

Focused on the Future: Innovation and Investment at HBCUs

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ETS POLICY EVALUATION & RESEARCH CENTER





Leonard Haynes, United States Department of Education (USDOE)

On October 24–25, 2018, 65 presidents and representatives of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), leading associations, research organizations and civil rights organizations came together to brainstorm and strategize about strengthening the role of HBCUs in U.S. higher education and the new economy. Jointly convened by the National Urban League (NUL) and Educational Testing Service (ETS), this meeting was the second in a planned series of conferences designed to foster collaboration among, and further the mission of, HBCUs. **Michael Nettles**, Senior Vice President at ETS, described this meeting as an opportunity to “reflect on the historic strength of HBCUs while also challenging ourselves to prosper in the future.”

“But for HBCUs, where would we be?”

Leonard Haynes, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary of the United States Department of Education (USDOE) posed the above question early in the conference, saying it should be central to HBCU

messaging and coalition building. National Urban League Senior Vice President of Education and Youth Development **Hal Smith** agreed, adding, “The ‘but for’ conversations speak to both the history of HBCUs and what’s possible ... This work is not about competing with one another. It’s about making sure our partnerships bring together a common conversation, deeply rooted in our culture and the mission of these institutions to help us expand our vision and our impact ... We can’t lose sight of the things that make us matter, our mission, the ‘but fors’ ...”

Presenters and participants expressed resounding faith in that mission and optimism for the future of HBCUs, both as institutions of learning and agents of economic and social change. Even as they discussed the long-standing challenges of inadequate state and federal funding and regulatory setbacks, participants’ fundamental confidence in HBCUs’ transformational power was palpable. **Lezli Baskerville**, CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), characterized that potential by stating, “HBCUs are uniquely situated to provide the skills, the intellectual capacities and the services

we need to get America back on track ... they are inextricably linked with our nation's academic, economic and competitive goals as well as its ability to achieve and maintain peace, racial healing and justice for all."

It was with this level of conviction and urgency that presenters and participant work groups at the conference explored five topic areas:

- Leveraging federal financing for students to enroll and attain degrees
- Leveraging federal financing to institutions to support student success
- Preparing teachers for elementary and secondary education and 21st-century classrooms
- Meeting the demand: Offering students the opportunity to learn through distance education and alternative delivery
- Demonstrating success: The case for collaboration and partnerships

Funding Sources and Strategies

Antonio Flores, President and CEO of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), opened the funding discussion with a brief history of Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act (HEA). In particular, he explained that Title V, which authorizes programming and funds for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), was an outgrowth of Title III, which authorizes programs for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and HBCUs.

In addition to their shared legislative history, HBCUs and HSIs share an overlapping student population. According to Flores, "a number of HBCUs are also HSIs. The largest HBCU, St. Peter's College, enrolls 60 percent Hispanic students." And they share similar challenges. Both Titles III and V are:

1. persistently underfunded and due to sunset in 2019; and
2. increasingly prone to calls from Congress to justify funding, as with the PROSPER Act, where graduation rates and years to completion were to be linked to institutional funding.

"In a perfect world, you wouldn't need to prove you're poor."

— *Barmak Nassirian, Director of Federal Policy, American Association of State Colleges and Universities*

Despite these limitations, Flores sees opportunities for increased funding, particularly in STEM fields. In California, Florida, Texas, New York and Illinois, over half of the K–12 student population is Hispanic. The combined Hispanic, African-American and Asian-American student populations of these states makes them overwhelmingly "majority minority." And, said Flores, these five states account for almost half of the national economy. If competition from foreign student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities continues to decline, U.S. students—including students of color—will see increased opportunity to fill those seats, so long as they have the adequate preparation, access and resources to do so. STEM and tech are already integral to Titles III and V and increasingly central to the new economy, presenting a sound case for boosting these line items to adequately prepare the nation's workforce.

Leveraging Federal Funds for Student Access and Completion

In his remarks about federal funding for students, **Barmak Nassirian**, Director of Federal Policy with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), pointed to underfunding and



Kevin Rome, Fisk University; Harry Williams, Thurgood Marshall College Fund; Lezli Baskerville, NAFEO; Lodriguez Murray, UNCF; Ivory Toldson, QEM Network

flawed authorizing language as barriers to equity and student access. His suggestions for improvements to the HEA fell into four categories:

1. Needs Analysis and Delivery of Benefits:

“In a perfect world, you wouldn’t need to prove you’re poor,” said Nassirian. “The federal student funding system generally favors children of professionals, who can help them navigate the complicated, time-consuming application process, and whose wealth isn’t limited to ‘earnings’ as defined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®),” Nassirian explained. The FAFSA needs analysis is primarily based on earnings, meaning employment income. It exempts assets such as home equity, farm equity and small business assets (defined as 99 or fewer employees). As such, Nassirian said, it “collapses wealth profiles and creates complexity to keep people out.” Low-income young people, returning veterans, working adults, single parents and those who do not have the relative luxury of time and support are disadvantaged by the current application and delivery system. Nassirian recommends “simplifying the interface while

complicating the back-end [means testing] mechanism.” He stated that the process for buying a car, which uses a consumer’s credit score to determine eligibility, is far simpler, faster and a more accurate indication of ability to pay than the current process for accessing federal student aid.

2. Mandatory Funding:

According to Nassirian, authorizing levels are not enough to ensure funds are accessible to the neediest students. “The most important bedrock program under grants is the Pell Grant and it absolutely should be shifted over to mandatory funding.” He added that the system is currently “upside down” because loans, not grants, have become mandatory entitlements. He explained, “If twice as many people show up for loans, twice as much will go out the door in loans. But, if twice as many showed up for Pell Grants, the program would go into deficit and there would be cuts.” Regarding many campus-based programs designed for lower-income students (such as work-study), Nassirian noted, “We means test people but we do not means test institutions . . . wealthy colleges and universities receive the lion’s share of

discretionary dollars, while colleges and universities serving the largest numbers of poor people are ‘at the end of the line’ largely due to wealthy institutions’ astute grant writing in the 1960s.

3. Student Loans:

Ideally, said Nassirian, federal grant programs would maximize benefits to institutions that provide the most transparent process and a back-end safety net to low-income student borrowers, packaging loans at reasonable rates with simplified repayment options. “People shouldn’t need a Ph.D. in economics to select the best loan package . . . it should self-select into the most favorable option,” he added.

4. Gatekeeping:

“We need to keep rip-off schools from targeting low-income, minority communities,” said Nassirian, noting that “one-third of African-American students go to for-profit schools, compared to only 10 percent of White students.”

The subject of predatory lending and for-profit institutions emerged several times throughout this two-day conference. In response to a participant’s question about regulatory gatekeeping, **Lodriguez Murray**, Vice President of Public Policy and Government Affairs for the United Negro College Fund (UNCF®), cautioned, “For-profit institutions are not like HBCUs, but their student population is . . . so when you’re crafting the rules, you have to be careful not to become the Trojan horse that those other [for-profit] schools ride to a better deal.” Regarding the disproportionate number of African-American students attending for-profit institutions, **Ivory Toldson**, President and CEO of The Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network, noted that many African-American students are not choosing between an HBCU and a for-profit; they are rejected from HBCUs, where



Stephen Kostyo, Learning Policy Institute

admission standards have become more restrictive over the past 20 years. For example, said Toldson, largely as a result of states’ performance-based funding schemes, “HBCUs use the ACT® and SAT® at a higher rate than Predominantly White Institutions [PWIs]. As a result, many low-income students who may have relied on state-subsidized higher education are forced instead to choose community college, private institutions or for-profits.”

*“If every HBCU had all three TRIO programs,
82,156 more students could be served.”*

*— Stephen Katsinas, Director of the Education Policy Center,
University of Alabama*

Participants in the Federal Funding for Students work group had several additional suggestions for improving access and outcomes, including:

1. Pushing states to put more “skin in the game,” including a partial or full match with federal funding and more investment in their public institutions.
2. Eliminating some prohibitions on student aid, including for those with drug convictions and those who have defaulted (restore eligibility to those already prohibited).

3. Removing the limit on the number of semesters eligible for student aid. For example, Pell Grants are currently capped at six years.
4. Expanding TRIO and access programs overall. Currently, only 22 HBCUs have campus-based TRIO programs.
5. Redesigning work-study to offer more meaningful employment opportunities and a more competitive wage.
6. Identifying and communicating with policymakers and stakeholders about state and local policies that limit funding to HBCUs based on performance measures.
7. Partnering with K–12 systems to develop the pipeline of prospective students and communicate the benefits of HBCUs.
8. Calling on HBCU alumni to “tell their success stories,” advocate for HBCUs with funders and legislators, and recruit students.

Leveraging Federal Financing to Institutions

Opening the discussion of federal funding to institutions, **Stephen Katsinas**, Director of the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama, focused on Title III (institutional aid) and TRIO programs authorized by Title IV. He explained that, although 96 out of 99 HBCUs receive some Title III funds through this competitive grant program, funding levels vary widely from a high of approximately \$7.5 million to a low of \$775,000. Of the three TRIO programs, Talent Search, Upward Bound and Student Support Services, only 23 percent, 45 percent and 41 percent of HBCUs, respectively, had these programs on their campuses. Katsinas noted, “If every HBCU had all three TRIO programs, 82,156 more students could be served.” One possible solution may be to encourage more consortia of HBCUs, perhaps

with foundation support, with the goal of advocating for the Department of Education (DOE) to enact a consortia model for HBCU TRIO funding. Katsinas’ other suggestions for improving HBCU access to federal funds included:

1. “Play to your strengths regardless of the dominant political ideology.” When making the argument for funding HBCUs, “the data that matter” are economic. He recommends using statistics that show how many HBCU graduates are employed by highly valued corporations in a legislator’s state and how many were on Pell Grants.
2. Conduct a Title III and Title V impact study: Collect the data to show the actual impact of “funds that are designed to provide venture capital to institutions that are extremely short of venture capital precisely because they serve predominantly low-income people.”
3. Establish pathways for community college students to transfer to HBCUs.
4. Reconsider the appropriate role of the state in the mix of federal and state student aid. Currently, of the 16 states in the Southern Regional Educational Board, the average contribution is 27 percent, but some states’ contributions are as low as 1–7 percent. Getting the balance of state and federal contributions “right” is particularly important with the return of Summer Pell Grants and a 12-month federal foundational student financial aid program.
5. Advocate for a federal Maintenance of Effort provision to preserve states’ operating funds for public and private institutions. This is particularly important in the “Deep South,” said Katsinas, where there will be no new state funding for need-based student aid if state budget cuts continue.
6. Expand College Promise: “Encourage local industrial development authorities to invest in human capital in the same way they’re investing in physical capital,” Katsinas advised.



Martha Kanter, College Promise Campaign; Beverly Daniel Tatum, Spelman College; Joseph Youngblood, Thomas Edison State University

In her remarks regarding funding for institutions, Baskerville urged participants to “leverage programs that prepare, inspire and connect students to college and opportunity;” to ensure low-income, underserved communities will send a cohort of students to HBCUs and other minority serving institutions.” She added that, in addition to Title III and TRIO, “There are dollars available in every one of the 12 federal budgets,” including those of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and rural housing, many of which include funds for infrastructure, which can be the most difficult for HBCUs to find elsewhere.

Baskerville recommended:

1. HBCUs leveraging federal dollars to provide services like childcare, health and nutrition programs that would bring students to campus and serve the community.
2. Creating and maintaining institutional niches focused on meeting 21st-century needs in areas of strength — focusing on “answering some of the nation’s most vexing problems.”

3. Shifting messaging from “a collective cohort of underfunded, under-resourced institutions struggling to thrive and focus instead on being innovative, transformational institutions.”
4. “Seize and create opportunities based on the browning of America. Own and market HBCU diversity. Excite nondiverse institutions, corporations and foundations about investing in HBCUs.”
5. Creating consortia of HBCUs, MSIs, PWIs and competitive research institutions to enhance and expand offerings.
6. Leveraging technology to expand course offerings and learning opportunities.
7. Investing \$100 million in new federal investments in programs to train and connect workers in STEM to well-paying jobs.

Focusing on research and particularly STEM funding for institutions, Toldson identified a wide disparity in federal funding between PWIs and HBCUs. He noted that in 2014, four PWIs received more revenue from grants and contracts than all four-year HBCUs combined.



Lodriguez Murray, UNCF; Hal Smith, National Urban League;
Ronald Marlow, National Urban League (NUL)

And 89 HBCUs *collectively* received \$1.2 billion in grants and contracts from federal, state and local governments and private foundations, while Johns Hopkins *alone* received \$1.6 billion. Toldson added, “HBCUs aren’t having the type of impact the nation needs because HBCUs aren’t receiving the investment.”

“leverage programs that prepare, inspire and connect students to college and opportunity.”

— Lezli Baskerville, CEO, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)

How can funders better understand HBCUs and how can HBCUs compete more effectively for funds?

Toldson recommends:

1. Developing relationships with other researchers, offices of grants and sponsored programs (internally and externally) to build collaboration instead of competition.
2. Being resourceful and taking advantage of training opportunities to gather material and ask questions, as well as building an individual and institutional knowledge base around the grant application process.

3. Deepening understanding of what reviewers are looking for — understanding the fine-grained details and nuances of the grant application process.
4. Changing your mindset. Eliminate the underdog mentality and deliberately build a positive mindset that recognizes rejection is part of the process. Build expertise and agency.
5. Changing institutional culture by changing the systems around you. Institutional leaders should hire consultants to mentor junior faculty and build a supportive research environment that incentivizes success and connects faculty research to the broader mission of the institution.

The Federal Financing to Institutions work group had some additional suggestions for increasing funds for institutions. These included:

1. Considering a tuition rebate program for faster completion. This would improve graduation rates and, in turn, better situate HBCUs for state and federal funds with performance-based criteria.
2. Considering Pell Grant offsets. Use unspent Pell funds to support tutors, counselors and therapists for high-need students.
3. Limiting student debt. Currently, institutions aren’t permitted to limit how much students borrow over and above established cost of attendance. Sometimes more funds than necessary are borrowed. It is in the interests of the student and the institution to avoid the negative effects of default.
4. Employing retention strategies, such as maximizing credit hours for those who are able, having an early start in summer (this can help with retention), and partnering with other HBCUs that have early start or special programs.
5. Looking at the benefits and potential challenges of Summer Pell Grants.
6. Expanding graduate programs to bring researchers and research dollars.



Kristal Moore Clemons, Virginia State University; Doris Williams, Southern Initiative Algebra Project; Sharonda Ragland, Virginia Union University

7. Identifying centers of excellence; recognizing the diversity of HBCUs and working with institutions and students to address growth areas and build strength.
8. Identifying and clarifying sources of federal funding (asset map or “cheat sheet”); one idea was for ETS and NUL to develop a clearinghouse of information for HBCUs.
9. Continuing and increasing grant workshops and technical training (institutions and USDOE).

Meeting Demand through Distance Education and Alternative Delivery

The advent and evolution of distance education is inextricably linked with major disruptions in U.S. history, explained **Joseph Youngblood**, Vice Provost and Dean at Thomas Edison State University. World War II and the GI Bill, the Korean War, the Vietnam War — with each of these global events, education policy and institutions adapted to students’ (and society’s) changing needs. These adaptations are

most successful, says Youngblood, when institutions maintain fidelity to their fundamental mission. For example, he explained, his institution has constructed its identity around the very specific mission of meeting the needs of adult students. Technology serves that mission and enhances educational opportunity and access. Youngblood suggested that HBCUs can learn from the history of adult distance education by first ensuring “the environment has been cultivated and there is an infrastructure and architecture in place that allows the best of what we know about distance education to become a part of HBCUs’ institutional culture and ethos.” And, he added, overlaps between the adult learning population and the HBCU student population present “opportunities for HBCUs and Adult Serving Institutions [ASIs] to partner and effectuate the missions of both sectors.”

The Distance Education working group noted several benefits to HBCUs exploring and/or expanding online offerings. **Kristal Clemons**, an assistant professor at Virginia State University, noted that the



Mark Joseph, Call Me MISTER; Roy Jones, Call Me MISTER

mission of HBCUs “is about access and opportunity and graduation. We care about our students in an online platform just as much as face to face.” The online option provides access for rural students as well as for those whose life circumstances may not allow for the traditional campus-based experience. Online programs can also boost enrollment (with little additional impact on physical infrastructure) and create opportunities to expand course offerings and research through partnerships with other institutions worldwide. The working group’s suggestions for successful planning and implementation of distance education included:

1. Addressing mistaken assumptions directly. Often faculty are reluctant to consider online teaching. Clarify that online courses don’t lack rigor — on the contrary, they can enhance rigor and can also be used to enrich face-to-face classes.
2. Partnering faculty content experts with tech/instructional design experts to develop rigorous, engaging online courses.
3. Building infrastructure thoughtfully with mission taking the lead. Essential components include: learning management systems, technology

expertise, faculty training and a distance learning office to support faculty and students.

4. Investigating opportunities for using Title III funds to support distance learning.

Preparing Teachers for 21st-Century Classrooms

Although the need for excellent teachers, particularly teachers of color, continues to rise, studies show that a teacher shortage persists, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas. In his opening remarks on day two of the conference, Nettles explained that African Americans, who represent 12 percent of the total U.S. population between 25–64 years of age, are underrepresented in several key fields including registered nursing (11 percent), STEM (7 percent), managerial and professional office (8 percent), finance (5 percent) and teaching (9 percent). And as of 2012, 16 percent of public elementary and secondary school students were African American, while only 7 percent of public school teachers were African American.¹ Meanwhile, the percentage of all college students interested in teaching has declined.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2016). *The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>.

Denise Pearson, Vice President for State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), stated that in 1992, 15 percent of college freshman stated their intention to major in education. In 2005, that number dropped to 4.2 percent. Although many HBCUs began as teachers' colleges, Pearson commented, "... now HBCUs largely turned [training teachers] over to other institutions that may produce students who have the requisite knowledge and skills, but maybe not the requisite dispositions to get in front of our students and say, 'Regardless of your ZIP code, regardless of the hue of your skin, you can be great and be whatever you want.'" Reminding participants of the research demonstrating the benefit of having teachers of color for students of color, particularly young men, Pearson emphasized, "It's communities of color that are hurt the most by this [teacher shortage] crisis. They get the worst teachers — many are not prepared or don't want to be there, or both," which results in students whose challenges are not insurmountable being excluded from the opportunity to succeed. She added that state attainment goals, such as 60 percent of the population earning a postsecondary credential by 2025, are completely unsustainable unless all students can enter higher education with the skills and knowledge to graduate. Pearson's suggestions for addressing the crisis include:

1. State agencies of higher education approaching their work "through an equity lens." When developing policies such as teaching credits or dual enrollment, are they considering the impact those policies will have on disadvantaged populations? State agencies are most inclined to listen when this is framed as a workforce development issue.
2. Getting to know the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) in your state and engaging with P–12 school partners. This work can't be done in silos.



Kevin Rome, Fisk University; **Roslyn Artis**, Benedict College; **Charlie Nelms**, American Association of State Colleges & Universities

3. Considering how accrediting agencies can help support low-resource schools in their efforts to get accredited.

Mark Joseph, Program Coordinator of the Call Me MISTER® program, addressed the shortage of African-American men in the teaching profession, saying, "In order to stand tall in our own classrooms, we [African-American men] need to understand what we bring to the table." He went on to explain that Call Me MISTER is the collaborative brain child of Clemson University and three South Carolina HBCUs (Benedict College, Claflin University and Morris College), with the mission to "recruit, retain and certify African-American males as elementary teachers" using a service leadership model.

The Preparing Teachers work group agreed that addressing the teacher shortage, and particularly the shortage of teachers of color, requires an integrated approach to "preparing, engaging, recruiting and retaining teachers." **Beverly Tatum**, President Emerita of Spelman College, underscored the retention element, stating, "This is not just important in the K–12 space, but in higher education and HBCUs as well. At Spelman, we often lost faculty to other institutions who saw us as a talent pipeline."



Lester Newman, Jarvis Christian College

At all levels, the group agreed that deliberate efforts are needed to cultivate, support and incentivize talented educators to teach in our nation's highest need communities, including forming partnerships with:

- parents, students and teachers;
- philanthropic organizations;
- wraparound services for communities and families; and
- HBCUs to seek federal, state and third-party grants to replicate model developmental schools and push the teacher education agenda forward.

The Case for Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration and “strength in numbers” were recurring themes at this conference in all five topic area work groups. Participants acknowledged the paradoxical challenge of striving to grow HBCUs with such a profound mission, while also operating in a highly competitive funding environment. Speaking for the partnership work group, **DàVida Plummer**, Dean of the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communication at Hampton University, commented, “Ultimately, unless we unify as HBCUs

and understand that the competitive environment doesn't mean we are each other's number-one competitor, it will be difficult to accomplish our goals.” Whether in the form of one HBCU collaborating with corporations, K–12 public schools and wraparound services, or multiple HBCUs building consortia for economies of scale, shared expertise and political influence, participants agreed that working in isolation is not a sustainable way forward.

“... now HBCUs largely turned [training teachers] over to other institutions that may produce students who have the requisite knowledge and skills, but maybe not the requisite dispositions to get in front of our students and say, ‘Regardless of your ZIP code, regardless of the hue of your skin, you can be great and be whatever you want.’”

— Denise Pearson, Vice President for State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)

Local Collaboration:

Baskerville described the historic role of HBCUs as having been “at the epicenter of economic and educational life in the Black community.” While also advocating for national and international partnerships, Baskerville encouraged institutions to continue to regain their place at the epicenter of their local communities. Leveraging federal dollars to situate programs like Head Start, Early Start, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on HBCU campuses “will not only bring students to the campuses, but help the community to thrive. So, by the time students are ready to go to college, they've been on, understand and have been served by our campuses.” **Robyn Ince**, Vice President for Education Policy and Advocacy at NUL, offered the example of Coppin State University, where outreach



Denise Pearson, State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)

not only supports the community, but strengthens the institution's position by building a "cradle-to-career pipeline." **Roslyn Artis**, President of Benedict College, added, "It's clear that as a sector, we're quite small yet critically important when you reflect on the economic impact and look beyond the dollars and cents ... the historic impact and the concentric circles around the institutions and communities they serve ... We recognize we're not necessarily located *in* these high-need communities, but we are born of these high-need communities."

Regional, National and Global Collaboration:

Kevin Rome, President of Fisk University, commented, "HBCUs have long had profound impact on our communities and our country. They are transformative. They've led to social mobility. But there remains a significant need for HBCUs to provide solutions, not just for our community, but for the world." Collaborating to answer this need will not only increase HBCUs' efficacy as an agent of change regionally, nationally and globally, but also promises to make individual institutions and the sector stronger.

For HBCUs, the phrase "strength in numbers" has several connotations. Strength can be gained from economies of scale, where HBCUs, or HBCUs and other organizations, pool resources in physical proximity or through technology. For example, **Lester Newman**, President of Jarvis Christian College, explained, "Public-private partnerships are particularly helpful to small, under-resourced institutions. They add to their capacity and enhance their infrastructure. This not only makes the campus more competitive, but serves the needs of the surrounding community as well." Online course offerings and access to the resources of larger research institutions can also expand HBCUs' offerings, enrollment and productivity at lower cost than "going it alone."

"We recognize we're not necessarily located in these high-need communities, but we are born of these high-need communities."

— Roslyn Artis, President of Benedict College

There's also the strength that comes from joining together in consortia or networks to expand HBCUs' political footprint and amplify their voice and story. **Martha Kanter**, Executive Director of the College Promise Campaign, reported that the work group described such collaboration as "collective competency." She added that HBCUs must build "their collective competency to have the collective will to have collective impact and drive the new economy and society we all want to be a part of." Opportunities to build a "collective competency" include:

- Forming consortia (and advocating for the DOE to adopt a consortia approach to awarding TRIO and other federal dollars).
- Forming regional and national consortia to bring HBCUs' collective voice and common interests to their state and federal legislators.



Maria Thompson Coppin State University; Barmak Nassirian, American Association of State Colleges and Universities

- Identifying “networks of excellence,” where areas of strength and expertise among HBCUs can be engaged for mutual benefit.

Strength also comes from facilitating students’ social mobility and exerting influence on the new economy through programs and partnerships with the STEM and business sectors. **Ronald Marlow**, Vice President for Workforce Development with NUL, described efforts underway to build a consortium of HBCUs to partner with registered apprenticeship programs. Building on a federal grant designed to expand opportunity for women and people of color, this HBCU consortium will expand the pool of students who can “use registered apprenticeship as a vehicle to later employment, while minimizing the debt they incur during college.” The benefits of such business connections for students include 21st-century skills training and a commitment of employment after graduation. The benefits to HBCUs include a growing network of satisfied alumni professionals who themselves serve as “ambassadors” for the HBCU brand. Apprenticeships and other business

partnerships also offer a stream of data with which to demonstrate HBCUs’ impact on the local, state and national economy.

Harry Williams, President and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund® (TMCF®), emphasized the role of corporate America in supporting African-American students and HBCUs. He explained that 62 percent of the funds provided directly to students through TMCF comes from corporations. He added that leadership programs like TMCF’s teach students the “soft skills” needed to become career ready and bring them together with major companies through career development events, serving the needs of students and “solving corporations’ diversity problem in the right way.”

“But there remains a significant need for HBCUs to provide solutions, not just for our community, but for the world.”

— Kevin Rome, President of Fisk University

Recommendations of the Collaboration and Partnership work group include:

1. Establishing “networks of excellence.” Think about HBCUs as a system. Identify strength areas and growth areas in HBCUs regionally and nationally. Indicators of strength may include enrollment, civic participation or economic impact in domains like teacher preparation, medicine, research, law and policy, digital innovation and STEM.

- The network might consider using “scorecards” for intra-network use only, with the potential to demonstrate individual or collective positive economic impact.
- Intentionally structuring networks will facilitate leveraging investment and create opportunities for shared services, such as back-office support, legal representation and research.
- Operating in the collective can help protect HBCUs from damaging state and federal policies to which individual HBCUs may be more vulnerable.

Key stakeholders to advancing networks of excellence include:

- HBCU presidents
 - HBCU government relations and lobbyists
 - Chief academic officers
 - Progressive research and development faculty
 - Other HBCUs with expertise in a need or growth area
 - Corporate partners
 - Philanthropic organizations
 - Civil rights and advocacy partners
2. Focus on infrastructure and planning grant opportunities for development at HBCUs. Through a case-study approach, examine, articulate and



Antonio Flores, HACU; Michael Nettles, ETS

elevate HBCU market share. Fund this development through a sustainable capital investment strategy, defined as “10 years or more of a multibillion-dollar investment.”

3. Identifying Title III funding and other revenue streams to be utilized by the network, and monitoring state and federal policy and funding streams for opportunities. Remember to look beyond the obvious funding sources.

Mindset and Messaging: “Tell your story, tell it with power, tell it in the collective”

Although not among the five formal discussion topics of the conference, mindset and messaging were recurrent themes. Work group participants, particularly in the two Funding and Collaboration groups, emphasized that, for legislators, prospective students and partners to see the power and potential of HBCUs, those working with and for HBCUs need to let go of deficit-minded thinking. Williams commented, “You hear this phrase, ‘Our schools do more with less.’ No. We need to do more with more.” Williams’ comment was directed at the need for more funding. It also points to the need for a mindset that recognizes that HBCUs provide a service to the nation

and produce quality graduates who contribute to the nation at a level *worthy* of more funding. Speaking for the partnership group, Plummer said, “We first have to believe we’ve got the best thing going . . . that a predominately white institution [PWI] can’t do what we do to student capital . . . to know, if employers want to diversify their corporations, their newsrooms, their campaigns . . . the best person to assist them in doing that is going to be found at an HBCU.”

“You hear this phrase, ‘Our schools do more with less.’ No. We need to do more with more.”

— Harry Williams, President and CEO of the Thurgood
Marshall College Fund (TMCF)

Although they acknowledged the toll persistent underfunding can have on HBCUs, participants exuded confidence in the HBCU mission and methodology, expressing optimism for the future. Smith commented, “We have opportunities to innovate now in ways we couldn’t have imagined four to five years ago . . . people are focused on doing more because of our current political climate, asking themselves ‘What more might I be doing?’” And Murray described what he sees as the needle moving on interest in and support for MSIs. He noted that Title III funding this year has increased by as much as six figures at many HBCUs, and they are gaining some ground with Department of Defense and National Institutes of Health grants as well. “The HBCU brand is rising,” he said, adding, “There’s something about our institutions . . . Students are saying, ‘I want this HBCU experience. I want the education and the value it provides. I want this community sense.’”

Empowered by faith in HBCUs’ value and encouraged by positive indicators of progress, participants noted

it’s also crucial to share this narrative effectively and strategically. Tatum commented, “At times during the conference, it felt a bit like we were preaching to the choir.” As other participants nodded in agreement, she added, “That’s okay, because the choir needs rehearsal . . . Coming together to share ideas and experiences helps us to better articulate what resources we need and how exactly we might use them, which increases the likelihood of actually receiving those resources.”

While the moral argument for providing opportunity and social mobility to low-income, historically underserved students is powerful, several presenters suggested the economic benefit argument is most effective, particularly with state legislators. Data showing the high percentage of HBCU graduates hired by states’ most valued corporations and/or the percentage of those graduates who were reliant on Pell Grants is persuasive. So is data quantifying the economic impact of each HBCU on its community, state and nation. A recent UNCF study of HBCUs’ economic impact considers domains such as employment and lifetime earnings. The study shows the collective impact of HBCUs in some states is over \$1 billion. And nationally, the economic impact of all HBCUs is \$14.8 billion, with over 134,000 jobs generated for their local and regional economies.² Regardless of political ideology or regional agenda, these numbers warrant attention.

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it provides. I want this community sense’”***

— Lodriguez Murray, Vice President of Public Policy and
Government Affairs for the United Negro College Fund (UNCF)

² United Negro College Fund. (n.d.). *HBCUs make America strong: The positive economic impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. Retrieved from <https://www.uncf.org/hbcu-impact>.



Patrick Gusman, University of the District of Columbia (UDC); Wynetta Lee, North Carolina Central University (NCCU); Joseph Stevenson, Miles College of Alabama

At the time of this conference, midterm elections were just around the corner. Persuasive as the economic argument can be, several conference presenters cautioned it's not enough. Legislators must also hear stakeholders' voices through their votes, sending the message that HBCUs are a priority. Baskerville said, "There's a troubling pattern [in the United States] and on HBCU campuses . . . in 2016, 18–29 year-olds were 20 percent of the electorate, but half of them didn't vote and 20 percent fewer than that voted on HBCU campuses." She added, "We need to be asking candidates if they support all the pipeline programs . . . whether they understand the economic, educational and civic value of HBCUs and will invest accordingly." But ultimately, only those who vote can exert this leverage. **Patrick Gusman**, Executive Director of Strategic Partnerships at the University of the District of Columbia, commented, "There is no reason, given the pride in all the HBCUs, that there shouldn't be 90 percent turnout on campus. Democrat or Republican, if only 5 percent vote, candidates are making the calculation about influence."

Key Takeaways

As stakeholders in and advocates for HBCUs, participants in the Focused on the Future conference were well versed in the content and concerns discussed. The value many described taking away from this convening was in the process of coming together and reframing the work as a collaboration. Given that the survival and growth of each individual institution depends upon the health and recognition of the sector as essential to the nation, participants agreed competition between HBCUs is counterproductive. So, as part of their commitment to meeting students' needs, the group resolved to find innovative ways to share resources and amplify their collective voice and impact. They further resolved to translate the inspiration and key ideas from the conference into actionable strategies at home and in coalition.

A condensed summary of those key ideas includes:

1. Crucial changes to HEA authorizing language and programs are needed to more equitably resource HBCUs and better serve the nation's lowest-income students, who are also its fastest-growing

- demographic. Those programs that already serve student needs must be protected and new and increased funding streams identified.
2. Diversify funding sources. All 12 federal budgets have funds available to institutions that know where to look and how to compete. Capacity building within and between institutions is essential; in coalition, institutions with strength in development can share their “know-how” with others while all benefit from strength in numbers.
 3. Partnership at all levels — within the community, between institutions and wherever mutual interests exist — is vital to meeting the 21st-century needs of students and the nation.

4. First believe, then broadcast the message of HBCUs’ undeniable value as agents of social change and drivers of the local, state and national economy.
5. In all things, the first and recurring question must be, “How does this strategy, innovation or investment serve our core institutional mission?”

“Coming together to share ideas and experiences helps us to better articulate what resources we need and how exactly we might use them, which increases the likelihood of actually receiving those resources.”

— Beverly Tatum, President Emerita of Spelman College

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