

**EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO YEAR TWO REPORT:  
Evaluating the Kansas City Scholars College Scholarship Program**

Third-Party External Evaluation Conducted by: W. E. Upjohn Institute  
for Employment Research

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The Upjohn Institute has completed the third-party evaluation of KC Scholars from launch in September 2016 through FY19. They prepared a Year-One and a Year-Two Executive Summary and accompanying Full Evaluation Report.

Reports include a description of the methodology and findings and are viewable at <https://kcscholars.org/impact/>. KC Scholars hosts an annual community stakeholder meeting at which findings are transparently shared and conversation engaged. The Report is also shared with the KC Scholars' staff and Board of Directors, the Kauffman Foundation leadership, current and potential donors, Postsecondary Network campuses, and Scholars and their families. In 2019, the President and CEO met with the Vice President of Education and the Evaluation team of the Kauffman Foundation to discuss how findings were used to drive program improvement.

This Executive Response describes how KC Scholars utilized findings from the Year-Two Report (dated February 22, 2019) to drive continued program improvement and is intended to accompany the report in institutional records.

**General Statement of Response:**

KC Scholars is a data-driven, outcomes-based program, including:

- a rigorous 10-year evaluation plan built into the program planning process and referenced in the business plan,
- a dashboard of key indicators (target and actual) that is updated annually,
- monthly receipt and analysis of data trackers provided by support service collaborators regarding Scholars' participation in college advisement and college-planning activities, and
- ongoing internal analysis and synthesis of data and trends.

KC Scholars embeds the collection, analysis, and use of data into its daily culture, with "Data-driven results and evaluation" being among the organization's 4 core values. In sum, KC Scholars values and utilizes evaluation processes and findings to ensure it is on track to achieve the program's stated goals and to make modifications that make the program more accessible to potential applicants while preserving the integrity of program design.

### **Findings Were Drivers of Continued Program Improvement:**

The President and CEO facilitated the staff studying and understanding findings. The Program Manager and President and CEO extensively discussed and used findings to drive the following key adaptations during the 2019 application and award cycle.

1. **We made significant changes to the application and scoring process based on feedback from community reviewers.** KC Scholars convened 3 focus groups with community volunteer reviewers to understand what about the process was challenging and what worked well – to augment what was summarized in findings and to hear first-hand from reviewers. Based on the report and focus group feedback, these modifications occurred:
  - Essay prompts were reformatted. Rather than asking 2 multi-question prompts, 2 specific prompts were asked and required to be answered. This reduced the incidences of applicants not answering all prompts and ensured that a more wholistic picture of applicants was presented to reviewers.
  - Recommendations were reformatted to ensure that recommenders were answering prompts that provided a more wholistic picture of the applicant.
  - The recommender scoring rubric was revised to more clearly reflect what was being reviewed and scored. Rubric score prompts were reworded to exactly match essay and recommendation prompts and the difference between possible scores was made clearer.
  - Reviewer training was strengthened by providing more and more relevant examples of implicit bias and through expanded engagement of returning reviewers.
  - The format and reviewer interface experience on the online scholarship portal was made more attractive and easier to navigate.
  
2. **We adjusted how we select 9<sup>th</sup> grade match awardees, increasing the racial diversity of the awardee pool.** The method of selecting 9<sup>th</sup> grade awardees to fill the 50 available spaces in the College Savings Match and Incentive Program was modified, resulting in the most racially/ethnically diverse cohort of the 2017, 2018, and 2019 cycles. The new method maintains a distribution across all 6 service-area counties as intended in the business plan - % of awards made to each county is now proportional to the % that applied from each county.
  
3. **We are providing an additional application window for adult scholars to provide more time in their transition to college.** KC Scholars had been considering the challenges – for adult learner applicants – of an 9-week application period, awarding on May 1, and Scholars' required to be enrolled in college by August. This schedule was not flexible enough for adult learners or for the campuses. Starting with the 2020 cycle, we will have a 5-month application period and awards will be made in December and again in March – providing greater access and flexibility and more time for adults to prepare to go back to college. During the 2019 cycle, KC Scholars broadened eligibility for the adult learner scholarship to those with an earned associate degree who are supported

to complete a bachelor's degree (33% of 2019 awardees have previously earned an associate degree).

4. **During the application window, we are now providing updates to high schools on which students have started an application.** Each year, high schools have requested to learn from KC Scholars which students had started an application, so they could encourage them to complete. During the 2019 cycle, KC Scholars did communicate to schools, several weeks before the application deadline, which students had started an application. KC Scholars was unable to communicate how many of the application tasks were complete (eligibility quiz, application, essays, recommendations, uploads) as it changes each minute - risking communication of incorrect information. Schools were appreciative of the communication, indicated that it helped them with student follow-up, and this practice will continue.
  
5. **We have convened a community group to recommend strategies for increasing the number of male applicants.** The Year-One evaluation surfaced that males are disproportionate as a % of applicants, compared to female applicants. The same holds true for percentage of awardees. The challenge is encouraging more males to apply. KC Scholars acted during the 2019 cycle to encourage more males to apply: greater outreach to male-focused non-profits and work with largest school districts. The % of male applicants did increase by 9% in 2019, as compared to the first 2 cycles. At the community stakeholder meeting in February 2019 where findings were shared, a commitment was made to form a community-based group to work alongside KC Scholars to craft strategies to encourage more males to apply. The group is now working and includes 13 community members, racially/ethnically diverse themselves and from a variety of sectors. Strategies formulated by the group will be enacted for the 2020 application and award cycle and % of male applicants and awardees will be continuously evaluated.