



## TOPLINE MESSAGES

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### Summary:

In the mid-20th century—with the G.I. Bill, the Higher Education Act and Civil Rights Act—the nation invested in and opened access to higher education for its citizens, broadening the opportunity for Americans to earn a college degree and expanding the pathway to success. Today, that degree is more critical than ever, and it's incumbent upon educational institutions to advance the movement, to ensure that talented students from every part of society have access to an excellent education. Unfortunately, too few students from lower-income backgrounds have access to the full breadth of opportunities. The American Talent Initiative brings together a diverse set of public and private institutions united in this common goal, enhancing individual efforts to attract, enroll, and graduate low- and moderate-income students, learn from each other about how best to support them, and share these experiences in order to expand higher education access across hundreds of colleges and universities.

### About the American Talent Initiative

- **The American Talent Initiative is a long-term alliance between the nation's top colleges and universities** that has one central, ambitious goal: **by the year 2025, attract, enroll, and graduate 50,000 additional high-achieving, lower income students at the nation's top-performing 270 colleges and universities.** Our goal is to increase and sustain total enrollment of lower-income students attending these top-performing colleges from 430,000 to about 480,000 by 2025. For many participating institutions, this goal will be defined by the share of Pell students enrolled and graduating.

- **The American Talent Initiative (ATI)** is a Bloomberg Philanthropies-supported collaboration between the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program, Ithaka S+R, and a growing alliance of Ivy League, state flagship, private universities and liberal arts colleges committed to increasing opportunity for lower-income students.
- As of April 25, 2017, 68 colleges and universities have joined the initiative. Across the membership ~700,000 students are enrolled (~60% in public institutions and ~40% in private non-profit institutions). The membership is incredibly diverse, representing 26 different states, 5 different Carnegie Classes, and a wide range of institution sizes, with total undergraduate enrollment ranging from 900 to 45,000 students at individual institutions.
- We are coming together because research shows that:
  - When qualified high-achieving, lower-income students attend top colleges and universities, their probability of graduating increases significantly, as do their potential earnings and long-term quality of life.
  - The educational experience of all students at these colleges and universities improves when greater access is provided to talented students from all backgrounds.
  - Our nation and our economy benefit from cultivating and supporting talented young people from every zip code and income level.
  - Unfortunately, too few qualified, lower-income students claim their places at these colleges.
- To maximize the initiative’s reach and impact, in the years to come, ATI aims to expand, including at least 100 more of the >270 colleges and universities with six-year graduation rates consistently above 70 percent. Each year, we will reassess institutional eligibility for ATI using the most recently available data in order to expand the reach of our collective work, as well as to incentivize institutions to improve graduation rates to gain full access to our growing knowledge-sharing community.
- ATI members are all working individually to expand opportunity to talented students across the United States and the globe. Here is what we are doing at [xx school].... But we believe we can do more if we work with other, committed institutions.
- ATI is being designed as a community of practice where members share their practices in the areas of attracting, enrolling, supporting and graduating lower-income students, each contributing the lessons from their own experience. As experts in institutional practice, Ithaka S+R and Aspen will serve as researchers and facilitating organizations, creating structured opportunities for sharing to take place and ensuring that relevant lessons are shared with each ATI member institution.

- Summaries of highly effective practices will be publicized broadly so that non-participating institutions can also benefit.

### **Why this Initiative Now**

- We're calling it the **American Talent Initiative**, because it's all about elevating and supporting the best talent in the country, and right now, tens of thousands of our country's most talented students are not going to the schools that we know – based on their determination and ability – that they can excel in.
- Everyone should have a chance to participate in the American Dream, and that is not currently the case in our country. Each year, at least 12,500 incredibly well-qualified, lower-income students do not enroll in top colleges and universities where at least 70 percent of all students graduate and they have the best opportunities for post-graduate success.
- Put another way, across seniors, juniors, sophomores, and first-year students, there are more than 50,000 highly talented, lower-income students who are not enrolled in our top colleges and universities, according to recent research (by [Stanford researcher Caroline Hoxby and Harvard researcher Christopher Avery](https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/key-findings-from-the-hidden-supply-of-high-achieving-low-income-students/) <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/key-findings-from-the-hidden-supply-of-high-achieving-low-income-students/>) These students have earned the opportunity to enroll in institutions with the highest graduation rates and best track records for post-graduate success, but for a variety of reasons—a lack of information about their options, confusion about costs, inadequate financial aid offers—many of them simply lack access.
- Our nation and our economy benefit from cultivating and supporting talented young people from every zip code. Growing disparities in household income make equal opportunity for all talented Americans one of our nation's most important goals, and ATI seeks to be part of the solution.

### **ATI's Role and Impact**

It's not acceptable that only one in four of the students on America's top campuses come from families in the lower 50 percent of incomes. A critical mass of America's colleges and universities with the highest graduation rates are ready to work together to solve the problem and collaborate in an alliance that is focused on making a difference by working towards a decade-long goal. These schools are committing to:

- **Committing to Visible Goals:** To contribute to the shared goal of an additional 50,000 lower-income students, Members commit to stepping up their own efforts to recruit, support, enroll lower-income students and ensure that they thrive on campus, graduate, and are positioned to succeed after college.
  - **Facilitating Research and Knowledge Sharing:** To inform our collective actions and activities, members will share what they learn about making progress toward this goal with one another and with the broader higher education community and the public. Members will also report data on lower-income student enrollment and success, so that ATI can measure its aggregate progress on an annual basis.
  - **A Sustained National Campaign:** To amplify the impact of our individual and collective actions, ATI members will lead the way in contributing to a national campaign that unites leaders around the importance of socioeconomic diversity on college campuses and motivates those in and beyond the membership to act on this important issue.
- We know that this is completely doable. *The New York Times* College Access Index, for example, shows that it is possible for colleges of all types to admit and graduate more socioeconomically diverse high achieving students. All of our members will be learning from these leaders, and sharing their own strategies. We'll identify and promote replication of effective practices and elevate initiative member efforts so the knowledge about what works can be shared more broadly.
  - ATI member colleges will begin executing their plans in 2017 and we expect most to achieve measurable improvements in 2018 or 2019.

<b>American Talent Initiative Participating Institutions (*members joining in January–April 2017)</b>	
Allegheny College*	Rice University
Amherst College	Rutgers University*
Bard College*	Saint Michael's College*
Bates College	Smith College*
Baylor University*	Spelman College
Brown University*	Stanford University
Bucknell University*	Swarthmore College*
California Institute of Technology*	The Ohio State University
Carleton College*	University of California, Berkeley
Claremont McKenna College*	University of California, Davis*
Colby College*	University of California, Irvine*
Columbia University*	University of California, Los Angeles
Cornell University*	University of Denver*

Dartmouth College	University of Maryland, College Park
Davidson College	University of Massachusetts, Amherst*
Dickinson College*	University of Miami*
Duke University	University of Michigan - Ann Arbor
Elizabethtown College*	University of Minnesota*
Fordham University*	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Franklin & Marshall College	University of Pennsylvania*
Georgetown University	University of Richmond
Georgia Institute of Technology	University of South Carolina*
Gettysburg College*	University of Southern California*
Harvard University	University of Texas at Austin
Johns Hopkins University	University of Virginia*
Kenyon College*	University of Washington
Lafayette College*	Vanderbilt University
Lawrence University*	Vassar College
Lebanon Valley College*	Wake Forest University*
Lehigh University	Washington University in St. Louis
Marist College*	Wesleyan University*
New York University*	Williams College
Pomona College	Wofford College*
Princeton University	Yale University

# ATI MEMBER Q&A

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## Questions related to mission and goals

### **What impact should be expected from the American Talent Initiative?**

Beyond our goal to attract, enroll, and graduate 50,000 additional high-achieving, lower-income students in America's top colleges and universities, we aim to build a sustained national campaign to:

- Raise public and private sector awareness about the “missing” talent in these schools, including raising awareness about opportunity and affordability among lower-income students and communities;
- Create momentum among leaders in higher education to act on improving access and success for low- to moderate-income students;
- Engage up to 270 institutions nationwide in pursuing measureable goals related to their own contribution to meeting this challenge; and
- Disseminate research detailing proven and promising strategies for increasing opportunity and access.

To reach our goal of 50,000 additional lower-income students among the 270 institutions by the year 2025, our aspirations for the entire sector would be to reach 10,000 by 2020; 25,000 by 2022; and 50,000 by 2025. For many ATI institutions, this progress will be measured by Pell student enrollment share and/or graduation rates.

While most progress will be achieved through ATI members reaching their goals, we anticipate that the increased attention and awareness raised from our collaborative efforts and sustained campaign will inspire others outside of ATI to act, creating an indirect, but equally valuable impact on increasing opportunity to lower-income students.

### **What is your definition of “lower-income” or “low- and moderate-income” students?**

We define low- and moderate- income as the bottom 50 percent of the national income distribution. Because of data limitations, we are currently using as a proxy eligibility for the Federal Pell Grant Program which provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate students and covers roughly the bottom 40% of the income distribution. ATI refers to the US Census calculation of those who are below the median family income level. While the cutoff changes each year, in 2015, it was \$56,500.

- For traditional students (those under age 24 and without their own children), that income definition is determined by their parents' family income. For non-traditional students, it relates to students' personal income levels.
- About 90% of Pell Grant recipients have income levels below \$40,000.

**Why did you choose 270 institutions and a 70% six-year graduation rate required to join the initiative at this time?**

We recognize that many colleges in the US are focused on helping lower-income students succeed. We applaud their work and hope to learn from their successes. We chose to focus on the institutions with high graduation rates, however, because research shows that better student outcomes are often linked to time to degree, and these 270 institutions have demonstrated success at graduating their students at high rates. The 270 schools we are targeting comprise small liberal arts colleges, public flagships, and private research universities that often have greater resources than other four year colleges. We believe these institutions are well positioned to invest in the success of lower-income students.

**Questions related to race and social disruption**

**Is this a “talent initiative,” a “low-income initiative,” an “equal opportunity initiative” or an “Affirmative Action initiative”?**

ATI is about ensuring that all students who have proven that they can be admitted into and excel at top colleges have the opportunity to do so, regardless of the size of their parent’s bank account. We know from relevant research that many, many students have the ability to thrive in a top institution but do not access those opportunities for a variety of reasons related to their socioeconomic status. These barriers are both real and perceived, but can be overcome.

Studies have shown that applicants from lower-income families (many of whom are Pell-eligible) disproportionately self-select away from many of our highest-performing colleges and universities. As importantly, many apply or fail to attend because they cannot access the financial aid they need. Indeed, some highly talented lower-income students are displaced by less talented wealthy students, simply because more affluent students can pay full freight. These same colleges and universities, paradoxically, may offer lower-income students greater chances of success and can be equally or more affordable than other options.

This initiative is about ensuring that institutions access talent from every neighborhood, and make the commitment to do it. While racial and ethnic diversity is not the primary goal, we fully expect that racial and ethnic diversity will be enhanced as a result of these efforts, and plan to track whether that is so. In fact, colleges that have recently expanded economic opportunity tend

to increase racial and ethnic diversity as well. The focus is on lower-income students who are incredibly well-prepared and have the capacity to excel in our institutions. It's a talent initiative that will reach a group of students that is economically, ethnically and racially diverse.

**Are programs such as this a reaction to recent social disruption – like riots in Baltimore or protests on college campuses? How have those events affected your thinking related to the goals and plans of this initiative?**

ATI aims to expand opportunity at a time when so many in our country feel disconnected, lacking a sense of hope. This Initiative will play a small but we hope significant role in healing those divides.

**Will this initiative help address concerns about racial disparities on America's campuses?**

We believe that increasing diversity on our nation's campuses enhances the educational experience for students from all backgrounds, but we're especially focused on the educational experience for lower-income students. ATI will work with our members to explore how, as their campuses become more diverse, they can ensure that lower-income students, as well as students of color, are fully integrated into the campus community; that lower-income students have the support they need to succeed in and after college; and that all students are engaged in ways that promote healthy dialogue and debate around the important issues of our times.

## Questions related to student success and student quality

**What is this project going to do to help students succeed once they are admitted to these colleges and universities?**

Our focus will be not just on enrolling students in these institutions, but ensuring that they are fully included and supported in their efforts to excel over four full years.

There isn't just one strategy that will be or should be implemented across all institutions. There are many approaches, including: monitoring how students are doing and intervening to guide them back toward success if they are struggling; providing the resources students need; and ensuring that students have full access to the extra-curricular opportunities these colleges offer, including study abroad, leadership positions and internships.

ATI is being built as a community of practice where members share their practices in the areas of attracting, enrolling, supporting, and graduating low-income students, each contributing lessons



from their own experience. Ithaca S+R and Aspen will bring their own expertise in institutional practice and will serve as researchers and facilitating organizations, creating structured opportunities for sharing to take place and ensuring that relevant lessons are shared with each ATI member institution. Summaries of highly effective practices will also be publicized broadly so that non-participating institutions can also benefit.

**Will colleges and universities that participate in ATI be accepting students who otherwise might not have been qualified to enroll?**

Quite the opposite. We know from research that talented students thrive in rigorous academic environments regardless of their family economic situation. For a variety of reasons, however, many colleges and universities aren't enrolling thousands of highly-qualified lower-income students. This is not good for students, colleges, or our country, as talented students who have earned the opportunity to enroll in the top colleges and universities in the United States are missing from our ranks.

[Questions related to recruitment, accountability, funding](#)

**Why are these particular colleges and universities signed on as members of the Initiative? Why are other, similar schools not members?**

This reflects the first phase of a multi-year long-term initiative. We'll be expanding the invitation for an additional 50 or more colleges and universities to join within the first year. But we had to start somewhere, and we chose to limit the size of the founding group to 30 because it's manageable enough in size to make critical decisions in areas related to organizational systems and processes, such as governance and data-sharing. With that in mind, our 30 founding members are diverse in terms of their size and sector (i.e., large, small, urban, rural, public, private), their geographic region, and their levels of selectivity within the 270. In addition, their leaders have a demonstrated commitment to socioeconomic diversity and lower-income student success on their campuses.

**As colleges get more expensive and states cut back funding, how are colleges and universities going to find the dollars to pay for this?**

That is a great question. Obviously, the degree of difficulty goes up for public universities that are part of ATI if states cut funding. But we know it can be done. For example, even though there are constrained state contributions to higher education, University of California institutions still have some of highest Pell enrollments in the country. The precise mechanisms by which

institutions will accomplish this will vary from school to school, but strategies will entail some combination of raising additional resources and reallocating existing ones. Based on initial research we have done, we know how some institutions have funded this in the past, including:

- Shifting more financial aid for highly talented students away from so called merit aid – which often goes to students with limited or no financial need – to need based aid – which goes those with greater financial need;
- Making need-based financial aid a higher priority for alumni and private philanthropic giving;
- Reassessing priorities of how money is spent in ways that fully protect the quality of education offered; and
- Working with state governments to increase need-based financial aid programs.

**How do we know for a fact that individual colleges and universities will increase the number of Pell (lower-income) students? Isn't this a voluntary initiative?**

Each institution will set goals that will contribute to our national enrollment goal. For each institution, participating in this initiative requires indicating something measurable that will contribute to the collective goal. For some, that may be expanding the pipeline of low-income students applying. Others may choose to reallocate financial aid, while others may choose to raise retention and graduation rates. But what all of these strategies must have in common is a commitment to contributing to ATI's national goal of educating an additional 50,000 lower-income students in the 270 eligible institutions by 2025, and each college or university joined the Initiative because its president and leadership support this goal.

**How are you (ATI institutions) going to be recruiting these students? How are we communicating this to prospective students who are difficult to reach?**

Each ATI institution will determine how best to recruit students and we will be researching what works best and creating an opportunity for members to share best practices with one another and the field at large.

**How many more students will you add to your freshman class from this effort? How many will go to which institution?**

Each ATI institution will determine its own goals, which will relate to many factors including the size of its student population, how many lower-income students already enrolled, and the availability of resources, including from the endowment. We are setting a goal that we see as ambitious, but it is up to each institution to do what it can to contribute to the larger goal of educating 50,000 additional lower-income students by 2025. Some may add lower-income

students to their freshmen class; others may add community college transfers or increase lower-income student retention and graduation rates. Some may choose to reallocate existing resources; others may choose to focus on raising additional funds. The 50K additional low- and moderate-income is goal for all of the 270 institutions, not just the 30 ATI institutions.

**Does ATI further segregate a relatively small group of institutions already perceived by many as “elite” from the higher education community-at-large?**

By no means does ATI purport to be doing the only – or even the most important—work to increase student access and success within higher education. ATI institutions understand that they have an obligation to do their part, but by no means are unique in serving the public interest or educating students well. Indeed, ATI institutions understand that they have a lot to learn from other sectors about how to educate low-income students.

**Does ATI displace other deserving students who would otherwise be eligible for places in the entering classes at the participating institutions? (For example, UNC has a cap on enrollment.)**

Each school will determine its own strategy for contributing to the collective goal of 50,000 additional students. There are multiple ways to increase the number of lower-income students at institutions, some of which may require making choices between students, but which also could include expanding the number of student admitted and enrolled (as was recently done by Amherst College). In the end, we know that there are thousands of students who would otherwise be admitted to America’s top colleges and universities – those that provide the best chance of graduation and post-graduate success – who are not enrolling talented students now.

**How are you (ATI institutions) going to be recruiting these students? How are we communicating this to prospective students who are difficult to reach?**

There are many ways such students can be recruited. For example, a companion effort to ATI funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies – College Point – is ramping up counselling to thousands of low-income high-achieving students nationally. The National College Advising Corps is working to do the same in high schools in 16 states. While ATI will work to connect its members to such initiatives, each ATI institution will ultimately determine the best way to recruit students and we will be researching what works best and creating an opportunity for members to share best practices with one another and the field at large.

**How many more students will you add to your freshman class from this effort? How many will go to which institution?**

Each ATI institution will determine its own goals, which will relate to many factors including the size of its student population, how many low-income students it already enrolls, and the availability of resources, including from the endowment. We are setting a goal that we see as ambitious, but it is up to each institution to do what it can to contribute to the larger goal of 50,000 additional lower-income students by 2025. The 50,000 additional low- and moderate-income is goal for all of the 270 institutions, not just the 30 ATI institutions.

**Many of these schools have endowments sizable enough to allow them to add their share of Pell students as a quick solution that doesn't have to wait until 2025 and would hardly make even a tiny dent in their available funds for running their institutions? So, why create a multi-organization, 10-year initiative when the money is there and the solution is doable today?**

Many colleges and universities have been working to address the challenge that ATI aims to resolve. But those that have been most successful include many with relatively small endowments as well as some with large endowments. The issue is not endowment size, but rather finding ways to accelerate the solution to the national problem: too many talented low-income students are being excluded from top colleges and universities. Our theory of action is that by making commitments to one another and sharing information about successes along the way, that ATI members can accomplish that better than they could by working alone.

### [Questions related to ATI membership, funding, and governance](#)

**How does ATI differ from the University Innovation Alliance or any of the other national organizations/initiatives that are working on this problem?**

ATI is distinguished by its goals and membership. There are many other important initiatives across higher education, with goals equally important as ATIs. But, we believe the scope of our initiative and our collaboration across many different types of institutions, presents us with even more opportunities to research and assess the programs we implement to ensure that we enroll and graduate more lower-income students.

**What is the rationale for colleges to join an initiative in which members are all competing for the same population of students?**

The whole premise of ATI is that there is a large group of talented students that could go to these institutions who are not today. Far from a competition, ATI is recognition that collaboration will

enable colleges to reach out to, enroll, pay for, and graduate the many talent lower-income students who deserve a place at our institutions but are not today being served.

### **How is the Initiative Being Funded?**

Bloomberg Philanthropies has provided a multi-year \$1.7 million grant to enable the Aspen Institute and Ithaca S+R to manage the Initiative, to conduct and disseminate practice research, to analyze enrollment and other related data, and to convene presidents and other representatives from ATI member institutions.

### **How is the Initiative Governed?**

A seven member steering committee has been charged with governing ATI in its initial stages. A more formal governance structure will be determined during the first year of the initiative. The current Steering Committee is:

Ana Mari Cauce, University of Washington  
Christopher Eisgruber, Princeton University  
Michael Drake, The Ohio State University  
Martin Kurzweil, Ithaca S+R  
Daniel Porterfield, Franklin & Marshall College  
Carol Quillen, Davidson College  
Josh Wyner, Aspen Institute

### **Questions related to data**

**Is this number of the shortage of high-achieving, low-income students only based on SAT and ACT scores? This is somewhat biased for low-income considering that the cards are stacked against low-income students on these areas of measurement?**

This initiative does not endorse any specific admissions criteria; every ATI institution will retain its unique process and standards for admitting students. What we know, however, is that, based on test achievement and high school grades, that there at least 50,000 lower-income students across the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes, who can excel at a top institution but are not today enrolled in one. There are likely many more, but we are starting with this number. As more lower-income students are enrolled and graduating, ATI will be a success.

**What number are you increasing by 50,000 more students? What is the number of students you are starting with?**

At this juncture, our best proxy for measuring progress towards our shared goal is the enrollment and success (graduation) of Pell-eligible students. Based on the latest federal data available, about 430,000 students at the 270 eligible institutions are Pell Grant recipients. Based on this illustrative baseline, our goal would be to increase the number of Pell Grant recipients attending these top-performing colleges from 430,000 to about 480,000 by 2025, through increased admission and persistence to graduation.

## Some More Tough Questions

### **Do any ATI members give out merit aid? Isn't that the real problem?**

One of the strategies committed to by ATI members is to prioritize need-based aid, as opposed to merit-only aid. But addressing only that one issue will not be enough. There are many reasons that many talented lower-income students don't have access to top colleges. Every ATI institution is committed to doing its part to enroll and graduate more lower-students through some combination of admissions, financing and student support strategies. As long as they make progress toward the ATI goal, we think it would be a mistake to measure their commitment through the lens of any one practice.

### **Are ATI members going to stop the practice of early admissions? Isn't that the real problem because it disadvantages low-income students?**

Early decision can disadvantage lower-income students, but some colleges and universities that employ early decision have, at the same time, dramatically increased lower-income enrollments. In other words, ATI goals can be achieved while maintaining early decision. That is because there are lots of reasons that many talented lower-income students don't have access to top colleges. Every ATI institution is committed to doing its part to attract, enroll and graduate more lower-income students through some combination of admissions, financing and student support strategies. As long as they make progress toward the ATI goal, we think it would be a mistake to measure their commitment through the lens of any one practice.

### **This initiative is about socioeconomic diversity, but what about racial diversity? Isn't it possible that increasing socioeconomic diversity will compromise the ability of top college to increase racial and ethnic diversity? Aren't these strategies at odds with one another?**

These two types of diversity are incredibly important and pursuing one should not compromise the capacity of a college to pursue the other. While racial and ethnic diversity is not the primary goal, we fully expect that racial and ethnic diversity will be enhanced as a result of these efforts, and plan to track whether that is so. In fact, colleges that have recently expanded economic opportunity tend to increase racial and ethnic diversity as well.

**We have heard this story before. About a decade ago, for example, about 40 top colleges made a commitment to allow students from families making less than ~\$60,000 per year to attend without taking out loans. And yet, the sector has made no progress. What is going to make this effort any different?**

You are right, this is not a new issue. What is new is the agreement of so many colleges to engage in an effort that is both collective and sustained so that we can achieve progress across the entire sector of top colleges and universities. What is also new is that the Aspen Institute and Ithaca S+R are being funded by Bloomberg to manage this initiative as well as to provide data analytics and practice research. In the end, this is not another new effort, but the coalescing of many dedicated institutions into a more collaborative movement.