

# THE POWER OF US

Annual Report



2025

# WE CHOSE TRANSFORMATION

2025 was a defining year of resilience and reimagination. In partnership with the Graduate Tacoma movement, we continued to prove what's possible when a community aligns its efforts and resources.

Together, we expanded financial aid access across Pierce County, provided direct navigation for 380 graduating seniors, and channeled more than \$1.35 million directly to local youth programs and community organizations.

Beyond the metrics, 2025 required us to be honest about sustainability and our future. By mid-year, we reached a critical inflection point. We entered a strategic pause to evaluate our role and path forward, engaging in deep reflection and extensive listening with our community.

During this time, we asked our Board of Directors a difficult question: Do we dissolve entirely, or do we transform into a leaner, more focused model to ensure collaboration remains a catalyst for Pierce County students?

**We are proud to announce that in 2026, we will officially emerge as the EdCollaborative - a streamlined organization dedicated to increasing postsecondary attainment in Pierce County. We will drive results through three focused impact networks: affordability, navigation, and workforce.**

This is the through-line that connects financial aid access to workforce outcomes and economic mobility for the families who call this region home. As we close this chapter, we invite you to look back at the milestones of 2025 and the relationships that carried us through. Together, they form the bridge to our next chapter of focused, collaborative action.

# IMPACT AT A GLANCE



**+10%**

**FAFSA Completion**

Multi-district campaigns successfully drove a 10 percentage point increase in financial aid applications for the Franklin Pierce School District (43% to 53%), demonstrating the power of coordinated community outreach.



**\$1.35M**

**Invested in Community**

Acting as a trusted steward, we directed significant public funding to local organizations and youth programs that provide the holistic support systems our young people need to thrive.



**380**

**Seniors Guided**

Our Community Response Team provided individualized navigation support to graduating students across three school districts, ensuring no student had to navigate the path to postsecondary life alone.



**\$340K**

**Secured for Scale**

Through collective advocacy, we successfully secured a state budget proviso to expand financial aid outreach pilots in North Central ESD 171, proving that our work in Pierce County can serve as a model for the entire state.

## I Ever...School Edition

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rs responded to the statements  
expecting to hear.



# PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY

No student should have to navigate the journey from high school to postsecondary life alone. Through our Pierce County Pathways initiatives, we serve as the connective tissue bridging gaps and transforming individual effort into collective success.

By aligning cross-sector partners and elevating student voices, we are building proactive systems where support finds students long before they ever reach a crack in the pavement.



# Campaign Free Aid: Powering a Unified Ecosystem

The significant increases in FAFSA completion seen across our region this year are a powerful testament to the impact of alignment. These results prove that when K-12, higher education, government, and community organizations move in sync, the path to affordability opens for everyone.

Through Campaign Free Aid, we successfully transformed fragmented efforts into a unified ecosystem of support. As we transition into the EdCollaborative, this initiative represents the heart of our role: serving as the primary convening table where cross-sector partners navigate policy changes and share strategies to ensure resources reach the students who need them most.

## IMPACT IN PRACTICE



### 42 Partner Organizations

We facilitated the sharing of resources and strategies across school districts to build a stronger regional network.



### 300+ Students Connected

Regional events provided the critical, face-to-face assistance high schoolers need to navigate financial aid hurdles.



### Student Co-Design

In the Fife School District, students served as architects of our outreach, ensuring it was culturally responsive and authentically resonant for their peers.

# What's Next: Bridging the Gap through Connection

The transition from high school graduation to college enrollment is often where the most promising paths are lost to administrative hurdles. In 2025, our What's Next Community Response Team transformed this vulnerable window into a bridge of sustained support.

By replacing bureaucratic checklists with human-centered connection, we ensured students experienced support as a relationship grounded in trust and possibility. This model is the blueprint for our future navigation work, proving that data is most powerful when it is used to foster human connection.

## IMPACT IN PRACTICE

### 380 Students Supported

We provided individualized, one-on-one guidance through direct support requests, helping seniors navigate their unique next steps.

### Data-Informed Outreach

By capturing student enrollment intentions, we provided school districts with unique insights that enabled targeted, effective summer support.

### Community Connector

Our data allowed partners like Northwest Education Access to forge deeper, more effective relationships with schools like Gates High School.

## High School to Postsecondary: Systems-Level Change

Systems change happens when we stop building for students and start building with them. As the regional lead for Washington STEM's High School to Postsecondary initiative, we partnered with Franklin Pierce and Bethel school districts to align adult perspectives with the actual needs identified by young people.

Through listening sessions and surveys, we elevated student voices to the center of the conversation - transforming raw data into collective action. These insights became the School District Readiness Playbook: an adaptable roadmap for intermediaries, colleges, governments, and community-based organizations to build effective, equity-focused partnerships. This is our core work: transforming data into action so every student can move confidently toward a future where they can thrive.





# POLICY CHANGE AT SCALE

Policy change is the lever that allows us to scale impact far beyond any single program or district. By shifting systems, we create sustainable opportunities that reach students across Washington. In 2025, our advocacy work acted as the bridge between local innovation in Pierce County and statewide resource movement.

During the 2025 legislative session, we championed HB 1136 and SB 5164, designed to strengthen the state's financial aid outreach and completion pilot program. While these standalone bills did not advance, our collective advocacy successfully secured a \$340,000 budget proviso. This funding directly expands the financial aid outreach pilot to community and technical colleges within North Central ESD 171, turning our regional insights into a statewide benefit.

This work serves as a preview of the advocacy and policy lever that will fuel the EdCollaborative, ensuring our goal is backed by the public resources necessary to achieve it.



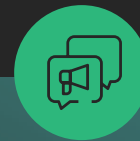
## Data-Driven Analysis

We demonstrated the direct link between dedicated outreach specialists and increased FAFSA completion and enrollment.



## Implementation Insights

We produced a case study featuring lessons from partners at Olympic College and Big Bend Community College to show how the model works in practice.



## Public Messaging

We positioned FAFSA completion not just as a form to be filled out, but as the essential cornerstone of postsecondary opportunity.

# THE POWER OF US

Systems change doesn't only happen in boardrooms. It happens when communities lead. Our fifth annual Charting Our Future conference brought together over 250 attendees, 37 expert presenters, and 19 sponsors around this central truth. Throughout the convening, our partners reaffirmed that successful outcomes are born from deep, sustained connections.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### Co-Design Over Consultation

We were challenged to move beyond "including" youth voices and toward a model where students are the primary architects of the systems meant to serve them. True innovation happens when we stop building for students and start building with them.

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### A Holistic Ecosystem of Care

Keynote speakers Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Erin Jones reframed the role of the educator, reminding us that those in the classroom are the first responders to the trauma our youth carry daily. To support the student, we must first sustain the people who stand on the front lines of their lives.

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### Sustainability as a Strategic Choice

Rest and wellness are not perks or luxuries. They are strategic imperatives for long-term success. To achieve lasting systems change, we must normalize wellness as the essential fuel that sustains our collective movement.



## 2025 Community Impact Award

We are proud to recognize the Student Aid and Scholarships team at Clover Park Technical College as the recipient of this year's Community Impact Award. This extraordinary team was honored for reimagining financial aid by moving away from traditional service models

toward a culturally responsive strategy for postsecondary access. To support their continued innovation, the award includes a \$5,000 investment to help them drive community change through 2026.



# STEWARDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Trust is earned through action. In 2025, we strengthened our role as a trusted steward of public resources by directing more than \$1.35 million in community investments beyond the classroom. These partnerships are essential to building the holistic support systems young people need.

## Participatory Budgeting: Community-Led Investment

We served as the technical and administrative lead for the City of Tacoma's District 4 participatory budgeting process. By facilitating the allocation of \$800,000 for youth programming and cultural events, we ensured that public funding remained rooted in community priorities. We streamlined the distribution process to move these resources directly into the hands of residents and local leaders.

### Participatory Budgeting Recipients

#### Cultural Programming

- Golden Bamboo
- Salishan Association
- All Star Vintage
- Sister Cities Council of Tacoma-Pierce County
- Toolbox Learning Laboratories
- PUSH for Dreams
- Feed Needs

#### Youth Programming

- Pearl Foundation of Puget Sound
- The Game Time Way
- Innovation Change Makers
- Tacoma Arts Live
- Mi Chiantla
- Asia Pacific Cultural Center

## Expanded Learning Opportunity Consortium

Through the strategic deployment of \$550,000 via the PSTAA fund, we enabled the Pierce County Expanded Learning Opportunity Consortium to create 662 new program slots. This investment delivered measurable growth, with 53% of participating youth reporting improved learning environments and successfully reaching key developmental milestones.

### Expanded Learning Funding Recipients

- Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound
- GreenTrike
- Tacoma Arts Live
- YMCA of Pierce & Kitsap Counties
- Franklin Pierce School District

# 2025 FINANCIALS

In 2025, our financial priority was to steward resources with absolute intentionality. We successfully fulfilled our existing community commitments while thoughtfully winding down legacy initiatives to ensure we entered our next chapter on firm financial footing.

## Revenue Sources

Foundation & Corporate Grants	\$947,427
Government Contracts	\$959,945
Individual Contributions	\$36,998
Sponsorships	\$56,900
Other Income	\$485,471
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$2,486,741</b>

## Expense Allocation

Grants & Regranting	\$1,033,255
Staffing & Benefits	\$1,007,307
Events & Convenings	\$259,184
Community Sponsorships	\$20,671
Operations & Administration	\$219,907
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$2,540,324</b>

# A YEAR OF HARD CHOICES

By mid-2025, we reached a crossroads. The question at the center of our reflection was not whether our work mattered, but whether our existing model could sustain that work for the decades ahead.

The honest answer was no.

Facing this truth led us to the most difficult decisions in our organization's history. To protect the mission and ensure the work survived, we moved to a lean, fully remote operating model and, most painfully, reduced our staff. These were not just organizational shifts; they represented the loss of colleagues and friends who poured their hearts into this movement.

In the quiet that followed, we sat with our Board, our partners, and our community to ask: "What do you need from us now?" The consensus was not to retreat, but to evolve. We have taken that feedback to heart, moving forward with a sharpened focus and a renewed sense of purpose.





# THE EDCOLLABORATIVE

In 2026, we emerge with a new name and a sharpened focus. The EdCollaborative is our promise to the community to take the DNA of everything we have built and focus on increasing postsecondary credential attainment.

As a streamlined intermediary, we will align the region's efforts through three impact networks that form a bridge to opportunity.

- **Affordability:** Ensuring the cost of education is never a barrier to a student's potential.
- **Navigation:** Creating smooth pathways to guide learners through the complexities of the postsecondary journey.
- **Workforce:** Closing the gap between learning and earning by connecting people directly to careers that can sustain families.

In the coming months, we will share more about how these networks will function in practice. We are moving forward with a renewed sense of purpose, rooted in the relationships and trust that have always sustained us.



## VISION

Communities where education creates economic opportunity for everyone



## MISSION

Align partners to build pathways that turn education into economic success



## NORTH STAR

70% postsecondary attainment in Pierce County



FOUNDATION FOR TACOMA STUDENTS



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STAFF

# GRATITUDE

## TO OUR STAFF

To the team members who navigated unprecedented change, and to those whose positions were impacted this year, we are profoundly grateful. You carried the weight of data infrastructure, policy analysis, and relationship-building. You navigated uncertainty with professionalism, care, and heart. Your legacy is woven into every student who found a path forward this year. We honor the years of dedication that brought us to this moment.

Dr. Tafona Ervin  
Chief Executive Officer

Gray Sterling  
Deputy Director

Elvin Bucu  
Senior Director of Development

MacKenzie Daniels  
Finance Director

Shaima Shamdeen  
Director of Communications

Ben Mitchell  
Director of Policy & Advocacy

Rodney Wolfenbarger  
Director of Pierce County Pathways

Alan Foote  
Data Analyst

Justin Sharp  
Data Analyst

Elena Olson  
Executive Assistant

Alexander Vo  
Communications Manager

Nikki Torres  
Development Manager

Abby Shade  
Strategy Manager

Hannah Hibbs  
Strategy Manager

Davianna Stewart  
Operations Coordinator

## TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thank you for the courage to face hard truths. You provided steady, values-driven leadership through one of the most challenging seasons in our history. Your commitment ensured that our evolution into the EdCollaborative is not simply a rebrand but a strategic realignment. Thank you for guiding us toward a sustainable future.

Dr. Ivan Harrell II - Chair  
President, Tacoma Community  
College

Tanisha Jumper - Secretary  
Chief Communications Officer, Tacoma  
Public Schools

Katie Condit - Vice Chair  
CEO, Workforce Central

Dr. Joyce Loveday - At Large  
President, Clover Park Technical College

Dave Jones - Treasurer  
Owner/Operator, Windermere Abode

Stuart Young - At Large  
Managing Director, BCRA

Holly Bamford Hunt | Executive Director, Bamford Family Foundation

Sandra Eliason | Chief Communications Officer, Metro Parks Tacoma

Cassandra Mitchell | Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, Providence

Victoria Woodards | Mayor, City of Tacoma

Dr. Lance Goodpaster | Superintendent, Franklin Pierce School District

Dr. Sheila Edwards Lange | Chancellor, University of Washington, Tacoma

Ben Whitworth | Chief Operating Officer, Mary Bridge Children's Hospital

Nathe Lawver | Secretary Treasurer, Pierce County Central Labor Council


Dr. Chio Flores | President, Pierce College Puyallup

## TO OUR DONORS & PARTNERS

To every individual donor, family, foundation, corporate partner, public funder and those who wish to remain anonymous: thank you for sticking with us. In a year when many organizations faced headwinds, your investment reflected faith in our mission and confidence in our transformation. You understood that systems change requires stability, adaptability, and long-term trust.

This annual report reflects a year of profound change and renewed purpose. We thank our entire community for your partnership and persistence as we transform to better serve Pierce County's students.

**Black Future Co-Op Fund • Pierce County • City of Tacoma • Tacoma Public Utilities • Bamford Foundation • United Way of Pierce County • Tacoma Community Foundation • MultiCare Mary Bridge Children's Hospital • Puget Sound Energy • Workforce Central • Coordinated Care • BCRA Design • Bassetti Architects • Tacoma Rainiers • University of Puget Sound • University of Washington Tacoma • Tacoma Community College • Washington State University Everett • BrightSpark Early Learning • Russell Family Foundation • Commencement Bank • Perkins Coie • Ballmer Group • Byrd Barr Place • Washington STEM • M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust • Woodworth Family Foundation • Gates Foundation • Washington Student Achievement Council • Concrete Technology Group • Greater Tacoma Community Foundation • Dimmer Family Foundation • BECU • Florence B. Kilworth Foundation • Heidner Charitable Trust • Windows of Hope Foundation (a legacy of the Gary E. Milgard Family Foundation) • KeyBank • The Boeing Company • Fuchs Foundation**

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