



# The Fellowship Initiative in Context

## Applying a Positive Youth Development Framework

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The Fellowship Initiative (TFI) is a multiyear program developed by JPMorgan Chase to expand opportunities for African American, Latino, and other young men of color. TFI's mission is to help young men acquire the skills, knowledge, experience, networks, and other resources they need to succeed academically and professionally. Students apply when they are in the 9th grade; programming begins the summer before their sophomore year and extends through the summer before they enter college. TFI fellows also receive support throughout college.

This brief summarizes TFI's theoretical underpinnings, the activities and supports it provides, and how it compares with other programs and initiatives aimed at helping young people access and succeed in college. TFI's design and approach reflect the principles of positive youth development, applying these principles to the particular challenges and barriers facing young men of color. During each TFI program year, a team of staff, mentors, and partners delivers a diverse array of out-of-school activities and supports (including academic enrichment and skill development, college guidance and preparation, and professional and leadership development) all explicitly aimed at helping fellows complete high school, persist in college, and succeed in their subsequent careers.

Many other programs and initiatives share TFI's goal of helping students successfully complete high school and gain admission to college, equipped with the skills and capacities they need to succeed in college. However, few appear to offer the breadth and depth of activities and supports that TFI delivers over three years, and few explicitly target young men of color.

The TFI experience highlights the need to learn more about how best to improve high school and college outcomes for young men of color, including what program elements participants consider most valuable and why, how to effectively measure both short- and long-term developmental gains, and which program components have the greatest impact, alone or in combination.

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## BOX 1

### The Urban Institute's Collaboration with JPMorgan Chase

The Urban Institute is collaborating with JPMorgan Chase over five years to inform and assess JPMorgan Chase's philanthropic investments in key initiatives. One of these is The Fellowship Initiative (TFI), a multiyear program developed to help young men of color acquire the skills, knowledge, experience, networks, and other resources they need to succeed academically and professionally. The goals of our collaboration include using data and evidence to inform JPMorgan Chase's philanthropic investments, assessing whether its programs are achieving desired outcomes, and informing the larger fields of policy, philanthropy, and practice. This brief provides a foundational description of the TFI program model, including its theoretical underpinnings and activities, in the context of the broader field, while highlighting opportunities to learn more from TFI and other programs about how best to improve outcomes for young men of color.

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## Background and Purpose of The Fellowship Initiative

Our nation needs a diverse workforce that includes people from all parts of society. But today, a major obstacle to expanding the pool of future professionals is that the United States loses many people of great potential before they even make it out of high school. For complex and deep-rooted structural reasons, young men of color consistently confront difficult odds of achieving positive life outcomes—especially if they are from low-income neighborhoods.

The environments in which children grow up profoundly shape their socioemotional health and development and set the stage for future success. Developmental psychology has long noted the importance of different levels of environmental influence on child and adolescent growth, levels that prominently include (1) prevailing mainstream sociocultural contexts, which shape how groups of people are perceived and treated; (2) institutions and systems, which frame their opportunity set; (3) community and neighborhood environments, which shape their daily lives and interactions; and (4) family settings, which should confer security, stability, and general well-being. These environments create nested ecological spheres, each one uniquely influencing a child's development, as well as interacting with each other to compound or mitigate their impacts.<sup>1</sup>

Boys and young men of color often grapple with significant threats or challenges in each of these spheres.<sup>2</sup> While the transition through high school to college can be difficult for anyone, boys and young men of color growing up in the United States must confront negative societal perceptions, disparate treatment within systems and institutions, and sometimes damaging neighborhood environments and family instability. They carry a particularly heavy load as they navigate the road to adulthood—a road on which their sense of self is still nascent and key decisionmaking skills are not yet fully formed.

To address this challenge, JPMorgan Chase in 2010 developed a program targeted to young men of color as they prepare to enter 10th grade—a critical point when many young people fall off track. As part of a portfolio of initiatives focusing on creating economic opportunity, JPMorgan Chase's Global

Philanthropy assembled a team to lead and manage this program and drew on internal resources to deliver services and activities aimed at helping fellows navigate high school and enter and persist in college, increasing their prospects for completing college and entering the professional workforce.

A first cohort of 24 TFI fellows from New York City graduated from high school and entered college in 2013. Based on this experience and lessons learned, JPMorgan Chase expanded the program in 2014 to serve 120 fellows across Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City.

## A Program Model Informed by Research

Before designing TFI, JPMorgan Chase leadership reviewed the literature on education and youth well-being and engaged with scholars to craft a multifaceted program that could address potential areas of disconnection for young men of color from marginalized neighborhoods. The new program would rely primarily on the principles developed by positive youth development, which has emerged as the dominant frame in adolescent science over the past few decades.

Previous approaches in adolescent science focused on young people as delinquent or deficient and requiring management or correction. They emphasized the qualities young people *lacked* compared to what was expected of adult behavior. In contrast, positive youth development theory understands adolescence as a distinct developmental phase where boundary testing and individual identity development are crucial steps on the path to adulthood, steps that need to be supported by patient and caring adults. Positive youth development views adolescents as malleable people who need to be nurtured and cultivated in safe environments in order to reach their full potential.

The old paradigm reinforced the existing negative narrative around young men of color and led to the creation of programs focused on fixing problem behaviors and “problem children” as opposed to providing the supports and resources necessary for healthy adolescent progress. In contrast, the positive youth development paradigm aligns with TFI’s goal of seeding transformative change in the life trajectories of its fellows, building on their assets and contributing to their socioemotional health as a necessary foundation for enriching their academic exposure and eventual career success.

## The Positive Youth Development Framework

The positive youth development framework takes into account not only youths’ personal attributes, but also the ecological context—or surrounding environments—that shapes the lives and experiences of adolescents. The theory recommends holistic approaches to promote individual growth and well-being. Humans cannot be reduced to one aspect of their development (e.g., intellectual, socioemotional, physical, biological, cultural). These aspects are *interrelated* and mutually influence every person’s growth (Lerner 2005). For example, conventional educational institutions often pay inadequate attention to the socioemotional health of students—especially young men of color from marginalized neighborhoods. In fact, because of the prevailing negative societal narrative, their socioemotional health is often under assault by people’s perceptions of them as a group.

The positive youth development theory also maintains that an individual's life trajectory is not fixed; it can change at any point. Indeed, the adaptive nature—or *plasticity*—of human development is a fundamental strength. Adolescence is a time of dramatic brain development and emotional growth; it creates incredible possibilities for transformation. On the downside, if adolescents are not stimulated, these changes can take a negative turn. The framework also emphasizes that positive human development can take place across *multiple contexts*, such as family, school, and community. Positive change can be promoted in many different environments among people in those settings (Benson et al. 2006; Lerner 2005).

These three principles provide a basis for how to support healthy emotional growth (or developmental assets) and suggest the optimal learning approaches and supportive environments to promote this growth. Interventions that apply positive youth development principles are often community-based and designed for preteens to young teenagers (Roth et al. 1998). These programs typically target youth who are at risk of experiencing difficult transitions into adulthood (because of poverty, personal challenges, or other risks). There is broad agreement around the “big three” features of optimal youth development programs: (1) they provide positive and sustained adult-youth relationships for at least one year, (2) they include skill-building activities, and (3) they offer opportunities to apply these skills when participating in and leading community-based activities (Benson et al. 2006; Lerner 2005). Researchers find evidence that positive youth development programs can improve socioemotional health, decreasing behaviors like aggression. However, evidence is not yet available regarding gains in outcomes such as educational attainment or employment.

### **Framework Goals: Promote Key Developmental Assets**

According to positive youth development theory, several key developmental assets promote healthy emotional well-being in adolescents. While these different assets are often closely related, they support separate aspects of individual well-being. Together, they address and support the whole person's needs physically, personally, and socially.

The research field is divided about the number of developmental assets. The Search Institute identifies 40 and groups them into four categories of internal assets (commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity) and four categories of external assets (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time). A sufficient number of these assets must be in play for healthy development of skills and knowledge. When enough assets are in play, an individual can be considered thriving.

FIGURE 1

**Internal and External Developmental Assets for Adolescents**

Internal assets			
<b>Commitment to learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievement motivation</li> <li>School engagement</li> <li>Homework</li> <li>Bonding at school</li> <li>Reading for pleasure</li> </ul>	<b>Positive values</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Caring</li> <li>Equality and social justice</li> <li>Integrity</li> <li>Honesty</li> <li>Responsibility</li> <li>Restraint</li> </ul>	<b>Social competencies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning and decisionmaking</li> <li>Interpersonal competence</li> <li>Cultural competence</li> <li>Resistance skills</li> <li>Peaceful conflict resolution</li> </ul>	<b>Positive identity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal power</li> <li>Self-esteem</li> <li>Sense of purpose</li> <li>Positive view of personal future</li> <li>Positive cultural identity<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>
External assets			
<b>Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family support</li> <li>Positive family communication</li> <li>Other adult relationships</li> <li>Caring neighborhood</li> <li>Caring school climate</li> <li>Parent involvement in schooling</li> </ul>	<b>Empowerment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community values youth</li> <li>Youth as resources</li> <li>Service to others</li> <li>Safety</li> </ul>	<b>Boundaries and expectations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family boundaries</li> <li>School boundaries</li> <li>Neighborhood boundaries</li> <li>Adult role models</li> <li>Positive peer influence</li> <li>High expectations</li> </ul>	<b>Constructive use of time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creative activities</li> <li>Youth programs</li> <li>Religious community</li> <li>Time at home</li> </ul>

Source: Chart based on Search Institute developmental assets.

<sup>a</sup> Positive cultural identity is an additional asset developed with community input for the Silicon Valley YMCA. We think it is also appropriate in the TFI context.

These assets are not easily measured, but they are generally understood to undergird healthy adolescent development. Whether the accumulation of assets from whatever source (family, school, and community) contributes to the best outcomes, or whether specific developmental assets are particularly helpful in certain community contexts, is an open question. Research generally finds that more is better (Benson et al. 2006).

More concretely, students are considered thriving when they have achieved the five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Together, these qualities indicate self-esteem and academic achievement. These attributes precede college and career success and are arguably more important than other early indicators like high school grades or PSAT scores (Lerner 2005).

**Pedagogical Approach: Experiential Learning**

New understanding of adolescent brain science has influenced TFI’s approach to academic enrichment and skills enhancement. An emerging and growing body of research has revealed that because of the adolescent brain’s continued plasticity, the teen years are a period of dramatic brain development. This

also involves the development of new elastic neural systems that make the adolescent brain highly sensitive to experiences. These physical changes provide an extraordinarily important window for enduring learning and knowledge building (Steinberg 2014). While this malleability may result in less-developed impulse control and decisionmaking skills (Giedd 2009; Reyna and Farley 2006), it also provides an exceptional opportunity to shape adolescents with positive stimuli that will become “hard-wired” in future years (Steinberg 2014).

Because of its heightened capacity to change, the brain is receptive to positive influences that can promote growth (Crone and Dahl 2012). To capitalize on this tremendous potential, education and enrichment programs can develop program components that align with the key motivators of adolescent behavior.

Novelty and challenge are particularly stimulating for adolescents. Project-based and experiential learning can address the need to express creativity and demonstrate competence. Out-of-school time can be particularly useful for creating tailored experiences to supplement more formalized classroom learning. These supplemental opportunities have the flexibility to employ program designs and curricula that focus on providing stimulating learning approaches that emphasize building noncognitive skills and contribute to personal growth.

Adolescents thrive with activities and experiences that capture their attention and imaginations as well as stimulate their creativity, intellect, and autonomy. This combination allows students to develop advanced thinking, better self-regulation and healthy identity development.

Students are also helped to persist through challenges when they understand that intelligence and talent are not fixed—and can be developed through perseverance and hard work (Dweck 2006). When students learn that struggle is a necessary part of growth, they build stronger affinity for learning and gain confidence in their own ability to persist through mistakes.

## **Providing Supportive Environmental Contexts**

By working across multiple disciplines, programs can understand what needs to be marshaled across different settings—in homes, classrooms, and community-based programs—in order to foster positive youth development and help adolescents negotiate across their various worlds (Lerner 2005). “Adults, peers, families, and the social context of institutions all facilitate development by providing opportunities and supports through which youth can work to accomplish the two essential and deeply intertwined tasks of adolescence - identity formation and the development of mastery, or the building of competencies that help them meet their needs successfully” (Lynch and Mahler 2014, 5; also see Pittman and Cahill 1992).

Peer influence is a particularly strong factor in adolescent development and behavior. When used positively, peer accountability can improve student outcomes. Cohort models and learning communities can help student academic performance and social development (Adams 2014; Richardson and Feldman 2014).

The programs' environmental—or ecological—assets that support positive youth development are considered to foster personal and intellectual growth (Lerner 2005, 41–43). According to the positive youth development framework, key environmental assets include the following four essentials:

- positive role models (or human resources) can naturally lend their strengths, skills, talents, and abilities to impressionable adolescents;
- physical and institutional resources that provide opportunities for learning, engaging, and modeling routines for structure can provide stability and certainty for youth;
- collective activity—or mutual engagement of community members—enhances adolescents' social capital and can mobilize the resources of the youth-focused program, the family, teachers, and others in service of the youth's development; and
- accessibility—or the ability to get to and partake in human and physical resources—provides necessary and meaningful access to adults in the setting, which must also include safety in the physical environment.

## TFI Program Design and Curriculum

No program can single-handedly address the systemic and structural forces that too often constrain the choices and derail the potential of boys and young men of color. But in all aspects of its design and implementation, TFI acknowledges and partners with the fellows, families, and mentors to help TFI fellows recognize and overcome these challenges. For example, staff members receive monthly trainings on such topics as the impact of violence and trauma, meanings of masculinity, and how to help mentors navigate class and cultural differences. TFI ensures that its staff and that of its partners reflect the racial and cultural diversity represented in each cohort of fellows. And the curriculum includes presentations and discussions among fellows to build their understanding of race, class, and gender issues and to help them develop strategies for navigating the societal, institutional, and community environments in which they live.

The key features of the TFI program and the setting in which it is delivered are intended to work together to build the developmental assets that adolescents need to achieve college readiness, access, and persistence (figure 2). TFI's core programming extends over three years, creating opportunities for fellows to develop sustained relationships with committed adults while engaging fellows' families in the program as much as possible. For example, families receive weekly e-mails from program staff, and family meetings are scheduled whenever new program events or activities are introduced to make sure families understand the plans and how they fit into the program goals.

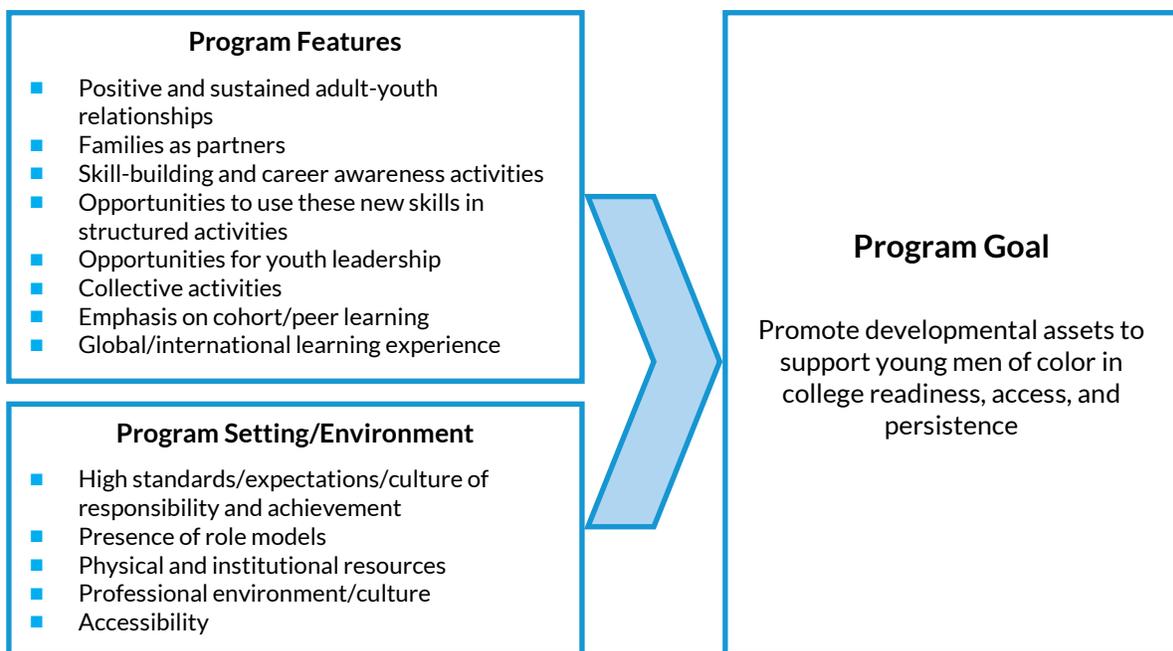
TFI offers activities that build skills and career awareness, and it provides opportunities for the fellows to apply new skills in structured activities. The program also incorporates opportunities for the fellows to exercise leadership and emphasizes peer learning among members of each fellowship cohort. Fellows are encouraged to contribute to the program's curriculum by suggesting topics and projects—

taking ownership of their own development and knowledge building. The program also places a high priority on establishing a culture of high expectations, personal responsibility, and accountability.

TFI has deliberately created a program setting with the ecological assets necessary for adolescent development. The vast majority of the program’s activities takes place at the JPMorgan Chase headquarters for each site, with the expectation that consistent exposure to a world-class corporate environment functions as a point of familiarity, as well as a model for professional aspirations. This location not only serves the practical purpose of providing a safe and secure learning space, it also signals the importance JPMorgan Chase places on the TFI program and the participating fellows.

FIGURE 2

**TFI Program Design**



**Personal Development**

TFI targets young men of color who are talented and motivated but falling short of their full academic potential. Public high schools were invited to nominate students with strong potential, based on their academic performance as well as other characteristics (such as motivation, an interest in college, and engagement in activities). TFI staff and partners also conducted information sessions for classes of high school freshmen to encourage students to apply. A rigorous application process, including essays and in-person interviews, was then used to select a cohort of fellows in each TFI city that includes a mix of backgrounds, challenges, and accomplishments. JPMorgan Chase employees reviewed applications and interviewed candidates. Most fellows are from low or moderate-income families, most have a parent or guardian without a postsecondary degree, and most have grade-point averages of 80 or higher when they apply.<sup>3</sup>

TFI's asset-based approach emphasizes skill building, socioemotional health, and personal development in key areas that contribute to academic success including planning and goal setting, decisionmaking, collaboration, communication, self-awareness, and accountability. This is achieved through ongoing coaching from the program managers and mentors, as well as structured peer learning and supportive experiences. Every Saturday, TFI fellows start the morning in a fellowship circle, which provides a space to share highlights and challenges, and to discuss current events. In addition, fellows complete volunteer projects throughout the program such as reading to first graders and working at food banks or soup kitchens.

Mentoring plays a central role in the TFI program. A wealth of research demonstrates that positive adult influence—especially sustained, consistent mentoring—can have a strong positive effect on outcomes (Lerner 2005). Fellows are paired with JPMorgan Chase professional staff members who serve as mentors and work with fellows over their three years in the program. Mentors agree to meet with their fellows monthly and to maintain contact (either in person or virtually) every week. Forming reliable and steady relationships is crucial. Inconsistent, unpredictable, or short-term mentoring has actually been found to have a negative impact on students (Grossman and Rhodes 2002; Rhodes 2004).

TFI fellows gain responsibility and opportunities to help shape their learning experience each year. TFI often breaks each cohort of 40 into smaller teams to allow for deeper relationship building and to encourage fellows to get to know each other. These teams are rewarded for collective (not individual) performance, which helps leads to conversations about fellows' accountability to each other. During their junior year, TFI fellows lead smaller groups within the program. Team leader responsibilities include taking attendance, encouraging each other to dress professionally, and providing many other helpful nudges to other fellows (e.g., reaching out to mentors, completing assignments). During their senior year, TFI fellows select classes during the Saturday sessions, mimicking part of the college experience.

## **Program Implementation and Management**

TFI is housed within the economic opportunity team of JPMorgan Chase's foundation. Across its three cities, TFI deploys five full-time staff and a network of consultants and other partners working part time or under contract. TFI staff are education and youth development professionals with experience in such organizations as the Harlem Children's Zone, The Posse Foundation, Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, and The After-School Corporation/ExpandedED. The full-time staff consists of an executive director and an associate, who provide programwide development and management, and three program managers, one in each TFI city, who plan and manage day-to-day activities with the fellows, their families, and local consultants and contractors. Program managers also coach the fellows, build relationships with each one, track progress, and provide suggestions and support for continued growth. All three program managers are men of color who themselves have achieved college and career success and who have extensive experience with youth development, professional development, and leadership development.

National program partners—including leading nonprofit organizations—are engaged, to serve all three cities, and locally, to provide city-specific programming. Examples include: Outward Bound, which provides outdoor learning and leadership development; All Star Code, which taught the fellows programming; Groundswell, an organization focused on the arts and social awareness; IDEO, which introduced the fellows to “design thinking;” and The Experiment in International Living, which planned their educational experiences in South Africa. Local partners include: Bottom Line, Center for College Access and Success at Northeastern Illinois University, Social Justice Learning Institute, and Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA). Other organizations, including the National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR), Campaign for Black Male Achievement, and the Mental Health Association, play advisory and training roles nationally.

This structure enables the program to be quite nimble, identifying and implementing new or modified activities in real time as needs arise or are prioritized by the fellows or as staff identify opportunities to enhance fellows’ exposure to resources. To illustrate, one lesson learned from the pilot phase of TFI was that fellows’ socioemotional health was essential to academic achievement and persistence in college. Consequently, the staff engaged the Mental Health Association of New York to develop and conduct assessments of social-emotional needs and supports. Based on these assessments, program managers can identify and provide needed supports for individual fellows and/or family members.<sup>4</sup>

TFI’s core program activities fall into three broad categories: academic enrichment and skill development, college guidance and preparation, and professional and leadership development. All three core activities aim towards the concrete goals of high school completion, college attendance and completion, and—ultimately—successful entry into the professional workforce. Many TFI activities and events are intentionally designed to advance multiple objectives: academic enrichment plus college preparation, for example, or college preparation plus exposure to professional opportunities.

Over the three years, TFI fellows meet on three Saturdays each month for full-day learning sessions. During the summers they participate in extended retreats or expeditions that focus on a different theme each year. The program also provides special leadership intensives at least once a year: two- to three-day sessions that feature guest speakers and company tours. Figure 3 provides a calendar of activities offered through TFI. At the time of this writing, fellows are starting the second semester of their junior year in high school; specific activities through their senior year may still evolve.

FIGURE 3

Calendar of TFI Activities

		Academic enrichment and skill development	College guidance and preparation	Professional and leadership development
Sophomore year	Summer	Week-long orientation on a college campus, including academic enrichment, exposure to college environment, team building and leadership development activities		
	Fall	Weekly instruction in English language arts and math enrichment Small group academic support and tutoring		Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions
	Winter		College planning—peer coaching sessions	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions Winter Break series: visits to companies, and local leaders share career stories
	Spring		College visits College fair	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions Spring Break series: exploring art and the creative process
Junior year	Summer	Two-day stay on a college campus for intensive academics	College visits	Outward Bound hiking and camping expedition
	Fall	Weekly instruction in English language arts and math enrichment Small group academic support and tutoring		Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions, including company visits
	Winter		SAT/ACT prep	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions
	Spring		SAT/ACT prep College visits College 101—preparing students and families for college	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions Financial capability training (budgeting, wealth management and credit)

FIGURE 3 (CONTINUED)

Calendar of TFI Activities

		Academic enrichment and skill development	College guidance and preparation	Professional and leadership development
Senior year	Summer		College application help	Summer Leadership Academy in South Africa
	Fall	Weekly instruction in English language arts and math enrichment Small group academic support and tutoring	Advice and guidance with college essays	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions
	Winter		College prep workshops Help with scholarship applications and financial aid forms	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions Community service activities Winter Break series: mentors, employees, executives as guest speakers
	Spring		College prep workshops Help with scholarship applications	Saturday “Lunch and Learn” sessions Monthly professional/career development learning sessions Spring Break series: exploring art and the creative process
After graduation	Summer		Planning a summer “bridge” program to support transition to college Outward Bound weekend leadership retreat	

## Academic Enrichment and Skill Development

This component of TFI is geared to improve fellows' academic skills and advance their critical thinking abilities in order to prepare them for success in college. The program seeks to instill in students the awareness that learning is a matter of process and effort more than natural smarts (Dweck 2006; Yeager and Dweck 2012; Yeager and Walton 2011). TFI aims to monitor the fellows' high school grades improvement; stay in contact with the teachers, counselors, and deans at their schools; provide ongoing tutoring (in person and online); and enhance Fellows' writing skills.

In total, TFI provides about 30 extra days of learning time each year, including at least 75 hours of intensive academic instruction outside the fellows' schools. At the beginning of their fellowships (immediately after their selection), the fellows complete a week-long program orientation on a college campus near their city. This orientation includes academic classes (math, English, psychology), as well as team building and leadership development activities. During the summers before the fellows' junior and senior years, academic intensives are incorporated in major retreats and expeditions; fellows can also receive additional individual tutoring.

Throughout each school year, fellows receive at least three hours of academic instruction each Saturday (or nine hours a month) and access to in-person tutoring during the week. Because many fellows have difficulty attending weekday tutoring sessions (owing to other obligations and travel time to the tutoring site), TFI is experimenting with offering online tutoring options and providing laptops to help fellows complete school assignments and access assistance.

## College Guidance and Preparation

TFI aims to support fellows through college application and selection and to prepare them to succeed in college once they get there. The academic enrichment activities described above, including exposure to a college environment, clearly contribute to this goal. But applying to college (and obtaining needed financial aid) is daunting, particularly for young people whose families may lack experience with the process. Therefore, TFI explicitly offers a sequence of college preparatory and guidance sessions, beginning in fellows' sophomore year and extending through their graduation from high school.

TFI establishes a college-going culture from the very beginning. During the selection process, interviewers (JPMorgan employee volunteers) share the names of their colleges, and the interview rooms are named after colleges and universities in each region. Throughout the process, the fellows are referred to as the class of 2021. After TFI fellows are selected for the program, they participate in a week-long orientation on a college campus that is designed to expose them to a college experience and the wealth of resources available there. Activities include classes, group talks about current events and issues that can affect their success, team building, tours, and sports.

During their sophomore year, fellows are encouraged to begin planning for college and exploring college options, through discussion sessions and peer coaching, as well as college visits and participation in local college fairs. To illustrate, fellows visited California State University, Fresno; Drew University; New York University; Oberlin College; Ohio State University; San Diego State; Stanford; UCLA; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of California, Davis. College visits continue during the fellows' junior year, but the focus shifts to preparation for SAT and ACT exams, as well as coaching sessions to prepare students and their families for the college experience. Beginning the summer before their senior year, fellows receive hands-on help with their college applications, including advice and guidance as they write their college essays. Fellows and their families also participate in workshops focused on paying for college. TFI is engaging leading college-access organizations to address such challenges as "under-matching," when low-income or first-generation students enroll at less-selective colleges than their academic qualifications suggest they could attend. Once college applications have been submitted, TFI helps students and their families complete financial aid forms and scholarship applications.

Plans are under way for "college bridge" activities for the program's final summer that will support the fellows' transition to college. Staff members anticipate that they will continue to engage with the fellows after they enter college to help them succeed there. The program now supports the 24 fellows who participated in the pilot program to make sure that they persist through college. The staff does so by contacting each fellow at least three times during each school year, reaching out to college administrators or professors when needed, and engaging more intensively with the few students experiencing serious setbacks. The program has also engaged Sponsors for Educational Opportunity to provide college and career coaching for the pilot participants. Sponsors for Educational Opportunity makes sure that students are carrying an appropriate course load and remain on track through graduation. Its staff members review résumés, provide professional development advice, and help with internship matches.

## **Professional and Leadership Development**

TFI provides an array of experiential learning opportunities aimed at building fellows' leadership skills, confidence, and social capital, as well as career-related seminars and workshops designed to introduce the fellows to professional opportunities and networks. These activities offer exposure to people, organizations, and places that broaden the fellows' personal awareness of the world and the opportunities open to them. The goal is to make the fellows' world a bigger place and demonstrate that they are not limited to or by their neighborhoods. Through these experiences, TFI also aims to provide fellows with opportunities to build skills, including communication skills and the ability to work in diverse teams, that will contribute to their success in college and, ultimately, at work.

Throughout the school year, the weekly Saturday sessions include professional and career development discussions, many of which are planned to address specific interests expressed by the fellows. Local program managers also organize outings during the school year. Fellows have participated in a speaker series on the banking industry, a commercial real estate workshop focused on

community development, leadership workshops with politicians and community leaders, and sessions on design-thinking and innovative technology. During winter and spring breaks, fellows visit local businesses for additional exposure to professional career opportunities. TFI also uses the winter and spring breaks for volunteer and service learning activities, and for engaging workshops, such as a mural project, exploring art and the creative process, interactive game design, how to start a business in a day, and basic computer programming.

During the summer before their junior year, fellows participate in a ten-day Outward Bound excursion to focus on persistence and teamwork, build character, and contribute to each fellow's personal competence and growth. The summer before their senior year, TFI will sponsor fellows on a two-week international travel and cultural exchange led by the Experiment in International Living in South Africa. The exchange will provide opportunities for exposure to people with different histories, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, fellows will spend time at the African Leadership Academy, a boarding school for top high school talent across Africa. The fellows will work in teams with African Leadership Academy students and learn how they are pursuing their education and career goals in the face of significant challenges.

## The Fellowship Initiative in Context

Many programs and initiatives share TFI's goal of helping students successfully complete high school and gain admission to college, equipped with the skills and capacities they need to succeed in college and ultimately enter the professional workforce (Smith, Benitez, and Carter 2012). A scan of the field indicates that many are delivered through public high schools or integrated in charter school curricula; others focus on out-of-school time, particularly the summers before and after a student's senior year of high school. These initiatives typically offer some combination of six elements: counseling, with an emphasis on the college enrollment process; academic enrichment so students have the skills necessary for college; parent involvement; enrichment activities that broaden students' awareness and understanding of available opportunities; one-on-one mentoring; and scholarships (Harvill et al. 2011). However, few initiatives appear to offer the breadth and depth of activities and supports that TFI delivers, and few target young men of color.

Many college-access initiatives operate within high schools, often public charter schools that prioritize college readiness and admission. Common activities across these in-school programs include: college awareness and counseling, tutoring and/or accelerated academic instruction, classes aimed at building students' organizational and study skills, help preparing for college entrance tests, and help with applications for financial aid and scholarships. The KIPP through College programs, which extend from middle school through college, are a particularly robust example. During middle school they offer help with high school placement and transition, financial literacy, college knowledge and career awareness, social supports, and mentoring. During high school the programs provide academic support, financial literacy, college knowledge and awareness, SAT/ACT preparation and support, college tours and applications, and college placement. After students enter college they continue to receive

mentorship, college and career advising, career awareness activities, internships, and help with résumé building.

Two programs exemplify out-of-school programs aimed at college access and persistence. College Forward (<http://collegeforward.org/>) pairs near-peer coaches (recent college graduates) with high school juniors for a full year, builds trusting relationships, and provides personalized guidance and supports with college awareness, application, and selection, including essay workshops, practice college entrance tests, college visits, and parent workshops. Bottom Line (<https://www.bottomline.org>) offers high school juniors one-on-one college counseling, including help creating a list of potential schools, writing essays, completing applications, applying for financial aid, searching for scholarships, and selecting a college. It also provides summer programming for students admitted to college, including group workshops on the college environment, social events, assistance with enrollment, housing, and course registration, and financial aid advising. In addition, Bottom Line offers counseling and mentoring for up to six years, including advice on selecting a major, securing internships, finding a career path, and managing loan debt.

We identified no initiatives offering a breadth of activities and supports comparable to TFI. Programs that focus on career exposure and readiness generally do not pay as much attention to college readiness, nor do they provide academic instruction and tutoring. Many programs aimed at college admission offer campus visits, supplemental academics, and assistance with college applications, scholarships, and financial aid. But few of these also include the experiential learning, leadership development activities, and international travel offered by TFI. And while many initiatives include a mentoring component, few appear to provide multiyear mentoring relationships focusing on academics, college, and career development, with established professionals.

Most college access programs aim to serve low-income students or those who will be the first in their families to attend college. Some serve students who have been identified as at risk of academic failure, while others focus on those who are succeeding academically, and a few (like TFI) appear to target students who are underperforming relative to their potential. Although descriptions of these programs suggest that most students participating in them are youth of color, few initiatives explicitly aim to serve young men of color.

TFI stands out as an intensive model, explicitly targeted to the challenges facing young men of color, and as a one that applies the research-informed principles of positive youth development. TFI is also well-resourced, deploying the assets of JPMorgan Chase to recruit well-qualified staff and partners to support fellows' travel and other enrichment activities, provide mentors, and make facilities available for programming. Other programs may not have the capacity to deliver the full range of activities and supports offered by TFI.

Nonetheless, data and analysis focused on the experiences and achievements of the TFI fellows could yield valuable insights for the field, including identifying promising components—or combinations of components—that could be replicated more broadly. TFI may also offer lessons about how

collaboration with private-sector institutions may be a mechanism for involving mentors and other volunteers who commit to developing to deeper, multiyear relationships with young people.

Documenting the design and implementation of TFI highlights other opportunities to learn more from TFI and other programs about how best to improve outcomes for young men of color. Additional investigation could help answer such questions as the following:

- What motivates individual young men of color to participate in programs like TFI, how do they assess the benefits of participation, and what aspects of these programs do they consider valuable, and why? In-depth interviews and focus groups could shed valuable light on how participants experience and evaluate the services and activities, and could offer insights to other initiatives looking to adapt or expand their offerings.
- How do programs systematically assess the short-term and long-term growth and development of participating young men of color, and do these measures fully reflect the programs' theories of change? The positive youth development literature highlights the importance of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner 2005), arguing that measures of these attributes would be more relevant indicators of long-term success than high school grades or test scores. Research that tests and refines tools for measuring such developmental qualities could contribute to programs' capacity to effectively assess participants' progress. Such research could also explore how tools for tracking the developmental growth and progress of young adults needs to be tailored to populations that may have distinct needs, like young men of color.
- What program components constitute essential ingredients for success, and how much time or exposure to these components is required to achieve impact? And does an integrated model, which combines multiple components, yield substantially better outcomes?

Addressing these questions would require rigorous documentation and evaluation of individual components, such as academics, mentoring, leadership development, college guidance, nonacademic enrichment activities, or peer learning. It may also entail comparing participant outcomes across program locations and programs serving similar students, or for a comparison group of students receiving no services.

Further research of this kind could help expand and strengthen the programs and initiatives aimed at helping young men of color overcome long-standing structural challenges that, for too many, block the path to college and career and rob our nation of the diverse workforce it needs to thrive.

## Notes

1. This framework pulls from the ecological perspective developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which is widely accepted in the field of developmental psychology.
2. For a full discussion of these overlapping contexts, see Rawlings (2015).
3. Nine percent of applications lacked information about family income, 20 percent lacked parent or guardian academic degree information, and 26 percent lacked grade information.
4. The plan is for this questionnaire to be re-administered either once or twice a year to gauge any changes.

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