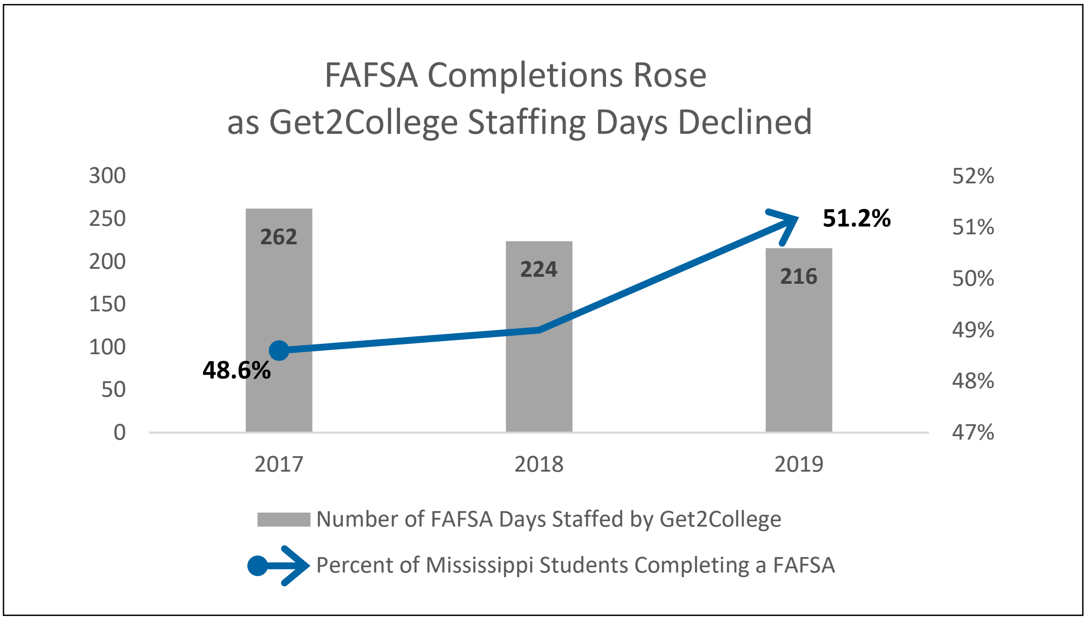
> We have seen, I think, more results with ... Get2College than we did when we were just doing it on our own. We ... tried having FAFSA workshops here at the [community college]. ... Those never really panned out nearly as well as going to the schools.

Another partner highlighted how the Get2College model helps educators emphasize to students the opportunities offered by the FAFSA and address the application's reputation as an onerous undertaking:

> I see the direct impact. Paying for college is an issue. … The more we talk about it, the more we educate the household, the guardians, the students themselves on the responsible way to pay for college. I just remember when I was coming through as a student, FAFSA was talked about as just this terrible process. ... We talk about it as "Look at the opportunity." ... More than anything, it's about changing the image of what FAFSA is.

Results

FIGURE 1 Completions Rose as Get2College Staffing Days Declined



Sustained High Completion Rates

A key goal of the partnership was to sustain the relatively high percentage of FAFSA completion among high school students across the state while easing the demands on Get2College staff and resources. This goal was achieved.

The percentage of Mississippi high school graduates who complete the FAFSA by March 31, the deadline for applying for the state's only need-based grant,[2] has increased each year of the partnership. (See Figure 1.) This increase happened as Get2College staffed fewer FAFSA Days across the state (216 in 2018–2019, down from 262 in 2016–2017).

In addition, 2018–2019 HELP grant applications increased in each of the districts where community colleges partnered with Get2College. This increase is relevant because the Get2College model includes counseling students about state aid opportunities and allows them time to complete the HELP application after they complete the FAFSA. In interviews, nearly all community college leaders noted that they followed this approach upon joining the partnership.

The partnership also resulted in more high schools hosting additional FAFSA Days, giving many students more than one opportunity to get application help at their school. Among high school counselors who responded to their survey, 31% said that they hosted more FAFSA Days at their high school; 67% said they hosted the same number.

Staffing and Data Support

Counseling staff are the gatekeepers of college financial aid services at the high school level, and their perspectives are key to the ongoing success of the FAFSA completion initiative. This study's survey of counselors found that insufficient staff time was the number one barrier to hosting a FAFSA Day. Building staff take on the responsibility for organizing a space; getting the word out to teachers, students, and parents; and assisting with the process on the day itself, particularly with directing students to and from classes.

[2] The HELP grant covers full in-state college tuition.

Concerns about maintaining quality is one aspect of scaling for any organization. Get2College staff were initially uncertain about the type of feedback they would receive from the counselors, since for many years the counselors had relied directly on FAFSA Day assistance from Get2College staff. But the majority of counselors — 67% — who had worked with Get2College before and after the community college partnership said FAFSA Days run by college staff were just as effective as the pre-partnership events and 18% said they were more effective; only 16% said the events were less effective. Overall, 90% of the counselors who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied with the FAFSA completion support provided by the community colleges.

The majority of community college partners said they also found ways to utilize the data on FAFSA completion shared by Get2College staff to improve completion efforts. One partner said, "I'm sitting here waiting for April 15 when I hope we get the next round of data to tell us whether or not our FAFSA completions went up. I can't wait to find out." Several partners said they share these data with high school counselors in their area, sometimes to spur the scheduling of additional FAFSA Days.

The Rural Context

The interview protocols for this study were designed to assess the Get2College model and partnership broadly, and not as a research study of financial aid counseling in a rural context. Since all participating community colleges are located in rural areas, however, the issues of rural challenges and access organically emerged. Transportation factors were a recurring theme in the interviews. One partner noted that "less than 10% of the senior class has a driver's license" at one high school that is "an hour and 20 minutes from our location" at the community college:

> That is a huge deal. If they do not get a full Pell [Grant] combined with institutional scholarships or state aid, HELP grants, any of that, that really impacts whether they go to college and whether they get training and whether they better themselves or not. They're literally stuck.

The interview protocols for this study were designed to assess the Get2College model and partnership broadly, and not as a research study of financial aid counseling in a rural context. Since all participating community colleges are located in rural areas, however, the issues of rural challenges and access organically emerged.

Several community college staff members described the high levels of poverty in their partner high schools and the need for grant and aid money if many students were to have any chance at a college education. One interviewee noted the importance of a one-on-one approach to counseling students and their parents — "having someone there to help navigate" the complex application paperwork, particularly documentation of household finances.

While the digital divide and its impact on rural communities has been well documented (Perrin, 2019), there is no research into the impact of that issue on FAFSA completion in rural communities. The most recent update to the Federal Student Aid (n.d.) website requires an updated browser and access to quality, consistent internet to load a content-intensive page. The lack of high-speed internet connection across Mississippi is well documented, and the study's findings suggest this is creating a serious barrier for rural schools. "A lot of times, it's technical issues that keep us from completing what we're doing," one community college partner said. "I've pushed up through the chain this idea of having a mobile FAFSA unit that we could send around in our district and park at the high schools ... to take the technology to them." More research is needed

on the impact of inadequate technology in rural high schools on the college financial aid and admissions processes.

Challenges to the Partnership

The Get2College partnership approach created concerns in two areas: perceived conflicts of interest and sustaining buy-in to the program.

While the community colleges proved to be strong partners because they are embedded in the state's rural communities, that advantage also created the potential for a conflict of interest: Would community college staff represent their institutions instead of providing neutral, third-party financial aid counseling?

Only one high school counselor surveyed wrote in to raise this issue: "My only concern about the community college partnership was that while helping with FAFSA and state aid, [the community college staff] actively tried to recruit students." In other parts of the state, often in areas where students are most likely to enroll in the community college, those staff did not perceive neutrality to be an issue. And several colleges were careful to note that they took steps, such as wearing neutral T-shirts when in the schools, to avoid any appearance of a conflict. "We're there to help you file a FAFSA no matter where you're going," said one community college leader. It was clear that while perceptions may differ according to the local context, this approach to partnership can create the possibility of conflicts of interest.

Any partnership has an ongoing need to invest in partner buy-in, particularly during staff and leadership transitions. With so many competing demands on the time of staff at low-resourced community colleges in Mississippi, another challenge facing the Get2College partnership was sustaining the investment. And the main theme that emerged from the counselor survey responses was the ongoing need to generate buy-in for the effort to educate students, parents, and educators on the financial aid processes.

Counselors noted that as a neutral third party unaffiliated with a university or government program, Get2College is uniquely positioned to raise awareness of the need for financial aid counseling, particularly in the under-resourced rural communities that make up much of the state. As they manage fewer FAFSA Days, Get2College staff could be in the position to refocus their efforts on other assistance for Mississippi students, such as financial aid presentations aimed at building student, family, and educator buy-in.

Discussion

When the Get2College staff recognized that the demand for their financial counseling services exceeded capacity, the team came together to brainstorm how to scale within the context of the initiative. (See Figure 2.)

Coburn (2003) points out that "spread" — which, in the case of Get2College, would mean focusing on serving more students — is only one dimension of scaling. Serving more students was the original goal to maintain the initiative's high statewide FAFSA completion rate. This focus on completion numbers, however, could have led to discounting the needs of rural students who, in some areas in Mississippi and nationwide, constitute a small number of graduating high school seniors. As a result, the resource-intensive work of counseling those students does not substantially increase overall completion numbers.

In addition to spread, Get2College sought to increase what Coburn (2003) refers to as the ownership dimension of scaling by partnering with community colleges, thereby widening the group of participants in the FAFSA completion effort. Community college staff were already contributing members of rural communities across the state. By enlisting community college staff as partners in the effort to increase FAFSA completion and financial aid knowledge more broadly, Get2College was able to expand the ownership of helping local high school students overcome college access barriers.

With regard to the sustainability dimension of scaling, it became clear that keeping partners engaged is a process. For transformative scale to have impact, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors

FIGURE 2 Questions to Ask Before Scaling a Program

As foundations seek to support scaling proven initiatives, program leaders should consider approaches to scaling as appropriate to each context. A key reflection question should always be: Who might be excluded?

have to change and become new social norms (Bradach & Grindle, 2014). When Get2College designed the partnership, it was assumed that after three years the community college partners would "own" FAFSA completion in the high schools in their region. In some ways, this sense of ownership has increased across the state. But the need to communicate the importance of this effort is ongoing, especially when leadership at partner institutions changes. While the amount of Get2College staff time spent attending FAFSA Days continues to decrease, sustaining the community college partnerships requires continued communication, training, and sharing of resources and data in order to develop the new social norm.

Through this experience, the Get2College team learned that scaling has impact over time, and it requires a willingness to evolve (Coburn, 2003). The initial approach was to develop a three-year scaling plan based on community colleges that were already engaged in this work and identify the resources necessary to support the capacity of the new workload. An issue that surfaced was the need to adjust course, particularly in the face of statewide policy changes. While this partnership is the right model at this time, Mississippi will soon implement a mandated college and career course at the high school level that will likely change how the state delivers financial aid counseling to seniors. Get2College must be ready to redesign its approach to respond to changes in the landscape.

Get2College developed its financial aid counseling model over many years, hundreds of FAFSA Days, and thousands of individual counseling appointments. Letting go of control over the program was uncomfortable at first, in part an illustration of what Coburn (2003) refers to as "the trap of perfection" in scaling. Get2College staff is deeply embedded in college financial aid issues, including its engagement with the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) and keeping abreast of changes in federal and state financial aid policy. Thus, there was concern that turning over control to partners with many competing responsibilities might result in a decline in quality information for students and families.

Get2College quickly learned that the colleges know their communities and high schools well and are already trusted partners. It also became clear that many of the partners, while knowledgeable about the work in the financial aid space, sometimes lack a clear system for counseling students past barriers. In response, ongoing training continues to be a key aspect of the partnership, and concerns about quality through scaling have lessened over time.

Conclusion

As foundations seek to support scaling proven initiatives, program leaders should consider approaches to scaling as appropriate to each context. A key reflection question should always be: Who might be excluded? If an organization pays attention only to scaling up quantitatively, it could miss out on dimensions of quality relevant to any model for scaling a program (Coburn, 2003).

In Get2College's partnership with community colleges, particularly important was the ownership dimension — bringing more professionals across the state into a commitment to FAFSA completion and college counseling. Through ongoing trainings and other resource sharing, Get2College has decentralized this work and allowed for more organizations, primarily community colleges, to become enmeshed in the efforts of counseling students on issues of financial aid.

Mississippi is a rural state with a high poverty rate. The original goal of the Get2College FAFSA initiative was to increase statewide completion. In pursuit of that well-intentioned aim, it became clear that, when scaling, an organization could increase overall numbers by leaving behind rural areas, where more resources are needed to reach fewer students. Indeed, a number of foundations have made the strategic decision to devote their efforts to urban areas, where a concentrated population allows them to increase overall numbers with fewer resources. Yet, neglecting rural areas can in some contexts mean the exclusion of those with the least access to resources, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities. In Mississippi, excluding students at rural high schools from college access initiatives exacerbates disparities in the availability of information and financial resources for many students with the greatest need.

WHEF has made a commitment to viewing its work through an equity lens to serve students who have historically been underrepresented in college, including students of color and first-generation and low-income students. In Mississippi, that means prioritizing rural communities. Get2College and at Woodward Hines Education Foundation are committed to building and supporting the pipeline to college opportunity for this critically important population.

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Advancing Social Determinants of Health Through Investments in Postsecondary Attainment and Sustaining Employment

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Introduction

The Humana Foundation, Humana Inc.'s philanthropic arm, is a corporate foundation with a strategic geographic focus on the southeastern region of the United States. Since 1981 the foundation has supported many areas, including domestic and international health, the arts, and civic and cultural development. In 2015 Humana Inc. announced its Bold Goal initiative, a population health strategy to improve the health of communities by 20% as measured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Healthy Days measurement.

In 2018, the foundation announced an alignment with Humana Inc.'s Bold Goal initiative, deepening its geographic focus and significantly shifting to address social determinants of health more intentionally with a key aim of promoting health equity. The foundation's investments are currently focused in eight of Humana's Bold Goal communities: Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Broward County, Tampa, and Jacksonville, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Knoxville, Tennessee.

The foundation has four key portfolios — the Strategic Community Investment Program (SCIP), the Community Partners Program, the Humana employee programs, and disaster philanthropy. In 2019, the foundation awarded $12.4 million to more than 30 organizations in Bold Goal communities across all four portfolios. The focus of this article, the SCIP, seeks to advance health equity by addressing key social determinants of health. In 2019, the foundation invested $7.6 million in 12 organizations to support programs within the SCIP portfolio. These funds, ranging from annual amounts of $400,000 to $1 million per organization, were

Key Points

- In 2018, the Humana Foundation shifted the focus of its work to the social determinants of health, with the key aim of promoting health equity. With this new focus came a recognition that larger, long-term investments would be needed to support strategies addressing upstream determinants of health. The foundation also recognized the need to co-create processes with communities to understand how to provide essential holistic supports.
- This article explores one area of the foundation's new efforts, the Strategic Community Investment Program, which focuses in part on postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. The foundation partnered with the University of Louisville's Center for Health Organization Transformation to systematically review models in the literature of successful postsecondary attainment strategies to evaluate the results in communities.
- This article shares key learnings from the literature and coordinated practice in communities that were used to revise the foundation's strategy, and concludes with suggestions for other foundations interested in addressing postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities they serve.

FIGURE 1 Strategic Community Investment Areas

distributed across four key social determinants of health — food security, financial asset security, social connectedness, and postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. (See Figure 1.) The grants specific to postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment, which occurred in Year 2 of the foundation's investments and are discussed in this article, are located in Jacksonville, Louisville, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. The foundation's intent is to direct investment dollars to the most marginalized demographic and geographic populations, particularly people of color and communities with high concentrations of poverty.

A New Approach to Grantmaking

The Humana Foundation recognized that a commitment to the social determinants of health and achieving health equity would require a more strategic approach to grantmaking. In 2018, it announced new staffing, including a director of programs, that would focus on research and strategy; larger, longer-term grants (up to three years) within specific areas of social determinants of health; and a goal of partnering more closely with communities to better understand how to leverage the foundation's social, moral, intellectual, reputational, and financial (SMIRF) capital to achieve health equity. Foundation board leadership also made the decision to focus resources on addressing systemic and cultural influences, on strategic areas where greater impact could be achieved, and where there was already momentum in the communities served.

In late 2019, a year into the launch of the new strategy, the foundation evaluated the messaging and framing of the expected results of the work. Staff began to hone the approach by developing a common narrative needed for staff and leadership to align expectations about the length of time required to see impacts in systems-level work. To ensure common definitions and language internally and externally, the foundation developed a set of recurring takeaways. A few of the guiding takeaways that staff, board, and partners use to guide their work around the vision of health equity include:

1. *Health is local and specific.* Health is more than health care. The choices we make are driven by our environment and the choices we have in that environment. Culture must be considered in the design and implementation of strategy and we must use a lens of historical context to guide our work.

2. *We are focused on whole person and whole community health.* We seek to understand the underlying impacts of health. We can make the greatest impact by starting in one's life as early as possible.

3. *Change takes time.* We must build, grow, and sustain relationships and investments over time.

4. *Collecting data and assessing impact takes time.* It requires building capacity and the allocation of resources (e.g., human,

TABLE 1 The Humana Foundation Portfolios of Work

Portfolio Area	Program Description
Strategic Community Investments Program (SCIP)	Large investment dollars to organizations in the eight Bold Goal communities
Community Partners Program	Smaller investments in organizations based in Louisville, Kentucky, Humana Inc.'s headquarters, that are working to improve the quality of life and place
Disaster Philanthropy	Support for efforts that help people prepare, recover, and rebuild their lives, health, and well-being before, during, and after a disaster
Humana Employee Programs	Support that allows Humana employees to engage in charitable giving and volunteerism, and that provides a scholarship fund for children of employees

financial, trust, technology). Data must be disaggregated to understand inequities. We must use learnings to inform our investment strategies. Additionally, the changes that happen across multiple generations is critical to assess when understanding the interpersonal changes in a community.

5. *Relationships drive results.* Networks of multisector partners are needed for large-scale change. We will partner with other funders to pool our resources for greater impact.

These recurring takeaways continue to be refined and integrated into the overall strategy as the foundation and its partners experience what it takes to invest in health equity.

At the root of each of the Humana Foundation's four portfolios of work is its investment in research to advance health equity by better understanding social determinants of health, in all their complexity and interconnectedness. (See Table 1.) Some of these portfolios reflect long-term investments areas for the foundation, including disaster philanthropy and Humana employee programs. Others were newly defined in 2018 in alignment with the Bold Goal initiative, including the SCIP. This article highlights the postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment work that is housed within SCIP, where much of the newly adopted investment strategies have been implemented.

Postsecondary Attainment as a Social Determinant of Health

Automation, globalization, and related forces have led to major changes in the U.S. economy, shifting the workforce toward skilled services such as health care, finance, and information technology. In the competitive environment created by these forces, employers demand a broader, more complex skill set from employees, especially the ability to utilize ever-improving technology (Carnevale, Strohl, Ridley, & Gulish, 2018; Carnevale, Rose & Cheah, 2011; Holzer, 2008). Two-thirds of all jobs now require some education beyond high school, and while a bachelor's degree remains the surest path to obtaining a high-paying job, ample opportunity remains for middle-skill workers who obtain associate degrees, certificates, and licenses beyond a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2018). Workers who lack opportunity to access further education are often restricted to low-skill, low-paying jobs (Holzer).

Socioeconomic status (SES) — measured by education, income, and occupation (Berzofsky, Smiley-McDonald, Moore, & Krebs, 2014) — underlies three major determinants of health: health care, environmental exposure, and health behavior (Adler & Newman, 2002). Low-SES

FIGURE 2 Evolution of Understanding Postsecondary Attainment

2017

Postsecondary Success & Sustaining Employment

Participants are trained, credentialed, and hired for a job that they keep for a minimum of six months that pays a living salary[a] and offers opportunity for career mobility.

2019

Postsecondary Attainment & Sustaining Employment

Programs result in closing systemic gaps in middle-skills employment,[b] as measured by effective partnerships with employers and industry partners that result in participating individuals being trained or credentialed and then hired or retained for living-wage jobs that are specific to the region and offer a range of support services specific to the population.[c]

[a] Living salary refers to a salary that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

[b] Systemic gaps are those that exist for groups or populations in which the systems or structural mechanisms are interactive rather than singular in nature (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017).

[c] Job-training programs need to be tailored to both the region and target population (Campbell et al., 2008; Ray, Galvan, & Zarestky, 2018; Schnur, Warland, Young, & Zralek, 2013).

Americans are more likely to experience higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, chronic stress, low birthweight, arthritis, and cancer; more likely to engage in negative health behaviors; and less likely to have access to health care services (Adler & Newman; Khullar & Chokshi, 2018). Opening pathways for low-income workers to earn higher wages in more skilled positions has the potential to increase not only household income, but also household health status. Evidence indicates education and training beyond a high school degree is a reliable pathway to obtaining a median-income job. (Carnevale et al., 2018).

The Beginnings and Evolution of Postsecondary Attainment

Recognizing that overall physical and mental health are intimately connected with economic well-being and opportunity, the Humana Foundation selected postsecondary attainment as one of its focus areas. In 2017, after a scan of available data in Louisville, foundation leadership determined that an investment in postsecondary attainment in the region had the potential to move the needle on health equity. For nearly 15 years, there has been a strong history in Louisville of research and data gathering about health outcomes from such resources as Louisville's Center for Health Equity (2017) and the Greater Louisville Project. These local government and communitywide efforts have identified well-defined gaps in postsecondary attainment as a barrier to equity.

Further defining its approach to postsecondary attainment, the foundation worked with a consultant to create a very specific results statement around what it wanted to achieve through this portfolio of work. Understanding that job mobility and income are closely linked to overall health status, the results statement was focused on individuals being trained, credentialed, and hired for a job that they kept for a minimum of six months, paid a living wage, and offered opportunity for career mobility (Weidrich, Rice, Sims, & Weisman, 2017).

In 2018, the foundation released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to all eight Bold Goal communities with the opportunity for communities to focus on food and social isolation and, in Louisville only, an opportunity to focus on postsecondary attainment and financial asset

security. The foundation's initial investment in postsecondary attainment was restricted to Louisville largely due to the availability of local data that informed its understanding of opportunities and challenges in the region. Through a series of listening tours in the Bold Goal communities, however, the foundation learned from grantees and community stakeholders that there was a need and capacity in other geographies to work on postsecondary attainment. This led the foundation to open the RFP for postsecondary attainment to all Bold Goal communities in 2019 and subsequently invest in programs in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Jacksonville.

The initial focus of postsecondary attainment has evolved as the foundation and its partners have engaged in the work itself. (See Figure 2.) The current emphases of the foundation's work in postsecondary attainment are:

- closing systemic gaps in middle-skills employment (Carnevale et al., 2018);
- training, credentialing, hiring, and retaining individuals for living-wage jobs (Weidrich et al., 2017); and
- partnering with employers and industry partners to build effective collaborations that support individuals seeking out and obtaining middle-skills jobs (Jain, Newman, & Montes, 2017).

This revised strategy is the result of one year of learning and exploration both internally and alongside partners. First, foundation staff realized after considering initial responses that the request of partners to focus on only one select determinant of health was not aligned with the interconnected nature of the social determinants of health. In 2019, the foundation revised the RFP to allow partners to focus on multiple determinants. Second, the foundation was interested in a deeper understanding of its postsecondary attainment work and formed a partnership with the University of Louisville's Center for Health Organization Transformation (CHOT) to conduct a scan of the research literature and examine models of success for postsecondary attainment.

The Humana Foundation is committed to using an evidence-based approach in its work and made a key strategic decision to concentrate its postsecondary attainment strategy on building a training and credentialing pipeline to middle-income jobs.

Finally, the foundation conducted focus groups and informal discussions with grantees and key community stakeholders across all Bold Goal communities to better understand opportunities for each of the funding areas, including postsecondary attainment. It is important to note that engaging with grantees and key stakeholders to inform strategies and investments represents a significant evolution for the foundation in terms of partnering with the community. This marks an intentional strategic shift that is critical to its interest in understanding and addressing social determinants of health. The foundation recognizes that without elevating community voice and investing in community-driven solutions, the challenges of working on social determinants of health would be impossible.

Cultivating Key Learnings for Strategic Guidance

The Humana Foundation is committed to using an evidence-based approach in its work and made a key strategic decision to concentrate its postsecondary attainment strategy on building a training and credentialing pipeline to middle-income jobs. As such, it was interested in conducting a comprehensive exploration to further inform its efforts. The University of Louisville's CHOT was contracted in early 2019 to complete a literature review to identify evidence-based strategies for postsecondary attainment. The foundation found value in

partnering with CHOT as it provided a set of key learnings from the literature and time with the CHOT research team to reflect on those learnings, an activity that many taxed foundation staff do not have time to engage in effectively. Other foundations may find value in working with university partners to make space for this type of reflection and to condense a large body of research into attainable and practical applications for work in social determinants.

The primary purpose of the CHOT literature review was to explore interventions and key elements related to successful job training and placement for low-income individuals, the intended target population for the foundation's work in postsecondary attainment. The following research question was developed to guide the literature review: "What kind of job training programs increase job access at a livable wage for asset-limited, income-constrained families or individuals?" An initial scan of the literature revealed two streams of research: postsecondary success and job-training programs. These areas were shown to have little overlap and, although they share some characteristics, they have very different mechanisms and protocols to achievement. For example:

- Postsecondary programs tend to emphasize college readiness, degree completion, financial and academic assistance, and transition to college. In contrast, job-training programs focus on entry-level positions, on-site training, career counseling, work readiness, certification, and subsidized employment.

- Postsecondary programs are generally aimed at the college/university or state level, while job-training programs seem to be more community-based and specific.

Based upon these findings, the CHOT team recommended that the foundation focus more holistically on job-training programs as opposed to academic readiness and degree completion, concluding that this area of work could be more readily influenced at the community-level through grantmaking. This is an important distinction from postsecondary attainment programs that emphasize degree completion by, for instance, providing scholarships to students needing financial support or increasing recruitment and retention of traditionally underrepresented students. While postsecondary education completion is one important element in advancing individuals up the income ladder and providing additional opportunities for job mobility, it is not the only necessary approach.

First, not everyone is interested in attending college, nor do all jobs at the middle-income level require a college degree. Many individuals who are in the workforce may not be interested in returning to school, though they may be interested in a job-training program that can support skill building and job advancement. Second, many communities, particularly in rural areas, do not have abundant job opportunities for those with postsecondary degrees. Instead, many employers in these communities seek out individuals with skills that can be learned in an apprenticeship or job-training program. Finally, ensuring that students entering college, particularly those from underrepresented populations such as communities of color and first-generation college students, have access to the necessary supports to help them complete a degree program requires a significant investment of human and financial capital that is not possible with the investment of a single foundation. The Humana Foundation's decision to invest in job-training programs was made with the consideration of how it could best utilize and leverage its investments in the communities it serves.

In conducting the literature review, the CHOT research team distilled key learnings that the foundation might consider as it refines its strategy for postsecondary attainment with an emphasis on job training. The key learnings of the literature review are described below, including highlights from some of the grants funded within the postsecondary attainment strategy. Where possible, there are shared examples of key learnings in action. It is important to note, however, that this work is still in a nascent stage and many of the key learnings continue to be integrated into the overall strategy.

Key Learnings

Learning 1: Engage Multiple Stakeholders in the Work

The literature review suggested that successful postsecondary attainment programs foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including local industry, employers, and community colleges (Maguire, Freely, Clymer, Conway, & Schwartz, 2010; Roder & Elliott, 2019). These programs are more likely to be successful because they begin by assessing economic opportunity and then work to train and match participants with the skills local employers identify as necessary. Organizations doing credentialing and training must be aware of the workforce needs of local employers so they can tailor their specific programs to meet employer demand. A strong relationship between employers and training and credentialing organizations can also enable job placement for individuals once they complete their educational or training program.

One foundation investment partner, for example, is actively identifying government partnerships and developing relationships with local labor unions to build stronger pipelines and apprenticeship programs for those who need credentialing for jobs. The process this investor has undertaken to build out its partnership models with employers, unions, educational institutions, and government agencies has created a model for the foundation to consider in future work.

In addition, employers who require four-year degrees for middle-skills positions, a practice that disproportionately affects populations with lower college graduation rates, could benefit from partnership opportunities to expand their thinking around what constitutes a qualified candidate. Another foundation grantee has increased the amount of contact it has with its community partners so it can better understand job training and placement data in the local context.

At the foundation level, there are growing expectations that grantees bring multisector constituents to the table, including those who are facing challenges obtaining middle-skills employment. The foundation's evolution has

The literature review suggested that successful postsecondary attainment programs foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including local industry, employers, and community colleges.

brought to bear that systemic solutions cannot be created without the voices of lived experience. While it was not necessarily the case in the past, the foundation has been moving toward a framework where the key stakeholder is "community."

In being accountable to its own expectations for grantees, the foundation is exploring opportunities to engage with employers and other key stakeholders in the postsecondary attainment space. One thought is that a learning community could be convened at regular times throughout the year, both virtually and in person, to share learnings and strategize. The learning community would bring together community-based organizations working toward postsecondary attainment with employer and industry partners who provide middle-skills job opportunities. It is important to note that foundation staff currently play an active role in connecting grantees and community partners around shared learnings that are surfaced in conversations and grantee learning reports. The development of a community-driven learning community, however, could catalyze the foundation's investment in social determinants by bringing innovative solutions to the table that are developed by and for the community. The University of Louisville's CHOT is working with the foundation to develop a new strategy to bring its partners together within this type of learning community to identify systemic solutions to address postsecondary attainment.

Learning 2: Provide Wraparound Supports

Postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment requires attention to the

Postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment requires attention to the interconnected factors that impact successful employment, and must include an assessment of and solutions to the underlying factors that have prevented individuals from improving their economic status in the past.

interconnected factors that impact successful employment, and must include an assessment of and solutions to the underlying factors that have prevented individuals from improving their economic status in the past. Access to wraparound services such as transportation, housing, healthy foods, and child care is key to ensuring individuals have the necessary supports to not only complete postsecondary opportunities, but also to enter and sustain employment (Hall, 2015). For example, one foundation grantee provides programming that encourages and supports participants of all ages with an emphasis on single parents and their children and on foster care alumni. Although this organization is not focused on postsecondary training directly, it provides essential wraparound supports to individuals engaging in postsecondary education and/or training opportunities.

Each of the foundation partners that focuses on postsecondary success believes that education changes lives, families, and communities. By providing support services that address issues that may be barriers to academic and personal success — housing, child care, and food security resources — organizations are able to assist participants with meeting their educational goals. While still too early to share data around the long-term impact of these supports on engaging and sustaining employment in middle-skills jobs, this has informed the foundation's thinking around more holistic models to help individuals succeed in their postsecondary goals.

An additional support that has surfaced as being important to address in the future is mental health; many individuals with whom foundation grantees work struggle with depression and anxiety, which may be barriers to postsecondary attainment and employment. One grantee has implemented a trauma-informed approach to supporting individuals in developing and implementing a life plan that includes career goals.

It is important that wraparound supports be provided to individuals even after they secure employment to ensure they are successful in retaining the job. Employers, particularly in Louisville, report high attrition rates for new employees within the first 30 days due to issues related to transportation and caregiving (both child care and elder care). This is an area where multistakeholder collaboration could be beneficial by partnering in a learning community that develops and tests new solutions to address these challenges.

Learning 3: There Must Be an Equity Focus

In Year 2 of the SCIP portfolio, organizations were asked to have a greater emphasis on systems-level approaches, shifting focus from the individual gain among people helped to, instead, considering how to impact larger systemic and structural issues. Further, in its application process, the foundation began asking organizations to define and identify their efforts around equity.

Responses to these questions help the foundation better assess organizational readiness to engage in equity efforts and also help to identify potential gaps in the field and greater opportunity for multisector partnerships. Each of the postsecondary attainment partners focuses their efforts on zip codes where there are high concentrations of poverty and primarily marginalized populations; people of color have been disproportionally affected by lack of education and economic opportunities. Closing the postsecondary attainment gap in these populations is therefore necessary to address systemic gaps in

middle-skills employment and close large gaps in overall postsecondary attainment and success (Katz, Poo, & Waxman, 2018). The foundation recognizes that each of its partners is different and encourages them to focus on equity in the context of their own communities. This explicit focus on equity is a foundational step in closing systemic gaps in postsecondary attainment.

While the foundation continues to highlight equity efforts externally, there are also ongoing internal efforts to ensure application processes and decision points within the foundation are more equitable and that investment dollars are truly reaching marginalized populations. In one case, foundation staff invited community partners in New Orleans to weigh in on the development of an RFP for the foundation's Community Partners Program. It hopes to utilize similar approaches in the postsecondary attainment work as it matures and more partnerships are built.

In terms of further strategic approaches to postsecondary attainment, there are many promising practices that can accelerate the foundation's work; this includes influencing local policy, which the foundation has not yet incorporated into its strategy. Katz et al. (2018) suggests, for example, supporting the earned income tax credit to individuals with no dependents and piloting and scaling models with portable benefits (e.g., health insurance and retirement) for workers. These are strategies that the Humana Foundation can consider in future strategic refreshes, particularly as it continues to explore new and effective approaches to address health equity (Katz et al.). However, recalling that the foundation is very early in its postsecondary attainment work, the development of this strategy continues to be a learning journey for the board and staff. Moreover, there is much to be considered and included at all levels, both internally and externally.

Learning 4: Invest in Evaluation and Data Capacity

The Humana Foundation has a goal of intentionality in designing evaluation to inform strategy. It is currently reviewing its overall evaluation framework to better collect meaningful impacts of the work it is funding. The foundation is also realizing the importance of funding its partners in this same pursuit. Data and evaluation capacity can increase an organization's understanding of the population it serves, allowing it to better develop strategies to meet the needs of local employers and individuals seeking postsecondary opportunities. It can also support an organization's ability to be nimbler in adapting strategies to meet the needs of the population.

The foundation's investments in organizations have allowed for increased data collection and analysis capacity, for example. One grantee reported that 76 individuals participating in its job-training program had achieved their individual postsecondary goal of being hired into a living-wage job. In alignment with the literature, the foundation and the grantee anticipate that these individuals' sustained employment will subsequently improve their outcomes among other secondary determinants of health (e.g. food security), yet there are no systems in place at the organizational level to capture this type of data in an evaluation. Nevertheless, there is a desire to be more specific and granular in observing any relationship between postsecondary success and social determinants of health; thus the foundation is moving to a more intentional evaluation strategy with outside consultants and utilizing internal systems such as Microsoft's Power BI.

The Humana Foundation has a goal of intentionality in designing evaluation to inform strategy. It is currently reviewing its overall evaluation framework to better collect meaningful impacts of the work it is funding.

Investments in data capacity and evaluation also serve to support the foundation's strategy in postsecondary attainment by helping to identify where success is occurring and where more resources may need to be invested. The provision of data is an objective entry point into strategic discussions that may otherwise be difficult to have with partners. These strategic discussions can deepen relationships with partners by opening up honest conversations about the success or lack thereof among their current work, as well as create opportunities for collaborative solutions.

The foundation is interested in evaluating the long-term impact of gains in middle-skills employment on the overall health of families. Currently, foundation partners are focused on whether individuals receiving postsecondary education or training are obtaining and retaining middle-skills jobs. However, there is an opportunity to use data to understand potential outcomes of employment retention on the long-term economic well-being of their children, for example. Evaluations requiring longitudinal data are often costly and require higher levels of capacity from both the funder and their partners. It is important that funders strategically invest in data and evaluation capacity to support organizations in assessing long-term impact, particularly if the investments are intended to impact systemic factors. Funder investments might include assistance to organizations in vetting potential evaluation consultants, creating scopes of work given organizational capacity, providing financial resources for data collection and analytics technology, offering venues for reflecting on data, providing funds to organizations and communities to build local evaluation capacity, and working with community to reflect on data and generate collaborative solutions.

One learning of the foundation is that in order to do this deep-level community work and to employ SMIRF capital in a way that is beneficial for partners, the foundation must increase the number of its employees. Currently there is one program officer who oversees the SCIP portfolio in eight communities. Similarly, other foundations should invest in their own capacity to learn and adapt in complex environments. For instance, they might consider hiring staff whose role it is to build internal muscle for strategic shifts.

This learning and adaptation role is important: Program staff often do not have time to critically reflect on the data collected through their portfolios and often focus on individual grants rather than the overall portfolio. Having internal supports available to identify and incorporate key learnings into strategy can serve as a catalyst for moving the needle on complex issues such as postsecondary attainment.

Finally, the foundation does not expect communities to implement a one-size-fits-all approach to postsecondary attainment — rather, they provide resources to organizations to help support the use of data to develop programs and services that meet local needs. All applicants and partners that are focused on addressing postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment are required to use the Occupational Employment Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) to inform and evaluate their strategies. The foundation recommends this dataset as a tool to help organizations plan and evaluate their strategies at a systems level, identifying jobs that are most relevant in their area and that pay a living wage.

Because this is a key element of the foundation's postsecondary attainment strategy, it is important that grantees and community stakeholders have timely data on the wages for jobs in their communities so they can develop an appropriate career pipeline to advance workers into higher-paying jobs. Foundation partners are also encouraged to use the Public Use Microdata Areas dataset to better understand the population they are serving and to identify communities that may need postsecondary resources but are not currently being served (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Conclusion

Tackling upstream determinants is complex and requires an operational and cognitive model that factors in the interconnectedness and context of social determinants, which, to identify, requires a deep understanding of community. The Humana Foundation has spent the last two

years learning from partners, studying the literature, and co-creating new solutions to address postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities it serves. To accomplish similar efforts, foundations may consider how to more closely partner with their grantees and local stakeholders to bolster community work. For instance, particularly in foundations serving a large geographic area, supporting a local community liaison to be the foundation's expert in that region, building partnerships and leveraging community resources, can advance community work more effectively than can foundation staff who work at a distance. A local expert can be a key leverage point for complex initiatives that require contextual knowledge, such as postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment.

Foundations interested in working on social determinants of health may also consider diving into a diverse exploration of root causes that should begin with meeting with local partners to identify key challenges and opportunities, understand resources at the community level, and become grounded in the historical context in which the work will take place. This exploration can also include speaking with other foundations about their approaches and working with local academic institutions to review and incorporate evidence-based research. The foundation's strategy for postsecondary attainment has considered all of these inputs and continues to explore other avenues for strategic change, such as learning communities.

Finally, a major consideration for foundations interested in working on social determinants of health is their commitment to long-term investments of staff time and financial resources that are necessary to impact systemic change. Conversations with board members, staff, and community stakeholders are necessary to gauge interest in and stamina for this long-term work.

It is far too early to determine whether the Humana Foundation and its partners have been successful in closing systemic gaps in postsecondary attainment. However, from the examples provided in this article, it can be said that the foundation is making strides in partnering with communities to identify and support successful models for improving postsecondary attainment and moving individuals into middle skills employment. Where in the past the foundation would have internally developed grantmaking programs, it is now actively engaging with grantees and partners to inform its work and pivot to meet community needs.

Tackling upstream determinants is complex and requires an operational and cognitive model that factors in the interconnectedness and context of social determinants, which, to identify, requires a deep understanding of community.

With active engagement, however, comes the need for greater accountability. Strategic approaches to learning are being considered to share discoveries, grow and deepen relationships with partners, and support the capacity of both the foundation and communities to create innovative solutions to increase postsecondary attainment and employment sustainability.

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Moving the Needle or Spinning Our Wheels? A Framework for Long-Lasting, Equitable Change in Education

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Keywords: *Philanthropy, equity, institutionalization, postsecondary education*

Tools

Introduction

In the new age of grantmaking, referred to by different authors as disruptive, strategic, muscular, or venture philanthropy (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016), many funders are looking to "move the needle" on persistent challenges in order to impact educational outcomes and racial inequities for years to come. In the best-case scenarios, these efforts lead to new organizational structures, metrics, or practices that have staying power beyond the term of any particular funding stream. In other words, they remake the domain, realigning political and practical pressures such that key activities become self-sustaining and no longer reliant on external support.

However, achieving this type of outcome is no small feat. Nationwide, philanthropists support many types of valuable work, including developing and disseminating priorities and ideas (focusing), designing and testing programmatic solutions (engineering), bringing together key stakeholders (brokering), and filling gaps in capacity or infrastructure (building). Yet at times, these individual efforts don't seem to add up, leading some to characterize the continuation of existing funding structures as "spinning our wheels." How can funders interested in achieving meaningful change select strategies that do more than exacerbate initiative fatigue (Kuh & Hutchings, 2014)?

We engage with this puzzle in the context of the growing number of today's philanthropic organizations increasing their investments in postsecondary policy and outcomes, often directed at reducing persistent social inequities (Bacchetti & Ehrlich, 2007; Bushouse & Mosley, 2018; Gandara, Rippner, & Ness, 2017). The postsecondary sector faces many challenges that negatively impact students across the board, and

Key Points

- In the quest for equitable and lasting reform in postsecondary education, philanthropy's great strength is its flexibility to make use of multiple strategies. However, as most grantmakers know firsthand, not all strategy combinations lead to lasting systemic change.
- This article offers an actionable approach for designing and analyzing philanthropically funded movements in order to remake an area of educational policy or practice. It begins with a review of philanthropic literature that identifies the primary change strategies used by funders in the education sector. It then introduces a tool, rooted in organizational research, to understand and predict the circumstances under which different combinations of strategies are likely to lead to lasting change.
- These recommendations are made concrete by applying the analytical tool to two real-world examples, the movements for degree reclamation and community college data capacity, with particular attention to deepening funders' analytic and strategic attention to dismantling educational inequities.

also cause disproportionate harm to Black and brown students, low-income students, women, and gender expansive students. Even when systems and structures are remade in ways that make them more effective overall, this may do little to reduce inequities that impact minoritized students.

In this article, we argue that funders seeking transformative change in postsecondary education and elsewhere need to develop a remaking strategy to guide and organize decisions about funding priorities, strategic collaborations, and measures of success. We put forward a framework to guide strategy developments, informed by: a) a review of existing research on philanthropic efforts towards long-lasting transformation, b) research on persistence and change drawn from the management and sociological research traditions, and c) consistent attention to the specific dynamics of inequity. We illustrate the use of the framework by analyzing two cases, and offer insights for its practical application to enhance long-lasting and equitable grantmaking outcomes.

The postsecondary sector faces many challenges that negatively impact students across the board, and also cause disproportionate harm to Black and brown students, low-income students, women, and gender expansive students. Even when systems and structures are remade in ways that make them more effective overall, this may do little to reduce inequities that impact minoritized students.

Philanthropic Movements: What and How

Modern philanthropy is grounded in a commitment to creating long-lasting transformative change (Baltodano, 2017; Greene, 2015; Kelly & James, 2015; Kelly & McShane, 2013). We know from prior research that successful efforts at achieving systemic change involve multiple forms of influence, including formal policy and more informal transformations of practice (Hallett, 2010; Kezar, 2013). Reviewing existing research on philanthropic efforts in the education field, we have synthesized four key reform strategies frequently used by education funders: focusing, engineering, brokering, and building. Although these categories can be employed individually, they are not mutually exclusive and often emerge together in individual projects. Moreover, while any grantmaker can employ one or all of these strategies, they may or may not achieve meaningful and lasting change. This leaves many reformers frustrated when their initiatives fizzle out after funding dries up.

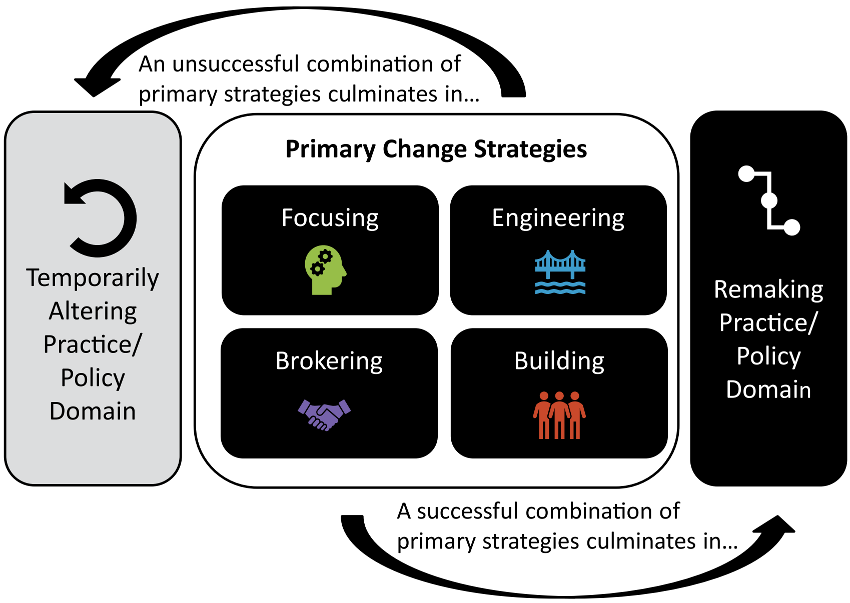
Lasting change occurs when reformers use the tools at their disposal in a way that culminates in a remaking of the field. Remaking is discussed here as a fifth category of philanthropic work — one that ultimately results from a strategic combination of the four first-level strategies. Remaking denotes the fundamental realignment of the political and practical pressures in an area of education such that lasting and meaningful social and policy changes become self-sustaining.

Whereas a grantmaker may take on any combination of the four primary strategies, only certain combinations will result in a remaking outcome for a given issue and context. (See Figure 1.) The second half of this paper is dedicated to strategizing about what combinations will result in a remade domain, and which will result only in limited or temporary change.

Focusing: Promoting Ways of Thinking

By "focusing," often referred to as thought leadership, philanthropy sets the political agenda or

FIGURE 1 Grantmakers' Reform Strategies



answers this question for policymakers: What matters in education right now?

This category includes efforts to influence policy and practices by cultivating new ideas or by amplifying the urgency of particular ideas through funded projects and papers, media outreach or training campaigns, and coordinated efforts using existing foundation platforms. Studies in this category indicate that philanthropic actors can play a key role in shaping the tenor and focus of knowledge production via investments in research and/or white papers from think tanks, associations, and other bodies. In this way, foundations have been shown to generate idea convergence among key actors (Bryan & Isett, 2018; Quinn, Tompkins-Stange, & Meyerson, 2014; Reckhow & Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Thümler, 2011).

Focusing projects can occur through two primary processes. First, these investments can orchestrate and promote entirely new ways of thinking. This can take the form of promoting new languages (e.g., "equity-minded"), developing new or different metrics (e.g., college graduation rates), or motivating issues under a new framing (e.g., college completion and the "future of work"). Second, they can keep ideas on the map by producing new content through media agencies, social media, and podcasts (La Londe, Brewer, & Lubienski, 2015; Lubienski, 2017; Lubienski, Brewer, & La Londe, 2016). For example, the Lumina Foundation has built a broad thought-leadership presence — using its own platform and providing resources for nonprofit media agencies to do the same — in the field of postsecondary change around its college completion initiative, dubbed "Goal 2025." As a focusing strategy, Goal 2025 has encouraged leaders and policymakers to reorient their work around the college completion rates of nondominant student groups, rather than the more muddied (and well-trodden) waters surrounding college access.

Engineering: Design and Testing

By "engineering," philanthropy influences the field by answering this question: What interventions work to achieve key education goals?

Perhaps the strategy most associated with philanthropic work is the role of foundations in launching or testing new mechanisms of social change. Foundations frequently invest in piloting and evaluating new interventions intended to solve education problems (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Saltman, 2010). The models that emerge from these investments are the raw materials with which foundations may choose to launch campaigns around particular policies or practices.

Many key movements have been first launched as pilot and evaluation programs using philanthropic dollars, only to evolve into full-blown policy movements or templates. For example, research and piloting projects that redesigned developmental education were foundation funded, a project that ultimately spun off into state-by-state policy reform efforts.

Brokering: Catalyzing Policy Diffusion and Policy Learning

By "brokering," philanthropy influences the field by connecting decision-makers with best practices and partners who have already made progress on relevant issues.

Philanthropic actors have the power to bridge contexts — from industry to schools, from one district or region to the next — as they take interventions or policy designs and aid in their diffusion across networks (Gandara et al., 2017). This occurs as grantmakers orchestrate connections and knowledge sharing, and encourage the adoption of best practices in a systematic manner (Bushouse & Mosley, 2018; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hwang & Young, 2019; Suárez, Husted, & Casas, 2018; Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval, 2015). Grantmakers can engage in brokering work by creating cross-sector or cross-region networks (e.g., via convenings, institutes, etc.) through funded projects intended to "scale" a particular model to multiple contexts. This can often take the form of leveraging philanthropic convening power, wherein stakeholders who would normally not interact are brought together in the hopes that ideas will spread.

Funders can also act as intermediaries by investing in the creation of template policies and toolkits to lower barriers to adoption and facilitate the spread of ideas, including offering incentives to do so (Anderson & Donchik, 2016). For example, foundations were central in the creation of Complete College America (CCA), which played a crucial role in the diffusion of performance-based postsecondary funding models as a policy tool through the creation of networking opportunities, as well as the provision of technical assistance and policy templates carrying the legitimacy of being a CCA "Game Changer" strategy.

Building: Capacity and Coalitions

By "building," philanthropy invests in talent infrastructure to fulfill new policy demands or bring together networks needed for collective learning toward new goals.

Similar to but distinct from brokering, philanthropic actors can contribute to the spread and stick of new policies or practices by building infrastructure to implement a proposed change or building coalitions dedicated to an issue (Bryan & Isett, 2018; Hwang & Young, 2019; Saltman, 2010). Building is about creating the technical, material, and social capacity needed to bring an idea to reality at scale. It is a process of sustained collective learning.

For example, grantmakers have engaged in both capacity- and coalition-building efforts in the area of universal prekindergarten, which have yielded demonstrable results. In this instance, funders have invested in community capacity via partnerships and programs intended to increase program quality and prevalence. Funders also built long-term partnerships among membership organizations of public officials and researchers, which created a complex network of proponents who could apply policy pressure at multiple levels with mutually reinforcing messaging about the economic and social benefits of universal pre-K (Lubienski et al., 2016).

Remaking: Creating New Normative and Political Pressures

By "remaking," philanthropic actors use their primary reform tools to build new and durable

Tools

Tools

Philanthropic actors can remake educational policy environments by embedding new standards, metrics, or organizations into the political and organizational environment in ways that change the terms of future engagements. Remaking creates new interests and new measures of legitimacy that outlive active grants.

constituencies, meanings, and beliefs that can carry on mobilization for a particular goal beyond the terms of their investment.

Philanthropic actors can remake educational policy environments by embedding new standards, metrics, or organizations into the political and organizational environment in ways that change the terms of future engagements. Remaking creates new interests and new measures of legitimacy that outlive active grants (E. Anderson & Colyvas, 2020; Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Greene, 2015). For example, grantmakers for CCA used focusing, building, and brokering to create new best practice pressures in the field. As CCA drew attention to states with poor graduation rates, it created an incentive for states and colleges to formally affiliate with the college completion movement, requiring adherence to CCA's preferred systemic strategies. While contentious, this pressure to be a CCA alliance member created interests above and beyond (although affiliated with) grant dollars, to adopt and sustain new practices.

This example highlights how durable changes can be achieved through a combination of focusing, engineering, brokering, and/or building strategies. Of course, these successes cannot be divorced from the opportunities afforded by specific political and social moments (Kingdon, 2013). The critical question then is, how can grantmakers know which strategies will ultimately remake an issue?

Change, Equity, and Self-Sustaining Structures

How can funders interested in achieving meaningful change select strategies that work? To answer this question, we pull from scholarship on what makes policies or practices persist and what makes them change (E. Anderson & Colyvas, 2020; Scott, 2013).

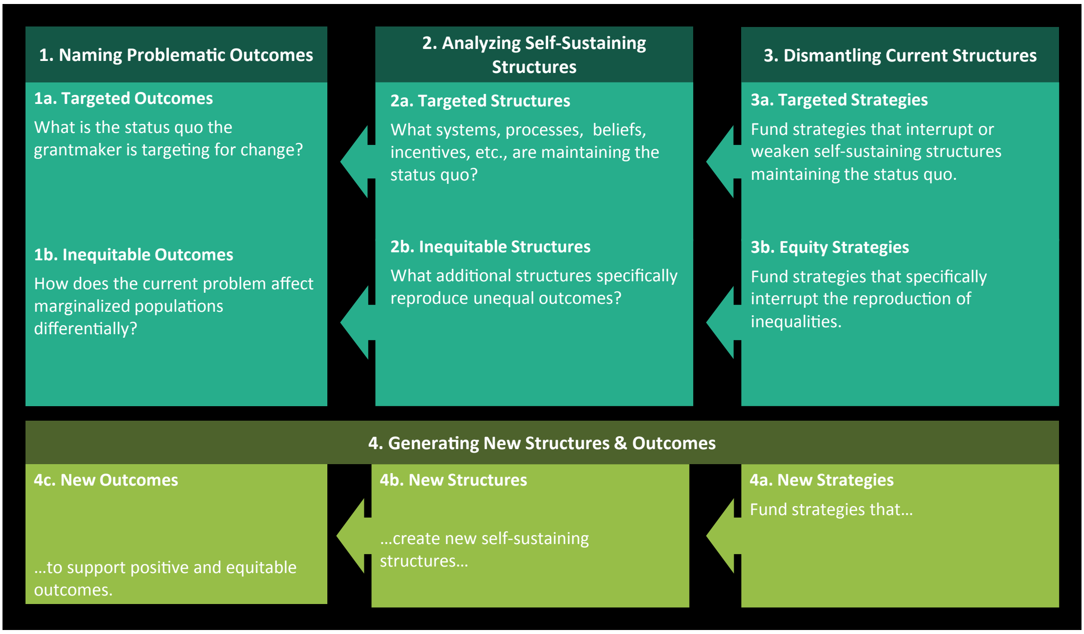
Decades worth of studies in this area have demonstrated that when policies, practices, or beliefs remain in place across long periods of time and wide expanses of geography, they are typically supported by durable beliefs, norms, power structures, or other stable systems (Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Colyvas & Maroulis, 2015; Jepperson, 1991). These durable orders are difficult to change precisely because they reproduce themselves by determining the rules, norms, and standards deemed legitimate in a field (Zucker, 1987). We refer to these sources of support as self-sustaining structures.

Self-sustaining structures are the forces reproducing the status quo that reformers, like grantmakers, seek to change. In order to produce change, reform strategies should reduce or replace the self-sustaining structures that create persistent problematic and inequitable outcomes. We can think of a portfolio of funded projects that seeks to do this as pursuing a remaking strategy — that is, a set of funding strategies selected to remake persistent practices and outcomes.

A Road Map for Lasting Change

In order to support the development of remaking strategies, we have assembled an analytic tool that can be used both to analyze existing philanthropic efforts and plan for future steps. We illustrate this approach with two highly visible, philanthropically funded postsecondary

FIGURE 2 Components of an Equity-Oriented Remaking Strategy



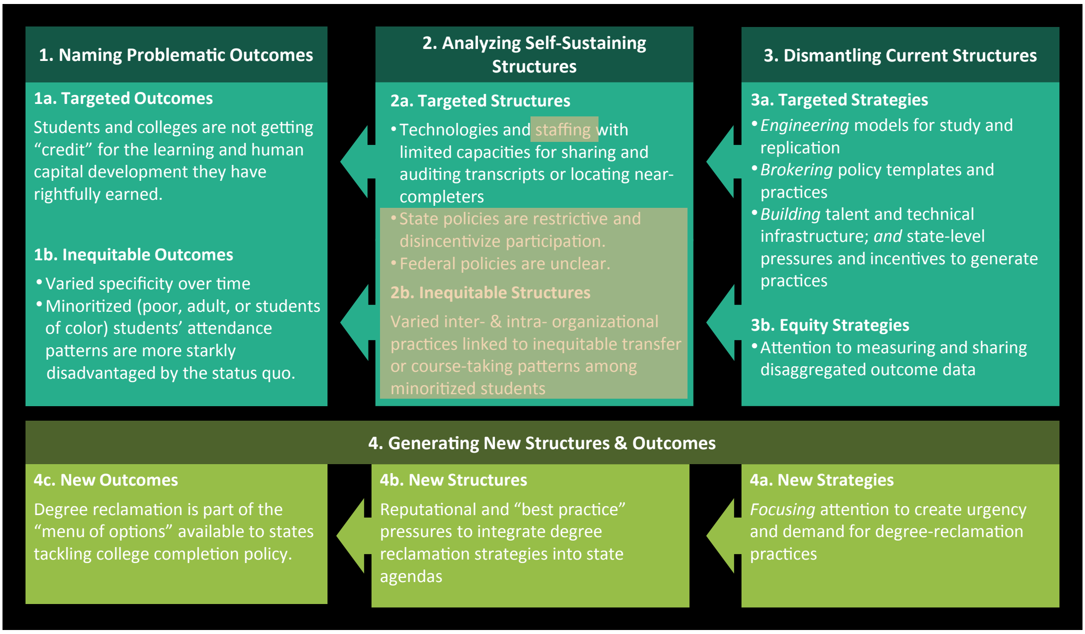
movements linked to the push for college completion: advocacy for degree reclamation and advocacy for community college data capacity. For each case, we derived case histories by analyzing contemporary news accounts, white papers, and peer-reviewed literature, and member checking with identifiable leaders.

This tool provides a road map for the analysis and/or development of a remaking strategy with an explicit focus on equity. (See Figure 2.) The arrows indicate relationships of influence. Reading from right to left, funded strategies — represented in the far-right column — are intended to influence self-sustaining structures which, in turn, influence targeted outcomes. In order to use this road map for purposes of developing a remaking strategy, we suggest working in a clockwise manner, following the order of the numbers (indicated in parentheses).

The process begins with naming the problematic outcomes (1). This means both specifying the outcome that remaking is targeting for change (1a), and looking intentionally for ways that the status quo may be disproportionately affecting minoritized populations (1b). Having identified the problem, the next step is to analyze what self-sustaining structures are causing the problem to persist (2). This includes both structures reproducing the outcome overall (2a), and specific attention processes exacerbating the issue for marginalized groups (2b). Decisions about funding potential focusing, engineering, brokering, and building strategies (3a) can then be evaluated based on their ability to dismantle current self-sustaining structures (3), particularly those responsible for inequitable outcomes (3b). Funded projects can also be designed intentionally to create new systems and incentives (4a) that build new self-sustaining structures (4b), which would in turn support more equitable outcomes (4c). We represent each case below.

In the case of degree reclamation, we demonstrate the substantial progress and central role of engineering and brokering to alleviating barriers toward advancing degree-reclamation practices. We also argue that degree-reclamation proponents are still striving to build the type of coalitional base and incentive structures necessary to remake the domain of practice after funding ends. By contrast, in the community college data-capacity movement, leaders have

FIGURE 3 Degree Reclamation Goals, Structures, and Strategies



Note: Content highlighted in orange represents self-sustaining structures in need of further strategic attention.

been able to create discursive, political, and professional changes in the field that have become self-sustaining and durable. In other words, the domain has been remade. However, the movement continues to evolve to address central concerns about how to connect its theory of action more explicitly both to questions of educational equity and to processes of educational responsiveness.

The Degree Reclamation Movement

As the college completion era emerged in the mid- to late 2000s, multiple grantmakers — ranging from the Helios Education Foundation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation — turned their attention to initiatives designed to catch the "low hanging fruit" in the postsecondary field. (See Figure 3.)

The problem targeted was simple: How can states and colleges recognize all students for the learning they have fully or nearly completed (1)? The logic behind such an initiative is that if we can convert amassed credits to degrees or reenroll students just a few credits shy of completion, we can see a big boost in college completion with relatively little resource commitment or costly institutional change (Taylor, 2016).

Funders ranging from collaboratives among regional and national philanthropies to local community funders took up this issue at a relatively rapid pace. Analyzing historical reports and concurrent accounts, many strategies designed to dismantle existing obstacles emerge (3a).[1] Primary among these were engineering models for degree reclamation that could be studied and replicated; brokering and incentivizing evolving policies and models across institutions and states to encourage adoption; building capacity through professional development and subsidizing labor and infrastructure development to facilitate degree-reclamation processes — e.g., data sharing across institutions, degree audit systems, and processes for identifying and reenrolling near-completers. Funders

[1] The authors also conducted direct member checking of this account with funders and evaluators associated with this movement.

also supported focusing on and disseminating information that motivated tactics like reverse transfer in the realm of policy and practice (4a).

The movement for degree reclamation is ongoing and ever-changing as it strives to meet its goals. However, there is much to be learned in asking of its early and intermediate stages: What self-sustaining structures did the movement change or weaken (2), and what new structures, if any, did it create (4b)? In doing so we get a clearer picture of the possible road ahead for this movement. In this spirit, we offer a few observations.

First, this initiative to date has done some crucial work in the ways it legitimized, established, and tested intra-institutional processes (e.g., transitioning to an opt-out process allowing institutions to more freely share student records for the purpose of degree completion),[2] interinstitutional sharing agreements, and state policy environments (e.g., funding formulas that reward institutions for degree conferrals) conducive to recognizing and rewarding students' diverse learning pathways (Robinson, 2015; Taylor, 2016; Wheatle, Taylor, Bragg, & Ajinkya, 2017).[3] It has also generated informed conversations among researchers, policymakers, and students about the real value in the achievement of an associate degree in terms of educational and labor market rewards and in the reenrollment of near-completers, which has had an important legitimizing effect critical to sustained practice. And finally, this work has advanced new technological infrastructures for connecting and analyzing student records that are crucial if robust degree reclamation processes are to become the status quo (Bragg & McCambly, in press).

We posit that this movement is still evolving on at least three fronts crucial to remaking this domain. First, relevant data sharing and degree auditing processes are prohibitively labor intensive, which prevents their elevation to self-sustaining structures at many colleges and universities. Leading voices in this domain have traced this difficulty, in part, to the need for a centralized student data system (a role the National Student Clearinghouse could fill but has not yet), automated degree audit technologies, and federal guidelines that clarify Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act restrictions and alleviate fears of noncompliance that sustain ineffective accumulation of student learning records. To this end, some institutions participating in degree-reclamation projects have not been able to allocate hard money to continue the labor-intensive work started by grant-funded staff. If these responsibilities are not optimized or embedded in a permanent, funded position in the college, they cannot self-sustain.

Second, few states were able to permanently address the imbalance in incentives and rewards that make this work mission optional rather than mission central. For example, when it comes to reverse transfer — transferring credits earned at four-year institutions toward reclamation of associate degrees from two-year colleges — many four-year institutions may find that the labor required to collaborate on this work brings little reward or recognition. In fact, we could argue that even in a state with performance-based funding, if the funding pool is a zero-sum game, helping two-year colleges confer more degrees could cost four-year colleges some degree of funding over time.

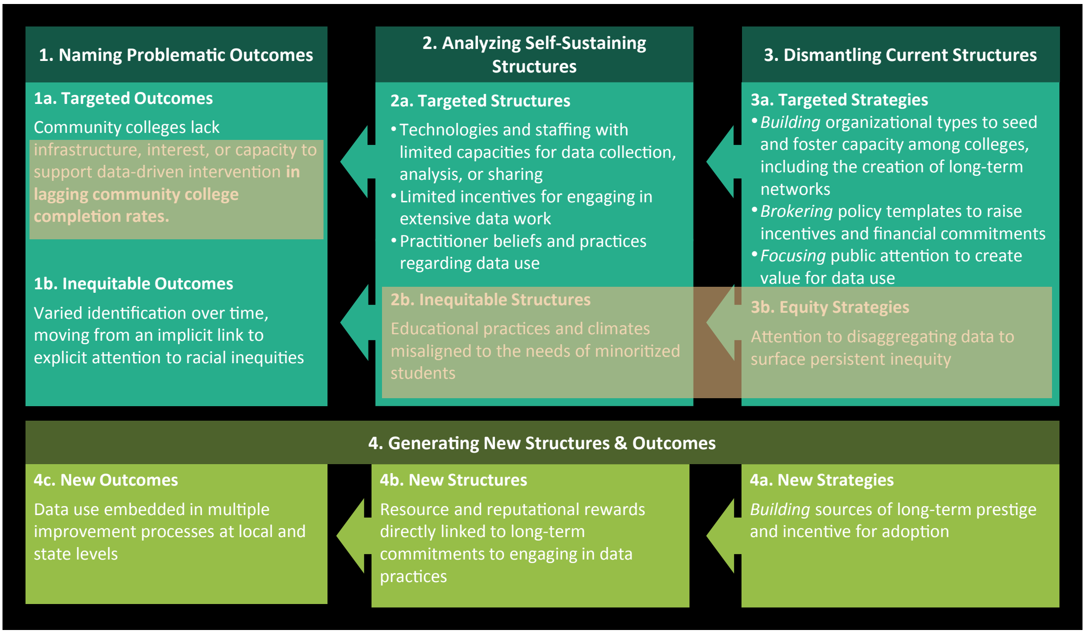
Finally, this initiative, which has gained an emphasis on equity over time, is still in the process of cementing its contribution to this end by explicitly identifying and responding to the self-sustaining structures by which inequities are built into this broad policy problem.

Degree reclamation as a movement continues to evolve as its leaders take stock and set a course toward transitioning from building models and capacity toward achieving sustainability.

[2] For some specific examples, review Bragg & Taylor's *Optimizing Reverse Transfer Policies and Processes* report here: https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:70295, and Adelman's *Project Win-Win at the Finish Line* here: http://www.ihep.org/research/publications/project-win-win-finish-line.

[3] See, for example, the Education Commission for the States' *50-State Comparison* of "reverse transfer" policies: http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBquest3RTA?Rep=TR1804

FIGURE 4 Data-Capacity Goals, Structures, and Strategies



Note: Content highlighted in orange represents self-sustaining structures in need of further strategic attention.

The extensive capacity building, analysis, and experimentation afforded by this movement has brought the disjunctures in student record management and credentialing systems fully into the light. This story highlights the iterative nature and long-term commitment, modeled by this movement's funders and partners, necessary to achieving significant education reform, and indeed some of the next steps identified in our brief analysis are embedded in the emergent work of current major initiatives.

Community College Data-Capacity Advocacy

Just prior to the degree-reclamation campaign, the notion of "data driven" decision-making became a centerpiece of the college completion movement (Morest & Jenkins, 2007; Mayer et al., 2014). This is particularly true with regard to community colleges, which up until the mid-2000s had historically had limited data collection and analytic capacities, and were simultaneously known to have the lowest degree completion rates in the postsecondary domain (Wilson & Bower, 2016; Goomas & Isbell, 2015; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011). Multiple initiatives and calls emerged to enhance, reward, and generally "move the needle" on community college data capacity at the national level as a prime lever for advancing a college completion agenda by changing the nature of the information we have about where and how we are losing students (1). (See Figure 4.)

As in the previous case, multiple foundations — ranging from C.S. Mott to Kresge among at least a dozen others — began funding, together and separately, a variety of projects designed to advance the data-capacity movement. Analyzing a variety of retrospective and concurrent accounts, several key strategies emerged to dismantle existing structures (3).[4] Primary among these were building organizations with long-term commitments to seeding and incentivizing the cultivation of capacity in terms of talent and technological infrastructure at colleges; focusing attention via white papers and public

[4] The authors also conducted direct member checking of this account with funders and evaluators associated with this movement.

engagement to raise the profile of the power and potential of data capacity for transforming student outcomes; and brokering best practices through online hubs, national professional development convenings, exemplar model dissemination, and sharing or even incentivizing state policy models that create policy pressures or diminish old policy constraints. Funding strategies also included building ongoing incentives for participation via the prestige[5] associated with joining the movement and encouraging other resource custodians in the field (e.g., think tanks producing policy frameworks, associations, foundations, etc.) to make data capacity a precursor to inclusion (4a).[6]

The movement for data capacity is alive, well, and adapting to its own successes and shortcomings. We can look to this movement, now at least in its adolescence, to ask: if most philanthropic funding for this movement ceased today, what shifts in self-sustaining structures could sustain organizational commitment to data capacity? Based on the strategies employed above, we believe that not only was baseline capacity achieved as a result of substantial funder investment, but structures were altered (2) and added (4b) that would maintain positive pressure to this end.

First among these is the combination of shifts in practice norms and the development of new prestige-conferring fixtures in the postsecondary domain. Given their multiple and locally oriented missions, community colleges as a sector largely lack the sources of relative prestige (e.g., ranking, awards, selectivity) that incentivize the competition common among four-year colleges and universities (Ayers, 2015; Dowd, 2013). Funders not only created a public dialogue about data practice, but connected this dialogue to multiple types of incentives, including induction into valued networks, inclusion in high-profile prize competitions, and even consideration for future grant-funded projects. While opting into this movement could, on one hand, be seen as admitting your college has a completion problem, funded campaigns framed this work as a marker of quality and innovation, which developed into a form of capital or prestige distinct from that associated from other postsecondary genres. Other critical shifts to self-sustaining structures included key state policy wins to alleviate constraints;[7] the creation of dedicated, ongoing positions and funding lines for dedicated data staff; and the data-informed changes to student data management systems to lower barriers to analytic practice.

In addition to the gains already achieved, the remaining work of this movement stems from some early oversights baked into the movement's theory of change. First, the primacy of equity in this movement has evolved over time (1b). While the connection was always implicit given the populations served by community colleges, the connection between data capacity and "equity gaps" was tenuous for some time. At moments this emphasis has been more explicit, with the belief that making equity gaps visible to a larger group of stakeholders would itself elicit change. What we don't see, and what the current iteration of the movement is taking up quite intentionally, is careful attention to the question: By what self-sustaining structures does a lack of data use or capacity differentially affect minoritized communities (2b)? This is similar to a broader challenge facing this movement — which is the need to expand available resources to be responsive to data-driven revelations. While knowledge of student patterns and equity gaps may heighten urgency or precision, without expanded capacity to respond, even the strongest movement could still result in at least a few spinning wheels. In this movement's current

[5] See, for example, the positive regard associated with being selected as an Achieving the Dream college or, more exclusively, receiving an Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.

[6] See, for example, the American Association of Community Colleges' Voluntary Framework for Accountability, the Center for Law and Social Policy's Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework, or the Complete College American Game Changer Strategies.

[7] See, for example, Dougherty & Kerrigan's (2007) *Fifty States of Achieving the Dream: State Policies to Enhance Access to and Success in Community Colleges Across the United States:* https://doi.org/10.7916/D8VX0R1N.

One of the great strengths of the philanthropic community that emerges in this review is its ability to attend to multiple sources of persistence and change at once to remake an area of social policy or practice, including issues of focusing attention, engineering programs, brokering across networks, and capacity or coalition building.

iteration, we see leaders actively taking up both equity and theory-of-change gaps.

Implications and Conclusion

One of the great strengths of the philanthropic community that emerges in this review is its ability to attend to multiple sources of persistence and change at once to remake an area of social policy or practice, including issues of focusing attention, engineering programs, brokering across networks, and capacity or coalition building. Grantmakers have the freedom to employ their resources — be that financial and/or their public platforms — to attend holistically to the pressures that both prevent and create change. However, identifying the right targets and strategies for effective reform often remains elusive.

We argue that using the model presented in this article may help to address three challenges common to philanthropy-led reform movements:

- *Connecting educational outcomes to structures.* Some movements accomplish their target goal — for example, a state legislature passes a new bill — only to find that while this policy changes a practice, that practice is not substantively linked to the education problem itself. In other words, not all changes interrupt the processes by which problematic outcomes are reproduced. Our approach prioritizes naming the problematic outcome and linking outcomes to their self-sustaining structures as early steps in developing a remaking strategy.
- *Targeting structures that are self-sustaining.* Similarly, many funded reform initiatives produce immediate changes by temporarily producing special attention or effort toward a given problem. But as soon as these temporary pressures subside, so too do the altered outcomes. This occurs because the funded projects neither dismantle existing self-sustaining structures nor create durable new self-sustaining structures. A remaking approach ensures that change is long-lasting by specifically targeting both existing and new self-sustaining structures.
- *Identifying structured inequities within generalized problems.* Many leading voices in education change movements regularly and rightly remind us that if we do not design for equity in our educational initiatives, strategic plans, etc., then it is nearly impossible to achieve equity by accident. Working in postsecondary (or any) education spaces means that we are constantly working in domains historically structured for white supremacy and racial inequality (Ray, 2019; Smith, 2016). In other words, the patterns of difference between white, middle class and poor or minoritized students that we have come to expect are rarely driven only by the self-sustaining structures that prop up the distribution around the mean.

We can use the need for higher-quality, higher-touch advising systems as a case in point. Low-touch, high-case load advisement processes in colleges and universities lead to lower completion rates, on average, across populations. These negative effects are greater for students of color. It is possible to motivate advisement redesign under the premise that advisement is implicitly and inherently an equity issue. However, this

is the type of trap many change movements fall into on a regular basis. If grantmakers fail to recognize the specific mechanisms by which inequities occur, then they cannot target their strategies to diminish those conditions. Without this focus, we posit that, even in the best-case scenario, grantmakers will achieve a level shift in average outcomes but ultimately maintain racial inequities rather than disrupt them (Cox, 2016; Dorsey, Bradach, & Kim, 2020). For this reason, in the road map we draw out explicit attention at each analytical point to surface and respond to the self-sustaining structures that (re)produce inequity over time above and beyond the mean distribution of the problem.

In order to reap these benefits, we argue that grantmakers may consider embedding an equity-oriented remaking strategy into planning future work. We consider it the priority to use this framework to look inward, within the walls of the foundation, to think about the role of multiple grants or portfolios over time in reducing or replacing the constellation of self-sustaining structures supporting extant and often racialized problems. For example, if models already exist to support better outcomes in a particular domain, then engineering projects may offer less traction toward remaking than focusing or building projects that create new self-sustaining beliefs or pressures needed for implementing models in a long-term way. Most crucially, we urge funders to attend to equity problems throughout each stage of the planning and evaluation process, engaging specifically with structures that produce differential racial disadvantage rather than positioning equity as an implicit part of a generalized problem.

We can also think of this approach as a tool for supporting the sustainability of individual grant-funded projects. While many funders already ask their grantees to speak to how their projects will be sustainable, this step can easily become symbolic without significant meaning in practice. Thoughtfully incorporating prompts or exercises into application and review procedures could promote valuable reflection by all parties to target projects toward new or existing self-sustaining structures. Many funders already

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engaged in reform efforts routinely attend to the alignment between education problems, strategies, and solutions. We recommend that funders interested in maximizing their impact additionally look carefully at how their strategies dismantle self-sustaining structures that support the status quo — particularly those leading to inequitable outcomes — and how new structures can be created to sustainably reproduce new, equitable outcomes instead. The complexity of this work further highlights the value of long-term and iterative funder commitments, coordinated cross-portfolio work, and multi-funder collaboratives for "moving the needle" on systemic change.

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Tools

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Tools

Investing in Mission-Driven Advocacy

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Keywords: *Advocacy, philanthropy, social action*

Key Points

- Philanthropy has a significant role to play in public policy advocacy, both in involving the individuals they support in advocacy and ensuring that advocates have the tools to be successful — not only in funding, but also in robust capacity-building assistance.
- Looking at the work of the National College Attainment Network, this article explores how philanthropic investments can impact advocacy, in both financial and capacity-building support, through a recounting of a recent advocacy grantmaking initiative. It also details the key conditions conducive to policy change and the supports that were provided to grantees during the funding period.
- As philanthropic leaders consider how to make wise programmatic investments in the realm of advocacy and how to best evaluate that investment, this article also discusses conceptual assessment frameworks for effective advocacy investments elevated by scholars and practitioners, and puts forth an original set of practical evaluation guidelines that were used in the evaluation of its grantees' success. Also included is a specific issue-area case study on the impact of the collective grantee cohort.

Introduction

Philanthropy has a key role to play in policy advocacy. This is particularly true for policy issues that affect people supported by the nonprofit community. The individuals receiving services, and those providing them, are both authentic and expert voices on the issues affecting them and the most effective solutions. However, many direct service nonprofits are not equipped or trained to do advocacy work. Furthermore, philanthropic leaders may wonder how to assess the effectiveness of advocacy investments.

Philanthropy can help ensure that advocates have the tools — not only funding, but also capacity and skills — to be successful. In order to understand where to invest and how to evaluate that investment, it is first important to understand the landscape in which the advocates will operate. For the National College Attainment Network (NCAN), this primarily is the U.S. Congress and federal law focused on higher education.

This article will explore how philanthropy can play a key role in public policy advocacy through both financial and capacity-building support. Using a group of recent NCAN grantees as an example, it will explore the atmosphere conducive to policy change, the supports NCAN provided to grantees, evaluation of grantee success, and an issue-area case study on the impact of the collective grantee cohort.

Background

The National College Attainment Network began advocacy funding in 2017. As a membership organization committed to empowering communities to close equity gaps in postsecondary attainment for all students, NCAN also frequently provides competitive grants to members by leveraging investments from larger national foundations. From Fall 2017 through Fall 2019, NCAN supported its first set of advocacy grantees to great success.

This cohort of grantees included 17 NCAN member organizations, who were selected through a competitive process. (See Table 1.) The network evaluated prospective grantees based on their readiness to expand their policy work. The measure of "readiness" included the following requirements: a commitment for the board

Tools

TABLE 1 NCAN Member Advocacy Grantees

Organization Name	Grant for State Work	Grant for Federal Work	Service Area	State	Special Populations
10,000 Degrees	Yes	No	Multicounty, Bay Area	California	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Undocumented
Alabama Possible	Yes	No	Statewide	Alabama	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Rural
College Forward	Yes	Yes	Austin	Texas	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
College Horizons Inc.	Yes	No	New Mexico and National	New Mexico	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Native American
College Now Greater Cleveland	Yes	No	Cleveland Metro Area	Ohio	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
College Possible	No	Yes	Cohort-based program in several cities	Headquartered in Minnesota	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Multistate
College Success Arizona	No	Yes	Statewide	Arizona	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
College Success Foundation	Yes	Yes	Statewide	Washington	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
Florida College Access Network	Yes	Yes	Statewide	Florida	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
Goddard Riverside Community Center–Options Center	Yes	No	New York City	New York	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
Michigan College Access Network	Yes	No	Statewide	Michigan	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
Montana College Access Network	Yes	No	Statewide	Montana	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Rural
Southern California College Access Network	Yes	No	Los Angeles County	California	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Undocumented
Tennessee College Access and Success Network	Yes	Yes	Statewide	Tennessee	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Rural
College Crusade of Rhode Island	No	Yes	Statewide	Rhode Island	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis	Yes	Yes	St. Louis Metro Area	Missouri	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color
uAspire, Inc.	No	Yes	Direct Service MA, CA / Online & Training multistate	Headquartered in Massachusetts	Low-Income, First-Generation, Students of Color, Multistate

of directors to spend staff time on policy/advocacy work, having already participated in some level of advocacy work in the past, and looking to expand the portion of staff time spent on policy/advocacy work. Additionally, applicants needed to contribute to the shared goals of the issues NCAN identified as being ripe for action and having large effect on the target population. Additionally, the grantees were geographically diverse, with several located in key congressional districts.

The grantee organizations all work directly with students to overcome barriers to entering, persisting in, and completing a postsecondary degree or certificate. Network members are increasingly prioritizing policy and advocacy work because they see that their students will not be successful in education beyond high school without systemic change. It is no longer enough to guide students around barriers; the barriers must be broken down.

This "on the ground" realization matches the definition of public policy advocacy set forth by Atlantic Philanthropies in 2008:

> As a general definition, "public policy advocacy" aims to bring about a change in public policy or the law, its interpretation or its application, typically with the objective of correcting a perceived injustice or achieving specific legislative, legal or other change. (Deutsch, 2008, p. 3)

For NCAN members, especially this cohort of advocacy grantees, the injustice is the inability of many students of color and students from low-income backgrounds to afford education beyond high school ("postsecondary" education), and the difficulty in navigating the system that does provide access to financial aid.

In order to break down barriers affecting students, NCAN grantees had to first learn the process that built this system and the strategies to change it.

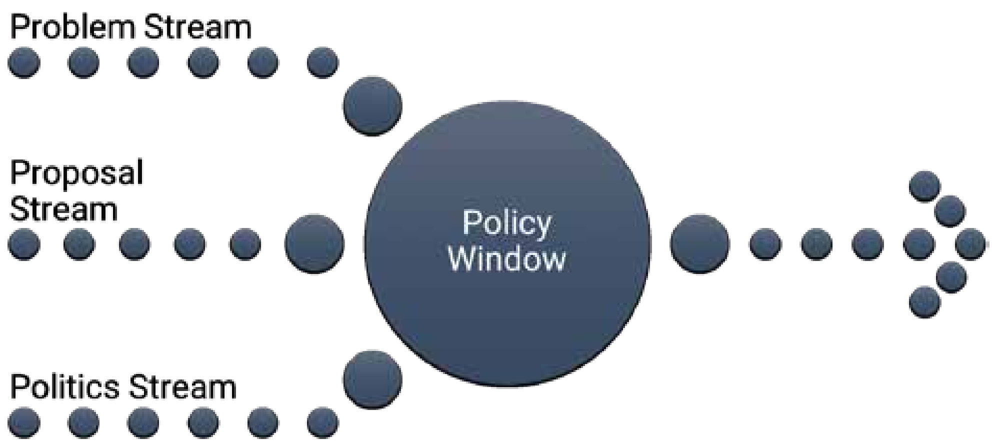
Understanding the Policy Window

The policy process can be opaque to those outside of it. In his seminal book on the subject, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies,* scholar John W. Kingdon (1984) provided an influential framework to understanding the policy process. In Kingdon's theory, advocates and political actors prepare for the right moment when their agenda can be advanced, which he refers to as a "policy window." The policy window, i.e., the perfect moment for an issue to be addressed, opens when the three "policy streams of activity" align — the streams are that of problems, proposals, and politics.

The problem stream is understood when stakeholders realize that a particular issue is a problem and therefore elevate it on the agenda for action. In higher education, this could be coalescing of public opinion that college is not affordable for all (Marken, 2020). The proposal stream represents the process by which the experts in a particular field narrow the infinite number of policy solutions down to the ideas that are seen as achievable. For the college affordability example, the debate now focuses on increased public investment through a combination of increasing the Pell Grant, providing free college tuition, and/or match funding from the federal government to increase state investment in their public systems of higher education. The political stream is about building the will among policymakers to address the problem with the solutions offered by advocates. This could be impacted by, for example, campaigns led by advocacy groups to influence the decision-makers to address the issue. The affordability issue will be addressed when Congress finally tackles the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). When these streams align, the policy window is open and the issue becomes a priority on the governmental agenda. (See Figure 1.)

The policy process is intuitive for effective advocates who are acutely aware of the need to prepare for the policy window. They employ a variety of tactics that follow these streams of policy activity, such as making a problem relevant

FIGURE 1 John W. Kingdon's Policy Window Framework



to stakeholders, developing and offering policy solutions, and motivating those central to the levers of power to act on their solutions. When advocates or political actors are unprepared for a policy window, it is unlikely that they will see favorable change for their issue of importance.

As advocates prepare for the policy window, there are a number of political realities behind the legislative process to consider. The truth is that the policy window, as it pertains to Congress reauthorizing major legislation, is not frequently open. This means the policy process is unpredictable and that motivating prospects of a major change at the federal level is often a long slog for advocates.

One political reality is that in recent years, Congress is considering legislation less frequently than is historically the case, as seen in the declining number of congressional committee hearings (Policy Agendas Project, 2017). Another factor to consider is the documented polarization between the major political parties, where members of opposing parties are increasingly less likely to cooperate and find agreement on legislative efforts (Andris et al., 2015). These trends signal to advocates that the potential for policy windows are fewer and less frequent.

The primary law governing the federal role in postsecondary education is the HEA of 1965, which is the authorizing legislation for major federal programs (Hegji, 2014). The HEA was last reauthorized as the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Though Congress has occasionally tackled changes outside of an HEA reauthorization, evident in such laws as the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, the ability to pass a reauthorization along its intended timeline for expiration has proven difficult. The HEA is now several years overdue for reauthorization, remaining in effect by extension to the law.

This happens to be commonplace among major authorizing legislation. (See Table 2.) Though typically written with the intention to be renewed every five years, a decade can pass without a reauthorization to a central piece of legislation.

NCAN Advocacy Grantee Project: An Overview

Affecting policy change requires playing the long game of continued preparedness for the opening of the infrequent policy window. The desired results do not always fit neatly into a grant timeline or a strategic plan. Philanthropy should

TABLE 2 Examples of Last Reauthorizations of Major Legislation

Federal Legislation	Most Recent Reauthorization	Previous Reauthorization
Higher Education Act	2008	1998
Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act	2018	2006
Elementary and Secondary Education Act	2015	2002
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	2015	2004
Workforce Investment Act	2014	1998

create a foundation that allows their grantees to succeed when the opportunity presents itself.

This support should both be monetary and content-based. Grantee staff time is necessary to do the work, so an appropriate level of financial funding is needed. But in addition, the individuals doing the work need the skills to monitor the policy window, contribute momentum toward it, and act quickly when it opens. In NCAN's experience, the capacity building provided to grantees in addition to direct funding is key to their ability to quickly capitalize on an opportunity.

Capacity Building

The National College Attainment Network provides capacity building to advocacy grantees through training, technical support, and a materials clearinghouse. Each of these items reduces the amount of time an organization must spend supporting their advocacy work and allows them to focus on the actual action items that make change happen: building relationships, collecting their data about effective strategies to make change, elevating authentic voices from the communities served, and providing feedback to policymakers.

Training for NCAN grantees and members happens in a variety of formats and throughout the year. In-person trainings happen twice a year: a Capitol Hill Day in early spring and the NCAN National Conference in the fall. The value of these in-person convenings, with travel support for many provided, is profound. Members form relationships with each other that help them trade notes about building advocacy capacity within their direct service organizations.

Each in-person training includes an overview of the federal policy landscape for the relevant issue area, a "how to" session on how to have a meeting on Capitol Hill, and a storytelling workshop that teaches attendees to incorporate data and personal experience into their advocacy pitch. Finally, the trainings allow for ample time to rehearse their meetings. As NCAN's focus area is higher education, the audience for these trainings include college-access professionals as well as students with lived experience. The training is invaluable for allowing them to learn these new skills together, for providing time to practice their advocacy ask, and to reinforce that they are the experts of their experience with valuable information to share with elected officials.

In addition to these in-person trainings, NCAN also offers webinars to grantees year-round. This format offers a different avenue of support because it allows current grantees and member organizations alike to participate while also providing timely content that may not wait until the semiannual in-person meetings. Topics are wide-ranging. Some webinars focus specifically on advocacy training, such as legal and effective ways to interact with the campaign cycle, how to

A key part of NCAN's strategy to build capacity among our members to do advocacy work is to combine the capacity building with funds that can be easily leveraged for further growth. The biggest challenge for direct service organizations in doing advocacy work is time. They need staff time to execute the work.

hold an in-district meeting during congressional work period, or using social media effectively to support advocacy goals. Other webinars focus on issues education, such as how the federal appropriations process works, historical overviews of how key policies came to be, or explainers about bills introduced. Specific topics for higher education include the history and workings of the Pell Grant program, background on the federal student loan system, and bills introduced to renew the long-overdue HEA.

Beyond trainings, NCAN and partner consultants offer technical assistance to grantees as they tackle their own policy priorities. Grantees participated at a variety of intervals, at minimum quarterly and at most monthly. Each grantee was required to develop a specific work plan for the advocacy goals proposed in their grant application. The regular technical assistance supported them in refining their goals and focusing on achieving change through advocacy. Congress can be unpredictable; policymakers have their attention caught by current events. These shifts require a plan that is adaptable to take advantage of a moving target. Additionally, on-call technical assistance allows grantees to receive immediate feedback. Direct service providers frequently can identify the problem and the solution, but the specific action that government must take to enact the solution is not always clear. Foundations who do not have employees with this skill set could consider hiring consultants to provide this support to grantees.

In addition to trainings and technical support, NCAN manages a repository of resources that grantees and members alike can access at any time. The materials, curated for grantees and now managed though an online advocacy calendar, spare the organizations from using their time to develop work from scratch. This includes templates and guides such as the aforementioned work plans, agendas for meeting with policymakers, and a recess meeting how-to toolkit. Beyond these materials that allow grantees to more effectively and efficiently execute their advocacy work, NCAN also tracks relevant federal legislation hosted through a platform that automatically integrates updates from Congress.gov. This grantee resource is also a time saver for NCAN staff. The materials are organized on an "action center" that is freely available on NCAN's website to grantees, members, and others interested in advocacy on the higher education policy issues (NCAN, n.d.).

Leverage of Funding

A key part of NCAN's strategy to build capacity among our members to do advocacy work is to combine the capacity building with funds that can be easily leveraged for further growth. The biggest challenge for direct service organizations in doing advocacy work is time. They need staff time to execute the work. NCAN's capacity support is designed to help them maximize their impact with limited time, but it was also designed to allow them to focus dollars on staffing rather than programming or direct costs like events or materials. Successful advocacy work requires people.

Two key results for NCAN grantees leveraging NCAN advocacy funding were developing a new staff position and expanding student advocacy programs. On the staffing side, NCAN grants were not large enough to fund a new staff person, but they gave several grantee organizations the capacity to prove what they could do with a

small amount of time and pitch to other funding sources what they could accomplish with another staff member. It also gave them the ability to have matching funds and demonstrate to other funders that they were worth the risk of investment. 10,000 Degrees and uAspire are two organizations that were able to add dedicated staff time for advocacy after participating in the NCAN grant project.

The second key part of investment in people that allowed for replication was the addition of student advocates. As direct service providers in the high school to college space, current college students are the best voices for the proposed changes NCAN grantees champion. The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis has a student advocate program and with support from another funder was able to share it with several fellow NCAN members, many of whom were grantees. Network grantee Southern California College Access Network learned from that work and was able to leverage its NCAN funding and training to raise additional dollars to support its own student advocates.

For any advocacy effort, authentic voices are still a crucial part of the process. Social service organizations should consider advocacy programming that leverages investment to involve and train those who are receiving services from the nonprofit. These individuals, often underrepresented in leading policy discussions, are the experts on their experience and most qualified to propose solutions facing their community. As this work takes time away from other responsibilities, such as requiring individuals to take time off from work, in NCAN's case it is a critical component that student advocates are paid for their time to participate. This should be considered generally in creating advocate programs, particularly those working with individuals from low-income backgrounds.

This combined support of capacity building and leverage of funding allowed grantees to have success on their policy goals, as detailed in the next section, and to join together on a key higher education advocacy priority, simplification of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) during the grant period and after the grant period had ended, and ultimately achieve a major win in this higher education policy area. The trainings, specifically the focus on drumbeat and relationship building, and the leveraged funding that allowed the work to continue post grant period, were necessary elements toward the outcomes achieved during this grantmaking and the significant policy win that is discussed in the case study that follows.

Evaluating the Outcomes

When investing in advocacy work, philanthropic leaders must consider whether an investment is likely to be effective and on what timeline. Put forth in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* Barkhorn, Huttner, and Blau (2013) establish an Advocacy Assessment Framework with nine essential conditions for successful advocacy investments. The authors' approach to "structured" evaluation in this assessment framework, among other evaluative models considered, was influential in NCAN's development of evaluation guidelines for the advocacy grantees.

While the framework may be more useful in longer-term and continued investments, NCAN's guidelines were established due to the need to evaluate the grantees' impact, and reflect the ability of grantees to effect change within a short and specific grant window. (See Table 3.) Specific to grantees, a demonstrable increase and ensured continuity of their capacity beyond the grant period were important measures of success for this grantmaking. As demonstrated through the included case study, success continues beyond the official grant window and evaluation process.

For NCAN to conduct evaluation, grantees were asked to complete midpoint and final grant reports, which roughly equated to annual reporting. Through grant reporting as well as the regular technical assistance calls with grantees, NCAN performed intake of grantee data and measured the progress attained by grantees during the grant period. For the reports and supporting documentation, in addition to other relevant information, NCAN requested data on grantees' outcomes achieved, their policy and advocacy capacity, and their ability to sustain

Tools

Tools

TABLE 3 Development of NCAN Grant Evaluation Guidelines

Advocacy Assessment Framework (Barkhorn, Huttner, & Blau, 2013)	NCAN Grant Evaluation Guidelines
• "Dynamic master plan: A pragmatic and flexible advocacy strategy and communications plan is ready for execution." • "Strong campaign leaders: Central advocates can assemble and lead the resources to execute the strategy and communications plan."	• Formalization and/or increase of internal policy and advocacy work
• "Strong campaign leaders: Central advocates can assemble and lead the resources to execute the strategy and communications plan."	• Leverage current funding to support future work.
• "Influential support coalition: Allies can sway needed decision-makers and help the campaign leader to pursue the solution."	• Recognition as expert and/or national leader on at least one core issue
• "Open policy window: Spur[ring] demand for the solution."	• Contribution to "drumbeat" efforts related to core issues

this capacity post-grant. Utilizing the grant reports and evaluation guidelines, the following outcomes data were collected.

Formalization of and/or Increase in Internal Policy and Advocacy Work

The majority of this grantee cohort had previously engaged in policy work, but had done so in an ad hoc manner. The work was not integrated into their overall strategic goals or the oversight of the board of directors, or was done in very small amounts. One measure of success during this first investment was whether organizations were able to formalize the role of policy and advocacy efforts and goals within their organization. Two examples of this transformation:

- In California's Marin County, the academic support nonprofit 10,000 Degrees said the grant "served as a framework to organize staff training on our organizational positions and assurance that it 'is O.K.' to be active in the advocacy space." The organization was also able to leverage this initial investment into additional funding, allowing it to add a dedicated staff member to manage policy and advocacy work. "Additionally," it reported, "the trainings and webinars have increased our familiarity and ease with understanding and anticipating legislative opportunities to influence policy and policymakers."
- College Possible, headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, with locations nationwide, created a policy committee and developed the organization's first policy agenda. This structure allowed it to advocate for college affordability and FAFSA simplification. The nonprofit bolstered its efforts by gathering data and students' stories about the direct impacts of policy on student success to effectively educate policymakers, which is also an important drumbeat activity.

Leverage Current Funding to Support Future Work

The support of this project was twofold: 1) "Buy back" time to allow staff to focus on policy and advocacy work, and 2) Provide additional capacity-building supports so that staff were able to decrease the time the foundational building phase took and dive in sooner to fast-moving policy conversations. Some examples of grantees successfully leveraging their funding:

- College Now Greater Cleveland succeeded in formalizing its internal process: The

grant "heightened our awareness to important policy issues, created a need for more consistent cross-departmental communication, and has increased our comfort with being a part of important political conversations," it reported. This work, targeted at both federal and state college affordability, allowed the organization to receive additional funding to study students affected by past-due institutional balances, a major barrier to reenrollment in postsecondary education for non-completers.

- Working with a coalition, the Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN) actively engaged the new governor to prioritize postsecondary attainment, specifically advocating for the adoption of a state postsecondary attainment goal, the creation of a coordinating body to oversee the goal, and development of an improved data system to better serve students. SoCal CAN leveraged its first foray into policy work through this grant for additional funding to continue the work.

Recognition as Expert or National Leader on a Core Issue

An important element to increasing the likelihood of policy and advocacy success is to have many, varied, respected voices recognizing the same problem and proposing similar solutions. Another measure of success for grantees was their ability to establish themselves as experts or national leaders on a core issue. Some examples of successful grantees:

- College Success Arizona credited the grant with its recognition as a national expert. "As a result of the increased exposure, we are now being asked to advise policymakers and other leaders more broadly on issues we care most about, including Pell Grant funding, FAFSA simplification, and student loan reform," it reported, noting those are "all issues that impact low-income and diverse Arizona students disproportionally." Beyond providing issues education advisement to policy leaders, it was also quoted in national publications such as *The Hechinger Report* and *The Hill*.

An important element to increasing the likelihood of policy and advocacy success is to have many, varied, respected voices recognizing the same problem and proposing similar solutions. Another measure of success for grantees was their ability to establish themselves as experts or national leaders on a core issue.

- Three grantees were invited to participate as witnesses to the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee as issue experts. Laura Keane, chief policy officer of uAspire, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, testified on the complicated nature of financial aid offers (Reauthorizing the HEA, 2018). Kristina Scott, executive director of Alabama Possible, and Michelle Scott Taylor, chief program officer for College Now Greater Cleveland, testified on the burdensome process called FAFSA verification (Reauthorizing the HEA, 2019).

- College Forward worked with Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), a champion for FAFSA simplification, to help inform other members of Congress on students' barriers to completing the FAFSA. College Forward staff and student alumni joined Rep. Doggett at Akins High School in Austin, Texas, for a press conference announcing the Equitable Student Aid Access Act, which both would increase the number of students who qualify for the full Pell Grant and make it easier for those students to access aid.

Tools

Given that the policy window rarely opens for any one issue, it is paramount to success that advocates continue to remind policymakers of the problem faced and solutions available. Without this continued momentum, it is unlikely that a policy window alignment will ever occur, as the problem will no longer be forefront for policymakers.

Contribution to 'Drumbeat' Efforts on Core Issues

Given that the policy window rarely opens for any one issue, it is paramount to success that advocates continue to remind policymakers of the problem faced and solutions available. Without this continued momentum, it is unlikely that a policy window alignment will ever occur, as the problem will no longer be forefront for policymakers. While it may feel repetitious to philanthropic leaders and advocates alike, the high rate of turnover for elected officials and their staffs make a continued drumbeat key to success.

Grantees also conducted more than 200 meetings with policymakers, released policy briefs and research reports, created or revamped policy priorities one-pagers, published opinion pieces, and hosted advocacy days that leveraged the student voice in policy conversations with legislators and their staff. Some specific examples:

- The CEO of College Crusade of Rhode Island wrote an op-ed in the Providence Journal about the need to raise tax revenue to better fund higher education (Bramson, 2019).
- College Success Arizona trained students to be advocates and on how to interact most effectively with their representatives at the federal level on issues such as FAFSA completion and Pell Grants.
- The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis organized an advocacy conference, where students gathered for two days to build relationships and learn the issues and tools for advocacy work on state and federal policy.

Grantees achieved noteworthy success toward their policy goals during this period of grantmaking. Most notably, the demonstrable culmination of success is their ability to continue their advocacy functioning beyond the grant period and achieve a momentous policy win on a key higher education priority: simplification of the FAFSA. The following case study illustrates how grantees were able to quickly engage on a policy window that opened and required immediate advocacy, calling upon their skills-based training, relationships developed during the grant period, and the leveraged funding that ensured post-grant capacity.

CASE STUDY: FAFSA SIMPLIFICATION

The NCAN cohort of grantees discussed in this case study was active from December 2017 through September 2019. During that time, several grantees were consulted on legislation drafting and impact on students, served as witnesses for congressional panels, had policy wins at the state level, and were quoted in the media. All of these actions elevated their policy priorities. However, the policy window had yet to open for one of the collective top priorities: simplification of the FAFSA.

The problem, policy, and politics of FAFSA simplification finally aligned in December 2019. Leading up to this victory, advocates had spent years broadly championing FAFSA simplification and a full calendar year advocating for the specific policy solution that would shorten the application's financial section. The policy window finally opened with the politics aligned with the agreement on problem and policy.

In December 2018 the Faster Access to Federal Student Aid Act of 2018 (FAFSA Act of 2018) passed the Senate, but stalled in the House of Representatives. Ideally, the House would have attached the measure to must-pass legislation, most likely the then-undecided fiscal year 2019 appropriations package, but the stalemate between the House and President Trump led to the 115th Congress ending in a partial government shutdown.

Throughout the beginning of 2019, or the 116th Congress, the NCAN cohort continued to advocate for the importance of FAFSA simplification. Unfortunately, the FAFSA Act continued to sit on a shelf in Congress. The network continued to provide trainings in person and online as well as guidance about "drumbeat" — keeping the dialogue going without overwhelming elected officials. Grantees continued to share data, collect student stories, and remind their elected officials that students were still struggling every day to access the funding they needed to go to college. But as negotiations to reauthorize the HEA heated up, few members of Congress were willing to rock the boat and the FAFSA Act of 2018 was still not reintroduced.

From a funder's perspective, the official grant cohort ended in September 2019. But the work of NCAN's grantees continued, even as NCAN worked to select new grantees for the next cohort. In December 2019 the policy window opened, and it opened fast and wide because the politics aligned when policymakers combined this problem and policy solution with another time-sensitive problem: the recently expired funding for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority serving institutions (MSIs). The House and the Senate disagreed on how to pay for this funding, but the merging of ideas provided the offset needed because the changes in the FAFSA Act of 2018 actually saves the federal government money through changes to federal student loan repayment. However, there were holdouts on this plan because of the implications to changes required by the IRS; in addition to the education committees, the tax committees in each chamber had to approve the legislation.

The problem, policy, and politics of FAFSA simplification finally aligned in December 2019. Leading up to this victory, advocates had spent years broadly championing FAFSA simplification and a full calendar year advocating for the specific policy solution that would shorten the application's financial section. The policy window finally opened with the politics aligned with the agreement on problem and policy.

To those observing from the outside this FAFSA simplification solution may have appeared brand new, when in fact advocates had been working on it for over a year. Network grantees were a key part of the conversation and were able to stay appropriately engaged due to the capacity building and training that NCAN provided. The work happened rapidly, by phone call and text message, and it relied heavily on relationships that had been built over the last two years advocating for the importance of FAFSA simplification. Network grantees would not have been able to seize this opportunity without training on maintaining relationships on Capitol Hill, continued data and story collection, and issue tracking. Specifically, Alabama Possible was able to work with Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.), a leading voice on both HBCU/MSI funding and FAFSA simplification. College Forward worked closely with Rep. Doggett, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The National College Attainment Network believes philanthropy can be a significant force for impact through policy advocacy. The nonprofit community is in an opportune position to lead advocacy initiatives alongside the individuals they support. In context of policy, these actors bring in authentic voices with unique expertise on issues and solutions. Through NCAN's advocacy grantmaking, demonstrable results of these opportunities clearly show that direct service nonprofits, with financial and robust capacity-building support, can lead effective advocacy work.

Immediate advocacy for the importance of these priorities was necessary. In less than one week, advocates were able to convince lawmakers of the value of the changes to the FAFSA process as a way to both help all students and provide key funding for HBCUs and MSIs. On Dec. 19, 2019, the Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education (Future) Act became law. The network was able to update our former grantees and activate them quickly because they had the training and knew the issues. Due to the advocacy experience and relationships these organizations had built, NCAN was able mobilize them when the policy window opened, helping to achieve a 20% reduction in the number of questions students must answer when completing the FAFSA.

Lessons Learned and Conclusion

The National College Attainment Network believes philanthropy can be a significant force for impact through policy advocacy. The nonprofit community is in an opportune position to lead advocacy initiatives alongside the individuals they support. In context of policy, these actors bring in authentic voices with unique expertise on issues and solutions. Through NCAN's advocacy grantmaking, demonstrable results of these opportunities clearly show that direct service nonprofits, with financial and robust capacity-building support, can lead effective advocacy work.

As philanthropic leaders consider mission-driven investments in advocacy, NCAN encourages funders to reflect on the success materialized through this grantmaking cohort and offers these important lessons learned to inform future funding of advocacy engagements:

1. Even when practitioners are constituents and experts in their field, advocacy work can be intimidating. Do not underestimate the time and effort necessary to help them understand that their voice matters and that this work has an impact even if they can't see it immediately.

2. Including the population directly affected by the problem to be solved — in this case, college students — brings the message to the next level. The message is authentic and therefore has a bigger impact. Further, direct service providers are more likely to engage in advocacy work when they see how it directly benefits the populations they are working to serve.

3. Small investments can go a long way in terms of buy back or staff release time. The investment is not about a dollar-for-dollar exchange for time, but rather signals that spending time on policy and advocacy is core to fulfilling the mission of the nonprofit.

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Emergent Learning: Increasing the Impact of Foundation-Driven Strategies to Support College Enrollment and Completion

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Keywords: *College access, college completion, college match, high school, school districts, foundations*

Introduction

As part of its focus on better access to quality education and credentials that lead to secure employment opportunities, the Lumina Foundation has established criteria for strong postsecondary achievement goals that are "rooted in the global shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy. The vast majority of jobs being created require education beyond high school, and that trend shows no sign of abating" (Lumina Foundation, 2019a, para. 4).

Research data bear this out: In 1973, workers with postsecondary education held only 28% of jobs; by 2010 that share had risen to 59%, and to 65% by 2020 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Yet while the workforce requires a greater level of education to earn a family-sustaining wage, Americans in the lowest income quartile have achieved only incremental increases in postsecondary completion. By 2018, only 16% of students in that quartile had obtained a bachelor's degree by age 24, compared to 62% of students in the highest quartile (Pell Institute, 2020, page 145, Graph 5a(i)).

Seeing these trends play out in Mississippi, which has a postsecondary attainment rate of 45% but no formally established, statewide postsecondary attainment goal (Lumina Foundation, 2019b), the Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF) launched the Get2College program in 1997 to provide resources and support for students, their families, and educators to increase the number of Mississippi students getting to and through college. And as it became apparent that more was needed to move that needle, in 2016

Key Points

- This article examines lessons learned as part of the continued development of the Get2College Pilot School Program, an initiative of the Woodward Hines Education Foundation, designed to test a strategy for increasing college enrollment among Mississippi students through greater college exploration opportunities and application and financial aid supports.
- While a review of the first three years of the pilot found it had an impact on college-going culture at its eight participating schools, Get2College found no significant increase in college enrollment over the 2016–2018 academic years and a retrospective analysis revealed flaws in the program's design and theory of change. In response, the foundation partnered with a consultant to refine its strategy for a second phase of the pilot. Among the results of this partnership were four major lessons for the foundation: Begin with a commitment to engagement between school districts and school administrators; create a "college team" at each school to embed support for enrollment and completion; build a strong theory of change and evaluation method; and customize support strategies to regional contexts and individual schools.
- These lessons from the Get2College Pilot School Program can be of value to other foundations considering a transition from direct intervention to systemic change in their approach to college enrollment and completion support.

TABLE 1 Get2College Pilot Program Impact: School Years 2017–2019

School Year	Students served at Get2College centers and through outreach events	FAFSAs completed at FAFSA events and Get2College centers
2017	34,407	7,105
2018	34,268	7,503
2019	34,361	7,807

WHEF launched the Get2College Pilot School Program, providing counselors, teachers, and administrators at eight rural Mississippi high schools the tools and professional guidance to support students in strengthening their schoolwork and taking the other steps necessary to enroll in college.

The foundation was not alone during that time in considering how to shift its programmatic interventions to create broader systems change. In 2018, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors observed,

> Realizing that the world's pressing challenges are becoming more complex, and often seemingly intractable, many philanthropic funders are reflecting on how to create more transformational impact. They wonder whether they are putting their resources to best use, and what they could do differently to create more sustainable solutions to the challenges they aim to address. (Grady, Diggins, Schneider, & Paley Rose, 2018, p. 2)

During the first three years of the pilot, WHEF identified an impact on college-going culture in the high schools but did not see a significant increase in college enrollment. A retrospective analysis of the program revealed flaws in its design and theory of change. As foundations and organizations look to transition from direct intervention to systemic change in their college enrollment and completion efforts, there are opportunities to learn from the challenges faced by WHEF's pilot program and how they were met.

WHEF's Get2College Program

Mississippi's history of structural racism continues to limit the economic and educational achievements of its population. Children of color in the state are still more likely to be born into poverty and are less likely to climb out of it than their white counterparts. Nonwhite Mississippians were commonly denied access to educational opportunities and placed in separate and unequal schools and school districts. Despite much progress in the more than 50 years since landmark federal civil rights legislation, wide disparities remain: 38% of white adults in Mississippi hold a postsecondary credential, compared to 25% of African American adults (Lumina Foundation, 2019b). When attainment rates are broken down by county, the disparity comes into even sharper focus. In Issaquena County, where 64% of the population is African American and 35% is white, only 6.7% of its residents over 25 have a bachelors degree or higher. In Madison County, where the demographics are flipped — 58% white and 38% African American — more than 48% of residents have a bachelors degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

In the 23 years since it began providing free college counseling and financial aid support to any person in Mississippi who requests it, WHEF's Get2College program is now serving over 34,000 students each year through a range of community- and school-based events. (See Table 1.) Get2College staff also provide direct assistance to help students complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and submit their college enrollment information to the National Student Clearinghouse. (See Table 2.) Though the program was able to show a strong correlation between counseling support at Get2College centers and rising college enrollment, it was clear that more than direct programmatic

TABLE 2 Get2College Enrollment Rate by High School Graduating Class

	Seniors who received one-on-one support	% enrolled in college first year	% of enrolled college students who persisted to Year 2
Class of 2017	2,167	88%	84%
Class of 2018	2,217	88%	82%
Class of 2019	2,001	89%	Unavailable

Note: This enrollment rate, for students whose data Get2College submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), is slightly lower than the total number of seniors served in each class because not all students who received support provided a birthdate, which is among the data required by the NSC.)

intervention was needed to ensure all 30,000-plus high school seniors in Mississippi have the opportunity to enroll and complete their post-secondary education.

The Pilot School Program

To scale Get2College's impact beyond the few thousand students it could provide with one-on-one counseling support, WHEF piloted a strategy to improve the college-going culture in Mississippi high schools and make college planning a part of the student experience.

The Get2College Pilot School Program, a partnership with eight rural Mississippi high schools, was designed to increase students' college-going rates through intensive, on-site support of the schools' own efforts to increase college access and success. Using nationally identified best practices, the National College Attainment Network's (NCAN) Common Measures,[1] and data points from NCAN's Benchmarking Project,[2] the pilot program provided training for counselors and teachers at the beginning of each school year that focused on the college admissions process and how to create a college-going culture on high school campuses. Interested teachers were provided ACT prep training and ACT workshops were made available to students.

The pilot program also offered timeline workshops to juniors and seniors and financial aid and college-planning workshops to families. Days were blocked off for students to meet one-on-one with a Get2College staff member for advising and help with admissions and financial aid applications. The program organized college tours for juniors and seniors and sponsored application, FAFSA completion, counseling, and signing-day events. From 2016 to 2019, the pilot program's 740 events reached over 2,000 high school students.

Evaluation

In 2018, the Get2College Pilot School Program was evaluated by researchers at Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center (SSRC). Using a multimethod approach that included student focus groups, interviews with counselors, and in-depth analysis of student-level data, SSRC found that the pilot schools' college enrollment rates showed little change. (See Figure 1.) In 2015, the year before the intervention was launched, the college enrollment rate was 64%; in 2018, after three years of the pilot program, the rate was 64%.

During the same period, however, smaller schools — those with fewer than 100 graduating seniors — had higher college enrollment rates overall and a larger increase in those rates than did the larger schools. Enrollment rates at smaller schools increased from 64% in 2015 to 69% in 2018; in those same years, college

[1] See https://www.ncan.org/page/CommonMeasures

[2] See https://www.ncan.org/page/BenchmarkingProject

FIGURE 1 Enrollment Rates for Get2College Pilot High Schools

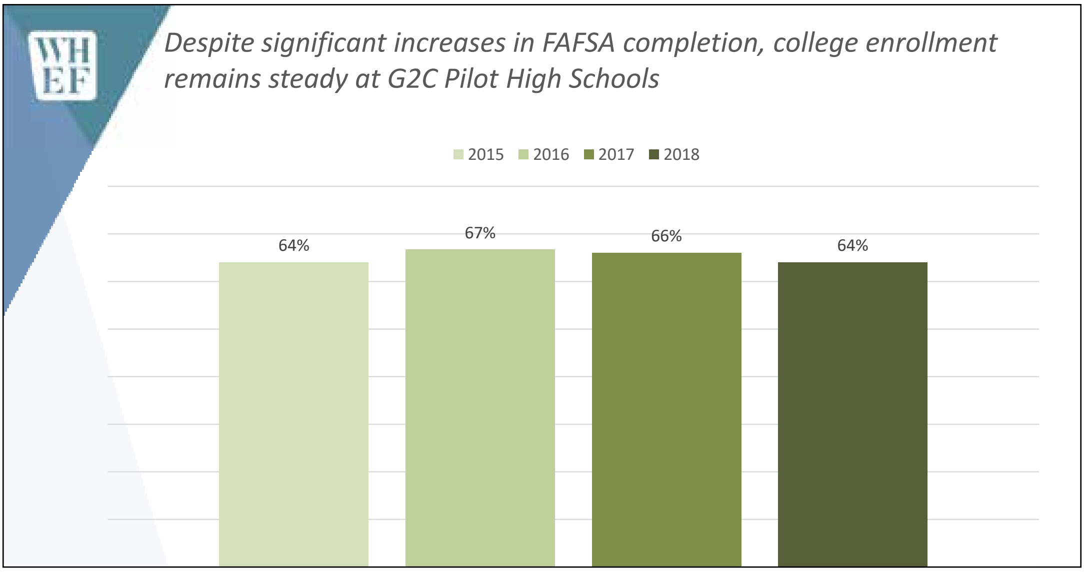
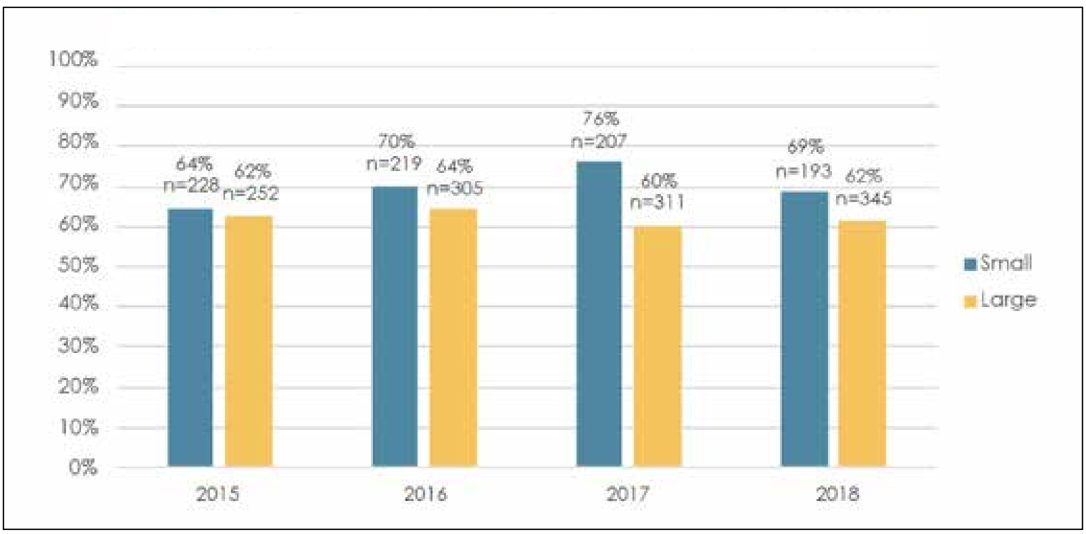


FIGURE 2 Enrollment Rates for Get2College Pilot High Schools by School Size



enrollment rates were at 62% in larger schools (WHEF & Mississippi State University SSRC, 2020). (See Figure 2.)

Beyond the enrollment data, SSRC found that the clearest difference between pilot schools and their nonpilot counterparts emerged in students' access to information about college. Pilot-school students consistently reported access to high-quality information that met their needs. Nonpilot-school students reported widely varied access to and quality of such information (WHEF & Mississippi State University SSRC, 2020). Despite demonstrated access to better information about college planning, however, the pilot did not realize the ultimate goal of improving students' postsecondary outcomes.

Pilot 2.0 Strategy

To address these shortcomings, WHEF sought support in devising a Pilot 2.0 strategy from UnlockED, an education consulting firm with experience working to create systemic change in school districts. Among the results of the partnership were four major lessons for organizations focused on improving postsecondary achievement that are considering a shift from a direct service model to one that seeks to create systemic change.

Lesson No. 1: Start With District/School Administration Engagement

At the launch of the Get2College Pilot School Program, the participating high schools signed a partnership agreement that required engagement from school leaders. Beyond the initial connection, however, there was no sustained relationship between Get2College and school leadership. While school staff were committed to the pilot program and to supporting students' college enrollment efforts, the presence of Get2College staff often meant that schools increasingly relied on them for support. Get2College support, in other words, supplanted rather than fostered the schools' own efforts. This isolation of effort, with either Get2College or school staff, would never represent a systemic solution or provide school leadership with the tools to understand how to integrate postsecondary supports into the fundamental work of the school.

UnlockED and NCAN have observed this type of reliance on outside college access and support organizations in programs around the country where the initial approach was based on student-specific support. In contrast, NCAN recently documented the work of AchieveMpls, a nonprofit based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that has partnered with the city's public school system to increase engagement from school principals in providing students with career and postsecondary planning services.

Formed in 2002, AchieveMpls is a 501(c)(3) whose staff of nearly 40 operates career and college centers in 11 Minneapolis and four St. Paul public high schools, serving more than 15,000 students annually. The organization coordinates with district counselors and college access network partners, including other local NCAN members, and brings principals into the conversation about how to shift from a narrow focus on preparing students for postsecondary enrollment to broader thinking about postsecondary persistence and completion (Debaun, 2020).

Lesson No. 2: Create a College 'Team'

During the first three years of the Get2College pilot, counseling staff changed at four of eight schools and five schools were assigned a new principal. This type of turnover is not unusual. In the 2016–2017 academic year, 35% of principals nationwide had remained at their school for less than two years and only 11% had been at their schools for 10 years or longer. The most recent national study also found that 18% of principals were no longer in their same position one year later; in high poverty areas, that rate was 21% (Levin & Bradley, 2019). In 2014–2015, the average ratio of students to school counselors in Mississippi was 438 to one — a ratio that far exceeds the recommended ratio of 250 to one and helps to explain the high turnover rate at pilot schools (National Association for College Admission Counseling & American School Counselor Association, n.d.).

Get2College found that creating cross-functional teams can provide better holistic support for students and help prevent the burnout and turnover associated with high counselor-to-student ratios — results seen in other school districts that adopted this team approach. As part of a program launched in 2016 by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), each high school built a college team led by the school's college and career coordinator that brought together college support organizations that work with the high school, senior-class teachers, and other relevant staff in partnership and collaboration to ensure that each student received appropriate support. Since the implementation of both a district-level strategy and school-based teams, the DCPS has seen its college enrollment rate increase from 42% to 55% (DCPS, 2019). With these teams, schools gain access to

actionable, building-level data and are thus better able to "identify ways to expand opportunities to reach students who are otherwise disconnected" (Savitz-Romer, 2019, p. 136).

Lesson No. 3: Build a Strong Theory of Change

All programs and interventions, no matter their size, scope, or sector, benefit from a clear and shared understanding of that effort's theory of change, data collection and analysis strategy, and evaluation method. Developing, sharing, and agreeing upon these elements in advance of programming has myriad benefits and sets the program or intervention up for a better chance of success. Consider each in turn:

- *Theory of change/logic model.* Although theories of change and logic models are not interchangeable, they are related and critical to laying out a road map for all stakeholders of a project or program. A theory of change describes the broad picture of how an effort will affect its target audience, while a logic model offers detailed documentation of the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes the effort will employ and is expected to achieve. A shared understanding of what a program will do, how that will happen, and why it is necessary is critical both for stakeholder buy-in and implementation fidelity.

- *Data collection and analysis strategy.* Each of the logic model's components should have an associated indicator and a strategy for data collection, storage, and analysis. Establishing a project's data requirements early on will make stakeholders' day-to-day efforts easier, reduce burdens on participants, prevent confusion, and improve the evidence base for assessing impact.

- *Evaluation method.* "How do we know if our efforts have succeeded?" is the eternal question for social impact. Would results have been achieved without the program or intervention? Program evaluation is not monolithic; it can be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both. Evaluation methodologies and strategies vary widely. Understanding at the outset the methods that will be used to measure impact has implications for implementation fidelity, stakeholder accountability, and buy-in for the work.

Get2College found that creating cross-functional teams can provide better holistic support for students and help prevent the burnout and turnover associated with high counselor-to-student ratios — results seen in other school districts that adopted this team approach.

Each of these elements could have been improved upon during the Get2College pilot. Although the project had a theory of change and an understanding of what practices would be employed with schools, their codification in a logic model would have provided consistency and fidelity across their implementation. Additionally, as the pilot progressed, adaptations were made in the way data on student behavior were collected and the specific information that was being tracked, possibly obfuscating or muddling actual results.

Changing the methods for data collection and analysis midway is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it represents nimbleness and responsiveness to shortcomings or new challenges. On the other, it creates breaks in trend data and difficulties in comparing results over time. Such changes also place burdens on personnel: Get2College team members, for example, had to go back to the school staff and request additional data on grade point averages and ACT scores and then modify the Get2College tracking system to accommodate that new information.

Midstream changes to the program and its implementation also created challenges for the SSRC

FIGURE 3 Data Shared With Pilot High School Leaders: Sample Dashboard

Mock HIGH SCHOOL College Enrollment Report

Data Source: National Student Clearinghouse file submitted in August 2019.

Mock HS Graduate Profile

Class	# Grads	Average ACT	ACT Participation	Average GPA	FAFSA Completion	# HELP Grant
2011	314	19.0	79%	2.54		
2012	265	18.5	81%	2.56		
2013	330	18.0	82%	2.69		
2014	299	19.0	86%	3.03	69%	
2015	328	19.0	87%	2.96	67%	19
2016	303	18.0	93%	2.90	77%	26
2017	342	18.5	96%	3.06	77%	39
2018	310	18	95%	3.09	80%	48
2019					82%	54

First Year College Enrollment Rate w/ ACT Score

Popular Colleges for First Enrollment

Class of 2018

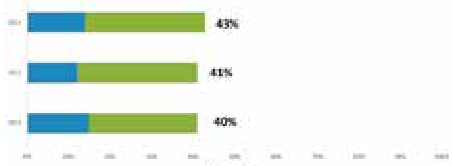
University	# of Grads
LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE	70
GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY	42
STATE UNIVERSITY	31
NEIGHBORHOOD COMUNITY COLLEGE	20
STATE UNIVERSITY - LOCAL CAMPUS	19

Persistence at 2 year vs 4 year

Persistence: % of graduates who enrolled in year one who re-enrolled at ANY university in year 2 (Classes 2015—2017)

College Completion Rate

% of the high school graduating cohort who graduated from college (2 year or 4 year) within six years of graduating from high school.



team in evaluating the impact of various interventions. Without consistency, over time and across sites, it became much more difficult to assess which program components were effective.

Lesson No. 4: Customize Strategies for Regional/School Context

The WHEF pilot had a singular, programwide strategy of support and interventions, but the participating schools varied in size and, among other differences, had unique district priorities and distinct regional contexts. As noted earlier, program results did begin to show some impact when school size was taken into account. As the SSRC found,

> [D]isaggregating the college enrollment rate by school size shows that smaller schools generally had higher college enrollment rates overall and showed a larger increase in the college-going rate between 2015–2017. Students from small schools had a lower college enrollment rate in 2018 compared to previous years but were still significantly higher than their large school peers. (Pellegrine et al., 2018, p. 8)

The pilot was designed to reach all students in each high school. That goal, however, was much more difficult to achieve at the larger schools, and therefore a limited number of students in those schools actually received all services. When this finding is taken into consideration along with the lessons regarding principals' engagement and school-based teams, it serves as additional evidence of the need for a systemic approach that embeds college and financial aid application assistance in the work of the school.

Pilot School Program: Phase Two

In 2019 Get2College launched phase two of the program. Five of the eight original pilot schools opted to participate in this phase, which required them to obtain their college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse and partner with Get2College to evaluate the data.

Phase two kicked off by providing the five participating schools with evaluations of their college enrollment and completion trends. Each school received support in identifying equity gaps in enrollment, opportunities to bridge gaps in college and financial aid supports, and universities with strong and weak records of student persistence and completion. Along with sharing the dashboard with the data on enrollment trends, Get2College staff met with school-based staff to ensure they were prepared to take ownership of building a postsecondary strategy that took into account their schools' historic trends and outcomes. (See Figure 3.)

The meetings with leadership and school-based teams were opportunities for conversations with Get2College that went deeper than merely scheduling the spring FAFSA sessions — which, while important, are only a part of equipping the school to create a stronger college-going culture. Together, the teams were able to examine the challenges to college access and opportunity faced by students in rural communities, to think critically about the importance of the new Mississippi curriculum requirement for a dedicated College and Career class, and to explore opportunities to build deeper partnerships with local universities.

With this information, Get2College worked with each school to determine what specific supports and services were needed to connect with the school leadership's unique vision, understanding that such assistance is part of an ecosystem of college supports within the school and that those supports are a shared responsibility.

With the four key lessons in mind, Get2College also adopted a new commitment to building schoolwide partnerships, embedding the work in multiple areas of the school, and providing a buffer for staffing transitions. As Get2College partners with schools across the state to build their postsecondary teams, students will have consistent messaging and guidance that ensures their access to the tools and resources to enroll, persist, and complete their intended postsecondary goals.

A clear theory of change and logic model, an established data collection plan and proposed evaluation strategy, and staff and stakeholders who understand the role of each and their responsibilities within the project provide a strong foundation on which to build.

As Get2College expands pilots and launches new work, the program will take a more purposeful, pragmatic approach to ensure that these components are in place before programming begins. A clear theory of change and logic model, an established data collection plan and proposed evaluation strategy, and staff and stakeholders who understand the role of each and their responsibilities within the project provide a strong foundation on which to build.

Conclusion

Get2College continues to grapple with how to deliver quality services to students while simultaneously creating the systemic change it sees as necessary to ensure all Mississippians have access to college planning services, and to increase college access and completion. Taking what was learned from the Pilot Schools Program, Get2College is reshaping its programs and initiatives to better align with the needs of school leaders, students, and their communities. At one pilot school this is being approached by creating a deeper partnership with the local community

college, where 66% of the school's college-going students enroll. At another school, it means increased support for FAFSA completion and targeted work assisting students in completing the state grant application.

The supports provided to the five phase-two high schools are specific to the needs of each school's student population. While this strategy does take more time, the focus is on creating systemic improvements to student support, empowering school-based staff, and focusing the time and resources available on the interventions that best meet the identified needs.

As an organization, Woodward Hines Education Foundation is also strengthening its connection with the Mississippi Department of Education and higher education leadership to advocate for a statewide postsecondary attainment goal.* In partnership with district superintendents and school principals and counselors, they are helping to create a college-going culture in every school across the state with the goal of increasing postsecondary attainment in Mississippi.

* October 2020, immediately before publication, the Mississippi Department of Education approved a postsecondary attainment goal.

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The AAACF Community Scholarship Program: A Strategic Approach to Building Community

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Keywords: *Community foundations, scholarships, donors, college access, college degree attainment, community colleges*

Reflective Practice

Introduction

Scholarships are one of the oldest forms of philanthropy, dating back to colonial days (Drezner, 2011; Gaudiani, 2003), and community foundations have a long history of providing scholarships to local students (Daun-Barnett & Lamm, 2012). These scholarship programs, however, have largely failed "to support low-income students who otherwise would not complete postsecondary education" (Hadley & Morgan, 2017, p. 3).

Founded in 1963, the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation (AAACF) had by 2014 created more than 45 scholarships, most of which were one-time awards to students meeting criteria determined by donors. For years these funds were distributed without any attempt to learn whether the scholarships were truly having an impact on degree attainment, and foundation staff did not follow up to assess their impact on students' academic or career goals. A hands-off, donor-driven approach in general has been common among community foundations (Remmer & Ruth, 2015); for scholarships, not surprisingly, this results in programs that tend to focus on rewarding merit or fund students who might otherwise still have access to college (Hadley & Morgan, 2017).

In 2014 the foundation was also preparing for a transition in staff leadership. The new leaders brought a data-driven approach to their work in line with growing calls from the field for community foundations to be more proactive than reactive in their grantmaking (Remmer & Ruth,

Key Points

- Five years ago, the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation decided to take a strategic approach to offering college scholarships that would address gaps in educational achievement among local students. To increase the impact of its scholarship program, the foundation shifted its emphasis from one-time awards to promoting degree attainment, and determined that the criteria for new scholarships would be based on impact data instead of donor intent.
- The Community Scholarship Program awards multiyear scholarships to local students of color, students from low-income families, and first-generation college students, and provides them with a dedicated college success coach to help them successfully navigate through higher education. The program is in the midst of a four-year evaluation of its impact on persistence and degree completion among its scholarship recipients, and early assessments indicate positive outcomes.
- This article outlines the evolution of the program, examining its design, implementation, and outcomes to date. To encourage replication in other communities, it concludes with recommendations for other community foundations interested in addressing disparities in access to college and degree attainment in the United States.

2015). This changing orientation of community foundation models toward an ideology of impact coincided with a larger trend of donors asking for measurable results and accountability for their giving (Crutchfield & McLeod Grant, 2008; Grace & Wendroff, 2001). It also represented an opportunity for foundation trustees to take decisive and strategic action to achieve demonstrable community impact (Millesen & Martin, 2018).

At a board retreat in Fall 2014, trustees were briefed on how the foundation administered scholarships, with an emphasis on the time commitment necessary to oversee more than 40 programs and the lack of existing data to demonstrate their impact. Instead of tracking outcomes, the staff's focus had been on assuring donors that scholarship dollars had been awarded. Also shared with the board were data from Washtenaw Futures, the county's College Access Network member, to document the persistence of large achievement gaps based on race and socioeconomic status among students pursuing postsecondary education — this despite the fact that the foundation's service area of Washtenaw County is home to Ann Arbor, considered among the most educated cities in America (McCann, 2019). Despite the efforts of a movement led by the Michigan College Access Network to increase attainment of postsecondary credentials (Daun-Barnett & Lamm, 2012), the state ranks 33rd nationally in that outcome and is below average in the Great Lakes region (Bell & Lewis, 2020). Washtenaw County's goal is to increase postsecondary attainment to 70% of the population.

In an effort to increase the impact and efficiency of the scholarship program, staff presented the board with a new approach: No new scholarships would be created — or, as some framed it, accepted from donors — unless they were part of a new Community Scholarship Program (CSP). The program which would be administered by a central scholarship committee, while the foundation would continue to honor and administer all existing scholarships in perpetuity.

As the trustees discussed this new approach, staff assured them that the foundation would not be

In an effort to increase the impact and efficiency of the scholarship program, staff presented the board with a new approach: No new scholarships would be created — or, as some framed it, accepted from donors — unless they were part of a new Community Scholarship Program (CSP).

saying no to donors; rather, they were presenting other options — with one designed specifically to address disparities in degree attainment — offering the potential to attract contemporary donors focused on impact. The board's concerns were valid; community foundations have often been found to prioritize donors' perceived interests over impact (Buteau, Chaffin & Buchanan, 2014). Foundation staff was asking the board to trust not only that the new program would increase degree attainment among the community's most vulnerable populations, but also that donors would support the change.

New donors would indeed be necessary. The trustees approved the new CSP, but with no initial funding. The new program directly addressed educational disparities by focusing on three populations: students from low-income families, first-generation college students, and students of color. Donors could still create named scholarship funds, but those would be administered under the CSP umbrella.

In Fall 2015, a potential new donor contacted the foundation to learn about opportunities to make a demonstrable difference in Washtenaw County through a significant gift. Staff presented several options, including CSP. Because it was a program merely in theory at that point, with no funding and no scholarships yet awarded, staff had to rely

TABLE 1 Community Scholarship Foundation Timeline

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Board approves program, with no funding	Anonymous donation of $1 million to launch CSP	First cohort selected and announced	Public match met within a year	Evaluation begins	Updates to program based on growth

on the compelling data behind the CSP's design to make the case. And they needed to have faith that the assertion made to trustees — that donors would respond to the data and the potential for impact — would be proven true.

Staff explained to the potential donor that CSP was part of a larger shift in the foundation's approach to scholarships, away from college access and toward degree attainment — which are very different goals. Local and national data both conclude that students can often find support to start college, but rarely attain scholarships that help them persist all the way to graduation (Hadley & Morgan, 2017). The donor found the rationale compelling, and was also intrigued by the opportunity to be the CSP's inaugural donor and kick-start the program in a meaningful way. The donor advocated for community participation in what was, after all, a community program, and also sought to prioritize public school students over students from private schools, where college preparation resources were likely to be more readily available. (See Table 1.)

Program Design

A number of foundations have notably funded college access and degree attainment support for students of color and low-income and first-generation college students. The Suder Foundation, based in Texas, devotes its resources to first-generation college students. The Boston Foundation is a partner in the city's college completion initiative, Success Boston, which focuses on first-generation, low-income students of color. The Lumina Foundation's emphasis on educational attainment gave rise to its A Stronger Nation data tracker, which measures progress nationwide on postsecondary certificate achievement. The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's scholarship programs assist students with financial needs and provide sustained support toward degree attainment (Coker & Glynn, 2017).

However, the combined aspects and features of the CSP program do appear to make it unique among community foundations. Rather than merely awarding scholarships, the AAACF's Community Scholarship Program was designed to incentivize degree completion, whether at the two- or four-year college level, by providing a dedicated college success coach and multiyear funding. A commitment to maintaining funding for the duration of a student's academic program is a critical component in supporting low-income students to achieve their full potential (Coker & Glynn, 2017). (See Table 2.)

Because data showed that local students from low-income families generally had lower GPAs than their more affluent counterparts, the foundation determined it was important to select students based on potential rather than merit. Students need only a 2.0 GPA to qualify for a CSP award, which takes into account the many factors that can impact a student's high school performance. This was a significant shift from the foundation's previous approach, which tended to focus on scholastic achievement.

In addition to changing the funding model, the foundation also designed the program to incorporate critical support services. Beyond substantial, renewable funding, many students need mentoring support to persist to graduation (Hadley & Morgan, 2017). Every CSP recipient would work with the program's college success

TABLE 2 Community Scholarship Program Eligibility Criteria

AAACF Community Scholarship Program Goal: Increase postsecondary degree attainment for Washtenaw County students with a specific focus on students who are economically disadvantaged, youth of color, and/or the first generation in their family to attend college.
Student Eligibility Criteria • Must be a student who qualifies as at least one of these criteria: ∘ Economically Disadvantaged (currently qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program) ∘ Youth of Color ∘ First-Generation College Student (neither parent having graduated with a 4-year degree) • GPA of 2.0 or higher • Resident of Washtenaw County; preference will be given to those students who are graduates of a Washtenaw County public high school • Will have graduated high school within the last 24 months and be enrolling in college for the first time

coach, who would assist students with their transition to higher education and support them in multiple ways on the path to degree attainment. The coach would help students find additional academic and social supports on campus, assist with applying for financial aid, and provide the encouragement and accountability needed to help students navigate their college journey.

The foundation relied on community partners with expertise in education to help hire and train the college success coach. In addition to Washtenaw Futures, whose data helped to inform the program design, CSP also partnered with three local institutions: Washtenaw Community College (WCC), Eastern Michigan University (EMU), and the Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD), which is also home to Washtenaw Futures. The coach was designated an employee of record at WCC and was given training from EMU. The AAACF and two local family foundations, the James A. & Faith Knight Foundation and the RNR Foundation, fund the salary of the coach. The distribution of responsibility for the coach across institutions was seen as a tool to further embed the scholarship in the local community.

The foundation and WCC had worked together before, but the dynamics of the CSP nurtured a new level of commitment from both. The partnership represents a model of engagement between an area's community foundation and community college, focused on the core goal of increasing degree attainment. The foundation's three partners bought into the vision that CSP could have a collective impact on the community by focusing on students who would benefit most from the program.

Most place-based scholarships in Michigan are considered synonymous with "promise" scholarships (Anderson, 2019), in which a municipality partners with private or public funders to provide in-state public college tuition for local high school graduates. While not a designated promise scholarship, CSP is a community-based program in every sense of the word: Local donors support scholarships for local students who are selected by a group of community volunteers for a program overseen by community organizational partners.

Implementation

In January 2016, AAACF launched the program with an anonymous $1 million endowed gift, which included a $250,000, dollar-for-dollar challenge match for a CSP Level the Playing Field Fund, named to underscore the need to facilitate more equitable college access for low-income students graduating from Washtenaw

In January 2016, AAACF launched the program with an anonymous $1 million endowed gift, which included a $250,000, dollar-for-dollar challenge match for a CSP Level the Playing Field Fund, named to underscore the need to facilitate more equitable college access for low-income students graduating from Washtenaw County public schools.

County public schools. Most importantly, the donor wanted to be anonymous to keep the focus on the community, a critical component for community buy-in as demonstrated by the donor anonymity component of the Kalamazoo Promise (Strickland, 2009).

The foundation determined that for the Level the Playing Field match to be successful, the advertisement and invitation to donate should be unveiled at its annual community meeting, which draws the AAACF's largest public audience. Staff also determined that CSP would only seem like a viable and attractive program to the community and potential donors if the foundation demonstrated that the program was underway. That meant having the first cohort of Community Scholars selected for introduction and public reveal within just a few months.

The foundation's online portal for its existing scholarship programs, which launch each year in mid-January, would be used for the CSP as well. The committee of staff and community volunteers who had been selecting recipients of some of the existing scholarships was also given responsibility for determining the new Community Scholars. Although the work of these volunteers is demanding and intense, administration of AAACF scholarships — particularly the CSP — is possible because a staff person has been dedicated to the task, which involves promoting the scholarships in local schools, interacting with students throughout the application process, and managing the volunteer selection committee. Additional staff members were also involved in fast-tracking every aspect of the CSP announcement.

Before hundreds of audience members at the foundation's May 2016 annual meeting, 11 Community Scholars were introduced. Promotion of the scholarship following that evening garnered interest, including early responses to the $250,000 match opportunity. Particularly attractive to donors was the opportunity to create a permanent, named scholarship fund at the $20,000 level if they agreed to the CSP scholarship criteria and student selection by an independent scholarship committee. The community match of $250,000, ranging from small individual gifts to several named funds within the CSP, was met in less than one year. The early success of the program has been followed by continued support because of intentional donor engagement and the foundation's promotion of CSP as a priority initiative.

Another fast-track element was the hiring of the program's first college success coach. Just as it was important to show the viability of the program with the students selected, the first coach was a critical hire. The decision that the coach should be a graduate student from EMU helped the foundation strengthen its ties with the Ypsilanti-based university, which has fewer resources than the county's major research institution in neighboring Ann Arbor. The AAACF could not have found a better choice. The coach brought to the job a grounding in student affairs and was herself from the demographic background targeted by the CSP. Not only was she viewed as a coach, but students also remarked that she was an inspirational role model — proof that someone like them could succeed in college.

The shift to promoting degree attainment required certain measurements to be put in place

to monitor that progress. Measuring scholarship outcomes and tracking data, never a part of other AAACF scholarships, were essential components of the multiyear structure of the CSP awards. For the program's targeted student population, benchmarking data show that while 70% enroll in college for a first semester, subsequent enrollment falls to 30%. The foundation set a goal for 80% of its CSP students to enroll their first semester and 40% to reenroll in subsequent semesters; and a program goal for 40% of its students to graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree, also above benchmarks for the population.

Evolution

The CSP has evolved over its five years of its existence from a program intentionally created, yet without funding, to one that has awarded $1 million to 50 students. As a newer initiative, as well as one with significant continued growth, CSP has been continually assessed and refined to ensure it is furthering degree attainment. That ongoing review has led to changes to several aspects of the program.

Funding Packages

When the CSP was launched, Community Scholars were presented with renewable awards for up to five years and a coach to encourage persistence. Shifting from one-time to multiyear awards was new territory for the foundation, and the initial multiyear levels represented larger annual amounts than many of the AAACF's existing scholarships. The award for students attending a two-year institution was $1,500, renewable two times (a three-year award); for students at four-year institutions, it was a $3,000 scholarship renewable four times (a five-year award).

To all constituents, including donors who expressed concern about the true impact of the program given the costs of a college education, it became clear that the actual award amounts needed to be increased. Although the program had been designed as a multiyear award to encourage persistence to graduation, the prescribed amounts for each year were not sufficient to create that incentive and also failed to provide flexibility. Students had different financial needs to begin with and, based on those needs, required differing amounts of funding at different points in their academic progression.

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Additionally, the foundation learned that the impact of its funding was sometimes compromised because of the way student need was calculated by the federal government for student loans and scholarships. For example, a student might begin freshman year with other need-based financial aid in place. If that student received a CSP scholarship administered directly to their student account, their previous need-based aid might be reduced if the CSP award added to what was calculated as household income. A way to overcome this issue is to distribute what is designated as needed by the university at a given time and to distribute remaining funding as needed in the future, such as later years when students incur costs for more credit hours, laboratory fees, and other expenses.

The need for more substantial funding packages could be accommodated because CSP's endowment size grew significantly through additional gifts. During the time of growth, the foundation had also recognized that the timing of the funding needed to be adjusted from the initial yearly

Reflective Practice

In addition to the coaches and the dedicated AAACF staff person, CSP requires personnel from three key areas of the foundation — grantmaking, philanthropy, and finance — to work in tandem with the CEO. From securing gifts to working with the scholarship committee to cutting checks to the institutions and more, CSP has created opportunities to deepen working relationships at the foundation.

allocations. The packages for all CSP students have changed significantly. Each is now awarded up to $20,000, to be distributed according to their needs for up to five consecutive academic years. This flexibility in support is designed to encourage persistence and degree attainment.

Even with the increased funding and flexibility, the foundation was aware that students often face financial barriers unaddressed by financial aid that could also impede their progress (Coker & Glynn, 2017). In response, the AAACF allocated resources to create an Emergency Aid and Financial Assistance Fund, which was also supported by donors. This fund has provided Community Scholars with money for books, transportation, groceries during breaks when student housing does not provides meals, and even expenses related to study abroad. The partner organizations and college success coach were critical to identifying this need and the difference that meeting it could make in helping students finish their degrees.

Staffing and Training

The college success coach has proven to be a critical program element and one that has also changed over time. The original coach finished her degree program and took a position as an academic advisor at another institution, although she remained engaged with students in a volunteer capacity. As the first coach, she was also able to provide important insights. She recommended that the foundation hold an orientation for Community Scholars at WCC for the coach and students to get to know one another and AAACF staff before the start of the fall semester. Research supports this suggestion, finding that such orientations are particularly helpful for matriculation among first-generation and low-income students, who often face challenges entering college (Castleman & Page, 2020). Another effort being considered is to connect new Community Scholars with more advanced students, particularly those enrolled at the same institution.

Following the advice of the first coach, her successor organized an orientation. When that coach was not able to remain in the position, the foundation and its program partners saw the benefits of having multiple coaches, especially as the program continued to grow. As of 2019, two full-time coaches serve the 50 Community Scholars enrolled across four CSP cohorts. Having two coaches ensures continuity, allows students to gain different perspectives, and enables the coaches to provide support to each other.

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Donor Response and Engagement

In addition to strengthening internal staff relationships, CSP has fostered connections with program partners and donors. The $250,000

match was met in less than one year. Many donors who began their support during the match have not only renewed support, but often increased it. Even larger gifts have been secured since the match completion, as the program has evolved.

Foundation staff felt exposing some existing legacy scholarship donors to the CSP could result in conversion of those funds. Through education about program objectives and opportunities to meet Community Scholars and others involved in the program at the annual CSP luncheon, AAACF has drawn several preexisting funds under the CSP umbrella. These donors have been attracted by the sustainability of the program as a community-driven partnership and the uniqueness of the coaching component.

Indeed, funding the college success coach position has been so attractive that one of the local family foundations supporting the position also provided funding for a four-year, longitudinal evaluation with hopes that its findings will encourage other funders to replicate the CSP program in communities nationwide.

Evaluation

The evaluation is being conducted by a higher education faculty member at EMU, which is not only a partner in CSP's administration, but also an institution with a dedicated mission of service to the local community. The localized aspect of CSP makes the EMU connection to the evaluation work significant, as does the fact that many Community Scholars are likely to study at EMU.

The evaluation and assessment plan includes both formative and summative evaluations. Utilizing interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the evaluators created a task- and outcome-oriented evaluation model that gives CSP ongoing feedback for continuous improvement (Musick, 2006). As such, all evaluation and assessment efforts occur in close collaboration with CSP staff. Grounded in organizational and student development theory, the evaluators intend to answer two main questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the AAACF Community Scholarship Program and how do they relate to one another?
2. How do CSP characteristics relate to student outcomes (e.g., persistence and degree attainment)?

Although the research questions may seem broad, they have allowed the evaluators the flexibility to capture many aspects of the program. However, they have ultimately been tasked with identifying the impact of the coaches on students' persistence and graduation attainment. By understanding and documenting the characteristics of the program and their relationship to one another, the evaluators will be able to understand the role of the college success coach as well as other program elements in student success.

The first year of the evaluation focused on developing a baseline for the program. All major stakeholders were interviewed to understand their expectations and goals for CSP. An artifact analysis conducted to determine if modifications were necessary to application materials and the online portal led CSP to make recommended changes. During the second year, evaluators interviewed Community Scholars and coaches to assess the nature of their relationship and the ways in which coaches were or were not having an impact on student success. Evaluators made recommendations for tracking student-coach interactions and other aspects of the program. During the third year just begun, evaluators will continue to interview scholarship recipients and coaches as well as students who applied for the scholarship and did not receive it. Additionally, evaluators will work closely with CSP staff to create a procedures manual for coaching and program logistics. In the fourth and final year, the evaluation will compare CSP to similar programs across the country, identifying common and unique characteristics and evaluating the extent to which successful components of CSP can be transferred to other settings.

Preliminary results indicate that the program is helping students move toward degree attainment. During interviews, Community Scholars

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repeatedly stated that having a coach and knowing in advance that funding is in place for multiple years allow them to focus on succeeding in school rather than worrying about how to pay for it. The coach is often described as a supportive mentor, and students see their guidance as critical to helping avoid making choices that could have harmed their academic success, such as moving out of a dormitory because of a roommate conflict, changing schools without understanding the full implications, or failing to take advantage of institutional resources. In other words, coaching helped them to persist toward degree attainment.

Outcomes

The donor response to CSP has made it one of the most significant programs in AAACF's history — not just in contributions, more than $4 million in less than 5 years — but also in the number of donors involved: 100-plus. The exact number is a challenge to pinpoint because some donations have been given collectively. One group of donors, for example, is composed of a high school's booster club members who pooled contributions to create a named fund to memorialize a student lost in a tragic accident. Although the scholarship may not be awarded to a graduate from that specific high school, what was most important to the supporters was assurance that the student's name and story be preserved and carried on in perpetuity for the benefit of the community.

This is just one case demonstrating that donors do indeed respond to a program based on data and impact. The board's initial fear, that no longer accepting new scholarship funds that did not fall under a central rubric would turn off supporters, was laid to rest: CSP has attracted many new donors and enhanced relationships with many existing donors. In the handful of instances where potential donors inquire about establishing a scholarship fund with particular criteria that AAACF no longer accommodates, the foundation is still able to provide a community service by referring the donor to a specific institution of higher education. When trustees now consider changes to other traditional strategies and practices, they routinely cite the community's response to CSP as evidence that donors will respond to documented impact. And with several estate commitments now in place to provide some confidence that CSP will continue significant growth, the foundation will likely focus on greater efforts to support nonscholarship aspects of the program, such as the Emergency Aid and Financial Assistance Fund, the coaching positions, and related staff work.

The foundation has also learned that the scholarship award does not always provide students with the intended aid because of the practice of "scholarship displacement," by which colleges and universities reduce or eliminate financial aid when a student's total scholarship awards exceed the total cost of attendance for an academic year. The foundation is part of statewide policy discussions to change that practice so that privately funded scholarships, such as CSP, do not displace other financial aid that institutions can provide to students (Bell & Lewis, 2020). Although this policy and advocacy role in the scholarship arena represents new territory for the AAACF, the work is in keeping with CSP's goal to promote degree attainment. Every barrier to a student's graduation must be addressed, and the foundation will continue to evolve its program and practices to meet these needs.

Community Scholars are being tracked by cohort year to monitor their progress, and they are all above benchmarks for enrollment and persistence. In Summer 2019, the foundation

celebrated its first two CSP graduates, students who received their associate degrees and transferred to four-year institutions to pursue bachelor's degrees.

Implications and Recommendations

The foundation has fielded calls from across the country seeking information about CSP, and as it continues to track program data AAACF will share its findings so that similar programs might be created in other communities. The program's structure, evolution, and outcomes to date are being shared through this article in hopes of drawing attention and interest from other foundations. As the evaluation is completed and more data are available, the AAACF will seek additional ways to share replicable concepts with other communities for building a local scholarship program that encourages educational access and attainment.

In the meantime, most communities across the country mirror the data in Washtenaw County demonstrating that young people of color, from low-income families, or who are the first in their families to attend college do not have equitable access to higher education and opportunities for degree attainment. Here are some approaches for funders seeking strategic ways to create impact on this issue in their communities:

- **Know the data.** The foundation AAACF recommends looking to local college access networks to help identify gaps in educational access and degree attainment. These data can inform the case for making changes in scholarship approaches. Beyond reviewing available data, a foundation may begin collecting its own data. The AAACF did not begin monitoring persistence and achievement data until the founding of CSP because most of its scholarships were focused on first-semester matriculation.

- **Be willing to take bold action.** The AAACF's board agreed not to accept new scholarship funds that did not fall under the bold program it developed. Despite some requests for new scholarship funds with different criteria, the foundation held firm.

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Some donors agreed to the CSP structure and those who did not were referred elsewhere; but inquiries from all prospective donors are addressed respectfully. The program has been successful because it is based not only on student data, but also on data from the philanthropic field that show contemporary donors respond to efforts that can demonstrate impact.

- **Steward all supporters and encourage new ones.** The AAACF agreed to administer existing scholarship funds in perpetuity as a legacy institution, even as it has focused on finding new supporters and giving existing scholarship donors the opportunity to move their funds under the CSP umbrella.

- **Work in new ways.** Foundation staff worked across internal teams for the greater goal of the program. Those from the grantmaking side who administered scholarships, philanthropy staff who worked with donors, and financial staff who monitor every aspect of the fund and distributions are in regular contact and collaboration. Relationships have been enhanced by working toward a mutual goal.

- **Be flexible and adapt.** The AAACF has evolved the program's design as it has learned from implementation and reacted to unforeseen issues, such as scholarship

displacement. Although the three founding criteria of the program have remained, nearly every other aspect of the program has changed in the short period of time since its public introduction in 2016 — from the funding packages to the staffing of the coach position.

As the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's Community Scholarship Program continues to evolve, it will remain a program that goes beyond awarding scholarships as it engages the entire community.

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Partnering for Postsecondary Success in Rural Texas

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Keywords: *Rural, grantmaking, capacity building, collaboration*

Introduction

Nearly 700,000 students attend schools in rural regions of Texas[1] (Showalter, Hartman, Johnson, & Klein, 2019). These areas are abundant in natural resources and diverse in population, and they are good places to make a home: 79% of rural Texas residents rate the quality of life in their community as good or excellent (Strategic Research Associates, 2018). Across the nation and within Texas, rural students match or outperform their peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the eighth grade and graduate from high school at high rates (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015).

Despite these strengths, young people who live in rural areas are significantly less likely to participate in postsecondary education. Nationally, about 42% of people ages 18–24 are enrolled in a college or university, but within rural communities the participation rate is only 29% (NCES, 2015). Among those who do enroll, only 42% graduate within six years (National Student Clearing House Research Center [NSCRC], 2018). Although this is comparable to the completion rate for urban students, when combined with low college-going rates the result is significantly lower educational attainment in rural regions overall. About 41% of people in urban areas hold at least an associate degree, as compared to 28% of people in rural areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2017).

Key Points

- Although students living in rural areas perform academically on par with their peers, they are less likely to complete a postsecondary credential due to geographic, economic, and other barriers. Greater Texas Foundation, a private grantmaker focused on postsecondary student success in Texas, fosters rural collaborations as part of its philanthropic strategy.
- This article reflects on lessons learned by foundation staff from this strand of work. It describes innovative models for postsecondary support developed by the foundation's rural partners, discusses the need to balance direct program support and capacity building, and emphasizes the importance of visiting rural communities in person.
- To conclude, the article suggests several ways funders can deepen their engagement with the rural communities they serve.

Several factors can make it difficult for rural students to earn a certificate or degree. The small size of some school districts can create a close-knit community but can also make it difficult to provide resources that help prepare students for college. About 23% of rural students take dual enrollment courses[2] — a rate significantly higher than the national average — but only 10% of rural students pass Advanced Placement (AP) courses, compared with 19% of high school

[1] Definitions of "rural" vary widely. The estimate offered here represents the number of students enrolled in Texas school districts classified by the National Center for Education Statistics as rural fringe, rural distant, or rural remote. Essentially, this definition includes communities of fewer than 2,500 residents that are at least five miles away from an urbanized area or at least 2.5 miles from an urbanized cluster. See https://nces.ed.gov/programs/handbook/data/pdf/appendix_d.pdf and https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html.

[2] Dual-enrollment courses allow high school students to take coursework from postsecondary institutions for college credit.

Recently we adopted a refreshed strategy for 2020–2024 that includes a commitment to continue dedicating a portion of our funds to work in rural areas, with an emphasis on collaborative efforts that span multiple institutions, sectors, or communities.

students overall (Showalter et al., 2019). Some rural districts can offer only a small number of upper-level math and science courses because they don't have enough teachers and students to form the classes. And regardless of subject area, opportunities for professional development and collaboration are often lacking for teachers in isolated areas (Hott, 2018).

Physical distance from institutions of higher education makes it harder for students to visit in person and imagine life on a college campus, and it means those who do choose to pursue a credential often must leave home to do so. About 5.4 million people in the United States live more than a 45-minute drive away from any institution of higher education, and most of these individuals live in rural areas (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019). And, although rural economies vary widely, students in some communities have limited exposure to careers that require postsecondary education and to mentors or school-based advisors who can guide them to and through those career pathways. Finally, the high cost of attending college, which includes not only tuition and fees but also living expenses and deferred income, is a barrier for many students, and those in rural areas are no exception: Nearly one in six rural K–12 students live below the poverty line (Showalter et al., 2019).

Since 2014, Greater Texas Foundation (GTF) has worked to improve postsecondary access and completion for rural Texas students. As a private funder whose overarching mission is to promote postsecondary success across the state, with a particular focus on underserved and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, we recognize that to increase the number of Texans who hold a certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree, we must include the many young people who live in rural areas of the state.

To that end, as one part of our philanthropic strategy we fund efforts to foster rural student success. Between 2014 and 2019, our board approved $4.9 million in grants to entities seeking to develop, test, and scale innovative postsecondary pathways and systems of support for rural students. Recently we adopted a refreshed strategy for 2020–2024 that includes a commitment to continue dedicating a portion of our funds to work in rural areas, with an emphasis on collaborative efforts that span multiple institutions, sectors, or communities.

In addition to grantmaking, we actively seek to develop relationships and identify partnership opportunities in rural areas of the state, including through our membership in Texas Rural Funders, a collaborative of philanthropic organizations seeking to bring additional resources and attention to rural Texas.[3] We also support research and reporting on rural issues as part of a broader effort to focus attention and resources on these important communities.

Although we have much more to learn about rural communities in our state, our work to date has taught us three lessons worth sharing with our colleagues in philanthropy:

1. Rural communities can develop innovative models for postsecondary support that fit their unique strengths and needs.

2. To make the strongest impact, invest in programs and in building capacity.

[3] See https://texasruralfunders.org.

3. There is no substitute for visiting in person.

Innovative Models

Often, we hear deficit-based narratives about rural communities that emphasize limited resources, struggling economies, and a refusal to adapt to change. Our experience has been quite different. We are privileged to support collaborations across Texas that address barriers to education in creative and resourceful ways.

Lee College, a two-year institution of higher education serving the city of Baytown and its neighboring counties, recognized that high school students on the outskirts of its service area in Liberty County had to travel up to 46 miles one way to attend dual-credit classes on campus, a barrier that made dual-credit participation prohibitive for many. By partnering with five school districts, local community development corporations, and GTF, the college established the Lee College Education Center in Liberty to provide dual-credit classes leading to an associate degree or certificate, as well as continuing education, GED classes, and ESL instruction for adults in the community. Dual-credit participation for students in this underserved region increased by 23% thanks to the partnership.

On the opposite side of the state, the Roscoe Collegiate Independent School District (RCISD) tackled the same challenge — providing students access to diverse postsecondary pathways — in a different way. District leaders transformed their traditional high school into an early college high school and developed a comprehensive curriculum that begins preparing students for college and career from preschool onward. They also partnered with regional employers to establish veterinary technician, drone operation, welding, and other certificate programs. In 2010, 38% of RCISD seniors attained an associate degree from Western Texas College upon completing high school; today, more than 90% reach that milestone in addition to graduating with an array of skills that make them highly employable. With support from GTF, the district has become a demonstration site for other districts interested in building their own comprehensive college and career readiness models.

Often, we hear deficit-based narratives about rural communities that emphasize limited resources, struggling economies, and a refusal to adapt to change. Our experience has been quite different. We are privileged to support collaborations across Texas that address barriers to education in creative and resourceful ways.

Advising and Teacher Development

The foundation funded another collaboration to address a different barrier for rural students: limited access to college and career advising. The Rural Student Success Initiative (RSSI) is led by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, a well-established, trusted agency with a presence in nearly every county in the state. This multiyear demonstration project delivers intensive technical assistance to 15 rural school districts across Texas so they can maximize local assets and develop partnerships to collectively build a college-going culture and improve students' postsecondary outcomes. Although the RSSI is still in its early stages, participating districts already have made strides in developing the data infrastructure they need to track student outcomes and in providing students with critical resources, including college fairs and transportation to local institutions of higher education.

We also have seen unique solutions to another challenge: professional development for teachers who have limited opportunities close to home and few, if any, peers teaching the same subject matter in their school or district. Advancing Inquiry in Middle Mathematics (AIMM) is a joint

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initiative of the University of Texas at Tyler, Sam Houston State University, and Stephen F. Austin University to provide East Texas math teachers with high-quality support to improve their math instruction. Through a combination of in-person meetings, observations, site visits, online instruction, and reflective assignments, the program reduces the barriers created by geographic distance and allows educators to broaden their network of colleagues. Participants report the techniques and attitudes they have learned through AIMM are contributing to increased achievement and engagement in their classrooms.

Meanwhile, a team of researchers at Texas A&M University-Commerce exploring low-cost, high-quality approaches to professional development for rural educators found that even a simple intervention like a series of videos on research-based instructional techniques can enable educators to adopt more effective teaching strategies and let go of approaches that do not serve students as well.

An Asset-Based Perspective

These are just a few examples of the inventive and resourceful work happening across Texas to ensure rural students receive educational opportunities just as rich as those offered to their urban and suburban peers. Although each of these initiatives is unique, they share common keys to success: strong local leaders who are committed to their students, a thorough and data-based understanding of barriers and opportunities in the community, and at least one partnership with another organization to maximize resources and fill gaps.

As a funder, we certainly can't take credit for the success of these initiatives; all credit goes to the people doing the work. What we can say, though, is that if we viewed rural communities through a deficit lens, we would not have seen the potential of these efforts and would not have dedicated resources to support them. What a loss that would have been for rural Texas students and for us. There are many more opportunities to fund high-impact education initiatives in rural areas for funders who are looking for them with an asset-based perspective.

Balance Program Support and Capacity Building

Funders sometimes wrestle with the question of whether philanthropic dollars are best spent solving system-level problems or addressing immediate needs. In the education field, issues like limited postsecondary opportunities, teacher isolation, and poverty require long-term attention and investment. Meanwhile, though, thousands of students need access to college and career pathways, rigorous instruction, and resources now.

This dilemma is particularly pointed in rural areas. Small towns, school districts, and institutions of higher education necessarily have lean staffing structures, leaving leaders and educators very little time for the kinds of activities that lend themselves to systems change. Accessing and analyzing student data, engaging in strategic planning, and participating in conferences and other learning opportunities are difficult to manage on top of critical day-to-day responsibilities like keeping buses running and classrooms staffed — particularly if extensive

travel is required. At the same time, with limited financial resources it can be difficult to sustain fundamental programs and activities that meet students' immediate needs.

Given this tension, we believe supporting both capacity building and direct service is critical if we want to serve rural communities well. We try to balance long-term and short-term priorities across our rural portfolio — to see the forest and the trees all at once. On the "forest" level, we invest in knowledge-building activities to inform important decisions that impact rural students and schools. We joined our colleagues at Texas Rural Funders to support a rural component of the research phase for the Texas 2036 statewide strategic plan, for example, along with a symposium on rural Texas exploring what the data mean for our state.

We also fund smaller-scale research and capacity-building work to strengthen the long-term viability of organizations serving rural communities. The Rural Student Success Initiative, for instance, grew out of a small planning grant that allowed extension leaders to travel the state learning about postsecondary needs in rural communities, then develop a vision not only for the program itself, but also for its evaluability and sustainability. Beyond funding, we build capacity by connecting our rural colleagues with each other and with the rest of our network so they can learn from each other, discover new ideas for using existing resources, and collaborate to solve shared problems.

At the same time, we give attention to the "trees" to help meet immediate needs where we can. Our partnership with RCISD is a good example. The grant covered a portion of the costs associated with becoming a demonstration site to drive statewide learning — but it also included support for day-to-day needs like faculty professional development and parent meetings. Similarly, GTF's funding for AIMM enabled us to learn about a novel approach to instructional change, but it also provided stipends and supplies for the teachers who participated.

Given this tension, we believe supporting both capacity building and direct service is critical if we want to serve rural communities well. We try to balance long-term and short-term priorities across our rural portfolio — to see the forest and the trees all at once.

We continue to think carefully about this issue as we expand our network of rural partners. We want to leverage the power of strategic planning, research, program evaluation, and dissemination to help grantees make their work sustainable because we don't have the wherewithal to support even the most successful organizations in perpetuity. At the same time, we cannot forget that sometimes, a short-term infusion of funding for direct services is exactly what a community needs to build momentum toward their long-term goals.

Visit Communities in Person

This principle is true for grantmaking in any context, but we have found it especially powerful in our relationships with organizations serving rural students. We have traveled to St. Augustine, Nacogdoches, Roscoe, Schulenberg, and other Texas communities to get to know applicants and see firsthand the impact of GTF's grants. Each time, we have started the visit with questions and uncertainties, and each time we have come away with deeper understanding and confidence. The opportunity to see for ourselves a community's strengths, needs, people, and plans makes all the difference in our understanding of the work we are potentially or currently funding.

In one case, a rural organization submitted an ambitious proposal for a regional collaboration to strengthen dual-credit participation and

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outcomes. Although their end goal resonated with us, we were concerned that the plan faced logistical challenges and sought to accomplish too much in a short period of time. Instead of terminating the application process, however, we accepted an invitation to visit in person with representatives of the collaborative. The detailed discussion that ensued showed us how committed and thoughtful the team had been as they developed the project. The meeting also allowed us to clarify certain elements of our funding process and share what we knew about similar efforts in other rural parts of the state. As a result, we were able to award a planning grant, enabling the collaborative to draw up a well-researched blueprint for a sustainable dual-credit program that met their community's needs.

Texas is large and our staff is small, so we still rely on telephone, video, and email for much of our work. Communication through any medium is incredibly important. We appreciate any opportunity we have, though, to spend time face to face with the smart, dedicated people who serve students in rural Texas.

Our strategy for serving rural communities continues to evolve as we learn more. For example, we recently shifted from a broad interest in proposals from rural applicants to a more specific focus on fostering collaboration and collective action. Our rationale for this shift was that given the small size and limited resources of individual rural communities, the impact of a grant to a single organization working independently will be modest and short-lived. On the other hand, making grants that allow multiple entities in a region to work together yields a number of benefits: more extensive buy-in from a wider range of stakeholders, pooled resources to foster long-term sustainability, shared knowledge, a more diverse range of perspectives to inform the work, and economies of scale. We are also continuing to build our network of rural colleagues, mindful that as a funder located in a city, we need to lean heavily on those with direct experience in rural Texas to understand the communities we seek to serve.

Funder Support for Rural Communities

There is one final lesson we have learned about rural philanthropy so far: there isn't nearly enough of it. According to the most recent analysis, 19% of the U.S. population lives in a rural area, but only 6%–7% of private grantmaking benefits rural communities (Pender, 2015). Funders spend about $88 per person in rural communities, about half of what they spend per person in urban communities. Granted, this analysis was conducted in 2015 based on 2005–2010 data — but the age of the data itself suggests greater attention to rural philanthropy is warranted.

The good news is that your organization doesn't need to dramatically alter its strategy or adopt a formal portfolio focused on rural issues (although we won't argue against it!). You don't need a special process or set of standards to manage rural grants; we handle ours the same way we do the rest of our portfolio. There are, however, simple steps any funder can take to support rural communities in ways that align with their mission and strategy:

- Become familiar with data on rural students in or near the regions you serve. The Rural

School and Community Trust[3] is a good place to start; its biennial *Why Rural Matters* reports offer detailed data about rural education conditions in each state. Your state education agency, the USDA's Atlas of Rural and Small-Town America,[4] and the U.S. Census Bureau are rich resources as well. As you dig in, you may well find that answers to some of your questions have not yet been explored and published. These are opportunities for your organization to build the field by supporting new research.

- Visit and build relationships in rural parts of your service area to proactively identify opportunities for partnership. Local officials, district superintendents, and college leaders can provide you with important context and connect you to other community members. Listen carefully and ask questions.

- When appropriate, consider asking applicants focused on urban areas if it is feasible to include a rural site in their proposed work, or to add a rural lens to their proposed research project. You don't want to force work that isn't a fit, of course, but in some cases you may find that the organization welcomes the opportunity to extend their impact.

- When needed, take some extra time to guide rural applicants through your organization's funding process and expectations if they are new to your work. As with the value of in-person visits, this is a principle that holds true for any applicant, regardless of whether they represent an urban or rural community. It is especially important when working with applicants from rural areas, however, since leaders in smaller communities often play multiple roles and may have less time to fine-tune a grant proposal given the extent of their other responsibilities. It may also be necessary to work to identify an appropriate fiscal agent for the grant if the original applicant does not have structures in place that would allow them to manage the funds directly. This initial investment of time upfront will yield a higher-quality application and grant in the long term.

Although our five years of intentional funding and partnership in rural Texas have yielded significant benefits, we know there remain many more opportunities to support rural students as they pursue their postsecondary goals. We look forward to deepening our learning and impact — and we hope you'll join us.

Reflective Practice

[3] See http://www.ruraledu.org

[4] See https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/atlas-of-rural-and-small-town-america/

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Executive Summaries

VOL. 12 ISSUE 3

Results

7 Scaling Rural Access: One Foundation's Partnership to Expand FAFSA Completion Across Mississippi

B. Tait Kellogg, Ph.D., Higher Ed Insight; Ann Hendrick, M.S., and Kierstan Dufour, M.S., Woodward Hines Education Foundation; and Patricia Steele, Ph.D., Higher Ed Insight

In rural states, under-resourced groups are sometimes left behind when quantitative scaling strategies involve a more cost-effective focus on areas with a concentrated population. This article discusses Get2College, a model by the Woodward Hines Education Foundation to provide financial aid counseling to Mississippi high school students, and a study that assessed efforts to increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA. Get2College's approach to scaling involved a partnership with the state's rurally based community colleges and leveraged their established support networks to expand its outreach to the state's often underserved students and raise FAFSA completion rates among that population. As foundations seek to support nonprofits with scaling their initiatives, a key question to consider when choosing an approach should always be: Who might be excluded?

DOI: 10.9707/1944-5660.1527

19 Advancing Social Determinants of Health Through Investments in Postsecondary Attainment and Sustaining Employment

Melissa B. Eggen, M.P.H., J'Aime C. Jennings, Ph.D., and Molly O'Keefe, M.S.H.A., University of Louisville; and Brandy N. Kelly Pryor, Ph.D., and Leslie Clements, M.S., Humana Foundation

In 2018, the Humana Foundation shifted the focus of its work to the social determinants of health, with the key aim of promoting health equity. With this new focus came a recognition that this commitment would require a more strategic approach to grantmaking. This article explores the foundation's Strategic Community Investment Program, which focuses in part on postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. This article shares key learnings from the literature and coordinated practice in communities that were used to revise the foundation's strategy, and concludes with suggestions for other foundations interested in addressing postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities they serve.

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Tools

32 Moving the Needle or Spinning Our Wheels? A Framework for Long-Lasting, Equitable Change in Education

Heather McCambly, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate, Northwestern University, and Eleanor R. Anderson, Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh

In the quest for equitable and lasting reform in postsecondary education, philanthropy's great strength is its flexibility to make use of multiple strategies. However, as most grantmakers know firsthand, not all strategy combinations lead to lasting systemic change. This article offers an actionable approach for designing and analyzing philanthropically funded movements in order to remake an area of educational policy or practice. It introduces a tool, rooted in organizational research, to understand and predict the circumstances under which different combinations of strategies are likely to lead to lasting change. The tool is applied to two real-world examples, the movements for degree reclamation and community college data capacity, with particular attention to deepening funders' analytic and strategic attention to dismantling educational inequities.

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47 Investing in Mission-Driven Advocacy

Raymond AlQaisi, M.P.P., and Carrie Warick, M.P.P., National College Attainment Network

Philanthropy has a significant role to play in public policy advocacy, both in involving the individuals they support in advocacy and ensuring that advocates have the tools to be successful — not only in funding, but also in robust capacity-building assistance. Looking at the work of the National College Attainment Network, this article explores how philanthropic investments can impact advocacy, in both financial and capacity-building support, through a recounting of a recent advocacy grantmaking initiative. It also details the key conditions conducive to policy change and the supports that were provided to grantees during the funding period. Included is a specific issue-area case study on the impact of the collective grantee cohort.

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Reflective Practice

60 Emergent Learning: Increasing the Impact of Foundation-Driven Strategies to Support College Enrollment and Completion

Kimberly Hanauer, M.A., UnlockED; Stacy Sneed, B.A., Woodward Hines Education Foundation; and Bill DeBaun, M.P.P., National College Attainment Network

While the workforce requires a greater level of education to earn a family-sustaining wage, Americans in the lowest income quartile have achieved only incremental increases in postsecondary completion. This article examines lessons learned as part of the continued development of the Get2College Pilot School Program, an initiative of the Woodward Hines

Education Foundation designed to test a strategy for increasing college enrollment among Mississippi students through greater college exploration opportunities and application and financial aid supports. Four major lessons include: Begin with a commitment to engagement between school districts and school administrators; create a "college team" at each school to embed support for enrollment and completion; build a strong theory of change and evaluation method; and customize support strategies to regional contexts and individual schools.

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70 The AAACF Community Scholarship Program: A Strategic Approach to Building Community

Shelley Strickland, Ph.D., Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, and Carmen M. McCallum, Ph.D., Eastern Michigan University

A hands-off, donor-driven approach in general has been common among community foundations; for scholarships, this results in programs that tend to focus on rewarding merit or fund students who might otherwise still have access to college. The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation's new approach presented donors with other options including one designed to address disparities in degree attainment and focused on impact. The new Community Scholarship Program provides multi-year scholarships to students who are first generation, from low-income families, and youth of color, pairing each with a College Success Coach. This article outlines the program and concludes with recommendations for other community foundations interested in addressing disparities in access to college and degree attainment.

DOI: 10.9707/1944-5660.1532

81 Partnering for Postsecondary Success in Rural Texas

Allison Pennington, M.Ed., M.P.A., Greater Texas Foundation

Although students living in rural areas perform academically on par with their peers, they are less likely to complete a postsecondary credential due to geographic, economic, and other barriers. Greater Texas Foundation, a private grantmaker focused on postsecondary student success in Texas, fosters rural collaborations as part of its philanthropic strategy. This article reflects on lessons learned by foundation staff from this strand of work. It describes innovative models for postsecondary support developed by the foundation's rural partners, discusses the need to balance direct program support and capacity building, and emphasizes the importance of visiting rural communities in person. The article suggests several ways funders can deepen their engagement with the rural communities they serve.

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Call for Papers

FOR VOLUME 13, ISSUE 4: Community Leadership and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Abstracts of up to 250 words are being solicited for Vol. 13, Issue 4, of *The Foundation Review.* This issue, sponsored by the C. S. Mott Foundation, is focused on Community Leadership and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The SDGs, based on five pillars for sustainable development (economic, social, environmental, cultural, security), acknowledge that sustainable development needs to happen everywhere and that inequality exists within all communities. As such, the SDGs are meant to be implemented in all nations, with a focus on community-level actions, and indicators are meant to ensure that "no one is left behind."

The goal of this issue is to disseminate what has been learned about how the SDGs have been used by the philanthropic sector at the community level as a communications, organizing, and evaluation framework. International contributions are encouraged.

Papers for this issue might address issues such as:

- What are the benefits for communities and community-focused funders in using the SDGs? Can it be demonstrated that using the framework has led to better outcomes for communities?
- How have the SDGs been used to promote coordinated community action? How have community, corporate, and family foundations used them for collaboration? How are they related to other familiar tools and frameworks (e.g., impact investing, collective impact) for community-level collaboration and shared metrics?
- How does the global nature of the goals help or hinder their use at the community level?
- What role do the SDGs play in communicating within and across community stakeholders? Are there examples of how they have been used effectively to bring communities together?
- What are ways in which the SDGs have informed community-level investment and other non-grantmaking decisions of foundations?

Abstracts are due January 4, 2021. If a full paper is invited, it will be due June 15, 2021 for consideration for publication in December 2021. Submit abstracts to submissions@foundationreview.org.

Abstracts are solicited in four categories:

- **Results.** Papers in this category generally report on findings from evaluations of foundation-funded work. Papers should include a description of the theory of change (logic model, program theory), a description of the grant-making strategy, the evaluation methodology, the results, and discussion. The discussion should focus on what has been learned both about the programmatic content and about grantmaking and other foundation roles (convening, etc.).

- **Tools.** Papers in this category should describe tools useful for foundation staff or boards. By "tool" we mean a systematic, replicable method intended for a specific purpose. For example, a protocol to assess community readiness and standardized facilitation methods would be considered tools. The actual tool should be included in the article where practical. The paper should describe the rationale for the tool, how it was developed, and available evidence of its usefulness.

- **Sector.** Papers in this category address issues that confront the philanthropic sector as whole, such as diversity, accountability, etc. These are typically empirically based; literature reviews are also considered.

- **Reflective Practice.** The reflective practice articles rely on the knowledge and experience of the authors, rather than on formal evaluation methods or designs. In these cases, it is because of their perspective about broader issues, rather than specific initiatives, that the article is valuable.

Book Reviews: *The Foundation Review* publishes reviews of relevant books. Please contact the editor to discuss submitting a review. Reviewers must be free of conflicts of interest.

Authors can view full manuscript specifications and standards before submitting an abstract at https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/for_authors.html.

Questions? Contact Teri Behrens, editor, at behrenst@foundationreview.org or (734) 646-2874.

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