MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS MODELS OF SUCCESS

A Series of Briefs Looking Back on Two Decades of Impact & Lessons Learned from Key Lumina Initiatives

Prepared by Kelly Wilson Porter

October 1, 2023

KWP insights

Executive Summary: MSI Models of Success

PURPOSE

To elevate the collective voice and increase the capacity of MSIs to be leaders in the field in advancing access and success for racially-minoritized students through strengthening partnerships, policies and practices, and dissemination efforts among MSIs. Ultimately, this work was intended to advance enrollment, persistence, retention, and completion for Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and low-income students.

TIMELINE	TOTAL LUMINA INVESTMENT	KEY PARTNERS
2009 ⟷ 2013	$7M	Mathematica, Progress Together / IHEP Institute for Higher Education Policy / American Indian Higher Education Consortium *See Figure 1 on Page 4 for a list of MSIs*

IMPACT ON THE FIELD

Partnerships: Generally, most MSI partnerships achieved greater levels of communication, coordination, and collaboration as a result of the grant.

Data Use and Knowledge: A majority of grantees made strides in collecting, analyzing, and using data more effectively. However, most MSIs did *not* succeed in building up critical *data infrastructure and resources* to support increased *data capacity*, which was a key goal of the initiative.

Policies, Programs and Student Supports: While the short implementation time frame of three years was insufficient to produce *major* changes to policies and practices, many grantees reported smaller-scale changes to programs, student supports and policies, e.g. changes to curriculum and pedagogy and expanding student support services.

Student Outcomes: While Lumina originally expected that MSIs would see gains in student outcomes during the grant period, and these outcomes were expressed in the theory of change used by the grantees and partners, the final evaluation report did not cite impact on student outcomes at any of the MSIs.

Dissemination: Many grantees made strides in disseminating information about their efforts, including through media, outreach, presentations, and publications. However, it is unclear whether or not dissemination efforts resulted in increased awareness, buy-in, or replication of efforts to increase success for racially minoritized students.

LUMINA'S LESSONS LEARNED

Prioritize and Plan: Encourage institutions that are pursuing multiple goals to focus, at least initially, on *one* of their goals and provide support to help prioritize and sequence grant activities.

Invest in Sustainability: Provide guidance regarding expectations for sustainability, clarifying if it is the project activities or the outcomes –or both—that you expect them to sustain.

Assess *Institutional* Readiness: Sufficiently assessing the readiness of institutions to participate in an initiative is critical to success.

Assess *Collaborative* Readiness: To succeed as collaborations, partnerships require strong leadership support, incentives, and motivation, trusting relationships, shared decision making and adaptability to be successful.

Build Data Capacity, Infrastructure, and Guidance: The MSIs involved needed more support and guidance than what was provided to build meaningful data capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, the grantees could have benefitted from having a set of clear expectations for the proper collection, interpretation, and use of data.

Allow More Time for Dissemination: Dissemination should be expected to begin no sooner than mid-project and should be supported after a project ends.

Improving Student Outcomes Takes More Time: In this and many other initiatives, Lumina saw that improving student outcomes in the course of a grant cycle was not a realistic expectation.

Introduction to this Series of Briefs

Purpose: This brief is part of a series looking back on two decades of impact and lessons learned from key Lumina-funded initiatives. The purpose of examining this set of key initiatives is to explore Lumina's impact and reflect lessons learned that might inform how the foundation conceives of and plans for its role(s), impact, and strategies in the future.

Methodology and Limitations: By design, these briefs focus mostly on existing documents and data related to the initiatives, e.g. grant reports, evaluation and research findings, and any other key documents available in Lumina's grant system and the web. Therefore, the briefs may lack more recent and longer-term perspectives on the broader impact and lessons learned from these initiatives. Thus, they are intended to be used as a jumping off point for conversations at Lumina focused on lessons learned from past work and implications for the next strategic plan.

MSI Models of Success: Overview, Impact, & Lessons Learned

Purpose and Scope

The Minority Serving Institution Models of Success (MSI-MS) initiative, funded from 2009 – 2013, was Lumina's first large, long-term investment that focused on advancing attainment at minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Lumina awarded nearly $7 million in grants to 26 MSIs, as well as TA providers and other national support partners in the hopes of strengthening the influence of MSIs in higher education and equipping them with supports to improve institutional practice and policy. Ultimately, Lumina expected this work would position MSIs to increase the number of racially minoritized and low-income students enrolling in and completing postsecondary credentials. Figure 1 below shows the grantees and partners involved in this initiative.

Figure 1: Grantees and Partners Involved in the MSI-MS Initiative

Grantees / Lead Institution	2-year Partners	4-year Partners	MSI / Organization Type	Funding Amount
American Indian Higher Education Consortium	N/A	N/A	National partner supporting TCUs	$500k
California State University, Monterrey Bay	Hartnell College, Cabrillo Community College	N/A	HSIs	$500k
Florida International University	Miami Dade College	N/A	HSIs	$525k
Institute for Higher Education Policy	N/A	N/A	Policy and Communications Consultant	$1.2M

Jackson State University	Hinds Community College	Alcorn State University, Dillard University, Miles College, Tougaloo College	HBCUs	$543k
Mathematica / Urban Institute*	N/A	N/A	Evaluator	$1M
Salish Kootenai College	Fort Peck Community College	N/A	TCUs	$402k
Southern Education Foundation	N/A	N/A	National Partner supporting HBCUs and HSIs	$500k
University of North Carolina	N/A	Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, Winston-Salem State University, University of North Carolina at Pemberton	HBCUs and Native Students (Pemberton)	$516k
University of Pennsylvania	N/A	N/A	Research Consultant to highlight models of success	$500k
University of Texas, El Paso	El Paso Community College	Prairie View A&M University, Texas A&M International University	HSIs and HBCU (Prairie View)	$590k

*Originally, Lumina made a grant to the Urban Institute to conduct the MSI-MS evaluation but when the Project Director left and went to Mathematica, Lumina shifted the evaluation to Mathematica.

Rationale

At the time that Lumina launched the MSI-MS initiative in 2009, 25% of African Americans and 17% of American Indians and Hispanics held postsecondary degrees, compared to 40% for all Americans. Cognizant of the persistent equity gaps that disproportionately affected students of color, Lumina decided to invest in MSIs as levers of change and to build their capacity to serve more students of color and influence further systemic change.

Susan Johnson, who co-led this work at Lumina, was careful to note in a recent interview that the MSI-MS initiative did not necessarily mark a new step in Lumina's equity journey. "Lumina always cared about racially minoritized students," she said, "but we approached them indirectly through proxies (community colleges and MSIs) and our commitments were not explicit." She emphasized that Lumina did not explicitly state the word "equity" in an external-facing way until its inclusion in the 2013 strategic plan and the creation of an equity imperative statement in 2014; at that point the MSI-MS work was essentially over.

Lumina's engagement with MSIs was limited and indirect prior to the start of the MSI-MS initiative; previous investments were channeled through associations and intermediaries such as the American Indian College Fund and the American Association for Higher Education. These early investments focused primarily on research about and advocacy for MSIs, as well as capacity building for partner organizations that could help advance the work of MSIs. MSI-MS marked Lumina's first direct, large-scale investment in MSIs.

Vision and Approach

Jamie Merisotis, Lumina's President, stated that the vision for the initiative was to "amplify the collective voice and national leadership of MSIs to improve institutional practice and develop policy to more effectively educate all students of color" (Philanthropy News Digest). The MSI-MS initiative was both a capacity and public-will building effort intended to boost MSIs' collective voice and capacity to innovate, collaborate and lead change in the field. Lumina assumed that strengthening the individual and collective voices of MSIs could help them secure additional funding and resources to increase their impact. Another assumption was that policy makers and other institutions would learn from the experience and expertise of the MSIs, ideally leading to scaling the adoption of effective postsecondary policies and practices emerging from MSI-MS. Ultimately, Lumina hypothesized that all these changes would lead to increases in enrollment, completion, and attainment for racially-minoritized populations.

In pursuit of these overarching goals, grantees were expected to focus on three strategies, as shown in the theory of change below:

➢ *building partnerships* with MSIs;

➢ *implementing projects* in collaboration; and

➢ and *disseminating lessons learned* and other findings.

Figure 2: MSI-MS Program Theory of Change
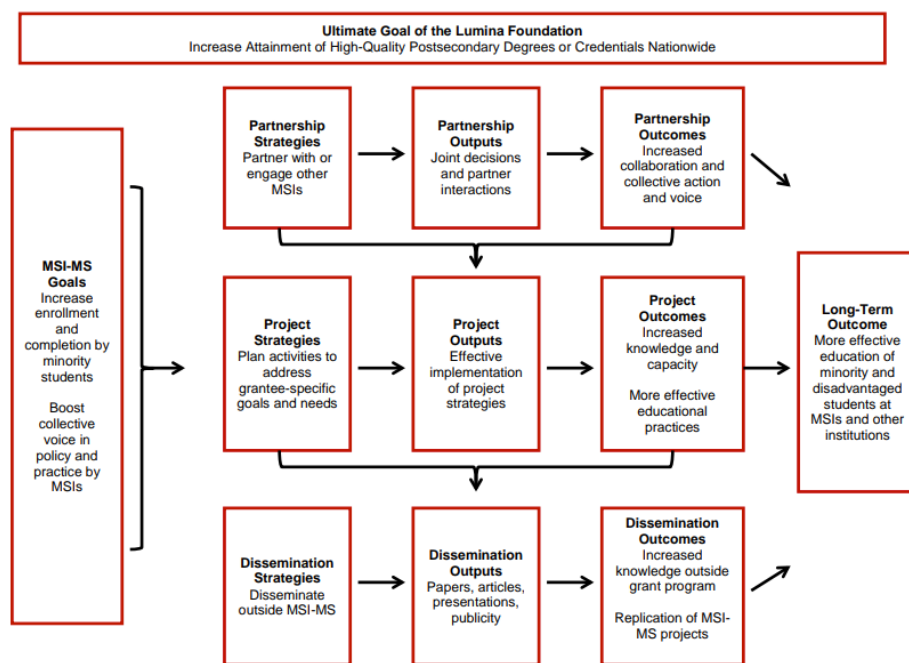
Lumina knew that strong partnerships between MSIs would be critical to achieving the vision for this initiative. From the start of the proposal process, two or more MSIs were required to collaborate and co-develop implementation plans in partnership. The core strategy used by all the MSIs involved collecting and analyzing data, then using results to inform changes to policies and practices to advance student success. The MSIs were free to determine what student success-oriented interventions to pursue; thus,

their approaches varied widely. For example, CSUMB focused on improving developmental education through curricular revisions, whereas FIU focused on improving transfer student success by enhancing the coordination of transfer student services at sending and receiving institutions, and UNC focused on improving retention and persistence for Black male students.

Dissemination was expected to result in the diffusion and distribution of knowledge, evidence, and models beyond the participating institutions and to essentially support the scaling up of policy and practice change to advance student success for racially minoritized students. Lumina supported grantees to share out learning from their projects to key audiences such as with scholars via articles in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at conferences, and with policymakers and educators through feature articles in the education or general press. Grantees had access to consulting experts to support dissemination efforts, including IHEP and their subgrantee, Widmeyer Communications.

Impact on the Field

Ultimately, the long-term outcomes Lumina expected to see advanced by this initiative—increased enrollment, completion, and attainment among racially-minoritized populations—did not come to fruition. The final evaluation report did not cite impact on any student outcomes at any of the MSI's involved in the initiative; it stated that the short implementation time period and various data challenges limited the ability to track changes in student level outcomes.

Some of the intermediate outcomes Lumina expected to achieve *did* come to fruition, including the following:

> **Strengthened Partnerships and Collaboration**: Generally, most MSI partnerships achieved greater levels of communication, coordination, and collaboration as a result of the grant. Many participating MSIs reported establishing new and/or strengthening existing relationship and building trust with partner institutions. Some partnerships continued beyond the duration of the grant period, while others did not.

> **Increased Data Use and Knowledge**: A majority of grantees made data collection and analysis a top priority and reported that they gained important insights from their data that drove decision making in the next steps of the grant activities. For instance, FIU reported increased knowledge about their first year and first-generation students, as well as dual admissions transfer students. SKC learned more about the factors that affect performance in developmental education for American Indian students. *However, despite gains in data knowledge and use, the evaluation stipulated that most MSIs did not succeed in building up critical data infrastructure and resources to support increased data capacity, which was a key goal of the initiative.*

> **Enhanced Policies, Programs and Student Supports**: The final evaluation report stipulates that the short implementation time frame of three years was insufficient and unlikely to produce major changes to policies and practices, especially given the time required to develop partnerships, launch activities, and collect data. That being said, many grantees reported

changes to programs, student supports and policies. A few examples include changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional approaches; improving admittance and graduation policies; implementing logic models and tools for tracking progress; and expanding student support services such as first or second year experience programs or orientations.

➢ **Improved Dissemination**: Many grantees made strides in disseminating information about their efforts, including through media, outreach, presentations, and publications. However, it is unclear whether or not dissemination efforts resulted in increased awareness, buy-in, or replication of efforts to increase success for racially minoritized students. It is also unclear if dissemination advanced the collective voice and influence of the MSIs involved in the initiative.

Challenges and Barriers

Key challenges and barriers experienced by MSI-MS grantees are listed below:

o **Data**: Lacking data quality and capacity among MSI project teams and institutional research offices was a key challenge throughout the initiative.

o **Focus**: Some MSI partners attempted to focus on too many goals at once without a clear sense of how to prioritize or sequence activities.

o **Sustainability Planning:** Many grantees struggled (or failed) to develop sustainability plans and generally lacked a sense of what to include or how to approach a sustainability plan. More TA and coaching in this area were needed.

o **Leadership**: Changes with leadership made it difficult for many MSIs to gain traction, to work in collaboration with other partners, and to move forward at the expected pace. Additionally, some of the lead MSIs struggled to gain buy-in and build consensus with leaders at their partner institutions.

Lumina's Lessons Learned

The following points highlight key lessons learned from the MSI-MS initiative:

o **Prioritize and Plan:** Encourage institutions that are pursuing multiple goals to focus, at least initially, on *one* of their goals. Furthermore, grantees would benefit from having additional support to prioritize and sequence activities to help to channel efforts toward a common goal faster and foster project progress.

o **Invest in Sustainability**: Provide guidance regarding expectations for sustainability, clarifying if it is the project activities or the outcomes –or both—that you expect them to sustain.

o **Assess *Institutional* Readiness:** Sufficiently assessing the readiness of institutions to participate in an initiative is critical to success. The evaluation found that "grantees that had an experienced team or were building on prior efforts—such as UTEP and SKC—were poised to start project

activities quickly and were able to tackle problems effectively," while the partners without experience doing this kind of work and/or existing efforts to build on took a long time to ramp up (Cosentino de Cohen, 19).

- o **Assess *Collaborative* Readiness**: To succeed as collaborations, partnerships require strong leadership support, incentives and motivation, relationships based on trust, shared decision making and adaptability to evolve based on new information and changing needs and priorities of all partners.

- o **Build Data Capacity and Guidance**: The MSIs involved needed more support and guidance than what was provided to build meaningful data capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, the grantees could have benefitted from having a set of clear expectations for the proper collection, interpretation, and use of data.

- o **Allow More Time for Dissemination**: Due to the lag time between implementation and gaining new knowledge and lessons learned, dissemination should be expected to begin no sooner than mid-project and preferably be supported after a project ends.

- o **Improving Student Outcomes Takes More Time:** In this and many other initiatives, Lumina saw that improving student outcomes in the course of a grant cycle was not a realistic expectation.

Sources

Cosentino de Cohen, Clemencia and Lisa Tsui. (2011, April 11). Evaluation of the Lumina Foundation for Education Minority-Serving Institutions Models of Success Program. Year One Report.

Lumina's Grantee Reports

Philanthropy News Digest. (2009, November 3). Lumina Foundation for Education Awards $4.5 Million to Minority-Serving Institutions."

Strong, Debra A., Clemencia Cosentino de Cohen, and Barbara Harris. (2013). Evaluation of the Minority-Serving Institutions—Models of Success Program Final Report. Washington, D.C., Mathematica Policy Research.