

POSTSECONDARY ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT (PSA₂) IMPACT GROUP

FUNDER COLLABORATIVE LANDSCAPE
ANALYSIS

Fall 2024



FUNDER COLLABORATIVE LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS GOALS

Grantmakers for Education's [Postsecondary Access and Attainment \(PSA2\) Impact Group](#) sought out RE.Envision Consulting to conduct a landscape analysis of funder collaboratives in the postsecondary education field to:

- Identify and profile national and place-based funder collaboratives in the field to understand opportunities, challenges and trends.
- Better understand funders' perception of collaboratives.
- Determine what synergies can be leveraged to move funder collaboratives toward action.
- Recommend opportunities for the PSA2 Impact Group and the broader field to support high impact efforts.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RE.Envision Consulting drew upon the following sources to inform the research:

LITERATURE REVIEW on 23 postsecondary funder collaboratives (what they are, what they do, how they are structured, how to start one, etc.).

DESK RESEARCH to develop profiles featured in this report.

INTERVIEWS with 10 education grantmakers to understand the perception and membership benefits of postsecondary funder collaboratives, and opportunities for collective action.

FIELD SURVEY of 200 practitioners who engage with or participate in postsecondary funder collaboratives. Received 21 responses.

INPUT FROM 14 EdFunders and PSA2 members with experience in postsecondary funder collaboratives.

Research was conducted between March and May 2024.

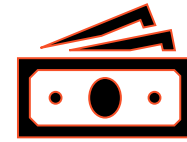
WHAT IS A FUNDER COLLABORATIVE?



Expertise



Willpower



Resources



Networks

“Rooted in the notion that working together leads to greater impact, knowledge and opportunity, a philanthropic collaborative is a model in which funders (and sometimes other participants) join forces to work together toward a common goal. By combining resources, willpower, networks and expertise, participants in a philanthropic collaborative can magnify their capacity to address large-scale social, economic and environmental challenges and better contribute to change.”

from [“A Donor’s Guide To Funder Collaboratives” in Giving Compass](#) article from Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (July 2022)



“FUNDER COLLABORATIVES—AND THEIR FORMS—ARE NOT STATIC. THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ONES ARE DYNAMIC PARTNERSHIPS THAT ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS, GOALS AND NEEDS OF THOSE INVOLVED.”

FROM “SURVIVING TO THRIVING: FUNDER COLLABORATIVES THAT MATTER”, EDUCATION FIRST (2024)

FRAMING AND CONTEXT

This research effort is not meant to be a comprehensive dive into funder collaboratives in the postsecondary field; rather, it is a starting point for those who are interested in this work. As such, the list of funder collaboratives highlighted in this report is not exhaustive, but a snapshot of efforts in the field.

The profiles of funder collaboratives are developed based on publicly available information, primarily gathered through desk research. Therefore, in some cases, information is not readily available to develop a complete profile for a funder collaborative.

ECOSYSTEM LEVEL FINDINGS



While many funder collaboratives focus on education in general, **very few focus explicitly on postsecondary education**. The funder collaboratives that focus on postsecondary education are both regional and national, addressing a variety of topics from **basic needs to mental health to higher education in prison**.



Members of funder collaboratives deeply **value the opportunities for shared education, peer learning and networking**. It was noted that often these opportunities led to ideas for large, complex, innovative projects at the **ecosystem/systems change level** (coalition building, movement building, large innovative pilot, narrative change, etc.), where funders could **leverage resources more strategically** and efficiently, since impact at this level is hard for any sole actor.



Like most fields, postsecondary education **does not exist in a vacuum**. To have an impact, funder collaboratives **need to understand the policy landscape** to support an equitable postsecondary system.

KEY FINDINGS TO MOVE TOWARD COLLECTIVE ACTION



There are several areas within postsecondary education where practitioners noted that **collective action**, specifically in the form of **pooled funding**, could make significant progress because these issues are complex, require widespread influence to implement, and should be tackled from various perspectives and stakeholders. These areas are **dual enrollment, transfer credit and credit mobility, student debt, equity** and **affirmative action**.

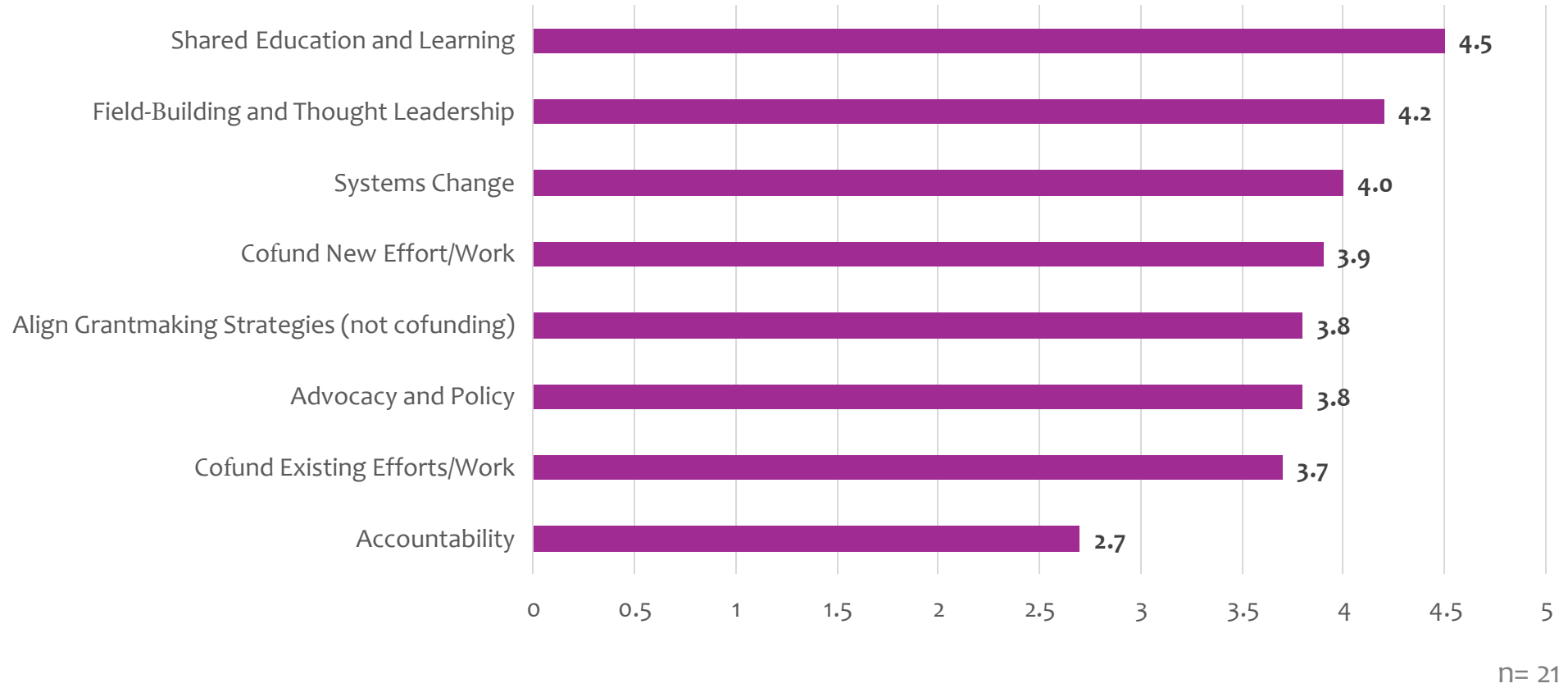


Trust, shared vision, clearly defined objective, goals, roles and timeframe, alignment on impact, transparent decision-making process and **strong governance infrastructure** were noted as key elements to move a funder collaborative from **dialogue to collective action**. Many of these components overlap with what makes a funder collaborative successful in general.



For a successful funder collaborative experience, **strong and transparent backbone support, infrastructure** and **governance process** were noted to be critical. This allowed the members to feel more confident in moving toward **collective action**. Some consulting firms that offer such support are [Sova](#), [Equivolve Consulting](#), [JKW Consulting](#), [Education First](#), and [Glen Price Group](#).

WHY DO FUNDER COLLABORATIVES EXIST?



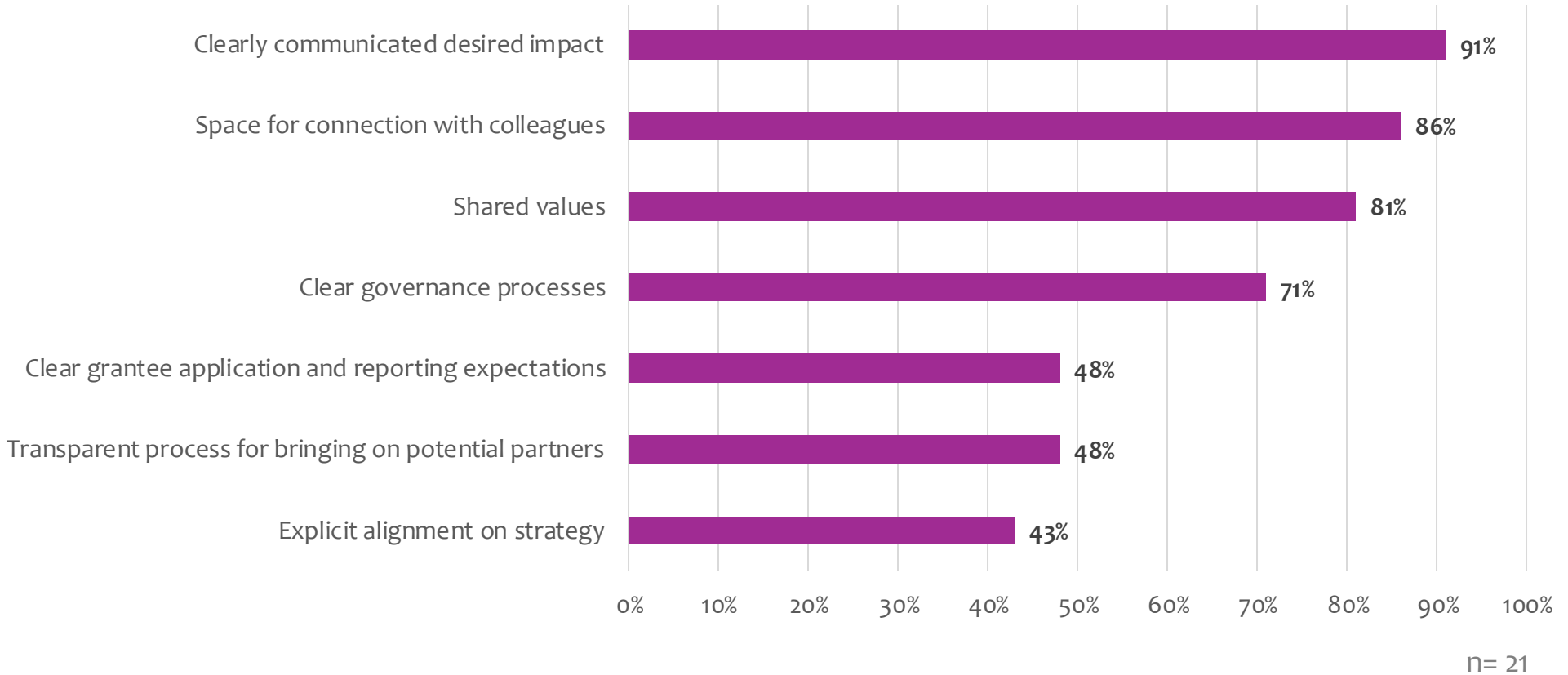
Survey respondents indicated that **shared education and learning**, **field-building and thought leadership** and **systems change** were the top three purposes of a funder collaborative. While **accountability** was reported as the least important purpose of a funder collaborative, it was lifted when asked about co-action in the interviews.

WHY PARTICIPATE IN A FUNDER COLLABORATIVE?



Survey respondents indicated that **leveraging resources strategically, developing learning opportunities that connect to grantmaking** and **increasing impact** were the top three reasons why they participate in a funder collaborative.

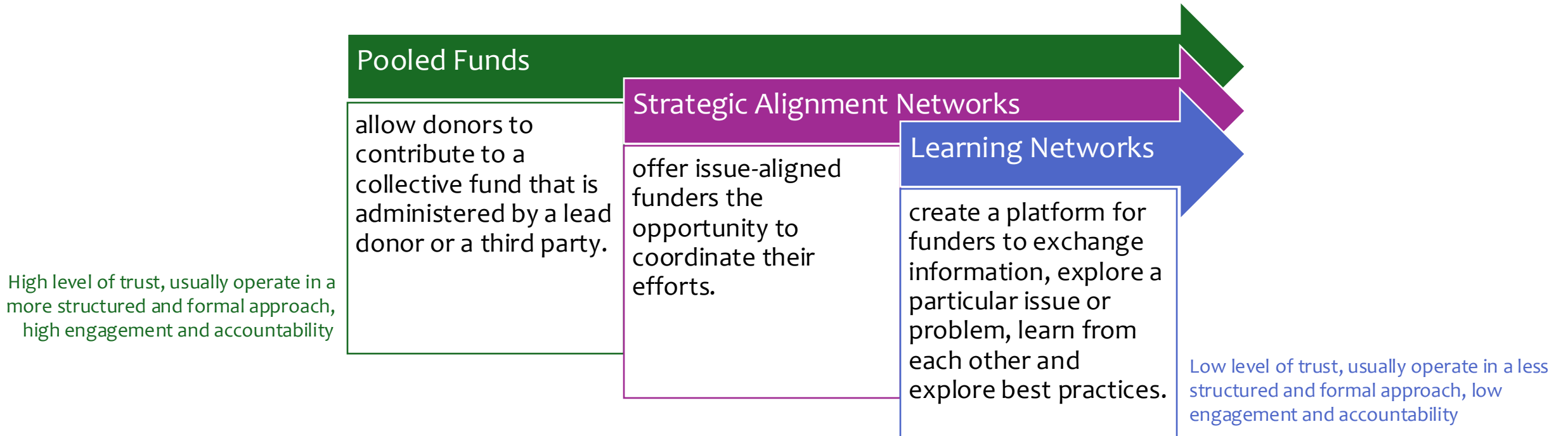
WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL FUNDER COLLABORATIVE?



Survey respondents indicated that **clear impact, space for connection** and **shared values** were the top features of a successful funder collaborative.

TYPES OF FUNDER COLLABORATIVES

There is a commonly shared and accepted typology of funder collaboratives that ranges on a spectrum of high to low level of trust, structure, formality, engagement and accountability. Understanding the typology can help to differentiate various call-to-action efforts.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PSA₂ IMPACT GROUP



Learning Network

Deepen its learning and education series by focusing on an areas of high need such as as mental health, higher education in prison and basic needs.

Make connections between funders and grantees whose work overlaps.



Strategic Alignment Network

Hold a smaller convening for PSA₂ members at the EdFunders annual conference.

Act as an intermediary to bring postsecondary funder collaboratives together to learn from each other and develop aligned strategies.

Create a mapping of grantees.



Pooled Funds

Move from a learning and information sharing orientation toward pooled funding.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE POSTSECONDARY FIELD

As a field, interviewees noted that actors in postsecondary education should closely collaborate across adjacent fields, with key stakeholders, and focus on nontraditional students to bring about equitable and sustainable change.

ADJACENT FIELDS

Workforce Development

Mental Health and Wellness

Justice System

Career and Technical Education

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Community Colleges

Employers/Business Associations

Residents

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Parents

Justice-System-Involved Students

Rural Learners

Immigrant/Undocumented Learners

FUNDER COLLABORATIVE PROFILES

Go to the appendix to learn about the definitions of
features of a funder collaborative.

CALIFORNIA COLLEGE PATHWAYS FUNDERS ALLIANCE

The California College Pathways Funders Alliance

is a diverse group of philanthropic partners who come together to share information, identify strategic investment opportunities and move the data collection and research agenda of the initiative forward.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	California College Pathways
Structure	Formal
Type	Pooled Funds
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Foster Youth
Level of Impact	Ecosystem
Cofunding	Yes

CALIFORNIA STUDENT PARENT POOLED FUND

The California Student Parent Pooled Fund is a collaboration between multiple funders who are focused on supporting student parents through a multigenerational strategy, simultaneously supporting both student parents and their children. The fund's grantmaking priorities include research and practice, movement building education, awareness, narrative change and policy/advocacy.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Michelson 20MM Foundation
Structure	Formal
Type	Pooled Funds
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Student Parents
Level of Impact	Ecosystem
Cofunding	Yes

COLLEGE COMPLETION INNOVATION FUND

The College Completion Innovation Fund (CCIF)

is a collaborative education fund that leverages partnerships with community-based organizations and colleges to address barriers that disproportionately affect New Yorkers with historically underrepresented backgrounds succeed and persist in college. Most of the students served are low-income students, first-generation college students, students of color and/or others who are traditionally underrepresented among college degree holders.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	City University of New York
Structure	Formal
Type	Pooled Funds
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Low-income, first-generation students
Level of Impact	Program
Cofunding	Yes

HIGHER ED EQUITY NETWORK

The Higher Ed Equity Network works to create a more equitable higher education system with an intentional, unapologetic focus on the needs of Black, Latino, Indigenous and other students who are harmed by persistent systemic barriers linked to their racial and ethnic identities.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Catalyst:Ed
Structure	Formal
Type	Learning Network
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Black, Latino, Indigenous Students
Level of Impact	Ecosystem
Cofunding	n/a

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON AND REENTRY FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

The Higher Education in Prison and Reentry Collaborative is a group of funders committed to working and learning together to achieve shared goals. Within this learning community, funders connect and share information, as well as inform and align funding efforts.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Ascendium Education Group
Structure	Informal
Type	Learning Network
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Justice-System-Involved Students
Level of Impact	Programmatic
Cofunding	No

LATINO STUDENT SUCCESS FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

The Latino Student Success Funder Collaborative supports postsecondary preparation, access and success. The collaborative provides learning experiences and introduces specific issues, programs, research and realities for funders.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Excelencia in Education
Structure	Formal
Type	Learning Network
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Latino Students
Level of Impact	Program and Ecosystem
Cofunding	No

LOS ANGELES POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE

The Los Angeles Postsecondary Education

Funders Collaborative is composed of local, state and national philanthropic organizations that come together as a learning and action community to support the piloting, scaling and sustainability of innovative programs and policies. The collaborative leverages the resources and knowledge of its members to create meaningful systemic change and drive equity outcomes in postsecondary education.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Glen Price Group
Structure	Formal
Type	Pooled Funds
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Postsecondary Access and Success; Systems Change
Level of Impact	Ecosystem
Cofunding	Yes

POSTSECONDARY MENTAL HEALTH FUNDERS

This group of funders came together after a meeting in August 2021 at an American Council on Education, Mental Health in Higher Education Convening (funded by Lumina Foundation). While the group informally convenes as a learning network, the funders are strategically aligned in that each has prioritized investments in student mental health and wellbeing in various ways.

Feature	
Host/Facilitator	Stupski Foundation
Structure	Informal
Type	Strategic Alignment Network
Focus Area Within Postsecondary	Mental Health and Wellness
Level of Impact	n/a
Cofunding	No

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FURTHER
RESEARCH**



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research and interviews with leaders and/or members of collaborative efforts could provide insight into key stakeholders, supports or gaps, future strategies and how collaboratives are sharing the broader postsecondary education and workforce fields. Some questions to explore are:

- How do you approach racial, gender and economic equity as a collaborative?
- What collaborative practices do you follow to bring funders together?
- How do you elevate community and grantee voices in the collaborative? How often do funders interact with grantees through the collaborative?
- How do you think about measuring the collaboratives' impact?

COLLABORATIVES FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

A handful of funder collaboratives surfaced during the research for which we were not able to confirm information to include in the profile. These collaboratives – all within the postsecondary education space – are listed below.

1. Postsecondary Equity Funder Collaborative
2. Higher Education Forward Fund
3. Data Champions Collaborative

COLLABORATIVES FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Below is a list of funder collaboratives that surfaced during the research but were not highlighted in this report because they are in fields adjacent to postsecondary, meaning postsecondary access and attainment is not their primary focus.

1. Blue Meridian Partners
2. Transformational Partnerships Fund
3. PEP Funder Collaborative
4. Rural Funder Collaborative
5. Fund for the Education Success of Students Experiencing Homelessness, Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice
6. Youth Transitional Funders Group
7. Strong Start to Finish Pooled Fund
8. CAPS College Persistence Group
9. Catalyze Challenge
10. Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative
11. Higher Ed Advocates
12. Digital Equity Funders Collaborative
13. Strengthening Post-Secondary to Workforce Pathways
14. Education Funder Strategy Group (EFSG)

APPENDIX



**FUNDER
COLLABORATIVE
PROFILE
CATEGORIES**

- **Host/Facilitator**
- **Structure (formal, informal)**
- **Type (learning network, strategic alignment network, pooled funds)**
- **Focus Area Within Postsecondary (if relevant)**
- **Level of Impact (program, ecosystem, both)**
- **Cofunding (yes, no)**

INTERVIEWEES

- **Dina Blum**, Raikes Foundation
- **Sue Cui**, Ascendium Education Group
- **Sharlene Diamond**, College Completion Innovation Fund
- **Leslie Gurrola**, Greater Texas Foundation
- **Rosa Guzman**, Glen Price Group
- **Molly Lasagna**, Ascendium Education Group
- **Ireri Rivas Mier Y Teran**, ECMC Foundation
- **Jennifer Nguyen**, Stupski Foundation
- **Enyi Okebugwu**, Imaginable Futures
- **Tom Strong**, The National Fund for Workforce Solutions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How do you define a funder collaborative? Which type of role/leader is the appropriate participant profile for a funder collaborative (decision-maker, someone with subject matter expertise, someone with capacity and bandwidth, etc.)?

Given your role, how do you engage with and/or participate in funder collaboratives?

- a. What are the benefits of engaging with and/or participating in funder collaboratives?
- b. Why might you disengage from a funder collaborative?

From the survey conducted, we overwhelmingly heard that funder collaboratives need a strong backbone or for success. Can you describe the role of such a backbone organization?

Are there areas within postsecondary that would greatly benefit from collective impact?

Are there areas within postsecondary where funders need to come at it from various directions?

If an entire funder collaborative or some members of a funder collaborative were to cofund, which synergies (program area, values, relationships, etc.) should be best leveraged?

- a. Would it be easier to cofund new efforts or existing efforts? Why?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Topic Brief for Donors Funder Collaboratives

Rooted in the notion that working together leads to greater impact, knowledge, and opportunity, a philanthropic collaborative is a model in which funders (and sometimes other participants) join forces to work together toward a common goal. By combining resources, willpower, networks, and expertise, participants in a philanthropic collaborative can magnify their capacity to address large-scale social, economic, and environmental challenges and better contribute to change.

Participants and Forms of Philanthropic Collaboratives

Funder collaboratives are not limited to a particular type of funder. Individuals, families, foundations, corporations, and many others participate in this philanthropic model. Funder collaboratives sometimes also work with governmental entities, NGOs, think tanks, individual experts, and other organizations in the ecosystem to further their insight, and impact.

Many collaboratives are hosted by an intermediary (such as Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors), which can provide the expertise needed to start and sustain a successful collaborative. In addition to providing a neutral "home" for the collaborative, an intermediary can help establish robust governance, manage grants, contribute issue-area expertise, and provide structure and oversight.

Regardless of the exact constellation of participants, collaboratives can exist in a [variety of formats](#). For example, funders may join a collaborative that has one fully integrated strategy, typically with decision-making authority resting with the lead funder. Alternatively, in a pooled fund collaborative, participants contribute financial resources toward a common "pot" from which funds are distributed. One version of a pooled fund is a giving circle, which convenes individual funders to combine resources to support a specific organization or objective. In a learning network, another type of collaborative, funders come together to share information and strategies based on interests in a common field or issue area. Finally, in a strategic alignment network, funders make grants independently, but work toward a shared and coordinated mission and strategy to obtain publicity, traction, and impact.



Surviving to Thriving: Funder Collaboratives that Matter



www.education-first.com



written by Kelly James, Education First

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Philanthropy & Funding

How Philanthropic Collaborations Succeed, and Why They Fail

By Alison Powell, Susan Wolf Dittkoff & Fay Twersky | Jul. 10, 2019

By combining and aligning resources and knowledge, funder collaboratives have the potential to drive greater results than donors could attain by working alone. (Photo by artistry/Stock)

**ABOUT THE
POSTSECONDARY
ACCESS AND
ATTAINMENT (PSA₂)
IMPACT GROUP**

Grantmakers for Education's [Postsecondary Access and Attainment \(PSA₂\) Impact Group](#) works to increase the number of learners accessing and completing postsecondary education or training, with a particular focus on historically underserved populations.

All Grantmakers for Education members are invited to join the PSA₂ Impact Group's [email communications list](#) and consider a more active role on the steering committee. Questions? Contact us at information@edfunders.org.

ABOUT GRANTMAKERS FOR EDUCATION

Grantmakers for Education is the nation's largest community of education philanthropists. Centering racial justice in education, we serve as a hub for new connections and ideas, a compass to help members navigate their work, a spur for collective action and a champion for positive change in education.

ABOUT RE.ENVISION CONSULTING

We are a strategy consulting firm that provides strategic and advisory services, research support, convening and backbone services, team and culture development, and project design and management. We partner with nonprofits, philanthropic entities and other mission driven organizations, to drive transformation of and innovation in our social systems.

We believe how we do the work is just as important as the work itself, so we do our work by centering people, fostering collaboration, prioritizing listening and learning and developing organizational cultures of care.