Igniting a National Movement for Student Leadership & Engagement at Community Colleges

Catalina Ruiz-Healy, Vice President, Rappaport Family Foundation
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COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS WHERE THE STRUGGLE IS. IT’S WHERE THE HEART IS.
“There is a tremendous amount of untapped potential on community college campuses and a real opportunity to make a huge impact by investing in community college civic engagement.” ~Arthur, De Anza College

“Community College is where the struggle is. It’s where the heart is. Students in community colleges have experienced just about every challenge life has to offer and so we understand what needs to change and how. And we have the connections to the community to be leaders not just on campus, but in our neighborhoods. And not just for a few years, but for life.” ~Toody, CCSF
Defying a host of Washington “insiders” who advised us that “young people don’t vote,” in 2003, the Rappaport Family Foundation (RFF), a private family foundation based in San Francisco with a corpus of $8 million, made a series of substantial investments in new and untested efforts to engage youth in the civic engagement process. These grants – the first official giving of our new family foundation – turned out to be the most strategic investment we have ever made.

We set aside the traditional aversion to risk that characterizes most foundation giving and put our money into an under-resourced field. Instead of adding our drops to the bucket of large initiatives that had written off the youth vote for generations, we looked for new, untested but promising strategies and small projects where our investment could convert an idea into a reality. We awarded grants to individuals and organizations that bucked conventional wisdom about voter engagement, and coached them on strategy and organizational development.
Largely as a result of creative, innovative, youth-led initiatives, in 2004 young people voted at the highest level since 1972. Furthermore, the undeniable significance of the “Youth Vote” has changed the game for civic organizing in all election cycles since. It also changed the conversation among funders and progressive leaders about how to instill a lifetime commitment to civic engagement among Millennials (individuals born between 1980-2000).

Since then, RFF has invested large amounts of time, energy, and more than $5 million in civic engagement initiatives led by young people, including those on university campuses, and among non-college youth. Through this work, we saw many strong and active training and advocacy organizations on 4-year university campuses. But when we looked to community college campuses – where the other half of our nation's college students enroll – the picture looked very different. As funders of youth civic engagement, we realized that we were neglecting a critical segment of the youth population.
Today, **almost half** of America’s undergraduates are studying in community colleges. The country’s 1,200 community college systems are the largest and fastest growing segment of America’s higher education system. We surveyed the community college landscape and saw clearly that, compared to four-year schools, this student population is a truer reflection of the 21st Century American experience: diverse, hopeful, motivated and busy. This is America’s future.

Based on our past experience with young people, we were willing to bet that community college students possessed vast, untapped potential as advocates for change on their campuses and in their communities – potential that we decided to try to ignite.
For the first time in our Foundation’s history, we limited our investments to a single geographic region – California, which constitutes nearly 30% of the national community college student population. We chose to invest only in California as a way to learn lessons up close, and as a way to answer whether or not we could make an impact with limited financial resources.

The inspiring results of our initial investments have reinforced our commitment to this emerging movement, and our conviction that it is ready and ripe for increased investment. We seek to prove yet again that, as the adage says, “As goes California, so goes the nation.”
THIS IS AMERICA'S FUTURE
WHO ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ANYWAY?

Set aside any stereotypes you may have.
45% Students completing degrees at 4-year institutions who previously enrolled at 2-year institutions

46% US undergraduate community college student population

42% are the first in their families to go to college

39% community college population age 21 or younger

60% of community college students are female

Representation of Community College Students Among Undergraduates { Fall 2009 }

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who are CC students</th>
<th>Undergraduate Segment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>All US Undergraduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>First-Time Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Asian / Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>Black</td>
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</tbody>
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*Students were considered enrolled at two-year institutions if they had at least one full-time or part-time enrollment at a two-year institution prior to the four-year completion date.

Source: American Association of Community Colleges. Fact Sheet 2012
Community College Students ARE...

A Booming Population
More and more Americans are entering postsecondary education through community colleges. As of 2012, community college students made up 46% of the US undergraduate population\(^1\). What’s more, of recent 4-year graduates, fully one in two went through a two-year institution. Now, more than ever, community colleges are the conduit for students to make their education dreams a reality. The profile of a community college student is being rewritten, right now

Young, Diverse, Less Economically Secure, and Busy
Millennials are a significant population on 2-year campuses. The fact is that the community college population is quite young, with a median age of 23; 39% are 21 or younger\(^2\). The growing student population is more likely to be female, low-income, and young. In fact, close to 60% of community college students are female\(^3\). Finally, a full 42% are the first in their families to go to college.

However, as we embarked on this initiative, the datapoint that stopped us in our tracks was the fact that compared to the national average of about half, more than 70% of students pursuing post-secondary education in California are enrolled in community colleges\(^4\). This is an overwhelming majority of our state’s undergraduates and equals 2.9 million students each year at 112 colleges within the 72 districts across the state. The California Community College (CCC) system is the largest system of public higher education in the nation.
WHY INVEST IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERSHIP & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?
We support new and promising models for engaging community college students to build:

The civic and political power of Millennials

A more inclusive democracy

Local, lasting community leadership

THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME PART OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
An investment in community college students is an investment in...

The civic and political potential of the millennial generation
As we’ve witnessed, young people are a key constituency whose voter participation rates can swing elections. We’ve also seen the success of civic engagement programs at 4-year campuses and universities with campaigns focused on the Dream Act and student cost increases, as well as in the strong student voice in the national Occupy Wall Street Movement. We need to ignite more of the same activism on 2-year campuses.

Local, long-term community leadership
One of the unique strengths of community college students is that so many of them come to school with strong roots in the community already. After graduation, in contrast to four-year university students, these students are more likely to stay local and become the citizens, parents, workers, civic leaders, and business owners who will determine their communities future success. For example, we’ve talked to students who are deeply committed to making higher education more accessible, not only to serve their own academic or career goals, but also to increase opportunity for their communities and families, and in particular their younger siblings.
A more inclusive democracy
Community college campuses, much more so than 4-year institutions, have student populations that reflect the socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our communities – as well as of the Millennial generation, and the younger generation coming up behind it.

Equity and opportunity for all
Community colleges, our society’s “great opportunity equalizers,” are a core part of the American Dream. “If you work hard,” we are told, “regardless of your background, you can get a college degree and a good job.” Poor retention and transfer rates and dramatic racial academic achievement gaps, however, suggest a dream deferred. Civically active community college students often fight first for a better education on their campuses.

Educational outcomes are proven indicators of future employment, economic mobility, health and a range of other self-sufficiency and quality of life factors. This is why building community college student leadership and supporting student civic engagement are critical steps in creating a more equitable society.
OUR SPARK INITIATIVE
2010 TO PRESENT
## RFF Spark Initiative Grants 2010-Present

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coleman Advocates for Youth SMAC</td>
<td>• Seeded the creation of SMAC’s educational equity campaign.</td>
<td>• Founded Immigrant Resource Center</td>
<td>• general support for SMAC activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Won priority registration for SFUSD students</td>
<td>• Placement Testing Policy Reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeAnza Institute for Community &amp; Civic Engagement</td>
<td>• Seeded creation of 15 ICCE Fellowships</td>
<td>• Supported 15 ICCE Fellows</td>
<td>• Continued support for ICCE Fellows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student-led negotiation for district-wide EcoPass for FHDA students</td>
<td>• Students founded DeAnza’s first Immigrant Resource Center</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilize.org</td>
<td>• Convoked 100 community college students, who competed for 6 mini-grants that were awarded by their peers</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CalPIRG Education Fund</td>
<td>• Transportation Reform Campaign in Los Angeles</td>
<td>• Piloted community college student campaign training across 5 campuses</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign for College Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provided training to community college students on advocacy, media presence</td>
<td>• Seeding and creation of statewide Community College Student Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Democracy Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeded creation of national network of community college Presidents and faculty committed to civic engagement on campus</td>
<td>• General support for TDC activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Organizing Institute’s New Organizing University</td>
<td>• Seeded creation of community college-specific format and curriculum with Marshall Ganz</td>
<td>• Seeded creation of community college access to NOU curriculum</td>
<td>• Scaling of community college access to NOU curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Invincibles</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supported Statewide bus tour to 4 community college campuses</td>
<td>tbd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt Institute’s Campus Network</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeded pilot on 4 campuses for ThinkImpact program and CampusNetwork’s policy journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Californians For Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeding and creation of statewide network of community college activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong>:</td>
<td>$160,000</td>
<td>$280,000</td>
<td>$360,000</td>
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At the outset of our community college leadership initiative, we conducted a nationwide literature review and interviewed experts in an effort to better understand the current state of those community college programs that seek to instill in students a lifelong commitment to political engagement. We found the following four themes: a limited formal body of knowledge; shrinking community college budgets; the closest programs in purpose focusing on charitable service-learning; and current federal government and private philanthropic initiatives for community colleges focusing on student access and academic or job-skill success.

Through a scan of existing work, we found a handful of programs that were targeting civic engagement and advocacy training for community college students. We identified three types of program models at work:

1. Institution-based programs are housed within the campus, offering curricular and/or extra-curricular opportunities for students through civic education and or service learning.

2. Permanent third-party programs are separate from the institution but affiliated with it over a longer term. These may provide training in organizing skills and issue advocacy opportunities.

3. Intermittent training programs are temporary, coming in to deliver advocacy training centered around a particular issue, and then leaving once the issue’s moment has passed.
In 2010, based on these lessons and conversations, we piloted a funding initiative to support community college civic engagement: RFF Spark. We looked for programs that would prepare community college students to be a generation of committed, skilled, life-long, progressive activists. We chose to invest in a wide range of strategies and program models in the interest of understanding what worked best in the community college setting. With an eye to the national field, we chose to concentrate our initial pilot efforts on California programs, so we could be more nimble and see the impact of our experiments more closely.

In addition to funding particular programs and initiatives directly, we invested substantial time and energy in bringing grantees and field experts together to share successes, challenges, and lessons learned. These convenings provided ongoing program development support for participants, and together we began to compile a set of best practices for the emerging field.

We have been impressed by the eagerness of participants to innovate, assess, and, when necessary, admit mistakes and make effective course corrections. We have been inspired by the dedication demonstrated by student leaders, many of whom are juggling full course loads, full-time jobs, children, and long-commutes.
OUR FIRST YEAR
2010–2011
WE LOOKED FOR PROJECTS THAT WERE PROMISING BUT ALSO RISKY OR UNTRIED & THAT WOULD LIKELY NOT EXIST WITHOUT OUR SEED SUPPORT
Rappaport Family Foundation sought to explore the range of program models already in practice, and identify new, promising models and campaigns for engaging California’s community college students.

We wanted to learn 1. What models work best in terms of student engagement and completion rates, and why; 2. Which issues, if any, would prove to be “stickier,” more resonant organizing anchors for students than others?

We looked for projects that we felt had the potential both to last and be replicated by others, and committed to make between four and six $120,000 grants over three years. We also looked for approaches that were promising, but also risky or untried, and that would likely not exist without our seed support. Starting in 2010, we supported the following projects.
Addressing the need for well-skilled community college student organizers to assume leadership roles in the broad struggle over higher education access in California, the Foundation, over the last two years, has supported the training and development of students’ organizational, political, and community-based work. Exemplifying an “institution-based” program model, the ICCE Fellowship Program offers training, mentorship, and a yearly stipend to 20 students who have taken on extraordinary leadership roles in projects that promote community college access and success, including immigration reform. Matched by institutional resources, grant support from the Rappaport Foundation has allowed the college to expand significantly the number of paid trained student organizers.

The fellows have been strong and active, leading organizing and advocacy efforts related to the California budget crisis, the California Dream Act, the California Student Success Act, and regional bus transportation.

CALPIRG Students is a statewide student organization that gives students the skills and opportunity to practice effective citizenship. Our grant supported CALPIRG Education Fund’s 2010-2011 Build L.A. Transit Now! Campaign. An example of “permanent third-party” programming, the campaign goals were to improve local public transit options and leverage political engagement as a means to elevate young people as stakeholders in the debate over increasing public transit options in the region. Building on lessons learned from this campaign, a second grant was made to test a community college-specific organizing model to learn how to quickly scale and manage system-wide campaigns.
Through issue education, leadership development, academic support, student organizing, and policy advocacy, SMAC is working to win policies to close the achievement gap at City College of San Francisco (CCSF), promote civic engagement in underrepresented student populations, and develop committed life-long community leaders. We seeded Coleman – a community-based organization in San Francisco primarily working in the public school system – to pilot its first community college student organizing program at CCSF, the college where the majority of its youth members move on to after high school. The project is now in its third year. SMAC’s advocacy has been central to many education equity policy reforms on campus, including English and Math accelerated course implementation, priority registration for San Francisco Unified School District graduates, improvements to financial aid counseling and application processes, dramatically expanded resources for civic-engagement work-study positions, establishment of a Filipino Retention Program, and the development of a landmark Resource Center for AB540 (undocumented) immigrant students.

SMAC has four primary long-term goals: 1. Increase the academic success, retention and transfer rates of underrepresented students at CCSF (low-income African American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and Filipino young people); 2. Increase funding to CCSF and the community college system through structural tax reform at the state level; 3. Increase the number of working class people of color who have a college degree and a good job and can afford to stay and thrive in San Francisco; and 4. Increase the power of underrepresented students of color at CCSF to win their own agenda for change.

SMAC is a project of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. Founded in 1975, Coleman is a member-led, multi-racial, community organization in San Francisco, with a school-based organizing model with youth and parent organizing programs at targeted underserved elementary and high schools.
Mobilize.org empowers and invests in Millennials to create and implement solutions to social problems. Utilizing technology and social networking to connect Millennials on and offline, Mobilize.org convenes Millennials from around the country to discuss issues impacting the Millennial Generation and to develop sustainable solutions to address them.

Our grant supported a national organization to offer training opportunities for community college student leaders. Mobilize.org’s Target 2020 California Summit brought together student representatives from community colleges in Northern California to discuss the challenges they face in completing their education, and to collaborate on sustainable solutions to address them. The conference also provided opportunities for students to engage with civic leaders from around the state, receive leadership and skill-building training to help them strengthen their solutions, and network with funders, representatives from local and national organizations, and representatives from the educational system who could serve as partners for implementing their solutions. Additional funding was awarded to Mobilize.org to run a grant “contest” among participants in which students/student groups were selected by their peers to receive financial support from the Rappaport Family Foundation and 12-months of technical assistance from Mobilize.org and its partners.

Six mini-grants were awarded. These included grants to support statewide student advocacy around budget and revenue measures; establish two undocumented immigrant student resource centers; support foster-youth transitions to community college; support peer mentoring; and, educate faculty on the issues faced by undocumented students.
OUR SECOND YEAR: 2011-2012
WE CONTINUED OUR COMMITMENT TO 3 GRANTEES TO EVOLVE & CONTINUE THEIR WORK

WE STARTED CONNECTING LOCAL WITH STATE & NATIONAL WORK
In 2011, we continued our commitments to three existing grantees to evolve and continue their work: Coleman Advocates for Youth’s SMAC, CalPIRG, and DeAnza Institute Center for Community and Civic Engagement. Most of this work remained campus-centric.

We learned three basic lessons through our first year of funding: 1. Students are hungry to be connected on a statewide basis; 2. Successful student organizing is more likely to succeed on campuses where the faculty and administration are supportive of civic engagement pedagogy; and 3. We needed to work on how to scale capacity, and wanted to know if effective training could be delivered online to students across multiple campuses as a means to achieve that scale. In response to these lessons, we expanded our scope to include work that connected our California cohort with timely national initiatives, and we made grants to three additional organizations.

We awarded The Democracy Commitment its first grant to establish and grow a network of community college presidents, faculty and students who support active civic engagement and education on community college campuses. Since its inception, the network has grown to include hundreds of member college Presidents and faculty, and other partners who work to create a campus culture and environment that is supportive of civic engagement and organizing.
The Campaign, the leading college access advocacy organization in California, works to ensure that the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college and succeed. With our support, the Campaign is providing best-in-class advocacy and organizing training to community college student leaders from across California. As a result of this training, students have been playing a critical role in the Legislature’s review and implementation of the Student Success Task Force Recommendations, advocating on behalf of 3 million students.

We had originally funded Campaign for College Opportunity to develop a fiscally-independent Community College Student Senate; the grant transitioned into support for an advocacy and organizing training for community college student leaders across California. The grant shifted to providing our grantees technical assistance because difficult political and fiscal dynamics at the statewide level made it virtually impossible to begin advocating for a new fiscally-independent body.

We seeded the launching of New Organizing Institute’s NOU Millennial Project – an engagement organizing framework and curriculum provided via online courses. The pilot course was designed specifically for community college students in partnership with Harvard University and renowned organizer Marshall Ganz. NOU is testing whether online delivery and coursework can be scaled among community college organizers. Students first identified and worked to solve various local issues, including food policy, undocumented immigrant reform, and access to higher education.
OUR THIRD YEAR
2012-2013
WE CONTINUE TO BOTH DEEPEN & WIDEN OUR SCOPE THIS TIME TO TEST DEMAND FOR STUDENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES & TO AMPLIFY THE VOICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF CALIFORNIA
In 2012, we continued our commitments to seven of our eight previous grantees to adapt or continue their work. Campus-based leadership continued with Coleman Advocates for Youth’s SMAC, CalPIRG, and DeAnza Institute Center for Community and Civic Engagement. We renewed our commitment to New Organizing Institute’s New Organizing University, Campaign for College Opportunity, and The Democracy Commitment for them to continue working on amplifying the student voice on state level policy reforms, widening access to student leader capacity building and training, and creating favorable environments for civic engagement and activism to take place on campuses across the country.

We continue to both deepen and widen our scope, this time to test demand for student leadership in different parts of California, specifically in Southern and Central California, and to elevate the community college voice in national policy conversations. Finally, we chose to invest in an emerging statewide community college student network, again trying to understand how best to nurture and grow an emerging student leadership corps. In this vein, we awarded three new grants.
With Coleman and Campaign for College Opportunity, CFJ founded the Community College Equity Network (a coalition of community college equity organizations and students) in 2010 but found that students needed a student-only space to discuss concerns and challenges with each other. We awarded a grant to CFJ to formalize and manage a Community College Student Network to bring together and coordinate community college student leaders from across the state and amplify student voice in community college policy, share ideas and best practices for campus-level organizing, identify common issues, and develop and pursue pro-active legislative proposals. This group hopes to be the proxy for students who cannot be actively engaged in Sacramento. Californians for Justice is a statewide grassroots organization working for racial justice by building the power of youth, communities of color, immigrants, low-income families, and LGBTQ communities. Led by students, CFJ organizes to advance educational justice and improve student social, economic, and political conditions.

If you are under 24, you can thank The Young Invincibles for helping you stay on your parent’s health insurance plans. We think community college students have plenty to say about health care reform, student debt, and other national policy issues. We are supporting The Young Invincibles to ensure that the voice of community college students is part of these national conversations. We supported a bus tour to allow Young Invincibles to visit California community colleges students. The tour leaders then reported it back to policy – and decision-makers in Washington, D.C.

We remember awarding the Roosevelt Institute Campus Network’s first grant in 2003: a ream of paper. Almost ten years later, having created the leading student-led idea generation journal on 4-year campuses, Roosevelt now is ready to incorporate the other half of undergraduates. Seeing no existing infrastructure to empower community college students through their ideas, Roosevelt is piloting a project that adapts their current “Think Impact” model from Campus Network for the community college context. Think Impact is a classroom policy and activism curriculum. Roosevelt will be bringing lessons from their work at other non 4-year colleges and universities and launch chapters at five community colleges in California.

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A MOVEMENT TAKING ROOT: THE IMPACT OF RFF SPARK’S INVESTMENTS SO FAR
“All of my work – professional or volunteer – is about trying to make students believe that their voice is important, that their actions do have an effect, and that they have a say in the processes that determine their future.”

~Arthur, De Anza College
We are beginning to see the collective impact of this work. When we began our investments, the biggest question was whether community college students would be able to organize on a long-term basis given their academic, financial and personal constraints. We found that they did, and continue to do so, especially on a campus-level.

We also set out to see what models were most effective. We found that no matter what model is used, the student needs to be at the center of it, and that the model needs to adapt and be flexible and forgiving enough to accept higher rates of temporary absences and student turnover. Faculty support, we found, is critical.

Finally, we sought to identify any issues that were better at naturally attracting and retaining students than others. We learned that they are most impassioned by educational equity and immigration reform. Clean energy, sustainability and the environment also energize community college students.

The rest of this chapter talks in more detail about the change community college students have created; the students and organizations we support are showing us why it is effective and so critical to invest in promising models for engaging community college students in California. We’ve organized the narrative about our grantees’ impact on three dimensions: 1) California policy; 2) Campus policy; and, 3) The work’s impacts on the students themselves.
The Community College Equity Network – co-led by Campaign for College Opportunity, and largely made up of organizations supported by the Spark Initiative – was formed to coordinate advocacy efforts primarily around educational reform issues. This coalition was responsible for successfully proposing substantial revisions to the Student Success Task Force recommendations, which were incorporated into the language of the pending Student Success Act of 2012 (SB 1456). SB 1456 was signed into law by California Governor Brown in late 2012. The community College Equity Network is also responsible for ensuring student involvement in the implementation of the SB 145 at the local level.

Emily Kinner, a DeAnza ICCE Fellow, proved to be an invaluable ally in helping shape The Student Success Act (SB 1456, Lowenthal) into stronger, more student-centered policy. Specifically, Emily offered a critical community college student perspective in negotiating policy amendments that was informed by her sound research and lived experience. As a result of Emily’s ability to serve as a resource and student advocate with policymakers and their staff, the Student Success Act removed a major provision that could have inadvertently harmed students, and strengthened student protections language.”

—Jessie Ryan, Associate Director, The Campaign for College Opportunity
SMAC’s leadership and advocacy has been central to multiple education equity policy reforms on one of California’s largest community college campuses, including English and Math accelerated course implementation, priority registration of San Francisco Unified School District graduates, improvements to financial aid counseling and application processes, dramatically expanded resources for civic-engagement work-study positions, establishment of a Filipino Retention Program, and the development of a landmark Resource Center for AB540 (undocumented) immigrant students. Impressively, SMAC over two years has recruited 600 general members. With their help, SMAC won a precedent-setting reform campaign, in which placement tests are now advisory rather than proscribed as a placement mechanism. For English, students now have an option to be moved up one level from their placement score. And for math, students can now use multiple assessment measures (including high school math GPA, high school attendance rate, and exit exam scores) to determine their placement level.

SMAC has become powerful and relevant enough that its members have official representation on a broad range of school task forces and shared governance committees, as well as participation in Planning and Budget Council meetings.

In the last two years, DeAnza’s Institute for Community and Civic Engagement has trained a small group of powerful leaders every year, fostering a strong culture of organizing at De Anza. Nearly forty DeAnza Fellows have taken extraordinary leadership in projects that promote community college access and success, including immigration reform. Matched by institutional resources, grant support from the Rappaport Family Foundation has allowed the college to expand significantly the number of paid student organizers. Students at
DeAnza have successfully established student-supported resource and tutoring centers for undocumented AB 540 students. They also successfully negotiated a free Green Bus Pass program with the local transportation authorities, making transportation free for over 50,000 Foothill-DeAnza students.

The Democracy Commitment, founded in 2011, grew over the past year from its 35 founding members to over 100 community college Presidents, faculty and administrators, becoming the leading clearinghouse and repository of programs that colleges can access to feed their civic and democratic culture. The Democracy Commitment has found that campuses are both enthusiastic about the diverse opportunities for community college civic work and democratic learning, and recognize the financial constraints that come with being a community college student. Many, if not most, community college students work at least part-time. The median age of community college students on most campuses is between 27 and 29. Many have families or provide significant financial support to extended families. This does not mean that students have no time for civic or community work; it does, however, mean that civic engagement work has to be linked to their communities in more immediate ways than is often the case for 4-year university students.

We learned from our work with CalPIRG that the traditional CalPIRG campaign training model is not as effective on community college campuses as it can be in other settings where participants have more available time and fewer competing demands. CalPIRG campaigns on CC campuses have centered on bag cleanups, access to free books, and volunteering.
The Students Themselves

While there has been no third-party, blind study evaluation of these grants, we are confident that the collective work of these nine organizations has helped thousands of students stay in school, make progress towards completing their degrees, and become more active participants in their communities. We know this work has encouraged students to become the leaders we knew they always were.

Our work with Mobilize.org and our other partners taught us that there are hundreds of California community college students ready to connect with each other and organize – primarily around two issues: educational equity and immigration reform. These interests are clearly reflected in the policy and organizing reforms in which they choose to stay engaged.

Eight of the original 15 New Organizing University’s participants completed the course and four participants completed the Millennial Project with Honors, receiving certificates of completion from NOI/NOU and from the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education program. Projects that students developed ranged from empowering California’s young people affected by mental health challenges; to developing a policy for increased access to healthy foods through Sustainable Gardens for Sustainable Households; to developing a Peer Mentoring Program for retention and transfer.
Veronica

Veronica, a single mom who had her first child as a junior in high school, had never been involved in any political or civic engagement activities in her life until the SMAC faculty advisor saw something in her – a spark of potential – in a class discussion in her American government class. Now Veronica runs the base-building component of SMAC and is the group’s most effective recruiter, has spoken in multiple public hearings at CCSF, was profiled in the CCSF newspaper, testified at a SF Board of Supervisors Hearing on family flight and was quoted in the newspaper. A career path in civic engagement wasn’t even a consideration for Veronica a year ago; now she is 100% determined to work for a social justice organization after she graduates from a 4 year university. She has found her life purpose and life path.

Carlos

Carlos, as an AB540 student and the son of a single mother farmworker, would never in a thousand years have considered the possibility of running for Student Senate and as the Student trustee if his experience with SMAC hadn’t revealed to him what a natural and talented leader he is.

Toody

Toody is always saying that she would have dropped out by now if it were not for the community of support and acceptance that SMAC offers. Because of this feeling of being a part of something bigger than herself, she now has the confidence to be a public figure and take controversial positions in the name of equity, despite the risks involved as an out transgender woman. She considers Coleman her second family and is always at the center shadowing staff and asking tons of questions, soaking up whatever information and insights she can to bring back to SMAC campaigns.
“By addressing the implementation and appeals process concerns about the Student Success Task Force recommendations, we have helped make amendments to SB 1456 to address the concerns of our 3 million community college students. Because of our activism, we have also been able to include language in the Bill that requires students be included in the input in implementation and future policy changes that will directly affect students.

“I have testified at Higher Ed Assembly and Senate Budget Committees; the California Student Aid Commission, the Board of Governors and at various California Community College District Boards across the State. I have advocated for our students with my District Board, the Community College League of CA, the Student Senate for CA CC, UC and CSU Associations, Assembly Speaker Perez’s staff, Assembly Members Beall, Fong and Weikowski. I have also worked with The Institute for College Access and Success to fight financial aid cuts and have worked closely with the Faculty Association for CCCs to make sure we also represent our Faculty and Staff and their important roles in student access and success.”

From Emily, a 20-something student leader enrolled at DeAnza College, and a DeAnza ICCE Fellow, supported by the Rappaport Family Foundation
Cristal Lopez, DeAnza student is a DeAnza ICCE Fellow, supported by the Rappaport Family Foundation

My participation in the ICCE Fellowship was a valuable learning experience that allowed me to become an agent of change in which I was able to educate other students about their choices in higher education. My project gave me further understanding of my community which in return gave me confidence and inspiration to achieve my own educational goals.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHERS BASED ON WHAT WE’RE HEARING FROM THE FIELD
In assessing our pilot grants, we surveyed grantees on their successes, challenges, and lessons learned. We carried out one-on-one interviews with staff and student leaders, and we facilitated a focus group bringing together students from all four 2010 projects. Staff and students were thoughtful in their input, and enthusiastic about the opportunity to share their experiences. Grantees and students identified solutions to a number of the barriers that programs face and shared strategies for mitigating them. We thank them for offering specific recommendations.

These recommendations are both for students and groups who are exploring the possibility of institutionalizing civic engagement on their campuses, and for funders who are considering making investments in the engagement and leadership development of this emerging movement.
Choose Your Site Carefully

Pilot organizing projects on campuses with existing institutional buy-in and an organizing culture. An existing campus organizing culture is essential for certain projects. A physical space on campus for student organizers to meet, plan and hold events, or provide services can also add a sense of legitimacy to the project and a sense of safety and structure for participants. It was tremendously difficult to organize on campuses without some sort of existing openness from both students and administration.

Utilize an Empowerment Model Pedagogy

Utilize an “empowerment model” that encourages confidence, critical thinking skills, risk-taking, and innovation. Encourage program participants to see themselves as “leaders” and “organizers.” This identification as a leader can inspire a powerful drive in a student to live up to the potential that others see in her. Cultivate a “laboratory” ethic that promotes and values ongoing experimentation and assessment. DeAnza, SMAC, and New Organizing University were explicit in providing skills-building opportunities related to critical thinking and research and strategy development. They impress upon program participants that there is as much to learn from “failure” as from success. The Foundation also attempts to make “failure” as accepted as success.
Ensure campaigns are relevant, specific, and reflect the needs of students. Given the diverse experiences and interests of community college students, a program interested in building a large membership base and/or developing campaigns that “stick” must incorporate outreach strategies that include getting to know the target student population. This outreach will provide insights about the challenges students are facing, their ideas for solutions, which issues and efforts would inspire their participation in organizing or advocacy efforts, and how specific issues directly impact them. We have found that campaigns about educational equity and immigration reform are particularly “sticky” in California.

Highlight the direct stake that students on campus have in the outcomes of campaigns and give students concrete opportunities to make change happen. Utilize strategies such as classroom workshops, student surveys, and educational forums to highlight the relevance of a campaign to the students’ quality of life. Particularly in the case of programs that incorporate a student advocacy element, it became clear early on in our work with CalPIRG that it was not sufficient to provide students merely with a venue for articulating their needs, problems, and concerns. Voice is not enough. Programs need to be able to offer solutions, vision, and a concrete vehicle for change (e.g. policy advocacy or electoral campaigns) with accessible ways for students to plug in. Campaign for College Opportunity, SMAC, and DeAnza figured this out early on.
Offer students multiple issues and campaigns with which they can engage: All of our grantees found it strategic to have more than one issue or campaign for students to participate in at any one time. Not only does this allow for broader and more diverse student engagement, but it creates opportunities to compare and contrast student engagement rates across campaigns. These don’t need to be big – just varied enough to attract a broader base. Led by 12 students, DeAnza’s students ran seven different campaigns and were successful in mobilizing a large number of students, all interested in different issues.

Provide different levels of involvement and engagement, including mobile engagement opportunities. Ideally, a project or campaign should have concrete opportunities for students to access – whether they have 10 hours or 30 minutes a week to offer. CalPIRG found that many student schedules change significantly from semester to semester, so someone giving just a few hours a month can become a leading advocate down the road if they can remain even minimally involved at the beginning of their civic engagement experience.

Since it can be difficult to coordinate the schedules of large numbers of program participants, SMAC, DeAnza and CalPIRG learned that it was effective to provide engagement options that can be done at home or off-campus. Examples include petitioning, flyering, online and social media outreach, phone banking, conducting peer-to-peer outreach, and writing letters to the editor.

Academic credit was not as important to students as we thought. Almost all of the programs offered optional opportunities for class credit or were actively pursuing these options for their programs. Students reported that, in some cases, credit serves as a useful incentive to strengthen engagement. However, across the board, participants felt that requiring attendance in a credit-bearing class was an unnecessary limitation or expectation.
**Recommendations for Program Implementation**

**Develop Long-Term Relationships with Faculty**

**Forge strategic relationships with supportive faculty.** For some projects, faculty members served as official group sponsors, advisors, or individual mentors. Students referenced faculty who helped them navigate the complicated college bureaucracy, both in terms of their individual academic and financial aid needs and in terms of their civic engagement efforts. Faculty often took on their own direct intern- or member-recruitment efforts and, in some cases, provided venues for classroom outreach and workshops. Others carried out direct education, outreach, and advocacy related to student campaigns in and out of the classroom. All the projects we support could not have succeeded without faculty support.

**Involve faculty and other college staff to provide valuable mentorship to program participants.** Faculty, campus administrators, counselors, and others in positions of power can serve as mentors to and role models for students. DeAnza’s program matches program participants with mentors with whom they meet once a week. Mentors provide coaching and a safe space for students to talk about their aspirations, challenges, and fears, and receive affirmation from someone they can look up to and relate to as a role model.

**Involve faculty to provide consistency.** Because of high student turnover, especially in the case where there is not an on-the-ground staff coordinator, it is essential that programs have long-term faculty advisors and/or recruiters. DeAnza and City College of San Francisco have been exemplary in providing access to extraordinarily committed faculty advisors.

**Target outreach to departments most likely to have supportive faculty.** Programs have had the most success developing partnerships with faculty in political science, history, sociology and other social science departments. While targeted outreach is important, faculty in other departments may also become interested and supportive. One program with an environmental issue focus had success reaching out to marine biology faculty; another has support from a faculty advisor in the math department.
Understand that institutional relationships and institutional support are essential to move education reform objectives forward. Relationships with individuals in positions of power such as the Chancellor, Department Deans, members of the Board of Trustees and Academic Senate, officers in the Association of Student Councils and in relevant labor unions, can be a major asset to education advocacy efforts on campus, including increasing academic freedom or culturally relevant curriculum.

Make alliances work for outreach, organizing, and resource mobilization
Groups also recruited some of their most effective leaders from existing student groups (including student governments) and collaborated on educational forums, organizing campaigns, advocacy efforts and other activities. SMAC, reflecting the importance and potential of this work, developed (and added to its core leadership-development curriculum) a training about building and working in coalitions to reflect the importance and potential of this work. SMAC and CalPIRG found that a best practice to compensate for a deficit of resources is to join forces with other organizations or individuals in the same system that may provide similar access to students, such as mentoring centers, health centers, day care centers, libraries, and financial aid offices. DeAnza students also do this very well. Several programs leveraged relationships with existing student groups for resources such as meeting space, computer workstations, and printing and copying resources.

In the case where the staff and organizational missions are relatively aligned with an organizing and advocacy agenda, it can be strategic to partner with programs such as mentoring services that have access to resources on campus and relevant services to offer a program’s core constituency.
Account for the particular barriers to participation that working and low-income students confront. It may be necessary to schedule calls and meetings late in the evening or other non-traditional times. For students without regular Internet access, build in extra time for responses to e-mails and plan to follow-up e-mails with phone calls. Programs often budget for travel costs (e.g., bus fare, parking) to cover participant expenses to attend gatherings.

To retain and support student leadership and maintain programs over time, provide supervision, ongoing student staff development, a pipeline of new leaders, and a balance of structure and flexibility. When the project coordinator or organizer is a student, intensive, immediate, and ongoing staff development is crucial. Consistent supervision and support is essential for program success. The staff person should conduct regular check-ins – several times a week if possible – with a supervisor or mentor to assess progress and receive feedback and coaching. Ideally, orientation for new program staff should include training and “shadowing” an experienced campus or community organizer. Both DeAnza and SMAC hired a project coordinator in their second year, and point to the professional support provided by this position as key to their success in keeping students in school, and organizing.

Offer practical wrap-around services with the program. Offering practical skills-building opportunities and direct support (such as resume-writing workshops, financial-aid access workshops, and tutor hours for study sessions) can be effective student recruitment tools. When combined with political education, such services are a great way to build the commitment necessary for more active involvement in advocacy and organizing efforts. SMAC learned early on that it needed to provide peer tutoring in order to keep students not only involved, but also in school as successful students.

Offer program participants training in the basics of project and time management. Students emphasized the need to become proficient in goal setting, problem solving, task and project prioritization, and volunteer recruitment and delegation. Early on skill-building helps to avoid over-commitment, inefficient use of limited time, straying off-course, and burning out. These are important like skills as well that will serve students in many aspects of their lives for years to come.

Leverage the full range of free communication and productivity tools available. These tools include social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, webinar software (WebEx), Google docs, DropBox, BaseCamp, and the like.
Recommendations for Funders

**Invest in Long-Term Network Development**

Bring program participants together on a regular basis and create opportunities for networking, coordination and collaboration across campuses. Students who are passionate about issues they want to change thrive when they come together. The sense of camaraderie and community that students get from participating in programs is one of the primary benefits they identified from participating in them.

Students are inspired and motivated by discovering that there are students at other colleges facing similar challenges, and who share a common passion and vision for change. Student organizers are eager to learn from one another’s experiences, support one another’s campaigns, celebrate one another’s victories, build networks, and coordinate efforts. Mobilize.org’s summits are a stellar example of this in action.

Projects welcomed funders and others with broader views of the landscape to take the initiative to connect groups and coordinate bridge-building opportunities. Several groups suggested grants targeted for collaboration and inter-campus convening. Groups have also appreciated the unique bird’s eye view perspective that funders in this new field have to offer.

**Invest in Leadership Development and Support**

One program suggested that funders consider supporting a permanent staff person or consultant with relevant expertise to provide ongoing technical assistance and coaching, coordinate collaborative efforts and convenings, and serve as a liaison between the sponsoring foundation and grantees. Rappaport Family Foundation will be considering this recommendation in future grant cycles.
In addition, we are guided by the following key principles

**We recognize students as experts of the problems and the solutions.**
Young leaders often have the experience of feeling tokenized by institutions and condescended to by people in positions of authority. No one understands the myriad challenges community college students face – and the possible solutions – better than students themselves. Similarly, it is students who have the most insight into the best strategies for engaging and empowering other students.

**We do not expect student leaders to shoulder their work uncompensated.**
Community college students are often in economically challenging circumstances, for a variety of reasons. To be an effective leader or student organizer requires significant time, which is a student’s most valuable resource. Thus our philosophy is to ensure that our grantees use much of our funding to pay reasonable hourly wages or weekly or monthly stipends to the students involved in our programs.

**We approach our grantmaking with commitment, patience and accountability.** We recognize that it is important that new investments in the field have the time to develop a project model that can continue beyond our current grantees’ participation, especially in a field where projects are blazing new trails. We also know that it is through results and incorporating accountability that new funders will be attracted to this burgeoning field.

**We factor in the need for flexibility when it comes to goals and activities.**
Particularly with new projects in this burgeoning and ever-changing field, we know that organizations need the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, respond to students’ shifting priorities, and implement changes to the original program plan and project design to respond to what they are learning.

**We think taking risks is important because it moves the field forward.** Philanthropy is generally risk-averse, particularly in the current economic climate. But the truth is that if funders are not taking risks, we have no chance of supporting the development of something genuinely distinctive. Creative solutions are more often than not the product of trial and error. Without risk and without some amount of allowable failure, there can be no innovation, no experimentation, and no transformation. Our work with select grantees has yielded good lessons in this regard.
   http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/


   -resources/resources-from-robert-w-franco/the-civic-role-of-community-colleges

5. Campaign for College Opportunity. *Divided We Fail: Improving Completion and
   Closing Racial Gaps In California Community Colleges, October 2010.*
   http://www.collegecampaign.org/resources/research/

6. Rappaport Family Foundation, “*An Overview of Civic Engagement Programs
   on Community Colleges, June 2010.*”
   http://www.rappaportfamilyfoundation.org
   /Final%20Report%20for%20Site%20June2010.pdf

7. We are working on designing and developing evidence-based data to be able to
   measure how programs and the field mature, and the results that programs achieve.
   We know that access to this data will help this movement attract other funders.
We are inspired every day by the intelligence, tenacity and commitment of community college student leaders. Now entering the third year of the Spark Initiative, we are excited by the brave and thoughtful experimentation we see at work, and by programs that demonstrate to us that positive progress is not just possible, but is being made by community college students every day.

We are greatly encouraged to see that in the time since we began our pilot, more and more philanthropic, academic, and political leaders have started to take notice of the community college sector. We are particularly pleased that more of our fellow funders have realized that supporting career training and job readiness is only a part of the larger role that community colleges play in the lives of their students. Regardless of career choice or job placement, community college graduates must also be engaged, informed citizens of their communities and the nation.

Throughout our Initiative, we have been struck by just how below-the-radar and under-resourced community college student organizing, advocacy, and civic engagement has been until now. In the words of Campaign for College Opportunity, we see the potential for a “community college student leadership legacy for the state of California.” We do believe that the seeds of that movement are currently taking root; that the day is not far off when community college campuses will be fertile training grounds for the Millennial generation’s most effective civic leaders, and serve as the spawning grounds for the most timely campaigns for change.

We encourage you as a funder and philanthropist to consider incorporating community college student leaders into your own thinking and how incorporating their talents, experience and wisdom can help you achieve your own philanthropic goals more quickly.