Lumina Community Partnership for Attainment - FAQs

1) Why is Lumina interested in community higher education efforts?

We believe communities, particularly those working in partnership across sectors, not only have a vested interest in building an educated populace, but are well-equipped to influence culture and behavior. Economic and demographic trends point to the necessity of engaging high population centers in this work. If the US is to reach Goal 2025, with 60% of Americans possessing a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential, we need individuals, organizations, and partnerships working at all levels to leverage their assets and provide the opportunity for many more students, young and adult, to get to and through a postsecondary credential.

2) You want to increase percentage of post-secondary educated people to 60 percent. Where does the country stand right now with these numbers?

As of 2011, the latest data year available, attainment in the US is about 39%, an increase of two percentage points since 2008. For more information, as well as information about your state and community, visit www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation. Currently, because of national reporting, we are unable to account for the nation’s attainment rate for certificates. Goal 2025, however, is inclusive of certificates. We encourage communities to pay attention to this type of credential, and we understand that this data will start to be collected in the near future.

3) What criteria were used in the selection of invitational applicants?

Lumina has a vast network of grantees and partners in the field, working at the national, state and local levels on higher education efforts, and staff remain vigilant looking for movements in the field that relate to our goals. We targeted communities with established and growing efforts that are striving to significantly increase higher education attainment. We also solicited advice and input from a variety of national organizations working in communities, who recommended communities for partnership.

4) How many communities will be chosen for partnership out of the full invitation list?

For the first cohort, we invited 28 communities to participate. We did not invite the communities to apply with the intent of cutting the list to a lower number. It is our hope that all of the communities invited will ultimately apply and enter into the partnership.

5) Will Lumina release the list of communities invited to apply?

Lumina will not release the list of communities invited to apply until the application period is complete and final decisions regarding the partnership are made. However, in cases where cities are located in close proximity and may share media markets, etc, we will notify the communities.

6) Are there any states where multiple cities have been selected?

There are a couple states where multiple communities have been selected to apply. However, the impetus behind the invitation was driven entirely by the communities’ activity and commitment to attainment, not necessarily to their state.

7) How does this work connect to Lumina’s Latino Student Success program?

Lumina’s Latino Student Success program started a couple years ago, and currently has 13 communities focused on improving Latino preparation for, enrollment in and completion from college. The Community Partnership for Attainment draws many lessons from the LSS program, but is operating on a significantly larger scale, and is not supporting start-up efforts. We intend to bring current LSS sites into the Community Partnership effort, both to enhance the capacity of
those cities to focus on higher education outcomes, and to provide learning opportunities for the other communities which must focus on Latino Student Success.

8) How will Lumina address multiple initiatives happening in the same city?

Having multiple initiatives going on in the same city does not negatively impact Lumina’s desire to engage. However, multiple competing initiatives or multiple initiatives that do not appear to be gaining traction will negatively impact the potential for a community to be invited to participate. It is not Lumina’s intent with this program to “anoint” one program over another. Rather, we encourage communities to build true collaborations that reduce redundancy, align resources, and produce results. We expect that multiple initiatives in the same city will work together and leverage their resources.

9) How does Lumina’s strategy address Collective Impact?

Lumina fully supports the tenets of Collective Impact, and believes that community partnership that utilize those tenets are more likely to achieve lasting results. However, Lumina also understands that true collaboration is difficult and takes time. Therefore, Lumina is not requiring that communities adapt to a particular framework, but we are requiring that multiple community sectors work together on a higher education agenda, and communities engage in data-based decision making. Lumina will also provide communities with support to build out and strengthen their various collaborative models.

10) My city has a cradle-to-career effort underway. Does this automatically qualify my community?

Lumina celebrates cradle-to-career efforts, which often work to align services, opportunities and programs to positively impact the lives of children and adults. However, because Lumina is focused on higher education attainment, simply having a cradle-to-career program underway does not automatically qualify a community for entrance into the partnership. Community efforts must have strong work occurring to impact higher education attainment. Further, that effort must address community residents who are in or in close proximity to college enrollment (high school graduates, college students, returning adults, etc.). We do not, for the purposes of the Lumina Community Partnership for Attainment, consider early childhood or elementary/middle school efforts as postsecondary attainment strategies. Further, for the purposes of the Partnership for Attainment program, we will encourage communities to focus on moving the postsecondary needle, so there will need to be a clear line drawn between efforts that focus on high school students and their ultimate postsecondary enrollment and completion.

11) We have a strong high school completion project underway, and it doesn’t include higher education right now. We believe we can add higher education, but it is a new issue. Are we at a disadvantage?

Lumina is interested in supporting communities as they build out their postsecondary attainment strategies. However, we are looking to partner with communities that have already undertaken some effort to organize around that issue. We encourage communities that are considering adding higher education programming to connect with other cities to learn, and to keep Lumina updated for potential entry in a later partnership cohort. Lumina will have multiple opportunities for cities to apply before 2016.

12) Will the collaboration group be required to support all of the target populations?

No, though we require communities to focus on one or a combination of target populations and/or issues, driving toward increased attainment.

13) How broadly might we define the geographic boundaries of the metro-area / region?
The geographic boundaries of the metro-area/region may be defined as broadly as is appropriate to the organizing body. For instance, some mobilization efforts are lead through regional workforce investment boards that operate within a multi-county region. Other efforts are targeted toward an area inside a larger city. Both are appropriate for the Community Partnership for Attainment. The key factor is the ability to mobilize the population within the geographic area selected for focus.

14) **What are participating communities expected to do under this program?**

Participating communities are expected to utilize the partnership as an opportunity to broaden and/or deepen their higher education work. Once the application for partnership has been accepted, communities will enter a planning phase. This phase will require communities to build a 3-year action plan, with key objectives and outcomes articulated annually. Once the planning phase ends, communities will receive funding, technical assistance, network development, and responsive support to execute on their plans to achieve their objectives. Communities will also be expected to participate in network convenings and learning opportunities, to report on outcomes they have achieved and challenges experienced, and to share their stories with others, particularly those communities looking to build out their own higher education programs.

15) **To avoid situations where some communities set very ambitious goals while others choose to underpromise and overdeliver, what advice do you have in articulating achievable goals?**

First, it is important to understand that while the nation’s “Goal 2025” is 60%, your community goal should be relevant to where you are now, and where you want to be in the future. We anticipate that some communities will set a goal of less than 60%, while others will shoot beyond that mark. This is entirely appropriate.

Second, through the Charter Development phase, communities will receive strategic advice and guidance about how to set their goals, and will build a plan in partnership with Lumina and our national partners. In the case where communities’ objectives are either unambitious or unachievable, we will work with those communities to arrive at an agreement. We do not expect communities to meet an ambitious overall attainment goal in three years, but we do hope communities will use this program to make progress on key activities and objectives that can lead to improved probability of success down the road.

16) **Will the learning opportunities be provided at no charge as part of the partnership?**

All of the opportunities articulated in the plan will be offered at no charge to communities, including participation in convenings and learning labs. In addition, we will provide a comprehensive menu of options that a community collaboration may select from in order to form a professional development and learning network plan. However, to manage costs and capacities of our technical assistance partners, we will put an upper bound on the number of communities they can assist.

17) **Could you define the expectations of cities on site visits, cross-city meetings, etc. annually once the Partnership is established?**

Lumina will convene the Partner communities at least once a year for a major gathering. In addition, communities have the opportunity to engage in Learning Labs, or issue-specific gatherings of communities addressing the same challenge. In cases where communities are traveling for the purposes of the Partnership, costs will be covered outside of grant funding.

18) **What does the “Theory of Change” mean?**

By “theory of change” (Application, Section 2, item 4), we are asking for a description of what you want to do, and how you want to do it. Why are you focusing on the target population or critical
issue? What do you want to change about it? How are you going to change what you want to change? And why do you think what you plan will impact that change?

19) **Would it be possible for Lumina to provide additional information on the meaning of "system change"?** (Application, section 2, item 4c)

By system change, we refer to programs that undertake significant civic, educational and resource-utilization reform, intending not just to increase the uptake of higher education opportunity, but to change the delivery of that education, and the functions of the infrastructure within a community.

20) **How many of the professional development opportunities may our collaborative group utilize?**

Based on the community’s action plan, delivered through the Charter Development phase, a community may utilize any number of opportunities. However, because we are dealing with a very large number of communities, we will ask partner cities to be reasonable in their requests, and to tie requests for technical assistance and development opportunities to their plan.

21) **On the first page of the application, it indicates the fiscal agent can be different than the coordinating agent. Can you explain?**

Many communities will have established organizations leading their higher education attainment work—organizations that are able to accept grant dollars. However, communities with newer efforts, committee approaches, or Collective Impact approaches may either not have fiscal capacity within the coordinating structure, or may choose to deliberately separate the coordination and fiscal authority. If coordination and fiscal authority reside within the same organization, please use that organization for both fields. If it does not, please identify the appropriate agents for both.

22) **What types of activities will grant dollars support?**

The grant dollars provided under this program will be very flexible and can support a wide variety of expenses, including staff, consulting, database development, planning, convening, publications and other items. Communities will be expected to articulate how they plan to spend the dollars allocated, and will report against that plan. Grant dollars may not support direct scholarships or any political or lobbying activity.

23) **How will grant dollars be awarded? Are there matching requirements?**

Grant dollars will be awarded each year, contingent upon the achievement of the objectives and outcomes established in the community plan. Communities that achieve their outcomes will receive the next year’s allocation. Those communities who are delayed will be reviewed, but will be eligible throughout the term of the program to draw down annual allocations on a flexible schedule. Grant dollars will be awarded to the first cohort under the following schedule:

- $25,000 in 2013 for planning phase
- $75,000 in 2014
- $75,000 in 2015
- $25,000 in 2016

We do not require matching funds, but expect that many communities, to leverage the investment, will match some or all of the Lumina grant.

24) **Must the planning grant be exhausted by the end of 2013?**
No, the planning grant will not have a deadline by the end of 2013. The planning grant may be spent out over time, and its exhaustion is not a barrier to receiving the first annual award.

25) Is my program required to have a higher education partner?

It is strongly advised that communities build partnerships and healthy working relationships with higher education institutions. Those institutions are, after all, the only organizations that actually grant degrees.

26) My work focuses on one population. Is this okay, or should we focus more broadly?

We encourage communities to follow their priorities. Focusing work on one population, particularly one that has been traditionally underserved, is absolutely appropriate, particularly if that focus is able to galvanize action and attention in the community. A broad approach may be appropriate, as well, but could be more difficult and complex to mobilize. Either approach, provided it is addressing higher education attainment, is encouraged for the purposes of the Lumina Community Partnership.

27) Can I partner with organizations/community sectors that are not mentioned in the invitation packet?

The organizations and community sectors that are mentioned in the packet are simply examples. We encourage every community to build partnerships with the organizations and actors that are able to contribute to higher education attainment. Organizations should make a strong effort to work with and leverage other related initiatives.

28) How will Lumina facilitate the collection and reporting of key performance indicators (KPIs)?

Lumina has multiple purposes for facilitating the collection and reporting of performance indicators. First, we want to ensure that communities receive data and indicators with enough frequency to drive necessary course-corrections and resource alignment. We also seek to build community bench strength in gathering data independently. Finally, we will use the KPIs to drive internal planning. For cohort 1, we will provide higher education indicator collection and reporting for each community, including information on postsecondary enrollments, persistence, and completions. We will teach communities to monitor their own attainment rates, and will provide support for communities to learn how to gather the indicators needed for specific efforts.

29) Can you describe more fully the types of data you will be collecting?

Ultimately, this work comes down to improvement in four key areas that are relevant to higher education attainment: postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary retention, postsecondary completion (graduation), and postsecondary attainment\(^1\). These will be the key pieces of information that Lumina will track and facilitate for communities in our evaluation of “moving the needle.” However, we do expect that communities will want and need a wider variety of indicators, such as K-12 to postsecondary transition rates, success of distinct population groups, and more specific program indicators.

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\(^1\) There is a difference between completion and attainment. Completion often gets defined as graduation rates, or the number of students exiting college with a degree in a certain amount of time divided by the number who start a degree program. Completions can be measured in rates, though the methodology is disputed and often does not count significant numbers of students we care about, including returning adults, part time students, and transfer students. Attainment is the proportion of a community’s population within the age range of 25-64 (working age) that holds a postsecondary credential. Obviously, increased completions often lead to increased attainment rates, though the connection is not 1:1, as residents, particularly young people, are mobile.
It is very likely that, in the information Lumina provides communities from the National Student Clearinghouse, that we will attempt to break that information down by population groups where it is available. Communities will also likely have the opportunity to track specific student population groups through direct engagement with NSC.

A note on the data—it is possible to track a distinct group of students to and through college with the establishment of a cohort. This would be the community’s responsibility. By preparing a distinct list of individuals to track, NSC should be able to provide aggregate data about their movement through postsecondary to a credential. However, at the aggregate level, the data will report on ALL students, not just those who graduated from a specific high school.

30) Will Lumina provide access to baseline data to be used in completing the application prior to Sept 20?

The baseline data to be provided, including labor market information, higher education outcomes, and collaboration strength, will be provided following September 20. We ask that communities provide their current attainment rate and a higher education goal as signs of focus and commitment. Deeper descriptions of the work and action planning will take place during the charter development phase.

31) What is the Charter Development Phase?

Following the approval of applications for Partnership, the Charter Development Phase will begin. This phase is intended to enable communities to develop their action plans for the duration of the Partnership. These action plans will articulate annual objectives and activities that, when reached, should provide momentum toward the achievement of the community’s overarching attainment goal. Communities will articulate: 1) what they want to do; 2) how they are going to do it; 3) what resources the activity will require; and 4) how they know they have succeeded.

These objectives will be partnered with identification of technical assistance and supports from the Partnership program in a “Charter,” which will serve as the agreement between Lumina and the community.

32) Please provide clarification regarding section 2 question 6 of the partnership application.

We do prioritize and collect data tied to metrics today. Are you requesting that we provide post-secondary targets for the metrics that we collect today or are you looking for us to provide a prioritized listing of metrics which we currently collect?

We ask communities to identify, preliminarily, the types of postsecondary outcomes they might expect from their work. These are not intended to be targets or established outcomes, but to get the community thinking about which indicators are meaningful, if they have not already. The metrics information that is requested will enable Lumina to plan and organize the cohort. Communities are not expected to report against the outcomes they list in this question.

33) You articulated that Lumina would be entering into an agreement with National Student Clearinghouse. Can you provide more information about that?

The National Student Clearinghouse provides cross-state, cross-institution data about student participation in and transition through postsecondary education. Where local high schools are participating, the NSC also provides information about the transition from K-12 to postsecondary. We think this type of information is important not only for the purposes of the overall Community Partnership for Attainment, but also for your work in communities. The terms of our agreement with NSC are still being worked out, but we anticipate that communities will receive support, at a level to be determined, to enable them to link their K-12 systems and make direct queries.

34) Can you describe the nature of the evaluation process, and the evaluation assistance that will be provided?
Lumina has engaged the OMG Center to provide evaluation for the overall community mobilization strategy. OMG will monitor aggregate data and approaches, and will conduct “deep dives” into 8-10 communities using various methodologies. Lumina’s evaluation will not likely meet the needs of communities looking to do an in-depth evaluation of their work. However, this type of activity is an entirely appropriate use of grant dollars.

35) **What is the timeline / length of the partnership?**

The length of the partnership is through 2016.

36) **Will the partnership have the potential to continue beyond 2016?**

The partnership may have the potential to continue beyond 2016, but for the purposes of organizing the work, we are using a term that coincides with Lumina’s strategic planning schedule.

37) **Is there flexibility on the timeframe for the Charter Development process?**

To some degree the Charter Development phase will extend through the following month as we negotiate the details and approaches. However, the first cohort does fall into this phase during the holiday months, and we understand the pressures that time of year introduces. We will provide more information very soon about how much flexibility we can offer, and whether a new, later due date may be established.