

2008 Regional Stewardship Awards Cover Sheets



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Please provide the following information, either on this form or in a separate document.

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Is this application for an... organization region

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Program Description: Please see the complete application



Graduate! Philadelphia

Alliance for Regional Stewardship Award Nomination

May 15, 2008

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GraduatePhiladelphia.org

Description of the Program

Graduate! Philadelphia is the first regional initiative in the US aimed at building a competitive regional economy that offers opportunity to all by helping working adults with some college credits complete their degrees. This innovative effort targets the region's most pressing competitive challenge: talent. As a six-county (in PA and NJ) collaborative effort of nine participating colleges and universities, the City of Philadelphia, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, *Graduate! Philadelphia* demonstrates the region's ability to work together and collaborate across borders and boundaries. Launched in 2006, *Graduate! Philadelphia* has already achieved breakthrough results, has been replicated in at least one other region, and stands to serve as a model for the kind of regional human capital development strategies necessary to build innovative, inclusive regions.

Graduate! Philadelphia was founded in 2005 through a civic "research and development" effort led by the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (PWIB) and the Pennsylvania Economy League—Southeastern Pennsylvania (PEL). The report issued by the PWIB and PEL at that time—"Graduate! Philadelphia: The Challenge to Complete"—served as a provocative call to action, one that has been embraced by the regional business leadership and Philadelphia's new Mayor, Michael Nutter. (In fact, Mayor Nutter was an early supporter of *Graduate!* and in his inaugural address issued a bold challenge to the city and region to double the percentage of adults with a college degree, a direct result of *Graduate!*'s information and advocacy campaign).

Seed funding for the *Graduate!* initiative was provided by the Workforce Investment Board and the United Way, who serve as Managing Partners of the effort. Major follow-on funding has been provided by the Knight Foundation—in its largest-ever grant to a workforce development initiative in Philadelphia, and by the City of Philadelphia's Commerce Department.

The Need and the Opportunity for Graduate! Philadelphia

Human capital development is the most pressing and serious economic and social challenge facing the Philadelphia region. Philadelphia ranks 92nd out of the 100 largest US cities in postsecondary educational attainment, despite having the second highest concentration of postsecondary institutions in the country. Only one in six adults 25-49 years old has an associates or bachelor's degree (roughly 18 percent;

another seven percent have an advanced degree.) With a workforce consequently largely under-prepared for the 21st Century economy, Philadelphia struggles to attract and retain private industry. Further, the small hiring pool of highly skilled workers does not mirror the racial and socio-economic composition of the region, with resulting tensions that increase the outward migration of skilled workers. While about half of the immediately surrounding counties are doing somewhat better locally, Philadelphia is the region's primary economic driver and employment hub.

These challenges are heightened by a sharp decline in the number of individuals who will age into the workforce over the next two decades. For individuals, a college degree translates into \$1 million more in lifelong earnings. Lack of a college degree highly limits access to jobs requiring lower skill levels, which pay less, and typically lack health and other benefits such as tuition support. The status quo is largely perpetuated by the high cost of college tuition and an overwhelming, diffuse array of information about postsecondary education and financing options, which tend to discourage lower-income earners from investing in a college degree.

At the same time, about 80,000 working-age adults' between the ages of 25-49 in the City, and another 220,000 in the region have at least one year's worth of college credits, but no degree. This age group is of particular importance since today's 25 and 35 year olds will remain the mainstay of our workforce for many decades. Close to 70 percent are women who are single heads of households. Many are minorities grossly underrepresented in postsecondary education. Many entered college soon after high school, but gave up for reasons other than academic performance. Many are lower-income earners and are "stuck" in entry-level jobs for want of a degree and the skills acquired in college.

Investing in getting them first to an associates' degree and then to a bachelor's degree will yield substantial economic returns: higher skills and productivity for employers, a larger tax base, and higher wages, better benefits, and more career control for individuals. In the Philadelphia region, men who hold an associates' degree are 11 percent more likely to find employment than men with a high school diploma and their earnings are 18 percent higher; for men with a bachelor's degree the probability of employment rises to 19 percent and earnings increase by 36 percent. The returns of education are greater yet for Philadelphia women: Women who hold an associate's degree are 19 percent more likely to find employment than women with a high school diploma and their earnings are 35 percent higher; for women with a bachelor's degree the probability of employment grows to 31 percent and earnings increase by 61 percent, on average.

Getting 10,000 individuals to complete an associates' degree will increase purchasing power by \$35 million in the first year and \$1.05 billion over 30 years (not counting subsequent potential salary increases). City tax revenues (the City charges a wage tax) would increase almost \$4 million in the first year, and \$230 million over 30 years, and social service expenditures will decrease by an estimated \$10 million in the first year and \$300 million over 30 years. Home ownership rates among this group are expected to rise significantly as well.

Social returns are a bit harder to quantify, but studies show that college graduates are more involved with their children's schooling, are more likely to volunteer and to vote, and are less apt to be involved with the criminal justice system.

Graduate! Philadelphia views college non-completion as a regional economic, social, and systemic problem, and addresses solutions accordingly. A few systems exist to remedy low postsecondary educational attainment levels, but they are focused on broadening the pipeline of high school students preparing and applying to college. *Graduate! Philadelphia* is the region's first systemic attempt to address adult college completion. Providing supports to motivated adults so they can complete their college degree will change the face of the region in several ways:

Physical: (a) Narrowing the wealth gap. College-credentialed individuals will be able to compete for better paying jobs with important benefits (health insurance, tuition plans, paid time off, retirement plans.) This will ultimately provide a path for upward mobility into the middle-class. As an example, on average, earnings rise by \$9,000 a year (roughly 30 percent) for graduates of Community College of Philadelphia in their first year after graduation. (b) Grow the region's economic strength. Employers will have a larger, better-educated, more diverse credentialed hiring pool. (c) The face of the middle-class will more closely mirror the racial and ethnic demographics of the region.

Systemic: Philadelphia's educational pipeline is failing its residents. The public K-12 system is graduating youth who are not well-prepared for either college or work. Community College of Philadelphia, the only open-access and postsecondary institution in the city, has only an 18 percent combined graduation and transfer rate. Other postsecondary institutions, the vast majority of which are private, command tuition that is well beyond the capacity of most working adults, and graduation rates, especially for lower-income, first generation students, are low (estimated at far below 50 percent, according to *Graduate!'s* research, national studies, and IPEDS—Department of Education data.) Adults who interrupted their studies have no systemic supports to facilitate the way back to college.

Helping adults return to college and complete a degree, and encouraging colleges to provide better supports for working adult students, will increase the overall number of adult students completing degrees, and will positively impact the entire pipeline. Research shows that college-educated parents are more involved in their children's schools, and their children are more likely to go to college and complete a degree. In addition, enabling more minorities to complete degrees will provide positive role models for minority youth who are at higher risk for lower educational attainment.

Connecting the region's workforce development, postsecondary education, and economic development efforts around shared goals promotes a better understanding of how these systems can interact effectively where now they are isolated, disconnected, and often compete for the same resources. Further, many of the interventions described here often have a stronger, longer lasting impact and better outcomes when they are combined. Importantly, *Graduate!'s* services integrate incentives, programs, models and practices from these different arenas that can contribute to higher college completion rates. More specifically, many of the region's employers offer tuition benefits, even for entry-level employees, but employee uptake on these programs is low in part because employees don't know about the programs, and in part because they lack other supports in order to get back successfully to college. As part of the financial planning component, *Graduate!* helps provide adults with information about their own employer's tuition benefits program and connects them directly with the Human Resources personnel responsible for these benefits. *Graduate!'s* clients are also referred to agencies that can help with other issues that are identified as barriers, such as CareerLinks (One Stops) for employment needs, agencies offering childcare solutions, etc. All of *Graduate!'s* services are free to clients (eligibility is determined by age – over 19, and by having at least some college credit but less than a bachelor's degree.)

This collaborative effort will lead to better leveraging of resources and the development of solutions that will have more robust impact on beneficiaries. Furthermore, bringing business and policy-making stakeholders to the table is encouraging them to take joint and shared responsibility for raising educational attainment levels, as demonstrated by the challenge issued by Philadelphia's new Mayor.

Attitudinal: The job market in the Greater Philadelphia region has changed dramatically over the past 40 years: gone are most of the manufacturing jobs that required a high school diploma and

on-the-job training. Health, education, and financial services are now the prominent industries that pay family-sustaining wages, and they require workers with postsecondary training and degrees. Nonetheless, attitudes toward postsecondary education are unrealistic. Many still believe that a high school diploma is sufficient education to land a job with family-sustaining wages. Equally dangerous, many youth believe that they can and will go to and succeed in college despite being academically and socially unprepared and faced with significant financial need. Sadly, many also view college as a luxury for middle-class youth. Several local initiatives are making great strides in preparing youth for college. But once an individual has interrupted their studies, the sense of failure and frustration can be detrimental to any progress made, and the risk for never completing the degree is high. *Graduate! Philadelphia* seeks to motivate a change in attitudes toward higher education, to show how a college degree can be and should be part of most everyone's transition from high school into the workforce.

Ultimately, *Graduate! Philadelphia* recognizes that college completion for all age groups is the main issue. In particular, *Graduate!* focuses on adults because of the transformational power of a college degree earned by an adult on the entire family: earning power increases, but also there is a role model and a guide for younger family and community members. Being the first in the family to go to college (1st generation) is in itself a major risk factor for dropping out of college, and complementarily, the biggest indicator for succeeding in college is having a college graduate parent. Thus, *Graduate!'s* goal is to ensure that every family in the region has the resources to help and encourage at least one adult become a college graduate. At the same time, bearing in mind the ultimate scope of the issue and available funds, *Graduate!'s* strategy is to start with a goal that can lead to relatively quick and demonstrable successes, reaching for "low hanging fruit," thus building support and momentum for the larger effort ahead. Thus, *Graduate!* is first targeting adults who have some college credits and some motivation to seek guidance to return to college.

Graduate! Philadelphia's Distinctive and Innovative Approach

Graduate! Philadelphia is unique in two ways:

First, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first regional approach to the issue of college degree attainment among working adults. (Even before its formal launch, *Graduate! Philadelphia* was named "most innovative workforce practice" in Philadelphia by Innovation Philadelphia, one of the region's most influential economic development agencies.)

While the issue of human capital development and college completion is certainly not unique to Philadelphia, most approaches are typically driven by individual colleges competing with each other for students. *Graduate! Philadelphia* recognizes that other major stakeholder groups need to be more deeply engaged as well, including the individuals themselves, employers and other service providers who serve the identified populations, economic and workforce development organizations, and local and state government. To this end, *Graduate!* brings together these stakeholders from across the region in dialogue that has not hitherto happened: in formal and informal gatherings and conversations arranged by *Graduate!* or where *Graduate!* representation is present. *Graduate!'s* messaging to the public, businesses, and policy-makers, is seen as objective and concerned with the region's and individuals' well-being rather than a college sales pitch.

Second, *Graduate!* provides a suite of connected services specifically tailored for working adults with college experience. Whereas existing college access services in the Greater Philadelphia region target primarily youth and first-time college students, the environment they provide is

either not accessible to adults (e.g. located within the high schools during the school day) or makes adults feel self-conscious in the presence of youth. Furthermore, with dozens of colleges advertising, some of them “degree mills,” the amount of information is simply overwhelming. Individuals are often unaware of the many options that serve adult students well, such as asynchronous (online) courses and hybrid courses, weekend and evening courses, cohort-based programs, and accelerated programs. Working adults are also typically unaware of many of the bona fide financial resources available to them, both Federal and State-sponsored, and through employers. On the other hand, many have fallen prey to predatory lenders that advertise heavily, and are now deeply in debt or very wary of any offer of financial assistance. Consequently, many adults feel paralyzed and unsupported and do not pursue any of their choices.

Graduate! has designed a suite of services to provide potential college completers with assistance in sorting through options efficiently and effectively and demystifying financial assistance, tying education to career outcomes, and connecting individuals to advisors and support systems to ensure successful and timely degree completion. Once clients have reconnected with college, *Graduate!*'s staff continues to support them through graduation as cheerleaders, “coaches,” and advocates. Clients who complete an associate’s degree will immediately be encouraged to roll it into a bachelor’s degree. Clients receive assistance and support for re-enrollment at any college of their choice, including but not limited to *Graduate!*'s partner colleges.

Services are also designed to provide solutions for businesses: for motivating employees to pursue college degrees and thereby raising skill levels and knowledge, and by preparing a broader, deeper labor pool of well-educated individuals with the soft skills required for business success as well as specific industry and disciplinary knowledge. Unions are seeking *Graduate!* as a benefit for their members as well.

Graduate! Philadelphia also provides “neutral territory” and a conduit for Deans of Continuing Education divisions to share best practices and develop collaborative solutions for engaging more students and supporting them through degree completion. The *Graduate!* Deans’ Roundtable goals include creating an early-warning system to identify students who are at high risk of dropping out again; developing/maximizing utilization of supports proven to increase retention and completion; decreasing time-to-degree through better curricular alignment between two- and four-year colleges; maximizing credit attainment, credit accumulation for course completion and credit transfer; increasing the use of Prior Learning Assessment in a way that increases transparency for students and other colleges; and developing solutions for students who have taken courses at many different colleges and are now attempting to translate this learning into a degree. Ultimately, many of these solutions will positively affect the college experience for all students, not only returning students.

Graduate! Philadelphia is also expanding its partnerships to address needs related to success in college, such as reliable, affordable childcare, transportation, stable housing, emotional support systems, etc.

Graduate! Philadelphia’s Results to Date

Not even three years old, *Graduate!* has already demonstrated tangible results, brought leaders together across sectors in new and effective partnerships, and is poised for rapid growth and national impact. Operating with a three part strategy—a marketing campaign, an online portal, and a physical college re-engagement center—*Graduate!* is already reaching thousands of regional citizens with the will and the way to finish their college degrees.

- Returning to Learning Marketing Campaign Strategy and Roadmap.

Graduate!'s own research and market research conducted by its partners and others clearly show who and where the potential beneficiaries are, the barriers that keep them from returning to college and completing their degrees, and how they learn about college re-entry opportunities. Based on this knowledge and working closely with all stakeholder groups, *Graduate! Philadelphia* has developed a marketing campaign strategy that will drive and underlie the programmatic efforts outlined below. Several focus groups and in-depth group discussions have informed the process. In brief, research has shown that adults are more likely to make the decision to return to college if they hear the impetus and encouragement from someone they trust: for example, a spiritual leader, a family member, friend, or neighbor, a caring employer, a labor union official, the Mayor. Thus, gaining recognition and word-of-mouth endorsements from individuals who are perceived as highly trusted in the Greater Philadelphia community is *Graduate!*'s primary strategy, coupled with related events and activities in the community to support these endorsements and bring services to people where they live and work. To-date, the four major regional newspapers and the major broadcast television stations and radio channels have all highlighted *Graduate!* in a highly positive light (see attached media files.) As a result, individuals have come to *Graduate!* saying "my mother/brother/daughter/neighbor/minister/manager (etc.) read this article and told me I absolutely have to contact you..." Presidents of the Philadelphia AFL-CIO and several labor unions, and senior Human Resources managers in the District Attorney's Office and several major employers have reached out to *Graduate!* to provide its services their members and employees. *Graduate!* is in conversation with one of Philadelphia's largest churches to start a ministry and services onsite.

- Graduate! Philadelphia Portal: Online support for prospective returning students. *Graduate!*'s initial online portal was launched in January 2008 and is being significantly overhauled in mid-May. Accessible via the Internet (www.graduatephiladelphia.org) and at facilitated access sites administered by social services providers, the Portal enables individuals to search for programs by academic fields and vicinity and learn about services that support adult college students, such as evening and weekend advising hours, adult-friendly schedules (accelerated programs, evening, weekend, etc.,) delivery modes (face-to-face, cohort-based, online, hybrid, etc.,) and career goals (relating degrees to career paths, and building on career pathways research conducted by several organizations in the region.) It includes a calendar of events and deadlines updatable by colleges as well as clear explanations of financial assistance options and links to contact names and information, and downloadable resources on financial assistance. It has checklists and suggestions for questions to ask, tips on balancing life/work/college, links to childcare and public transportation resources, and information on other considerations typical to working adult students. Outreach and promotion is being done through the *Graduate!* network (including colleges and organizations affiliated with *Graduate!*) and traditional and new media. Other outreach avenues are also being developed.

Later in 2008, the Portal will also be a resource center for Human Resources personnel who are interested in supporting their employees' postsecondary education efforts, including articles on making the business case for investing in employee degree completion, preferred policies (tuition prepayment), benefits of/how to find and partner with a preferred educational provider, a link to *Graduate!*'s calendar of education fairs and related events, etc. The Portal is fully integrated with Re-engagement Center operations (see below.)

- The Graduate! Philadelphia Center

The first *Graduate! Philadelphia* Center opened in early February with a launch attended by over 300 area leaders. The launch was featured in all the regional Philadelphia print, TV, radio, and online media outlets, and the AP wire story was featured in tens of newspapers literally around the world, from Houston to San Diego to England and Australia. It was also featured in Forbes and Fortune magazine online editions. Locations and schedules for opening additional Centers are currently under evaluation.

The Center offers an individualized plan of action for each client with the goal of **re-enrolling and completing** a college degree. Since non-completers are already at high risk for future non-completion, services address physical barriers as well as academic and social preparation and supports. The goal is to create a life-changing impact on clients early, starting with their very first interaction with the Center, and to form a relationship that carries through degree completion. (A related goal is to ensure that even if clients do not return after the initial intake/orientation sessions, they will have gained knowledge that will eventually motivate them return to seek college re-engagement services at a later time.)

Center services are designed to remove or lower barriers by:

- Helping clients sort through the overload of information and options for adults, which can be overwhelming and even immobilizing.
- Introducing clients to the many new learning options for adults (including accelerated programs, cohort-based programs, and online and hybrid courses) and assessing learning styles and best fit for clients; educating clients on the many financial assistance sources available to working adults for tuition and related expenses, including information about tuition benefits provided by the area's larger employers and labor unions.
- Providing assistance in filing for financial assistance, loan rehabilitation, transcripts, credit transfers, and college applications.
- Teaching clients ways to shorten their time-to-degree through maximizing transfer of prior credits and applying for college credit for non-collegiate learning, demystifying the college experience and college systems, educating clients about college services that support adult as well as "traditional" students.
- Helping clients connect career and educational goals.
- Assessing academic preparation (and if needed refer to tutoring services or recommend developmental courses).
- Helping clients develop a realistic plan of action that includes a plan for financing the entire expected duration of studies, strategies for success in college (e.g. maintaining momentum, planning and registering ahead to minimize delays due to courses filling up, etc.) strategies for balancing work, family, studies, and other obligations and creating a support system, developing commuting routines, etc.
- Providing social supports and referrals to other resources.
- Participating colleges and universities are onsite and allow clients to interview them and "comparison shop" in one convenient location. Partner colleges also provide supporting services through completion.

Many of these services are offered on a walk-in basis, over the phone, or by email, in accordance with client preferences. Some services are offered as workshops and repeated several times a month on different days and at different hours. Orientations are also held onsite at employers' and community-based organizations (such as the YMCA.) The Center is housed in an inviting storefront in a highly accessible area of the Gallery shopping mall in Center City Philadelphia, and open during hours that are best suited for working adults. The Gallery sits atop a major public transportation hub and has ample attached parking.

In its initial configuration, the Center was designed to provide general information to 3,000 individuals per year, and to provide more intensive assessment and re-engagement services to approximately 1,000 prospective students in the first year and 1,700 in the second year, as capacity increases. These goals are quickly being shattered. In its first 3 months, the Center has fielded almost 1,000 information requests and provided more intensive assistance to almost 300 individuals.

- Returning To Learning College Fairs for Working Adults.

Graduate!'s Returning to Learning College Fairs (R2L) condense Center services and deliver them periodically at central locations in Philadelphia neighborhoods with large numbers of college non-completers. Since the launch of the R2L fairs, a hugely successful fair has already been held with AFSCME District Council 33 members (City government's main labor union) and another is scheduled with Philadelphia International Airport in early June for the Airport's 35,000 employees (including subcontractors.) Planning for additional fairs is already underway for summer 2008 with private employers, the Transit Workers Union, and churches.

Beyond these tangible results, *Graduate!* has galvanized public and private leaders to come together in new and effective ways to tackle one of the region's most pressing competitive and social challenges. Nine colleges and universities have come together to collaborate for the first time and six to eight more will join in summer 2008. Through the United Way and the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, private sector leadership organizations are collaborating on this human capital challenge; the Mayor and his staff have eagerly joined in partnership to achieve the objectives articulated in the Mayor's inaugural address in January 2008. *Graduate!* is working with and informing the work of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and Select Greater Philadelphia, Workforce Philadelphia2.0 (an economic development initiative centered on learning and talent) and the region's STEM (Science Math Engineering and Technology) collaborative.

Graduate! is likely to blossom in other regions as well. Already, with encouragement and support from Philadelphia, Louisville has inaugurated a *Graduate! Greater Louisville* initiative. As other regions grapple with their human capital strategies, and recognize the tremendous loss stemming from the fact that only two-thirds of those who begin a college degree program receive their degree, more and more regions will begin their own versions of the *Graduate!* playbook. There is already considerable early interest in the *Graduate!* model. *Graduate! Philadelphia's* Executive Director, Hadass Sheffer, has been invited to present at several conferences in the last year and has heard an enormous amount of interest from other communities facing similar challenges and interested in following *Graduate!'s* lead.