Case Study No. 6

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

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Engaged Partners:

The Achieving the Dream Partnership

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PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Discipline & Focus	Knowledge	Resources Linked to Results	Effective Grantees	Engaged Partners	Leverage, Influence & Collaboration	Persistence	Innovation & Constant Learning

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Grantmakers for Education's mission is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students. We achieve this mission by:

1. Sharing successful strategies, effective practices and lessons that exemplify responsive and responsible grantmaking in education.

2. Creating venues for funders to build and share knowledge, debate strategies, develop leadership, collaborate and advocate for change.

3. Gathering and interpreting data to illustrate trends, highlight innovative or proven educational approaches and support informed grantmaking.

Grantmakers for Education developed its series of case studies on effective education grantmaking as reflection and discussion tools. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of successful or unsuccessful grantmaking. In addition, to help make the case a more effective learning tool, it is deliberately written from one foundation's point of view, even though other foundations may have been involved in similar activities or supported the same grantees.

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The mission of Grantmakers for Education, a diverse national network of over 200 grantmaking organizations, is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In June 2005, we announced eight education grantmaking practices—drawn from the experience and wisdom of our members—that we think lead to results in education. These Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking seek to promote the wisdom, craft and knowledge education funders need to achieve maximum results.

As a complement to the principles, Grantmakers for Education is developing this series of case studies designed to encourage foundation trustees, leaders and program staff to reflect more deeply on what these principles mean for their own grantmaking and how they might be integrated into their efforts.

With the help of a distinguished set of advisors from our field, we have chosen case studies that we believe represent rich, thought-provoking examples of how funders might aspire to use these principles in their education grantmaking. Hindsight is always 20/20, and while we think these cases showcase exemplary efforts in education philanthropy, we also chose them because each sheds light on the careful work a funder must invest to make a grant effective, the challenges that crop up along the way, and the messiness inherent in grantmaking despite the best-laid plans.

In the end, we hope these principles—and the cases that help illuminate them—affirm a set of positive attitudes about the future: philanthropy, done wisely, can contribute solutions to the problems that prevent too many students from learning and achieving.

ENGAGED PARTNERS:

The Achieving the Dream Partnership

Tonika Cheek Clayton

Introduction

Just three years after it began, the Achieving the Dream Partnership—a nationwide initiative supported by a national funder, many local and regional funders, and national research and advocacy organizations—was well on the way toward its initial goal of creating a national movement focused on improving the success rates of minority and low-income community college students. But its growth generated difficult questions for its designers and funders: What impact would continued expansion have on the initiative's original design? Could one of the initiative's key engagement strategies—giving all partners and funders an equal voice in design and governance—be maintained? Was a new model of decision-making now necessary to sustain the work?

Achieving the Dream's approach for raising student success rates includes providing community colleges with funding, peer-learning opportunities and leadership coaching. Data-facilitation services are also provided to promote a "culture of evidence" in which college administrators and faculty regularly collect and analyze data to solve problems and develop action plans for improving student achievement. The initiative's design and governance are distinctive: All key decisions are made by consensus of the participating partners, which include national grantee organizations, foundations and other funders. The national partner organizations provide the managerial, consulting and technical services to operate the initiative, while funding partners help govern the initiative and provide the funds for community colleges to participate.

By 2007, the total grantmaking committed to Achieving the Dream activities had reached close to $100 million, with $56 million in grants from its founding national funder, Lumina Foundation for Education, and $43 million in grants and contributions from other funding partners (*see Exhibit 1 for a summary of investments*). Early indicators from an evaluation of the first cohort of 27 participating colleges suggested that Achieving the Dream was already making an impact: many of the colleges had begun to show signs of progress in using data analysis to drive decision-making and to employ new strategies aimed at improving student attainment. In addition, Achieving the Dream's model for improvement had reached 83 institutions across 15 states, exceeding the partners' initial projections of engaging 55 colleges over five years. Still, even this promising number represented just 20 percent of the 410 community colleges that Achieving the Dream categorized as serving high proportions of low-income students or students of color.

Expanding the initiative to work in more states would build on the momentum and positive buzz generated from the first few rounds of grants, many partners argued. But any expansion would require tough decisions about how to adjust the initiative's operating model, which had recently reached its capacity threshold. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to offer more community colleges the same level of direct support. If Achieving the Dream were to grow, it would need to do so using fewer foundation resources.

Another issue of concern was the growing number of partners who had an equal say in framing the direction of Achieving the Dream. Since 2004, when Lumina Foundation had made its original decision that new funders would join the initiative with an equal voice in decision-making, the total number of funding partners had reached 19. With the influx of so many funders, some partners worried that building consensus on key decisions affecting the future of Achieving the Dream would grow increasingly difficult. At the same time, many viewed the inclusive, collaborative partnership as a key ingredient for ensuring loyalty and commitment to the sustainability of the initiative. Looking forward, the partners would need to decide whether the ever-growing enterprise could maintain its commitment to giving everyone a say on all key decisions without slowing down the work. Should the partnership stay intact, or should it break up and let each grantee carry on with its own clients and funders?

Feeling a sense of urgency to keep the momentum going and resolve these issues about the initiative's future business model, Carol Lincoln, national director of Achieving the Dream, asked each partner organization to assign one person to a small work group to develop an initial design for national expansion. Recommendations would be presented at the next partnership meeting in late 2007. Lincoln knew it was time to address questions that were on the minds of many partners—and that would influence the initiative's future success.

Effective education grantmaking: Engaged partners

Conceived in 2004 by Lumina Foundation for Education, Achieving the Dream is a comprehensive national initiative aimed at helping more community college students succeed, particularly low-income students and students of color. Achieving the Dream seeks to create a national movement that changes policy and practice in community colleges across the country, and it emphasizes the use of research to drive change. With help from Achieving the Dream coaches and research experts, leaders at participating colleges collect and analyze data to identify gaps in student achievement and then take steps to close those gaps. The initiative also works to improve the environment in which these campuses operate by highlighting for state and local leaders the importance of community colleges and the student populations they serve.

By combining efforts focused on institutional change, policy development, knowledge development and public engagement, the designers and funders of Achieving the Dream aim to build a unique and more powerful approach to improving community colleges. "No other community college access or success initiative has all of these mutually reinforcing elements," explained Lincoln. "No other effort has the unique combination of practitioners, researchers and policy developers." Also unique is the initiative's commitment to "co-creation"—to engaging many partners and funders in designing the effort, tailoring the work to conditions in different states and participating fully in the ongoing decision-making.

Confronting two unhealthy approaches that surface frequently in philanthropy—the tendency for grantmakers to think they alone have all the answers and the tensions that arise when national and local funders try to work together—this case study is intended to help grantmakers think more deeply about the concept of *engaged partners*, one of Grantmakers for Education's Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking.

The case study focuses on the decisions made by Achieving the Dream's creators to build a sustainable model in which a broad and diverse range of stakeholders—including funders—take ownership of the problem of poor student success rates in community colleges and work collaboratively to influence changes in states and communities across the country. It illustrates the virtues—and some pitfalls—of engaging stakeholders with different agendas and missions to work together on a common problem and find common solutions. In doing so, the case study suggests ways a funder can garner support and commitment from other stakeholders and funders, and it challenges grantmakers to consider their assumptions about how social changes happen and are sustained.

Achieving the Dream: A commitment to ensuring postsecondary success

Lumina Foundation for Education

Achieving the Dream's initial funder, Lumina Foundation for Education, is an independent, private foundation that offers grants and policy education to further its mission of "expanding access to and success in postsecondary education in the United States." Funded in 2000 by proceeds from a student-loan company asset sale, the foundation is among the nation's largest, with more than $1.5 billion in assets and paying out approximately $50 million per year in grants. Based in Indianapolis, Ind., the foundation distributes grants across the country to promote student access, student attainment and adult learning. The foundation's three largest national initiatives are

- **Achieving the Dream:** an initiative aimed to improve the success of minority and low-income students in community colleges;

- **KnowHow2GO:** a public-awareness campaign to educate parents and students on how to prepare for college; and

- **Making Opportunity Affordable:** an initiative focused on helping higher education increase productivity in order to expand college access for all students at an affordable cost.

Through 2007, Lumina Foundation's funding for Achieving the Dream had reached $56 million; the foundation has pledged to provide support for Achieving the Dream's continued development through 2012.

Laying the groundwork for social change

At the end of 2001, after assessing the major challenges of low-income and minority students in postsecondary education, Lumina Foundation leaders decided to focus on student attainment in community colleges as a key grantmaking area. Martha Lamkin, then the foundation's president and

CEO, explained: "I cannot overstate the importance of helping community college students succeed. Community colleges enroll almost half of the nation's undergraduates, and the students they serve often have few other options for higher education. With today's jobs requiring more and more postsecondary education, the role of these institutions is more vital than ever."[1]

"The data revealed that many of the students we wanted to see succeed were enrolled at community colleges, but they were not succeeding at levels comparable to students from the majority group," remarked Samuel Cargile, senior director of grantmaking at Lumina Foundation. "In fact, students from all groups were not succeeding at sufficiently high rates to achieve their academic goals. Therefore, we decided that it was important to emphasize success among all students in the Achieving the Dream initiative, but particularly among low-income students and students of color." Soon thereafter, the foundation's staff began developing a plan for distributing $60 million directly to between 60 and 100 community colleges over a four-year period.

By late spring 2003, this original proposal had evolved in new ways, due in part to the addition earlier that year of Leah Meyer Austin to the foundation's staff as its new vice president for programs. Recently retired from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Austin brought to Lumina Foundation her prior experience in the strategic design of comprehensive initiatives. Austin worked to shift the focus of the staff proposal from distributing one-time grants to community colleges to building a foundation for change on a national scale. Austin recalled her first impressions of the original plan:

> There were two things that troubled me about the original plan to make large grants to several community colleges. One is that you don't get lasting social change from just making grants to institutions. You have to have a policy plan, a public engagement plan, an institutional transformation plan and a plan for building the capacity of all the major national organizations that work with whatever type of institution you're trying to change. You have to know what outcomes you seek for students. And you have to have a way to measure the baseline so that you know where you're starting in order to know years hence if you've made a change.

> The other big problem was that the foundation was brand-new to the concept of big-bet, long-term investments in major initiatives. I thought staff, officers and board members would need to swallow this in bites that they could chew. We would need to operate in shorter-term phases, each of which could lead to something bigger, but each of which could also be terminated in three or four years with some productive intermediate outcomes. For the first phase, I thought we should ask for no more than $10 million. Then, we could use that first phase to lay the groundwork for subsequent phases, but also to give us time to educate our staff and board about initiatives and build the capacity of our grantees.

Shortly after the new concept for Achieving the Dream was developed, the foundation's board of directors approved a $10-million grant to fund the first phase. Funding during this phase offered planning grants to national partner organizations to create a master work plan. The funding also supported the analysis and selection of states that featured a favorable environment for policy change and in which there were several community colleges serving high proportions of the targeted

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[1] "National Initiative to Help More Community College Students Succeed Will Expand to 24 New Colleges in Eight States," Achieving the Dream press release, April 16, 2007.

students. The team also sought to learn from other funders around the country who were already working to resolve community college issues.

Recognizing that they alone did not possess the expertise needed to define or address the problem of student attainment at community colleges, foundation staff members resolved from the beginning to engage other stakeholders in the design of Achieving the Dream.

In July 2003, the foundation convened a two-day "stakeholder meeting" with approximately 50 people from other organizations with a track record of working either with community colleges or with underserved students. At the meeting, the foundation presented its basic design of the initiative and invited feedback on the barriers and the opportunities that the initiative would face. "We wanted to find out if this was the right focus at the right time, so we invited a variety of knowledgeable people in related fields who we thought could inform us on the work we were considering; they included higher education leaders, prominent researchers, and student and community advocates," noted Cargile. Many of those invitees later became partners in Achieving the Dream.

Collaboration by design

Applying knowledge gleaned from the stakeholder meeting, the Lumina Foundation team revamped the initial design and sent it out with a special "request for qualifications" (RFQ) to all organizations that they believed could play a critical role in pushing Achieving the Dream forward. Although Achieving the Dream's focus had been set broadly on improving student attainment in community colleges, the team still needed to define each facet of the national initiative. The foundation wanted the RFQ process to help it identify the right group of national partner organizations that possessed the qualifications and capacity to take part in the design and implementation of the initiative.

As part of the RFQ, the foundation asked each organization to be specific about which of Achieving the Dream's basic elements (technical assistance, evaluation, communications, etc.) it would be able to work on. Also, the foundation looked for evidence that applicant organizations had a record of success in collaborative efforts. Austin discussed the importance of sending out an RFQ as opposed to the more traditional route of distributing a "request for proposals" (RFP):

> Our thinking was that if we sent out an RFP, we were just going to have a run-of-the-mill initiative where organizations peck off chunks of the work, view it as a project, do their work, collect their money, and move on to the next grant and the next project. We wanted something in which our grantees would become so deeply invested that if we walked away from the work they would continue it without us. I believe strongly that grantees have loyalty and dedication to what they design and create. What someone else imposes on them, they will view as a project and not a life's work. Co-creation is the most basic principle when you want deep investment in social change.

From the RFQ process, the foundation selected eight national partner organizations and invited them to attend a series of meetings with its staff in which all nine organizations would collectively determine the specific details of how Achieving the Dream would accomplish its goals (*see Exhibit 2 for list of national partner organizations and key responsibilities*). Austin recalled their first meeting: "Throughout the meeting, people would take me aside and say, 'Just tell us what you want us to do, and we'll do it. We don't need these planning meetings, and we don't need so many different

grantees.' These were highly successful organizations that were accustomed to bidding against each other for contracts and grants. Initially, some may have been befuddled by the fact that we did not expect them to compete; we expected them to become partners in an enterprise that was bigger than any one organization. I think they saw us as a new foundation with an audacious approach. They probably thought we were out of our minds."

Although the organizations were not guaranteed grant money for the program at this point, the foundation paid them consulting fees for their time. As part of the design process, the group determined each organization's roles and responsibilities—with the exception of MDC, Inc., which Lumina Foundation had already selected to be the initiative's managing partner.

MDC, a 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in North Carolina, works on a wide variety of projects and initiatives as part of its goal to "build the capacity of institutions and communities to work for more just and equitable conditions," especially in the southeastern United States. As the managing partner—or intermediary—for Achieving the Dream, MDC was given the task of coordinating the work of the initiative, in addition to overseeing and monitoring grants made by funders to colleges and to national partner organizations. "We chose MDC as the managing partner because, unlike many other similarly talented organizations, they had led multipartner collaboratives in the past," noted Austin. "Also, they had a staff member, Carol Lincoln, who has the perfect temperament for this kind of work. She's unflappable, generous in sharing leadership and talented at achieving win-win consensus."

Since this was a new experience for many of the people involved, the co-creation process became difficult for participants at times. Lincoln commented on the advantages and disadvantages of working collaboratively with many other organizations:

> It's a hard way of working, but in the end it pays off. It can be hard for people who are experts in their field to have their ideas challenged by others, equally expert, but with different perspectives and techniques. Most of our organizations were used to working in environments where we had full responsibility and control of the work. To move to an environment where the majority of decisions are made by consensus of a large number of people who have different points of view is frustrating to some because it slows down the work. But most of us would say we made better decisions because we considered everyone's point of view.

Lumina Foundation and MDC pressed the organizations to continue working together, making it clear that no organization would receive an implementation grant until the group had finished the initiative's design. Austin reflected on that period: "It took a while to convince them that Lumina Foundation was just another partner who sat at the table like everyone else."

Despite efforts to give every partner an equal voice and to build consensus around the initiative's direction, conflicts emerged that ultimately resulted in the exit of one of the original partners. "During the developmental phase, one of the potential partner organizations withdrew from the initiative because of a difference in philosophy over how prescriptive to be about the use of data to improve student achievement—in essence, a difference in methodology," said Cargile. Frustrated with the partner's unwillingness to compromise its position in light of the group's decision, the foundation staff decided to pull the partner's representatives aside and ask them to either go along with the group's decision or leave the partnership. Ultimately, the partner opted to leave.

Crafting the blueprint

Together, during a series of meetings throughout 2003, the remaining national partner organizations and Lumina Foundation worked diligently to agree on all initial design aspects for how Achieving the Dream would work. The original theory of action they crafted for the initiative assumed that if a college routinely uses data analysis to diagnose, develop and implement strategies to address student success barriers, the college will improve student attainment. After building consensus about the initiative's theory of action, the partners took on the even more difficult challenge of developing what Austin called the "integrated action plan" (IAP) (*see Exhibit 3 for flowchart of original theory of action*). The IAP serves as a comprehensive written account of the initiative to guide all Achieving the Dream participants.

In narrative form, the IAP includes meticulous details about the initiative's context, activities, expected outcomes and work products. Austin commented on the importance of developing the IAP: "Organizations working in a partnership have to figure out how every action affects another action. Everything has to knit together. Crafting an integrated action plan is the hardest thing to do, because everyone participates in its development. The plan is more than what you see on paper; it's the explicit and implicit negotiation of the relationships among the partners. The partners may not have seen it that way at first, but they came to appreciate it. And they came to see that the IAP helped other potential investors understand and decide to put their dollars into Achieving the Dream."

By spring 2004, the group had completed the original version of the IAP, which they viewed as a living document that would evolve over time as they learned more from their work. Shortly thereafter, the national partner organizations were asked to submit grant proposals to Lumina Foundation, based on commitments laid out in the IAP, to begin work on Achieving the Dream. In June 2004 the foundation approved the outlay of $9.3 million in grants to these organizations (*see Exhibit 2 for national partner organizations' key responsibilities and total grants received*).

Governance and decision-making

To avoid having a roomful of 50 partners trying to make decisions regarding each part of the work, the partners created smaller work groups to manage and implement actions detailed in the IAP. Lincoln described how partners responded to the formation of work groups:

> Each of the partners had a chance to put any one of its staff members on any work group it wanted. It was fun to watch initially because, during the first year, some of the committees were almost as big as the partnership. On the one hand, everybody saw him- or herself in all of the work, cared about it and brought something to contribute. There was also a twin joke of "maybe I'm going to miss something if I don't show up to the meeting." Over time, though, as we developed more trust, it has become possible for smaller work groups and ad hoc task forces to lead aspects of the work.

Recognizing that every decision made in work groups or by individual partners did not warrant full partnership consensus, the team included a section in the IAP that details decision-making processes for various aspects of the work. For example, each partner is expected to make daily decisions about its own work, but if the decisions have implications for Achieving the Dream that affect other

partners, the partner is expected to seek input from the appropriate work group. If a work group fails to make a decision within a reasonable time frame, the decision can be made by MDC. Certain decisions, such as the model for national expansion, require a consensus process that includes all partners. Face-to-face partners' meetings are held at least twice annually, and partners also gather in conjunction with an annual meeting for grantee-college teams and their technical assistance providers.

Achieving the Dream's design

In defining Achieving the Dream's approach, the partners organized the work into five work strands[2]:

- Promote and sustain institutional change.

- Develop policy and improve the policy environment for community colleges.

- Engage the public and build public will for change.

- Build knowledge about practices shown to make a difference.

- Enhance partners' internal capacity.

Creating an initiative that would work on multiple fronts was intentional. "To achieve social change, I believe you need to start at the center of the bull's-eye, with the individual who is going to benefit from the change—in this case, the community college student. Then you figure out how you are going to work with all those who affect the student's academic success: families, community organizations, schools, government agencies, etc.," explained Austin. "Many foundations take a slice or layer or ring of this work; for example, they'll work on public policy change in an attempt to effect lasting improvements. Our approach with Achieving the Dream was different: we wanted to invest close to the center of the bull's-eye but also have strategies for working in the other rings and bringing in partners who could help make change in those areas."

Promoting and sustaining institutional change at community colleges

For the institutional-change work strand, the partners help participating colleges develop a results-oriented, self-learning culture in which faculty and administrators continually use data to solve problems and seek out strategies to improve student results, especially for low-income students and students of color. Under Achieving the Dream's approach, each participating college moves through these four stages of action:

Commitment to Improving Student Outcomes: Each college's senior leadership team commits to making the changes in policy and resource allocation necessary to improve student outcomes, and it organizes a team to oversee the process.

- **Identification of Problems, Engagement of Stakeholders and Development of Strategic Plan:** Each college collects, disaggregates and analyzes student data to get a better understanding of the institution's performance. A "core team" comprising the college's president, senior

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[2] Achieving the Dream Integrated Action Plan.

administrators and faculty spearhead the work and spread the "culture of evidence" to other colleagues, while a "data team" comprising a research director and other faculty members is responsible for analyzing and presenting data accurately and truthfully to reflect the realities of student success rates at the college and to reach out to students and community members for advice on ways to strengthen institutional performance. To support these activities, each participating college receives a $50,000 planning grant plus the services of a leadership coach and an institutional research consultant (the "data facilitator") provided by Achieving the Dream. (Illustrating how Achieving the Dream's IAP works in practice, each of these components is managed by a different partner: the American Association of Community Colleges manages the planning grants, the University of Texas' Community College Leadership Program manages the coaching and MDC manages data facilitation.)

- **Implementation and Evaluation:** To receive additional funding and services to implement their strategies for improving student performance and to evaluate the impact of these strategies, colleges submit a proposal to MDC detailing their strategic plans for addressing their findings. MDC and the other partners review all applications and decide which colleges to support for further work. A college can receive up to $400,000 in funding over the four-year implementation phase, plus the continued contribution of coaching and data facilitation. Since colleges are given autonomy to determine which strategies best meet their specific needs, a wide variety of strategies to improve student success are implemented across participating colleges. At annual strategy institutes, colleges are encouraged to present evidence of effectiveness of selected strategies to other participating colleges. Colleges also join various learning networks and share their progress via the Achieving the Dream website.

- **Institutionalization:** During the final phase, a college refines and expands its most effective strategies and ensures that organizational structures, systems and resources are guided by data and evidence of effectiveness. Achieving the Dream partners expect that grantee colleges will use this phase to ensure the long-term sustainability of the work.

To gauge the effect of the initiative as a whole, all colleges document over time the percentage of low-income students and students of color who accomplish the following:

- successfully complete developmental courses and progress to credit-bearing courses;

- enroll in and successfully complete gatekeeper courses;

- complete the courses they take, with a grade of C or higher;

- re-enroll from one semester to the next; and

- earn certificates and/or degrees.

Developing policy

For the policy work strand, Achieving the Dream partners work to shape the policy environment for community colleges at both national and state levels. "We knew we had to work on policy development because we felt that if we only worked at the college level, we would never get to some of the big barriers or opportunities at state and national levels to change the landscape for all colleges," remarked Lincoln.

Jobs for the Future, the national partner organization responsible for the execution of the initiative's policy work, outlined the policy strand's four goals[3]:

- Institutionalize community college student success as an explicit policy goal and priority.

- Identify and implement specific policy changes in data and accountability, system alignment, financing and/or support for institutional improvement that promote student success.

- Move beyond a general policy statement and a few specific policy changes toward a culture that is based on the use of rich student data to assess policy needs and options.

- Disseminate strategically the knowledge developed and lessons learned from the policy work to other states and national audiences.

In each state where community colleges receive support from Achieving the Dream, the initiative also funds a statewide "lead organization" to advocate for supportive policies, resources and incentives for community colleges to improve student success rates. For example, the lead organization might take steps to influence state policies to increase the level of financial aid offered to low-income community college students. In addition, the partners, in conjunction with the lead organization, aim to improve state data systems to measure postsecondary student outcomes at the state level. The lead organization in each state receives $75,000 yearly and commits at least one staff person to work on the project for half of his or her time (*see Exhibit 4 for list of lead organizations*).

Although the partners allocate most resources for policy change at the state level, they also aspire to shape national and regional accreditation policies by sharing their findings widely and building relationships with key policymakers and opinion leaders. As of 2007, the policy change work centered mainly on researching and identifying policy opportunities and barriers within each state and developing frameworks to address the barriers. Lumina Foundation had invested $1.8 million in this work strand, in addition to the $75,000 in annual grants allocated to lead organizations in the first five states.

Engaging the public

The initiative's third strand aims to build public support by increasing community awareness of how community colleges can advance opportunities for all students, especially students of color and low-income students. Through this work, the partners hope to persuade business leaders, community leaders, students and families to support policy and institutional improvements focused on student success.

Lincoln commented on the partners' decision to find a new national partner organization to pursue this work: "When we decided that we needed to have a public-engagement strand, we didn't really have an expert in engagement among our partners. We knew that Public Agenda had extensive experience in community engagement that could be applied to our work, so we invited it to join the partnership." As part of its contribution to Achieving the Dream, Public Agenda designed a tool kit to

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[3] "Achieving the Dream Annual Report to Lumina Foundation for Education Grant # 3715," Jobs for the Future, July 31, 2007.

help the colleges effectively engage their communities and provided technical assistance to selected community colleges that helped pilot community, faculty or student engagement strategies.

Additionally, each partner plays a role in disseminating data and lessons from Achieving the Dream whenever appropriate through publications, speeches, conferences and websites. As an example, Austin noted, "Whenever the American Association of Community Colleges president spoke publicly, he inevitably talked about Achieving the Dream. That was a tremendous help in building awareness and affirmation for the initiative."

Building knowledge

For the final work strand, the partners seek to provide stakeholders with access to data, data-analysis tools and research on practices shown to affect student achievement and institutional change at community colleges. Recognizing there were little research and data available on student success at community colleges, "we identified a handful of research studies that we knew we wanted to have done to give us a better handle on what strategies really make a difference with student success," commented Lincoln. "We also wanted a full evaluation of Achieving the Dream."

The Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College, the University of Texas' Community College Leadership Program, MDRC (a nonprofit education and social-policy research organization), the University of Florida's Institute for Higher Education and MDC all took on roles in knowledge-building efforts, conducting studies of community college practices and policy analyses, developing instructional modules to train institutional researchers at community colleges, analyzing coaches' and data facilitators' reports on work at the colleges, and conducting the overall evaluation of the initiative.

Knowledge-development work included creating a national database of community college student data and an Achieving the Dream college database to help identify effective strategies for improving student attainment and to assess the impact of Achieving the Dream.

The partners did not expect significant results in terms of student attainment in the early years, in part because institutions cannot change rapidly, and in part because many, if not most, community college students are part-time attendees. However, by 2007, the evaluators had recorded baseline data for the formal evaluation of Achieving the Dream and had begun to report progress on the first 27 community college participants. Key findings listed in the overview of the 2007 Achieving the Dream evaluation report include the following[4]:

- Institutional measures reveal low rates of success at baseline. Before the initiative was launched, colleges reported that, on average, 30 percent of students who were referred to introductory college English completed the course within three years; for introductory math, the rate was about 20 percent.

- The colleges embraced the goal of building a culture of evidence. The presidents at the colleges generally showed strong leadership, and each college created at least a small team to plan and implement Achieving the Dream.

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[4] *Building a Culture of Evidence for Community College Student Success—Early Progress in the Achieving the Dream Initiative*, MDRC and Community College Research Center, May 2007.

- About half of the colleges used data analysis to identify problems to address on their campuses. Colleges were not always sure how to respond to what they had learned from the data, however. Some colleges struggled because their research offices were understaffed or their computer and data-collection systems were weak (however, colleges in subsequent rounds have reported fewer challenges with data or institutional research and appear to be embracing Achieving the Dream data-analysis practices more quickly).

- Colleges implemented a wide array of strategies to improve student success.

- Six colleges showed signs of institutionalizing a culture of evidence after only one year. Most other colleges showed signs of progress.

By 2007, Lumina Foundation, the primary funder for this particular work strand, had invested $6.3 million in the evaluation of Achieving the Dream. Several other funders were investing lesser amounts to assess aspects of the implementation of the initiative in their geographic areas.

Enhancing partners' capacity

The initiative's final work strand focuses on developing the internal operating capacity of each partner organization to sustain its work with community colleges beyond the life of Achieving the Dream. Recognizing that participation in the initiative would allow the partners to gain new knowledge and experience, each partner set its own goals and plans for sustaining its work and expanding the initiative after Lumina Foundation had completed its multiyear investment.

Demonstration phase: Round 1

Initially, Lumina Foundation designated $11.8 million for the first round of participating community colleges. To inform the selection process, the partners searched for the first states and community colleges to participate in the initiative. "We began by identifying a national pool of eligible colleges based on the enrollment of low-income students and/or students of color," read the IAP. "We then examined the states with a critical mass of such colleges and selected a subset of those states with policy environments favorable to our goals."

Given the initiative's focus on promoting change both on community college campuses and in the surrounding policy environment, the partners elected first to choose a set of promising states and then to find community colleges within those states. After agreeing on the factors to consider in choosing states, the partners ultimately narrowed the list to five (Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia) where they would begin the demonstration phase.

Eligibility of the colleges in each state, the partners next decided, would be based on two criteria: percent enrollment of minority students (defined as African American, Latino or Native American students) and percent of first-time, full-time students who were Pell grant recipients.[5] These criteria narrowed the number of eligible community colleges in the five states to 105 out of a pool of 410

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[5] Pell grants are federally funded financial aid to full- or part-time students who have not earned a bachelor's or a professional degree. The Pell grant amount awarded to students is based on financial need, costs to attend school and the student's part- or full-time status.

eligible community colleges across the nation—and the partners invested in significant orientation and outreach efforts to encourage this initial cohort of community colleges to apply.

The partners—still Lumina Foundation and its partner national organizations, with all grant funds during the initiative's first grantmaking cycle coming from the foundation—selected 27 of the 60 colleges that eventually applied. Colleges were chosen based on the quality of the applications, the colleges' willingness to meet required commitments, the partners' knowledge about the colleges' circumstances and the initiative's diversity objectives. Austin recalled, "We had to select the first group of colleges carefully because they would provide the baseline data for Achieving the Dream's evaluation. We wanted to be sure that a college's leadership was behind the initiative and that the college would be willing to collect and disaggregate student data by race and income."

Demonstration phase: Rounds 2-4

After the successful launch of round one, the partners set out to recruit new funders who were willing to provide grants to support the participation of more community colleges in additional states. By 2007—which was the last year the original Achieving the Dream IAP had specified planning grants to community colleges would be made—18 additional foundations and grantmaking organizations had signed on to support the initiative, nearly matching Lumina Foundation's investment dollar for dollar. Their support, along with that of colleges that were so enthusiastic about the effort that they chose to fund their own participation, brought in more clusters of colleges in new and existing Achieving the Dream states—so that 84 colleges across 15 states were participating by 2007. (In August of that year, one college chose to withdraw from the initiative.)

In June 2005, the initiative attracted its first new funding partners, KnowledgeWorks Foundation of Cincinnati, Ohio, and the Nellie Mae Education Fund of Quincy, Mass., whose grants respectively expanded Achieving the Dream's reach to Ohio and Connecticut. In April 2006, the Houston Endowment Inc. joined the partnership, committing $9 million to fund 10 additional institutions in Texas. A few months later, College Spark, based in Seattle, Wash., and the Heinz Endowments of Pittsburgh, Penn., made commitments to expand the initiative to community colleges in their states. In 2007, 13 new funding organizations joined the initiative, adding 26 more colleges and six new states: Arkansas, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oklahoma and South Carolina (*see Exhibit 5 for funding partners*).

Recruiting new funding partners: Infrastructure is the selling point

From the start, Lumina Foundation had made it clear to national partner organizations that it planned to fund the initiative's infrastructure development, knowledge base, and initial round of colleges and lead organizations. Recognizing that future rounds would require the enlistment of new funders, foundation staff began sharing Achieving the Dream's vision and goals with other funders early in the initiative's development. "We sought other funders not only to expand the program but, even more importantly, to demonstrate to the partner organizations that their efforts would be rewarded by more than the foundation. Almost immediately, the partners put their hearts and souls into recruiting additional funders as well," remarked Austin.

To educate funders on Achieving the Dream's approach and activities, the partners invited prospective funders to annual partner meetings and institutes. Also, Lumina Foundation was one of a group of funders who formed the Community College Affinity Partnership in September 2004 to start an ongoing dialogue with other funders and organizations that worked closely with community colleges. The affinity group met periodically to discuss pertinent topics and exchange ideas and information on their efforts to help community colleges. The partnership offered an opportunity for Lumina Foundation and other funders to generate interest in and get feedback on their work, and some of its members later became Achieving the Dream supporters.

When presenting Achieving the Dream to prospective funders, the partners shared the IAP and looked for ways in which the initiative complemented the work that the funder was already doing. They also emphasized the benefits of working with a national initiative for which the infrastructure was already built.

That was a key selling point, Austin explained. "It would be very difficult for many local funders to convene all these national organizations, get their undivided attention, pay for the necessary development, research, design, policy work, communication materials and the like," she said. "But many can afford to pay for three or more community colleges to participate in the initiative. They then become part of a national movement, but they can spend their dollars locally."

Christine McCabe, executive director of College Spark, a grantmaking organization focused on Washington state, echoed Austin's observation: "With a staff of four, we could not have gotten this off the ground without Achieving the Dream's infrastructure. We were pleased by the relatively moderate level of staff commitment required on our part since our small team did not have the capacity to dedicate a full-time staff person to the initiative."

Similarly, George Grainger, grant officer at the Houston Endowment, observed that it was different from his experience with other national grantmaking initiatives. "Achieving the Dream specifically articulates the core goals of the initiative, but it is not prescriptive on what you need to do to achieve those goals," he said. "It shifts the problem-solving down to the institutions and people closest to their college's unique challenges and problems."

Engaging funders as partners

New funders were invited to become initiative partners and given the autonomy to select their own colleges. "As long as they sign on to the key principles and outcomes of the initiative, our message to funders has been 'You do it your way, in your place, to meet your needs,'" said Austin. As part of their commitment, funding partners pay for all expenses pertaining to their colleges' involvement, which include data facilitators, leadership coaches, planning and implementation grants, and related traveling expenses. If the funder's cluster of colleges is in a new state, the funding partner is asked to commit to a five-year, $75,000 annual grant to a local lead organization for policy-development work. The new partners also receive the most updated version of the IAP. "The IAP is very thoughtful," noted McCabe. "I go back to the IAP time and time again to remind myself of Achieving the Dream's goals and the actions corresponding to those goals."

Beyond financial commitments, the funders can choose to participate in as many or as few partnership activities as desired, including partner meetings and institutes. Funding partners are also

encouraged to build on the work of Achieving the Dream through other initiatives. For example, Grainger worked with the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas to develop a Board of Trustees Institute to complement Achieving the Dream efforts. "If you really want to transform institutions, I think you also need to bring the boards of trustees to a new line of thinking. This was an area that the Achieving the Dream model did not address," noted Grainger. In response, Houston Endowment provided funds toward operating an annual Trustee Institute for the Houston-area Achieving the Dream institutions. The first annual Trustee Institute was held in Santa Fe, N.M., in March 2007. More than 25 elected board members from the nine community colleges in the greater Houston area attended, along with each institution's president.

Finding common ground with new partners

Working with new funders brought a new set of challenges for Lumina Foundation and the partner organizations. To help funders meet their own objectives, the partners chose to be flexible in areas that did not significantly compromise Achieving the Dream's approach. For example, the Houston Endowment wanted to include three four-year colleges in Achieving the Dream, despite the initiative's focus on community colleges. After the Houston Endowment demonstrated that the four-year institutions faced challenges similar to those of community colleges, the partners agreed to include the four-year colleges. In another case, the Heinz Endowments pressed for specific benchmarks that required additional work from select partner organizations. Ultimately, the partners agreed to a compromise that met the foundation's needs while minimizing the strain on partner organizations.

With the influx of funding partners in 2007, the total number of partners made day-to-day management and decision-making more difficult, even though many funders chose not to get involved in the management of the initiative. Accommodating special requests from funders with different needs consumed a significant portion of MDC's time. In an effort to streamline communications with all partners, Lincoln established routine reporting procedures and asked funding partners to refrain from requesting excess reports. "Sometimes we can't get information in the time frame we need because we've got our own internal cycle for funding approval," commented McCabe. "It's one of the challenges of working with a national organization."

In addition, partners worried that too many different perspectives would slow down their collaborative work. One administrator pointed to the delayed release of Achieving the Dream's state of the initiative report because partners had conflicting opinions on what should be included. Nevertheless, many still viewed the inclusive partnership as one of the core strengths of the initiative.

The road ahead: National expansion and new terms of engagement

Looking ahead, Lincoln and other partners were anxious to figure out how to adapt the existing model to accommodate more states, funders and community colleges. Austin wondered whether it would be necessary to consider a new form of governance for Achieving the Dream. "During the current demonstration phase, our collaborative governance model is what succeeded in building this movement for change that community colleges now seek to join," she said. "But when does a partnership get so large that it requires a new way of working?"

In addition to asking one person from each partner organization to serve on the national expansion work group, Lincoln asked each partner organization to submit a white paper to the work group, detailing its ideas on how national expansion could work. The national expansion plan needed to address many questions, including the following:

■ How could the partners plan for the future while still testing the model? Could fidelity to the original concept of on-campus support to community colleges be maintained as more colleges became involved?

■ What would be the initiative's structure? Were partners willing to continue together for another four to eight years? What would happen if there wasn't consensus on the best path forward?

■ Would new funders be invited to participate in the national expansion? Was the commitment to "co-creating" the initiative still the best way to involve locally focused funders and sustain the Achieving the Dream movement?

■ When does a partnership get so large that it requires a new way of working?

Heading into the next phase, many Achieving the Dream partners were confident that the initiative had been successful in engaging stakeholders and setting a foundation for sustainability. Austin summarized, "From the start, we developed Achieving the Dream with a plan that Lumina Foundation would not be in it forever and that the base of power, the base of intellect, the base of creativity had to be external to this foundation. We had to sow the seed somewhere else and grow the initiative's base of support. With the help of the partnership and many dedicated funders and other individuals, we certainly have done that."

She added, "Our challenge moving forward is to continue imbuing each new partner with the vision of Achieving the Dream—creating excitement, passion and commitment anew."

EXHIBIT 1
SUMMARY OF ACHIEVING THE DREAM TOTAL INVESTMENTS

Investments by Lumina Foundation – 2003 thru 2007

Integrated Action Plan	*$ 1,364,000*
Partner Organizations	*32,239,000*
Demonstration colleges	*14,050,000*
State policy	*1,875,000*
Evaluation	*6,288,000*
Total	$55,816,000

Investments by Funding Partners – 2004 thru 2007
(see Exhibit 5 for list of funding partners)

Demonstration colleges and state policy	$43,457,000

GRAND TOTAL   **$99,273,000**

EXHIBIT 2
NATIONAL PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS IN ACHIEVING THE DREAM
Grants Received from Lumina Foundation for Key Responsibilities

American Association of Community Colleges – ($8,298,300)
- Help recruit and select participating colleges.
- Co-host various learning events, including an annual strategy institute.
- Co-lead the national policy work.
- Lead various events aimed at creating national awareness of Achieving the Dream and the issues it seeks to address.
- Spread lessons from Achieving the Dream and strengthen the commitment and capacity of community colleges to increase student success.
- House the Achieving the Dream website.
- Establish web-based data tools and maintain the initiative's database on the Internet.
- Participate in all four work groups.

Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin – ($5,485,200)
- Recruit and deploy coaches and oversee their work.
- Co-lead the partners' collaborative efforts for designing and carrying out the kick-off institute for each round of demonstration colleges.
- Collaborate with American Association of Community Colleges and MDC on the design and delivery of the annual Strategy Institute.
- Help identify "promising practices" at colleges and document lessons about institutional change.
- Co-lead the institutional-change work group and participate in the other three work groups.

Community College Research Center, Teachers College at Columbia University – ($5,117,300)
- Conduct research on a variety of issues, including college practices associated with student success, institutional research capacity at community colleges and alternative frameworks for institutional change.
- Oversee development of the Achieving the Dream national database, which can be used to identify eligible colleges and compare Achieving the Dream institutions with the national universe of community colleges.
- Work with states on analysis of state data and collaborate with Jobs for the Future and state leadership teams on reform of state data systems.
- Participate in all four work groups and co-lead the knowledge-development work group.
- Collaborate with MDRC on assessment of Achieving the Dream's institutional change model, faculty engagement and other evaluation components.

Institute for Higher Education, University of Florida – ($1,686,600)
- Provide professional development opportunities for data facilitators who work with the colleges.
- Develop a web-based curriculum for institutional researchers on data-driven change.
- Participate in the institutional-change and knowledge-development work groups.

Jobs for the Future – ($7,385,500)
- Lead the state policy work and co-lead the national policy work.
- Select state lead organizations, support the work of those organizations and administer the state policy grants.
- Help states reform their community college data systems.
- Develop a portfolio of state policies that enhance student success.
- Co-lead the policy work group and participate in the knowledge-development and communications/public-engagement work groups.

MDC – ($8,726,700)
- Lead the process of developing a shared vision for Achieving the Dream among partners and funders and be responsible for developing the IAP and monitoring its implementation.
- Coordinate the efforts of the partner organizations to accomplish the initiative's goals and create a community of learning and practice among the Achieving the Dream partners.
- Co-chair the partners' work groups.
- Hire, train and manage the data facilitators.
- Pilot with Public Agenda strategies for building community support for the initiative's agenda.
- Plan and deliver institutes and networking events in collaboration with other partners.
- Develop and maintain content for the Achieving the Dream website.
- Lead efforts to connect Achieving the Dream with other community college initiatives and assist Lumina Foundation in efforts to attract other funders to Achieving the Dream.
- Facilitate the partners' efforts to develop approaches to spread Achieving the Dream practices to more colleges.
- Oversee an initiative-wide communications strategy.
- Assist colleges and states in developing strategies to address cultural, national, and individual values, practices and policies that cause opportunity and support to be allocated in ways that give advantage to some groups over other groups.
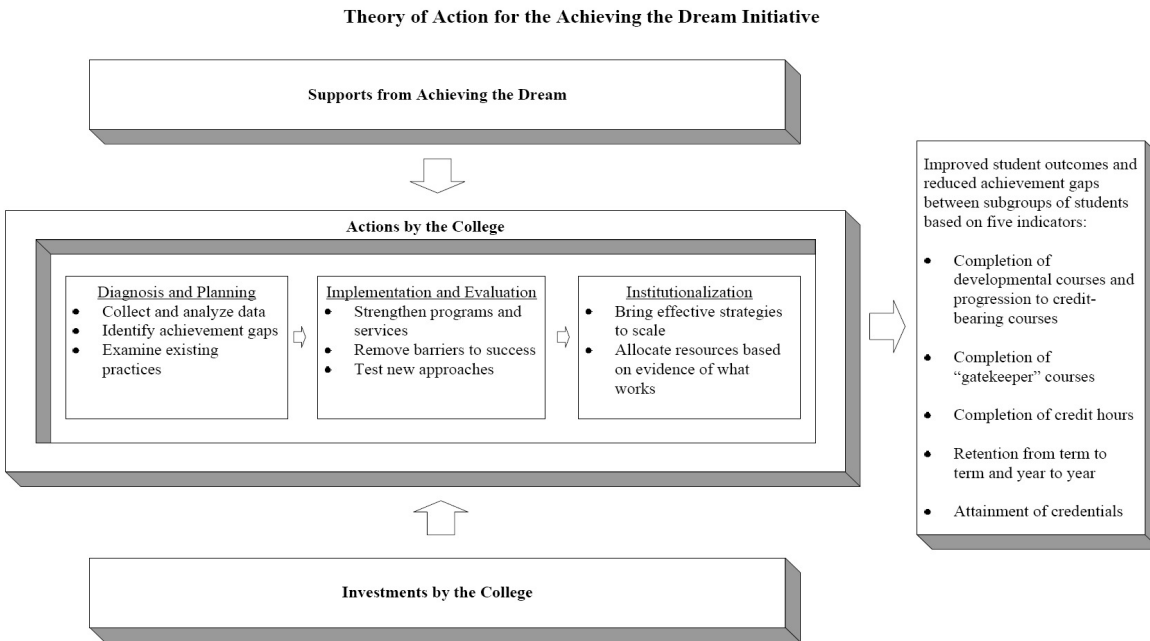
MDRC – ($6,287,837)
- Lead the evaluation of Achieving the Dream.
- Provide timely feedback to Lumina Foundation and the Achieving the Dream partners on the progress of the initiative as well as an independent, objective and valid assessment of the initiative's impact.
- Develop a comprehensive evaluation plan that assesses the efficacy of the overall initiative as well as the results achieved by specific programs or reforms at participating colleges.
- Participate in the institutional-change, policy and knowledge-development work groups.

Public Agenda – ($1,881,200)
- Help the initiative and colleges in particular with strategies for engaging various stakeholders.
- Create tool kits and provide technical assistance to selected colleges that seek to expand their capacity for public engagement.
- Work in collaboration with other partners to develop effective approaches to conversations on racial dynamics bearing on Achieving the Dream.
- Participate in the institutional-change and communications/public-engagement work groups.

Source: Achieving the Dream Integrated Action Plan, Lumina Foundation for Education Annual Reports 2003-06.

EXHIBIT 3
ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S ORIGINAL THEORY OF ACTION

Theory of Action for the Achieving the Dream Initiative

Supports from Achieving the Dream

Actions by the College

Improved student outcomes and reduced achievement gaps between subgroups of students based on five indicators:

Diagnosis and Planning
- Collect and analyze data
- Identify achievement gaps
- Examine existing practices

Implementation and Evaluation
- Strengthen programs and services
- Remove barriers to success
- Test new approaches

Institutionalization
- Bring effective strategies to scale
- Allocate resources based on evidence of what works

- Completion of developmental courses and progression to credit-bearing courses

- Completion of "gatekeeper" courses

- Completion of credit hours

- Retention from term to term and year to year

- Attainment of credentials

Investments by the College

Achieving the Dream partners continue to refine this model. In late 2007, the model was changed from three stages (illustrated above) to the stages described in the text of this case study (see pages 8-9). The new theory of change is described in detail in *Becoming an Achieving the Dream College: A Framework for Assessing Implementation of the Achieving the Dream Model of Institutional Performance Improvement* (Davis Jenkins et al., August 2007).

EXHIBIT 4
ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S STATE LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Arkansas Department of Higher Education

Connecticut Community Colleges System Office

Florida Department of Education

KnowledgeWorks Foundation (Ohio)

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Michigan Community College Association

New Mexico Higher Education Department

North Carolina Community College System

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges

South Carolina Technical College System

Texas Association of Community Colleges

University of Hawaii Community College System

Virginia Community College System

Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges

EXHIBIT 5
NEW FUNDING PARTNERS BY YEAR

<u>2004</u>
Lumina Foundation for Education

<u>2005</u>
KnowledgeWorks Foundation
Nellie Mae Education Fund

<u>2006</u>
College Spark Washington
The Heinz Endowments
Houston Endowment, Inc.

<u>2007 (includes self-funded institutions)</u>
Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation
Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation
Kamehameha Schools
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
Northern Virginia Community College
Office of Hawaiian Affairs
Oklahoma City Community College
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
Palmetto Institute
Paris Junior College (Texas)
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Rose State Community College (Oklahoma)
South Carolina Technical College System
TERI
The Boston Foundation
Tulsa Community College
University of Hawaii Community College System
Victoria College (Texas)

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

Questions to consider while reading this case about effective education grantmaking:

1. What was the Lumina Foundation for Education's theory of change—the assumptions, activities and expected outcomes—for Achieving the Dream? Was it a plausible theory? Why or why not?

2. What evidence did you see in the case that *engaged partners*, one of GFE's Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking, was part of the Lumina Foundation grantmaking strategy? Was the foundation effective in this regard and could it have been more effective? Did engaging partners—both partner funders and partner grantee organizations—in the design of Achieving the Dream improve the likelihood of success? Why or why not?

3. Achieving the Dream seeks to create a national movement that "changes policy and practice in community colleges across the country." Are there other plausible ways for philanthropy to create a movement similar to the engagement strategy Lumina Foundation and its partners undertook?

4. What role does funder collaboration play in the design of Achieving the Dream? As outlined in this case study, what are the advantages and disadvantages Lumina Foundation confronted in deciding to work collaboratively with other funders?

5. What advice would you give Achieving the Dream's partners as they chart a course forward? What would you recommend the Achieving the Dream Partnership do next as it considers expansion?

6. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case and how might they apply to your grantmaking work in education?

EPILOGUE

In January 2008, Leah Meyer Austin reflected on the next steps for Achieving the Dream—and what its work suggested for other funders seeking engaged partners to advance social change:

Although the Achieving the Dream Partnership hoped for expansion beyond the original number of colleges and funders, Lumina Foundation had not anticipated the rapid growth that occurred. From 2005 to 2007, the number of colleges participating in the initiative swelled from 27 to 83. Each new college needed a coach and a data facilitator, thus tripling the number of experts that our intermediary organizations needed to recruit, train, compensate and match with colleges.

Another simple marker of rapid growth is the attendance at the annual Achieving the Dream Strategy Institute for participating colleges. In 2005, the first year the partnership held a Strategy Institute, a relatively manageable number of participants—200—attended. By 2007, attendance had swelled to 650; in 2008, the number of attendees will reach 900. Each year, the partnership seeks a larger venue for the meeting, and each year participation has to be capped due to overdemand.

Nonetheless, success cannot be measured in numbers alone. The numbers demonstrate that the vision and goals of Achieving the Dream have captured the imagination of community colleges, higher education systems and funders; that is certainly an interim indicator of success. However, ultimate success resides in the achievement of the students themselves—low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners.

Clearly, then, the story of Achieving the Dream is still unfinished, even as the partnership plans for national expansion; the policy work group examines its progress in participating states; and the knowledge-management/research work group conducts a number of interesting and potentially helpful studies. As I write this epilogue, the communications work group has convened to hire a new communications firm. The college teams are meeting regularly with their coaches and data facilitators; the Strategy Institute will occur in a few weeks. In other words, even as an as-yet-unknown future is taking shape, it is business as usual for Achieving the Dream: partners are working in both small and large teams to accomplish far-reaching goals that none could hope to achieve alone.

Because it is too early to point to summative evaluation results, what can we learn from this effort? What reflections, mistakes and triumphs can guide future initiatives? What do we still need to know about *engaged partners*?

For foundations and their grantees, comprehensive-partnership initiatives such as Achieving the Dream are big bets. We invest human and financial resources in environmental scans, strategic design papers, theories of change, requests for proposals, grantmaking and grants management, networking meetings, and evaluation. We keep prospective grantees waiting while we invent a strategy that we hope will satisfy their needs. In a very real sense, we invest our foundations' reputations, as well as their funds, in these social ventures.

We cannot guarantee success, but we can take some steps to improve our chances.

If there were a single aphorism to sum up what Lumina Foundation and its partners learned from Achieving the Dream about improving chances for success through engaged partners, it is this: *Don't spend a dime if you don't have the time.* Ample time is required on at least four fronts.

Foundations' time

Foundation staff and board must have time to prepare administratively and strategically for a partnership enterprise, and the time Lumina Foundation invested early in Achieving the Dream was the initiative's single greatest resource.

We held stakeholder meetings to test our ideas, and we also used those meetings to get acquainted with many leaders who were working in, studying or advocating on behalf of community colleges. We sponsored a "listening tour" of states that might become involved, in order to know more about local and state policy issues affecting community colleges and possibilities for successful intervention. We asked potential grantees to tell us their qualifications for the type of work we anticipated, and we interviewed them to determine whether they had had experience working in partnerships. We got to know other foundations and took time to understand their priorities.

Most important, we spent time engaging with our partners to design a plan that fit every partner's activities into an integrated whole.

In all, we spent about a year preparing for the initiative and another year launching it, making planning grants and setting the stage for what was to come. During those two years, although our grantees were working assiduously, we at the foundation neither expected nor had significant student outcomes to highlight. We were fortunate to have a board of directors that demonstrated patience and willingness to stay the course. Lumina's trustees wanted to see results, but they also knew that the kind of measurable results in student achievement that we sought would not come in the early years of the initiative. And they were willing to wait. In the interim, we kept them well-informed about potential problems and interim indicators of progress. They, in turn, cheered us on and gave us valuable counsel.

For many valid reasons, the time for advance preparation and the patience to wait years for big outcomes are often luxuries that foundations believe they cannot afford. When we began work on Achieving the Dream, Lumina was a new foundation, not yet well known among potential grantees. Because the foundation had a "credit" for a large grant made in its first year, our small staff could invest valuable time in planning without major payout worries. Our grantmakers managed and made far fewer grants than they do now. Several staff members were captivated by working on their—and our—first initiative; they formed solid working teams that learned and grew in their jobs together. Finally, as relative unknowns, we could operate in an open, but quiet, atmosphere, without raising expectations about what we might or might not fund.

Today, in contrast, time is a rare commodity at Lumina Foundation. In the demanding flow of daily tasks, it is all too easy to set arbitrary deadlines and to skip over important building blocks. We have stumbled a bit despite lessons learned from Achieving the Dream. We now know that the steps we took for Achieving the Dream are important for every new initiative: careful environmental scans, deeply thoughtful interviews with stakeholders, genuine involvement of grantee organizations, partner development and implementation of an integrated long-range plan—all these tactics and more heighten the prospects for success.

Our foundation has taken several steps to ensure that we invest appropriate time in new work. Working with social-change consultants, we have used the development of a foundation-wide theory of change as an opportunity to anticipate investments and prepare outcomes-focused teams for new work. We have emphasized the importance of sharing lessons learned, conducting after-action reviews and spending staff-development time to examine the field in which we work, as well as the practices that are likely to evoke desired outcomes. Organizational learning is now one of our core functions in addition to research, communications, policy analysis and education, program development, evaluation, and convening and networking. All these approaches require the mind-set that initiatives respond to urgent problems, but they also demand organic growth; there is no formula for successful development that will substitute for the investment of time.

Grantees' time

Funding partners and capacity-building organizations—intermediaries—need time to plan together and separately to meet initiative goals. Our intermediary grantees and the colleges and policy bodies with which they worked made Achieving the Dream a vibrant reality. In retrospect, our commitment of time and resources to help the intermediaries with their own capacity-building needs was essential, and possibly insufficiently robust, because our partnership organizations are in greater demand now than ever before.

At Lumina Foundation, we have been delighted to see foundations' increased support for community colleges and the organizations that have developed skills in assisting them. However, the intermediary organizations on which we depend for delivery of services need time to ramp up to respond to increased demand. Philanthropies' requirements of intermediary, capacity-building organizations have forced these organizations to grow quickly, stretching the capacity of their existing employees and competing with one another for a limited supply of new talent.

Those of us working at foundations must ask ourselves whether the time pressures we create—pressures to get work started, to show measurable results and to finish in inordinately short three- or four-year increments—are responsible for generating intermediary organizations that lack sufficient operating support and administrative heft. One need only read *General Operating Support: A GEO Action Guide*, published by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations in late 2007, to realize the extent of the problem that burgeoning project-directed funds, with insufficient overhead support, have created among key nonprofit organizations on which foundations depend for grantee services. More foundations are considering providing unrestricted operating support for their key intermediaries; Lumina Foundation, too, has spent time interviewing intermediary grantees and planning with them for more orderly growth. I believe an extra measure of financial support, and the time to use it, could help enable those essential intermediaries to develop their capacities effectively and efficiently.

Long term, it is likely that foundations (with the exception of operating foundations) will continue to maintain small staffs and will depend on intermediary organizations to implement comprehensive initiatives such as Achieving the Dream. The concept of "engaged partners" behooves foundations to look closely at their interactions with their intermediaries. Working together, foundations can ensure the vibrancy, health and readiness for action of these key organizations.

Achieving the Dream has gone a long way toward establishing a collaborative of foundations and intermediary organizations, but there is room for improvement. For example, when each funder

requires reports on a different schedule, with a different format, intermediaries may find themselves spending untoward time in report-writing—time that could be spent more profitably in working with foundation grantees. When working with other funding partners, we need to be much more aware of—and seek to minimize—these places where our collective involvement actually makes the work harder for grantees.

Time to achieve indicators of progress

Participating educational institutions require time to gather and examine baseline data, set up leadership teams, plan strategies for improvement and build the work into institutional culture, budgets and classrooms.

In its conception and execution, Achieving the Dream is a vision, a process and a movement. The vision expresses the conviction that more students can succeed in community colleges, given the support that they require. The process engages colleges in examining their own student achievement data and planning and implementing strategies that will lead to greater student success. Finally, the movement endeavors to capture the imaginations of policymakers, higher education systems and the public, heightening their concern for all students' postsecondary achievement and their support for community colleges and the important role they play in the educational pipeline.

Progress in each of these areas—the vision, the process and the movement—provides interim indicators of success over a relatively long period of time. Has the number of foundations with an interest in community colleges' student achievement increased? Are colleges willing to engage in examining student data that may evoke painful discussions of race and class? Are more colleges eager to join the ever-growing number of those that have accepted the Achieving the Dream mantle?

These interim indicators—necessary, but insufficient—confirm progress and encourage us to continue our support. Because we know that community-college students are largely part-timers with many other family and job commitments, we know that we must bide our time for a period of years, waiting for the important student outcomes we seek.

Are engaged partners essential? Do they merit the time invested in their development?

Policymakers, media and the public at large will take time to grasp and provide external support for the work. Achieving the Dream has evoked many comments from others working in philanthropy. These remarks range from admiration to skeptical incredulity. Some wonder if we have made the work too complex; others avow that they would have neither the patience nor the time to engage and work with a large number of partners.

For us, partner engagement is a means, not an end. We are attempting to reach a goal—increased student achievement—that no one organization, working alone, can accomplish. We are trying to build a movement that no one foundation alone can support. Perhaps every educational issue does not require a comprehensive partnership such as that in Achieving the Dream, but for those of us at Lumina Foundation, we are confident that without our partners "the dream" cannot become a reality. Ultimately, Achieving the Dream belongs to the partnership, not to Lumina. They, not we, will achieve the dream. Over time, as we gradually let go of our "ownership" of the work, we are confident that many deeply engaged partners will have made the goal their own.

NOTES

Effective Education Grantmaking

principle no. 1 ## Discipline and Focus
In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.

principle no. 2 ## Knowledge
Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.

principle no. 3 ## Resources Linked to Results
A logic-driven "theory of change" helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.

principle no. 4 ## Effective Grantees
A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.

principle no. 5 ## Engaged Partners
A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners— the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue—to ensure "ownership" of education problems and their solutions.

principle no. 6 ## Leverage, Influence and Collaboration
The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.

principle no. 7 ## Persistence
The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.

principle no. 8 ## Innovation and Constant Learning
Even while acting on the best available information—as in Principle #2— a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn't—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

Grantmakers for Education improves the knowledge, networks and effectiveness of education philanthropy. By connecting effective education strategies with effective grantmaking strategies, we help foundations and donors leverage their investments to improve achievement and opportunities for all students. Founded in 1995, we are a national association of over 250 philanthropies that connects grantmakers with knowledgeable leaders, promising programs, experienced colleagues and actionable research.

grantmakers for education gfe