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Media Contact: Janae Hinson ([Janae.hinson@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:Janae.hinson@aspeninstitute.org), 202-736-2531)

**American Talent Initiative Shows Increased College Access for Lower-Income Students**  
*Momentum builds as 108 U.S. colleges and universities join forces to improve opportunity*

A nationwide alliance of leading colleges and universities has made significant progress in improving opportunity for low- and moderate-income students, according to a new report.

Members of the American Talent Initiative (ATI) have increased enrollment of students who receive federal Pell grants by 7,291 since the 2015-16 school year. This momentum, highlighted in *A 2018 Report on the Progress of the American Talent Initiative in its First Two Years*, released today, indicates that ATI is on track to reach its goal to make higher education at colleges and universities with high graduation rates available to 50,000 additional low- and moderate-income students by 2025.

ATI has grown from 30 founding members in December 2016 to 108 today, and includes flagship state universities, prominent liberal arts colleges, and every member of the Ivy League. The initiative is a program of Bloomberg Philanthropies and is led by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program and Ithaca S+R. ATI is also supported by the Gray Foundation. It has fostered unprecedented collaboration among a set of colleges and universities that vary widely and rarely partner in such significant ways. Member institutions commit to a collective goal while also setting their own targets and strategies to improve access and success for lower-income students.

"Thousands of talented, lower-income students are qualified to attend our country's top colleges, but too many never get the chance," said Michael Bloomberg. "We are changing that, because America is strongest when the doors of opportunity are open to all—no matter how much is in their bank account."

"This project exemplifies the kind of real social and human impact that focused, collective, and joyful effort can yield," said Dan Porterfield, president and CEO of the Aspen Institute and former president of Franklin & Marshall College, a founding ATI member. "More than one hundred colleges and universities are proving that, by competing together, we can make a tangible, positive difference in thousands of lives."

Between 2015-16 and 2017-18, the report shows, 68 of the 96 members that have been part of ATI long enough to submit multiple years of data increased their enrollment of Pell students; this includes 19 public colleges and universities and 49 private ones. Many members have reversed declines in the enrollment of Pell students since 2015-16, the year that ATI began.



There is a wide chasm in the United States between who gets a bachelor's degree and who does not, and high-graduation-rate colleges and universities play an important role in closing that gap. To be eligible for ATI, colleges and universities must have a six-year graduation rate at or above 70 percent. Even though thousands of lower-income students have the academic credentials to succeed at the 296 institutions that qualify, fewer than half of students at those colleges and universities come from families in the bottom 80 percent of the national income distribution.

In recent years, economic diversity has emerged as an important goal for many colleges and universities, but progress has been slow. The ATI impact report shows that the growth in opportunity has accelerated at dozens of colleges and for thousands of Americans.

The report details some of the most effective strategies colleges and universities have adopted to expand opportunity. They include:

- Making socioeconomic diversity a public priority advocated by presidents, chancellors, and trustees
- Expanding the pipelines of applicants through new approaches to recruitment and transfer admissions
- Increasing the size of the student body to create additional space for students who receive Pell grants
- Shifting resources to need-based financial aid and taking other steps to make college more affordable
- Improving campus supports and student retention to boost the number of low- and moderate-income students who graduate

"ATI's progress shows that colleges and universities can take action to protect the values that are core to the mission of higher education, even in the face of significant challenges," said Robert J. Jones, chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "These early results are a cause for great celebration among the increasing number of students and families across the nation who now find a high-quality college education to be more affordable and more accessible. We need to build on this momentum and deliver on our collective responsibility to put a college education within reach of anyone in this country who wants to pursue that opportunity."

The report notes that member institutions will need to persist in their efforts if ATI is to reach its 2025 goal and sustain expanded opportunity in the years to come. However, the report highlights many reasons for optimism. "The initiative has galvanized members, surfaced and shared effective practices, and raised the profile and priority of socioeconomic diversity, thereby laying a foundation for further progress," the report finds.



ATI leaders said that sharing information among members and documenting progress publicly through tools such as the impact report play an important role in the initiative.

“We want to recognize the member institutions not only for their concrete progress, but also for their remarkable spirit of collaboration. To help move ATI forward, many institutions have shared information that they would not otherwise,” said Catharine Bond Hill, managing director at Ithaka S+R, which authored the report. “We are glad to gather this initial information, and look forward to sharing future reports that contribute new lessons and strategies for success in this critical area of educational opportunity.”

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**About Bloomberg Philanthropies:**

Bloomberg Philanthropies works in 480 cities in more than 120 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: the arts, education, environment, government innovation, and public health. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg’s charitable activities, including his foundation and his personal giving. In 2017, Bloomberg Philanthropies distributed \$702 million. For more information, please visit [www.bloomberg.org](http://www.bloomberg.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#), and [Twitter](#).

**About The Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program:**

The Aspen Institute’s [College Excellence Program](#) aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. The program is part of [The Aspen Institute](#), which has a mission of fostering leadership based on enduring values and providing a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues.

**About Ithaka S+R:**

[Ithaka S+R](#) is a not-for-profit service that provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, technological, and demographic change. Ithaka S+R is part of [ITHAKA](#).

**About the Gray Foundation:**

The [Gray Foundation](#) is committed to maximizing access to education, healthcare and opportunity for low-income children in New York. The Foundation is also focused on funding initiatives to advance the care of individuals living with BRCA gene mutations.