

UNCF FAQs

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IMPACT

What does UNCF do?

For 76 years, UNCF (the United Negro College Fund) has invested in better futures for students, communities and the nation by working with its member historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to provide students with the college education they need and that the 21st-century economy demands. To support its 37 member HBCUs and the more than 60,000 students it supports, UNCF:

- Provides member HBCUs with financial and other support so they can keep their academic programs strong and their tuition affordable.
- Awards more than 10,000 scholarships through 400 programs each year to help students at member HBCUs and many other colleges and universities across the United States earn their degrees and launch their careers.
- Advocates in Washington, DC, and around the country for the importance of HBCUs, college education and college readiness.

UNCF's core mission has remained the same. We're proud to have helped cultivate some of the country's most brilliant minds for decades, helping more than a half-million students graduate from college since our founding. UNCF has more than doubled the number of minorities attending college, supporting students attending more than 1,100 colleges and universities each year. Still, for every scholarship UNCF gives a student in need, we must turn away nine other applicants due to a lack of funding.

You say that UNCF invests in colleges and students. What is the return on that investment? What successful outcomes can UNCF point to for its colleges and students?

The primary return on an investment in UNCF, its member HBCUs and its students is measured in students graduating from college. More than 500,000 students have earned college degrees from UNCF-member HBCUs, a total that increases by 8,000-plus graduates each year.

Recent research by UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute highlights UNCF's recipe for success:

- UNCF-member HBCUs out-perform non-HBCUs at graduating students from low-income African American families—the students the country most needs to go to and through college.
- HBCUs are more affordable, costing an average of 28% less than comparable non-HBCUs.
- African American recipients of UNCF scholarships have a higher six-year graduation rate, more than 70%, than non-recipients. In fact, UNCF scholarship students graduate at nearly twice the rate of all African American students. That impact, extrapolated to all African American college students, would increase the annual number of African Americans earning college degrees by nearly 16,000 annually.

Why is it important to support UNCF-member historically Black colleges and universities?

HBCUs out-perform non-HBCUs by 14% at graduating students from low-income, African American families, according to research from UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, at a time when a college education is the prerequisite for entry into the economy's best and fastest-growing jobs and career paths. Research also shows that attending an HBCU costs students less—an average of 28% less—than going to comparable non-HBCUs. With these advantages, it's not surprising that more students graduate from UNCF-member HBCUs today than in 1972—the first year of "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."[®]

I know that HBCUs make an important difference to their students' abilities to go to and through college. Do they have wider impact as well?

Recent independent research has shown that HBCUs generate significant economic impacts for the communities, regions and states where they are located. A study entitled *HBCUs Make America Strong: The Positive Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, conducted by the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business and underwritten by Citi Foundation, detailed these dollars-and-cents impacts. Nationally, America's HBCUs generate 134,090 jobs, an impact comparable to that of software giant (and longtime UNCF partner) Oracle. The total national economic impact of HBCU spending amounts to \$14.8 billion. And the added lifetime earnings of HBCU graduates is \$130 billion. The full report, which contains impacts for individual states and colleges can be found on UNCF's website.

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Why is UNCF, an organization with “college” in its name, so actively involved in making sure that students of color get a better education before college?

Students’ ability to enter and succeed **in college** requires a strong education **before college**, from kindergarten through high school graduation. But research by UNCF and ACT, the nation’s leading college-testing organization, shows that African American students continue to lag behind those from other racial groups in meeting ACT College Readiness benchmarks. The research demonstrates that academic gaps begin appearing before high school. African American students are more than four times as likely as White students, for example, to attend schools with less-qualified teachers. Districts serving the most students of color receive about \$1,800, or 13%, less per student than districts serving the fewest students of color. And schools with high African American enrollment have less access to high-level math and science courses than schools with low African American enrollment.

Unless solid academic foundations are established in primary and secondary schools, large numbers of African American students will continue to be academically underprepared and need remedial courses—courses for which they must pay college tuition but receive no credit—in college or not to attend college at all. So an organization that, like UNCF, is committed to increasing the number of students of color attending and graduating from college must work to increase the number of students receiving a pre-college education that prepares them for college coursework and college success. That makes it in the interest of our students and member HBCUs for K-12 schools to give their students an education that prepares them for college coursework and college success.

Does UNCF help only African Americans?

Not at all. UNCF’s member HBCUs admit students without reference to race or ethnicity.

I know students who encounter financial emergencies in the middle of the academic year, between the times scholarships are awarded. What does UNCF do to help them?

For low-income families—like the 98% of full-time UNCF students who qualify for financial aid—emergencies are always just around the corner: a parent’s layoff or pay cut, or an eliminated after-school job. Such emergencies can put college education at risk. Students may have to drop out. Seniors may not be able to graduate. And once students leave before graduating, they are apt never to return. UNCF created the UNCF Emergency Student Aid (ESA) program precisely for students facing such emergencies. Since the program’s founding in 2009, more than 13,000 scholarships, with a value of nearly \$30 million, have been awarded—thousands of students, our next generation of college-educated professionals and civic leaders, enabled to stay in college to pursue and complete their degrees.

You have an active public policy and government affairs program. What notable successes has it had?

Recent federal legislative accomplishments include:

- Passage of The 2019 FUTURE Act, providing permanent federal funding to HBCUs and other minority serving institutions for science, technology, engineering and mathematics curriculum
- Passage of the 2020 CARES Act, providing:
 1. \$575 million of dedicated funding directly to HBCUs to help institutions respond to the coronavirus pandemic;
 2. Additional \$354 million of funding for HBCUs to handle coronavirus situations on campus, with half that funding (\$177 million) going to students at HBCUs;
 3. Securing deferments of payments to the HBCU Capital Finance Program to 14 UNCF-member institutions, nine public HBCUs and other HBCUs during the pandemic;
 4. Convincing Congress to repurpose additional U.S. Department of Education grant money for coronavirus responses;
 5. Ensuring opportunities like the Payroll Protection Program could include HBCU campuses

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INSPIRE

What is the significance of “A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a wonderful thing to invest in”?

UNCF’s universally recognized motto, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”[®] proclaims the fundamental imperative for UNCF’s commitment to giving all Americans the opportunity for a college education: the conviction that our young people are our most precious resource.

In recent years, UNCF has expanded the iconic tagline to read “A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a wonderful thing to invest in.”[®] It underscores that helping students go to and through college is not only the right thing to do, but is also an investment in the economic and social future of families, communities and the country. The support that UNCF receives from individuals, corporations and foundations is the nation’s investment. The 60,000 students who attend college with scholarships and at UNCF-member institutions, the 8,000-plus who receive undergraduate and graduate degrees each year, and the college-educated professionals they become are the return on that investment. They are our dividends.

At this point in our history, why does the United States still need an educational organization and programs targeted to African Americans and other students of color?

Much progress has been made since UNCF was founded in 1944 and especially since “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”[®] was created and helped to change the way Americans think about both race and education.

But the persistent achievement gap between Americans of color and the majority population, and the persistence of recent evident and public racist acts across the U.S. testify to how far we still have to go to reach racial equality. The high cost of college and lower income levels for many African Americans—and the fact that African Americans disproportionately do not receive a high school education that adequately prepares them for college—result in African American rates of college attendance and graduation that are much lower than those of other groups, placing severe limits on their ability to contribute to the economy and civil society.

At a time when college opportunity is an indispensable part of our national quest for social and economic justice, the nation needs students of color to be able to go to and through college and on to careers of success and service. HBCUs and the educational opportunity that they afford, and the hundreds of thousands of people whose support makes that education possible, must be an important part of the journey to full equality.

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INNOVATE

Economic projections point to a need for approximately 1 million more STEM professionals over the next decade if the country is to retain its historical preeminence in science and technology. What is UNCF doing to help students get the education they need to qualify for these positions?

UNCF operates the UNCF/Fund II Foundation STEM Scholars Program. The program is identifying 500 highly motivated and academically talented African American high school students who are committed to pursuing STEM majors in college and STEM-based industry careers after college. In addition to providing scholarship support, the program supports students through mentoring and access to internships that will help prepare students for the tech workforce. The program also exposes students to the principles of startup tech-entrepreneurship and offers them a unique opportunity to pursue their own entrepreneurial ventures upon graduation.

Does UNCF provide internships?

Yes. Many UNCF programs offer students the opportunity to supplement classroom learning with paid, hands-on experience in professions they may be considering. The UNCF K-12 Education Fellowship Program, for example, places participants in positions that give them experience building a robust pipeline of high-achieving African Americans engaged in education reform. And the UNCF-Oracle Corporate Scholars Program offers internship opportunities to students who aspire to work in the fast-growing technology industry.

The American economy is increasingly entrepreneurial. Does UNCF offer support for entrepreneurial-minded students?

The UNCF/Koch Scholars Program provides undergraduate and graduate scholarships, online support, mentorship opportunities and an annual summit aimed at broadening educational opportunities so that aspiring African American students can better understand how entrepreneurship, economics and innovation contribute to well-being for individuals, communities and society.

I read that many college graduates are unable to find the kind of well-paid jobs their degrees qualify them for. What is UNCF doing to help them?

UNCF has created the UNCF Career Pathways Initiative. This \$50 million initiative, funded by Lilly Endowment, is supporting the efforts of selected HBCUs, like those that belong to UNCF, and predominantly Black institutions to help students gain the knowledge, preparation, insight and skills needed for meaningful employment in the technology-driven global economy.

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INVEST

Why do we need more college graduates?

The workforce and its requirements are changing. There was a time when a high school diploma and a good work ethic qualified a worker for a good job. But today almost all the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs and career paths require a college education, and employers need college-educated employees to compete in the global economy. And with the U.S. on track to become a “majority-minority” country (a country with a majority of people of color), many of the new college graduates the country needs will have to come from the ranks of African Americans and other Americans of color—exactly the young women and men whom UNCF HBCUs and UNCF scholarship programs excel in enrolling and graduating.

In addition to paying students’ college costs, what do UNCF scholarships do to help their recipients graduate from college?

Research by UNCF’s Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute demonstrates that recipients of UNCF scholarships are, as a group, significantly more likely to graduate than non-recipients. The Patterson Institute’s *Building Better Futures: The Value of a UNCF Investment* reported that the predominantly low-income African American recipients of UNCF scholarships had a six-year graduation rate of 70%—substantially higher than the graduation rate for all students. These outcomes suggest that if funding permitted all African American students to receive the support that UNCF scholarships provide, the annual number of African Americans earning college degrees would increase by 15,876 annually, contributing significantly to the country’s college completion goals.

Moreover, HBCU graduates are twice as likely as African American non-HBCU graduates to agree strongly that their college experience prepared them well for life and the workplace, according to a 2015 Gallup-USA Funds *Minority College Graduates Report*.

How can I help UNCF send more students to and through college?

UNCF, which receives no federal funds, depends on contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations to support its member HBCUs and the students who attend them. To make your investment, go to the “Donate” page at UNCF’s website, [UNCF.org](https://www.uncf.org).

You can also invest your time and effort in UNCF as a volunteer. UNCF offices across the country work all year long helping students go to and through college by hosting galas, walkathons and other fundraising events, and those same offices work in the local community to make sure students get the education they need to go to college and graduate. If you want to help, go to the “Volunteer” page at [UNCF.org](https://www.uncf.org), and we’ll connect you with the office closest to you.