

# FutureMakers Coalition Drives Student Success Through Partnership and Scholarship Innovation



## Too Restrictive, Too Small, Too Hard to Track

Scholarship administration in the funder sector is challenging.

Awards often come with parameters that are too restrictive, making them hard to market and generate a large enough applicant pool.

The awards can be too small for students to complete a full year of college, much less earn a degree or certificate so the student often has to chase multiple scholarships each year.

Finally, it's hard to track student outcomes to know whether the donor achieved their intended results.

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation (SWFL), backbone organization for the FutureMakers Coalition—a 5-county local college access network in Southwest Florida—did an analysis of the nearly 90 scholarships they administered to better understand how effective they were in improving student outcomes. The analysis revealed that some of their scholarships never paid out.

## A New Opportunity

The community foundation, through the FutureMakers Coalition, partnered with CareerSource Southwest Florida, Cape Coral and Fort Myers Technical Colleges, and local employer Lee Health to explore how to meet a critical and chronic shortage in certified nursing assistants (CNAs) in the area.

Lee Health alone had 90 openings for CNAs. The coalition partners saw an opportunity to create a career path for residents who were struggling to move up the economic ladder while strengthening the economic development of the region.

They marketed the CNA scholarship in low-income areas of their region, promoting the opportunity to get on a path that offered career growth in the high-demand, growing health field that could lead to higher level positions, with support for earning higher education levels.

## A Community-Based Solution

Each partner had funds to contribute, but no partner on their own could cover the entire cost of tuition, books, exam costs, and other fees.

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation identified a scholarship fund that had never paid out because the fund had only reached \$16,000 of the required \$25,000 level so they investigated the possibility of redeploying the funds in the most effective way.

Leveraging the relationships built through the FutureMakers Coalition, the partners recognized that by working together they could help more people move out of poverty and close the gap on Lee Health's workforce shortage.

## The Results

While the original \$16,000 scholarship fund was modest, it has benefited 60 students over an 18-month period and has begun to address Lee Health's talent pipeline shortage as well as that of other local health care employers across Lee County. Each partner had to change some of their processes in order to make the plan work, but in doing so, they created a model that could be used for additional workforce development areas in healthcare and in other fields.

**"All partners were in it for the right reasons."**

Tessa Lesage  
Director of Social  
Innovation & Sustainability  
Southwest Florida  
Community Foundation



# Collective Impact at Work

The FutureMakers Coalition was formed to build a community-wide approach to postsecondary access and success. Relationships among key partners made it possible to address a local workforce need while promoting a viable career path for residents in a way that wasn't possible when each organization operated on their own.

## Helping Students Succeed

### Bringing Opportunity Where it's Needed Most

The coalition focused their marketing outreach to lower income areas where unemployment was higher and many residents were underemployed, attracting over 60 people to turn out for the information session.

### Direct Billing

The partners worked together to directly pay the higher education institutions that offered the required courses to eliminate the chance that funds would be depleted before the credential was earned.

### Taking a Whole Student Approach

Partners found that some students started certification programs and even completed the coursework, but couldn't finish because they didn't have enough money to cover final exam costs or drug testing fees. Partners also recognized that low-income students were more apt to have needs beyond tuition costs.

To qualify for the scholarship, applicants were required to start with CareerSource who had a robust intake process that gauged eligibility for workforce retraining grants among other areas of need.

Today's student, particularly adult students, often have needs beyond tuition that keep them from completing a postsecondary credential. Starting with CareerSource helped the scholarship dollars go further by attracting other sources of funds first and provided support for non-education related barriers like housing insecurity, transportation, and food scarcity.

### Soft Skills Needed

When the students completed their program, the Coalition encountered another hurdle. While the students now had the technical skills to do the job for which they were applying, they lacked the soft skills to make it through the interview process. The Coalition worked with partners to provide career services (e.g. resume writing, filling out applications, interview preparation) so that students were truly "employment ready."

## Tracking Student Outcomes

The community foundation knew the difficulty of finding scholarship recipients 7-8 years later to assess outcomes so they were intentional, requiring recipients to connect with the foundation on LinkedIn. Recipients signed a statement of understanding that allowed for the tracking of their progress using the social media platform. That way, over time they can see who completed their credential and found work in the field of choice.

## A Blueprint for Communities

### Combat Stigmas

Some 18-month certificate programs, particularly in construction and healthcare fields, are in high demand and can move people into a job that earns a competitive wage, helping residents become employable sooner while building stackable credentials.

### Analyze Your Scholarships

SWFL Community Foundation, with 88 scholarships to manage, found it helpful to add a position dedicated to overseeing them.

In doing so, they were able to better understand the impact they were having with scholarships and where a new approach was needed. They could build intentional strategies in how to set up scholarships that were more likely to be used based on their analysis, and better processes for tracking results.

### Embrace Adaptability

While it took effort to change business as usual, all partners agreed the effort in changing some of each organization's process was worth it.

### Look Beyond the Bachelor's Degree

Some of the greatest need is with those pursuing an industry certificate or a 2-year degree. The community foundation tries to move donors away from restrictive language, and get new donors to think about the needs of the changing student landscape.



## Want to Learn More?

You can find more resources about how communities across Florida are increasing post-secondary attainment at [www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org)