About the Education Trust in Tennessee

The Education Trust in Tennessee advocates for equitable education for historically-underserved students across the state. We seek to influence policy and practice in Tennessee by engaging and equipping key education stakeholders, including policymakers, thought leaders, practitioners, community organizations, parents, and students. Our goal is to drive a state conversation about how our public education system can better serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, pre-k through college.

We do so by working alongside advocates to:

- draw attention to inequities in Tennessee by identifying and analyzing data that disproportionately impact underserved students across the state
- equip partners with actionable and accessible tools to advance better educational outcomes and opportunities for underserved students
- advocate for policies and practices that improve opportunities and outcomes for students of color, linguistically diverse students, students from economically-disadvantaged families, and students with disabilities
- empower students, families, and communities to build urgency and collective will for educational equity and justice

Introducing Thrive

Ultimately, our highest goal is to ensure that more students of color and those from low-income backgrounds graduate from high school and go on to complete a postsecondary credential. More than almost any other factor, a postsecondary degree is the ticket to achieving social and economic mobility, yet too few students are able to enroll in, afford, and complete college.

We are excited to launch Thrive, a multi-faceted project that seeks to identify and advance strategies that promote equitable access to college for students of color and students from low-income families. Thrive aims to equip Black and Latino students, and community organizations serving these students, with tools and resources to identify and uplift proven strategies to increase the number of Black and Latino students progressing to postsecondary education.

By collaborating with educators, practitioners, and students we will prioritize pathways to postsecondary success by discovering, investigating, and advancing strategies that increase the ability of our students to access and succeed in postsecondary opportunities.
Discover: We will uncover what supports, processes, policies, trends and tools currently exist in Tennessee’s college access landscape.

Investigate: We will explore evidence-based practices that improve the path to postsecondary access for marginalized students.

Advance: We will advocate for the implementation of a set of proven strategies to improve the college access process for students of color and those from low income backgrounds. We’ll champion these recommendations both at the district and state levels.

Thrive: We will create an environment where marginalized students have the support and resources they need to access college and reach their full potential.

The Challenge

The state of Tennessee has developed programs and scholarships to increase college access throughout the years. In 2003, Tennessee created the HOPE Scholarship to award Tennesseans financial assistance to attend postsecondary institutions in the state. Within its first year, the HOPE Scholarship awarded over 80 million dollars to over 30,000 students. Tennessee expanded their college access efforts in 2014 when the Tennessee Promise Scholarship was signed into law. TN Promise offered recent high school graduates the opportunity to complete an associate degree or certificate program free of tuition at a public community college or College of Applied Technology. After the Promise Scholarship was implemented, the state of Tennessee saw significant increases in FAFSA completion and overall college enrollment. From 2015 to 2017, Tennessee led the nation in FAFSA filing. Within the first year of the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, the college-going rate increased from 57.9 percent to 62.5 percent.

Tennessee, like many states, experienced significant changes in higher education in 2020 due to COVID-19. We witnessed a decline in enrollment rates, graduation rates, and FAFSA completion. The statewide college-going rate dropped from 61.8% for the Class of 2019 to 56.9% for the Class of 2020.

Overall enrollment and graduation rates have dropped during 2020 and students of color have lower enrollment and graduation rates compared to their peers. Graduation rates for white students increased from 92.7% to 93.2% in 2020, and Black students’ graduation rate fell from 83.5% to 83%. In addition, Hispanic students fell even further behind their peers, dropping from 84.1% in 2019 to 82.4% in 2020. First-time, full-time enrollment of Black male students declined by 35% and Black women declined by 27%. Enrollment at community colleges in Tennessee is down by 11.5% compared to last year, or about 10,000 students.

In 2020, we also saw a decline in FAFSA application completion rates. According to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the application rate for the high school class of 2020 dropped to 56.9%, representing a decline of 4.9 percentage points from 2019. Students with family earnings between 32k-72k decreased by 1.4% in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020. Students with family earnings up to 32k significantly decrease by 7.2% in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020.
For far too long the voices of communities and students of color have been absent in local and statewide conversations about inequities in education in Tennessee, and the persistent gaps in achievement and college and career readiness. COVID-19 has revealed how fragile our gains have been, and the urgent need for a close examination of practices in the field that inhibit student access to and success in postsecondary.

**The Opportunity**

The Education Trust in Tennessee believes that college students and organizations working directly to support them know what strategies and practices can be used to address college access and success for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds. We also believe students and the organizations serving them must have opportunities to discover and advance strategies that mitigate the recent losses in enrollment and persistence, and increase them in significant and sustainable ways.

We are launching the Thrive Network in order to build a community of practitioners and students who are interested in learning and leading on these issues. Our strategy is multifaceted, and designed so that members of the Thrive Network can learn together, and to elevate a set of strategies and practices that show real promise in addressing college access and success for students.

One component of our network is the [Thrive Network Student Fellowship](#), an opportunity for college students who are interested in learning about and leading conversations about improving pathways to postsecondary opportunities for students in Tennessee. For more information about that component of the network, [click here](#).

**Thrive Network Community of Practice Grants**

The other component is the Thrive Network Community of Practice, an opportunity for organizations working directly with students to receive funding to develop or expand a strategy that ensures more students of color are making it to and through college. The grants will provide practitioners with the opportunity to develop and implement a strategy, but to also share their learnings and recommendations with policymakers and key decision makers.

The Education Trust in Tennessee will award up to five grants, of up to $30,000 each, to fund activities over a 11-month period. Grant recipients will receive targeted coaching and support from the Education Trust in Tennessee in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, communications, and policy analysis as they implement their projects.

**The Education Trust in Tennessee Priorities**

The Education Trust in Tennessee, in collaboration with the TN Alliance for Equity in Education, developed a [policy agenda](#) that includes six key priorities. Successful applicants will align their project to our Higher Education Priority and to one or more of our higher education equity actions.

**Higher Education Equity Principle:** Every student has access to high-quality, affordable postsecondary options with equitable completion and student success outcomes
Higher Education Equity Actions:

- Remove barriers in postsecondary admissions processes and increase college access supports for high school students
- Expand access to state financial aid and in-state tuition to include undocumented/DACA students
- Ensure that state postsecondary data are accurate, widely available, and disaggregated by race and financial aid eligibility
- Prioritize need-based financial aid to reduce financial burden, particularly for students of color and those from low-income families
- Increase the number of faculty and staff members of color at postsecondary institutions
- Identify and uplift best practices for institutions to support historically excluded student populations and create a welcoming, inclusive campus climate for these students

Guidelines for Proposals Requirements

Successful proposals will include each of the 6 elements described below, with as much specificity as possible in each response.

1. Executive Summary
Include a summary of the theory of action, key participants and/or audiences, proposed activities, and intended outcomes.

2. Organizational Description
   - Successful applicants will clearly describe how the organization’s mission, vision, and theory of action serve to support our priorities.
   - Include a description of the organization(s) involved in the grant. If more than one, explain the relationship and roles of the partner organizations.
   - Designate a lead agency and a point of contact; including title, organization, email and phone number.
   - Include brief examples of past successes that highlight your efforts or your organization’s ability to improve student access to postsecondary.
   - Include examples of your organization’s engagement with the Education Trust in Tennessee or in education practice or policy more broadly.

3. Project Strategy
   Successful applicants will include a descriptive report that includes the following components:
Community need: Describe the postsecondary access needs within the community. Identify the problem or gap your project will address.

- **Audience:** Describe the critical audiences whom you plan to inform or persuade. Include an explanation of why these audiences are important in the community and their potential influence on your project aims.

- **Communications:** A plan or strategy with objectives, targets, and timelines to share your successes and learning.

5. Organizational Capacity
Include organizational capacity to complete activities, including:

- Current staff

- Current organizational priorities, and

- Current budget

 Include an explanation of how the activities will work to elevate the organization’s role in serving their community and with the target audiences that have been identified.

 Include a clear timeline that details the implementation process for activities proposed within the grant. The timeline should include specific measurable outputs that will demonstrate success in implementation; outputs include activities that occur as part of the funding, e.g., programs, training, workshops offered – outputs represent ‘what you do.’

6. Budget
Successful applicants will demonstrate throughout the proposal how the requested funds will be used to meet the needs and achieve the outcomes of the grant.

- Download and complete [this budget template](#) and submit it with your application.

- Include a budget narrative that explains the rationale behind each major budget item.

### Allowable costs

- Applicants can request up to $30,000 over an 11-month period.

- Funds should be used to directly support activities as planned in the grants.

- Funds cannot be used for major infrastructure purchases such as equipment, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Extenuating circumstances should be clearly described both in the grant and budget narrative.

- Funds cannot be used for direct lobbying activities
Funds can support up to 50% of a full-time staff member who will spend the corresponding time on an initiative designed to further our priorities.

• Hiring of part-time staff or interns is allowable.

• Funds may be used for direct service delivery to individuals, clients, students, or families.

**Format**

No more than 10 pages, single-spaced, inclusive of budget and budget narrative, exclusive of any cover pages or appendices.

Applications should be sent as one PDF (application and budget) via email to Jamie Clinton, jclinton@edtrust.org by Wednesday, January 5th by 5 p.m. CDT.

**Who Can Apply**

Proposals are encouraged from non-profit and educational advocates, organizations, or collaboratives, with experience working with students and families disproportionately affected by disparities in gaps in achievement, graduation rates, college going and completion rates, and access to resources. We are particularly interested in proposals from advocates or organizations that have demonstrated connections, history, and roots in communities of color, or those disproportionately affected by the disparities mentioned above.

**Selection Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated on the degree to which the proposed activities advance the priorities and recommendations of the Education Trust in Tennessee. Specifically, proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

• An effective demonstration of a need within the proposed community,

• The establishment of concrete and measurable outputs and outcomes,

• Evidence of organizational capacity to achieve stated goals,

• Appropriate use of funding and

• The degree to which the organization is led by or can demonstrate clear connections to communities of color, including a history and roots within those communities.

**Grant Recipient Expectations**

Grants are designed to allow for specific organizations to develop greater leadership advocacy capacity, and also to build an enduring statewide network of practitioners and advocates.

Indirect lobbying activities include issue-based and policy-based activities are acceptable.

Funds cannot be used to advocate in direct support of a particular piece of legislation at the...
local or state level including particular school board or city council resolutions. Funds cannot be used to advocate in direct support of elections.

It is the expectation of The Education Trust in Tennessee that grant recipients will participate in activities including, but not limited to the following:

- Active participation in the The Education Trust in Tennessee’s events
- Engagement with state and local policymakers on priority areas and associated issues, as scheduled by The Education Trust in Tennessee staff team.
- Grantee meetings (virtually or in person; costs associated with in-person meetings will be covered by The Education Trust in Tennessee)
- Creating a final presentation and short report on the project and its impact; to be shared at a Thrive convening in late September
- Participation in possible meetings with representatives of the Tennessee Department of Education, the State Board of Education, Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee Board of Regents, or the State Legislature as applicable per grant project, in consultation with The Education Trust in Tennessee staff team

**Reporting**

Measuring our collective advocacy efforts and the impact of your project is imperative to ensure intended outcomes. Therefore, applicants will demonstrate a commitment to the goals and outcomes of their project at multiple points during the grant period through the following:

An online survey of existing advocacy capacity and related needs.

**Grantee Consults:** Recipients will participate in TWO to THREE consults (schedule to be determined with grantee and staff). The purpose of these meetings is to capture information on project progress and to proactively identify potential areas of support (e.g., technical, advocacy, evaluation, strategic) for increased success. Receipt of the second half of grant funding is dependent upon demonstrated progress and impact.

**End-of-Year Report:** Recipients will complete a report for the Thrive Convening, (template to be provided) at the end of their grant funding cycle communicating progress towards (1) project goals, (2) proposed outputs and outcomes.

Periodic check-ins (online/phone/in-person, TBD as needed)

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## Timeline and how to apply

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Release of RFP</td>
<td>Application posted to website</td>
<td>Monday, December 6th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter of Intent</td>
<td>The letter of intent should include a one-sentence description of the partners submitting the proposal, and a one-paragraph explanation of the proposed grant activities (maximum 200 words)</td>
<td>Monday, December 13th</td>
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<td>Letters of intent should be emailed to Jamie Clinton, <a href="mailto:jclinton@edtrust.org">jclinton@edtrust.org</a> by 5 p.m. CST</td>
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<td>Informational Webinar for applicants</td>
<td>The Education Trust will review RFP guidelines and applications will have an opportunity to ask questions</td>
<td>Wednesday, December 15th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline to Apply</td>
<td>Applications submitted to Jamie Clinton, <a href="mailto:jclinton@edtrust.org">jclinton@edtrust.org</a> on Wednesday, January 5th by 5 p.m. CDT</td>
<td>Wednesday, January 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notification of Award:</td>
<td>Applicants will be notified of award via email</td>
<td>Friday, January 14th</td>
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<td>Grant MOU Signed by all parties</td>
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<td>Friday, January 21th</td>
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<td>Thrive TN Network Kickoff meeting</td>
<td>All grantees are required to attend the kickoff meeting</td>
<td>Wednesday, Jan 28th</td>
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<td>First half of grant funding awarded by:</td>
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<td>Tuesday, February 15th</td>
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<td>Second half of grant funding awarded by:</td>
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<td>Wednesday, June 15th</td>
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<td>Grant period ends</td>
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<td>Friday, December 31st</td>
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Applicants must complete an emailed letter of intent indicating their desire to apply for the grant to jclinton@edtrust.org. Upon receipt of the letter of intent, details for the webinar will be sent along with acceptance to the proposal phase. The Informational Webinar will clarify requirements and answer general questions from applicants.

Applicants will be notified of acceptance to the proposal phase via email by Friday, January 14th 2022.

Final application should be emailed to Jamie Clinton, jclinton@edtrust.org by Wednesday, January 5th by 5 p.m. CDT

**Applicant notification**

Applicants will be notified of award status via email to the designated point of contact on Friday, January 14th, by 5 p.m. CDT