

## College Forward Strategic Growth Plan 2012-2016

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# College Forward Strategic Growth Plan

- May 30, 2012 -

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

College Forward, an Austin, Texas based 'college completion program that begins in high school,' was established in 2003 with a single goal: a bachelor's degree for every student. We provide intensive mentoring for low-income and first-generation students whose education, without our services, would most likely end with high school. From 30 students in our inaugural class, we now serve 2,760 students from Austin and Houston, Texas, who currently attend 14 high schools across seven public school districts, or one of more than 90 colleges across the nation. We project that 700 students will earn bachelor's degrees by 2016.

College Forward (CoFo) has demonstrated effective, affordable ways to address persistent gaps in college access and completion. Our students' outstanding, documented achievements prove the U.S. can reverse a long-term decline in educational and economic achievement (see Page 11 for a comparison to state and/or national norms):

- **99%** of our students graduate from high school
- **99%** apply and gain acceptance to colleges and universities
- More than **90%** enter college within 12 months of high school graduation
- More than **80%** enter four-year colleges and universities, and
- **82%** of students who have entered college since 2003 are either still in college and making progress towards a degree, or have already earned degrees
- Our students take an average of **4.34** years to earn a bachelor's degree.

CoFo's successful programs have gained local, state and national recognition: with its 2011 "Award of Excellence," the National College Access Network recognized CoFo as the best college access organization in the U.S. Also in 2011, we garnered a coveted "CollegeKeys Compact Innovation Award" from the College Board for our outstanding college completion program. America's Service Commissions featured CoFo in their 2010 publication "Transforming Communities through Service: A Collection of 52 of the Most Innovative AmeriCorps Programs in the United States." Our founder and CEO, Lisa Fielder, was named Ernst & Young "Social Entrepreneur of the Year" in 2011.

College Forward was recently selected as the first partner of an Austin-based social venture capital group, Innovation+ (a 'Strategic Partner' of Social Innovation Partners International), which committed to help CoFo secure human and financial capital to support our ambitious, five-year scaling plan. This plan defines two initial initiatives: 1) development of an earned income strategy, and 2) development of a revolutionary technology platform to enhance

student services. These, together with secondary initiatives that include program licensing and additional geographic growth, will provide a foundation upon which CoFo can rapidly scale up, from 2,670 students in 2011, to 13,499 students in 2016 (of whom half will be from the Austin and Houston metropolitan service areas, and half will be recruited nationally), and ultimately to many thousands of new students per year by 2025. The total, five-year cost of the growth initiative is projected to be **\$6,889,326**, which does not include \$17,602,321 for program operations (see projected costs, Pages 44 - 46, for budget details and a breakdown of student enrollment by program):

Period	Growth Costs	Program Costs	Total Costs	# Students	Cost/Student
2011-2012	\$ 735,843	\$ 2,620,431	\$3,356,275	2,669	\$ 1,258
2012-2013	\$1,633,515	\$ 2,853,500	\$4,487,015	3,750	\$ 1,197
2013-2014	\$1,293,683	\$ 3,395,250	\$4,688,933	5,637	\$ 832
2014-2015	\$1,620,858	\$ 3,958,340	\$5,579,198	8,591	\$ 649
2015-2016	\$1,605,427	\$ 4,774,800	\$6,380,227	13,499	\$ 473
Totals	\$6,889,326	\$17,602,321	\$24,491,647	N/A	N/A

College Forward’s programs not only achieve outstanding results; they are also extremely cost-effective. Our annual per-student cost fell 64%, from \$3,500 in 2003-2004 to \$1,258 in 2011-2012; we project further reductions, to an annual cost per student of \$473 in 2015-2016.

College Forward seeks to scale our *impact*, rather than our *organization*. By leveraging our expertise with sophisticated technology, we will provide essential services at the lowest cost to the largest number of students in the shortest possible time. Our first initiative will commoditize CoFo’s unique organizational differentiator, our college completion program, to take advantage of a virtually wide-open marketplace in which degree completion has become both a ‘hot topic’ and an economic issue. These “Success Partnerships,” which will launch as early as June 2012, will for the first time enable colleges and universities, charter and parochial schools, community-based organizations, scholarship providers and others to enroll their low-income and at-risk students directly in College Forward.

For Success Partnerships’ low-income college students, we will provide both “virtual” support and personalized mentoring to address financial, academic, and socio-emotional issues that too often undermine continued enrollment. Students will benefit from real-time response to confusing or troubling issues; institutions will benefit by decreasing average time-to-degree and increasing student retention and graduation rates. CoFo and our partners can optimize organizational strengths—of which ours is keeping students in college. We project strong outcomes across the board:

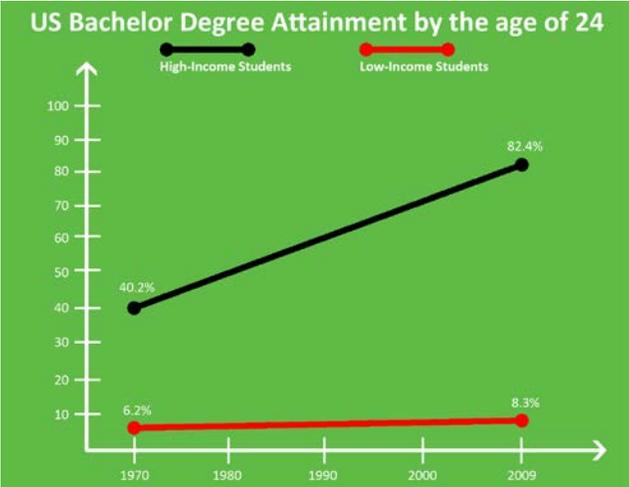
- 80% first-year student retention rate (as compared to the Texas average of 68%)
- 15% reduction in time-to-degree (from an average of 11 semesters to 9.3)
- 60% of students will earn bachelor’s degrees within six years (as compared to 9% nationally)

Subsequent scaling initiatives, launching in 2013 and thereafter, will enable College Forward to provide consulting services to other organizations, to license our popular and successful high school and parent education programs, to share our technology platform, and perhaps to undertake additional expansion of our high school programs within our home state of Texas.

**INDUSTRY AND MARKET ANALYSIS**

**Market Context and Need**

The correlation between poverty and education is incontrovertible, with each new study providing fresh evidence of the benefits to individuals and society of post-secondary credentials. According to Georgetown University’s Center for Education and the Workforce, “income inequality is driven largely by access to college,” with average lifetime earnings of college graduates exceeding those of high school graduates by 84%. College graduates also enjoy greater job security and reduced unemployment (“Hard Times,” 2012) and are more engaged with their families and their communities (“Education Pays 2010”).



Yet low-income Americans lose more ground every year: whereas the bachelor degree attainment rate for high-income 24-year-olds increased from 40.2% in 1970 to 82.4% in 2009, for low-income students the rate increased only from 6.2% to 8.3% in the same period (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2010). A McKinsey & Company report concluded that the gap in educational achievement “imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of

a permanent national recession” that is “substantially larger than the deep recession” of 2008 (“The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools,” 2009).

To help students overcome financial issues and soaring tuition rates, the U.S. has earmarked massive amounts of federally-funded student aid – more than \$238 billion in 2009 (The College Board, “Trends in Student Aid,” 2010). University spending per student has also been on the rise, including spikes in student support services: in 2006, public universities spent almost \$4,000 per student on administration, support and maintenance, and \$1,200 per student on counseling services (US News, “The Surprising Causes of Those College Tuition Hikes,” 2009).

But, perhaps because these and other efforts have typically put institutional priorities before student need, they have had little impact on student success. Only nine percent of low-income college students persist to earn bachelor’s degrees by the age of 26 (Pennington, “For Student Success, Stop Debating and Start Improving,” 2012), as compared to 77% of middle- and high-income students (Wyner, Bridgeland, and DiIulio, “Achievement Trap,” 2007). The cost to individuals, who must bear the burden of student financial aid debt regardless of educational outcome, is enormous. According to Baum, Ma, and Payea (“Education Pays 2010”) modern life penalizes people with only high school diplomas, who, in comparison with college graduates:

- Take home \$21,900 less per year in median earnings
- Contribute \$5,900 less per year in federal, state and local taxes
- Suffer an unemployment rate 5.1 percentage points higher
- Are 17.1 percentage points less likely to have full-time, year-round employment
- Are 18 percentage points less likely to have health care coverage
- Are eight times as likely to receive public assistance

The accumulated cost to the nation is staggering. Schneider and Yin, in “The High Cost of Low Graduation Rates” (2011), found that: for full-time students who started college in fall 2002 seeking a bachelor’s degree, but who failed to graduate six years later, approximately:

- **\$3.8 billion** was lost in income;
- **\$566 million** was lost in federal income taxes; and
- **\$164 million** was lost in state income taxes nationwide.

Note that these losses are only for one year and one class of students; they grossly understate the overall cost of low college graduation rates, because losses accumulate year after year. Further, losses of this magnitude are incurred for each and every new cohort of students entering college. The college dropout rate represents a systemic drain of talent and economic potential; America’s failure to retain and graduate low-income college students, accumulated over 40 years (the span of an average working life), has a tremendous impact on both individual and general prosperity.

This is where College Forward comes in. We believe that the persistent under-achievement in higher education of low-income students is the civil rights issue of our time. And it is for these students specifically that we developed programs and interventions to equalize access to college degrees and, ultimately, to professional employment. We enroll students who meet the

College Board's definition of 'low-income' (family income less than 186% of the federal poverty rate – or first generation to earn a bachelor's degree) and who demonstrate the motivation to attend college as evidenced by a class rank within the top 60% of their high school class and the timely submission of a completed CoFo application (see Appendix B). We have no plans to change these criteria for high school students, and will require that Success Partners pre-qualify students according to similar guidelines. Because 65% of our students are Hispanic, CoFo has developed significant organizational expertise in addressing the unique needs of Hispanic students and their families.

## **Size of Market**

College Forward has a world-class service to offer – but who will pay for it?

In considering this question, we first determined who has a stake in student success. From our point of view, as a college access provider, every student who walks onto a college campus represents an investment – of time, of resources, of dreams. We know, with just a little more attention, that student has a good chance of persisting in college and making our investment pay off. But who else makes a similar commitment?

Colleges and universities do. In 2010, 4,146 U.S. institutions enrolled 17.9 million students. And these institutions have serious student retention problems: of those 17.9 million students, 42 percent (7.5 million) will drop out without earning degrees.

College access programs do. The most recent accounting of American college access organizations, published in 2002 (Swail and Perna, "Pre-College Outreach Programs"), counted 1,110 such programs – but that number is woefully out of date. Kim Cook, President of the National College Access Network, believes that 5,000 college access programs exist in 2012. If each program serves an average of only 200 students, participant numbers must easily exceed 1 million students. That's quite an investment in student success.

Charter and parochial schools do. Today, more than 5,600 U.S. charter schools enroll 2 million students every year. Another 33,600 private and parochial schools serve approximately 15% of the K-12 population, or 5.5 million students.

Scholarship providers do. Almost 5,000 scholarship providers – including community foundations, community-based organizations, and service clubs provide approximately \$3 billion per year in scholarships to 6.7 percent of all college undergraduates, or about 1.2 million students.

These are the people and organizations that constitute our true market for Success Partnerships; though they appreciate the criticality of college persistence and completion, their expertise and focus lie elsewhere. They appreciate the value of working to their strengths and partnering for their weaknesses, and it is up to College Forward to turn these potential partners into a marketplace.

## STRATEGY AND THEORY OF CHANGE

### The Organization, 2003 to Present – Mission, Vision, and Theory of Change

College Forward’s mission is to provide career-focused college access and college completion services to motivated, economically-disadvantaged students, in order to help them overcome generational poverty (our current mission statement, slightly out of date, is undergoing revision and will be completed in Summer 2012).

Our Vision Statement is:

Empowering students. Inspiring dreams. Changing lives.

Low-income and first-generation students apply to College Forward for three primary reasons, which we will reinforce in the future with targeted branding:

- College Forward helps students believe they, too, can go to college, earn a degree, and have an exciting, lucrative career;
- Our positive, relationship-based, non-judgmental culture is exciting and appealing;
- Our direct service providers - young, degreed “College Coaches” (currently AmeriCorps members and CoFo college students) - are irresistible near-peer mentors and wise older friends. Young students are delighted to be recruited and embraced by appealing role models who promise to support and encourage students and their parents through the entirety of the college experience.

High Schools value College Forward because we help them realize their goals:

- 99% of our students graduate from high school;
- Unlike most college access organizations, which typically serve only a scattering of select students per campus, CoFo enrolls large student cohorts at each high school we serve. This enables us to make a splashy impact, and to introduce a lively, college-going culture. The presence of CoFo in a high school transforms hallway conversations immediately and permanently.
- CoFo increases high schools’ direct-to-college rate;
- We raise the quality of the colleges students apply to and attend;
- We increase ACT scores, academic focus, enrollment in Advanced Placement classes, and scholarships awarded;
- CoFo supplements the work of overtaxed high school counselors;
- We provide a much-needed after-school option at the secondary level;
- We provide services at no cost to students and families, and at no or very low cost to high schools and school districts (although we will begin assessing fees in 2013);
- We build strong, mutually-supportive relationships with high school personnel.

Colleges and universities have eagerly partnered with CoFo since 2004 because we support their goals:

- CoFo helps colleges identify and recruit strong, diverse applicants;

- Unlike other college access programs, we directly increase college persistence and graduation rates;
- Our students form a strong core of successful, low-income coeds who model appropriate academic behaviors and support other (non-CoFo) students on campus;
- Our services are free to students and families;
- Colleges have not yet been asked to pay for the services we provide to their students, although that will change as outlined in this document.

### *Theory of Change*

Studies consistently prove that, for most low-income students, a college degree is “the passport to America’s middle class” and the only sure route out of generational poverty (Jencks and Riesman, 1968; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Adelman, 1999; Terenzini, Cabrera and Bernal, 2001; Carnvale, Rose and Cheah, 2011). This is the benchmark around which College Forward developed our Theory of Change:

Loosen the grip of poverty through higher education.

A chain of logical assumptions and prerequisites flows from this goal:

- To participate in the middle class, an individual must earn a middle-class income;
- A middle-class income is predicated upon a stable job that pays a professional salary;
- To be qualified for a professional job, an individual must have at least a bachelor’s degree;
- Financial, academic, behavioral, and socio-economic barriers make entering college and earning a degree extremely challenging for low-income students; and
- College Forward can systematically identify and overcome each of these barriers.

From these assumptions, College Forward developed a two-pronged approach to fulfilling our Theory of Change:

- Ensure that more low-income students are served, and
- Change the way students go to college in America.

This document, our strategic growth plan, embodies College Forward’s fealty to these twin goals. We will ensure that more students are served by A) continuing to grow our “organic” student enrollment in Austin and Houston; B) establishing Success Partnerships that will enable CoFo to serve the students of other partners; C) sharing our high-quality program models with other service providers through licensing and consulting agreements; and D) disseminating our institutional knowledge through conference sessions, webinars, workshops, and research publications.

CoFo can legitimately claim to have already begun “changing the way students go to college” by pioneering the case management of currently-enrolled college students. Even when attending huge state universities, our students are more than just a number — they receive almost unlimited support, guidance, and mentorship.

But College Forward is not yet reaching enough students to maximize our impact. We will continue working to change the way students go to college in America by A) promoting and sharing our highly-effective, low-cost program models as widely as possible; B) providing unimpeachable evidence that low-income students can be fully as successful through college and into careers as high-SES students; and C) following our students' lead by supporting a national advocacy movement of 'kids pulling other kids up from poverty through education.'

### *Current Programs, Services, and Successes*

Three distinct areas of expertise differentiate College Forward from similar programs:

- We address the entirety of the college completion gap. Many organizations help students enter college, albeit without the ongoing support to help students persist and graduate. We believe that an acceptance letter is only one step -- and not the most difficult —along the path to a degree.
- We have unique expertise with Hispanic students. CoFo's program model, which includes bilingual parent services, has proven to be so effective for this rapidly growing demographic group that we question the academic literature about this population's vaunted "educational intractability." In fact, though they represent only 60% of our enrollment, an impressive 66% of our college graduates are Hispanic.
- Our students themselves are leading the way to a scalable, systemic change, routinely using the knowledge they gain from participating in CoFo to usher friends and family members through the college process. Though we have never made 'paying it forward' an expectation, 13% of our students have sought formal roles as CoFo high school Coaches or college mentors, and anecdotal reports evince a near-universal impulse to support other students' college aspirations. Beginning in 2012-2013, we will provide structure and encouragement for CoFo students who seek an active role in 'changing the way students go to college in America' through targeted advocacy.

College Forward's student-centric program models are complementary to, yet distinct from, the public education system. In developing our services, we looked to our students themselves, rather than to education pedagogy, as the repository of expertise on their life situations, their motivations and challenges – in a sense, College Forward employed principles of human-centered design even before IDEO popularized that concept in 2009. It was our founding board's decision, for instance, to recruit and admit students from the top 60% of their high school class (a decision later validated by the Bridgespan Group in "Reclaiming the American Dream," 2006); but it was the students who established that 11th grade, when college begins to loom on their horizon, is their point of greatest receptivity to college access services.

### College Access Program – for High School Students

College Forward's services are provided free of charge to students and families. Other than our top 60% admission criteria, CoFo adopted income guidelines established by the College Board's Task Force on College Matriculation for Students from Low-Income Backgrounds in deciding

whom to serve: students must qualify for the National School Lunch Program (i.e., their family's income must not exceed 185% of the federal poverty rate), or be from the first generation in their household to earn a bachelor's degree. Applicants must also demonstrate motivation by completing and submitting a CoFo application (Appendix B). Because we exist to serve students, we strive to be as inclusive as possible; we are proud that CoFo has never turned away a qualified applicant, even when applications have far exceeded our projections.

Whenever possible, College Forward conserves resources by utilizing existing facilities – so we partner with school districts to serve students in their high school classrooms (which also solves most transportation issues). Though in 2004-2006 we experimented by offering classes during the regular school day, students prefer after-school classes as being more relaxed and conducive to extended college research or in-depth conversations. Students also requested that classes meet twice per week, more often than we initially envisioned. After-school classes are led by AmeriCorps "College Coaches," themselves recent college graduates, or by Work/Study students who are currently enrolled in nearby colleges. High School classes maintain an average ratio of 35 students to each Coach.

Thanks in no small part to the fact that we listen to our students and respect their preferences and ideas, CoFo boasts an extremely impressive nine-year retention rate of 74.54%; in other words, of 3,594 students we have served in any way since 2003, all of whom were at least fifteen years old at the time of initial enrollment, three-quarters still self-identify as CoFo students. Considering that average *one-year* student retention in teen-serving after-school programs is 29%, and that retention typically *decreases* with each year of age (Pearson, Russell and Reisner, "Patterns of Youth Retention in OST Programs, 2005-06 to 2006-07," 2007), a 74% nine-year retention rate is highly unusual. Clearly, College Forward is doing something right in the service of our students.

College Forward's high school curriculum can be roughly sorted into four semesters, with emphasis as follows:

- Junior Year Fall - self-exploration, college research;
- Junior Year Spring - ACT and SAT test preparation, five-day Summer Tour of Colleges;
- Senior Year Fall - essays and college applications;
- Senior Year Spring - FAFSA and scholarship applications, college success strategies.

There is some overlap between semesters: juniors are also encouraged to apply for scholarships, for instance, and most students re-take the ACT and SAT during senior year. Other topics woven into the curriculum include financial literacy, career selection and college majors, study skills, resume-building and job skills, and self-advocacy. CoFo also provides two bilingual, day-long workshops for the parents of high school students; these workshops, which include a visit to a local college, are extremely popular and well-attended.

## College Completion Program – for College Students

College completion services actually begin during the last semester of high school, with intensive lessons in financial literacy and college success strategies. They continue through the summer before college, when they focus on transition issues – housing and tuition deposits, freshman orientation, degree planning, and registration for freshman classes.

Because our students are geographically dispersed across more than 90 U.S. institutions, our college completion services rely heavily upon technology and social media. We review students' grades each semester, and review financial aid status annually. Office-based College Completion Coaches, each responsible for approximately 100 Collegians, interact with students via phone, text message, Facebook, Tumblr, Foursquare, and other outlets. Coaches assist with college transfers; link students with campus-based tutoring, counseling, health care, etc.; insistently remind students to renew financial aid; and provide guidance on academic skills, summer jobs and internships, roommate issues, etc. They are trained to deal with a wide range of academic, financial, and socio-emotional problems and to immediately escalate difficult issues that exceed their experience.

Campus-based College Mentors, who are CoFo upperclassmen, volunteer to mentor incoming freshmen through the first year of college. Mentors are trained to provide guidance, to respond immediately to critical student issues, and to escalate any difficult issues they encounter. They constitute a rapid-response force on a growing number (currently 12) of college campuses at which we have multi-year enrollment.

### *Program Outcomes*

Our student-centered programs are unique but successful. As of 2011:

- 99% of CoFo students have graduated from high school – *the national average for all students, regardless of family income, is 69%*;
- 99% have been accepted to college – *nationally, 69% of applicants gain acceptance to college, but that number includes students who apply to vocational schools*;
- More than 90% enter college within 12 months of high school graduation – *the national average for students of all income levels is 63%*;
- More than 75% enroll at four-year institutions – *the national average for low-income students is 56%*;
- 83% of students who have entered college since 2003 are either still enrolled or have graduated – *Texas boasts a 63% first-year-only retention rate for all students; low-income students are not reported separately. Across the U.S., only 9% of low-income students earn bachelor's degrees by the age of 26*;
- Our students take an average of 4.35 years to earn bachelor's degrees – *the Texas average, for students of all income levels, is 5.3 years*;
- More than 80% of our students report mentoring other youth along the college pathway – *very few low-income students receive any type of college preparation or college mentoring services.*

These success rates far surpass national averages for all students, including those from high-income backgrounds.

College Forward collects data on a wide range of metrics (see Appendix C), from daily class attendance to students' scores on a series of diagnostic college entrance exams, to the ultimate disposition of each submitted college application and much, much more – this attention to detail serves as an early-warning system as well as an indicator of program efficacy. Because we are extremely confident of our data-tracking methodology and our results, we have chosen to put off a very expensive program audit for a few more years.

CoFo did, however, contract with the respected evaluation firm ICF International in 2011 to perform a small program audit and test our data. ICF chose to investigate three specific metrics: ACT score improvements, college acceptances, and college enrollment, for the high school Classes of 2010 and 2011. They found that, far from exaggerating, CoFo was in fact slightly underreporting our success rates (see Appendix D).

The Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas is in the final stages of an evaluation of our student outcomes as compared to a “matched comparison group” of students who attended the same high schools but did not participate in CoFo. This study, the “Central Texas College Access and Persistence Program Evaluation,” should be finalized by September 2012. We have every reason to believe that the forthcoming study will confirm College Forward’s effectiveness.

College Forward’s student outcomes are remarkably consistent across all program years and all service sites – including our new Houston site. Since 2003, and despite an 8900% increase in enrollment during this period, our first key metric – college acceptance – has varied by less than one percent, from 99% to 99.5%.

## **SCALING PLAN**

### **Rationale**

Between 2003 and 2012, College Forward’s per-student cost declined 64%, from \$3,500 per year to \$1,258, thanks in equal measure to tighter management and efficiencies of scale. Despite our vigilance in ‘tightening the ship,’ however, we are unlikely in the future to see that cost drop further without a substantial investment in infrastructure. How, then, can CoFo fulfill our Theory of Change – ‘loosen the grip of generational poverty’ by 1) ensuring that more students are served and 2) changing the way students go to college in America – without also having to become a fundraising behemoth?

The imperative of responsible, sustainable growth, of fulfilling our mission while also paying for it, led to these and other questions:

Who is serving students now, and with what results?

Who is investing in students, and how much are they investing?

Who will serve students in the future, and what will motivate them to do so?

What assets does CoFo have that can help others serve students better? More cheaply?  
 How must CoFo change or grow in order to be successful? Can we achieve that?  
 What will success look like? How will we recognize it, measure it, and report it?  
 What are the risks, and to what extent can we ameliorate them?  
 If we fail, what is our exit strategy?

And it also required careful attention to three overarching priorities:

- Know College Forward very well; understand our capabilities and limitations
- Know potential partners very well; understand their needs and how we can meet them
- Understand CoFo’s capacity to meet those needs

Clearly, College Forward cannot address the huge national need alone. For true impact, we must leverage our strongest assets – our successful program models, technological savvy, and entrepreneurial culture – to build partnerships with others who need and value our expertise. Ultimately, CoFo will create more avenues for fulfilling our mission: a) serve our partners’ students directly, b) license our program models to others who will serve students, c) channel earned income to support and grow CoFo’s Austin and Houston programs, and d) draw others into a new student-service marketplace that we will create and prove.

Long-term organizational sustainability must be College Forward’s first priority; we cannot focus on issues of scale in the face of constant worry about paying the bills. And we believe that increasing income while reducing costs is a primary key to sustainability. We therefore established the following strategic priorities:

Strategic Priority	Initiative	Requires	Launch
Sustainability	<b>Success Partnerships</b>	Technology, Talent, Branding, Sales and Marketing Plan, Training Programs, Documentation	2012
Sustainability	<b>Access Partnerships</b>	Technology, Talent, Branding, Sales and Marketing Plan, Curricular Revisions, Training Programs, Documentation	2014
Incremental Growth	<b>CoFo Cities</b>	Technology, Staffing, Partnerships, Funding Plan, Documentation	2015
Advocacy	<b>CoFo Amigos</b>	Planning, Partners, Training Programs, Clear Agenda, Resources	2013

Sustainability hinges on predictable income, around which organizations can build budgets and make sound business decisions. But nothing is less predictable in the nonprofit world than

income, which is ever subject to fluctuations in the economy, policy, and donor whim. Too often, vital nonprofits that attempt to scale their impact find themselves scaling unwieldy development efforts. In any case, constantly begging for money is no way to do business. To be viable in the long term, College Forward must become less dependent on charity and more self-supporting – and this will require the commodification of our assets and the development of earned income streams.

College Forward’s reputation rises from the success of our two central programs, college access (high school) and college completion (college). Of the two, college completion is our much more unique service and clear differentiator; it is also much less labor-intensive and free from geographic limitations. College completion is therefore the obvious program around which to build CoFo’s initial scaling strategy.

### **Initiative One: Success Partnerships (fee-based Services for College Students)**

The marketplace for direct college completion services is in its infancy, with only a handful of small, ‘boutique’ practitioners, almost all nonprofit college access programs that provide little or no mentorship to their students during college. Only one commercial provider of direct college completion services, Inside Track, has begun to make headway in developing a market – and their services are both limited and expensive.

College Forward will leverage our college completion expertise and successful, low-cost program model to address this vacuum by providing customizable services to meet the needs and resources of target partner groups:

- Colleges and universities
- College access organizations
- Scholarship providers
- Charter schools, parochial schools, and public school districts
- Civic and university-based service organizations

Proving the market for college completion services will spawn competitors – which, from our perspective, is a good thing. Though we intend for CoFo to remain the market leader, our ultimate ambition is *to solve the problem*. The number of low-income students who need college completion support is simply too great for a single organization to address; we hope to inspire other organizations not only to participate and compete (thereby strengthening the field), but also to benefit from CoFo’s best practices and spirit of continuous improvement. Solving this problem on a national scale will truly “take a village;” and, by implementing our strategic plan, CoFo aims to figuratively “build the first hut.”

Because our college completion program is largely ‘virtual,’ administered through social media outlets, CoFo will not be constrained by geographic location. In fact, we have served students at institutions as widely separated as Maine and California since 2005, with excellent results. With thoughtful preparation, the careful investment in resources and capacity, and the development

of a strong service model, we are confident in College Forward's ability to market Success Partnerships nationwide.

### *Ecosystem Analysis and Target Markets*

The first decade of this century witnessed a national emphasis on *college access* – on helping low-income students get into college. A burgeoning industry of nonprofit organizations (including College Forward) arose, and it got results: initial college enrollment grew 38% between 1999 and 2009 (National Center for Educational Statistics). Increased enrollment was not matched by degree completion, however, which rose less than five percent during the same period (Carnevale and Rose, "The Undereducated American," 2011). A slowly-dawning recognition followed the Pell Institute's publication of "Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students" in November, 2008 (Tinto and Engle). Within three years, the education world was in thrall to the new priority of *college success* – that is, degree completion.

And what a hot topic it is! Whereas for decades state and federal education funding has been predicated on enrollment, this new focus on college completion has altered the landscape for educational institutions and nonprofits alike:

- President Obama's most recent federal budget proposed \$50 million in 2012 and a total of \$1.3 billion over five years in performance-based funding to institutions that have demonstrable success in enrolling and graduating high-need students (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/factsheet/opening-the-doors-of-college-and-opportunity>).
- The Higher Education Outcomes-Based Funding Act, passed in 2011, requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop metrics for each institution, basing up to 10 percent of state appropriations on degree completion and related criteria (<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=E8E48883-0E99-66EF-9445A942A166C686>).
- Fourteen states now base a percentage of education funding on performance, with appreciable results ("Performance Models and Metrics in Higher Education," Office of Policy Analysis, 2012), and more states are considering similar legislation.
- The U.S. Department of Education published a "College Completion Tool Kit" in 2011 ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/college\\_completion\\_tool\\_kit.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/college_completion_tool_kit.pdf))
- The College Board announced two major initiatives in a single week (April 23, 2011): "The College Completion agenda: 55% by 2025" (<http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/>) and "The Completion Arch" ([http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/events/live-webcast-completion-arch?ep\\_ch=PR&ep\\_mid=10525452&ep\\_rid=33257549](http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/events/live-webcast-completion-arch?ep_ch=PR&ep_mid=10525452&ep_rid=33257549)).
- TG (formerly known as TGSLC, or Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation) will very shortly publish a tool intended for colleges to use in determining the effectiveness of existing services, "Certificate and Degree Completion Self-Assessment Guide and Toolkit."
- In 2008, Lumina Foundation, the largest education funder in the U.S., repurposed its mission and resources towards "Goal 2025," to increase the number of Americans with

high-quality degrees and credentials to 60% by 2025 ([http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal\\_2025.html](http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025.html)).

- Also in 2008, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to double the number of low-income students who complete degrees or credentials (<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/low-income-postsecondary-degree-081209.aspx>).
- The theme of NCAN’s 2012 Annual Conference will be “Changing the Odds: College Success for All” ([http://www.collegeaccess.org/Annual\\_Conference](http://www.collegeaccess.org/Annual_Conference)).

This insistent new emphasis on college completion by federal, state, and private funders has created a sea-change in the education world, as the full spectrum of stakeholders – including community-based organizations, charter schools, postsecondary institutions – scramble to refocus priorities and resources. A number of strategies have been proposed, explored, and implemented – but, perhaps because they are institution-focused, driven primarily by ‘the numbers’ - whereas CoFo focuses exclusively ‘on the student’ – they have so far had little or no appreciable impact:

College Completion Strategies	Sample Service Providers
Campus-based student support services, including academic, financial, health, and socio-economic counseling	Colleges and Universities
Predictive student surveys, usually administered at initial enrollment	ACT Inc. Noel-Levitz
Student-tracking software	Hobson’s Starfish
Consulting services - analysis/ assessment of campus-based student retention strategies, with or without recommendations for improvement	Noel-Levitz Hobson’s SunGard Scannell and Kurz Maguire Associates
Direct support services to students	Beyond 12 Inside Track University Life Coach College Forward

*Target Market – Colleges and Universities*

Colleges and universities have employed student retention strategies for decades. To encourage “campus engagement,” institutions sponsored an impressive array of clubs, activities, and events. Single-class residence halls, dormitory-based “peer mentors” (i.e., Resident Assistants), specialized academic programs (i.e., Honors Colleges), freshman-only “core classes,” academic tutoring services, and other well-intentioned initiatives followed,

always backed up by counseling services. However, despite estimated average annual expenditures exceeding \$5,200 per student (“The Surprising Causes of those College Tuition Hikes,” US News, 2009), graduation rates have hardly budged; Noel-Levitz found in 2011 that “up to 55 percent of private college respondents, up to 73 percent of public university respondents, and up to 64 percent of two-year public college respondents reported using practices that the majority of respondents in their sector judged to be “minimally effective.”

These institutions recognize an urgent need to provide deeper services: more than 80% of colleges and universities include student retention in their top five institutional priorities, often with the support of high-level administrators: 33% of VPs/Deans of Student Services, 24% of college presidents, 20% of VPs/Deans of Academic Services, and 17% of Provosts report retention as a “top-level concern” (Greenhouse & Associates, 2008). And now there is the real likelihood that poorly-performing institutions will lose *up to ten percent* of their funding in the short term, and more within a few years, if graduation rates do not improve dramatically. Even the powerhouse University of Texas, in February 2012, established an ambitious new goal of raising four-year graduation rates from 50% to 70% within five years.

A rapidly-growing pool of consultants seeks to help IHEs assess and address this new priority. Noel-Levitz (Iowa City, IA), which ten years ago pioneered a pre-college student assessment tool, now also offers consulting and campus-based academic advising. Hobsons (Chicago, IL) offers an “early-alert” software solution in addition to consulting. Maguire Associates (Concord, MA) offers 30-, 60-, 120-, and 150-day options for “audits/assessments and corrective plans.” Scannell and Kurz (Pittsford, NY) offers more limited consulting services, and SunGard (Wayne, PA) offers software solutions, as do ACT, Inc. (Iowa City, IA) and the College Board (New York, NY).

In addition to consulting and software solutions, a handful of organizations have experimented with more ‘hands-on’ service approaches:

- University Life Coach ([www.ulifecoach.com](http://www.ulifecoach.com); Austin, Texas) is a for-profit company that markets college preparatory services and limited college completion support directly to students (and their parents). For \$229, students complete Gallup’s StrengthQuest personality assessment, receive one 60-minute counseling session to discuss their StrengthQuest results, and have “perpetual access to online resources.” For \$895, students also get nine 60-minute coaching sessions on 18 pre-selected StrengthsQuest topics.
- Beyond 12 ([www.beyond12.org](http://www.beyond12.org)) is a nonprofit organization that partners with the City and County of San Francisco, San Francisco Unified School District, City College of San Francisco, and San Francisco State University to support students who participate in the “Bridge to College” program. They provide college access and direct college completion support to Bridge to College students who attend City College of San Francisco and/or San Francisco State University.
- Inside Track ([www.insidetrack.com](http://www.insidetrack.com); San Francisco, CA) is a for-profit company that provides one year of limited in-person and “virtual” support (30 or fewer minutes per week) to college freshmen who attend one of twelve IHEs across the U.S. Students are

identified by their institution, which pays Inside Track's \$1000 average annual per-student fee. The company promises "measurable results, including increased student engagement in campus life, higher levels of academic achievement, increased student satisfaction, and a 20 percent reduction in attrition." For an additional \$600, students may purchase Inside Track's support through their sophomore year. It must be noted that Inside Track does not focus on low-income students, but seeks to serve a college's entire freshman class.

- College Forward ([www.collegeforward.org](http://www.collegeforward.org); Austin, TX) is a nonprofit organization that provides "virtual" support (and, on some campuses, in-person support) for the duration of their college years to low-income college students who attend colleges and universities throughout the U.S., or who are temporarily studying abroad. Students are recruited by College Forward or, beginning in 2012, identified by a sponsoring institution or organization, which will pay up to \$715 per year for College Forward's services. For full-service students (see Page 23), CoFo projects a year-to-year student retention rate of 80%, a 15% reduction in time-to-degree, and a degree completion rate of 60% or better.

#### *Target Market – Community-Based Organizations*

Spurred by funders' demands, college access programs and civic organizations have sparked a mini-industry of 'best practice' webinars and conference sessions on implementing college completion services. CoFo has observed, however, that very few college access practitioners have the knowledge or resolve to create effective programs – of more than 300 organizations who are current members of the National College Access Network, for instance, fewer than a half dozen have developed responsible college completion practices or reported acceptable results. College Forward receives frequent requests for technical support from access providers who seek to develop or administer completion services. We believe this market is ripe for development, and that CoFo's clear leadership in the field is a significant asset.

To answer a key question – *can we successfully engage other programs' students?* – College Forward conducted a pilot test in 2011-2012, enrolling 33 students from two college access partners, Con Mi MADRE in Austin (24 students) and Turner Twelve in Dallas (9 students), into our regular program. We treated pilot students to the same services that CoFo students receive, very closely recording their participation and progress. And our results have been outstanding, with 90% of pilot students agreeing that "having a CoFo coach is making me more successful in college," and 100% reporting that CoFo "gives me the answers/support I need to be successful." Feedback from our two partners indicates high satisfaction with CoFo's performance, professionalism, and reporting capabilities, although they did express concern about our future pricing structure. A report on the outcomes of this pilot test, including the rank assessments and recommendations of all organizational partners, will be compiled in the fall of 2012.

#### *Target Market – Charter and Parochial Schools*

Charter schools currently enroll two million students across the U.S. (120,000 in Texas), with another 1.4 million (40,000 in Texas) in private and parochial schools. These institutions often share funders with college access providers, and are feeling the same pressure to ensure students' ultimate college success; they, too, are seeking solutions. A very few, such as KIPP and YES Prep charter schools, have launched college completion initiatives (<http://www.kipp.org/students/kipp-through-college>), but their results are less than stellar. We believe College Forward can add significant value to charter and parochial schools' long-term student outcomes and funding streams.

To test this assumption, College Forward conducted a pilot test in 2011-2012, enrolling 32 students from San Juan Diego Catholic High School in Austin. As with our other pilot, our results were outstanding, with excellent student participation and a high level of satisfaction from San Juan Diego, which was able for the first time to report college enrollment statistics to their community and their funders.

*Target Market – Scholarship Providers*

An exciting market opportunity involves scholarship providers, very few of which provide college completion support (the Dell Scholarship and Gates Millennium Scholarship Programs are notable exceptions). This sector makes a huge annual investment in America's youth:

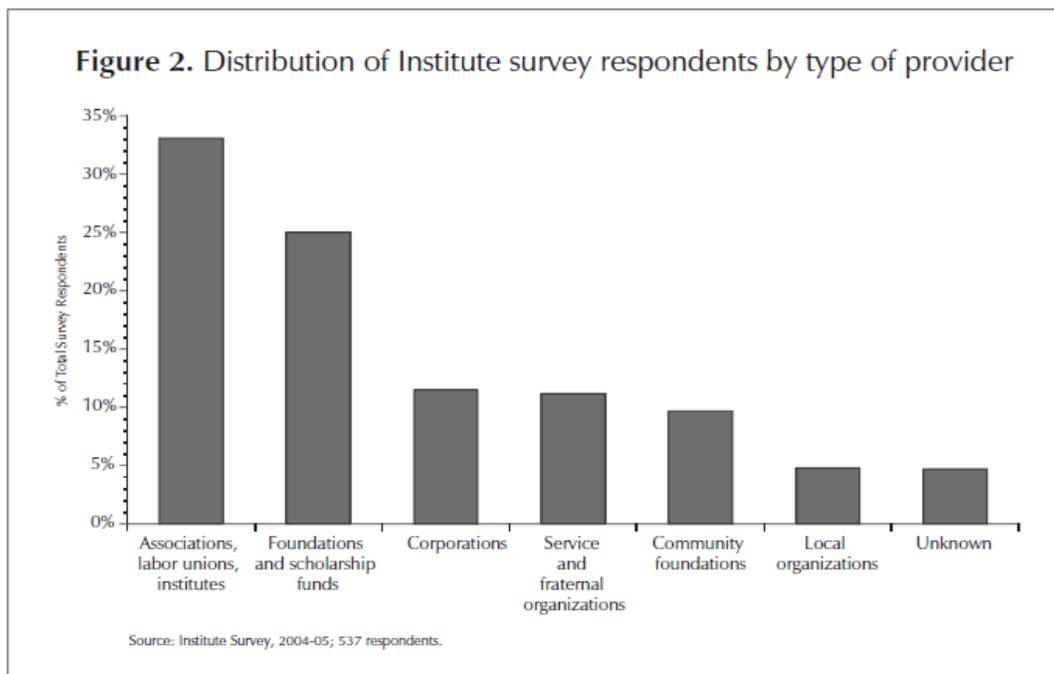
Type of Aid	Total amount of aid (\$USD)	% of total aid	% of undergraduates receiving aid	Average award for undergraduates (\$USD)
Private scholarship aid (estimated)	3.1-3.3 billion	2-3%	6.7%	1,982
SELECTED OTHER AID:				
Institutional	23.2 billion	19.0%	18.8%	4,257
Federal Grants	17.2 billion	14.0%	28.0%	2,609
Federal Perkins Loans	1 billion	1.0%	3.6%	1,948
State Aid	6 billion	5.0%	15.6%	2,070
Total aid (without private scholarships)	122 billion	98.0%	63.2%	7,350
Aid from all sources	124.5-125.3 billion			

Note: Private scholarship aid is represented by the medium range of estimates presented in Table 2 as well as NPSAS estimates. Sources: Institute Survey, 2004-05; NCES 2004a and 2004b; College Board 2004.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy, which estimates that seven percent of all college undergraduates receive scholarships, averaging \$1,982, divides almost 5,000 American scholarship providers into the following categories ("Scholarships Count," 2005):

- *Community foundations*, tax exempt philanthropic organizations that engage in charitable giving in specific geographic areas, typically no larger than a state;
- *Service and fraternal organizations*, such as honor societies, American Legion chapters, Kiwanis Clubs, women's clubs, and other organizations that have community service as part of their mission;

- *Corporations*, including a variety of companies, some of which establish separate foundations for charitable giving;
- *Independent foundations scholarship funds, and educational trusts* that are largely established for the purpose of funding scholarships (or sometimes other grantmaking)
- *Research centers and institutes*, which often target scholarships in particular disciplines or areas of research interest;
- *Associations, societies, and other national membership organizations* that also tend to target scholarships toward specific purposes that reflect their interests;
- *Local organizations* such as garden clubs, art centers, local societies, and other groups that focus their grant-making on local communities; and
- *Individual donors* who establish their own scholarships or provide money to the kinds of organizations described above.



The National Scholarship Providers Association (NSPA), whose mission is to “advance the collective impact of scholarship providers, and the scholarships they award, through exchanging best practices, offering professional development opportunities, and promoting student access and success in higher education,” boasts 298 members who collectively awarded scholarships totaling more than \$530 million in 2010-2011. NSPA feels strongly that “the connection of private scholarship providers to the access agenda has, regrettably, gone largely unnoticed in the broader national debate about paying for college.”

College Forward believes that scholarship providers, by virtue of their considerable investment in student success, constitute a large and wholly untapped market. For a relatively small

additional investment, CoFo can multiply the impact of their generosity by helping students reduce their time-to degree, significantly increase student retention and graduation rates, and take measurable steps towards professional employment. NSPA's annual conference, which will take place in Austin in October 2012, may provide an ideal venue at which to announce and market our *Success Partnerships*.

### *Other Environmental Considerations*

Of likely competitors in this marketplace, the most significant is Inside Track, the proprietary provider of direct services that is the current market-maker. We believe, however, that CoFo has several advantages over Inside Track, and will quickly overtake them as the market leader:

- CoFo has transparent and unimpeachable student success statistics, over seven years, for an extremely challenged student population – whereas Inside Track's claims are based on freshman-year-only data for students of all income levels
- CoFo's programs have received the nation's highest awards for excellence
- We are a nonprofit organization; many educational leaders are uncomfortable working with for-profit enterprises
- CoFo provides comprehensive services for the entirety of each student's college career and into post-college employment; Inside Track typically provides only one – and never more than two – years of support
- At \$715 per student-year, as compared to Inside Track's \$1000 per student-year, our pricing structure will be much more attractive.

Because our services are primarily technology-based, utilizing social media, we are not limited by geography in selecting and serving partners or students.

College Forward is confident in our ability to secure adequate funding for our scaling plan. Despite the economic downturn of the past few years, CoFo's income has grown every year, even enabling us to expand to Houston in January 2011. As of April 2012, just five months into our five-year development plan, we have identified 30% of our projected funding need.

### *Tiered Service Offerings, Pricing Structure, and Projected Enrollment*

College Forward seeks to serve a complex market that includes very large institutions (e.g., the University of Texas) and very small organizations (e.g., Turner Twelve) whose motivations, existing services, and resources vary widely. To meet the needs of these potential partners, we will offer a range of services that vary in intensity from our current full-service program to a low-cost, report-only ('Seasonal') option:

Service Tier	2012-2013 Enrollment	2013-2014 Enrollment	2014-2015 Enrollment	2015-2016 Enrollment
Full service	200 (Beta)	300	800	1,800
On-Demand	0	300	800	1,800
Seasonal	0	300	800	1,800
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>5,400</b>
Consulting	2	6	9	14

1. *Full-Service*

CoFo will provide individualized mentoring to help students achieve academic, financial and socio-emotional goals. Each student will be assigned a Completion Coach who will reach out at key points during the school year, developing a trusting relationship and seeking opportunities for impact and improvement. Whatever needs arise, from social transitional issues to financial aid crises and student loan management, CoFo Coaches will help students find appropriate solutions. When we serve several students on a campus, or when we enroll students from multiple academic years, we will work to implement a College Mentor program at that college. We estimate a minimum of 20 contacts per academic year, initiated equally by students and CoFo Coaches.

2. *On-Demand*

Based on College Forward’s criteria for enrollment, institutions may identify and enroll specific students, whom CoFo will contact at six critical times in each school year to ensure students are engaged and equipped to meet the predictable challenges of exam periods, financial aid deadlines, and scholarship reporting periods. In addition, after an initial system set-up to identify specific services and develop co-branded marketing materials, CoFo Completion Coaches will respond to students who reach out for support. Research predicts that, in university settings, 7% of eligible students will utilize this service.

3. *Seasonal*

Based on College Forward’s criteria for enrollment, institutions may identify and enroll specific students, whom CoFo will contact at six critical times in each school year to ensure students are engaged and equipped to meet the predictable challenges of exam periods, financial aid deadlines, and scholarship reporting periods.

4. *Consulting*

CoFo will provide customized services, such as data tracking, reporting, and program consulting. Reporting services can be tailored to monitor student records, grades, and enrollment information; CoFo can provide aggregated data and make recommendations for specific improvements.

At all service levels, students will benefit from real-time interventions; partners will benefit by decreasing average time-to-degree, increasing student retention and graduation rates, and building justification for future financial support. With aggressive performance goals for each tier of service, CoFo projects strong outcomes:

## CoFo Performance Goals, by Service Tier

<b>Full-Service</b>		Unlimited, personalized coaching, response and intervention on a comprehensive range of students' needs for support
Year-to-Year Student Retention		80%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 15%
Degree Completion		60%
<b>On-Demand</b>		Unlimited response to students' requests for support on academic, financial, and socio-emotional issues.
Year-to-Year Student Retention		70%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 10%
Degree Completion		50%
<b>Seasonal</b>		CoFo will issue critical reminders and reassurances at three pre-selected points each college term, including final exams.
Year-to-Year Student Retention		60%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 5%
Degree Completion		40%
<b>Consulting</b>		Staff training, student tracking, reporting, and recommendations.
Year-to-Year Student Retention		Varies
Time-to-Degree		Varies
Degree Completion		Varies

Success Partnerships will serve students directly by engaging students who otherwise would not be served, increasing their chances of degree completion. These partnerships will serve students indirectly through consulting services, academic research, and advocacy.

College Forward anticipates that Success Partnerships will become a substantial source of revenue, which will contribute to the diversification of our income streams and support long-term organizational sustainability. First-year (2013-2014) income projections for this initiative total \$393,000.

### *Sales Strategy*

As mentioned above, the most substantial barrier to entry in this marketplace is that the marketplace does not yet exist. Though there are new and compelling forces at play – especially as regards education funding – we will have to clearly demonstrate our cost-effectiveness and ROI in order to build successful partnerships.

Though we believe College Forward is well-positioned to do this, we face real challenges. Notably, we have no experience in sales marketing. And our largest potential customer base, institutions of higher education, is legendary for institution-centeredness and resistance to external ideas: according to one business consultant, IHEs are “less likely to understand the scope and severity of student issues, and will require significantly more lead time than other constituencies because IHEs must be ‘sold’ at each of multiple administrative levels.” The addition to College Forward’s staff of one or more professionals with experience in marketing to institutions, and in serving that customer base very well, is clearly indicated.

Fortunately, College Forward has tremendous assets and few significant competitors. Nobody can match our deep expertise in college completion for low-income students, our successful student outcomes, or the respect we have built over time. In most cases, the cost of our services will be lower than the cost to the institution of building and administering similar programs themselves. Not only that, but our programs and interventions are the result of years of experience dealing very specifically with a low-income population whose challenges and needs are very different from those of middle class students.

An impressive group of highly-credible partners and supporters can bolster CoFo’s marketing efforts by providing introductions, testimonials, and guidance. We are grateful to have the support of organizations like Bank of America Foundation, Barker Foundation, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Greater Texas Foundation, Impact Austin, KDK-Harman Foundation, KLE Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Meadows Foundation, OneStar Foundation, Sooch Foundation, TG, USA Funds, Webber Family Foundation, etc. A large number of education organizations are also happy to provide introductions and testimonials: College Board, Educate Texas, E3 Alliance, Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas, National Association for College Admission Counseling, National College Access Network, Texas Association for College Admission Counseling, etc.

Finally, College Forward’s staff is ambitious and fearless; we never shrink from challenge. A former staff member recently described our culture very accurately with the phrase, “CoFo struts when it walks down the street.”

### **Initiative Two: Access Partnerships (Licensing our High School Program)**

As attendance at oversubscribed conferences, workshops, and webinars attests, and as College Forward has noted in the frequency with which we receive requests for technical advice from service providers across the country, the U.S. has an unmet need for proven, cost-effective, easy-to-implement college access programming —curricula and data tracking systems, as well

as the training and support to implement them. Yet neither curriculum nor training is currently available from any source.

College Forward is working to put our high school college access curriculum online in August 2013 – and not just online, but ‘in the cloud,’ from which it will be universally accessible. This will not only increase program effectiveness and organizational efficiency, it will also enable us, for the first time, to share our curriculum and program models with other service providers while retaining real-time quality control. We plan, over the next 12 months, to develop a licensing initiative for our high school program, to include training and technical assistance, access to the online database (including curriculum), and real-time reporting capability. If successful, this will meet several organizational priorities:

- A licensing model will support our goal of “ensuring that more students are served”
- It will distribute the burden of financing program delivery across other organizations
- Licensing fees could be an additional source of earned income

Preparatory to putting our curriculum online, College Forward is undertaking a wholesale revision to incorporate new information and ideas, including links to websites and mobile phone applications. Existing sections on careers and college majors, job-hunting skills, summer internships and other student employment opportunities, and comprehensive financial literacy are being enhanced. Elements of gamification theory, which we believe will increase student excitement and engagement, are being incorporated for trial in the 2013-2014 academic year before the curriculum ‘goes live online’ in August 2014.

CoFo will reap an immediate increase in operational efficiency from putting our high school curriculum online; Coaches will no longer spend up to 20% of each week updating the database. By self-populating as students complete assignments and worksheets, the database will facilitate real-time quality control, support a 20% increase in per-Coach enrollment (thereby reducing our per-student cost), save more than \$30,000 per year in printing expenses, and provide a more responsive, more interactive experience for students.

Because College Forward’s current focus is on readying the College Completion Partnership model for market, we have postponed detailed market research into this curriculum license model until August 2012. As of this time, however, we believe that potential customer groups will include:

- Nonprofit college access organizations
- Charter and parochial schools
- School districts – especially rural districts that have few other services
- College-based outreach programs

College Forward will, during summer 2013, perform significant market research on high school program licensing and develop a comprehensive sales plan.

*Scaling Prerequisite: Technology Platform*

Neither of College Forward's earned income initiatives can come to fruition without the concurrent development of a unified organizational database. Though our utilization of technology – especially social media – is advanced relative to most nonprofits, our current infrastructure is too cumbersome to support the growth we envision. Over the past year, CoFo worked with consultants and students to understand current and emerging technologies, potential applications, and system requirements for a new, interoperable Information System that will revolutionize student services, streamline internal operations, and become the centerpiece of earned income initiatives. When development is complete, ours will be the most advanced college access and completion system in the U.S., and will incorporate our interactive curriculum; a real-time, self-populating database; and state-of-the-art predictive algorithms that will enable CoFo to detect potential student problems and intervene proactively.

Additionally, College Forward is one of only six organizations nationwide to receive a “Next Generation of Student Supports” grant from the Lumina Foundation in December 2011. This grant is funding the development of a student-centric, multi-platform, ‘gamified’ application that will ‘push’ timely information to students’ smart phones or other electronic devices. Lumina’s hope, and ours, is to stake a claim in a youth-oriented communication network that will someday be more ubiquitous than Facebook.

We project that the technology platform will yield significant benefits by 2014:

- From the start, this platform has been designed to facilitate communication across the organization, with layer interoperability, portals for remote access by students, parents, and partners, and multiple privacy levels. Not only will this strengthen and streamline internal processes, it will also make it possible for CoFo to share access to the database downstream, as another potential source of revenue.
- Phase I is a student tracking database, currently in internal trial, that will ‘go live’ in July 2012. This database will support the immediate launch of College Forward’s Success Partnerships, an earned income initiative that we project will enroll 900 students in 2013-2014, generating revenues of \$393,000.
- Phase II, a Convio donor management system, will be added by October 2012.
- Phase III, a student-support tracking system, will be implemented by December 2012. It will support and track approximately 150 Coach- or student-initiated trouble calls per day, or 22,500 calls in 2012-13.
- Phase IV, a financial management and reporting system, will launch in January 2013.
- Phase V will utilize algorithmic software (similar that that used by credit card companies to predict defaults) to scan information posted on social media outlets to detect anomalous behavior that could be indicative of future trouble. This will give College Forward the ability to intervene proactively to prevent problems. Phase V will ‘go live’ by July 2013, and will support 900 Success Partnership students (with 660 predicted interventions) in 2013-14 and 2,400 students (with 1,320 predicted interventions) in 2014-15.
- Phase VI, which will launch in August 2013, will put College Forward’s high school curriculum online.

By 2015, College Forward’s technology platform is projected to:

- Serve 6,757 College Forward college students and 180 Pilot/Beta students;
- Enroll and serve 5,400 Success Partnership students;
- Yield \$2,488,000 in earned income;
- Significantly strengthen services and service delivery.

### **Initiative Three: Incremental Growth (Expanding CoFo’s High School Program)**

Thanks to previous program expansion, College Forward is satisfied that we have substantially met the need for college access services in the Austin Metropolitan Service Area. For at least the past two years, new student recruitment has leveled off at around 600 new high school juniors per year – a number that we project well into the future.

Houston, however, is a vast market with an enormous unmet need for college access services. Subject to the availability of funding, we plan to grow both school district partnerships and student enrollment over the next five years, with significantly larger growth possible:

	2011-12E	2012-13E	2013-14E	2014-15E	2015-16E
Houston Enrollment Projections	316	611	1,011	1,455	2,215

Though expansion to additional Texas cities is not currently a part of our plan, College Forward is open to the possibility of such replication in the future, in partnership with local higher education institutions, public school districts, and funders. We do not, however, expect to have the organizational capacity to focus on this possibility before 2015.

### **Initiative Four: Advocacy**

College Forward is and will remain a staunchly apolitical organization. We exist to serve students, not to drive an agenda. Furthermore, we are well aware of the inherent dangers of partisanship, both external (with a fickle electorate) and internal (with strong and clashing political viewpoints) to an organization – and especially to a federal AmeriCorps grantee. So advocacy of any kind is not something we have approached lightly or yearned to embrace – in fact, the reverse is true.

As a student-centric and student-serving organization, however, fealty to our students requires that we listen actively and respond to all of their needs, both stated and implied. And, as students work diligently through college towards graduation and careers, one of their needs is coming across loud and clear: they want to do something to address America’s inequitable

education system. Their activism is not the messy, noisy activism of the entitled classes; our students act. They roll up their sleeves and help other young people like themselves make the same journey through college and into careers. They ‘pay it forward’ daily, doing all they can to broaden college access and success.

College Forward has recognized that our students both want and need a means of expressing frustration with an education system that too often discounts, overlooks, or under-serves similar students. We have begun seeking like-minded partners who are experienced in advocacy and who can offer guidance about developing positive advocacy policies and activities. Among these potential partners are: America Forward, City Year, College Summit, Education Council, Root Cause, ServiceNation, Social Enterprise Alliance, Stand for Children, StudentsFirst, Students For Education Reform, and Teach for America.

## **EVALUATION AND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION PLAN**

### **Evaluation Philosophy**

Whenever possible, we like to keep things simple. Measuring and reporting College Forward’s effectiveness in reaching our organizational goal – “a bachelor’s degree and a job for every student” – doesn’t require higher mathematics. Instead, we simply count, and compare year-to-year results: of all students who enroll in CoFo, how many graduate from college? Of students who graduate from college, how many secure employment in their field with six months of graduation? That’s our bottom line, and we aim for consistently better outcomes each year.

Because our core programs span six or more years, however, we note dozens of other milestones that indicate individual and collective student progress. Intermediate data tells us if we’re on track to realize our big goal, and also serves as an early warning system: a student who doesn’t take a college entrance examination cannot submit a college application; low class attendance may indicate that a Coach is struggling to build relationships with his/her students. By tracking and reviewing data closely, CoFo can detect and address issues before they become problems. Again, however, our statistical methodology is simply to count and report.

College Forward’s approach to student data is “trust but verify.” We confirm college enrollment, by semester, through the National Student Clearinghouse or with individual institutions. We record academic progress by obtaining official student transcripts at the end of each semester. Students submit copies of each year’s Student Aid Reports (SARs) as evidence of FAFSA/TASFA submission and renewal; if SARs are not available, CoFo confirms financial aid awards with each student’s college, or through direct verification at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov).

College Forward has worked with Jen Beck, Ph.D. of Eval Arts ([www.evalarts.com](http://www.evalarts.com)) since 2006 to develop and update qualitative surveys, which we administer semi-annually to high school students and annually to collegians. We also seek feedback from parents who attend College/*Universidad* 101 and 201 workshops, and from students who participate in the Summer

College Tour. Results of these surveys are tabulated and studied to ensure that CoFo is meeting the needs of the people we serve.

Our programs, and the evaluation of those programs, are predicated upon providing the best possible services to students. With a commitment to ‘continuous improvement,’ CoFo reviews quantitative and qualitative results annually to identify programmatic strengths and weaknesses, and to detect areas in which we can improve our services. In summer 2012, College Forward will employ UXD (user-experience design) methodologies to conduct a series of focus groups to determine which specific elements of our program have the greatest impact on student success. The results of this study will, for the first time, enable CoFo to concentrate resources on our most impactful units and program elements.

Finally, and with a sense of responsibility to both students and community, CoFo keeps a close eye on expenses; we strive to provide the highest quality services for the lowest possible cost. We are proud to report that, while student success statistics varied by less than one percent between 2003 and 2012, our annual cost per student dropped 64 percent, from \$3,500 to \$1,258. By comparison, at least one other Austin-based college access organization reports annual costs exceeding \$2,000 per student for each of six pre-college years. And the federally-funded Upward Bound program, which serves high school students only, costs \$4,912 per student year, or \$19,648 just to get a student to the gates of college (U.S. Department of Education).

As mentioned previously (see Page 12), because of College Forward’s careful attention to data collection and reporting, we are confident in the accuracy of our results – a confidence validated by ICF International’s audit in 2011. And, in September 2012, we will be able to report the results of a comprehensive “matched comparison group” study by the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas.

We recognize that the additional credibility of a full-blown quasi-experimental study will become increasingly important as College Forward scales. Such an undertaking is not only expensive but also time-consuming, however, and we hope to delay it until at least 2014-2015.

### **Evaluation of New Initiatives**

College Forward has no current plans to substantially revise our evaluation methodology for existing programs. The new initiatives described in this business plan, however, which have goals beyond service to students, must be regularly examined against additional criteria. Specifically, CoFo will regularly measure the success of new initiatives based on student success, partnership development, and profitability.

#### *Student-Specific Goals and Outcomes*

Students will benefit from real-time response to their concerns. CoFo’s student success goals will measure our ability to build relationships with students and serve them efficiently and well. A reliable indicator of engagement is the rate at which students respond to CoFo-initiated

contacts. Traditional College Forward students, who have at least a two-year relationship with CoFo before they enter college, respond at a 44% rate within 24 hours. Based upon the results of our 2011-2012 *Success Partnerships* pilot study, we believe an aggressive but reasonable goal is for 40% of all students to respond to CoFo-initiated contacts within 24 hours.

We strive to resolve student problems as quickly as possible; our new database will automatically record specific solutions to each problem and report time-to-resolution.

CoFo Success Partnerships - Response Goals		
Indicator	Criteria	Goal
Responsiveness	24 hours	40%
Problem resolution	Time-to-resolution	Average below 24 hours
Outcomes	Varies by service tier	See below

And College Forward’s student outcome goals will necessarily vary by service tier; see “Student Goals by Service Tier,” Page 23, for specific goals.

*Partner-Specific Goals and Outcomes*

College Forward’s partners will benefit by increasing student retention and graduation rates while decreasing average time-to-degree. We believe that these success indicators will also help partners build strong cases for additional financial support from state and federal sources.

The primary indicator of the success of College Forward’s new initiatives will be our ability to develop long-term partnerships. Our recruitment and retention goals are aggressive but, based on the strength of our reputation and existing relationships, and on the track record of the Director of University Relationships we will hire in fall 2012 , we believe they are attainable:

CoFo Success Partnerships - <b>Partner Development Goals</b>					
Service Tier	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Retention
Full-Service	2	4	5	7	90%
On-Demand	1	1	3	5	90%
Seasonal	1	1	2	5	90%
Consulting	1	2	3	6	25%
Total	5	8	13	23	N/A

College Forward’s ability to produce measurable results will be critically important in maintaining existing partnerships and developing new ones; partners must be confident that CoFo has an extremely high return on investment, and that duplication of our services would be cost-prohibitive.

Before developing specific, mutually-agreed-upon goals for each institutional partner, we must first work closely with that partner to establish the statistical baseline for a matching cohort of low-income students. Once we have defined existing year-to-year student retention rates, for instance, or time-to-degree, we can establish measurable, numeric goals against which to measure our effectiveness. College Forward’s overall goals, however, are aggressive and impressive. To enroll a sizeable number of qualified students at each service tier, we will recruit partners intensively; partners may enroll their qualified students:

Service Tier	2012-2013 Enrollment	2013-2014 Enrollment	2014-2015 Enrollment	2015-2016 Enrollment
Full service	200 (Beta)	300	800	1,800
On-Demand	0	300	800	1,800
Seasonal	0	300	800	1,800
<b>Total Students</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>5,400</b>
Consulting	2	6	9	14

Once enrolled, we will seek to serve both students and partners very well:

**CoFo Success Partnerships - Outcome Goals by Service Tier**

<b>Full-Service</b>	Unlimited, personalized coaching, response and intervention on a comprehensive range of students' needs for support	
Year-to-Year Student Retention		80%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 15%
Degree Completion		60%
<b>On-Demand</b>	Unlimited response to students' requests for support on academic, financial, and socio-emotional issues.	
Year-to-Year Student Retention		70%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 10%
Degree Completion		50%
<b>Seasonal</b>	CoFo will issue critical reminders and reassurances at three pre-selected points each college term, including final exams.	
Year-to-Year Student Retention		60%
Time-to-Degree		Reduce by 5%
Degree Completion		40%
<b>Consulting</b>	Staff training, student tracking, reporting, and recommendations.	
Year-to-Year Student Retention		Varies
Time-to-Degree		Varies
Degree Completion		Varies

*Earned Income Goals and Outcomes*

In addition to the student and partner success measures outlined above, College Forward is interested in developing these initiatives as earned income strategies to support our nonprofit operations. Our financial goals are optimistic but realistic:

Service Tier	2012-2013 Income	2013-2014 Income	2014-2015 Income	2015-2016 Income
Full service	\$ 0	\$ 214,500	\$ 572,000	\$ 1,287,000
On-Demand	\$ 0	\$ 153,000	\$ 408,000	\$ 918,000
Seasonal	\$ 0	\$ 25,500	\$ 68,000	\$ 153,000
Consulting	\$ 10,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 70,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 10,000</b>	<b>\$ 423,000</b>	<b>\$ 1,093,000</b>	<b>\$ 2,428,000</b>

## **Exit Strategy**

College Forward has committed both time and resources to developing the new initiatives described in this business plan, by which we will strive to serve additional students and partners well while also establishing an earned-revenue stream. We will be no less aggressive in meeting our goals.

If, despite our efforts, our strategic plan proves to be ineffective or unsuccessful, CoFo will scale back or cancel these initiatives. The following are non-negotiable conditions that would trigger a re-evaluation of our goals:

1. Preserve the mother ship – above all else, College Forward will act to protect our current students and our existing Austin and Houston programs. Their needs come first and, in the event of a catastrophic loss of human or financial capital, all other operations will be suspended until the crisis passes.
2. Inability to keep our promises – if CoFo fails to serve students or partners well, if we fail to achieve our stated outcomes, we will reexamine our ability to participate in this marketplace. The inability to meet goals in two successive years would be cause for reevaluation of our abilities, our priorities, and our plan.
3. If we lose money – we know that a substantial up-front investment will be required, and that it will take time to develop and prove our new initiatives. If, however, we are unable to generate income sufficient to meet expenses within three years, College Forward will reassess our entrance into the fee-for-service business.

## **ORGANIZATION**

In just nine years, College Forward's band of 'co-conspirators and loyal evangelists' built one of the most effective, credible, and highly-respected college-focused organizations in the U.S. Our growth has, however, been asynchronous, with program development and delivery running far ahead of more mundane but critically-important organizational priorities such as development and documentation. We have worked diligently since 2010 to restore that balance across the organization, addressing our deficiencies and building many of the prerequisites for growth. Over the past several months, we have taken meaningful steps towards sustainability:

- During a two-day, facilitated retreat in February 2012, based upon the input of seven important stakeholder groups, CoFo's Board of Directors codified our institutional Vision Statement, Values, Positioning Statement, and immediate priorities.
- We have captured all existing documentation relating to HR, development, and finance. Program documentation, more extensive and complex, is ongoing through 2012.
- We have developed 35 "as-is" process maps of CoFo's college completion program. 17 of these have been assessed and codified into "to-be" form; others are still under review and will be finalized by August 2012.

- CoFo launched a wholesale technological upgrade, the initial results of which will 'go live' in July 2012.
- In 2011-2012, CoFo piloted the utilization of college Work/Study students to lead after-school classes, as an alternative to AmeriCorps members. After a rocky start, this pilot yielded very promising results.

Results of College Forward's 2012 Board of Directors Retreat are as follows -

*Guiding principles:*

College Forward's Core Values are:

- Students First
- Nurture Relationships
- Family Focus
- Passion
- Persistence
- Pay it Forward
  - All in the most fun way possible

College Forward's Vision Statement is:

**Empowering Students. Inspiring Dreams,  
Changing Lives.**

College Forward's positioning statement is:

**Think Big, Manage Small**

## Strategic Priorities:

College Forward's Strategic Priorities include:

1. General:
  - a. Redraft Mission Statement
  - b. Present Retreat Outcomes to staff at semi-annual "State of the Organization" meeting in July
2. Growth Action Items:
  - a. Think big, manage small
    - i. Have high aspirations
    - ii. Establish good controls
    - iii. Get the money upfront, know where it goes
  - b. Build a strong fundraising model
    - i. Hire a Development Director
    - ii. Do research, give thought on how best to support Ray
    - iii. Identify marketable, productizable aspects of CoFo
    - iv. Figure out how to tap into the marketplace
    - v. Vet *Success Partnerships* as our first entry into the market
    - vi. Build a solid enterprise architecture
      1. Understand our requirements
      2. Make sure we have the right brainpower
      3. Hire the right contractors
      4. Map out the financial model
      5. Stay involved, monitor progress
  - c. Clearly articulate CoFo's brand and values; share with stakeholders
    - i. Look to strong models: Livestrong, Girl Effect, Apple, etc.
    - ii. Invest in good branding
    - iii. Get marketing help
    - iv. Get the best consultants in place
    - v. Keep messaging values as we scale
  - d. Develop and Implement succession plans
    - i. Hire a great second-in-command, train him/her to take over
    - ii. Identify and prioritize key positions
    - iii. Implement internal cross-training
    - iv. Schedule regular job rotations
    - v. Create self-sustaining processes
    - vi. Make regular progress
  - e. Spend time and money planning for growth
    - i. Check in/refresh strategic plan
    - ii. Break strategic plan down into smaller steps
    - iii. Make sure tactics match strategy, review quarterly
  - f. Replicate CoFo's program models
    - i. Continue to learn from our Houston experience
      1. Pending results of Fall 2013 re-enrollment
    - ii. Continue with work/study pilot as substitute for AmeriCorps
    - iii. Continue with College Completion pilot
    - iv. Document, document, document our approach
      1. Capture historical data
      2. Process documentation
    - v. Scout other potential sites in Texas

We are making excellent progress on these initiatives.

## Board of Directors and Board Committees

College Forward is grateful for the leadership of a strong volunteer Board of Directors, which is a powerful and effective driver of organizational growth (see Appendix E for biographies of College Forward Board Members):

Greg Bellush  
Tracy Benedict, *Vice Chair*  
Paul Brownell, *Chairman*  
Jason Fernandez, *Secretary*  
Mike Fitzpatrick  
Bill Forsberg  
Elsa Hinojosa  
Monte James  
Sean Kelly  
Rob Manzer  
Jacqueline Mata, *Treasurer*  
Meg Moore  
Ken Womack

The Board of Directors has established the following permanent committees:

### *Executive Committee*

Paul Brownell  
Tracy Benedict  
Jason Fernandez  
Jacqueline Mata

### *Finance Committee*

Mike Fitzpatrick, *Committee Chair*  
Tracy Benedict  
Jacqueline Mata

### *Resource Development Committee*

\*Dennis Cavner, *Committee co-Chair*  
Meg Moore, *Committee co-Chair*  
\*Hank Ewert  
Jason Fernandez  
\*Natalie Glover  
Sean Kelly  
Ken Womack  
Rob Manzer

### *Strategic Growth Committee*

Bill Forsberg, *Committee Chair*

Greg Bellush

Paul Brownell

\*Chris Earthman

Elsa Hinojosa

\*Randall Macon

Rob Manzer

Meg Moore

\*These individuals are not CoFo Board Members, but serve specific committees as volunteers.

Monte James, only recently elected to the Board, has not yet been assigned to a committee.

### **Staff Leadership**

#### *Lisa Fielder, Founder and Chief Executive Officer*

Lisa founded College Forward in 2003. For working tirelessly to serve students and develop sustainable programs that broaden CoFo's reach and reputation, Lisa was named a Bank of America "Neighborhood Hero" in 2006 and Ernst & Young's "Social Entrepreneur of the Year" in 2011. Founder and chairperson of the Austin College Access Network (facilitated by E3 Alliance), Lisa also serves on the Advisory Council for the Institute for Higher Education Policy/National College Access Network's "Research to Practice" briefs.

Lisa earned a B.A. from Trinity University and an M.Arch. from Rice University.

#### *Ray Blue, Development Director*

Ray joined College Forward in February 2013, after three years as Senior Director of Development at Dell Children's Hospital and six years as Vice President for Development at the United Way. He brings a depth of experience, a huge number of friends, and a fresh perspective to 'friendraising' that is a perfect fit for the CoFo culture.

Ray has a B.S. from the University of North Carolina and an M.Div. from Emory.

#### *Erica Gordon, Program Director – Austin*

Erica joined College Forward in 2008 to lead after-school classes at Del Valle High School. A talented manager of people and strategies, she now oversees program operations at all sites. Also a member of the growth team, Erica contributes to increasing CoFo's impact by perfecting and documenting replicable processes.

Erica holds a B.A. from Sam Houston State University and an M.S. from TCU.

#### *Austin Buchan, Manager, College Completion Initiatives*

Fluent in Spanish, Austin previously helped develop and implement a college preparation and completion program for low income students in rural Nicaragua. He oversees the development of College Forward's Success Partnerships.

Austin has a B.A. from Trinity University.

After several years of zero growth in permanent staff, CoFo has begun to carefully consider new, high-level job positions that address organizational limitations head-on, bringing in much-needed expertise and supporting succession planning. College Forward believes that the careful addition of seasoned professionals in key management roles will complement our young staff's enthusiasm and increase our likelihood of success in this scaling venture:

- An IT Technician, who supports CoFo's computing and communications equipment at all CoFo sites, was added to the staff in fall 2011.
- We are currently interviewing finalists for a newly-created Chief Operating Officer role, and hope to have that person on staff in July 2012.
- In fall 2012, we will add an individual who has extensive, successful experience in sales to post-secondary institutions. That candidate has already been identified.
- In early 2013, CoFo will add an Executive Assistant to address administrative duties.

## **Partners**

Through our partnership with a social venture group, Innovation+, we have expanded our Board and committee structure to include some of Austin's brightest minds and social entrepreneurs, who are committed to supporting CoFo's strategic growth. Innovation+ has committed to help College Forward raise the human and financial capital to fulfill our scaling plan, and they are very involved in that effort.

College Forward is fortunate to have earned the respect of credible professionals and organizations whose endorsement will support our entrance into this marketplace. Potential collaborators include current, committed funders (Bank of America Foundation, Barker Foundation, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Greater Texas Foundation, Impact Austin, Lumina Foundation, Meadows Foundation, OneStar Foundation, TG, USA Funds, etc.) and potential funders (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Houston Endowment, Kresge Foundation, New Profit, Growth Philanthropy Network, etc). A large number of education organizations are also happy to provide introductions and wholehearted advocacy for CoFo services: Austin College Access Network, the College Board, Educate Texas, Council of Public University Presidents and Chancellors, Education Policy Institute, E3 Alliance, Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas, National Association for College Admission Counseling, National College Access Network, Texas Association for College Admission Counseling, etc.

Some of our most essential partners are the public high schools we serve, who not only provide office space for our Austin and Houston operations for little or no charge, but who open their doors, classrooms, and computer labs to students and CoFo Coaches for after-school classes. It is thanks to their loyal and generous support that CoFo can boast successful students and low costs. School Districts whom we serve are Aldine ISD (Eisenhower High School), Austin ISD (Crockett, LBJ, and Travis High Schools), Del Valle ISD (Del Valle High School), Georgetown ISD (Georgetown High School), Goose Creek ISD (Lee and Sterling High Schools), Hays Consolidated ISD (Jack C. Hays and Lehman High Schools), Manor ISD (Manor and Manor New Tech High Schools), Pflugerville ISD (Connolly High School), and Round Rock ISD (Stony Point High School).

Texas colleges and universities – and especially our local institutions (Rice, St. Edward’s, St. Thomas, Southwestern, Texas State, University of Houston and University of Texas-Austin) not only generously host on-campus events, but they are ever-responsive to the needs of our students and of our organization.

## **Business Processes**

College Forward is ‘information rich and documentation poor.’ Though we have amassed tremendous organizational knowledge since 2003, little has been documented until now. Training each new cohort of mentors is increasingly time-consuming, and we struggled to transmit timely knowledge to our Houston expansion site.

College Forward begin gathering documentation across the organization in the fall of 2011, editing and codifying it or creating “as is” process maps, as practical. Four weeks of AmeriCorps training programs, for instance, have been captured and saved down to the last PowerPoint deck and handout. Program, event, financial, HR, and development process are mapped – and, during slower periods in the summer, these accumulated “as is” process maps will be studied for efficiency and ease of implementation, revised, and codified.

The arduous process of documenting practices and procedures across the organization is scheduled for completion in December 2012.

## **Culture**

We are extremely proud of our “CoFo struts when it walks down the street” vibe, and guard it jealously. With a goal of preserving and promoting the best parts of our culture, College Forward is currently undertaking several related initiatives:

In February, as a lead-up to our Board Retreat, CoFo surveyed several stakeholder groups to determine which of CoFo’s values are most essential to their continued relationship with the organization. Responses from each group – students, community partners, AmeriCorps members, staff members, and institutional partners – transformed into Wordles, guided the codification of CoFo’s organizational values and Vision Statement.

UXD (User Experience Design) research conducted on behalf of a “Next Generation of Student Supports” grant from Lumina Foundation evaluated CoFo stakeholders’ experiences from perhaps a more objective perspective. Results from that study were positive and encouraging:

## Stakeholders' Perceptions of CoFo's Culture

### Students

Supportive  
Informative  
Family  
Helpful  
Trust

### Community Partners

Experts  
Young  
Scalable  
Accommodating

### AmeriCorps Members

Fun  
Young  
Familial  
Encouraging  
'Funtential'  
Experimental  
Evolving

### Staff

Entrepreneurial  
Risk Taking  
Supportive  
Motivational  
Mutual Trust  
Strong Leadership

### Institutional Partners

Trusted  
Supportive

UXD research will be expanded in July 2012 to determine which specific elements of College Forward's programs and services have the greatest impact on student success. The outcomes of that research will not only weigh heavily in future curriculum revisions, but they will also contribute to a concurrent branding initiative.

In June 2012, College Forward will engage a branding firm to assist the organization in defining and communicating our identity to internal and external stakeholders. Working closely with Frank+Victor, the graphic design firm that developed our iconic logo and guided our name change in 2006 (from 'Admission Control: We Launch Futures' to 'College Forward'), this branding initiative will align all parts of our organizational identity, from website to collateral materials to the tee shirts students wear, to newsletters and social media outlets. We believe that an investment in branding at this time will contribute heavily to the ultimate success of our scaling initiatives, as the College Forward brand becomes more recognizable and credible.

Finally, our Board and management team have shamelessly copied the methods by which Southwest Airlines famously promotes its culture: we have established an internal ‘culture team’ whose job is to “infect” new people and sites with the “CoFo fever.” This team meets monthly to think up new and delightful ways to celebrate organizational accomplishments, outstanding contributors and student successes, and to perpetuate some of the creativity and spontaneity that make CoFo a great place to work. Beginning in 2012-2013, the organization will routinely earmark 0.5 percent of our annual budget to culture team activities.

**FINANCIAL PLAN FOR SCALING INITIATIVE**

College Forward’s total organizational budget for the five year period 2011-2016 is \$24,491,647, of which \$6,889,326 is earmarked for growth.

Period	Growth Costs	Program Costs	Total Costs	# Students
2011-2012	\$ 735,843	\$ 2,620,431	\$ 3,356,275	2,669
2012-2013	\$ 1,633,515	\$ 2,853,500	\$ 4,487,015	3,750
2013-2014	\$ 1,293,683	\$ 3,395,250	\$ 4,688,933	5,637
2014-2015	\$ 1,620,858	\$ 3,958,340	\$ 5,579,198	8,591
2015-2016	\$ 1,605,427	\$ 4,774,800	\$ 6,380,227	13,499
Totals	\$ 6,889,326	\$ 17,602,321	\$ 24,491,647	

A breakdown of growth expenses, by category, appears on the following pages:

- College Forward Growth Plan – Costs
- College Forward Growth Plan – Projected Costs and Students
- College Forward Growth Plan – Projected Sources of Revenue

Please refer to each page for an overview of income and expenses, and for a budget narrative by line item.

**College Forward Growth Plan – Costs**

This page is a summary of all projected College Forward expenses between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2016. Growth-related expenses are broken down into three broad categories:

The first category, “Sustainability costs,” not only encapsulates the heart of CoFo’s scaling initiative, but also addresses several long-postponed organizational needs (branding, marketing, additional office space, etc.), the addition of key personnel who have the experience to support growth, and developing a diverse, predictable and sustainable income stream that includes earned income and a greatly-expanded donor base.

Category two, “Technology Platform costs,” describes essential technology enhancements that must be in place to increase efficiency, improve student services, and support the rapid scaling of our impact.

The final category, “Incremental Growth costs,” outlines the costs associated with establishing CoFo’s high school program in additional cities. Because incremental growth is so resource-intensive, and our first commitment is to the students of our home state, College Forward will limit future city-by-city growth of our high school program to Texas cities. We do not anticipate having the capacity to undertake this kind of expansion before 2014 and, even then, will move forward only in concert with regional partners.

A separate category defines annual expenses for our existing high school programs in Austin and Houston, and for our College Completion program. Annual increases in this category reflect year-to-year growth in student enrollment.

### **College Forward Growth Plan – Projected Costs and Students**

This page projects student enrollment numbers and per-student costs, with and without a significant growth in student numbers.

The first section, “Incremental Growth Number of Students” describes planned enrollment growth in our existing Austin and Houston high school programs (note the flat enrollment in Austin), and reflects the fact that students move into the College Completion program after high school.

Section two, “Incremental Growth Total Costs per Student,” is a worst-case scenario, assuming that growth expenditures are not accompanied by increases in student enrollment. In this eventuality, as the existing operation absorbs all growth costs, CoFo’s per-student expenses would exceed our 2011-2012 cost of \$1,258, far into the future.

Section three, “Cumulative Growth Number of Students,” includes the projected enrollment numbers of our growth initiatives. Austin HS, Houston HS, and College Completion Program as described above. This section additionally lists student numbers for our 2011-2012 Success Partnerships pilot test (College Forward committed to support these students through college graduation), for a small beta test, and finally for the full launch of *Success Partnerships*. Section three also projects increases in enrollment due to licensing our high school curriculum, and from expanding our high school program to one additional Texas city in 2014.

Section Four, “Cumulative Growth Total Costs per Student,” describes the scenario CoFo anticipates, with significant growth in student enrollment, and reflects our projected reduction of annual per-student costs to \$473 in 2015-2016.

## **College Forward Growth Plan – Projected Sources of Revenue**

This last page itemizes College Forward’s projected income, by donor/grantor, over the next four years. Please note that these figures can and do change often – and we are grateful that financial support from these partners almost always increases from year to year.







## **RISK ASSESSMENT AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING**

College Forward's growth plan is not without substantial risks. The organization's leadership has considered both internal and external factors that could affect our proposal; the following contingencies, in particular, are at the forefront of mitigation planning:

### **A) Nobody's buying-**

The greatest risk to our scaling plan is establishing a viable market and developing strong partnerships. Though College Forward's relationships, reputation, proven outcomes, and powerful advocates are tremendous assets, our marketing and sales strategies must very specifically make a strong case for partnering with CoFo.

Because marketing and branding are not organizational strengths, CoFo has hired consultants experienced in market research, positioning, and pricing. We have earmarked \$341,000 of our strategic growth budget for branding, marketing, and market research. After 2016, based on the advice of our business consultants, CoFo will earmark a modest 3.5% of our annual operating budget for ongoing marketing-related expenses.

Equally important will be the 'face' of College Forward in establishing relationships with potential customers and making a case for partnership. We have already identified the ideal candidate, and in fall 2012 we will add a highly-respected, experienced salesperson whose track record of high-dollar sales to postsecondary institutions is stellar.

Fortunately, College Forward has tremendous assets and few significant competitors. Nobody can match our deep expertise in college completion for low-income students, our successful student outcomes, or the respect we have built over time for excellent, responsible, responsive service to students and partners alike.

In most cases the cost of our services will be lower than the cost to the institution of building and administering a similar program themselves. Not only that, but our programs and interventions are the result of years of experience dealing very specifically with a low-income population whose challenges and needs are very different from those of middle class students. Few institutions have the budget and experience to support low-SES student success.

College Forward also has, in the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and TG, extremely credible partners who want to see this venture succeed. They are well-positioned to advocate for our services to other grantees, many of which are the organizations and institutions whom we hope to serve.

### **B) Long Sales Cycle-**

Universities, particularly large state universities, are notoriously slow to make decisions; it may take CoFo months to develop the first partnership of this kind.

To mitigate this risk, College Forward will seek a diverse partner base, recruiting simultaneously from a variety of organization types. And CoFo has experience with exceptionally long decision processes and financial cycles – fortunately, we have the financial reserves to wait it out.

### **C) We Don't Raise Enough Growth Capital-**

In the past 15 months, College Forward has significantly augmented our fund development efforts:

- by partnering with Innovation+, an Austin-based social venture capital group (and the newest branch of Social Venture Partners International) that has committed to helping us raise \$6.9 million by 2016
- by establishing a committed Resource Development Committee of the Board of Directors, to help build relationships, plan “disruptive fundraising” strategies, and provide thought leadership and manpower for our development efforts
- by hiring a highly-experienced Development Director
- by adding a second grant writer
- by hiring a COO and a Salesperson, and
- by freeing our CEO up to build relationships and establish partnerships

### **D) AmeriCorps Funding is Reduced or Eliminated-**

In this event, CoFo will shift service providers from AmeriCorps members to college work-study students. The organization successfully utilized work-study students in 2005-2006 and again in 2011-2012, in partnership with St. Edward's University and the University of Texas-Austin.

### **E) Partnership Students Don't Match Our Low-Income/1st Gen Demographic Profile-**

We are experienced enough to know that this will happen occasionally. When it does, we note it in our database, and then move on – after all, this omission is rarely the student's fault. By gently but persistently reminding our partners about CoFo's values and mission, they will soon conform to our requirements.

### **F) We Grow Too Quickly, Thereby Undermining Our Existing Programs or Our Culture-**

College Forward's culture and people are tremendous assets; we often say that “growth is our DNA” because, between 2003 and 2011:

- Student enrollment increased 8900%, from 30 students to 2669.
- Annual income increased 2400%, from \$100,000 to \$2,429,558.
- Our annual cost per student decreased 64%, from \$3500 to \$1258.
- Despite this rapid growth, our critical student success metric - college acceptance - remained consistently high, varying between 98% and 99% of students per year

In anticipation of a wholly new kind of growth, however, CoFo has taken preemptive steps to preserve our central programs and our culture. Our goal is to scale quickly but intentionally, and to manage that growth at every stage.

College Forward's primary commitment is to our students, and real-time metrics tell us how they are performing at any given point in the program cycle. If we determine that our scaling initiatives are drawing attention or resources away from students, we will immediately slow or stop the pace of growth until we restore an essential balance. College Forward will not jeopardize our students' futures.