Educational Opportunity in Appalachian Ohio
Introduction

This report and its associated data is the outcome of a process undertaken by the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) to gather, assess, study, and learn about scholarship giving in Appalachian Ohio as well as the region’s educational issues more broadly. The Foundation’s goal was to more clearly understand, by what roles, through what means, and by what measures will activities and investments be focused by FAO in order to strengthen and support efforts to improve access to educational opportunity in Appalachian Ohio.

Information in this report is gleaned from 1990 and 2000 Ohio Census data, along with Ohio Department of Education reports for school year 2000-2001. Of the many scholarship sources available to Appalachian Ohio students, including government, college, and school scholarships, our focus is on private scholarship efforts within the region – those of foundations and nonprofit groups. These groups serve communities in the 29-county Appalachian Ohio region – award scholarships to students in Ohio, often within the same community as the granting organization – and allow scholarship recipients to attend school wherever they so choose.

Charts and maps included in this summary report, in the Foundation’s view, best provide a basis for data-driven program and grantmaking strategies, relevant to FAO’s mission and positioning. Those depicting additional research and findings are also included, usually organized together by subject.
Key Findings

Key findings from the assessment of private scholarship giving in Appalachian Ohio include the following:

- The region’s base of charitable assets to support access to educational opportunity is very weak; but evidence reflects a growing interest in improving access to post-secondary education. The data documents a significant increase in the numbers of organizations, committed to raising scholarship dollars. The proliferation of these community-based efforts, especially those founded in the 1990s, exhibits a cadre of leadership to anchor and expand a broader commitment for educational improvement.

Scholarships Funded by Foundations*
Located in Appalachian Counties in 1997

*Recipients of these scholarships do not necessarily live in the same county or region where the Foundation is headquartered.

Data Source: Guide to US Foundations, 1999
Appalachian Ohio counties have an undereducated workforce, a troubling “Achille’s heel” that, unless remedied, will make almost all attempts meaningless to address regional issues of genuine, long term economic improvement. While high school graduation numbers fall generally below those in other areas of the State, the rate of adults who have ANY college or technical school education beyond high school generally runs 20% below the state average.

Students in Appalachian Ohio public schools continue to demonstrate weak academic achievement; but the research provides important insights into how, programmatically, to best target and prioritize initial investments geographically. New resources can strategically connect with present efforts to improve educational access and opportunity. The data in this report is an important building block to map and identify those geographic areas that may require a “seed and sow” approach because of weak college attendance rates and low levels of civic participation to help address these issues.
New Leadership & Capacity

While the research confirms some of the region’s most worrisome educational deficits, the comparative abundance of new leadership and organizational capacity in the region is, by contrast, significant and unprecedented.

The Foundation initially identified a disconnected cadre of 125 grassroots or community groups actively supporting higher education through scholarships. These groups took the initiative to incorporate as charitable organizations, programs or foundations. Their most recent 990s show combined scholarship giving at over $3.3 million. Sixty-one of these programs are newly organized, formally incorporating after 1989. The emergence of these community-based initiatives exemplifies the recent focus on higher educational attainment in Appalachian Ohio.

FAO’s research indicates that presence of scholarship-awarding organizations in communities, nearly always coincides with a healthier educational climate, especially when compared to regions where few or no scholarship-funding organizations exist. College and technical school enrollment rates, proficiency scores and district ratings are frequently higher in regions with scholarship availability. Scholarship-funding organizations are in 28 of Appalachian Ohio’s 29 counties, yet nearly 60% of identified scholarship funding occurs in just three counties (Holmes, Muskingum, and Pike counties).

Overall, the Foundation’s research indicates these funding organizations, wherever they exist, are, for the most part, giving comparatively few scholarship dollars. Nonetheless, the existence of these entities in a community seems to have a value-added, ancillary effect to encourage healthier education systems. This suggests that community members who are willing to invest in strengthening educational attainment, also serve to encourage value systems that help communities improve educational achievement within their area.
Barriers to Change

Tuition in Ohio has reached an all-time high. The cost of access is likely to drive college enrollment rates in the wrong direction, an outcome that portends deepening economic crisis, in a region long characterized by its prevalence of poverty, unemployment and under-employment. Strategies of choice to respond to these new challenges, underscore the need and importance of “last dollar” scholarships, mentoring of educational leaders, and development of community capacity to support educational improvement and attainment. The stir of energy evidenced by these present and emerging leadership initiatives, can be catalytic. But without a sustained commitment and long term approach, not much is likely to change. The region is “far from home and a long way to go” – the percentage of scholarship giving by the 61 new organizations in Appalachian Ohio, identified by the Foundation, represent less than 20% of total scholarships awarded.

Despite the exacerbation of tuition hikes, ability to afford college costs is not the single most important or only barrier to the region’s students. Perhaps equally and/or more problematic are ingrained attitudes among the region’s population that college is unnecessary, beyond financial or academic reach and/or incorrect assumptions made about the actual cost of college tuition. Many of our students have low self-esteem relative to their academic capabilities. Family and friends in their socio-economic class do not typically aspire to or attend institutions of higher learning. They find it difficult to envision the opportunity for themselves or for their peers. Additionally, the perception of cost and affordability is often based on false assumptions when compared to actual costs or the long-term economic benefits of a shorter term investment in education and training.
Appalachian Ohio students are attitudinally and academically unprepared for the transformation taking place in the nation’s workforce that is knowledge and technology–driven. The consequence of failing to invest in post-secondary education and committing to a pattern of life long learning, will likely cost the region more in loss of industry and economic growth than can be measured by the region’s previous history of painful restructuring. The region’s students need a supportive community, willing to inform, inspire and insist upon the betterment of its citizenry. Perhaps the most significant finding of the Foundation’s research is that it newly identifies, in many communities, the willingness of particular communities to work toward fulfilling this need.

To achieve educational transformation in Appalachian Ohio, scholarships alone do not accomplish the breadth and depth of change that must occur. Investments must be made and sustained along a continuum of opportunity that, when knit together, become, over time, cumulative in its effect. FAO research provides evidence that community leaders in Appalachian Ohio believe scholarships and building community and educational capacity are a way to make a difference in helping the region to help itself. That this newly emerging community activism exists, is a critical precondition to long term success, especially in rural and under-served communities, where schools are failing and students do not succeed academically.
The Foundation as a Strategic Partner

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio is in the position to leverage the efforts of scholarship-funding organizations, already working at the community level, while attracting other important partners.

Since 1998, the Foundation has worked to improve the quality of life in the region by helping people create a lasting legacy through charitable giving. As a trusted steward of charitable gifts, FAO seeks an active partnership with donors and others who believe, as we do, that positive change can occur through region-wide, community-based philanthropy.

In addition to our work with donors, the Foundation serves the region in a variety of roles – as a leader, catalyst, advocate, partner and educator – on behalf of Appalachian Ohio’s communities. We award grants for charitable and civic purposes, promote and provide leadership on collaborative, region wide initiatives, and support efforts of community leaders and organizations through various programmatic resources.

As a regional community foundation, the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio is uniquely positioned to help build regional commitment to educational improvement as a regional issue; and, as a regional community foundation, provides multiple roles of leadership and advances tools and strategies that, together, further these interests.
FAO can Work with Donors & Investors to:

- **Build an asset base** at the Foundation for supporting scholarship giving, and other “access” opportunities, and leverage local match dollars with a regional approach, by attracting dollar-for-dollar “match” from other stakeholders – private stakeholders such as American Electric Power, Marathon, and Verizon; and public stakeholders such as Ohio University and Ohio State University who have the capability to create opportunities for indigenous students (and customers for their own institutions) by the establishment of university-advised endowed scholarship funds at FAO.

- **Reach into rural and underserved communities**, absent the infrastructure for philanthropy, and provide the vehicles to help gather and focus donor investments in educational improvement, including endowment building and establishment of local education funds.

- **As a steward of charitable resources**, build a permanent base of charitable capital to promote an increase in giving for scholarships and a broad array of other “access” opportunities; and use its power of endowment, to aggregate resources and “stream” earnings strategically, in order to mix, match and leverage new scholarship giving, including tuition wavers.

- **Deepen the level of capital investment** in intermediary institutions and organizations as crucial building blocks to increase the region’s capacity to achieve educational improvement. This is the work of getting to scale and building constituency on behalf of educational reforms to create the culture and expectation for excellence, in schools and student performance throughout the region.
Working with Communities

FAO is well positioned to support and strengthen efforts at the community level, through grantmaking and leadership, to improve educational access in Appalachian Ohio. Once again, its roles in a partnership, would be multiple:

- **FAO can, through its grantmaking, invest in developing the capacity and leadership of local initiatives** to maximize the Foundation’s support of rural and underserved areas of the region to build, scholarship giving; and,

- **FAO can, as regional leader and convener, help communities benefit from the value-added in working together**, aggregating efforts through regional convenings, workshops, and training events to build awareness, advance best practices, share tools and expertise, and encourage informed debate on important educational policy issues.

- **The Foundation can support community efforts to build education funds, engage their communities, organize parents and other residents**, advocate for sound policy and work with districts, teachers and institutions of higher learning. Strategic grantmaking includes a focus on supporting community interventions to promote the following:

  - Community dialogue and engagement on issues of educational opportunity
  - Constituency building to support community initiatives
  - Greater articulation between secondary and post-secondary institutions to create avenues of student access
  - Engaging donors and do-ers in shared educational enterprise development
  - Collaboration with districts, teachers and parents to create a shared vision for educational change
  - Community engagement in public policy and decision making, affecting educational opportunity
The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio is committed to sustained, long-term improvement for the region and has identified regional access to higher education as an initial, key first step to overall regional improvement and development. As a strategic grant maker, with endowment-building capabilities, and as a regional leader, catalyst and activist, the Foundation is uniquely positioned. It can guide a region-wide, collaborative effort among multiple partners with exploration already underway.