

The Denver Women's Equity Collaborative:
Partnering to Drive Economic Mobility for Black and Latina Women

Quick Pitch:

This collaboration will provide upward mobility for Latina and Black women who must work while earning a degree. In addition to supporting women through low-to-no debt education and paid experiences, we will empower employers to advance the upward mobility of female employees of color.

Executive Summary of Program/Project:

In Denver, only 17% of high school students earn a post-secondary credential that qualifies them for a high-wage career. For Latinx and Black students, this number drops to 8% and 9% respectively. Many women of color attend school part-time while working and caring for family – barriers that put them at high risk of dropping out (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2013; NCES, 2021). Women of color who do graduate remain underrepresented in positions of leadership and in top industries. The problem is manifold; traditional college is costly, rigid, and complex. Most expect students to study full time and do not accommodate those needing to work while they learn. Resources are not always available or easy to access. Both on campus and in the workplace, women of color also face racial and gender bias, as well as policies that put caretakers at a disadvantage.

AdvanceEDU and its partners are launching the innovative Denver Women's Equity Collaborative to close Denver's degree-attainment and career-achievement gaps for women of color. This effort requires leveraging the resources of the entire city to provide the right support as it is needed by learners, while simultaneously working to remove barriers for women of color. The collaborative includes public and private partners representing the city of Denver, Denver public schools, the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce, The Equity Project, The Colorado Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Colorado Thrives, and CWEE, which focuses on career achievement.

Together, our goals are to clearly map educational and career pathways into Colorado's top companies, conduct outreach to women of color and provide them with earn-to-learn pathways that feature paid learning experiences and low-debt courses, to design a data tracking system that allows us to synthesize resources, create DEI plans for participating companies, and finally, to establish a Women's Equity Collaborative Leadership committee. This committee would feature paid positions for program participants and would drive the work of the grant, lift up community voices, and influence resource and policy shifts within the city and state, as well as within organization.

Problem Statement:

Colorado's 4-year degree attainment for Latinx students lags 15% behind White students (Edexcelencia, 2021). Colorado sees an even bigger discrepancy in degree attainment for Black women. Women of color are more likely to attend school part-time while working and/or raising a family, which raises their risk of dropping out since the traditional college experience is not designed for those working or parenting. This education inequity is then carried over to the workplace, where women of color struggle for upward mobility due to biased policies and practices.

Collaborative's Approach: (1500 character max)

We have developed intentional partnerships across the following sectors to ensure a path to prosperity for women of color: education, workforce intermediaries, and employers. Each partnership aligns with the Wealth Accelerators Framework and helps build an earn-and-learn model that pairs low-to-no cost credentials with paid career experiences in Colorado's highest growth industries. These collaborators will meet for half a day once a month to discuss progress and any hurdles.

Our partners in Education (both K-12 and postsecondary), as well as our Workforce Intermediaries, will support the Education, Skills, and Training component of the Wealth Creation Framework by ensuring students have access to the courses they need to find a job in their chosen field, as well as training specific to their careers. Employer partners tie most directly to the Careers and Income facet of the Wealth Creation Model, but they also help provide financial health, and they will be integral in addressing occupational segregation with the help of our Workforce Intermediaries.

Our approach is not only unique in that it includes partners that can support women of color from before they ever set foot on a college campus, through their initial moves up the career ladder in the job of their choice, but in that these partners will provide a collective tracking model to monitor the women's progress. Not only will the collaborative provide resources for women, the Women's Equity Collaborative leadership committee will systematically remove barriers to their success by influencing city and state policy change. While other projects provide resources to help women, we will also remove barriers so that they need not rely on extra help to be treated fairly.