

FocusQuest Grant Proposal

Our Intent

FocusQuest is a full-range marketing branch for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), focusing on the development and enhancement of their online course offerings. As a marketing partner, we utilize specific skill sets to facilitate their outreach, impact, and visibility to grow their student body. We encourage students to participate in online learning and provide key life-skill tools and support, for their academic career and overall life success. We do this because we understand the value and impact HBCU students and graduates have on the community, state, national, and global levels and we can help. These students need your help as well- and in partnership, our investment will make a substantial difference in our education system, increase our global education ranking, and create a dynamic, diverse, and globally-competitive workforce.

The Problem

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) currently enroll over 70 percent of students with limited financial resources to pay for college and rely heavily on other forms of aid provided through the institutions. In the wake of rising college costs, student debt, and federal budget cuts, HBCUs are under pressure to increase revenues and decrease expenses. Simultaneously, they must also remain progressive and forward-thinking and maintain superior educational quality to continue the cultivation of invaluable leaders who impact the Black community as well as the nation's economic infrastructure.

Yet for decades these same institutions have been battling the inequalities of funding that continue to pose challenges to their mission. Public HBCUs heavily rely on local,

state, and federal funding. Private HBCUs are predominantly tuition-dependent. Both the public and private sectors experienced the steepest declines in federal funding per full-time equivalent student between 2003 and 2015; private HBCUs had the most substantial of all sectors, seeing a 42 percent reduction. Their gifts, grants, and contracts make up only a small percentage of their revenue (1). As the volatility of our national economy increases and access to state and federal funding declines, these gaps will further jeopardize institutional progress.

The online market will continue to grow as the demand increases, ensuring that a significant portion of learning will be available in this format. Such a small percentage of HBCUs utilizing this valuable option keeps many from flourishing in the future and could lead to their demise.

This perspective identifies the severity and multifacetedness of the problem faced by HBCUs.

Our Solution

FocusQuest is a performance marketing company that creates specific ecosystems to address the needs of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) by aligning resources and partners to benefit student development and institutional growth. The FQ team has two decades of experience assisting institutions in increasing their student body from 100 online students to 10,000+ students.

We also understand student success requires the interconnection of the various dimensions of personal development and the multiple goals of higher education. Our value of the 'whole' student is why we partner a Student Success Coach with every

learner, as they embark on the journey of quality online education. We create and provide a community for our learners to experience a safe environment, seamless transitions from admissions, enrollment assistance, academic, personal, and career coaching, career services assistance, and life skill provision to propel them to a fulfilling life of opportunities.

In short, we grow the presence of online education for both HBCUs and learners and make the transition smooth and efficient. With annual federally-funded grants, we can become the central conduit to facilitate growth, organization, accountability, reporting, and results needed to jumpstart and maintain the pathways for students completing online programs and certifications at HBCUs.

About FocusQuest

FocusQuest is a Limited Liability Corporation located in Lakewood Ranch, Florida, and in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. We are the pioneer Online Student Success Partner exclusively dedicated to assisting Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) develop online certificate- and degree-level programs for institutions of higher learning. We create accelerated access to online education for adult learners as a marketing partner and provide the support needed to ensure successful program completion. We only win when our institutions and our students win.

Our Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

Our mission is to create accelerated access to education for adult learners of color at HBCUs.

Vision

Our vision is to equip HBCUs with nontraditional learning programs that promote longevity.

Values (F.O.C.U.S.)

Facilitate	We are passionate about bridging the gap between students and our School Partners.
Optimize	We look to perfect the HBCU online educational experience from digital marketing to student enrollment extending to career opportunities.
Connect	We are innovative in our approach to being a conduit between the students, the HBCU, and a successful career path of their choice.
Understand	We understand the needs of the students, our School Partners, and our community.
Sustain	We are 100% focused on the longevity and needs of the students, School Partners, and our communities of color.

Our Services

- At the core of our business, we are an online performance marketing (OPM) company. We specialize in developing strategic blueprints that build online brands and market online degree and certificate programs for HBCUs. We have over 40 years of experience recruiting, advising, developing, teaching, and counseling students for for-profit and not-for-profit colleges and universities. We have unique systems and processes that generate student leads and enrollments

by connecting students with their chosen HBCUs. We assist schools with establishing an online presence, backend search parameters, and a customer relationship management (CRM) system.

- We offer a Learning Management Platform that develops and manages degree and certificate-level programs.
- Our Instructional Design Team works with school staff to create engaging learning methods and innovative course content for educators.
- Our Student Success Program consists of coaches who are experts in helping individuals reach their highest potential. Our Student Success Coaches support and guide learners through their educational goals from application to completion.
- The FocusQuest Online Community provides a virtual space where students connect with other learners, learn more about their HBCU, and enhance career development opportunities.
- Corporate Sponsorship Program connects students with organizations through mentorship, internships, and career opportunities.
- FQ Housing offers affordable housing to students near campus.



Key Partners (A subset of partners)



These examples highlight just some of the partnerships FocusQuest has built and continues to build to increase the exposure of the educational online offerings available at HBCUs, to students. This subset includes Greek organizations, churches, and small and large businesses. Targeted social media platforms are sourced as vehicles of promotion.

FocusQuest Leadership Team

FocusQuest is a purpose-driven services organization with a mission to create accelerated access to education for adult learners at HBCUs. Our organization is designed to engage and support learners and institutions to ensure success. We provide solutions beyond the traditional Online Program Management (OPM) model to meet the needs of those we serve.

Sean-Reed McGee, *Chief Executive Officer*

Sean-Reed McGee, husband, father, servant, son, and entrepreneur works hard to make an impact through his companies. Since 1995, as a graduate of Wagner College in NYC, he has positioned himself from an employee for just three years to a self-employed contractor building the revenues of a media company from one employee to a staff of over 400 employees with annual sales of \$145 million. As a salesman within the lead generation and performance marketing space, he transitioned from magazine print to outdoor to events to radio to web and call center to multimedia social platforms.

Sean-Reed has led the development of two successful companies from the idea stage to 9-figure acquisitions. His independent lead generation companies of Back2Learn and LaunchYourDegree reach 20,000+ students monthly for 40+ institutions. FocusQuest and FluidEducation- two of his Online Program Management groups- touch thousands of potential learners and connect them with select universities for online and campus-based learning. His company, PursueYourGoal Group, provides marketing for the insurance, mortgage, and solar industries. As an investor in multi-industry companies, Sean-Reed has been exposed to the core of what matters: the people and their intent, drive, and focus.

Sean-Reed is an influencer, calculated risk taker, and “let’s learn more by doing” type of guy who sees the big picture of wanting to create change within the communities he serves.

Chad Williamson, *Chief Operations Officer*

Chad Williamson is an expert in business development within the education industry. Mr. Williamson has more than 21 years of experience creating strategic alliances between corporations, organizations, and higher education institutions, resulting in long-term growth and success. As one of the pioneers in educational business development, Mr. Williamson has been responsible for creating and/or enhancing the strategic partnership channels of some of the largest education institutions in the nation.

It is this experience, and Mr. Williamson's passion for helping to create empowerment and success through education and professional development, that led Mr. Williamson to create several education companies. Mr. Williamson aims to help minorities and underrepresented individuals increase their marketability and success by creating access to affordable, accelerated education opportunities, formatted for adult learners.

Mr. Williamson was the Business Development Officer at Arizona State University (EdPlus), where he created its business development division and led EdPlus to approximately \$10 million per year in revenue in less than 2 years. Mr. Williamson worked closely with the leadership at The Rise Fund over 14 months to help facilitate their partnership with ASU, which led to the forming of InStride.

Dr. Ndala Booker, *Chief Student Success Officer*

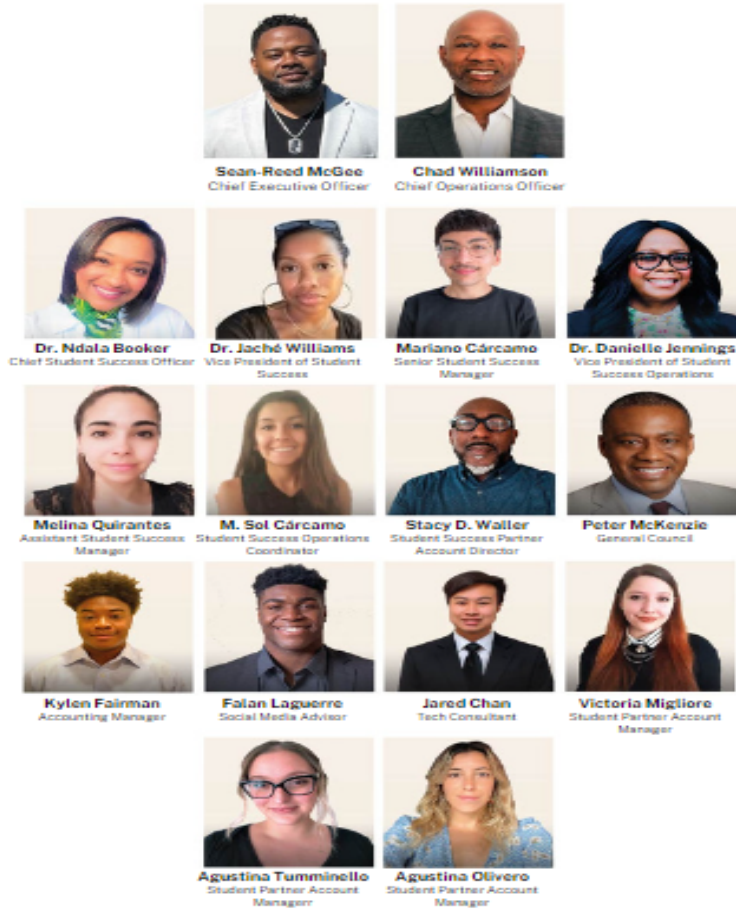
Dr. Ndala Gooding Booker holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Southern Adventist University and master's and doctoral degrees in education with a concentration in Curriculum Development and Instruction from Tennessee State University.

Dr. Booker served as the Data Coordinator for the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, where she immersed herself in the imperative of the university to foster “Critical Thinking Development through Writing.” At Oakwood, she also served as the Director for the Center of Academic Success and taught College Success classes. Later, she accepted the position of Retention Coordinator at Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama. There, she developed the Retention Office, proposed and managed the renovation of a new student lounge, and created a new Student Success Center. For the past six years, she served as the Director of the Center for Academic Achievement at AdventHealth University in Orlando, Florida. She is currently the facilitator for all workshops in critical thinking and academic success for all incoming undergraduate students.

From primary and secondary schools to colleges, universities, and organizations, Dr. Booker has lectured and presented seminars and workshops for organizations and businesses nationally and internationally. In Trinidad, West Indies, she had the opportunity to speak at a Youth Leadership Conference on the topic of purpose and potential and facilitated a Critical Thinking/Academic Success workshop for both faculty and students at the University of the Southern Caribbean.

Advisory Board

FocusQuest Team



Market Research

The role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) was to provide affordable access to education, advance the study and development of Black culture, and provide intellectual training that led to future employment and racial advancement. At their inception, HBCUs prepared students in three vocations: ministry, teaching, and trades. As the schools developed, yet with little to no budget, they found ways to create new curriculums that benefited students and the community as a whole. HBCUs continue to remain uniquely positioned to provide excellent education and create a

strong sense of belonging for Black students and other minority students. As of 2019, 100+ schools were classified as HBCUs. Now in the 21st century, these institutions must assess the current needs of the Black community and find ways to meet those needs online. However, in 2022 *Academic Influence* reported that just 36 HBCUs offered 250 online degree programs.

By 2026, the global online learning market should be worth \$375B due to the introduction of e-learning courses and distance learning programs. It is predicted that the United States elearning market will grow to \$21.64B based on the introduction of flexible learning technologies and the use of artificial intelligence in education for corporate and education sectors. The virtual classroom market is \$11.3B. From 2020 to 2026, the industry and professional elearning segment will likely grow with a CAGR of 32.1%. To remain relevant and innovative, it is necessary for HBCUs to navigate the unique challenges created through online education, while still providing high-quality academic, cultural, development, and career benefits students traditionally experience on campus.

Online Certificate Competitors

Coursera works with universities and other organizations to offer online courses, certifications, and degrees in various subjects. Its services include four-to-twelve-week courses, degrees, and professional certificate programs. In 2021, it was estimated that about 150 universities offered more than 4,000 courses through Coursera. Coursera's revenues rose in 2019 from \$184M to \$294M in 2020. It has been reported that Coursera has not made a profit to date. The company lost \$66M in 2020 as it ramped up marketing and advertising.

Skillshare is an online learning community based in the US. It focuses on providing education videos for non-accredited courses that are available through subscription. From 2010 to 2016, the company raised approx. 35M in funding. In 2018, the company raised \$28M in Series C funding. The courses focus on interaction instead of lecturing. The main courses include creative arts, design, entrepreneurship, lifestyle, and technology. As of March 2019, Skillshare had over 27,000 premium classes and more than 2,000 free classes available. The platform introduced the Groups feature that allows members to connect with other creators, share work, and take skills to the next level through engaging discussions and prompts.

Udemy is a for-profit massive open online course provider aimed at professional adults and students. As of May 2022, the platform has more than 52 million students, 196,000 courses, 68,000 instructors teaching courses in over 75 languages, and 712 million course enrollments. Students take courses primarily to improve job-related skills. Some courses generate credit toward technical certifications. Udemy has made a special effort to attract corporate learners seeking to create coursework for their companies' employees. In 2020, Udemy raised 50M at a \$3.25B valuation, and in October 2021, Udemy held its IPO in the US and is listed under the symbol UDMY.

Learning Management System Trends

The global learning management systems (LMS) market size was valued at \$12,793.52M in 2020 and is projected to reach \$81,223.80M by 2030. COVID-19 had a positive impact on the learning management systems market since the trend of online classes increased during the pandemic, which resulted in educational institutions as well as training centers adopting learning management systems. In 2021, North America held

the largest share of the market, accounting for more than 41% of the total revenue generated worldwide. As a result of the increasing number of Ed-tech activities, it is projected that North America would dominate the LMS industry. The United States has the biggest number of institutions and colleges in the world, and potentially companies that supply LMS will have opportunities to grow their operations.

LMS are mostly used for online learning but can also be used for other purposes such as a platform for online content such as asynchronous and synchronous courses. LMS software aid educational institutions in better management of their online learning programs. The market for learning management systems in North America is influenced by the ever-increasing need for education or learning that is both efficient and of high quality is an essential factor in the industry's growth. In 2017, hardware for online learning had the largest market share with a revenue of \$19.92B. Software is expected to lead the market with a CAGR of 31/2%. The content providers segment was 60% and is expected to grow by a CAGR of 27.4%. The services Segment is also increasing in popularity with a market size of \$128B in 2019. It is predicted that blended learning will grow a CAGR of 11.14% by 2025.

Blackboard Learn is a web-based virtual learning environment and learning management system developed by Blackboard Inc. The software features course management, customizable open architecture, and scalable design that allows integration with student information systems and authentication protocols. In the Spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a Virginia Public school system with 189,000 students abandoned Blackboard Learn 24/7 after weeks of unsuccessful attempts to use it and poor security allowing live sessions to be disrupted by hackers.

Canvas is a web-based learning management system used by learning institutions, educators, and students to access and manage online course learning materials. Its services include customizable course creation and management tools, course and user analytics and statistics, and internal communication tools

Problem Statement Detailed

With a historical foundation built on providing access to higher education for people otherwise denied, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have an understanding of the needs, history, and experience of Black students. Unfortunately, many historically White institutions (HWIs) still operate with deep-rooted racism, microaggressions, and bias, embedded in policy, practice, and people- albeit covert- that continue to shape negative and even traumatic experiences for Black students. In addition, retention and matriculation data from many of these institution types indicate that they are not equipped to provide the necessary response to bridge the academic success gap for Black students. The ramifications of the American education system for Black people in the United States have created a compounded reaping of inequalities in almost every aspect of life. HBCUs were, are, and remain vital and indispensable in the American education system.

HBCUs pride themselves in their understanding of the plight of their people. They meet students where they are and provide nurturing and support through safe, rigorous, and communal environments for students to thrive. They understand the past and present conditions for Black people in the United States, as well as the impact these conditions have to continuously create for the country as a whole. It is imperative to support their

shared vision and mission to serve those who have been underserved, especially in the wake of these ever-changing political, social, and economic climates.

Academic preparedness has been a major issue for young students of color, specifically within the Black community. Historically, the Black community has been drastically impacted by this gap in educational equity. Black students are less likely to have access to college-ready courses- particularly in math and science. When provided access, they are vastly underrepresented in honors or advanced placement courses, as well as gifted and talented education programs. Many schools for Black students house new, less qualified, or underpaid teachers. There is evidence of systematic bias in teacher expectations for Black students when those teachers are non-Black. Black students are not meeting college-ready benchmarks. The extreme disciplinary methods and practices for Black students further impact their access to education. Black students and students of color tend to have fewer resources. Reading and math assessment scores are significantly low. There is also the factor of an extreme lack of representation in school administrators and personnel (2). Future academic outcomes, long-term economic stability, health, and social opportunities are all predictions that can be determined to begin as early as early childhood education (3). Currently, Black people are underrepresented in high-wage positions and over-represented in low-wage positions and unemployment (4). At the same time, this problem vehemently affects the Black community, it also impacts the nation. The persistence of this epidemic “imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession” (5).

HBCUs outperform other institutions in providing a rigorous and affordable education while serving a higher proportion of low-income, first-generation, and under-served

students, with about 70 percent of those students receiving a federal Pell Grant, as compared to 32 percent at non-HBCUs (6). They also double the national average elevating low-income students from the bottom 40 percent in household income to the top 60 percent (7).

As of 2018 HBCUs provide education for over 300,000 students and inject billions of dollars into the national economy. As a “powerful economic engine” (8), these institutions increase job creation on a major level, both locally and nationally. Not only do they play a key role in creating a more diverse workforce, they also create equity, establish community, and drive social change.

The systems of the United States- finance, government, geopolitical, economic, technological, climate, agricultural, and even arts and culture- are all experiencing rapid change during a rapidly evolving VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) nation and world. It is now more important than ever to provide HBCUs with the resources necessary to continue developing innovative, driven, ground-breaking graduates in critical fields with the aptitude, capabilities, and creativity needed for our future. The efforts to overcome these conditions wane as worsening conditions emerge. Thus, there needs to be an investment made in the education of Black people in the United States.

Now, as never before, more and more colleges and universities are facing a range of financial challenges. In recent decades, organizational costs of institutions have increased while state funding dedicated to higher education fell.

Institutions responded to these trends by increasing net tuition revenue, but found it difficult to experience enrollment increases based on family income and concerns over

student debt; the global pandemic further impacted key revenue streams. While online programs exist, their accessibility now provides a “ram in the bush” that allows colleges and universities the [benefits for institutions of online programs] ability to navigate this difficult financial terrain. In a survey of Chief Academic Officers, 63 percent of these leaders believe online education is critical to their institutions' long-term strategy. Early entrants to the online market, generated positive net revenue from their online programs and used it to cross-subsidize other programs and activities. From Fall 2012 to Fall 2018, the number of students taking online courses increased, while the number of students taking in-person classes fell by around 9 percent.

Although higher education enrollments continue to decline, distance education enrollment continues to grow. In 2014, over 2.8 million students took online classes (9). In 2020, 11.8 million undergraduate students were enrolled in at least one online course and 7 million students were exclusively taking online courses (10). Online enrollment continues to exceed face-to-face courses.

Throughout their inception, one of the primary challenges for HBCUs has been limited support and fiscal opportunities. Historically, the Higher Education Act of 1965 addressed the needs of HBCUs by providing scholarships, grants, and loans for higher education. Specifically, Title III of the Act designated funds to assist developing institutions or HBCUs directly and Title IV provided student financing through grants, student loans, and work-study opportunities. In 1972, Congress established the Basic Education Opportunity which awarded need-based funding to students who were enrolled at least part-time in an accredited college or university. This

grant, later named the Pell Grant, was a strategy that linked student enrollment and the availability of federal aid and leveled the playing field for Black students.

The Pell Grant focused on providing funds to low-income and underserved individuals and families. In 1980, the grant and other special programs aimed at recruiting Black students were cut or eliminated. This decision reduced funds by \$200M and removed race as an identifier. While the Pell Grant recovered by the 1990s, the increase in funding was impacted by inflation and rising tuition costs. Black students had to decide to incur large debt or not enroll. The decline in enrollment created a loss of tuition revenue for HBCUs, which then had to place a heavy reliance on state funding. While state funding was made available, for “every federal dollar provided to public HBCUs the state pays 50 cents, while PWIs receive five to seven dollars for each federal dollar” (11).

While HBCUs received almost three billion dollars from the President’s American Rescue Plan (12), at least half of those funds were required to provide direct financial relief to students. The expectation is that far more will be used for that purpose through emergency grants, the erasing of outstanding debt or unpaid balances, and eliminating transcript hold practices. With the focus on student relief, HBCUs must still fund new academic programs, invest in key services to support students, update technology to remain competitive and provide quality education, and explore ways to remain adaptable and focused on the future. In May/June 2022, an assembly organized by the Higher Education Leadership Foundation (HELFF), gathered to discuss HBCU sustainability in the current social climate. Participants noted key areas necessary for an increase in the sustainability of HBCUs: more funding, a focus on the well-being, safety and security of students, an increase in community and corporate partnerships, a

consistently strong enrollment and retention plan, and intentionality of teaching specific skills and providing opportunities to increase students' social mobility (13).

Solution Statement Detailed

FocusQuest will utilize marketing strategy, technology, and human capital to identify and address the needs and goals of each HBCU for increasing enrollment and completion rates through online education. We will address and alleviate the unique challenges of each institution that impact its success. We provide the bandwidth to identify significant barriers and develop creative and technologically-innovative solutions. By engaging various levels and perspectives of each institutional community, we determine what gaps may be present regarding all components of online education. Using qualitative and quantitative data, as well as market research, we will develop individualized plans that will increase each institution's visibility, its outreach and access point to new students, its online program and certification offerings, and its student completion outcomes. Through careful assessment, planning, and engagement, we create and enhance online opportunities, align resources and partners, manage processes and systems, and play a significant role in supporting all students.

Performance Marketing

Performance marketing is the core component of our business. It is a digital marketing strategy that is driven by results. It is ideal for HBCUs looking to reach their audience at scale because payment is based on how users interact with the content. We will use our 40 years of higher education administration and professorial experience and apply that

knowledge and technique to increase the schools' pipeline of potential students.

Performance marketing is a creative and effective way for schools to diversify their audience and expand their reach, all while capturing valuable data.

Student Success Services

FocusQuest Student Success Services promotes student engagement, learning, and progress toward the student's educational goals. Our Student Success Coaches will utilize best practices and initiatives to ensure student success.

HBCU Experience & FocusQuest Community

Since inception, HBCUs were relational, creating leaders, and demonstrating the power of networking. At FocusQuest, we understand that building a sense of community is paramount to giving each student an authentic HBCU experience. We have designed the FocusQuest Community to connect students and share one of the best parts of the college experience- its culture.

Innovation and Technology

As a part of our commitment to continual improvement, we will complete market scans to ensure we are using the latest technologies. With the rapid advancement in technology, as well as the increase in reliability and evolving approaches of solution providers, it has become easier than ever to implement technology solutions to support continuous improvement programs.

Research and Development

Research and development is a key component of our organization which allows us to identify new ideas, use data science to gain knowledge, and complete departmental- and enterprise-level assessments to ensure organizational success.

Academic Affairs

FocusQuest Academic Affairs division will focus on educational excellence by providing instructional design, course development, and training for Student Success Coaches and HBCU staff and faculty.

Financials

We are requesting \$375 per credit per student.

12 credits

The goal of 10,000 students per year

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