

Regional Challenge Grant - LOI

KOO/CU RCG Partnership

Lead Applicant: Kingmakers of Oakland

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Fiscal Agent: College Unbound

Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?

While King County is one of the most educated counties in both the state and the nation with [56.4%](#) of adults holding college degrees, the story is very different when we demographically disaggregate the data. Only 24.9% of Black male adults in the county have obtained their degrees. The impact of this gap has led to a lack of diversity in senior and professional roles across all industries, negatively impacting the entire community. This is perhaps most keenly felt in public education. Students of color are now the majority in Washington public schools, but [black males make up only 1.3% of teachers](#).

The impact on our students is staggering. Research shows that having at least one Black teacher in third-fifth grades reduces a Black student's probability of dropping out of school by [29%](#). For low-income Black boys, the results are even more striking: their chance of dropping out of school falls 39 percent.

By focusing on degree completion for K-12 Educators we create a tangible entry point towards the larger goal of dramatically impacting college attainment for Black men in Washington state. The K-12 pathway is the first of many to advance the professional advancement of Black males in other areas of need so that their community feels truly represented. Further, by taking a multigenerational approach to degree completion, first increasing the number of Black men who have earned their degree, and eventually Black youth, we are able to amplify the impact of this work for thousands of students who will now see college completion as an option and an expectation.

With funding from the Washington Student Achievement Council's Regional Challenge Grant (RCG), Kingmakers of Oakland (KOO) will come together with College Unbound (CU) in an emerging partnership, working together to increase degree attainment and teacher certification for Black male educators in Pierce and King County, increasing the likelihood Black youth eventually earn their degree. During the Partner Formation Grant Period, KOO and CU will identify cross-sector organizations willing to come together in partnership to take a multifaceted approach rooted in the desire to collaborate, and convene folks who are inspired to create a healthy, affirming learning environment for Black boys in the public school system by helping to create pathways and support systems for Black male educators to earn their teaching credentials.

Through this partnership KOO and CU will increase access to educational opportunities for Black male educators by inviting community voice to lead our approach and ensure we bring cross-sector organizations into our RCG partnership that will best support adults as they work to earn their degree. Black male teacher turnover rates are [disproportionately high](#). In partnership we will not only work to train Black male educators, but also form relationships with the districts to change the culture to prevent Black educators from feeling isolated and/or experiencing microaggressions which are the two most prevalent reasons Black male educators leave the field. Our RCG partnership will take collective responsibility to recruit, train, and retain Black male teachers to have a voice in our public schools.

Kingmakers of Oakland expanded into Seattle in 2019 when the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) recognized they were failing black males and responded by creating an African American Achievement Department (AAAD). In preparation to launch the AAAD SPS sent approximately 30 district employees to Oakland

Unified School District to visit their AAAD, the only other in the country. Oakland's AAAD was seeing great success working in partnership with Kingmakers of Oakland. SPS decided to replicate the program and worked in partnership with KOO to launch a branch in Seattle. KOO in Seattle incorporated community voice and quickly became an integral part of the community through Lunch and Learns, Black to School Nights, and Rockin with KOO events. Based on community feedback KOO in Seattle focused on the launch of KOO's Family and Community Voice and Narrative Change programs as well as working to implement culturally relevant pedagogy to address the fact that while a lot Black males work in education, who are connected to the community, are from the community, are coaches, and have been at the school for over 10 years, few have their degree. KOO creates opportunities for Black males to earn their teaching credential and lead in the classroom.

KOO has chosen to work in partnership with College Unbound, an accredited college, designed to meet the needs of adult learners who are furthest from educational justice, working to end cycles of poverty for adults and their families through BA completion. The mission of College Unbound is to reinvent the higher education experience for underserved adult learners, using a students-driven model of rigorous and engaged scholarship. CU believes everyone has a right to postsecondary education; colleges bear the responsibility to remove barriers that prevent historically underserved students from completing their degrees. With the ability to embed itself in the community, CU's model is designed to identify and serve the specific needs of the community through place-based and partnerships and employment-based professional pathways. As part of the RCG partnership, CU will help eliminate educational opportunity gaps by providing a college program designed for working and parenting adults to successfully earn their degree, with the ability to build in support services to meet the specific needs of Black male educators of Black families in Pierce and King County.

How is or will the partnership be structured?

Kingmakers of Oakland will act as the lead application with Matin Abdel-Qawi, Chief Program Officer, as the point of contact. College Unbound will act as the fiscal agent for the partnership, with Megan Demeroutis, Director of College Unbound Washington, as the point of contact.

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KOO and CU will attend monthly planning meetings. At the the start of our partnership we will engage with the community to identify the strengths, barriers, and needs of our focal population. Once the community has identified the gaps in access to higher education opportunities and degree attainment, KOO and CU will reach out to the most appropriate cross sector organizations to join our partnership. By the end of our Partner Formation Grant Period we will have identified additional partners to join our RCG partnership and be ready for program implementation.

How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

KOO and CU are both organizations that have a history of working to create authentic relationships in the community, always incorporating feedback before moving forward with program design and implementation. For example; before launching in Washington state CU Site Director met with over 100 community members and professionals before determining when and where to launch the college's first cohorts of students. When first entering the community in 2019, KOO hosted Lunch and Learns, Black to School Nights, and Rockin with KOO events to get to know and be known in the community. Currently, KOO's Director of Teacher Recruitment meets monthly with an Elder Council for advice on program development and implementation.

CU and KOO are programs that have both shown great success in supporting adult students from before enrollment past graduation. While incorporating community voice, our RCG partnership will identify and implement key elements of our models that have proven success in leading to high rates of degree completion. By partnering with community based organizations we can lift up the existing high-quality relationships and create cohorts of students built on familiarity and trust, thus radically impacting college completion outcomes for our partner organizations. Not only will CU and KOO learn from the community to strengthen programming, they will also have an opportunity to learn from each other. They will have the opportunity to share best practices, as well as lessons learned as both organizations work to provide the best possible programming for adults ready to earn their degree.

Who are the focal populations in your partnership's work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?

The focal population for our RCG partnership will be Black male educators interested in earning their BA and teaching credentials. Many of these individuals are people who have been working in education for years, were born and raised in the community they work in, and have become integral parts of their communities as coaches and leaders in and outside the school.

Increasing the number of Black male teachers — and building the positive, welcoming spaces that will make staying in the profession worthwhile long-term — is essential to [improve outcomes for Black boys](#). Black male students perform better academically and are more likely to stay in school when they have teachers of their [race or ethnicity](#). Research shows that having at least one Black teacher in third through fifth grades reduces a Black student's probability of dropping out of school by [29 percent](#). For low-income Black boys, the results are even more striking: their chance of dropping out of school falls 39 percent. Yet, Black men makeup only two percent of [public school teachers](#). In fact, the entire national public school teacher workforce does not mirror the student population: the majority of students in the US are of color, while only about [20 percent](#) of teachers are of color. Research also shows that teacher diversity improves outcomes for all students, regardless of [race or ethnicity](#).

What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?

The two regions in Washington State with the highest concentration of Black residents – King County (7.4%) and Pierce County (8.1%) compared with 3.45% statewide. We will initially take a county-wide approach, however as we deepen our partnerships with community based organizations as we develop we

will narrow focus on particular regions within the county with the greatest discrepancies in degree completion by race. For example, in King County, [54% of White males](#) over the age of 25 have a BA or higher while only 24% of Black males in the region have the same qualifications.

What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?

A major barrier Black male educators face is access to the necessary qualifications to become a lead teacher in King and Pierce Counties. While there is easy entry into paraeducators and special education paraeducator positions, it is difficult for educators to then earn their teaching credentials to become lead teachers.

- Traditional college courses are offered in the day time
 - Many para educators can't afford to quit their job to pursue a degree
- Community college programs that offer courses in the evening take too long to complete
- Lack of credit for prior knowledge
 - For educators who have been working in schools, taking college courses feels like paying to learn things they have already learned
- Support with navigating the higher education system is not always available
 - Need for support filling out financial aid and scholarship applications
- Too expensive

What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?

We are proposing \$125,000 in funding to support the emerging partnership between KOO and CU. Over the course of the one year partner formation grant period, KOO and CU will incorporate community voice to identify systemic barriers for Black male educators interested in earning their teaching credentials.

Because we are initially taking a two-county-wide approach to the work, a major focus of the work will be on developing relationships with local community and education organizations with the goal of embedding this work deep in the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of where our black educators live and work. Based on the barriers that are identified by our focal population through community engagement activities and events, KOO and CU will bring in the most appropriate cross-sector organizations. These will be organizations that are embedded in the community and willing to work in partnership to create an ecosystem that will provide the best local support for increasing access to post secondary options, system navigation, support services, degree completion, and culture shifts to create a welcoming space for Black male educators within the school system. Food, childcare, and transportation stipends will be provided at community meetings.

Planning meetings between TGMC and CU:

- Monthly planning meetings
- Prompt communication between TGMC and CU via email, phone, text with additional meetings planned as needed
- Inviting additional cross-sector organizations to join our RCG partners as soon as it is appropriate

Community Voice in planning:

- Elder council - Representatives from our RCG partnerships will meet bi-monthly with elders from the community to get feedback and insight on our plan moving forward
- Community Talking session (4 group meetings)
- Small group meetings (8 small group meetings)
- One-on-one interviews (40 interviews conducted)

Prepare for Implementation:

- Formalize partnerships with 6 additional cross-sector organizations

Plan for Fall 2025 Launch:

- Sign MOU's with at least 6 cross-sector organizations to contribute to our RCG partnerships
- Identified partners and sign MOU's prior to implementation, Fall 2025

How will the proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Identify systemic barriers focal population faces in pursuit of degree attainment
- Identify cross-sector organizations that are embedded in the community and available to support Black male educators overcome systemic barriers to degree attainment
- KOO has increased capacity to help direct Black male educators to access best fit postsecondary pathways to earn their teaching credentials
- CU development of student cohort partnerships with employers with the goal of enrolling students starting in Fall 2025 or Winter 2026
- The expansion of KOO and CU RCG partnership to include additional cross-sector organizations providing services to increase our focal population's access to education attainment, degree completion, and career advancement
- A plan for our RCG partnership team to engage with our focal population and support them in working towards earning a degree or other post secondary credential with conditional MOU's for services provided and an implementation timeline

Long term outcomes

- Increase the number of Black men in King and Pierce Counties with a degree
- Impact the number of students in King and Pierce Counties with at least one Black male teacher in their school
- Increase college entry rates for King and Pierce County public school students.