



Check out our new website!

Our new website is live at [ascendiumphilanthropy.org](https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org). We're excited to share our newly-launched, streamlined site which showcases our four funding focus areas and makes it easy for partners to identify our investment priorities and find resources.

Measuring Success

Our work aims to contribute to a future where more learners from low-income backgrounds reach their education and career goals, equity gaps are eliminated and all postsecondary learning is valued and validated.

We've been working over the past year alongside HCM Strategists to identify success metrics for our grantmaking. To assess the progress of our strategy, we will monitor data points related to first-year persistence, degree and credential completion, time to completion and job placement.

At Ascendium, we also understand that how we approach our work influences how others respond. We hold ourselves accountable in areas like our grantees' and applicants' perceptions of us; the quality and frequency of our external communications; how we learn from investments; and how well we partner with grantees, other funders and thought leaders in the field. Continuous improvement is a high priority at Ascendium. We look forward to sharing our progress.

Focus Area Investment Priorities in Action

In the spirit of collaboration with partners and transparency, we are pleased to share additional details on our four focus areas (introduced in 2019). On our new website you will find investment priorities, information on our tactics and our desired outcomes for each of the focus areas, and below you can read more about four recent grants and their alignment to our investment priorities.

Remove Structural Barriers to Success

We work to fund initiatives that help **remove barriers to student success**, which fuels the **outcomes we seek** in this area. In practice, we support diverse stakeholders critical to institutional transformation and increasing student success: Ascendium partnered with the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) for a \$1.15 million strategic finance and student completion planning grant. This effort will develop the necessary elements to support a community of practice among college financial leaders and their peers to generate insights, practices and processes around financially viable solutions for equitable student success. By bringing business and finance leaders into conversation with other institutional stakeholders, NACUBO can use its network to identify new financial strategies, help members to reform practices that impede student progress and promote investment in best practices that work for an increasingly diverse student population.



Streamline Key Learner Transitions

We work to fund initiatives that help institutions **streamline transitions** for learners between postsecondary education, credentialing and workforce entry. This fuels the **outcomes we seek** in this focus area. In practice, we support systems that are working to align labor market demand and diverse educational pathways: Ascendium partnered with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System Foundation, Inc. for a \$613,915 grant to develop and execute an in-depth planning process to understand the systemic, academic and structural changes necessary for a statewide implementation of competency-based education within its general education, career and technical and workforce training programs.



Expand Postsecondary Education in Prison

We work to fund initiatives that help develop systems and best practices for high-quality **postsecondary education in prison**. This fuels the **outcomes we seek** in this focus area. In practice, we support efforts that engage diverse stakeholders critical to implementing policy and practice change: Ascendium partnered with The Education Trust (EdTrust) with an \$815,000 grant to create two distinct but interconnected leadership development programs that will engage formerly incarcerated learners and postsecondary education in prison practitioners in an intentional learning exchange, producing nuanced reports and analysis and informing improvements to institutional practice. The goal of the project is to shape institutional practice by illuminating and amplifying critical issues that impede incarcerated student success, as examined and understood through the lens of directly impacted individuals.



Support Rural Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development

We work to fund initiatives that develop collaborative, sustainable systems and best practices for system change along the **rural postsecondary education and workforce** spectrum. This fuels the **outcomes we seek** in this focus area. In practice, we support efforts that center rural postsecondary institutions in transformation efforts: Ascendium partnered with the Education Design Lab for a \$1.9 million grant to execute a three-year design challenge developing and piloting new solutions to the question: "How might we improve the ability of rural community colleges to be a critical engine (or catalyst) of growth in their local communities?" Education Design Lab will partner with several rural community colleges to collaboratively structure, design and evaluate new programs. This approach allows the Education Design Lab to understand the unique needs of rural learners and balance input from student-focused stakeholders.



Amy Kerwin Elected to NCAN Board Seat

We're pleased to announce that Amy Kerwin, Ascendium's Vice President of Education Philanthropy, has joined the National College Attainment Network (**NCAN**) Board of Directors. NCAN's mission, "to build, strengthen, and empower communities and stakeholders to close equity gaps in postsecondary attainment for all students," dovetails well with the mission of Ascendium.

[Read the news release.](#)



Recent Grants

Remove Structural Barriers to Success

Community College Doctoral Program Redesign

Exploration

University of Maryland Global Campus | \$825,825 | 6/1/20-5/31/23

This grant supports the University of Maryland Global Campus in developing a new doctoral program in community college leadership. The program curriculum will be comprehensive and innovative, designed in collaboration with influential community college stakeholders and thought leaders.

Scaling the Student Success Center Network Coaching Program

Scaling

Jobs for the Future Inc | \$1,298,100 | 6/1/20-6/1/22

This grant supports Jobs for the Future in building the capacity of four Student Success Centers to deploy coaches trained in advancing reforms at colleges in their states. The project provides capacity-building seed grants and strategic technical assistance to Centers in designing and implementing in-state coaching programs, while also providing training and ongoing professional development to the cadre of coaches.

Streamline Key Learner Transitions

Constructing a Predictive Analytic Model to Adult Learner Pathways

Exploration

The Graduate! Network Inc | \$260,000 | 6/1/20-5/31/21

This grant supports The Graduate! Network in developing a platform-agnostic quantitative and qualitative analysis of their data to construct a predictive analytic model to further understand patterns in adult learner pathways to degree completion. The analyses produced from this project will ultimately culminate in a report that will inform institutional policies and practices to further support adult learner re-engagement strategies and increase degree completion.

Scaling Education to Employment Solutions

Exploration

America Achieves Inc | \$150,000 | 4/1/20-7/31/20

This grant supports America Achieves in developing actionable recommendations for how philanthropy and the public sector can work together to scale high potential postsecondary education to employment initiatives.

Expand Postsecondary Education in Prison

Credit for Experience: Leveraging Prior Learning Assessments in Prison

Exploration

Reentry Campus Program | \$200,014 | 5/2020-11/2021

This grant supports Reentry Campus Program in refining their program delivery model to increase the meaningful use of prior learning assessments and wraparound services for incarcerated students in Rhode Island. Setting the stage for broad dissemination, the organization will work to codify the program design, cost structure and associated student outcomes.

Support Rural Postsecondary Education and Workforce Training

Supporting Rural Island-Based Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Students

Exploration

Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholars | \$144,400 | 5/1/20-10/31/20

This grant supports Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholars in preparing for a comprehensive mixed-method study focused on rural Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students and the rural institutions serving them.

Building Pathways to Quality Jobs and Financial Security in Rural America

Scaling

Local Initiatives Support Corporation | \$1,302,077 | 5/1/20-5/31/23

This grant supports 11 communities in the Local Initiative Support Corporation's Rural Works initiative, a national network of workforce intermediaries committed to modernizing and redeveloping pathways from postsecondary education and training to employment.

Field Support and Development

Supporting Postsecondary Education Writers and Coverage

Scaling

Education Writers Association | \$175,000 | 3/13/20-2/28/22

This grant supports the professional development needs of postsecondary education journalists as well as media coverage projects related to economic mobility and education beyond high school.

On the Go: Find Ascendium Staff in the Field

Ascendium Education Group has cancelled all staff travel plans until further notice, due to COVID-19 concerns. We hope everyone stays safe and we look forward to participating in events in the coming months.