

## A Tool for Community Based Organizations, the Lifeblood of Neighborhoods

### Introduction to the Save for College Program's Integration with the Local Social Infrastructure and the Role of Community Based Organizations

*Community based organizations (CBOs) can use the Save for College Program to advance their own organizational missions and strengthen their existing work supporting educational and economic success in their neighborhoods. CBOs are critical partners in the Save for College Program's decentralized, community-driven wealth-building approach and central to the model for scaling the Program citywide.*

**WHAT:** During the Save for College Program's pilot phase, NYC Kids RISE partnered with community based organizations that serve families in the pilot area's neighborhoods to determine how these organizations can best use and leverage the Program as a part of their work. CBOs have played three key roles within the Save for College Program model:

- 1. CBOs bring culturally competent scalability.**  
 As trusted institutions in neighborhoods, CBOs can leverage their local knowledge and expertise to support families to access and use the Save for College Program in a more culturally competent and effective way than a single organization with a one-size-fits-all approach can.
- 2. CBOs can catalyze and strengthen a neighborhood's social capital as part of community-wide efforts.**  
 CBOs can use the platform to work together in new and different ways with other networks and institutions within their neighborhoods that are also using and engaging with the Save for College Program—be it a school, a parent organization, a local business, or another CBO. These community-wide collaborations can both advance the CBOs' priorities for their neighborhoods, including advocacy for policy and systems changes, and strengthen the social capital ties that promote neighborhood economic mobility.
- 3. CBOs can use the Save for College Program to advance their missions and strengthen their own work.** CBOs can use the Save for College Program to advance their organizational missions by integrating the initiative's universal account platform and related rewards, information, and resources into their programs and services for families. In this way, partnering with CBOs can not only boost individual outcomes for families, but also strengthen the CBOs services.

**WHY:** Similar to a neighborhood's schools, CBOs play critical roles in the educational and economic opportunities of students and their families in their community, and they are a central piece of the neighborhood social infrastructure ("the physical places and organizations that shape the way people

interact").<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies have found the strength and concentration of community based organizations to be a key ingredient for creating vibrant neighborhoods and promoting greater economic opportunity.<sup>2</sup> In addition, integrating the initiative into CBOs' programmatic offerings is part of the Save for College Program's decentralized, scalable model that can better reach families where they are, across each of NYC's diverse school districts.

**HOW:** Particularly in an area as diverse as the pilot area in Queens, engaging with the local organizations that know their communities best was critical to the Save for College Program's design and launch. In the first year, CBOs across pilot neighborhoods provided feedback on the initiative's design and materials, hosted family engagement events at the public housing developments in the district, and worked with NYC Kids RISE and the City's Office of Financial Empowerment to integrate relevant Program information and support into the NYC Financial Empowerment Centers' free financial counseling services.

In Spring 2019, with support from Citi, NYC Kids RISE launched an initiative to pilot deeper partnerships with a set of community based organizations that serve families in the pilot area. Through this year-long initiative, this collaborative of six CBOs each developed and executed proof-of-concept projects for integrating the Save for College Program into their services for families, with technical assistance and a small grant from NYC Kids RISE. The six partner organizations spanned all of the pilot area's neighborhoods and provided services to families with young children that ranged from anti-poverty and financial empowerment, to after-school programs and summer camps, to citizenship services and immigrant rights organizing and advocacy. Through the year-long partnership:

- **Urban Upbound's** Astoria Houses Jobs-Plus site integrated the Save for College Program into the customer flow of their financial counseling and tax preparation services, creating a new incentive to encourage families with young children to use their services;

- **Make the Road New York** trained and equipped their “Padres en Acción” (Parents in Action) committee to distribute Save for College Program information to other immigrant families in their community, including undocumented families, and supported these families to access their scholarship and savings accounts through a train-the-trainer community organizing approach;
- **Sunnyside Community Services** led a college trip for first- and second-grade families in their summer camp, promoting college-going expectations for both students and their parents, including parents who had never seen a college campus;
- **Queens Community House’s** Community Schools program at P.S. 149 in Jackson Heights collaborated with the school’s parent coordinator, teachers, and other school staff to add capacity to the school’s support for families around the Save for College Program;
- **Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement** integrated the Save for College Program into their after-school programs at three schools in Long Island City, coordinating not only with the school teams but with other community organizations and civic groups to best support their families, most of whom live in public housing; and
- **Emerald Isle Immigration Center** held events to support families in their citizenship classes, immigration legal services, and health services to learn about the initiative and complete the foundational steps.

NYC Kids RISE also worked with the CBO partners and an external user design firm to create sets of CBO-facing and parent-facing materials that CBOs can use to better integrate the Save for College Program into their work, both in the pilot area and throughout the city.

In addition, these prototypes revealed opportunities for integrating the initiative within system-wide partnerships between City agencies and community based organizations (e.g. afterschool programs and Community Schools). They also demonstrated the need for dedication of greater resources (financial and otherwise) to lower-resourced neighborhoods with less CBO capacity.

## SELECTED METRICS FROM THE PILOT PHASE

(as of June 30, 2020\*)

- **15 community based organizations** engaged with and used the Save for College Program
- **29 CBO staff** were trained to support families to access the Save for College Program and complete the three Building Blocks
- **92 events** were held by CBOs that incorporated the Save for College Program
- **100 Building Blocks** that CBO Partnership Collaborative partners supported families to complete through their pilot projects
- **11 community based organizations** provided feedback on the Program’s design, materials, and engagement tools

**WHAT’S NEXT:** The ongoing health and economic fallout from COVID-19 has only reinforced the critical role that CBOs play in empowering and stabilizing their communities. NYC Kids RISE is continuing to work with CBO partners across the pilot area and beyond to determine how the Save for College platform can best amplify, support, and connect their efforts in fostering neighborhoods of economic and educational success. These partnerships will continue to play an important role as new communities begin to use the Save for College Program to build intergenerational wealth and to propel the futures of New York City children.

**Learn how you can help bring this platform to every family in every school across New York City at [nyckidsrise.org](https://nyckidsrise.org).**

*\*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all NYC public schools transitioned to remote learning in March of 2020 for the remainder of the school year and through the end of the pilot in June 2020, impacting metrics and milestones for the final quarter.*

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*, 2018.
- 2 See, for example, Small, Mario Luis, 2009. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; and Sampson, Robert J. 2012. *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*The NYC Kids RISE Save for College Program is a scholarship and savings program administered by NYC Kids RISE, Inc., a nonprofit, in partnership with the NYC Department of Education and the City of New York. NYC Kids RISE is neither affiliated with, nor an authorized distributor of, New York’s 529 College Savings Program and does not solicit investments or provide investment advice. The City of New York and the NYC Department of Education offer no endorsement or recommendation about, and do not control, own or are affiliated with the program manager for New York’s 529 College Savings Program and any particular college savings or other investment vehicle, including ones which families may learn about through the Save for College Program.*

*The NYC Kids RISE Save for College Program is a public-private-community partnership that provides families, schools, and communities with a way to work together to save for their children’s futures. It’s a universal scholarship and savings platform designed to make college and career training more accessible and achievable for all NYC public school students—regardless of their family’s income or immigration status. NYC Kids RISE, a nonprofit organization, manages the Save for College Program in partnership with the NYC Department of Education and the City of New York.*

