

\$10 Million Pandemic Grant Initiative Maintains Momentum for Student Success

Ascendium Education Group has announced the first two grants of a \$10 million initiative to allow postsecondary education networks and membership organizations to continue engaging their members in reform work amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 health crisis.

The **Maintain Momentum for Student Success** Initiative will allow networks and membership organizations leading the student success movement to offer discounted dues to eligible member colleges and universities. It will also allow them to adapt their services and offerings to remote and online delivery.

The first two grant recipients are **Achieving the Dream** (ATD) and the **American Association of State Colleges and Universities** (AASCU); they will share a total of \$3.1 million. These two recipients typify the kinds of organizations the Maintain Momentum initiative seeks to support. Their members substantially serve low-income students and students of color, which aligns with Ascendium's overall mission. ATD and AASCU also advocate for and help members implement proven student success reforms.

By supporting membership organizations and networks, Ascendium hopes to impact potentially tens of thousands of college students whose institutions will be making painful choices about professional development and membership expenses for upcoming budgets. The initiative's time frame is flexible, to allow for the possibility that financial impacts will be greater in the next fiscal year.

For more information, please follow the [Maintain Momentum for Student Success Initiative](#) link.



Collaboration is Key for West Virginia's Climb

In West Virginia, the economy is shifting from a dependence on natural resource extraction to manufacturing, renewable energy and advanced technology, all of which demand a focus on creating highly skilled and educated workers. However, only one-third of the state's working-age population held a college degree in 2017.

Recognizing this, the state and several organizations, including Ascendium, have stepped forward to collaborate on [West Virginia's Climb](#), a public awareness and programming campaign with an ambitious goal of increasing the state's postsecondary attainment rate to at least 60% by 2030.

Recently, Ascendium provided Philanthropy West Virginia with a \$750,000 grant to help fund West Virginia's Climb. In partnership with state agencies and other education-focused funders, Philanthropy West Virginia and partners will follow through with five identified activities. These activities include implementing a statewide open educational resources initiative; creating an emergency grant program to offer financial assistance to students when unexpected expenses arise; building the infrastructure for a financial aid program which would turn private donations into grant awards to offset the cost of equipment and materials; providing professional development to faculty advisors and academic advisors; and working directly with select institutions to improve their front-facing student support services.

Collaboration is key to the success of this initiative, but also something that makes the [project unique and attractive to Ascendium](#).

The grant activities are scheduled to take place over the course of nearly two years, with hopes of implementing long-term student support efforts that increase degree completion and strengthen West Virginia's economic future.



Ascendium Awards \$200,000 to Madison-Area Nonprofits Working for Racial Justice

Although Ascendium's education philanthropy is national, we are headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin and care deeply about the community where the majority of our employees live and work. This is why we **recently granted** \$50,000 each to four Madison-area nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving communities of color and improving racial justice.

The nonprofits were chosen by Ascendium's more than 250 employees, who were asked to nominate Madison-based nonprofits providing an identifiable and meaningful response to address racial justice. Employees nominated 15 organizations and the top four were selected.

The awardees are The Foundation for Black Women's Wellness, Freedom Inc., Urban Triage and the YWCA of Madison. All four organizations provide direct service to Madison residents in addition to leading broader community awareness and education efforts on racial and social justice.

"Now more than ever, education is the single most effective way to enhance upward social mobility, which is an essential step towards equity and inclusion," said Richard D. George, Ascendium's chairman, president and chief executive officer, in a statement. "Absent hope for opportunity, the underlying currents that foster racism and violence are given the power that drives crisis."

George continued by saying that Ascendium wanted to do more than provide a public statement about the need for change regarding racial justice. "We wanted to contribute to change by supporting those organizations in our community that are already doing great work in that regard," he said.

Ascendium Welcomes Two New Program Officers

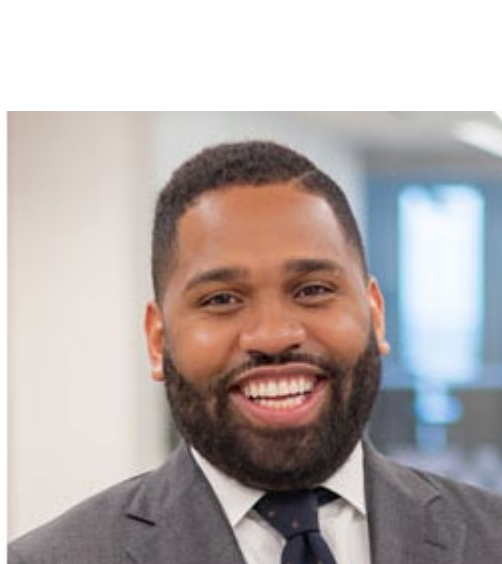
We're pleased to announce that **Jule Hall** and **Samaad Wes Keys** have joined Ascendium's Education Grantmaking team as program officers for Expanding Postsecondary Education in Prison (Jule) and Removing Structural Barriers to Success (Samaad).

"We're thrilled to welcome Jule and Samaad as program officers on our grantmaking team," said Rebecca Villarreal, director - education grantmaking. "Their experience in their respective focus areas brings an unparalleled value to our work."

Jule comes to us most recently from the Ford Foundation where he worked on Gender, Racial and Ethnic Justice issues. Jule holds a bachelor's degree from Bard College as a participant of the Bard College Prison Initiative. His commitment to his new role was honored by this work in the prison helping others attain postsecondary education in prison by assisting Bard College professors and administration and hosting new student orientations to prepare students for the rigors of postsecondary learning. Jule notes that "inside prison, when you provide people with the space to engage education, you'll observe them blossom into their fullest potential."



Samaad comes to us from the UNCF where he served as Strategist. He has a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Georgia. Samaad is excited about this role as it naturally builds on 10 years of experience working across several different higher education nonprofit organizations developing policies, procedures and practices to ensure the success of first-generation college students and other historically marginalized populations. Samaad's passion for this work to remove structural barriers to success is steeped in his desire to develop solutions for systemic barriers he faced as a first-generation student.



"Success in the postsecondary space shouldn't just be afforded to the majority or the affluent. It is imperative that we continue to explore methods to help eradicate barriers prohibiting student success," he said.

On the Go: Find Ascendium Staff in the Field – Virtually

Ascendium Education Group has cancelled all staff travel plans until further notice, due to COVID-19 concerns, but we are supporting and attending virtual events. We hope everyone stays safe and we look forward to participating in live events in the coming months. We will continue to share past virtual events, event recording and resources links and future opportunities to connect with Ascendium staff.

The Hunt Institute (recorded webinar, Amy Kerwin, panelist): Supporting Innovation in Education: Removing Barriers to Postsecondary Success

July 14

➤ **Education Writers Association**: 73rd National Seminar

July 21-24

➤ **Grantmakers for Education**: Conference Year-Round

August 3 2020-April 2021

Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness: 2020 Conference Series

(Rebecca Villarreal, panelist): Meet the Funders: Perspectives from Foundations

August 12

➤ **NCAN 25th Anniversary Conference**: Marching Toward Equity

September 14-16

Graduate Network! Learnx

September 17

➤ Ascendium-sponsored event