

Education Philanthropy Program



We believe in the promise of a better life no matter where you started—and the power of education and training beyond high school to transform the lives of learners from low-income backgrounds.

Ascendium is working to change postsecondary and workforce training systems so that all learners have equitable opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. Our grantmaking focuses on removing systemic barriers faced by learners from low-income backgrounds, especially those in historically underrepresented groups: first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans.

Our work will contribute to a future where more low-income learners reach their education and career goals, equity gaps are eliminated, and all postsecondary learning is valued and validated. To assess the progress of our strategy on the changes we seek, we monitor data points related to first-year persistence, degree and credential completion, time to completion and job placement.

OUR INVESTMENTS

Ascendium supports systems change through investments in capacity building, data infrastructure, partnerships and networks, evidence building and policy change.

OUR GRANT PARTNERS

We make grants to researchers, postsecondary education institutions and systems, workforce training providers and other nonprofit organizations.

OUR REACH

Our grantmaking is national in scope.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

- Remove Structural Barriers to Success
- Streamline Key Learner Transitions
- Expand Postsecondary Education in Prison
- Support Rural Postsecondary Education and Workforce Training

Our investment priorities:

Remove Structural Barriers to Success

Education systems are complex, and the institutions that comprise them can inadvertently create obstacles to success that disproportionately affect learners with fewer social and financial resources.

- We support efforts to identify and adopt policies and practices that reduce or eliminate barriers to student success at the institutional and system levels.
- We invest in the professional development of people leading reforms.
- We support the implementation of learner-centered policies at the institution, system and state levels.

Streamline Key Learner Transitions

Earning credits toward a degree, transferring between institutions, and entry or re-entry into the workforce are pivotal moments in a learner's academic and career journey.

- We support diverse pathways to technical education and workforce training.
- Our work eases transitions for learners, between institutions or returning to postsecondary education.
- We strive to promote alignment between postsecondary education and workforce entry.

Expand Postsecondary Education in Prison

The vast majority of incarcerated people do not have access to postsecondary education. Those who do often experience low-quality instruction, irrelevant credentials and insufficient student supports.

- We seek to explore new approaches and scale proven models of postsecondary education in prison.
- We work to build a body of evidence to support best practices.
- We forge connections and alignment between correctional systems, educational providers, employers and labor markets.

Support Rural Postsecondary Education and Workforce Training

Disparities in postsecondary success exist between rural students and their urban and suburban peers at every point in the pipeline, from enrollment to completion.

- We fund research to better understand rural learners and postsecondary providers.
- We work to identify the capacity needs of rural communities to support learners from postsecondary enrollment through workforce entry.
- We catalyze investment in and support for rural learners and providers by supporting the development of communities of practice.

The Three Ways We Fund

We fund initiatives at every stage of development, from promising but untested approaches to proven practices ready to be brought to scale. We organize grants into three categories: exploration, validation and scaling.

Visit ascendiumphilanthropy.org to learn more.