

Engaging Community Partners in Identifying and Using School Feeder Patterns

The value that local United Ways bring to community change work is our ability to bring people and organizations together to solve problems. That's the United Way "value proposition," which we know resonates with donors, partners and stakeholders. In many communities, United Way is the only organization that's recruiting people with passion, expertise and resources to execute research-based strategies that improve education, financial stability and health.

We're not about Band-Aid solutions, and that's why we engage deep and broad coalitions to create lasting change. Engaging a diverse array of individuals and organizations in your efforts to identify and use feeder school pattern data can help your United Way and community partners determine where to best focus resources, supports, and opportunities to achieve long-term impact and change the trajectory for students at greatest risk of academic failure.

Below are ideas for using this guide, [Solving the High School Graduation Crisis: Identifying and Using School Feeder Patterns in Your Community](#), a joint effort by United Way Worldwide, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, and Civic Enterprises, in connecting your community leaders more closely to this important education work.

I. Educate United Way Staff

Take an opportunity at your next cross-functional staff meeting to share the guide, with a 3-minute overview of how identifying feeder patterns can help your United Way better achieve its impact goals. Or, invite your resource development, volunteer engagement and marketing/communications colleagues to a pizza "lunch & learn" to brainstorm ideas on how their constituency could be more deeply engaged.

II. Connect the Dots for Donors

- **Brief your board** – Send copies of the flyer and the [guide](#) to current and former board members, with a cover note about how this will accelerate your education impact work. Facilitate a board conversation at the next board meeting, zeroing in on how using school feeder pattern data to focus supports on the most challenged schools and students is a critical strategy for boosting high school graduation, college readiness and workforce development.
- **Leverage as opinion leader outreach tool** – As your United Way are kicks off your workplace campaign this fall, consider how to fold this [guide](#) into your issue-focused conversations with corporate leaders. Do you know which CEOs care most about education? Share this work with them, in person – along with a 1-pager overview of the results your education work has generated so far. Focus the conversation on the issues, not on raising money. Create a follow-up strategy for your campaign coordinators to continue conversations about these issues with their company contacts.
- **Use as content for year-round communications** – Do you have an ongoing engagement strategy to keep in touch with your investors, volunteers and advocates? You should. Use a brief synopsis of what you said to your colleagues and board as content for an email, blog post, newsletter item, etc. You can frame it as interesting national education work across the United Way network, or make a direct link with the work you're engaged in locally.

III. Engage Your Education Partners

- **Engage your funded agencies and other community partners** – Pull together your funded agencies, other grantees, and community partners working on education for a conversation about the feeder pattern issue. Share the [guide](#), the context, and challenge and facilitate a conversation about how identifying and using feeder pattern data can further enhance the education work you are already doing together. This could lead to deeper conversations about shared community goals and aligned strategies.

Connect with local education leaders – Host an informal lunch or breakfast (not a media event) to discuss the feeder pattern challenge with community education stakeholders, especially those who are already involved in your work. This could include university deans and chancellors, community college presidents, school board leaders, school superintendents, teachers and teachers' unions, PTA or PTO leaders and more. Include the flyer with your invitation. Share the [guide](#) at your meeting, and use as a conversation starter to strategize how your United Way, working with education leaders and community stakeholders, can expand the use of feeder pattern data to complement and support existing school improvement efforts.

IV. Enlist Other Key Stakeholders

- **Broaden the conversation** – Consider talking with your health and financial stability partners about this work. For example, health providers you may be working with to improve child nutrition and physical activity should be in the conversation too. Education, income and health are intertwined in real life – and so should be in your strategy work too.
- **Reach out to employers** – Many business leaders are already engaged in high school graduation efforts, but might not realize the challenges in identifying feeder middle and elementary schools. Make a presentation to your Chamber of Commerce leaders (or its education committee) to share the [guide](#) and your coalition's plans for identifying and using the patterns to drive interventions.
- **Connect volunteers to the issue** – Send the flyer and a brief cover note to all your volunteers – anyone on your impact councils, allocation committees and affinity groups, and to any participants in your Day of Caring or Day of Action events – highlighting how important volunteers are to executing the strategies your United Way is pursuing. Restate any call to action for education volunteers or give them a heads up about upcoming volunteer events.
- **Frame the issues for policy makers (local, state or federal)** – Whether or not you're advocating for an education policy agenda, it's a fact that local, state and congressional policy makers need to understand the feeder school pattern issue. Making sure every community is maximizing its resources by moving "upstream" from the dropout problem is a cost-effective strategy.

V. Elevate the issue

- **Brief the media** – Hold an informal briefing or breakfast to introduce media leaders to the issue. Discuss how your community is impacted by the intersection of education, income and health challenges. Help them understand how strategically using school feeder pattern data can help ensure that all students succeed in school, work and life. While such a conversation can help media leaders understand how United Way is driving lasting community change, this is not about asking for media coverage or "pitching a story."