

## POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

# Partnering to Support Students Holistically

**Partner** College Futures Foundation

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College students experience higher rates of basic needs insecurity—insufficient funds for housing, food, transportation, and other necessities—than the general population. The pandemic increased this insecurity, exacerbating existing gaps in college completion for students of color and others. In response, institutions of higher education are partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs) to enhance their capacity to serve students holistically. In 2021, [College Futures Foundation](#) funded five community-based organizations partnering with California higher education institutions: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire, Rise Student Navigator Network, OneFuture Coachella Valley, Braven, and United Way Bay Area’s SparkPoint program.

The capacities, conditions, and strategies necessary to form successful partnerships of this kind have not yet been thoroughly studied. College Futures asked Education Northwest to facilitate a participatory, formative learning engagement focused on the funded partnerships. The goals of this engagement were to identify facilitators and barriers to effective partnership between CBOs and institutions of higher education, to explore how such partnerships can change institutional mindsets and cultures, and to understand how foundations can best support this work.

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## Understanding what makes partnerships work

Education Northwest worked closely with College Futures and the CBO grantees to identify promising strategies for initiating and sustaining partnerships and for serving students holistically. Over eighteen months, we conducted two sets of interviews with CBO grantees to understand how their partnership with higher education institutions began and progressed over time. We also visited one of each grantee’s institutional partners, interviewing institutional representatives and conducting a student focus group at each college.

To further understand the breadth of CBO-institutional partnerships in California, we conducted a landscape scan and identified over 60 CBOs partnering with nearly 150 higher education institutions in California to provide holistic student supports—constituting a statewide movement. Throughout the learning engagement, we brought the CBO grantees together to connect, share, and learn from one another and provide feedback on findings so that the report findings are informed by CBOs and their partners.

### Three key deliverables resulted from this learning engagement:

An [executive summary](#) and [full report](#) which provides a framework for how CBOs and institutions can partner to support students holistically

A systematic scan of student support pages on California community college and California State University websites to develop a [map of CBO-institutional partnerships](#) in the state that provide holistic student supports and a [directory of identified CBOs](#)

Grantee case studies drawing on the voices of institutional partners and student participants to highlight CBO services, successful practices, and the impact that a CBO can have on an institution

[Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County and the Inland Empire](#)

[Rise Student Navigator Network](#)

[OneFuture Coachella Valley](#)

[Braven](#)

[United Way Bay Area's SparkPoint program](#)

## Strategies and recommendations for sustained impact

This learning engagement revealed key conditions that facilitate partnerships, strategies for CBOs to initiate a partnership with an institution, strategies for both CBOs and institutions to sustain partnerships, and the changes that can result from these efforts. Drawing on interviews with CBO grantees, institutional partners, and student participants, we developed a framework to organize and offer perspectives on ways to effectively develop CBO-institutional partnerships.

In the report, we provide recommendations for higher education institutions, funders, and policy-makers in supporting the work. College Futures, funders, policymakers, and advocates can use the findings to guide future grantmaking, strategic planning, and policy agendas to institutionalize basic needs services and holistic student supports on college campuses. Community-based organizations and higher education institutions can use the report to learn more about how to form an effective partnership to support students. Grantees and other community-based organizations can use the case studies and landscape scan to demonstrate the impact of their work and to show the importance of partnerships to funders and institutions of higher education. We hope this work encourages the expansion of CBO-institutional partnerships to build institutional capacity to support students holistically.