



Education Partnerships

USA Funds® is a nonprofit corporation that works to enhance postsecondary-education preparedness, access and success by providing and supporting financial and other valued services.

USA Funds joins in work to bolster Mississippi's education achievement

USA Funds has a special relationship with Mississippi as the state's designated guarantor of federal student loans. As part of its work with Mississippi, USA Funds is partnering with the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning on projects to increase preparation for, access to and success in postsecondary education for students in Mississippi.

Mississippi's Mandate

The high-school-graduation rate in Mississippi is less than 60 percent, and only 20 percent of Mississippi residents age 25 and older holds bachelor's degrees. To address the issue of low educational attainment and offer solutions, USA Funds underwrote the report *Mississippi's Mandate: Why the Investment in Education Pays off in Mississippi*.

Released by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, *Mississippi's Mandate* finds that a low level of educational attainment in Mississippi causes significant losses for the state. The report shows that, by enhancing access to education, Mississippi could reduce social-welfare costs and improve its economy and overall quality of life for those living in the state.

"Education levels in Mississippi need to increase to meet demand," says Phil Pepper, assistant commissioner of research and planning and Mississippi's state economist. "The jobs available today require a more-skilled and educated workforce."

The report is available at www.usafunds.org/forms/school_lender/mississippi_mandate.pdf on the USA Funds Web site.

College-planning Web site

USA Funds recently awarded an \$80,000 grant to the Mississippi IHL to develop a Web site that will help Mississippi middle- and high-school students and their parents prepare for, apply to and pay for postsecondary-education programs.



The University of Mississippi was among those offering information to students at a recent Mississippi IHL college fair in Jackson, Miss., sponsored by USA Funds.

The Web site will serve as a comprehensive clearing-house of information specific to education on both a state and national level. Although middle- and high-school students and their parents are the primary target audience, the site also will offer information for school counselors, elementary-school students, college students and adult learners.

Student-retention conference

The Policy Center, with support from USA Funds, in 2007 will host the Mississippi Higher Education Retention Conference. The Policy Center is an independent, nonprofit, higher-education policy, advocacy and research center whose mission is to improve the beginning college experience. Some of the nation's leading authorities on student retention will present at the conference.

"USA Funds is pleased to partner with the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning on this conference and other projects to enhance access to postsecondary education," says Henry Fernandez, USA Funds executive director of scholarships, outreach and philanthropy. "We believe that these projects and USA Funds initiatives will help more Mississippi residents reap the significant benefits of higher education."

USA Funds initiatives

USA Funds supports a number of other postsecondary education-preparedness initiatives in Mississippi, as well as other states in which USA Funds is the designated guarantor of federal education loans.

USA Funds also is the designated guarantor in Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Nevada and Wyoming.

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Selected grants awarded by USA Funds July 1, 2006-Sept. 30, 2006

USA Funds awards grants to advance its nonprofit mission to enhance postsecondary-education preparedness, access and success.

Scholarship America

Minneapolis

Project Learning Communities Initiative

Geographic Scope National

Amount \$247,500

Grant funds support training related to Scholarship America's ScholarShop program for the pilot communities involved in the Learning Communities initiative — Tucson, Ariz.; Orlando, Fla.; Indianapolis; Okolona, Miss.; Washington, D.C.; and Wind River Reservation, Wyo. The endeavor aims to significantly increase the number of youth in selected communities who complete high school and successfully pursue postsecondary education.

Learn More Resource Center

Indianapolis

Project Learn More Indiana

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$173,806

This Web site — www.learnmoreindiana.org — raises awareness of the benefits and options for education after high school and the importance of early preparation. The site is a one-stop online information source for Indiana residents regarding education and careers.

Excelencia in Education

Washington, D.C.

Project Latino Achievement in Higher Education in California, With Policy-Makers Perspectives

Geographic Scope California

Amount \$127,000

Excelencia in Education is developing institutional and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing postsecondary access and success for California students, particularly Latinos.

Scholarship America

Minneapolis

Project E-Scholarship Program and ScholarShop Evaluation

Geographic Scope National

Amount \$118,000

Scholarship America — the nation's largest nonprofit, private-sector scholarship and educational-support organization — is conducting a comprehensive evaluation of its programs e-Scholarship and ScholarShop.

Foundation for Community Colleges

Sacramento, Calif.

Project Basic Skills as the Foundation for Student Success

Geographic Scope California

Amount \$103,000

Basic Skills as the Foundation for Student Success: Increasing Retention, Persistence and Success Rates for English as a Second Language and Basic Skills Students will promote student retention and degree completion at California community colleges. The initiative will include two retention conferences, publication of a manual about effective strategies, and the creation of an award recognizing staff for their retention efforts.

Brevard College Corp.

Brevard, N.C.

Project Mississippi Student Retention Conference

Geographic Scope Mississippi

Amount \$100,000

The event will focus on student retention and success with a particular focus on first-year students. Participants will include representatives of two- and four-year public, private and for-profit schools.

Experiential Learning & Entrepreneurship Foundation Inc.

Indianapolis

Project Youth Education Programs of Executive Service Corps of Indiana Inc.

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$100,000

The grant supports the transitioning of education programs to Junior Achievement of Central Indiana Inc. from Executive Service Corps of Indiana. The mentoring program, Job Preparation Workshops and Science Comes Alive program will serve more than 5,000 Central Indiana youth.

Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

Jackson, Miss.

Project Web-Site Creation, and Reproduction and Distribution of Binder Inserts

Geographic Scope Mississippi

Amount \$80,000

The Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning is developing a Web site that will help Mississippi middle- and high-school students and their parents prepare for, apply to and pay for postsecondary-education programs. Print materials will offer information about the college-preparatory curriculum, university admissions, planning for postsecondary education and financial aid.

Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township Foundation Inc.

Indianapolis

Project Advancement Via Individual Determination

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$70,000

AVID is a rigorous academic program for students who rank in the middle of their classes. The Lawrence Township Schools program in Indianapolis helps increase students' accessibility to a college-preparatory curriculum.

Jobs for Arizona's Graduates

Scottsdale, Ariz.

Project JAG Classroom to Careers Program

Geographic Scope Arizona

Amount \$60,000

JAG helps at-risk young people to stay in school and graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. The program provides participants with classroom instruction, student-organization activities, group and one-on-one counseling, tutoring, remediation, employer marketing, job development and follow-up services.

Riley Children's Foundation

Indianapolis

Project Riley Hospital for Children Education Program

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$50,500

The school program at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis helps children, adolescents and teens with chronic or life-threatening illnesses to be in school and prepares them to reenter their own schools after extended absences.

Police Athletic League of Indianapolis

Indianapolis

Project Indy PAL Club Youth Education

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$50,000

PAL of Indianapolis' efforts include those that involve at-risk youth in educational, cultural and fitness activities that aim to deter crime, increase self-esteem and promote a positive relationship with the police. This grant encourages mentoring and leadership opportunities for Indianapolis youth.

Starfish

Indianapolis

Project Starfish Initiative

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$50,000

USA Funds partners with the Starfish Initiative to cultivate promising low-income youth as leaders through an intensive academic and support program designed to promote college entrance and success.

Nevada Public Education Foundation

Carson City, Nev.

Project Nevada ACCESS

Geographic Scope Nevada

Amount \$50,000

Nevada ACCESS: Academics + Careers + College and Training Equal Student Success events will encourage and motivate students to include postsecondary-education options and technical training in their plans. The Nevada Public Education Foundation will host the events during the 2006-2007 academic year.

YMCA of Greater Indianapolis Urban Mission Branch

Indianapolis

Project Y-Teen Achievers College Readiness Program

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$50,000

Y-Teen Achievers helps provide social and financial access to higher education for low-income students by connecting them with adult mentor-coaches and facilitating placement, tuition assistance and college entrance. Students in the program participate in college tours and receive information about college admissions and financial aid.

Training Inc.

Indianapolis

Project USA Funds Bridge to Education Program

Geographic Scope Indiana

Amount \$50,000

USA Funds' grant provides career and life-skills training to disadvantaged, unemployed or underemployed women and men. Training Inc. equips people to become self-sufficient by preparing them for full-time employment or to continue their education.

Parents & Kids

Jackson, Miss.

Project Parents & Kids Regional College Fairs and College Planner

Geographic Scope Mississippi

Amount \$40,000

Parents & Kids, a Mississippi-based educational magazine, hosts series of college fairs throughout the state as well as college planners for participants.

Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education

Phoenix

Project Rapid Guide to Financial Aid

Geographic Scope Arizona

Amount \$36,250

The ACEP will produce this financial-aid publication with the support of USA Funds.

USA Funds customer-relations manager focuses on outreach in Mississippi, Florida

Vicky Keller has a passion for education. Keller, a USA Funds customer-relations manager, is responsible for determining customer needs and monitoring customer satisfaction with USA Funds' education-loan services. Her particular states of focus are Mississippi, one of the eight states where USA Funds is the designated guarantor of federal education loans, and Florida, another key USA Funds state.

Having worked in college financial aid and admissions prior to joining USA Funds, Keller can identify with the needs and concerns of her customers. Through her contacts in the financial-aid community, she often is called upon as a resource for postsecondary-education-outreach programs.

"Vicky is passionate about her job and her philanthropic work," says David Root, USA Funds customer-relations director. She truly works to fulfill the USA Funds mission."

USA Funds works to enhance postsecondary-education preparedness, access and success by providing and supporting financial and other valued services.

Keller is a familiar face at college fairs, high-school nights and community events throughout Mississippi and Florida, and presents information about college planning and success, financial aid, budgeting and study skills.

She strongly encourages her customers to take advantage of postsecondary-education materials and resources available through USA Funds, including USA Funds Unlock the Future®, USA Funds' early awareness program for middle-school students and their parents. Keller enjoys presenting the program, but she takes greater satisfaction when an organization presents the program, customizing it to fit their unique needs.

"USA Funds Unlock the Future is a great resource," says Keller. "The program has separate parent and student tracks that can be used independently."

One of the challenges that Keller faces in Mississippi is in reaching out to students in the state's rural areas.

"Some of these kids are the ones who need outreach programs the most," she says. "They might be the first in their families to even consider college, and the college-application process can be very intimidating. When I'm able to reach these kids — that's truly a great feeling."

Another outreach program in which Keller is involved is the Learning Communities initiative. Spearheaded by USA Funds and Scholarship America in 2005, the endeavor aims to significantly increase the number

of youth in selected communities who complete high school and successfully pursue postsecondary education. The initiative works to create new cultures of learning and improve the college-going rates of students in six diverse, low-income areas — including the Okolona school district in Mississippi and the Washington Shores district in Florida.

Keller has presented information about financial aid, budgeting, credit-card do's and don'ts, and successful study skills to students and parents in both school districts as part of the initiative.

While she encourages organizations to take advantage of USA Funds' programs and services, Keller also develops her own programs to meet specific needs.

"My favorite program this year was one I presented for nontraditional students," Keller says. "I was a nontraditional student, so I can present based on real-life experience, relate to the challenges, and offer solutions," she says. "Eight people attended, and five of those I helped complete the FAFSA decided to return to school. That's what I loved the most about it."

Students who qualify for undergraduate admission to college or technical school must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, to qualify for federal and state financial aid, as well as scholarships and grants offered by many colleges, universities and vocational/technical schools.

"I wouldn't do this job if I didn't love it and didn't think I was making a difference," says Keller. "I truly believe in USA Funds' mission, and there is nothing more fulfilling than to give someone the tools or information to help them pursue their education. To interact with potential college students and help them see that college can be a reality — that's what's so special about my work." ■



Vicky Keller, left, of USA Funds, joins Louanne Langston of USA Funds Services in leading a session about budgeting, credit-card management and study skills at Delta State University in Cleveland, Miss.

USA Funds works in Mississippi (continued from page 1)

The following are some key USA Funds-supported programs:

- ◇ The USA Funds Access to Education Scholarships® program awarded 340 new and renewal scholarships totaling \$505,500 to deserving college-bound students in Mississippi for the 2006-2007 academic year.
- ◇ The Learning Communities initiative is an effort to significantly increase the number of youth in six selected communities — including Okolona School District in Mississippi — who complete high school and successfully pursue postsecondary education. USA Funds is among 10 nationally recognized organizations partnering with local community leaders in this endeavor.



Sister Jean Meyer, left, and Rosemary Warren take part in a ScholarShop Jr. activity in Okolona, Miss. — part of the USA Funds-supported Learning Communities initiative.

- ◇ USA Funds Unlock the Future is an early awareness program that introduces students and their families to the benefits of and options for education after high school. ■

Passing A Test of Leadership

By Paul Lingenfelter
President, State Higher Education Executive Officers



Positive changes in the world economy have substantially changed the responsibilities of higher education in the United States. Previously, and as most older adults remember it, the mission of higher education was to advance knowledge and transmit postsecondary knowledge and skills to 25-to-35 percent of the population, generally those more blessed with advantages and aptitude.

Now, in the global economy, knowledge is more important than geography and natural resources. This shift has created wider opportunities for people around the globe and special challenges to the education systems of developed countries with their higher costs of labor. Today, 50-to-80 percent of the U.S. work force needs postsecondary knowledge and skills to be competitive in the global marketplace. Some older adults are not yet convinced this much education is necessary, but high-school students are beginning to figure it out. When asked about their aspirations for higher education, 80 percent of high-school sophomores said they intend to get a four-year degree, and 40 percent said they intend to go on to obtain a graduate or professional degree.

The report *A Test of Leadership*, recently issued by the U.S. secretary of education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, makes it clear the facts no longer justify complacency about America's global leadership in higher education. The bottom line is that more Americans need to enroll and graduate from our colleges and universities, and all adults need to continue learning throughout life to upgrade their skills and meet the responsibilities of citizenship. It is obvious what must change; we need to find ways of engaging and assisting those who now are not enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary education.

What demands attention?

- ◇ **High-school preparation.** Colleges need to be clearer about expectations and the requirements for success, and we must increase the motivation for students to take a rigorous curriculum in preparation for college and work. The federal Academic Competitiveness Grants, which employ good ideas field-tested in Indiana and Oklahoma, are a step in the right direction. This program needs to be refined and coordinated with state efforts in the rule-making process.
- ◇ **Early outreach.** The students most likely to succeed in college didn't start thinking about it in the 11th grade; most of them began planning for college in grade school. The federal program Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) has helped establish promising statewide early outreach programs in many states. These initiatives need to be expanded and refined so they extend to every state and become even more effective.
- ◇ **Access and affordability.** Aspiration and preparation are insufficient if low- and moderate-income students lack confidence in their ability to afford higher education and the means to pay the costs. The proper response to this challenge has many parts, including adequate support for both federal and state need-based aid, adequate direct support to institutions, and increased productivity in higher education.
- ◇ **More-disciplined attention to learning outcomes.** No individual can become proficient in more than a small part of the curriculum. Consequently, a single standard for higher-learning outcomes would be foolish. But faculties in each discipline and institution owe it to their profession and their students to set meaningful standards for learning and assess progress toward them. States and the nation will benefit from more general assessments of adult learning and skill, much like the National Assessment of Educational Progress for students in grades kindergarten through 12.

What should states do?

All of these issues will require sustained work over many years. But we need to begin, and we need to prepare for a long journey.

The states — which govern, finance and set policy for the public institutions that educate three-fourths of American college students — vary enormously in policies and circumstances. But every state needs to focus more attention on higher-education policy.

Although the particular needs of states will vary, states must:

- ◇ Set explicit, ambitious state goals for improving preparation for, participation in and completion of higher education.
- ◇ Use established state policy boards and commissions more effectively to monitor results and focus public policy and public resources on the highest-priority public needs.
- ◇ Work with institutions to assess and improve student learning, productivity and quality.

This agenda is urgent, not because American higher education is weak, but because a changing world requires it to become stronger in order to sustain global leadership. With a broad consensus on common purposes and a deeply shared resolve to succeed, we have, without question, the ability to pass *A Test of Leadership*.

The State Higher Education Executive Officers is a nonprofit, nationwide association of the chief executive officers serving statewide coordinating boards and governing boards of postsecondary education. ■

USA Funds offers new online grant application

USA Funds has redesigned the philanthropy section of its Web site and implemented new software to simplify and consolidate its grants-management and application processes.

The new software automates the process of submitting and reviewing initial grant applications and will save time and resources for both USA Funds and the organizations applying for grants.

Prior to completing a grant application on USA Funds' Web site — www.usafunds.org — potential grantees will answer an online eligibility quiz, ensuring that only proposals that meet USA Funds' guidelines are accepted and saving grantees from completing applications for projects that do not meet those guidelines.

The software also provides tools that will help USA Funds conduct analysis and measurement to evaluate the success of individual grants and the overall impact of those grants.

The redesigned "Organizations Supporting Higher Education" section of USA Funds' Web site also is more user-friendly and offers more resources for those seeking information about supporting access to higher education. ■