In early 2015, the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota launched Pathways 2 Prosperity (P2P): Building Women’s Economic Opportunity, a two-year pilot program to increase access to post-secondary education and high-paying employment for low-income women, women of color, and women in Greater Minnesota. Initial supplementary funding was granted to three pre-approved programs embedded in technical and community colleges and an economic development agency to learn from program design and delivery models.

This report indicates that while still in their formative stage, these programs and programmatic strategies are promising. Lessons learned across the programs are identified and recommendations for future program design and investment are shared.

While women have made major strides towards economic parity, there remain major obstacles that limit women’s full economic security. In Minnesota, the wage gap shortchanges women regardless of education, age or race/ethnicity, and poverty remains a problem that disproportionately affects female-headed households, women of color, and older women. While women now make up a majority of the workforce and earn a majority of all post-secondary degrees, these changes have not translated into economic parity. Access to affordable childcare and housing are simply out of reach for many women across Minnesota. The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota’s Status of Women & Girls in Minnesota 2014 shows that too many Minnesota women and girls experience barriers that limit their economic opportunities, including a lack of access to education and employment.

Research and evaluation shows that while many low-income women graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary education, most encounter barriers in persisting and finishing their degrees or certificates. Single mothers face enormous barriers to completing their college education and becoming economically self-sufficient, bearing the full financial responsibility and time commitment necessary for child rearing, education, housing, home-making and related expenses. Data show that women of color disproportionately do not complete post-secondary education. Simultaneously, research reveals there is a continued decrease in women’s pursuit of technical college training and education which often leads to middle skill jobs with good pay.

The Foundation believes that economic opportunity is the underpinning of all women’s equality – it increases women’s safety; improves her health outcomes; and impacts her leadership. Women and girls need greater
access to post-secondary education, support to complete their programs, workforce development, and skills training opportunities in order to obtain better paying jobs that lead them out of poverty.

Developing an Effective Grantmaking Intervention

To better understand how to disrupt these trends, the Foundation consulted national and local research, interviewed targeted nonprofit partners, other Women’s Foundations and philanthropies, and young women themselves to learn what investments they recommend to ensure women—particularly those who are low-income, between 18-24, women of color, immigrants and refugees, and/or are from rural areas—have pathways to prosperity. The recommendations are:

• Supplementary funding should prioritize wrap-around support services through partnership with community and technical colleges or partner organizations;

• Initial funding should target two to three grants for pre-approved programs and that funding should be supplementary, not supplant core funds;

• Funding should focus on programs that can be a replicable model and that will create institutional changes and shifts, in addition to individual shifts;

• Initial grants should be made through an invitation-only process, selected by Foundation staff;

• Gender norms need to be considered in fostering high wage/middle-skill tracks;

• Defined, rigorous mentoring needs to be a best practice; and

• Partnerships with local employers.

Pilot Program Launched

Taking these recommendations into account, the Pathways 2 Prosperity: Building Women’s Economic Opportunity was launched in 2015. P2P is a two-year pilot to increase access to post-secondary education and high-paying employment for low-income women, women of color, and women in Greater Minnesota. Lessons learned from this pilot will inform the Foundation’s next grantmaking cycle.

Three grants were awarded to innovative programs at two community and technical colleges and an economic development agency that create pathways for women to pursue employment in high-demand, middle-skill and high-paying fields through training and certificate programs, and workforce development. Funded programs also focus on increasing access to financial aid and other financial supports; expanding and improving student supports in strategic mentoring opportunities; and providing wrap-around services which include childcare, transportation and others as needed.

The next four pages describe each grantee partner, their unique program goals, target participants, strategic approaches and lessons learned to date.

Notable Practices and Results

Reviewing participant and grantee surveys and interviews after one year of programming shows that each pilot program has demonstrated meaningful successes and offers thoughtful lessons for programmatic design and replication. Results to date have been compiled across the programs to lift up these successful approaches that will support new program development for the Foundation and other organizations that are interested in engaging similar interventions.

“I want a career, instead of a job, in a field that interests me, instead of something I just refer to as a paycheck.”

- Dunwoody College Participant
SELECTED PILOT PROGRAM GRANTEE PARTNERS

Funding for this pilot focused on three pre-approved programs, where funding is supplementary, not primary. Grants were awarded to innovative programs at two community and technical colleges and an economic development agency that create pathways for women to pursue employment in high-demand, middle-skill and high-paying fields through training and certificate programs, and workforce development.

The following pages share more details on their unique program designs and

Bemidji
NORTHWEST TECHNICAL COLLEGE
Coding the Path from Poverty to Hope

Northwest Technical College (NTC) is a public two-year higher education institution in the Minnesota State system. NTC was started in the early 1960s to develop a workforce with practical skills and knowledge to fit professional opportunities in demand.

NTC has a unique partnership with Leech Lake Tribal College and Red Lake Tribal College which specializes in face-to-face and distance learning approaches across rural areas, facilitating the recruitment and training of Native American women. Medical coding was introduced into NTC’s curriculum in 2008 and the college is now strategically focusing on recruiting women into the program.

Minneapolis/St. Paul
DUNWOODY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
Women in Technical Careers Program

Dunwoody College of Technology is a 100-year old private, non-profit endowed institution of higher learning that offers certificate and two-and four-year degree programs in seven areas: Applied Management, Automotive, Computer Technology, Construction, Design and Graphics Technology, Health Sciences Technology, and Robotics and Manufacturing. All these fields are traditionally male-dominated.

The school’s 2014 strategic plan called to increase the number of low-income women and women of color who enter and complete associate degree programs in fields that are nontraditional for their gender. This cultural shift was prompted by the institution’s commitment to diversity and the expectations of employers to meet future workforce needs that will reflect the changing demographics of the Twin Cities.

Hibbing and Virginia
ARROWHEAD ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AGENCY
Career Pathways for Women

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) is a private, non-profit Community Action Agency with 50 years of experience in providing services to citizens living in rural northeastern Minnesota. The agency’s mission is to strengthen communities by providing opportunities for people experiencing social and economic challenges and its work focuses on the causes and consequences of poverty.

Programming includes employment and training including vocational assessment; Adult Basic Education (ABE); Head Start; housing services; youth development; rural transit and senior services. The organization has a number of programs focused on girls, young women and women’s education and workforce development.

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PILOT TOTALS

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The Coding the Path from Poverty to Hope program provides training and support for women to enter into the medical coding field, focusing on those living below the federal poverty level, those that are caretakers of a child and/or elder, or women of color. The college’s partnerships with tribal colleges offers unique access to Native American women.

The program seeks to address key barriers inhibiting women from seeking additional education which include: debt (academic and otherwise), transportation costs, daycare and elder care costs, limited culturally-appropriate mentoring, and the ability to successfully transition education into sustainable work experiences.

**Why Medical Coding?**

Medical coding involves using nationally recognized coding systems to classify procedures and diagnoses related to medical treatment used in insurance claims processing. The medical coding profession has rapidly increased in popularity over the past five years due to increased demand for workers in the field. Professionals earn between $40,000 and $56,000 per year, are offered flexible hours, and have the option to work from home. Medical coding jobs in MN are predicted to increase by 17% by 2020.

**Lesions Learned for Future Programming**

- Garner Institutional Support
  - Informing the entire college about the grant garnered institutional support on a shared mission level.

- Foster Faculty and Staff Commitment
  - Dedicated faculty ensured the program’s success—everyone pitched in and this was needed.

- Build in More Mentoring/Advising Hours
  - High-touch advising and wellness coaching contributed to the program’s success which takes time and resources.

- Reconsider Catch-up Education Requirements
  - Currently, these requirements could inhibit program participation while not impacting future job preparation success.

- Collaborate with Tribal Communities
  - The college’s partnership with tribal colleges enabled the program to be designed for thoughtful participation and recruitment for target participants.

**Participant Takeaways**

- Greater self-confidence
- Opportunity to find a job from home
- Increased computer skills and capacity to learn
- Exposure to new employable skills
- Erased debt
- Ability to plan for the future
- Financial support in the form of gas cards, Internet and laptops were essential

**Participant Snapshot**

- 27 Participants
- 10 # with dependent children
- 8 Identify as Native American

- 81% Persisted with job training initiatives
- 100% Placed in internships

- “It has had a big impact on my life. Without this grant I would not have had the financial means to pay off my educational debt. The grant made that possible and helped me get my foot in the door to accomplish my goals.”
PROGRAM + TARGET PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW
The Women in Technical Careers (WITC) Program provides need-based scholarships to enroll in one of three targeted programs: Construction Sciences & Building Technology, Computer Technology, or Automotive Technology and Robotics & Manufacturing Technology, all traditionally male-dominated. Each program offers degrees that lead to immediate, high-paying jobs in high-demand fields with opportunities for career advancement. The program is focused on low-income women ranging between 18-45+ and provides strategic wrap-around services to support success.

WRAP-AROUND PROGRAM STRATEGIES
Scholarships  Summer Orientation Program
Childcare Stipend  Monthly Cohort Meetings
Women’s Enrollment Coordinator  Weekly Advising
Career-focused Mentor Program  Weekly Guided Study
Faculty Professional Development  Professional Evaluation

PARTICIPANT SNAPSHOT
“The WITC program has helped me overcome the fear and doubt of entering the field of technology as a career as a Black, female, and older student. I have also learned a lot of great things about myself and that women do care about women.”

LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING
Give Time for Institutional Change
Having a year for planning and preparation built a solid foundation for the program.

Have a Dedicated Program Coordinator
This is key to Dunwoody’s success to date. The Program Coordinator was brought on board nearly a year before the first cohort. The coordinator has an awareness of the campus and community resources and the ability to build relationships with all different kinds of people, work closely with students, meet with the board of trustees and interface with donors.

Identify Recruiting Partners
These include schools, girl- and women-serving nonprofits, workforce development agencies, and cultural community nonprofits. It is challenging to attract a diverse cohort, particularly those in the 18-25 age group.

Introduce Support Services
For example, rather than telling participants there is a Career Services office, the Career Services Director was invited to a cohort meeting to share resources, answer questions and encourage women to set up a meeting to discuss their career goals. Many did and at least 8 of the 13 women who are employed in summer jobs in their industry this year secured their jobs through Career Services.

Monitor Attendance and Grades
Identifying those that were struggling enabled the program to offer targeted tutoring support to keep them engaged and in the program.

Faculty Professional Development
Faculty have limited experience working with women in this male-dominated educational and career environment. Investing in diversity and inclusion and differentiated learning approaches are essential.

Remove Barrier to Entry Policies
The program eliminated the application and enrollment fees for women applying for the WITC scholarship to support candidates.

The Occupational Gender Gap
Advocacy groups that have studied the occupational gender gap have identified common barriers to women’s participation in postsecondary technical education and careers: persistent stereotypes about gender and occupation; a lack of female role models and mentors from the technical sector to inspire and advise other women; male-centered learning environments and instructional techniques; and negative interactions in the workplace and classrooms. Women’s responsibilities as primary caretakers of their children and families and the cost of college are additional barriers.

This is a two-year program. Completion rates aren’t expected until May 2017.
PROGRAM + TARGET PARTICIPANT
OVERVIEW

The Career Pathways for Women Program focus is to assist low-income women to follow nontraditional career pathways through partnerships with school districts, community colleges, trades apprenticeship programs, and workforce development programs. The program seeks to engage young women ages 18-24.

WRAP-AROUND
PROGRAM STRATEGIES
Childcare
Transportation
Financial Literacy Training

PARTICIPANT SNAPSHOT

“I had no idea what a business plan was or how to even think how to draw one up. The class has given me a clear-cut avenue to have a solid business plan when I get to that point of starting the business.”

17 Participants
12 Are unemployed
9 # with dependent children

65% Persisted in job training initiatives
35% Placed in internship

LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Ensure Strong Teacher Support Model
Participants praised the support they received from teachers, who would follow up on all questions and seek out answers.

Connect with Financial Sources
Entrepreneurial curriculum included connections to financial institutions that can help participants with funding their businesses.

Diversify Offerings
Carpentry and entrepreneurship only appeal to some. The program seeks to provide an array of offerings in the future to attract more students and further increase completion rates.

Wrap-around Services Need to be Strong
Some participants struggled to attend classes due to transportation and timing issues. Additional planning is needed to ensure the right mix of support in future programs.

Advocate Across Agencies and Partners
The program proactively educated local stakeholders such as the Workforce Development Board, local colleges and school districts, and others to advance this work.

Recruit Person-to-Person
Individual, personalized recruitment is key to moving women into the programs and retaining them.

Welcome Women
Local colleges have women-only open houses to introduce women to the trade programs in a welcoming environment.

Beginning carpentry skills training in action.
P2P Pilot Program Outcomes To Date

Reviewing participant and grantee surveys and interviews after a year of programming shows that each pilot program has demonstrated meaningful successes.

KEY OUTCOMES TO DATE

Persisted in Job Training Initiatives
Persistence is the essential key to program completion, credentialing, increasing job opportunities and securing higher wages.

- AVERAGE 78%
  - NTC: 81%
  - DCT: 84%
  - AEOA: 65%

Placed in Internships or Apprenticeships
This strategy has proven to be crucial for women in non-traditional fields to provide hands-on experience and mentoring.

- AVERAGE 68%
  - NTC: 100%
  - DCT: 56%
  - AEOA: 35%

Obtained a New Job
To date, participants across all three programs have begun to secure new jobs or promotions, increasing their average wages by 24%.

- 11 PARTICIPANTS
  - 18% Received a promotion
  - 73% Increased income from employment
  - $13.10 Average hourly wage BEFORE the program
  - $16.30 Average hourly wage AFTER the program
  - 24% Percentage increase in hourly wage

Received Financial Support
Access to financial support has been proven to be a key tool to support women returning to school.

- 17 PARTICIPANTS*
  - $196,000 Total across programs
  - $12,263 Average per recipient

Reported Soft Skills Gained
Soft skills are necessary to advancing the technical skills gained.

- Networking, Interviewing, Resumes, Mentorship, Budgeting, Financial Literacy, Confidence Building, Stress Management, How to succeed as a woman in male-dominated industries

*Financial support figures available and calculated for 16 of 17 participants.
**P2P Pilot Program Notable Practices**

*for Future Program Design*

These successful systems change approaches have been identified across the P2P pilot programs to support new program development for the Foundation and other organizations that are interested in engaging in similar interventions.

1. **Changing Institutional Norms**

   Institutions and program staff require thoughtful engagement and training to create welcoming environments for women in traditionally male-dominated programs. Support for the program needs to come from across the organization—from the mission of the institution, to administrative staff, and instructors. Gender and culturally-sensitive training provided necessary tools to support teachers and create new attitudes across institutions. Changing institutional norms is an essential strategy for effective programming.

2. **Intentional + Targeted Recruitment**

   Recruitment strategy must be a fundamental focus of program design. Attracting women to non-traditional jobs can be a hard sell; creating welcoming entry points is critical. Identifying targeted participants can be challenging if they are not already part of an organized educational community; partnering with community and workforce development organizations supports culturally-appropriate recruitment efforts. Removing barriers to entry through educational debt forgiveness, financial scholarships, and eliminating catch-up requirements support enrollment.

3. **Wrap-Around Support**

   Holistic, wrap-around support proves to be an essential programmatic strategy. These include, but are not limited to: transportation, child care, and elder care to support basic attendance; tools such as laptops and internet access as required by technical program; debt-forgiveness and scholarships to remove barriers to entry as noted above; culturally-appropriate mentoring and financial literacy training to address differentiated challenges; and internships and apprenticeship placement to bridge the gap between training and employment.

4. **Strategic Planning + Preparation**

   Garnering institutional support and training staff as needed, recruiting participants, and arranging multiple wrap-around services across numerous administrative offices and partners takes time, planning, and coordination. One program planned for a full year in advance with a full-time program coordinator. It is crucial to build in enough time to roll out the program successfully.
The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota would like to thank the Walmart Foundation for its generous contribution in support of the Pathways to Prosperity Program. It has enabled us to increase women’s access to post-secondary education and to support low-income women, women of color, and women in greater Minnesota on their pathway to high-payment employment.

We thank Northwest Technical College, Dunwoody College of Technology, and Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, and their staff for participating in this pilot program and for contributing data and their insights on what contributes to a successful gender-based economic security program for women. We also thank their program participants for completing surveys and sharing their insights.

This evaluation was conducted and report produced by Korwin Consulting, an evaluation and planning firm that advances social justice solutions by identifying community strengths, building organizational capacity, and evaluating impact. We thank Ginger Daniel of Orange Strategies, for her design, writing, and contributions to this report.

Lee Roper-Batker, President and CEO
Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, 2016