MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES:
How 22 Cities Helped High School Students Complete More FAFSAas and Get More Financial Aid Dollars

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Patricia Steele
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FAFSA Completion Challenge Cities
FAFSA Completion Challenge

$75,000
• Greensboro, North Carolina—Greatest increase in FAFSA-completion rate and highest FAFSA-completion rate

$50,000
• Cheyenne, Wyoming—Second greatest increase
• Charleston, West Virginia—Second highest completion rate

$25,000
• Columbus, Ohio—Engaging a community ecosystem
• Jackson, Mississippi—Involving higher education
• Los Angeles, California—Overcoming barriers
• Phoenix, Arizona—Taking a strategic approach
• San Juan, Puerto Rico—Creating systems change
Data Sources
Partnerships & Strategies
### Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTNER TYPE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>K-12 School Districts</td>
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<td>Postsecondary Institutions</td>
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<td>College Access Organizations</td>
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<td>College Access Networks</td>
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<td>Houses of Worship</td>
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<td>STRATEGIES</td>
<td>NUMBER OF CITIES</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td><strong>OUTREACH</strong></td>
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<td>Social Media Outreach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Media Outreach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Outreach to Students and/or Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer or Near-Peer FAFSA Advisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kick-off and/or Wrap-Up Event</td>
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<td>Outreach to Specific Target Populations</td>
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<td>Website Featuring FAFSA Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community FAFSA Events</td>
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<td>Training Counselors and/or Volunteers on FAFSA</td>
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<td>FAFSA Completion Toolkit</td>
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<td>Community Center for FAFSA Completion</td>
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<td>In-Class Curriculum</td>
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<td>Individual Follow-Up with Students</td>
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<td>Student-Level FAFSA Completion Data</td>
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<td>Competitions and/or Incentives</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Outreach Strategies

Perceived Effectiveness of Outreach Strategies

- Direct Outreach to Students
- Outreach to Specific Target Populations
- **Peer or Near-Peer FAFSA Advisors**
- Direct Outreach to Parents
- Social Media Outreach
- **Kick-off and/or Wrap-Up Event**
- **Traditional Media Outreach**
- **Website Featuring FAFSA Information**

Legend:
- Red: Very Effective
- Teal: Somewhat Effective
- Black: Not Effective
Support Strategies

Perceived Effectiveness of Support Strategies

- School-Based FAFSA Events
- Individual Follow-Up with Students
- **In-Class Curriculum
- Student-Level FAFSA Data
- High School FAFSA Data
- Training on FAFSA
- Competitions and/or Incentives
- **FAFSA Completion Toolkit
- Community FAFSA Events
- **Drop-In Center for FAFSA Completion

Legend:
- Very Effective
- Somewhat Effective
- Not Effective
Lessons Learned
Lessons Learned

Don’t re-invent the wheel

Coordination is key
Case Study: Columbus, OH

- Leveraging Partner Resources to Provide One-on-One Support
- Engaging Families through Community Partners
Recommendations

• Leverage your resources by playing to partner strengths
• Identify underserved areas or groups
• Build a community FAFSA calendar
• Coordinate marketing campaigns
Lessons Learned

Set goals and track progress

Cash for College Data Dashboard

Most Alabama high school seniors who file their FAFSA get financial aid to help pay for college – including Pell Grants of up to $5,920/year. This money can be used for technical and academic programs at both two- and four year colleges and universities. Alabama students left $43.3 million in grants on the table in 2016. You can see FAFSA completion data for more than 350 Alabama high schools with the dashboard and search tools below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>This Year (10/1/17 - 12/8/17)</th>
<th>Last Year (10/1/16 - 12/9/16)</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAFSAs Completed</td>
<td>12,879</td>
<td>11,148</td>
<td>+ 1,642</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th Grade Enrollment</td>
<td>52,625</td>
<td>52,283</td>
<td>+ 1,352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion Percentage</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>+ 14.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current FAFSAs Completed

- Missing
- Completed
- Incomplete
Case Study: Charleston, WV

- Strategic Communications
- Friendly Competition

Photo courtesy Charleston, WV.
Recommendations

• Set clear goals for the city and each participating school/organization
• Expand access to student-level FAFSA-completion data
• Assist counselors and college access professionals in using data
• Consider setting up a local competition with incentives
Lessons Learned

Take a tiered approach

FIGURE 7: Funnel diagram showing tiered approach

KICKOFF: Schoolwide Events
in conjunction with college applications,
during Fall Break, culturally relevant, convenient for families
Counselors lead; postsecondary institutions, CBOs, community volunteers assist

Small Group Intervention
Group by similar issues
Communicate through text messaging
Counselors direct; Advisory periods and CBOs lead groups

One-on-One Assistance
Challenging situations
Continue text messaging
Counselors connect students to resources; CBOs, College Depot, Colleges

Diagram courtesy Phoenix, AZ
Case Study: Phoenix, AZ

- FAFSA Fiestas
- Targeted Triaged Interventions
Recommendations

• Raise awareness
• Target groups who may need more assistance
• Provide one-on-one support throughout the process
• Follow up to ensure completion
Lessons Learned

One-on-one assistance makes all the difference
Case Study: Jackson, MS

- Counselors Are Key
- Partnerships Make It Possible
Recommendations

• High schools are essential partners
• Offer training early and often
• Embed financial aid and FAFSA in professional development
• Assemble a toolkit
• Engage and support additional “FAFSA coaches”
Lessons Learned

Outreach matters
Case Study: Baton Rouge, LA

- Peers
- Families
- Community

SLAM DUNK the FAFSA
Recommendations

- Investigate new outreach methods
  - Text ‘nudges’
  - Social media
- Challenge high school students to come up with innovative strategies
- Figure out where your audience will be and meet them there
Questions?

Full report at: https://kresge.org/library/report-money-doesnt-grow-trees