

Policy Brief | November 2023

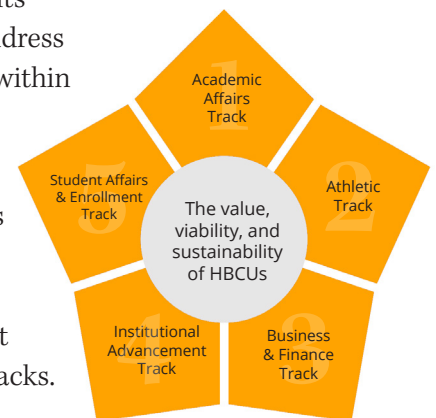
A series from the Southern Regional Education Board on the 2022 Higher Education Leadership Foundation Conference

Innovating Institutional Advancement at HBCUs

About

Historically Black college and university leaders from across the country met in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2022 to imagine the future of the HBCU sector. The Higher Education Leadership Foundation hosted the inaugural Ideation, Innovation & Collaboration: The Future of HBCUs conference, or IIC 2022, to discuss successes, challenges, threats and opportunities facing HBCUs today. The IIC 2022 conference served as a clarion call for institution leaders, administrators, funders and change agents to step up at this critical juncture and address HBCU's role, viability and sustainability within higher education.

Conference sessions provided an opportunity to share promising practices and solutions. As a conference partner, the Southern Regional Education Board has created this series of briefs to present information from the conference's five tracks.



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This report summarizes conference discussions related to the role institutional advancement plays in addressing HBCU value, viability and sustainability.

What is Institutional Advancement?

Institutional advancement is integral to the growth and development of colleges and universities. Advancement includes alumni relations, fundraising, internal and external communications, public and government relations, and overall community relationships. Together, these units support students, faculty and staff so they can advance the institution's mission. Developing alumni networks, public and private partnerships and strategically communicating donor impact is particularly important for HBCUs due to decades of underfunding from federal and state funding allocations.

Difficulty in Closing Endowment Gaps

Along with public funding, institutions rely on endowments for financial stability. The average rate of alumni giving at HBCUs has hovered around 10% for the past few decades, with private HBCUs having slightly higher giving rates than their public counterparts, according to the report *Giving Spare Change and Love to Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. Analyzing 2019 data, the Century Foundation found that average endowments per FTE student at public non-HBCUs are three times those of public HBCUs (Figure 2). Average endowments at private non-HBCUs are seven times those of private HBCUs (Figure 3).

Figure 2

Average Public Endowment Size (Per FTE)

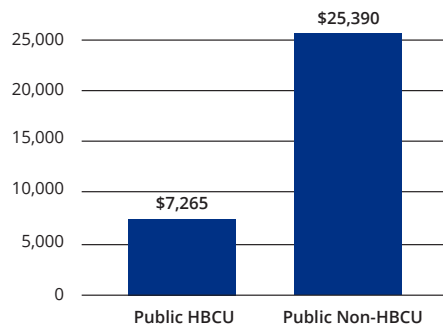
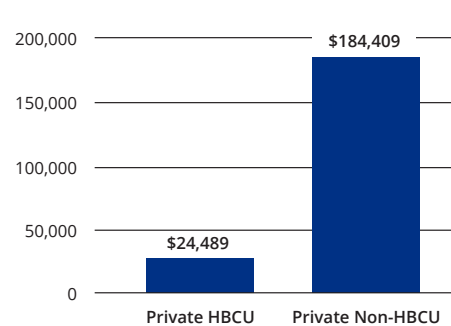


Figure 3

Average Private Endowment Size (Per FTE)



Note: FY 2019 Endowment data excludes two-year, tribal and medical colleges.

Source: Smith, Denise A. (September 2021). *Achieving Financial Equity and Justice for HBCUs*. The Century Foundation. Author calculations using IPEDs Endowment data for 2019.

Government Initiatives and Policies

In October 2021, the Biden administration announced significant increases in HBCU funding as part of the Build Back Better agenda, and Representative Alma Adams of North Carolina introduced the IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act to address historic inequities in HBCU funding and infrastructure. Policymakers in other states are addressing these gaps as well. For example,

in 2021, Maryland agreed to invest \$577 million to four HBCUs from 2023 through 2032 to settle a lawsuit resulting from an inequitable disparity in state funding between HBCUs and predominantly white institutes. A Tennessee legislative committee recently acknowledged the state underfunded Tennessee State University by up to \$544 million over the past 60+ years, failing to meet the state's obligations under its federal land-grant designation, according to a report by NPR.

Effective External Engagement

Fundraising is vital to creating and building endowments at HBCUs, especially public HBCUs, according to *Institutional Advancement at Historically Black Community Colleges: A multi-case study*. Annual alumni giving is one of the keys to funding endowments that provide infrastructure maintenance and expansion, scholarships and other financial aid, technology upgrades, attracting and retaining top administrators and faculty, and more, as reported in "Solution to the HBCU Crisis: Alumni Must Give Back." Alumni engagement includes financial donations, volunteerism, on- or off-campus service opportunities or a public display of institutional affinity. Studies found that institutions with clear fundraising strategies and a focus on students as lifelong donors, have attained high alumni giving rates. Ellucian cited several sustainable alumni fundraising strategies, including micro-campaigns, connecting alumni passion with institutional needs, embracing virtual events, building momentum for online giving and meeting alumni at every age and stage. Although not very reliable, philanthropic contributions from foundations or private donors are another source of external funding.

Cultivating effective partnerships between institutions, industries and businesses, and the surrounding community can address funding gaps. These partnerships can open doors to other funding and institutional support. A recent report, *Presidents and their Strategies to Build Partnerships at HBCUs*, reveals how some HBCU presidents are building partnerships with business and industry to improve the stability of their institutions. The report identifies five common practices among these HBCU presidents: 1) prioritizing actions, 2) being student-centered, 3) being data-driven, 4) collaboration and 5) innovation.

IIC 2022 Discussions of Institutional Advancement

At IIC 2022, the Institutional Advancement sessions focused on three key questions to inspire discussion, ideation, innovation and collaboration. These included:

- 1. How do we structure and market university initiatives and our value with our local community and alumni to build better partnerships?**
- 2. How do we create sustainable fundraising? How do we increase unrestricted dollars in our endowment? How do we create a culture of giving among alumni?**
- 3. How do state and federal policy changes affect our work? What is the importance of lobbyists for every institution? How do we communicate our value with policy-makers at all levels?**

HBCU institutional advancement officers, university presidents, funders, researchers and other administrators attended these sessions. The following is a summary of the ideas shared by these participants, as analyzed by the SREB.

Challenges

Three key challenges related to institutional advancement at HBCUs were identified.

1. Some HBCUs have weak outreach efforts and this lack of engagement hinders income generation. This can have many causes but administrative culture and lack of investment from university staff in outreach is one major cause, even in instances where the institutional advancement office may have ample capacity. Participants discussed various ways to address fundraising challenges through effective outreach and communications strategies, including: 1) leveraging social media and influencers, crowd funding and giving days; 2) focusing on branding versus marketing alone; 3) using data to guide efforts and make key fundraising decisions; and 4) seeing real estate as a resource in income generation rather than only a financial gap for the university.
2. Many HBCUs lack proper donor databases and data analysts, which hinders the ability to use data to shape outreach efforts.
3. HBCU alumni are not properly leveraged as donors, partners and advocates of the university's value and worth to the community.

“A vision without a plan and money is an illusion.”

— Conference attendee

Session participants stressed the value of people and relationships to institutional advancement efforts. Four audiences were highlighted as key advancement partners, including:

- Students and alumni, especially millennials and Generation Z
- Local and statewide elected officials
- Lobbyists, particularly related to generating public funding
- Philanthropists, foundations and other external funders

Ideation

The IIC 2022 asked participants to consider three frameworks for approaching HBCU sustainability: ideation, innovation and collaboration. During the institutional advancement sessions, two key ideation themes surfaced.

- **Community knowledge.** Cultivating an intimate knowledge of the community can help HBCUs better communicate and build relationships with community partners. As a result of strong relationships, the university

“You cannot be sustainable as a stand-alone. You have to be part of a community.”

— Conference attendee

and their partners can ideate together more effectively and “strive for bigger” goals and results.

- **More robust alumni engagement.** Alumni have always been a key advancement audience, but often universities ask alumni for money and stop there. Drawing on alumni ideas, expertise and networks can broaden community reach, advocacy efforts and help ideate more effectively with administrators.

Innovation


For HBCUs, especially smaller institutions, innovation can feel out of reach, as though it applies only to the creative or technical sectors. The institutional advancement session participants highlighted three ways to be innovative that can yield crucial dividends:

- **Rethinking capital projects and property assets.** HBCUs can increase donor investment through estate planning, trusts, property transfers and more. Communicating and simplifying these innovative opportunities for community groups and individuals can increase endowments.
- **Updating communications and outreach efforts.** There are many innovative ways to tell and amplify an institution’s story. For instance, fully utilizing social media platforms and other creative online outreach channels are low cost but high yield investments.
- **More effectively collecting and analyzing donor data.** This allows universities to better understand donor impact on revenue generation. While new technology systems can be quite costly at times on the front end, they can save in personnel costs and lead to high-impact donor development strategies for the university.

Collaboration

Participants in the institutional advancement sessions spent the most time discussing how to better collaborate with external partners, with other HBCUs and within their own institutions, emphasizing that relationships are at the heart of this work. Participants and presenters mentioned seven key ways for HBCUs to better collaborate internally, externally and with each other:

1. Talk to each other and share data on advancement strategies.
2. Share funding across institutions.
3. Collaborate with community and corporate partners for mutual benefit.



“Advocacy is so crucial and makes a difference. It separates the small institutions from the large ones. Having a professional advocate can be the difference in millions of dollars. They need to see and hear you.”

— Conference attendee

4. Consider collaborating and sharing in lobbying efforts.
5. Collaborate with political partners to improve public funding.
6. Increase time and energy spent with collaborative partners to yield positive results.
7. Collaborate and communicate internally between the advancement office and university other departments for broader advocacy and success.

Final Takeaways for Institutional Advancement

All advancement strategies are built on intentional relationships. HBCUs must devote more time to fostering partner relations and tracking the impact of their activities and touchpoints with partners to maximize the return on investment.

Conference discussions led to three key takeaways related to improving institutional advancement:

1. Networking, lobbying and creative outreach can yield dividends with government funders, philanthropists and other community partners. It is a mistake to under invest in these strategies.
2. Community partners can provide more than just donations — they can provide additional opportunities, relationships and connect shared resources.
3. Creative and innovative communications approaches can better use university resources. New branding and marketing strategies and media technologies can more effectively reach key stakeholders like students and alumni.

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