

# Investing in Degrees

*Engaging Local Funders in  
Degree Attainment Collaboratives*

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## About FSG

FSG is a mission-driven consulting firm supporting leaders in creating large-scale, lasting social change. Through strategy, evaluation, and research we help many types of actors—individually and collectively—make progress against the world’s toughest problems.

Our teams work across all sectors by partnering with leading foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. We seek to reimagine social change by identifying ways to maximize the impact of existing resources, amplifying the work of others to help advance knowledge and practice, and inspiring change agents around the world to achieve greater impact.

As part of our nonprofit mission, FSG also directly supports learning communities, such as the Collective Impact Forum and the Shared Value Initiative, to provide the tools and relationships that change agents need to be successful.

Learn more about FSG at [www.fsg.org](http://www.fsg.org).

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## About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with degrees, certificates, and other high-quality credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina’s outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an equitable, accessible, responsive, and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.

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# INTRODUCTION

Lumina Foundation's (Lumina) mission is to expand access and success in education beyond high school, particularly among adults, first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color. Lumina sees a unique opportunity to leverage the role of cities and communities to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025. To realize this opportunity, Lumina has invested in **place-based, collaborative efforts focused on degree attainment** in cities and regions across the country through programs such as the Community Partnership for Attainment (CPA) and the Lumina Latino Student Success Effort. As the foundation implements its new strategic plan, it is interested in understanding how it can more effectively engage businesses to achieve its broader goal of increasing the proportion of Americans with high quality degrees.

With this in mind, Lumina partnered with FSG, a nonprofit consulting firm with significant experience in supporting collaborative efforts, to conduct research on best practices and findings related to how collaborative efforts can most effectively engage local funders. Please note that this research brief uses the term "collaborative efforts" throughout to refer to efforts that convene a cross-sector group of organizations using a structured collaborative approach with the primary objective of increasing degree attainment among students in the local community or region.

# TRENDS IN LOCAL FUNDER ENGAGEMENT

**Local funders are important actors in the education philanthropy landscape.** In the most recent 2015 Grantmakers for Education (GFE) trends report, nearly 70 percent of survey respondents reported funding only within a local or regional area.<sup>1</sup> According to GFE's analysis, the influence of these local and regional funders is expected to grow.<sup>2</sup>

**Degree attainment makes up a large proportion of total education funding with significant investment in collaborative partnerships.** This GFE report highlighted the finding that degree attainment is the most funded area of education philanthropy with approximately \$250 million to \$300 million in annual giving. Of these funders, 62 percent reported engaging in collaborative partnerships in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

**There is also increasing enthusiasm for funder collaboration, especially among funders of degree attainment.** In a recent Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) study, 80 percent of grantmaking foundations surveyed reported that it was important to coordinate resources with other funders working on similar issues. Seventy percent of GFE's surveyed funders supporting degree attainment reported that increased collaboration would be beneficial.<sup>4</sup>

**Many local funders are frustrated with the lack of systemic change they have been able to achieve with current direct service investments.**

In many cases, funders are not seeing graduation rates increase or the equity gap narrow. Nor are they seeing the return on investment they are looking

*“We had almost 100 years of thoughtful philanthropy in our community, but the trends continued to go in the wrong direction. We had to stop and reevaluate, we needed to do something different.”*  
— Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

1 Grantmakers for Education (2015). *Benchmarking: Trends in Education Philanthropy*. Note: For consistency, this brief uses the term “degree attainment” instead of “post-secondary access and success,” which is the term used within the GFE paper.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

for in terms of social impact. To address these challenges, some funders look to collaborative efforts as providing a new approach that can complement their direct service investments and affect the root causes of the complex degree attainment challenge. The momentum to take on this new approach was exemplified during a 2014 panel session of funders co-led by StriveTogether and GFE titled “The Role of Investors in Supporting Quality Collective Impact in Education.” Dozens of funders attended the session and the subsequent breakout discussions. They emphasized a desire to pivot to a more accurate portrayal of funders of collaborative efforts as “investors” working to help improve outcomes for complex problems.<sup>5</sup> National funders and collaborative efforts should take advantage of this growing trend.

Even with these encouraging trends, **many collaborative efforts have struggled to fully harness the funder motivation to invest in collaborative efforts.** Some of the reasons include:

- Lack of local funders in the region or lack of funders who focus on degree attainment.
- One- to two-year grantmaking timelines and the need to demonstrate short-term results, which is often not aligned with the longer-time horizons of collaborative efforts.
- Limits on how much funding local funders can invest in the unrestricted infrastructure-related costs of the collaborative effort.
- Strategies of the effort might seem too broad to local funders, making it hard for them to see where they fit.

*“If you know one funder’s approach and way of working, you really only know one—every funder has different systems, boards, and approaches.” — Ken Thompson, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

**There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for engaging local funders in collaborative efforts.** Each collaborative effort has a unique context with different types of actors with their own decision-making culture and processes. That’s why, to engage local funders effectively, it is important to understand the local effort’s context, history, culture, and assets, as well as build respectful and productive relationships with community members and funders.

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<sup>5</sup> StriveTogether and Grantmakers for Education (2015). *The Role of Investors: Lessons Learned on Critical Roots That Drive Collective Impact*.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The first step for collaborative efforts looking to increase local funder engagement is to understand who the different local funders in their region are and what can be expected from them. The literature review and interviewees identified some important differences between various types of local funders that can inform the collaborative effort's engagement strategies.

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AND UNITED WAYS

Community foundations and United Ways are often the catalyzers of collaborative efforts. Many of them are supporting and driving the organizations dedicated to managing the collaborative (e.g., backbone organizations). They are natural conveners and bring deep community relationships with key local organizations (e.g., government, education institutions, and other local funders) and influencers. However, because it is often the case that much of their funds are donor-advised, they may not be able to shift their support to collaborative efforts without having to fundraise or convince donors of the benefits of taking such an approach. Perhaps, because of this donor-advised structure, community foundations and United Ways bring considerable expertise in fundraising that might be useful to collaborative efforts as they seek to ensure sustainability of the work. Additionally, community foundations and United Ways might provide a unique opportunity to connect the business and education communities because of their strong relationships with private sector leaders.

*“Collaborative efforts allow community foundations to address the root causes of the problem and complement their scholarship work.” — National foundation leader*

## FAMILY FOUNDATIONS

Family foundations can be quite nimble with their grantmaking. At times, family members leading family foundations are influential community and corporate leaders, which can be a tremendous asset for collaborative efforts. Family foundations can shift resources to a collaborative effort if they see alignment with their strategic plan, but many might not always have the staff capacity that a community foundation or a United Way has.

## CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS

Corporate foundations were often noted as less likely to fund the infrastructure and other costs of collaboration, but more likely to fund individual programs and activities organized by the collaborative or its partners. It might be best to engage corporate foundations once the effort has developed a plan or strategy, and there is a specific request for their involvement.

*“Corporate foundations will not always provide initial funding, but the full extent of their resources can be brought to help sustain the work once the effort is established.” — Jeff Raderstrong, Living Cities*

## REGIONAL EDUCATION CONVERSION FOUNDATIONS

Regional education conversion foundations play a unique role in bringing a regional view on education issues, elevating lessons learned from other collaborative efforts, and providing a more direct link to state-level policies and change strategies. Foundations such as the Helios Education Foundation and the Greater Texas Foundation are natural partners for collaborative efforts due to their strong expertise on both the policy and practice of degree attainment and commitment to collaboration. However, they don't necessarily bring deep relationships with specific communities given that they focus on all the communities in their geographic area (e.g., a state, or a region within a state).

## NATIONAL FOUNDATIONS INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITIES AND REGIONS IN WHICH THEY ARE BASED

Some national foundations, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, invest resources in the immediate geographic areas in which they are based (e.g., the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's investment in the Seattle Roadmap Project, a regional effort to improve student achieve-



ment from cradle to college and career<sup>6</sup>). Although they are investing locally, they are still often recognized by their national brand. This strong name recognition can open doors for collaborative efforts but can also create some tensions. That's why it is important that collaborative efforts maintain a community orientation by managing power dynamics between national and local funders and ensuring that other funders and partners can see their goals represented in the effort's strategy and vision. If the national funder is too dominant in the effort, the collaborative can be seen as overly influenced by the national funder and not by the community.

When collaborative efforts are beginning to identify potential local funders, they can use the following questions to better understand the landscape (Table 1).

Answering these questions can help a collaborative effort determine where to focus its local funder engagement. For example, in communities with minimal focus on degree attainment compared to education more broadly, collaborative efforts may need to invest in motivating more funders to focus on degree attainment. On the other hand, in communities with a strong focus on degree attainment but a lack of collaboration or alignment, the effort may need to focus more on highlighting how cross-sector collaboration can instill greater alignment among organizations working to address the problem.

TABLE 1.

| LOCAL CONTEXT DIAGNOSTIC   |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What types of local funders are currently investing in the community or region?</li><li>• Which of these different types of funders are investing in education? In degree attainment?</li><li>• To what extent are different types of local funders investing in partnerships and collaboration?</li><li>• What is the relationship between different funders? Do funders actively collaborate with each other? Is there a forum or venue for funder collaboration that already exists in our community? If so, how can we potentially engage with this forum?</li></ul> |

6 Description adapted from The Road Map Project website: <http://www.roadmapproject.org>.

# ROLES THAT LOCAL FUNDERS CAN PLAY

After getting a better understanding of the local funder landscape, it is important for collaborative efforts to determine how local funders might engage in the work. Our research identified several **different roles local funders are best positioned to play at different points in the journey of a collaborative effort**. Local funders can be supportive at the start of the effort, when the effort is building its infrastructure, and as the effort continues to sustain and grow its impact. Local funders can play some of these roles (e.g., community connector or infrastructure funder) at multiple points in the effort’s journey (Figure 1).

These roles are also not mutually exclusive (i.e., local funders can take on multiple roles simultaneously) and the most engaged local funders often take on many of these roles over the course of their engagement with a collaborative effort. The following section explains each of these roles in more detail.

FIGURE 1. ROLES LOCAL FUNDERS PLAY IN COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS



## Catalysts

**Local funders can start the collaborative effort.** Interviewees noted that collaborative efforts are often initiated through seed funding from local funders, which is one of the preconditions for collaborative efforts' success.<sup>7</sup> Beyond providing seed funding, local funders can also create a sense of urgency and bring partners together to improve degree attainment, often through providing data that highlights the need for multi-sector action.

**For example, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo found that poor educational achievement was hurting overall economic growth in Buffalo.** The

foundation realized that the challenge was too large and complex to address alone—it required a range of sectors (e.g., education, business, philanthropy, government) to work together. The foundation spent 2.5 years working with community partners to better understand the problem and potential solutions, commissioning research on the relationship between degree attainment and economic development as well as how different sectors could engage.

*“It was a very competitive process to be selected as a Say Yes city and received the \$15M in seed capital. We brokered the participation of all the stakeholders, got letters of support, and submitted the proposal to Say Yes national in partnership with other local funders.” — Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo*

It identified the Say Yes to Education model as particularly relevant to its needs and adapted the model to the Buffalo context. Say Yes to Education is a robust public-private partnership model that provides tuition scholarships and comprehensive wraparound supports for K-16 students with a clear goal of postsecondary completion. With this initial work completed, the community foundation brought together a broad set of partners (e.g., education, parents, business, government, and other local funders and nonprofits) that continue to bring new resources to the effort to improve the lives of students and families in Buffalo, New York.

**Similarly, together with Success Boston, The Boston Foundation created a sense of urgency to tackle degree attainment by revealing new data on the issue.** The foundation had been investing in high school completion and K-12 education reform for some time. It realized that although there were valid data on high school graduation,

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<sup>7</sup> Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer (2012). “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

there was very little information on what happened to students once they graduated. To learn more, the foundation funded a longitudinal study on degree completion proposed and conducted by the Private Industry Council and Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies. The study found that of those that ever enrolled in college, only 35.5 percent of the general population and 15 percent of under-represented minorities had earned an associate's or bachelor's degree after seven years. By working across K-12 and higher education to share these data publicly, Success Boston galvanized support for taking the issue head on. In 2008, at the direction of the mayor of Boston, the foundation funded the Success Boston College Completion Initiative with an investment of \$1 million dollars per year. Bringing together community partners including public schools, higher education, and city government, Success Boston reached the goal of doubling degree attainment to 70 percent by 2017 and started to design a collaborative effort focused on high school and college-level interventions and systems change to help them get there.

*“Local funders are one of the most important partners; they have credibility, power, and the ability to bring organizations to the table.”*

— Fay Hanleybrown, FSG

## Community Connectors

**Many local funders have strong relationships with a range of key community actors across different sectors.** Local funders can be particularly useful as the effort is establishing itself by helping identify and access key decision-makers and bring together a group of cross-sector partners to build the community leadership needed for the effort to be successful.

Some interviewees mentioned how useful it was to engage their local community foundation in the selection of initial leaders that should be part of the steering committee since the foundation understood the different players and dynamics among them well. An interviewee from a community foundation explains: *“As a community foundation, we are uniquely positioned to convene people and institutions.”*

*“Local funders know the community, have connections and can step up to lead toward a shared attainment goal.”*

— Jeanna Keller Berdel, Lumina Foundation

For efforts that are already underway, local funders can help expand the support base for degree attainment in the community. They can bring new resources and open the

door to new relationships, increasing the success of the effort. For example, Greater Texas Foundation, a statewide foundation based in College Station, Texas, had built strong relationships with a group of funders interested in minority-serving institutions for more than five years. Greater Texas Foundation connected these funders with some of the key decision-makers in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) region of Southern Texas. By connecting these funders to the decision-makers in the RGV, Greater Texas Foundation helped build strong new relationships that have led to significant philanthropic investment in the region. This was especially helpful considering the RGV is particularly underfunded and does not have a strong local funder presence.

*“We brought other funders to the RGV to meet with different sector leaders to talk about the strengths and challenges in the region... This led to the current RGV Focus effort.”*

*— Wynn Rosser and Leslie Gurrola, Greater Texas Foundation*

## Collaborative Host Organizations

**Local funders can also play the role of hosting the collaborative infrastructure or backbone.** Having a local funder hosting the collaborative infrastructure (or backbone) early in the development of the effort ensures that efforts focus on building their infrastructure and leadership instead of trying to fundraise and get new grants. Having funds secured for the first couple of years, the effort can concentrate on convening relevant stakeholders, uncovering data on the problem and potential solutions, and building consensus on strategies to address the problem. Having a local funder as the backbone also creates a sense of sustainability and lends credibility to the effort, providing a strong foundation that will allow the effort to progress and grow over time.

For example, Achieve Atlanta, whose mission is to get more students to and through college, was created through a partnership between the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, and Atlanta Public Schools. The effort has benefited from long-term funding from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation and back office support from the community foundation.

*“As local funders have provided funding and back office infrastructure, we have been able to focus on strategy and implementation, rather than spending all of our time on fundraising.” — Tina Fernandez, Achieve Atlanta*

The financial and infrastructure support from two local funders has allowed the effort to focus on building strong relationships with the public school system, other local funders, and nonprofit service providers, as well as establishing a board of respected business and civic leaders. Being able to focus on implementation can help efforts build a strong presence and credibility that can put them on a sound footing to achieve their mission.

## Infrastructure Funders

**Some funders might not be willing or positioned to host the collaborative infrastructure, but they can provide valuable funding to develop and sustain it.**

These funders are crucial to ensuring the continuity of collaborative efforts in the long term. Interviewees highlighted that local funders can provide funding to maintain the effort's infrastructure (e.g., backbone, data systems) or help fundraise for grants that can strengthen the effort's work.

*“Even though we have had leadership transitions at the city and school district, Success Boston did not go away. The work did not have to slow down thanks to the strong cross-sector partnership and our collective willingness to stick with it.”*

— Elizabeth Pauley, *The Boston Foundation*

**The Success Boston Initiative provides an illustrative example.**

Nonprofit partners of Success Boston often struggle with supporting unrestricted costs related to the ongoing operation of the effort. Even simple things like paying for coffee and breakfast at a meeting can be challenging during certain periods when funding is limited. With flexible funding, The Boston Foundation can fill these

funding gaps to ensure that relationships among partners continue to be strengthened. Additionally, the Foundation used its already strong fundraising team to support the continued resourcing of the effort beyond the foundation's initial investments, helping the effort secure additional funds.

## Community Leaders

**Local funders can be effective representatives of the community and play a leadership role to ensure momentum is maintained as the effort evolves.** Given their deep community relationships, local funders can help the effort build and maintain a solid understanding of community needs and challenges.

For example, many local funders (e.g., United Ways) already have events where they regularly meet with community members. Collaborative efforts can use those meetings to leverage local funders' know-how and platform, and ensure that community voice

is effectively represented in the collaborative efforts work. Local funders also play an important leadership role by maintaining momentum of the effort as it evolves. They can ensure continuity during leadership transitions within the collaborative effort and partner organizations. Some interviewees highlighted that during the life of their efforts, there have been numerous leadership changes in city government and higher education leadership. These transitions did not affect the progress of their efforts because the local funder was able to bring new officials up to speed and keep the effort's momentum going.

*“Local funders can play a much more holistic role in creating change by being part of working groups and the steering committee. They can bring their valuable relationships and political capital.” — John Kania, FSG*

## Program Grantmakers

**When efforts are established, local funders can align their current education grantees with the effort (e.g., identifying opportunities for current grantees to partner with the effort) or provide new funding for existing or new programs related to the effort (e.g., increasing the reach of a program already supported by the effort or funding a new program).**

This is potentially the most straightforward role local funders can play, and one that does not require them to change the way they operate. From the interviewees, we learned that some efforts are assigning different programmatic areas to different local funders to help them find a place where they can contribute to the effort's work.

*“... We don't want all funders to move to systems work; the work on the ground still needs to happen in concert with the jointly agreed upon work happening at the effort level.”  
— Ken Thompson, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

For example, Learn to Earn Dayton has been able to engage many local funders successfully, and part of its strategy is to give them the opportunity to fund programs in different parts of the education pipeline based on their current strategies. Local funders are attracted to the effort because they become part of a larger solution to increase college attainment while continuing to support programs that are part of their current strategic plan.

In conclusion, local funders can play many different roles as the collaborative effort advances in its journey. They can start the effort, bring partners together, host the collaborative, participate in leadership, and/or support the effort's infrastructure and programs.

# SUCCESS FACTORS FOR LOCAL FUNDER ENGAGEMENT

**There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for engaging local funders in collaborative efforts.** Each effort has a unique context with different types of actors with their own decision-making culture and processes. That's why, to engage local funders effectively,

it is important to understand the effort's local context and the different roles that local funders can play. It is also important to consider a set of success factors that can help efforts more effectively engage with local funders.

Something to keep in mind as collaborative effort leaders consider the success factors below is that for many of those funders, supporting collaborative work is a fundamental shift

from how they have traditionally engaged in philanthropy. Instead of only focusing on the number of individuals served or the percentage change in degree completion as the result of one program, local funders are seeking to improve the overall system of degree attainment in their community in order to engage in the effort. In other words, **supporting collaborative efforts requires local funders to move the focus of their work from executing their individual theory of change to rolling up their sleeves to become equal partners in pursuit of increased degree attainment in their community.** They are one voice among many in shaping strategy and goals.<sup>8</sup>

*“Engaging in collaborative efforts represents a different approach for local grantmakers. It requires a different skillset and the willingness to collaborate with others in the community.” — Robert Albright, Collective Impact Forum*

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Thompson (2014). “Collective Impact: Funder, Heal Thyself—Thoughts on Recent Local and National Funder Conversations.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.



## Engage Local Funders as Soon as Possible

**If at all possible, local funders should be engaged early on as the effort is getting established.** Local funders are more likely to engage in collaborative work if they can help shape the goals of the collaborative and ensure that the effort’s strategies relate to their own goals and strategies. Their ability to catalyze, convene, and connect is absolutely central to the early stages as well as the long-term sustainability of the effort.

Engaging local funders early can help ensure that the effort is accessing the full range of community leaders and providing the seed funding necessary for the initial period of convening and strategy setting. This often takes the form of local funders playing the infrastructure host or backbone role. Also, engaging local funders early will help build a long-term partnership and ensure their long-term commitment to the effort.

*“It is important to engage local funders in the work as early as possible. Powerful outcomes can be achieved when local funders help to drive action in their community.”*  
— Tina Gridiron, Lumina Foundation

## Use Data to Create a Sense of Urgency in the Community

**Collaborative efforts can engage local funders by supporting research and evaluation that demonstrate the urgency to work on degree attainment in their community.** Sometimes it is only a matter of putting publicly available data together in a way that presents a compelling case to help local funders perceive a sense of urgency. Efforts can collect data from a few education institutions to highlight the proportion of students that graduate in a given time frame.

Also, data highlighting how the lack of degree completion affects the local economy and other broader measures of community welfare, such as equity, can help bring local funders to the table that may not have previously seen degree completion as an area of focus for their investments. Data highlighting these connections can help demonstrate the need for investing in both direct-service-focused organizations and collaborations to create greater alignment and impact.

*“It is absolutely critical that the collaborative effort brings data to the table and can create a baseline understanding of the needs in education. Many cities and funders just don’t know what the baseline is or where to start.”*  
— David Litvack, Salt Lake City Government

One example of how to use data to create a sense of urgency comes from Say Yes to Education and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo's (CFGB) effort highlighted earlier in this brief. CFGB's board knew it wanted to focus on systems change to reduce the equity gap (e.g., degree attainment rates of under-represented minorities versus median graduation rates). Therefore, the effort invested in research to illustrate the link between degree attainment, equity, and overall economic prosperity. This was instrumental in securing the board's approval of CFGB's investment in the effort and enabled them to engage a set of cross-sector partners as active participants and supporters of the work.

## Highlight the Benefits of Investing in Collaboration

### **Demonstrating the benefits of investing in collaboration compared to individual organizations or programs can help efforts attract local funders.**

This can be particularly important for local funders that have been investing in degree attainment programs and are not particularly impressed with the results of their individual investments. The literature review and interviews highlighted three different core benefits of engaging in collaborative work:

*“Starting out with the big vision and then focusing on specific programs that could relate to funders’ priorities is the key.” — Tina Fernandez, Achieve Atlanta*

- **Greater efficiency and alignment:** Local funders might be attracted to the idea of how the collaborative effort will help align community-driven work toward a common vision and forum for shared learning, creating greater efficiency and less duplication of work. For example, efforts can demonstrate to local funders the impact of data sharing and learning on identifying successful models that can be scaled to a greater number of students.
- **Increased trust and relationship building:** Collaborative efforts should demonstrate the opportunity to build strong relationships with city and county government, the education sectors, and with the business community. The more access to different stakeholders the effort can generate, the more key organizations will be interested in coming to the table and contributing time and energy.
- **Greater impact at the systems and population levels:** Efforts should communicate how their work is taking a holistic perspective on how to increase degree attainment in their community, showing their expected outcomes and how those compare with the limited impact of funding a program.

## Show How Effort's Goals Align with Local Funder's Goals

**A barrier for engagement with local funders is the fact that it may be difficult for them to see how they fit into the strategy of the collaborative.**

As collaborative efforts look to engage with local funders, it is crucial to spend some time looking at the local funder's strategy and finding potential overlaps and opportunities for engagement. Leaders of collaborative efforts should come to the table with a clear articulation of how investing in the collaborative effort aligns with the funder's current grantmaking. This will make it easier for the local funder to make decisions about how to engage.

*“When we approach a foundation, we try to think about where our interests are similar so they can invest in the work we are doing.” — Tom Lasley, Learn to Earn Dayton*

Independently of whether a collaborative effort is asking for funding, it is important to know how its goals connect with the local funder's goals. Some funders might not be in a position to provide financial resources but can still participate as leaders or connectors. These local funders will also need to see how their goals align with the effort's goals in order to invest their time and human capital.

## Demonstrate Measurable Long-Term, Community-Level Impact

**Given that collaborative efforts require funders to take on a new orientation to social change, it is important that efforts demonstrate how they intend to measure broad community-level impact.** Many efforts do this by building robust data systems that allow them to measure changes across multiple indicators at the community level across different population groups. One interviewee talked about her experience bringing new local funders to the effort: *“Funders have appreciated that we are data focused and that we have been able to show specific metrics, which include baseline data and where we hope to be in 10 years.”* Developing a clear strategy and communicating progress and impact when engaging local funders can help all parties see the value of investing in the collaborative work.

*“Local funders are looking at opportunities to maximize their investments in a comprehensive approach.”*  
— David Litvack, Salt Lake City Government

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR NATIONAL FUNDERS ENGAGING IN COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

**Both local and national funders bring important strengths to collaborative efforts.** Local funders bring a deep understanding of community context and culture, strong relationships with community organizations and influencers, and a commitment to the long-term sustainability of community-driven work. National funders bring a certain type of legitimacy and prestige, a visible and ambitious goal or movement (e.g., Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025), the ability to share insights from proven approaches from other parts of the country, and access to national-level organizations to support policy and advocacy.

However, sometimes it is challenging for national and local funders to collaborate given that they have different levels of understanding of the context, different ways of working, and different strategies and needs. During conversations with interviewees and from scanning secondary resources, FSG identified four considerations for national funders engaging local funders in collaborative efforts:

- 1. Continue to use their national funder brand to advocate for degree attainment:** Having national funders bring attention to degree attainment can help make the case for the local funders in their respective regions. Interviewees highlighted how getting grants from national funders makes them part of a national effort, which legitimizes their work. This legitimacy sometimes translates into more funders wanting to join the work or additional access to leaders in the community.
- 2. Engage in true partnership with local funders:** When national funders come to the table with established, rigid goals and targets for their programs, it is hard to develop a true partnership with local funders. Many local funders have a broad range of focus areas and specific organizational constraints that make shifting resources to a new, already established strategy challenging. To help local funders make the case to their boards, national funders should develop programs in conjunction with key local funders to ensure that new collaborative efforts reflect the goals and objectives of both parties.

- 3. Identify and support efforts to be led and driven by local funders:** If starting a new effort, national funders should find a local funder to partner with as early as possible and should develop a relationship of shared ownership of the effort. Local funders are more likely to sustain efforts long term if they play a leadership role and see their goals and strategies reflected in the work. In addition, local funder leadership may increase the likelihood of success for the effort, given that they understand the local context and bring key relationships, ensuring deep engagement with community leaders.
- 4. Play a more “behind-the-scenes” role:** National funders sometimes need to step back from the effort and let local funders and other community organizations lead the work. Efforts need to be seen as community driven in order to increase buy-in from the community. Interviewees from both national foundations and local funders highlighted the need to ensure that no one funder is seen as the “owner” of the effort because it becomes harder to bring other local funders to the table.

# APPENDICES

## A. Methodology

The findings reported in this brief are based on both primary and secondary research and analysis. FSG conducted interviews with 22 leaders of local, regional, and national foundations, as well as leaders of collaborative efforts, and experts in education and collaborative work. FSG used a semi-structured interview approach and analyzed the data using a qualitative interview coding software program (NVivo). Lastly, FSG conducted a literature review of relevant Lumina documents and key articles, reports, and blogs (e.g., Collective Impact Forum, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Wallace Foundation, Living Cities, *Harvard Business Review*, Grantmakers for Education, the Community College Resource Center, and the Annie E Casey Foundation). Please see Appendix B for a full list of secondary resources reviewed.

The following questions guided the research:

- How are current collaborative efforts around the country engaging local funders? What roles are they playing, and to what effect?
- What are particularly effective ways that collaborative efforts can engage local funders?

## B. References

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