

# OUR **R** GAME PLAN

PROVIDING FIRST GENERATION-TO-COLLEGE, LOW-INCOME, PROMISING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS A **WINNING** CHANCE AT OBTAINING HIGHER EDUCATION.



## Rutgers Future Scholars GAME PLAN

*Why we do what we do, what we know, and how you might replicate what we have learned.*

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Rutgers Future Scholars (RFS) can be described simply as a college access program. However, we believe it to be more. We think of it as a movement—a movement towards reimagining how educational institutions can serve their communities. We begin with a declaration; **ONCE A SCHOLAR, ALWAYS A SCHOLAR**. This is our promise to each young person and their families of our unconditional commitment to their success, in turn, our collective success. We offer hope and opportunity. Our nation has created far too many “zero tolerance” or “no excuses” responses to actions which can be interpreted as undesirable. We believe in supporting young people throughout these critical years during both the hardships and triumphs, and promise to serve as a surefire mainstay, always believing in their genius.

This online guide is designed to provide peer institutions with resources, best practices, and recommended steps to assist in developing an effective and impactful college access program for the nation's most underserved youth, based on the Rutgers Future Scholars (RFS) model. The resources and information contained in this guide are a result of the collaborative efforts of the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) and Rutgers Future Scholars.

The National Summer Learning Association is the only national non-profit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing high-quality summer learning opportunities for all youth. For nearly 25 years, NSLA has worked at the forefront of the field to use indicators of research-based best practices to recognize and disseminate what works;



offer expertise and support to programs and communities; and convene leaders to advocate for summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. NSLA's work is driven by the belief that all children and youth deserve high-quality summer learning experiences that will enable them to succeed in college, career, and life.

Similarly, the Rutgers Future Scholars program is founded on the belief that all youth, despite their financial background, deserve an opportunity and the necessary support

to attend and excel in college. RFS is a unique and progressive initiative designed to increase the number of promising low-income, first-generation-to-college New Jersey students who complete high school, apply to, and attend post-secondary educational institutions, including Rutgers University. RFS selects 215 "Scholars" in the 7th grade to become a part of this unique pre-college pipeline each year based on RFS' principal of "promise" – or (the "Scholar's") ability to invest in themselves for the betterment of their future, families, and communities.

**At Rutgers Future Scholars, we believe that access to higher education not only changes the lives of our students and families but also has the transformative power to change entire communities. [www.futurescholars.rutgers.edu](http://www.futurescholars.rutgers.edu)**

## RUTGERS TAKES THE LEAD...

Rutgers has a long-standing commitment to access and diversity; for example, the student body is highly diverse, many are first-generation-to-college students, and more than 80% receive financial aid. In 2007, Rutgers University found itself uniquely positioned to respond to the inaccessibility of higher education for students living in underserved communities that housed three of Rutgers main universities. These communities, New Brunswick, Piscataway, Newark, and Camden, reflect both the diversity as well as the economic and educational disparity found in similar communities throughout the country.

For Rutgers, commitment to its home communities is a priority, and in 2007, enrollment of students from those communities was noticeably low. Driven by Rutgers' commitment to access, former University President Richard L. McCormick, was very concerned about this growing disparity within the University's host cities.

That year, University President McCormick announced the inauguration of the Future Scholars program. Since the program's inception, over 2,000 students have entered the RFS

Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management, Courtney McAnuff, recalls a conversation he had with President McCormick.

*"I was asked by the President why we cannot enroll more inner city youngsters at Rutgers. I told him not enough graduated [from high school], and many did not have the academic credentials to enroll. He asked me what we should do to change that, and I wrote the first description of the Future Scholars Program."*

pipeline. Rutgers Future Scholars has grown to include a fifth New Jersey community – Rahway; won numerous regional and national awards; and RFS' leadership has contributed to the development of two RFS-inspired programs at other peer institutions in the country.



The first cohort of RFS alumni graduated from their respective post-secondary institutions in May 2017. RFS has successfully reached its goal of increasing the number of promising low-income, first-generation students to complete high school, apply to, and attend college. The program has seen tremendous individual, programmatic, and systematic successes.

Rutgers Future Scholars aims to:

- increase the number of promising low-income, first-generation-to-college New Jersey students who complete high school, apply to and attend post-secondary educational institutions, including Rutgers University and
- develop a replicable model to incite peer institutions in-state and nationwide to partner with school districts to identify, support, prepare, and offer tuition scholarships to promising low income, first-generation-to-college middle school students.

Through RFS, students from some of the most vulnerable communities in New Jersey are offered hope and the opportunity to perceive and achieve a brighter future for the young people and families that comprise them.

*“Finally, and most significantly, I am proud to announce a bold initiative to expand the pipeline of talented students coming to Rutgers from underrepresented communities. Our student body is diverse, but too few young men and women – and especially too few young men – enroll at Rutgers from our state’s large cities, including Rutgers’ hometowns of Newark, Camden, Piscataway, and New Brunswick. We know that many students give up on learning as teenagers – or sooner – because they don’t see college in their future. So we will establish the Rutgers Future Scholars Program, a pilot project aimed at reaching low-income students who might otherwise never consider college within their grasp.”*

Former Rutgers University President,  
Richard L. McCormick, 2007



## The RFS Model

RFS is a five-year program that engages Scholars in an interdisciplinary and holistic pre-college curriculum with the intent of fostering academic growth, social development and personal enrichment. The curriculum contains a breadth of academic and experiential components, including rigorous university-taught academic classes, campus and cultural events, and in-school and afterschool mentoring and tutoring that begins in 7th grade and continues throughout their high school years. In addition, the program gives Scholars an opportunity to explore relevant career paths through internships and exposure to industry professionals. After successfully completing the program, Scholars that qualify and elect to attend Rutgers are awarded a four-year, *tuition-free education* through a combination of federal, state, and private grants.

**“Rutgers University offers one of the few programs for first generation, low income students that supports them all the way through college. The Rutgers Future Scholars program also starts earlier than most; 7th grade.”**

*Where to turn to when you are first in the family to go to college, New York Times, Eilene Zimmerman, June 27, 2017*

Once Scholars are selected, they are required to participate in an academic and experiential summer program on their local Rutgers university for three to six weeks each summer through the end of high school. In some cases, these experiences also include a residential component. Scholars enroll in rigorous university credit-bearing enrichment courses taught by Rutgers faculty and can also participate in on-campus events. The courses are theme-based and designed in collaboration with the local school district, Rutgers faculty and staff. While the coursework may vary on each university due to accessible resources and the unique needs of that community's Scholars, all universities adhere to the following academic and personal development themes. **These yearly programmatic themes, beginning in the summer and extending throughout each academic year include:**



These themes are designed to facilitate all participants' identity as a Rutgers Future Scholar, fortify their capacity to confront and master challenge; develop skill sets required by those who score competitively on college entrance exams; and explore career options linked to undergraduate courses of study.

# FUTURE SUCCESS BEGINS WITH SUMMER TRAINING...

**E**ach summer, Scholars are required to participate in programs on their local Rutgers University. The summer program has many purposes:

- It boosts a student's academic skills.
- It introduces them to careers and college majors in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), as well as liberal and performing arts.
- It also offers students the experience of living on a college campus.

In 2016, the NSLA, in collaboration with RFS' summer programs at Rutgers University Camden, Newark and New

Brunswick/Piscataway, conducted site visits to assess RFS' summer program quality and delivery of research-based best practices to promising Scholars. NSLA found that RFS exemplifies key areas of high-quality practices essential to stemming summer learning loss and closing the achievement gap that prevents many students from acquiring the skills necessary for acceptance into college.

Based on NSLA's finding from the summer 2016 assessment of RFS' summer programs, the following practices exemplify high-quality practices and should be adopted by other college access programs:

## SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Physical and psychological safety needs form the base from which further growth and exploration can proceed. Physical and psychological safety is one of the features of positive youth development programs specified by the National Research Council.

*RFS' staff provide an emotionally safe environment in which youth feel safe to be themselves, take risks, share, get to know one another and learn.*

## SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

A warm, positive, and welcoming environment for youth is conducive to learning. Positive development programs for youth are situated in positive relationships between caring adults and youth participants.

*RFS' staff greet Scholars warmly upon arrival. Smiles, positive gestures, and eye contact are consistently expressed towards Scholars.*

## INTERACTION

Academic success is linked to youth feeling a sense of belonging in a learning community and believing that teachers or adults care about their well-being. A sense of belonging is one



**NSLA's assessments gauge program quality in relation to research-based practices employed by high-quality summer programs using the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment (SLPQA) tool. This tool was developed through a formal collaboration between NSLA and the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to specifically measure the quality of summer learning programs against research-based standards.**

***\*Throughout the playbook, RFS' HUDDLES provide direct insights from the RFS team.***

The Summer Academy reinforces the mission of our organization by providing our Scholars with an intentional and intensive concentrated time at the university together with their peers, capitalizing on a time where typically first-generation youth from low-income families experience both summer learning loss and summer melt — a failure to enroll in college after receiving an acceptance letter. During the summer we are able to provide enrichment in a multitude of disciplines strengthening Scholars' academic and social-emotional well-being, as well as exposing them to a college campus.

Before the program, many Scholars expressed hesitation of visiting the university, even though they may have lived blocks away, because they feared they didn't belong. Demystifying the university campus allows Scholars to feel like it's now a home away from home. Additionally, while at the university, Scholars are able to reconnect with Scholars from other schools, communities, and cohorts as well as connect with peers from other pre-college programs housed at the university through collaborative academic and social events.



of the mind-sets that set the stage for improved learning outcomes by affecting academic performance, behaviors, and learning strategies.

*RFS intentionally recruits Mentors who, in many cases, graduated from the program and/or are familiar with the program's targeted demographic. The Mentors assist Scholars both in and out the program. The RFS staff and Mentors model what it means to be a part of a community.*

## ENGAGEMENT

In order for learning to be retained well and transferred to new settings it must be thoroughly practiced and integrated with existing knowledge. Learning environments that are supportive, interactive, and engaging promote interest, challenge, and belonging which have been associated with higher levels of youth engagement.

*RFS' staff encourages youth in using their creativity, curiosity, or imagination. Wondering, supposing, and being open to new ideas are important mental skills in all fields.*

For more information on how RFS implemented these research-based best practices, please view the [Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment Case Study](#).



Daily affirmations encourage and reinforce our sense of community:

**"We are Future Scholars.  
Successful Scholars, we  
Can achieve anything.  
Hopes and dreams,  
Opportunities are open,  
Leading us to a successful future  
As a  
Rutgers Future Scholar. Holla!"**

*Rutgers Future Scholars Newark*

## ACADEMIC YEAR

Integrated into the academic year, Scholars are supported by a strong network of mentors; have opportunities to build strong bonds with each other and adults; attend informational and motivational seminars; and participate in social and cultural events.



# COACHING *(Mentoring)*

Building a strong network of support is vital to Scholars' overall academic success and future professional career. Scholars are connected with Mentors who provide them with academic tutoring and personal guidance as well as connect them to resources and opportunities to promote career and college readiness.

The network of Mentors provides a strong foundation of support for Scholars. This network of Mentors may consist of:

- Undergraduate students (includes Scholars who have completed the pre-college RFS program)
- Local professionals serving as career advisors
- Community members and/or
- Peer leaders



Mentor training focuses on pedagogy and strategies on youth development. Mentors are provided with extensive and ongoing training to help Scholars excel in the following developmental areas:

9th and 10th Grade Curriculum	11th and 12th Grade Curriculum
Time Management / Study Skills	Know Yourself / Self Identity
Motivation / Goal Setting	College Planning
Self-esteem / Self Concept	Demystifying College
Financial Literacy	Determining Your Future Path
Character Development / Ethics	College Application Overview
Public Speaking	Understanding the College Application
Pre-SAT / SAT Prep Information	Financial Aid / Scholarships
Career Development	How to Survive in College

**IN NEW BRUNSWICK/PISCATAWAY,** Future Scholars meet with RFS Ambassadors/Mentors weekly after school. They are provided with an enriching curriculum to aid in their development in high school. They shadow their Ambassadors on campus and learn to navigate a college environment. They participate in a variety of professional/career oriented learning experiences on and off campus.

**IN NEWARK,** Scholars meet with a personal academic advisor at least twice a year to discuss their high school grades and future goals.

To build a college-going community involves everyone within the Scholars social networks. Understanding their new found identity of being a "Scholar" and college bound requires Scholars to be surrounded with as many like-minded peers as possible. Mentoring is a critical component of the RFS program. Beyond academics, the social-emotional well-being of Scholars is of the highest priority. RFS Mentors serve as both a compassionate and reliable resource and most importantly as an aspirant. RFS Mentors reassure first generation college-bound youth that they will "fit in" on any college campus, strengthening our Scholars' sense of belonging.

RFS Mentors are often undergraduates who reflect our Scholars either in career interests, community involvement, personal backgrounds, or are Future Scholars (attending Rutgers or area colleges/universities). Program alumni feel a great sense of pride in serving the program who helped them realize their genius while accessing a higher education. RFS Mentors work with Scholars in various settings; after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. They are not confined to the walls of a classroom and are encouraged to introduce Scholars to college culture through classroom shadowing, lectures, gallery openings, open mic nights, and sporting events. Throughout the pre-college experience, discussions around our interconnectedness and responsibility for each other are nurtured.

Mentoring training formats vary across sites. Unique to Rutgers University-New Brunswick, mentoring courses are taught through the department of Africana Studies. The course is cross-listed with multiple departments to assure a diverse pool of mentors. All mentors are either earning college credit through the course, an internship, independent study, or compensated through federal work study or the program.



## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

*(Local Cohort Meetings)*

Scholars from the same school district participate periodically in cohort meetings, strengthening their sense of belonging. These cohort bonding sessions provide the opportunity for peers to interact with and encourage each other. Cohort meetings take place monthly in the school district or on local Rutgers universities.

The purpose of the local cohort meetings is to:

- Develop a sense of kinship among the cohort class
- Connect to mentors
- Disseminate important program information
- Provide academic and cultural enrichment support



Building a sense of belonging begins with cultivating positive relationships among Scholars. Surrounding Scholars with like-minded college bound peers allows them to benefit from positive peer pressures and emphasizes the importance of excelling in and outside of the classroom. Cohort or "Class of" meetings that focus on teambuilding activities can take place: on a University campus on a Saturday morning; in a high school homeroom (critical mass of Scholars needed in one school for this option); and/or at a district school afterschool.

In recent years, "Cohort Advisors" were instituted to provide greater direction and oversight for the Scholars. Cohort Advisors are mainly undergraduate Scholars paid through federal work study, program funds, or as interns earning experiential or independent course credits.



**RFS**  
**HUDDLE**



**IN CAMDEN,**  
Scholars attend a Parent Academy on Saturday mornings alongside their parents/families.

**IN NEWARK AND CAMDEN,**  
Scholars participate in a Saturday Academy every other week. Scholars go to the universities to take academic courses; receive mentoring; practice team-building activities; and to engage in community service.

# CROSS TRAINING

*(Rutgers Future Scholars Seminar Series)*

When the school year begins, Scholars are provided with continuous support to ensure success and motivation. The Seminar Series consist of topics such as:

- Climbing the Academic Success Ladder
- College Application Process
- Financial Planning
- Career Exploration
- Navigating High School
- Team Building
- Select enrichment and review courses in English, Mathematics, and the Sciences

Scholars meet Rutgers University's stellar faculty and staff from over 100 major fields of study as well as inspiring Rutgers undergraduates and alumni from all over the world. The seminar series takes place on weekday evenings or Saturdays on the Camden and Newark universities approximately 5-7 times during the year. The seminar series concludes with a student-produced convocation open to parents and sponsors and administrators.

Beyond offering seminars in college readiness information, Seminar topics should reflect current and relevant issues important to the Scholars. Focus groups or surveys can guide speakers to ensure topics are of interest and meaningful to Scholars. The key is for Scholars to take ownership of their learning and leverage the intellectual capital within their reach.

Additional topics include: Making a Difference in Your Community; Impact of the School to Prison Pipeline on Your Community; Environmental & Climate Issues; Hip Hop Culture and Academia; and countless others. Seminars can be taught by mentors, cohort advisors, district teachers, university staff, local experts, and Scholars.



**RFS**  
**HUDDLE**

## TEAMBUILDING *(Social and Cultural Events)*

The more enriched, diverse and inclusive Scholars' backgrounds, the greater their chances of developing social and professional networks of opportunities. Scholars are exposed to a variety of social and cultural institutions and events including theatrical performances; nationally recognized museums and art galleries; performing arts schools and notable actors; musicians; and Pulitzer Prize winning authors.



## WHAT MAKES RUTGERS FUTURE SCHOLARS UNIQUE?

RFS' core principle is 'Once a Scholar, Always a Scholar,' meaning the staff believes in an unconditional commitment to each Scholar. Once a student is admitted into the program, the staff is committed to working with him or her despite their life challenges or circumstances. The RFS program and staff show the Scholar that their commitment to his/her success goes beyond curriculum and academics by embracing him/her as a lifelong member of the RFS family. RFS' staff "show up" for Scholars – at their homes, at school, in their community, and even at their family events. As a result, a special bond is established between RFS' staff and Scholars that fulfills youth's needs for a sense of belonging and promotes positive academic and youth developmental outcomes. Scholars are academically and emotionally supported to ensure their success in obtaining higher education and empowering generations.



## How to Replicate the Model

Rutgers Future Scholars represents an innovative and replicable model which proves that when higher education institutions develop strategic relationships with key partners, they can enhance educational opportunities for youth from underserved, low-income communities and positively impact the systems that surround them. The following are steps that peer institutions can take to replicate RFS' successful pipeline program.

### ASSESS THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Conducting a community needs assessment helps to focus the program's efforts and resource development; ensures the program is of value to the community; and provides an opportunity to access untapped resources for maximum program impact.

Ask the following questions:

1. What is the profile of youth who are eligible to participate in the program?
2. Based on the profile, what are some of the needs of the community served?
3. Has the organization obtained input directly from youth, parents and/or community/school leaders about the need for the program and what types of services they desire?
4. What information or perspectives may be missing to complete the picture and ensure the program is meeting the

true needs of the community?

5. What is the best way to collect this information, depending on the stakeholder group? (survey, interview, focus group)
6. What other programs, agencies, or organizations already exist in the area with a similar mission that can expand or enhance the program?

Once a community assessment has been conducted, the next step is to begin Strategic Planning.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING IS KEY!

Any progressive program striving to resolve not only a local but national issue should develop a strategic plan that ensures that the mission and vision of the program address the needs of and positively impacts the community it serves. By setting overall objectives and developing a goal driven action plan to achieve them, programs are able to set priorities; focus program energy and resources; assess program outcomes; build strong mutually beneficial community partnerships; and ensure that stakeholders are working towards the same goals. Therefore, developing a well-written and thoughtful strategic plan with the end goal in mind and actionable steps to measure progress are important components of any pre-college pipeline program.

RFS was designed based on the following visions and goals detailed in their strategic plan:



## STRATEGY 1

**Ensuring the Provision of Academically Rigorous Coursework and Support for RFS by forging and continuously maintaining key school and community partnerships**

- The success and sustainability of the RFS program depends on the investment and shared trust derived by reciprocally beneficial and enduring school-based and community partnerships. These constructive alliances create an institutional framework, sheltering the provision of services that are intrinsic to RFS.

### DEVELOP KEY PARTNERSHIPS

The *College Access Programs as Levers for Systems Change: A Case Study of Rutgers Future Scholars* executive summary indicates that the RFS program impact is broader than what is often recognized. As a result of RFS' long-term relationship with Rutgers University, its faculty, staff, and students as well as school districts, Scholars experience an integrated pre-college pipeline program that links them directly to University networks, resources, and programs. The RFS leaders' ability to integrate various partners to improve student access to and success in higher learning institutions also increases the opportunity for building networks and pooling resources across partnerships.

RFS' integration strategies are instructive for other higher learning institutions developing a pre-college pipeline program. The Case Study highlights the following integrated set of attributes:

✓ **Multi-site Interactive Structure:** Differences in community needs and opportunities provides contextual knowledge for serving Scholars in various environments while identifying opportunities for building networks and pooling resources across program sites. Despite the complexities and opportunities of the communities served, RFS encourages inter/intra-campus and cross-institutional knowledge sharing of leading college readiness and success practices. Programs should all consist of:

- A sense of belonging and family
- Peer-to-peer encouragement and accountability
- Meaningful connections with one or more professional staff members, including mentors
- Academic year programming offered at district schools or on a college campus
- Regular access to tutors to maintain an expected B in all subjects
- Yearly on-campus (residential or non-residential) summer programming of minimally 3 weeks
  - Including offering rigorous academic courses for early college credit
- Bi-monthly college readiness activities including tours, workshops, and fairs
- Bi-yearly civic engagement experiences to connect Scholars with their communities

✓ **Leverage of existing resources:** A coordinated but decentralized program structure allows programs to strategically use and strengthen existing local resources.

- For example, *RUonTarget* report enables Scholars to compare their grades to the recently admitted cohort at Rutgers to see if they're "on target" for admission based on their academic performance.

*\*Throughout the playbook, RFS' HUDDLES provide direct insights from the RFS team.*

**RFS HUDDLE: RFS has built strong partnerships with existing organizations and departments to leverage the intellectual capital within our networks. Outreach services are offered in collaboration with the Rutgers Academic Foundations Center, Civic Engagement Center, and Hill Center for College Access. Credit bearing courses are offered through partnerships with the University's Department of English, The Plangere Writing Center, The Rutgers Early College Humanities (REaCH) program, and School for Public Administration. Because the program is housed at a higher education institution, it is a natural fit to leverage the faculty and departmental resources available.**



✓ **Boundary-spanning Networks:** Campus-based networks within the University, local school districts, and community stakeholders build the scaffolding to support each step of the Scholar's progress and joins resources and systems that would otherwise be siloed.

When developing strategic partnerships it is important to establish a Memorandum of Understanding that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of each party. Please view this sample of a [RFS Memorandum of Understanding](#).

RFS' integration strategies are emphasized in the *RFS Theory of Change* which provides a comprehensive description of the context of RFS' work and methods for implementing strong, sequential program and network supports for middle school students. RFS makes a case for scaling the program to a national audience by using strategic partners and leveraging program strengths. Please view the [RFS Theory of Change](#).

**RFS HUDDLE: For example, as part of the partnership and Memorandum of Understanding agreement with local school districts, daily bus transportation is generously provided by the school district leadership. Scholars have pick up and drop off locations at their neighborhood schools.**





## ACTION STEPS

### ① Identify your Scholars

A. Students in partner district public schools

**RFS HUDDLE:** For RFS, 7th grade was the appropriate entry point. This may be different for other communities. Thoughtful conversations with community members, district leaders, and a strong foundation of data will help make the determination of what is appropriate for each community. Regardless of entry point, it is important that programs are inclusive of the entire community.



Scholars should mirror the community in which the program serves. Sometimes opposition may occur; however, program organizers must stand firm in the face of adversity to ensure voice to the voiceless and provide hope and opportunity. RFS is proud to serve “dreamers,” often referred to as undocumented students. Dreamers college tuition and fees are covered by courageous and generous supporters.

B. Low income (defined by free/reduced lunch status and verified by tax information)

C. First-generation-to-college (parent/guardians are non-graduates of post-secondary institutions in the U.S.)

D. Recommended by at least one staff person in school

E. Be in good academic standing or demonstrate commitment to improving

**RFS HUDDLE:** We refer to this as “Promise.” Consider selecting Scholars on more than academic standing. We also look for the “if only” students, those on the cusp of achieving remarkable feats but need the additional support system in their life to help them get there. School counselors and teachers can assist in identifying these students, as well as local community and faith based organizations.



F. Full support from family to participate (defined by parent/guardian signing a RFS contract)

**RFS HUDDLE:** This is an important piece to ensure the program also gains access to the Scholars grades, academic plans, as well as school guidance sessions. This initial agreement is key; however, the relationship with families must be cultivated and as with Scholars, trust must be earned. Scholars are still considered for admission even if “full participation” permission is not granted.



### ② Provide a safe and supportive environment that fosters interaction and engagement where Scholars can obtain the knowledge and skills to unleash their potential

**RFS HUDDLE:** RFS made an intentional decision to be a positive force and reliable space for Scholars. This means asking a Scholar, “What’s happening to you?” instead of “What’s wrong with you?” This reframing is one example of how program staff have displayed unwavering support.



*“RFS’ staff and mentors believe in me more than I sometimes believe in myself.” ~ Alexander, Class of ‘18*

### ③ Partner with school districts to align Scholars with a “pre-college trajectory”

**RFS HUDDLE:** This could mean different things for different districts. Close professional relationships and frank conversations with district administrators, teachers, and guidance staff are essential to figuring out what “pre-college trajectory” means in each context.



### ④ Utilize the vast array of cultural and human capital within the University to provide Scholars with academic enrichment and acculturation into the University community



## STRATEGY 2

### Research, Planning, and Assessment ensuring programmatic effectiveness

- Core aspects of RFS, such as workshops, tutoring programs, and summer academies, are developed based on strengths and needs demonstrated by Scholars through various means. Continuous assessment also directs the specific coursework provided for Scholars and the program's quality improvement goals. The RFS program leaders' emphasis on assessment has been a key discussion point for program improvement as well as a driver of communication with other researchers interested in college access and success. RFS' assessments are available for use so that similar educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can replicate all or some of these practices throughout the nation.

**RFS HUDDLE: The importance of using data as a tool can hardly be overstated. With limited resources, most programs will focus exclusively on direct service, but RFS recognized the importance of allocating funds for research and evaluation. Data collection and documentation has been crucial to program improvement and RFS' overall success.**



RFS established a partnership with Rutgers University researchers who have designed a full program evaluation, measuring outcomes across four key dimensions:

- Educational Persistence
- Academic Achievement
- Social-emotional identity development and
- 21st century skill development

RFS also tracks Scholars longitudinally (college enrollment, retention, graduation) at Rutgers University and other 2/4 year institutions via a partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse. The Office of Enrollment Management manages two pre-college online resources: the **K-12 Pre-College Directory** and the **MyRutgersFuture** student portal. The directory provides a centralized place for students and parents to search for K-12 programs of interest at the university. MyRutgersFuture is a customizable student portal that provides in-depth information about Rutgers. In partnership with the Office of Enrollment Management, RFS has leveraged these resources for their own program tracking and to build out their college advising curriculum. [Learn more about these resources here.](#)

**RFS HUDDLE: In leveraging existing local resources, RFS worked with Enrollment Management's (EM) existing tools as foundations for data tracking. This close partnership was mutually beneficial, as RFS pilot-tested new EM tools before they were released to the public and also made enhancement requests to existing systems that made them even stronger.**



RFS also partnered with other organizations to improve the quality of the program using data-driven strategies at the organizational, systems, and policy level.

- At the organizational level:** RFS has partnered with the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) to assess its program's quality and delivery of high-quality summer programming in relation to research-based best practices and indicators of quality. [Learn more about RFS Winning Strategies for Summer Programming and Overall Program Outcomes here.](#)
- At the systemic level:** RFS engaged the Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia University who found the program had an impact on the systems surrounding program participants, such as their families, districts, and communities. This has direct implications for building healthier communities.
- At the policy level:** RFS engaged CUNY economist Clive Belfield to conduct a cost/benefit analysis of the program; findings suggest a 4:1 return on the RFS investment, with each cohort of Scholars projecting approximate \$30 million dollars in taxpayer savings.

Data-informed programs use research/evaluation/data to:

- Help ensure goals are met
- Improve/enhance programming
- Help make the case to build additional support/cheerleaders for our work
- Garner financial support



## ACTION STEPS

- ① Identify and implement best practices or characteristics of successful pre-college pipeline programs

**RFS HUDDLE:** Research and resources on college access is an ever-changing field. Additionally, there are membership organizations worth exploring both locally and nationally which will provide rich information and a professional network willing to share best practices. RFS is a proud member of National College Access Network (NCAN), National Partnerships for Educational Access (NPEA), The College Board, and has participated in national forums such as NACAC, NASPA, Law School Admissions Council, and ACT. RFS/RU researchers are proud to have strong relationships with peers at other institutions and share resources, best practices, and emerging ideas within this network.



- ② Present a prototype
- ③ Cultivate and share program model with educators, policymakers and stakeholders for replication of all or some of the program's best practices
- ④ Create a comprehensive, highly regarded, consistently updated portal containing pre-college pipeline resources
- ⑤ Form professional learning communities (PLCs) for program leaders and stakeholders to assess the program quality and make recommendations for improvement by examining program admissions and graduations requirements, reviewing culturally responsive teaching practices and collaborating to formulate scaffolds that will lessen the strain of transitions experienced by Scholars





## STRATEGY 3

### Identifying Sustainable Financial Resources to ensure programmatic support and effectiveness

- RFS' program leaders work consistently to generate financial support needed to sustain the program's important, socially transformative initiative. The relationships forged as a result of these efforts are multi-faceted in that program supporters and donors do not just offer their funds; many offer their time, knowledge, and connections with business leaders and community agencies.



## ACTION STEPS

- ① Cultivate, implement, and continually modify a comprehensive fundraising plan
- ② Establish membership of a Development Advisory Committee

**RFS HUDDLE:** RFS' organizers recognized the importance of having experts in their respective fields, therefore, this plan was developed in partnership with seasoned fundraisers from the University Foundation. As a result, the plan is multi-faceted, includes diverse funding sources, and takes into account environmental context and future forecasting in a sophisticated way. Despite good planning, the fundraising landscape is turbulent and changes have been made to the proposed funding model to ensure program sustainability. A Development Advisory Committee that includes program leadership, corporate foundation leaders, fundraising partners, university leadership, and individual program donors has been a good model to help shape these changes.



- ③ Identify and cultivate alumni outreach
- ④ Establish a robust endowment fund

**RFS HUDDLE:** Early on RFS' supporters provided modest contributions to endowed Scholarships and programmatic support. In our first few years, the majority of the funding support came from local corporations and foundations. Businesses viewed pre-college programs as a pipeline of untapped talent critical to their missions of promoting diversity and inclusion within their organization. After proof of concept, the University leadership felt we were prime to begin a capital campaign to build a robust endowment. This required support from the University President and leadership from our University's Development Department (The Foundation) to ensure a comprehensive plan was created which included: educating development officers about RFS, identifying high-net worth individuals (Alumni and non-Alumni), and creating collateral/fundraising literature clearly articulating the message of success and impact the program has had on Scholars, families, and communities.



- ⑤ Communicate the results of fundraising efforts with stakeholders





## STRATEGY 4

### Marketing, Promotion, and Building a National Presence

- To underscore the value of the RFS program to Scholars, families, partners, and society at large, it is imperative for leaders and stakeholders to create forums for information sharing that advances the field as a whole.



## ACTION STEPS

### ① Establish and maintain a Communications Committee

**RFS HUDDLE:** Access to communication professionals (marketing/PR/branding) is paramount when determining the voice for the program. Creating common language to describe the reach and impact of the program is extremely important. Early on RFS implored members from many University departments, however, the size of the group proved unwieldy (20+). Later, the group was downsized to 5-7 key members who then articulated action steps for their respective colleagues.



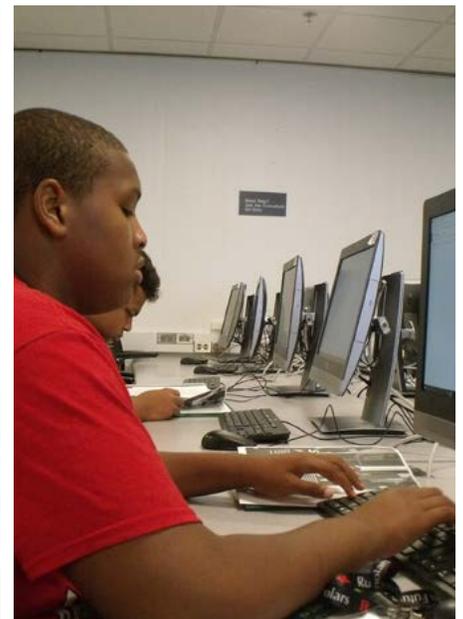
### ② Cultivate and continually modify a comprehensive plan that details cost/benefit ratios

**RFS HUDDLE:** As part of the communication plan, literature from various stakeholders must be created. For example, in 2010, RFS commissioned the Queens College, City University of New York and Economist Clive Belfield, PhD, to assess the cost benefit analysis of Rutgers Future Scholars. This study has been incredibly helpful as RFS makes the case for its program at the policy level.



### ③ Communicate initial program results to a broad and diverse audience

### ④ Partner with state and federal legislators to fortify similar programs

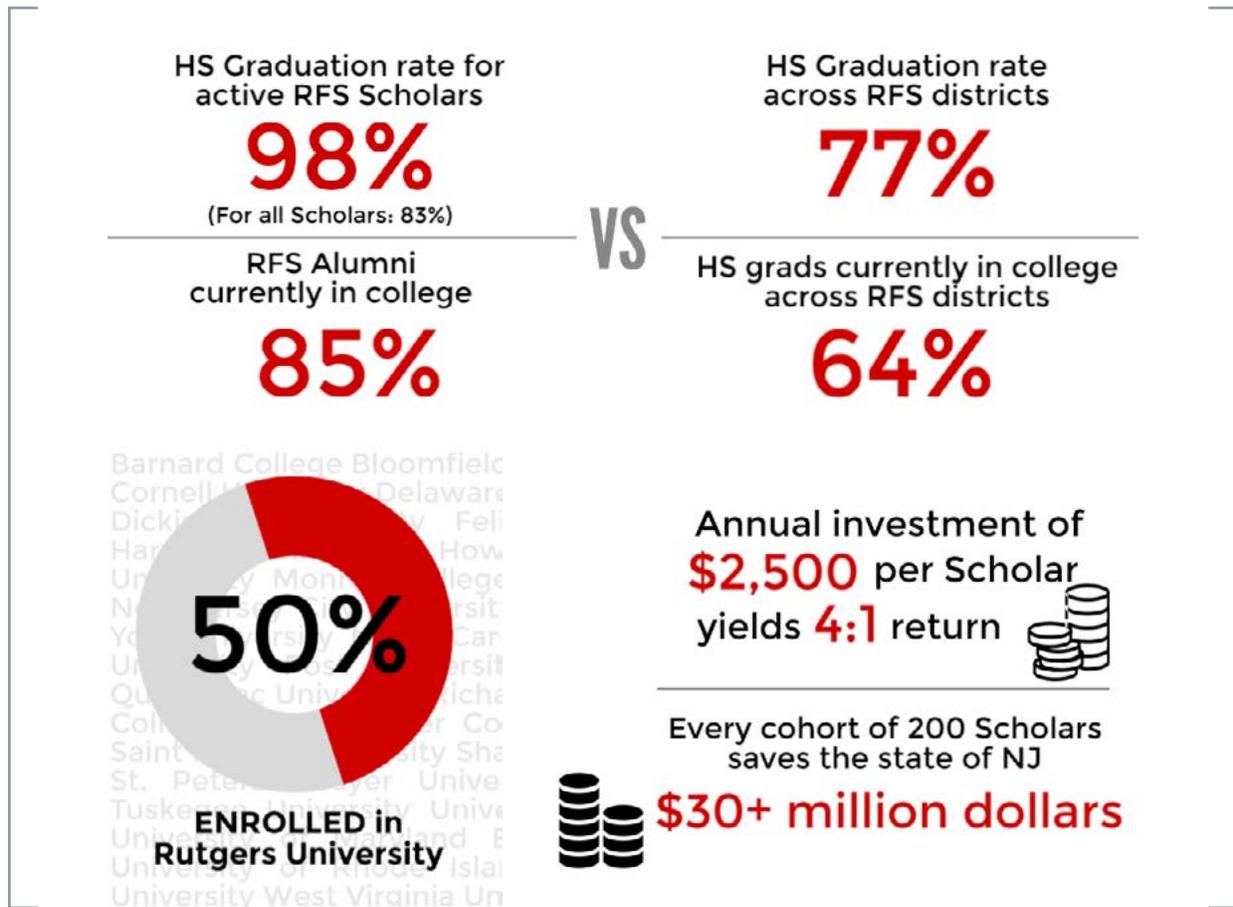


(Aramis Gutierrez, director, Meagan Schramm-Possinger, Research and Assessment Specialist, Rutgers Future Scholars Program, *The Rutgers Future Scholars Pre-College Program Blueprint*, 2010)

# CALL FOR A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

**R**esearch suggests that persons with higher education are more likely to have higher earnings, better health, are economically independent, and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Therefore, programs such as RFS may be viewed as public investments that not only benefit the students but the entire community.

From its inception in 2007, RFS aimed to develop a model to inspire peer institutions in-state and nation-wide to partner with school districts to identify, support, prepare and offer tuition scholarships to low-income, promising middle school students. RFS' innovative model has yielded a positive academic and economic impact on its community. The first year retention rate for the RFS Class of 2018 was 88% vs. the national rate of 77%. With at \$4 lifetime return for every \$1 invested in the RFS program, conservative models project a taxpayer return of \$30 million dollars for every cohort of 200 students in the program.



**These notable outcomes of the RFS program have inspired programs of prestigious peer institutions such as James Madison University and the University of Michigan.**

Imagine how many "Future Scholars" could be reached if other higher learning institutions joined the movement to ensure that underserved promising first-generation-to-college youth received an opportunity to achieve higher education and in turn empower generations.

For more information about how to start a Future Scholars program contact:

**Aramis Gutierrez**, Director, Rutgers Future Scholars

191 College Avenue, 202B, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 Phone: (848) 932-6713 Email: [aramis.gutierrez@rutgers.edu](mailto:aramis.gutierrez@rutgers.edu)

