

Strategy Spotlight

# PARTNERS

*How can non-profit organizations support policymakers and practitioners in prioritizing FAFSA completion? What role can partners play in driving collective impact?*

## SPOTLIGHT ORGANIZATION



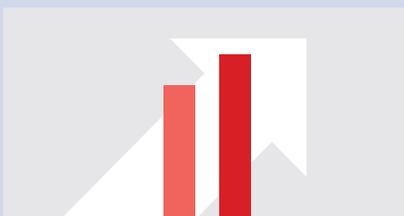
Get2College (G2C)  
Mississippi

## PROVIDER ACCESS

15

COLLEGE ADVISORS  
ACROSS THREE G2C  
SERVICE CENTERS

## STATE RESULTS



In a single school year,  
G2C HELPED INCREASE STATEWIDE FAFSA  
COMPLETION BY 11 PERCENTAGE POINTS

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Driving improvement on FAFSA completion is capacity-heavy. It requires targeted, on-the-ground support to move the needle. Yet many schools and districts have limited resources to rely upon to help students and families in completing the FAFSA. External partnerships—with community-based organizations, college access networks, and higher education institutions and systems—can play an important role in filling these gaps. While no two partner organizations are the same, they all add much-needed capacity to launch, grow, and scale FAFSA completion initiatives across a state or region.

## ACTION STEPS

To bolster the capacity of schools, districts, and state agencies to provide targeted support to students and families on completing the FAFSA, non-profit organizations can contribute the following services:

- ✓ Provide training, resources, and direct support to educators, students, and families
- ✓ Build capacity for schools to leverage data in prioritizing student supports
- ✓ Leverage other agencies, institutions, and external organizations to scale the capacity to provide on-the-ground support
- ✓ Build community awareness of the FAFSA through a communications and marketing campaign

## STRATEGIES

Below, we have highlighted how one such organization, Get2College, has partnered with the K-12 and higher education sectors to increase FAFSA completion rates across Mississippi.

### *Get2College*

Get2College (G2C), a program of the Woodward Hines Education Foundation, is the largest college access provider in the state of Mississippi. They deliver a range of college planning services to educators, students, and families to promote students' postsecondary success. With their support, Mississippi has catapulted in the national rankings to third place, with 74 percent of high school seniors completing the FAFSA during the 2018–2019 school year.

### *Providing Direct Support to Schools, Students, and Families*

With over a dozen college counselors in three centers across the state, G2C offers in-office appointments and on-the-ground assistance on

completing the FAFSA. Whether offering one-on-one advising sessions or coordinating FAFSA events with schools and districts, they provide necessary capacity for supporting students and families with completing the FAFSA.

### ***Empowering Schools to Leverage Data***

G2C manages a statewide FAFSA tracker on their website, which drives their annual FAFSA Challenge, in which schools can win \$500 for demonstrating either the highest completion rate or the highest growth from the prior school year. While they do not have access to student-level data, they provide trainings for high school counselors to pull this information from the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid. Additionally, they send a quarterly newsletter to all high school counselors in the state that includes aggregate FAFSA completion data by school size.

While school administrators are often dedicated to using data to inform the support they provide to students and families, G2C has found that they do not always know how to interpret it. Therefore, when sharing data with principals, G2C brings data from other high schools in their region to level-set on their school's performance and offers trainings on how to use the data strategically.

### ***Catalyzing Collective Impact***

G2C works in close partnership with districts, higher education institutions, and state agencies to catalyze the collective impact of their work. For example, the Mississippi Department of Education allows G2C to access high school counselors and administrators across the state and provide ongoing data support. The Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid helps ensure students are aware of the state's three grant programs, with G2C serving as the agency's communications arm.

G2C's postsecondary partners understand that prospective students need financial aid to attend their institutions and see the FAFSA as key to keeping their doors open. To build their internal capacity, G2C has led onboarding for financial aid officers at all 15 of the state's community colleges to serve as FAFSA volunteers in their districts. Additionally, G2C has piloted an opportunity for college financial aid administrators to "adopt" a local high school. Over two dozen administrators signed up to support students at 10 high schools with historically low percentages of students completing the FAFSA, seven of which increased their year-to-year completion rates. With a total cost of \$6,000, the pilot was a low-cost solution to building on-the-ground capacity.

### ***Building Awareness through Communications and Marketing***

G2C created a statewide campaign using the "First U Haf-ta FAFSA" slogan to raise awareness and build a volunteer network across the state. This enabled them to identify with a brand that was not a company, school, or organization—but rather, a movement. The branding also allowed individual schools and districts and the state to align around a common goal.

#### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT

In developing a comprehensive FAFSA completion strategy, states should consider partnering with non-profit organizations to provide necessary capacity to schools and districts in supporting students and families with completing the FAFSA. In doing so, states should provide access to individual student-level data so that these partner organizations can have a more direct impact working with students and families. In addition, states should seek to learn from the program models employed by non-profit organizations to lift up best practice strategies they can use as they start to institutionalize and scale their own FAFSA completion strategies.

