



ACHIEVE60AZ
EDUCATION ADVANCES EVERYONE

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Achieve60AZ Receives Over \$450,000 in Grants to Increase Education Attainment in Arizona

\$300,000 grant from Lumina Foundation will focus on updating obsolete tuition reimbursement programs to help increase adult access to higher education.

Phoenix, AZ— With \$466,500 in grants from Lumina Foundation and the Arizona Community Foundation, Achieve60AZ will address the equity gap for adult learners in Arizona and expand its work in communities across the state. To meet its 60 percent educational attainment goal, the state needs 1,000,000 more Arizonans to earn a 2- or 4-year degree or an industry credential. This number cannot and will not be achieved solely by the K-12 system, the postsecondary institutions, or through simply importing talent. The real opportunity for Arizona to meet its state attainment goal is through engaging adult learners.

Through the Lumina Foundation Adult Promise grant, Achieve60AZ will seek to revamp public employee tuition reimbursement programs in Arizona to move the state closer to achieving its goal of 60 percent postsecondary attainment by 2030 and work on closing equity gaps for minority groups.

“Serving adults without postsecondary certificates or degrees is essential to meeting Arizona’s state attainment goal and the national attainment goal,” said **Lumina Foundation Deputy Director for Postsecondary Finance, Terri Taylor**. “We truly believe in supporting this population and this opportunity with Achieve60AZ is not only important for Arizona, but for the entire country, and we applaud Achieve60AZ’s innovative, equity-focused approach.”

An informal survey of cities, counties, and state agencies that offer tuition reimbursement benefits to their employees reveals the usage rate for these programs is less than 5 percent. Current tuition reimbursement programs often impose limits on areas of study and force employees to pay for their education upfront, which may be prohibitive to those on the lower end of the pay scale. In addition, the majority of public entry level jobs are held by minorities – groups that already experience large attainment gaps.

“Tuition reimbursement plans are fairly popular, but the people who need to use these programs often don’t have the money to pay tuition upfront with worries about it being reimbursed later,” said **Achieve60AZ Executive Director, Rachel Yanof**. “We plan to work with different population groups statewide to find a model that works for cities and towns in Arizona and across the country. We want to make a difference.”

Through the grant, Achieve60AZ will research, partner, and support the implementation of employer-employee agreements, in which city and county employers actively use tuition

reimbursement to engage employees in earning their credentials. Achieve60AZ is hoping to create a national model that can be used across the country to erase financial and systemic barriers for adult learners.

In January, Achieve60AZ was also awarded a grant from the Arizona Community Foundation with funds to be used to help communities localize the attainment goal. Achieve60AZ is working with Expect More Arizona to engage various rural and suburban communities in efforts to create locally-owned goals that will drive education progress for their culturally and economically diverse cities and towns.

“Arizona is known for the diversity of our communities and its people. Understanding the unique opportunities and challenges to postsecondary attainment within each community is essential to reaching our state’s goal,” said **Expect More Arizona President and CEO, Christine Thompson**. “We’re happy to be a part of continued efforts to advance the attainment goal, as well as the seven other Arizona Education Progress Meter goals.

As the leading voice for P20 education with an established presence in over 30 communities, Expect More Arizona will share local data on key education milestones, convene local leaders to develop a shared vision, foster support and collaboration to achieve local goals, connect communities to successful programs around the state and across the P20 continuum, and elevate their efforts through traditional and social media platforms.

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About Achieve60AZ: More than 75 organizations in Arizona form Achieve60AZ that is fueled by a community-based effort to ensure Arizona remains competitive through the power of education. Their collective goal is to generate greater awareness of the importance of increasing Arizona’s level of educational attainment while building support to improve college entry and completion; boost adult education and training; and fuel a pipeline of competitive talent for Arizona’s employers. Achieve60AZ promotes support for the long-term steps needed in college entry and completion, adult education and training, and identifying and closing skills gaps to better prepare our workforce and our state for the future when the majority of jobs in Arizona will require some type of higher education.

For more information, visit: www.achieve60az.com.