

UNCF FAQs

Impact
Inspire
Innovate
Invest



IMPACT

What does UNCF do?

UNCF invests in better futures for students, communities and the nation by working with its 37 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 member HBCUs and the more than 50,000 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 14,000 scholarships 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.

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. Since 1944, more than 550,000 students have earned college degrees from UNCF-member HBCUs, a total that increases by about 8,000 graduates every year.

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

- UNCF-member HBCUs outperform 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 27% less than comparable non-HBCUs.
- Compared to those who do not receive UNCF scholarships, African American UNCF scholarship recipients have a 70% six-year graduation rate, more than 1.5 times the 40% six-year graduation rate of all African American college students nationwide and higher than the 62% six-year graduation rate of all students.

If this effect was applied to all African American college students, the yearly number of African Americans who complete their college degrees would go up by 16,500.

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

A college degree is essential for accessing the most desirable and lucrative occupations and industries in the economy. Research from the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute of UNCF shows that HBCUs are more effective than non-HBCUs at graduating low-income African American students, with a 14-percentage point advantage.

A 2021 UNCF study, *HBCUs Transforming Generations: Social Mobility Outcomes for HBCU Alumni*, found HBCUs to be powerful engines of social mobility. They found that more than twice as many HBCU students come from low-income backgrounds compared to the national average of four-year institutions (51% vs 23%), and more than twice as many HBCU students came from a low-income background and moved into the middle class or higher compared to the national average of four-year institutions (34% vs 16%).

These facts spotlight the power of HBCUs to change lives. And, attending an HBCU costs students less—an average of 27% less—than going to a non-HBCU. 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?

Independent research has shown that HBCUs generate significant economic impacts for the communities, regions and states where they are located. A 2024 UNCF study entitled, *Transforming Futures: The Economic Engine of HBCUs*, detailed these dollars-and-cents impacts. Nationally, America's HBCUs generate 136,048 jobs each year, similar to that of some large and well-known U.S. companies. The total national economic impact of HBCU spending amounts to \$16.5 billion. And the added lifetime earnings of HBCU graduates is \$146 billion. The full report, which contains impacts for individual states and colleges, can be found on [UNCF's website \(UNCF.org\)](https://www.uncf.org).

UNCF FAQs

Impact
Inspire
Innovate
Invest



IMPACT

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, click on the orange “Donate” button on UNCF’s website.

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 their local communities 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, and we’ll connect you with the office closest to you.

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 \$2,700, or 16% 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, require remedial courses in college—courses for which they must pay college tuition but receive no credit—or not be able 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. This means that it is 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.

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 Reform Fellowship Program, for example, places participants in positions that give them experience building a robust pipeline of high-achieving African Americans engaged in various facets of K-12 education. UNCF’s Lighted Pathways Program offers internship opportunities to students who aspire to work in the fast-growing asset management industry, while The Walt Disney Company UNCF Scholars Program places interns in the creative and corporate business spaces within the entertainment industry.

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?

Emergencies can certainly interfere with the ability to get to and through college. For low-income families—like the 90% of UNCF students who qualify for financial aid—daily life 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 to never 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 16,000 students have been awarded these scholarships with a value of nearly \$36 million. The ESA program has enabled thousands of students, our next generation of college-educated professionals and civic leaders, to stay in college to pursue and complete their degrees.

UNCF FAQs

Impact
Inspire
Innovate
Invest



INSPIRE

What is the significance of “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”®?

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.

At this point in our history, why does the United States still need an educational organization and programs targeted to financially and socially challenged students?

Much progress has been made since UNCF was founded in 1944 and especially since “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”® was created to help change the way Americans think about higher education and access to it.

However, recent increases in violence and strife have refocused the nation’s attention on the fundamental differences in equality and access to opportunities for all African Americans.

The persistent achievement gap between African Americans and the majority population, and the string of highly visible racial episodes from all over the United States in the last several years testify to how far we still have to go to reach equality. The high cost of college, lower income levels for many non-White students and the fact that non-Whites disproportionately do not receive a high school education that adequately prepares them for college, result in non-White 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 every American receiving a fair chance to advance economically and socially, the nation needs all its students 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 for all Americans.

UNCF FAQs

Impact
Inspire
Innovate
Invest



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 is addressing the nation's STEM talent gap through the Fund II/UNCF STEM Scholars Program, a national initiative that identifies and supports 700 academically talented and highly motivated high school students who are committed to pursuing STEM majors and careers. In addition to scholarship support, the program provides award-winning wraparound services, including academic tutoring, scholar mentoring, internship and career coaching and professional development opportunities that prepare students for success in a STEM-driven workforce. Today, program alumni work at *Fortune* 100–500 companies and pursue advanced degrees, including medical school, dental school and doctoral programs.

Are programs available to support students who don't have top grades, but have obvious and significant potential to become educated, productive members of the American workforce?

The Fidelity Scholars Program, funded by Fidelity Investments and administered by UNCF, combines a generous annual need-based scholarship with robust wraparound services that support "mighty middle" students' persistence to degree or certificate attainment. Eligible applicants are from underrepresented populations and historically underserved communities who have faced challenges in economic mobility. The scholarship is open to historically underserved and underrepresented students ages 16-24 who are permanent residents of several states.

More than just financial assistance, the Fidelity Scholars Program provides a wealth of resources through the support of mentors and college success coaches to empower students to earn a bachelor's degree, associate's degree or a related certificate.

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.

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 of 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 16,500 annually, contributing significantly to the country's college completion goals.