



# ***INCORPORATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN A CROSS-SECTOR POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT AGENDA:***

Lessons from Lumina Foundation's  
Community Partnership for Attainment Initiative

JUNE 2017

**ADVANCING  
EQUITY IN  
COMMUNITIES**

**EQUAL  
MEASURE**

FINDING  
PROMISE  
FUELING  
CHANGE

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## Acknowledgements

Equal Measure thanks the many organizations and individuals who contributed to the development of this Issue Brief. First, and foremost, we recognize Courtney Brown, Haley Glover, Susan Johnson, and their colleagues at Lumina Foundation for generously investing in efforts to improve postsecondary access and success, so that every student has a chance to succeed in college, and beyond. We also extend our sincere gratitude to Derek Price of DVP-PRAXIS LTD, with whom we worked closely over the course of this initiative, and whose insights and expertise were central to its success.

And finally, we must certainly salute everyone in the Community Partnership for Attainment communities who dedicated time to sharing their thoughts and experiences with us as we wrote this Issue Brief.

The individuals and organizations that forged partnerships in each of these communities are singularly committed to establishing a legacy of college access and success, and we celebrate them for those efforts. We are also grateful for their contributions as thought partners, and their insights have helped Equal Measure shape and refine what we learned over the course of the initiative.

## CITIES/REGIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE CPA INITIATIVE



Akron, OH	Ft. Wayne, IN	Pittsburgh, PA
Albany, NY	Grand Rapids, MI	Portland, OR
Albuquerque, NM	Greensboro, NC	Providence, RI
Atlanta, GA	Hartford, CT	Quad Cities, IA
Austin, TX	Houston, TX	Racine, WI
Berkeley, CA	Jackson County, MI	Richmond, VA
Birmingham, AL	Jacksonville, FL	Rio Grande Valley, TX
Boise, ID	Kalamazoo, MI	Rockford, IL
Boston, MA	Kansas City, MO	Salt Lake City, UT
Buffalo, NY	Las Vegas, NV	San Antonio, TX
Charleston, SC	Los Angeles, CA	Santa Ana, CA
Charlotte, NC	Louisville, KY	Savannah, GA
Chicago, IL	Memphis, TN	Shasta, CA
Cincinnati, OH	Milwaukee, WI	South Seattle, WA
Cleveland, OH	Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	Southern Indiana
Coachella Valley, CA	Mobile, AL	Southwest Florida
Columbia, SC	Monterey Bay, CA	Spokane, WA
Columbus, IN	Nashville, TN	Springfield, MO
Corpus Christi, TX	New Hampshire	St. Louis, MO
Dallas, TX	New York City, NY	Syracuse, NY
Dayton, OH	Newark, NJ	Tampa, FL
Denver, CO	Northwest Indiana	Tulsa, OK
Detroit, MI	Orlando, FL	Tyler, TX
Durham, NC	Philadelphia, PA	Washington, DC
Fresno, CA	Phoenix, AZ	Winston-Salem, NC

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## About Lumina Foundation

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

## About Equal Measure

Headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, Equal Measure provides evaluation and philanthropic services to social sector organizations. Its areas of focus include aligning systems for stronger outcomes, increasing access and opportunity, building human and social capital, strengthening community capacity, and advancing equity in communities. For more than 30 years, Equal Measure's clients have been major private, corporate, and community foundations, government agencies, and national and regional nonprofits. Equal Measure has deep experience with network collaborative initiatives that improve educational outcomes, and build career pathways, for young adults to live better economic qualities of life.

For more information about Equal Measure, please contact Seth Klukoff, Senior Director of Communications, at [sklukoff@EqualMeasure.org](mailto:sklukoff@EqualMeasure.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

Launched in 2013, Lumina Foundation’s Community Partnership for Attainment (CPA) initiative aimed to deepen the impact of cross-sector, place-based efforts to increase higher education attainment in communities and cities across the country.

Lumina’s mission is to expand access and success in education beyond high school, particularly among adults, first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color. This mission is directed toward achieving Goal 2025 – “to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025.” To reach an attainment rate of 60 percent by 2025, the nation must produce 62 million high-quality postsecondary credentials, including college degrees (associate’s and bachelor’s) and certificates that lead to further education or employment – an additional 23 million over expected production. Because cities are home to two-thirds of the country’s population, and drive more than three-quarters of the nation’s economy, bolstering efforts to increase higher education attainment within cities is critical to reaching Goal 2025.

*“The achievement gap is a symptom of an inequitable system.”*

—CPA Grantee

There is no shortage of energy around higher education solutions, though relatively few communities have deeply embraced these solutions, and fewer still have organized to plan and implement them in an integrated fashion. Likewise, a growing number of organizations with experience promoting higher education attainment and/or community transformation at the national level are working in communities – an excellent movement, but a limited and potentially chaotic one due to mission limitations and niches of those national organizations.

## ABOUT THE CPA INVESTMENT

*Here we highlight several key components of the CPA initiative:*

### BREADTH

75 communities across the US, rolled out over three cohorts

### CATALYTIC INVESTMENT

Approximately \$200,000 investments designed to help communities catalyze their work

### TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Convenings, coaching, and peer-to-peer exchanges to help communities identify and implement best and promising practices

### LEARNING EVALUATION

Collaborating with an evaluation partner to understand and learn from what’s working

### EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Elevating these concepts into the fabric of the initiative

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The goal of the 75-city CPA initiative was to strengthen place-based, cross-sector attainment efforts while better integrating the organizations working on them, and the knowledge gained from them. The investment combined grant support, technical assistance from a cadre of national experts experienced in community collaboration and postsecondary attainment strategies, a cohort model for grantee learning, and communications support to increase the visibility and impact of communities' work.<sup>1</sup>

The CPA investment prioritized three pillars:

- **Partnership Health.** Community partners must work collaboratively to set and achieve common goals, use agreed-upon accountability tools and measures, and use data to make decisions about program direction and design.
- **Equity.** Communities need to identify and develop action plans to address chronic attainment gaps between populations, particularly between racial and ethnic groups.
- **Attainment.** Communities must address both access and success for students, with the ultimate objective of increased postsecondary completion.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/community-partnership-info.pdf>.

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## About this Issue Brief

This Issue Brief focuses on the second CPA pillar – **Equity**. In this Brief, we discuss how CPA communities have interpreted this pillar, describe how they have applied this principle to influence their partnership and attainment efforts, and discuss what other communities, funders, educators, and community-change stakeholders can learn from their experiences. We draw from data collected through interviews with representatives from all 75 communities shortly after receiving CPA funding, visits to 14 communities, and follow-up interviews with 10 communities focused specifically on the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We conclude the Brief with recommendations about how to deepen the conversation about the diversity, equity, and inclusion imperative in postsecondary, community, and systems change efforts.

It is worth noting that when the CPA investment launched, Lumina Foundation was in the process of articulating its own stance on equity, and had not yet released the *Equity Imperative*,<sup>2</sup> which outlines the Foundation’s position on “equity and excellence” in educational attainment. Given the timing of the CPA investment and the forthcoming release of the *Equity Imperative*, communities began to interpret and internalize the pillar of equity in ways that were most fitting for their respective contexts.

### THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE

In June 2014, Lumina Foundation released the *Equity Imperative*. Drawing from its long-standing commitment to increasing postsecondary access and success, Lumina Foundation articulated the need to prioritize a commitment to closing achievement gaps, citing, “*Without intentional and focused efforts to address inequality in our society, the gaps will only continue to grow.*” In particular, the Foundation noted, “*Native American, African American and Latino students are disproportionately poor, have less access to quality education, and are underrepresented in positions of power.*” Furthermore, “*Despite improved college-going rates in postsecondary education for African Americans, Native Americans and Latinos, the gaps that remain in educational attainment must be addressed if we are to flourish as citizens and as a nation.*”

Lumina Foundation updated the *Equity Imperative* in January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/equity-imperative-2017-01-25.pdf>

# HOW DO COMMUNITIES INTERPRET DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION?

Community partners' definitions and interpretations of diversity, equity, and inclusion are as diverse as the communities across the CPA initiative, although nearly all interpretations tapped into power structures, including those based on race, socioeconomic status, gender, and religion.

Communities pointed to the necessity of tackling these power structures while simultaneously addressing more specific aspects of diversity, equity, or inclusion – particularly racial equity – that have led to and resulted in low education attainment across the country.

**Diversity was most often thought about in terms of who should be included in the partnership.** When considering the “who” of the partnership, the following characteristics were most often cited:

- **DEMOGRAPHICS**

This is perhaps the most common conceptualization of diversity, and includes race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, immigrant status, educational attainment, local community/neighborhood, or faith.

- **SECTOR**

Going beyond basic categories of “public” or “private,” sectoral diversity plays an important role in community partnerships, and includes higher education, K-12 school systems, nonprofit/community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, businesses, and government/public agencies. Additionally, attention to diversity within these groups is important.

- **POWER AND ROLE**

Power refers to an individual's ability to influence others' actions or behaviors, and is closely related to his or her role within an institution or the community. Those within positions of institutional or community authority (e.g., CEOs and other executives, superintendents, mayors) are understood to have more power – and access to resources and information – than those who do not (e.g., parents, students, teachers).



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**Inclusion was most commonly referred to as an individual’s involvement in a partnership’s activities and decision-making processes.** Communities made distinctions between “diversity” and “inclusion” by articulating that, while diversity reflects the makeup of those “at the table,” inclusion refers to the roles these individuals play – roles that are active and influential in partnership activities and decision-making.

*“Diversity is getting a bunch of people involved in a process. Having people represented in some way – hearing from people or getting voices in the process. Inclusion is deeper – Who is actually involved in decision-making?”*

—CPA Grantee

**Interpretations of equity fell into two categories: 1) an end goal – with diversity and inclusion as steps along the way, and 2) an overarching lens that guides the work.**

### **1. EQUITY AS AN END GOAL**

Many partners viewed equity as intrinsically linked to their goals of improving educational outcomes. They acknowledged that communities cannot create educational opportunities without eliminating achievement gaps and systematically eliminating the inequities within the educational systems and society. Efforts to improve postsecondary attainment, they stated, must ultimately create equity in their communities and among their residents.

### **2. EQUITY AS A LENS**

In considering equity as a lens, partners articulated that equity must be integrated into all aspects of their work. They viewed equity, along with inclusion and diversity, as active principles to implement. At the same time, partners acknowledged that incorporating an equity lens can be difficult, and that they must avoid letting equity lose its meaning or become an empty phrase.

# HOW CAN CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS APPLY PRINCIPLES OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION TO IMPROVE POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

Of the lessons learned from the CPA communities, four emerged as critical for integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into cross-sector partnerships. We discuss these lessons and highlight how communities can incorporate each into their work.

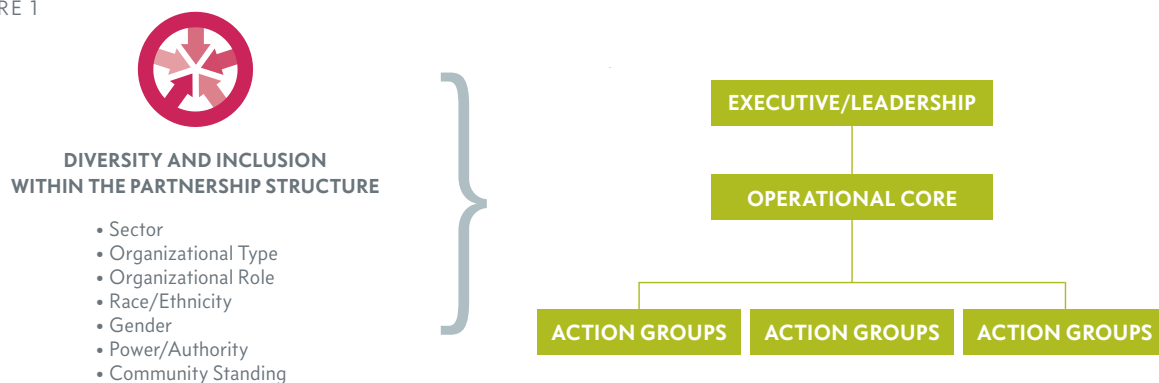
- 1 Create partnership structures that support diversity, equity, and inclusion
- 2 Address power dynamics with intentionality
- 3 Use data to sharpen the focus on educational inequity
- 4 Be attentive to the “who” and “how” of policy and practice change

## Create Partnership Structures That Support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Experiences of CPA communities suggest that a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion should be reflected in the structure of the partnership leading the postsecondary attainment agenda. Additionally, their experiences note that, unless an intentional effort is made, partnerships will consist of “the usual suspects,” developing committees and teams based on existing relationships and power structures.

Formalizing practices that embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in the partnership’s makeup and ways of working can keep partnerships accountable to addressing disparate outcomes and ensure that a variety of perspectives – particularly those from under-represented groups – are included in the partnership’s work. Diversifying a partnership’s composition can strengthen its ability to develop customized – and effective – solutions.

FIGURE 1



By modifying structures that determine who is “at the table,” partnerships can rely less on “diversity and inclusion by chance” and ensure that these principles affect their decision-making. Partnerships must consider how strategic and decision-making processes include or exclude particular perspectives, and identify opportunities for encouraging, valuing, and incorporating these perspectives at all levels within a partnership and across its functions (e.g., strategy setting, operations, or action).

While each community partnership has its own internal structure to facilitate its work, most include a leadership or executive committee that provides high-level strategy and direction, a steering group or operational core that manages the partnership’s operations, and workgroups or networks that implement changes within the community. Partnerships reported moments of realization that the groups they had created did not reflect the communities they were trying to serve. As a result, they took steps to identify the missing perspectives and change the group composition. While some partnerships had considered diversity and inclusion at the “work group” level, diverse perspectives among the executive or steering committees were much less common.

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## HOW CAN PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES SUPPORT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION?



- **ASSESS PARTNERSHIP MAKEUP**

Partnerships can assess and diversify their makeup by surveying members about their life experiences and demographics; comparing the demographic composition of the partnership – including subgroups such as executive committees and working groups – with the community as a whole; and recruiting partners from more diverse backgrounds to make the partnership – at all levels – more reflective of the community it serves.

- **TARGET GROUPS OUTSIDE OF THE “USUAL SUSPECTS”**

Partnerships should avoid relying on individuals from the most common stakeholder groups. Rather, partnerships should make a concerted effort to invite stakeholders from outside the network, consider who is not “at the table”, and welcome these partners and their perspectives.

- **FORMALIZE STRUCTURES THAT BRING UNREPRESENTED PERSPECTIVES TO THE TABLE**

Many partnerships have established systems for diversifying their partnership’s membership, and have turned to advisory groups as a way to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their processes. Formalizing the involvement of students or parents by creating new or leveraging existing groups can embed these perspectives into partnership decisions. Similarly, holding partnership “seats” for specific stakeholder groups can guarantee that community stakeholders who might have otherwise been overlooked are actively sought out.

- **MAKE MEETINGS ACCESSIBLE**

There are numerous ways partnerships can make meetings more accessible, including holding meetings in places and at times that allow diverse partners to attend; conducting meetings during the evening, so that students, parents, and community members don’t have to miss work or school to participate; providing child care and food during partnership meetings; and rotating locations to make meetings accessible to public transportation.

- **USE TRANSLATION SERVICES**

Valuable perspectives may be lost due to language barriers for prospective partners. Partnerships should ensure that meetings and materials give diverse audiences access to information and use accessible language that promotes inclusion and invites participation.

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SALT LAKE CITY, UT

## **Integrating Parent and Community Voice in Partnership Strategies**

*A Capital City Education (ACCE) provides access to educational opportunities for families living in neighborhoods on Salt Lake City's west side. Through its wraparound programs – including health care, mental health, high quality early childhood education, employment and education counseling, a food bank, financial literacy, and digital literacy – ACCE addresses the inequitable access to resources faced by many families in those neighborhoods. In designing its programs,*

*ACCE aims to be responsive to families' needs – for instance, offering adult education opportunities that are conducted with respect to work schedules and providing childcare onsite when possible. Each of the partnership's work groups includes resident leaders – parents and community residents who help drive decisions about strategies and programs. Through this partnership approach, ACCE intends to bring more resources and services to the community.*

## **Address Power Dynamics with Intentionality**

Community partners repeatedly discussed the interconnectedness between diversity, equity, and inclusion and power dynamics. When talking about including diverse, and often underrepresented perspectives in decision-making, the conversation typically shifts to giving power to those who lack it. Similarly, when identifying who in a community has access to resources or opportunity, conversations focus on community residents who have been disempowered through systemic barriers. In addition, cross-sector partnerships are made up of local organizations and institutions that have varying levels of power and influence in the community, each with its own power structure. These power structures likely have been developed and reinforced for years, or even decades.

Understanding and acknowledging that these power dynamics exist is an important step in breaking down barriers. Even more so, reducing or minimizing these barriers creates space for diverse voices in developing and implementing postsecondary success strategies – creating opportunities for innovative solutions that are attentive to and grounded in the range of students' needs.

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## HOW CAN PARTNERSHIPS ADDRESS POWER DYNAMICS WITH INTENTIONALITY?

### ACKNOWLEDGE POWER IMBALANCES ●

Partners believe it is critical to acknowledge the fundamental power dynamics and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to truly create a more equitable system. While some communities have brought in external facilitators to help partnerships discuss these issues, others have, over time, developed trust in being able to talk openly about power, including among those in the room.

### RECOGNIZE THAT SOME WILL PERCEIVE PARTNERSHIP AS A LOSS OF POWER ●

Partnerships are asking people and institutions to change. In some instances, this means giving up real or perceived power. In many communities, the people and institutions in power – the school district, colleges and universities, chambers of commerce – make up the majority of partners “at the table.” The more “power” those without power are given, the less power these entities have. Partners may be resistant to such power shifts, so be prepared to articulate the greater value of such changes.

### CREATE EQUITY IN DECISION-MAKING ●

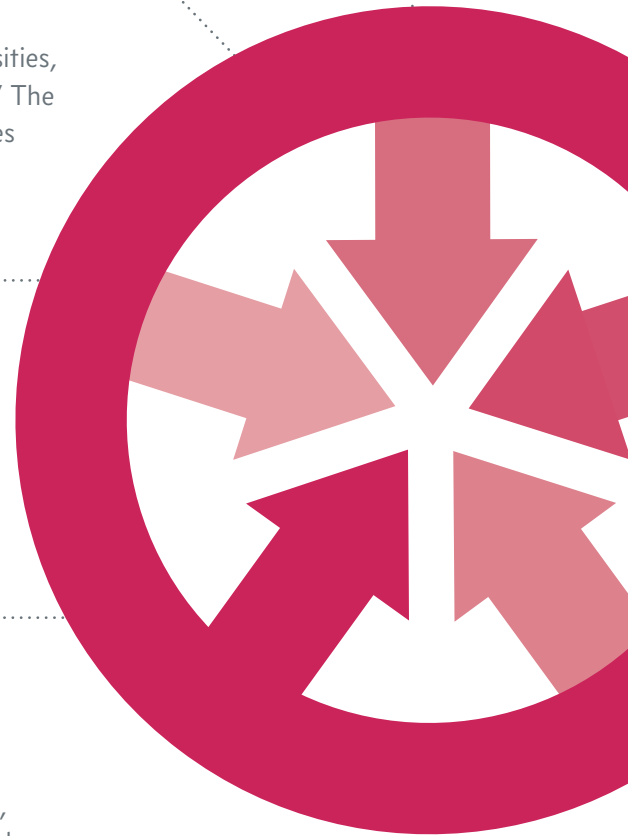
Equity in decision-making means including diverse perspectives at all levels of a partnership. Partnerships can easily default to those “with the most power” as key decision-makers, perpetuating inequity in decision-making and inadvertently maintaining the status quo. Establishing processes to include diverse partners at all levels of the partnership, “flattening” organizational structures to empower partners regardless of their role, and diffusing decision-making authority are essential.

### COMPENSATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND THOSE OUTSIDE THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THEIR TIME ●

Staff members of institutions can participate within the context of their day-to-day work (though it is important to note that very often staff members are doing so through their own volition, and thus adding to an already full workload). Community members and parents who participate, however, do so voluntarily, and often at their own financial cost and the risk of missing work or school. Partnerships can offset the time and costs of community members by providing them with stipends or other acknowledgements of their contributions.

### USE AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH ●

Initiatives to improve outcomes often operate with a deficit-based perspective – focusing on needs, missing resources, and what students don’t have. This can perpetuate negative stereotypes about low-income communities or communities of color. While it is critical to understand a community’s needs, it is also critical to do so while acknowledging what assets a community has, and to raise those up. Techniques like asset-mapping can allow partners to identify these existing resources – which can be physical (a community center, library, parks, etc.), or more abstract (a strong sense of community, active community leaders, creativity, etc.).



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DURHAM, NC

### **Elevating Youth Voice in Durham, NC**

*Made in Durham, the education-to-career partnership in Durham, NC, has developed inclusive strategies to increase youth perspectives and influence in the partnership's day-to-day work. Its Youth Network, composed of a diverse group of approximately 25 youth and young adults, aims to "ensure youth and young adults in Durham inform and fully participate in creating and evaluating [the] education-to-career system." This group of young people meets regularly to discuss goals, concerns, and, perhaps most importantly, ensure that youth are not "passive beneficiaries" but "drivers of change" in the partnership and community. Two members of the Network were selected to serve on the organization's board of directors.*

*The Youth Network's first year was spent conducting a research project, where the youth held focus groups of youth, teachers, and parents to better understand barriers preventing youth career success. The group identified two major issues – inadequate counseling and racial bias – which it presented to Made in Durham's Advisory Team. The Advisory Team voted unanimously to adopt these two issues as the partnership's areas of focus. The Advisory Team began by receiving presentations from Durham Public Schools' counseling program and the career and technical education program. The Advisory Team's work will be to uncover gaps in services to youth and the impact of racial bias, and then seek solutions to close those gaps and open up system blockages.*

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## Use Data to Sharpen the Focus on Educational Inequity

Data play a critical role in community partnerships, helping to set, refine, and communicate strategies for improving postsecondary attainment. Community partners regularly pointed to the role of data in helping make their partnerships and communities more equitable, while offering insights into practices that can enhance data use. In particular, they noted that data can sharpen a partnership's focus in three ways:

### TARGETING CHANGE

One critical role data can play is to help partners identify areas for change. These areas may refer to priority populations within a community, systemic barriers, or even geographic focal points. Importantly, however, data can help narrow where educational or complementary supports are most needed, and where particular policy or practice changes can help increase postsecondary attainment.

### ASSESSING CHANGE

Once partners establish priorities for increasing postsecondary attainment, data can play an important role in assessing their effectiveness. Relying on diverse experiences, particularly of the intended beneficiaries of a program, policy, or practice, is an essential part of assessing change.

### COMMUNICATING CHANGE

Partnerships can use data to tell the stories of their community – and explain why a focus on equity is so critical. Using data to make the case for specific policy or practice changes, as well as build commitment with stakeholders, can be successful through the use of qualitative and quantitative data. These stories can highlight the diversity of the community, as well as inspire stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds to become more engaged. Partners stressed that when sharing success stories, it is important to make sure they don't end up reinforcing stereotypes. Importantly, different data may be more effective for different audiences.

*“A number of people were shocked when we looked at the numbers. It was a rallying call for folks.”*

—CPA Grantee



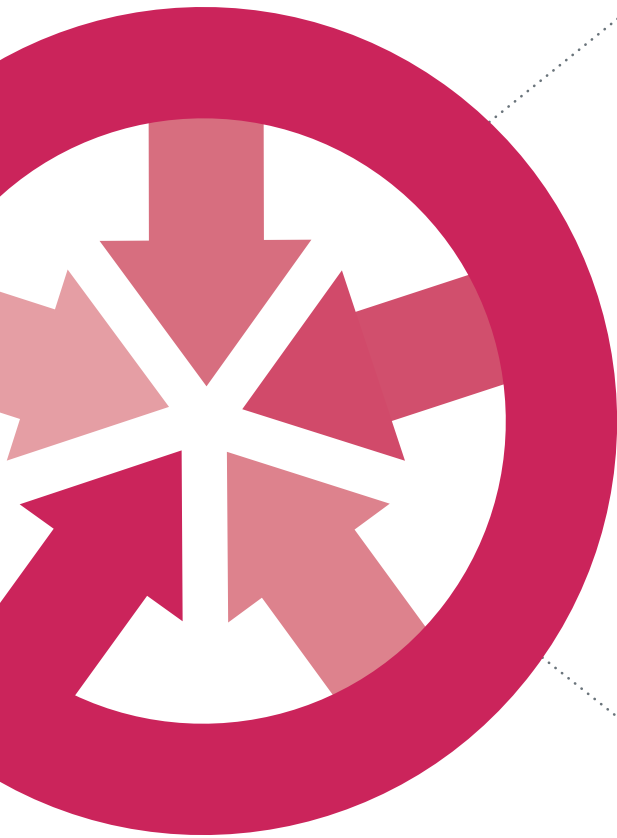
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## HOW CAN PARTNERS USE DATA TO SHARPEN THE FOCUS ON EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY?

### 1

#### TARGETING CHANGE

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- **DISAGGREGATE DATA**

For many communities, disaggregating data by race – or other characteristics – has been effective at providing demonstrable proof of the racial disparities in achievement. This was a powerful and compelling process that often helped catalyze action for partners and institutional leaders who had never seen their own academic performance data analyzed this way.

- **IDENTIFY “PLACES” OF INEQUITY**

Understanding where community needs, resources, and assets are located within a community can help identify places of action. Partners pointed to the value of using mapping software to identify communities or neighborhoods where residents have inequitable outcomes. These maps can help community members and stakeholders visualize the impact of inequity within their community.

- **SOLICIT INPUT FROM PARENTS AND STUDENTS**

While quantitative data are valuable, input from parents, students, and other stakeholders can help expose barriers to postsecondary success. Interviews and focus groups, for example, can help identify systemic barriers to postsecondary access or success only experienced by those trying to navigate the system.

*“We did a lot of geo mapping and were able to show visually that there are significant disparities...that the neighborhood you’re born into has an impact on your life.”*

—CPA Grantee

## 2

### ASSESSING CHANGE

#### MONITOR PROGRESS ● AMONG PRIORITY POPULATIONS

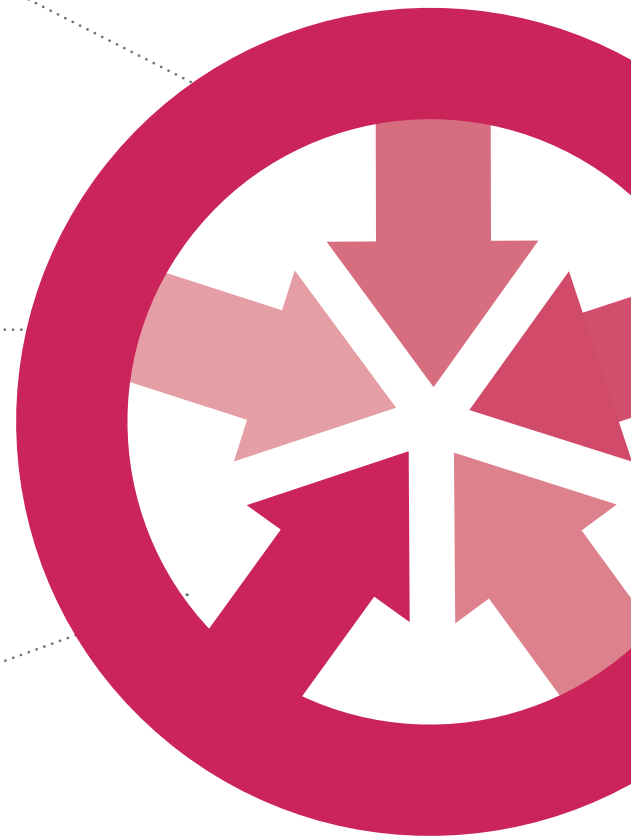
In the same vein that disaggregated data can help target a strategy; these data can be used to understand the intended and unintended consequences of implemented changes. A new program, for example, may show improvements among the overall population, but a closer look may reveal that low-income students continue to struggle.

#### REPORT ON PROGRESS ●

Community partners spoke of the need to report on the progress of their work. Partnership members, stakeholders, and others in the community should understand how the work is going, which creates equity in access to information. These data can be used to understand what's working, and with whom, rather than as a source of power or control.

#### MAKE DATA ACCESSIBLE ●

Data should be presented clearly and in plain language. Jargon and academic language create barriers for partners not in exclusive circles, and can be viewed as a way to “control the narrative.” In addition, there should be opportunities for diverse partners and community members to act on these data – including posting data online and making data available in multiple languages.

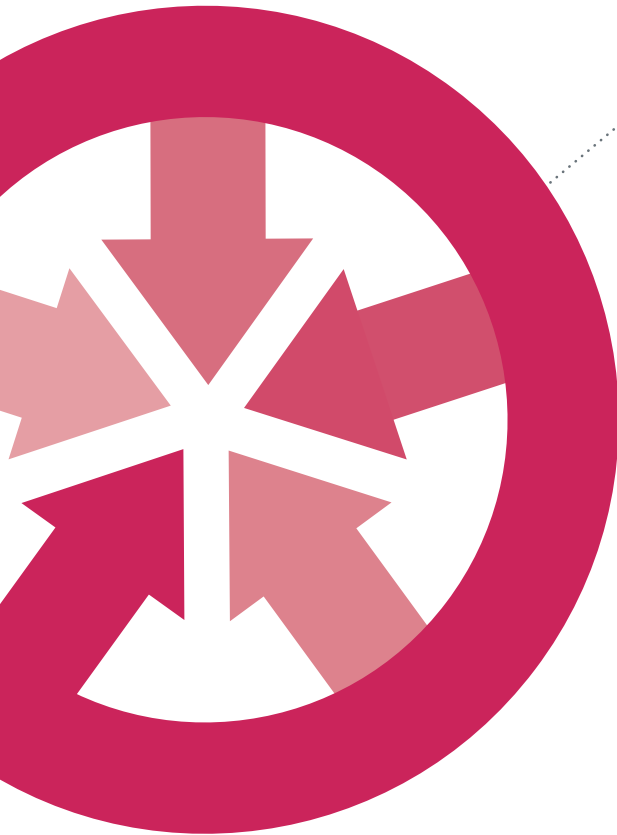


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## COMMUNICATING CHANGE

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- **INCLUDE INTENDED BENEFICIARIES IN DATA INTERPRETATION**

Partnerships should engage students, parents, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders when interpreting data about the partnership’s progress. Their experiences can help identify factors underpinning the data, and add a more nuanced understanding of how the strategy is working, and what the partnership can do differently to change the data or make greater improvements.

- **SHARE SUCCESS STORIES**

Sharing stories of success – through quantitative and qualitative data – can help develop new champions. Additionally, success stories can galvanize action around the postsecondary attainment agenda, particularly if the success involves overcoming a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Personal stories of success can help others understand what their path to a credential might look like.

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## MINNEAPOLIS, MN

### **Moving Beyond Race in Minneapolis - St. Paul**

*In Minneapolis - St. Paul, which has a large refugee community, Generation Next coalition partners disaggregated their data beyond the broad U.S. Census categories to better understand the needs of their residents. For example, instead of categories such as "Asian American," partners use country of origin, or self-identified ethnic background. The partnership also asked community members how they identify themselves, as a way to create demographic categories and organize its community data.*

*This activity informed, and provided more direction to, how the partnership connected community members to services. By developing an understanding of how residents identify themselves, and interpreting data through that lens, the partners are better able to design interventions that more effectively meet community needs.*

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## Be Attentive to the “Who” and “How” of Policy and Practice Change

Integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into decisions about policy or practice changes is critical to communities’ work. Across the 75 communities, partners raised a series of questions and reflection points when considering the most appropriate policy and practice changes to tackle:

**WHO** will benefit most from the policy or practice change that we are considering?

- Will the proposed policy or practice shift lead to reduced inequities among targeted student populations?
- How can we zero in on policies and practices that focus on students who experience the most profound structural barriers to postsecondary attainment?

**WHO** makes the decision about which policy or practice to focus on, and how does this map to students’ lived experiences?

- What does the research say about our proposed strategies?
- What do students, faculty members, providers, and other front-line staff elevate as the most pressing programmatic or policy barriers?
- Are the policies and practices we are considering getting at root causes of educational inequity, or are they treating the symptoms?

**HOW** will we ensure that the policy and/or practice changes lead to the intended attainment outcomes for the targeted students?

- How do we ensure that the combination of program and policy changes is additive or complementary?
- How can we ensure that the policies and practices do not result in unintended consequences for the students?
- What contextual, cultural, and other factors do we need to be aware of – and monitor – as implementation unfolds, to ensure that we are staying true to our values of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Collectively, these questions can help partnerships develop the best, most culturally responsive solutions for addressing barriers to postsecondary attainment.

*“This movement can’t be programmatically driven. When we talk about equity and the achievement gap, [the solution] has to be systems driven, not programmatic.”*

—CPA Grantee

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## HOW CAN PARTNERSHIPS BE ATTENTIVE TO THE “WHO” AND “HOW” OF POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGE?

### ROOT SOLUTIONS IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT ●

Understanding a community’s local context is critical to developing successful solutions to postsecondary attainment. Long-standing divides within a community, for example, may provide road blocks for future progress. Similarly, building from a community’s prior success can accelerate a partnership’s work, while developing a strategy that is widely recognized as having previously failed could provide even greater setbacks. Understanding community dynamics and the broader context of stakeholder roles and interests is essential for developing policy or practice changes across the community or within partner organizations.

### IMPLEMENT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES, PROGRAMS, AND POLICIES ●

Actions to improve postsecondary attainment must account for, and be adapted to, the populations they are intended to benefit. Questions that communities are considering include:

- » Are FAFSA workshops run by professionals who are culturally competent – or better yet, someone from the community? Are they held in locations accessible to community members? Do they address concerns of students with undocumented relatives?
- » Do curricula address diverse learning needs, or are classes and course sequences responsive to varying learning styles and non-academic needs?
- » Are course schedules and institutional practices structured to accommodate adult learners?
- » Do scholarship programs provide opportunities for those who would not otherwise have them, or do they advance opportunities for those who are already well-resourced?



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SANTA ANA, CA

## Meeting Parents Where They Are in Santa Ana, CA

*The Santa Ana Partnership's Padres Promotores program exemplifies how community members can advance a postsecondary attainment and success agenda. Based on a successful peer support model focused on diabetes maintenance, Padres Promotores became the higher education equivalent of this community engagement model. The program engages more than 30,000 parents each year through various activities, including home visits; presentations at community sites; school workshops; community fairs; and the annual Camino de Amistad event, in which family volunteers canvas neighborhoods with information about high school registration, school contacts, and higher education opportunities.*

*Parents who serve as Padres Promotores are sought out by the Santa Ana Partnership to connect with parents, share information, and link them to resources. In addition, Padres Promotores speak with parents informally at parks, churches, and other social events about a range of topics, including FAFSA completion, the Santa Ana College Free Tuition Promise, how to read report cards, and the importance of postsecondary education. The program exemplifies an ability to "meet parents where they are" through culturally and contextually appropriate supports.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

For many communities, the key to improving postsecondary attainment rests within their ability to address the needs of marginalized community members. Attention to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion is critical in closing achievement gaps and ensuring that all residents receive the support and resources necessary to succeed. Furthermore, policies and practices must be tailored to unique needs of community members.

We offer a set of recommendations grounded in diversity, equity, and inclusion for funders and community stakeholders to consider when implementing cross-sector, place-based change strategies:

### 1 Keep the past present

Take time to understand the historical context of the community, particularly pertaining to various demographic groups; consider the implications of this context for your change agenda; and work actively and continuously to view the objectives of the partnership in light of community history. Each community has a unique history of dealing with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and race relations in particular. Knowledge of “hot button issues” and their implications on the local sociopolitical landscape and educational institutions can help identify areas for catalyzing change as well as resistance.

### 2 Make inclusion intentional

Consider which stakeholder groups may need to be included, and how the structure of the partnership – or investment – can encourage participation and demonstrate value for a variety of perspectives and lived experiences. Philanthropic dollars provide a unique opportunity to encourage cross-sector partnerships. Rather than hope the “right” people come together, provide structure (such as RFP requirements or a planning phase) to bring these people together. Additionally, consider how partnership structures may inadvertently perpetuate existing power structures and exclude grassroots organizations, CBOs, students/parents, and community groups.

### 3 Be explicit about diversity, equity, and inclusion

The historical and political context in some communities make it difficult for partnerships to communicate their goals of reducing racial disparities in education and careers. Help partners and stakeholders understand the unique needs of demographic groups with the least opportunity, and the importance of targeting strategies to address the barriers they face. Consider how to communicate these goals publicly, and articulate a community-wide vision that focuses on targeted groups.

### 4 Take a 360-degree approach

Include the community in the development of postsecondary attainment strategies. Strategies that rely on the existing inequities and power structures are unlikely to produce different results. Make sure attainment strategies are vetted with and monitored by those who are affected by them. Students, parents, community members, faculty, teachers, and administrators need to have a vested stake in the identification and ultimate success of the change efforts – including the specific policy and practice changes that the partnership tackles.