

Charitable Giving to Community Colleges? The Return on Investment is Real—and Local

By Jack Hershey, President of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges

Like never before, Ohio's 23 community colleges are playing an essential role in the economic strength of Ohio and—more importantly—helping to ensure that Ohioans of every age and background share in that strength. Today, more than a third of students enrolled in education after high school are studying at a community college. The reasons are simple: the education is high-quality, affordable and immediately relevant to career goals.

Given the significance of community college to Ohio's workforce, why not consider making your local community college a part of your end-of-year charitable giving?

If you've never given to your local community college, it is ok, you're not alone. Only 1 percent of all higher education giving goes to community colleges, for various reasons. Graduates of four-year colleges are often moved to donate to their alma maters out of nostalgia—a financial contribution helps rekindle youthful memories of times with friends. Further, large four-year university sports programs often get national television attention that keeps their schools top-of-mind.

Looking to support a serious student? Students at community colleges tend not to linger for four years (or more) and few live on campus. Instead, they often have full-time jobs, families or other obligations that keep them hyper-focused on graduation and moving into a career. The fact that they successfully balance learning with all those life responsibilities is an inspiration. If that type of self-starting, go-getter is the kind of person you root for, consider supporting their success with a donation to your local community college.

Does your employer struggle to find good workers? Your community college is helping to fix that. Do you know anyone who has lost their job and sought retraining? Chances are a community college played a role in providing it. Do you know a young person for whom four-years in college isn't a good fit, and instead seeks hands-on learning to prepare for a real-world career? That's a community college. Know someone who withdrew from a university because of the amount of student debt they were accumulating? Community colleges are a natural home for them. If any of these reasons connect with you, then add your local community college to your annual giving.

For those who donate to causes with an eye toward return-on-investment, consider this: a \$10,000 gift to a community college has more than twice the impact as the same gift to a four-year institution. That's because the average tuition in Ohio for a four-year public university is almost \$10,000 per year (not including room and board) compared to just under \$4,500 at a community college. Dollar-for-dollar, a gift to a community college is a more powerful return-on-investment for donors.

Want to invest in your own backyard? A gift to your local community college is in line with your goals. Not only does nearly every community in Ohio have a local community college, but after receiving their degree or certificate, more than 90% of community college students seek job opportunities locally in comparison to graduates of larger four-year schools, who often move away from their local hometown to find work.

In recent years, Ohio community colleges have stepped up their efforts to meet local workforce demands, increasing in the number of degrees, long-term and short-term certificates awarded. They are succeeding for

students and succeeding for local businesses through adaptation, agility and flexibility in providing targeted programming for what communities need and want. A community college gift might not replace gifts made out of nostalgia or personal affinity, but they can certainly have a different impact: one that is significant, immediate and felt right where you live.

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