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Executive Summaries

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Results

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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

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?

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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

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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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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

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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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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.

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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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