

Toyota Engages the Power of Allyship to Aid HBCU Students in Time of Crisis

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This year, vulnerable college students across the United States have been faced with a new and wholly unexpected challenge to their education: the COVID-19 pandemic. The upheaval caused by sudden campus closures is stressful and disorienting for any student, but it is especially hard on those without the financial and family support needed to provide options for keeping going through the crisis. Unexpected expenses such as emergency travel, temporary housing, storage rentals, laptop computers, food and other costs that come with a swift removal from dorms and classrooms are not in the budgets for the more than 70% of students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) who are lower income (compared to 35% to 40% nationally), as cited by Brian Bridges, vice president of research and member engagement for the United Negro College Fund (UNCF).

To help HBCUs and their students cover these costs and transition to distance learning, among other needs, Toyota Motor North America is supporting 11 HBCUs through a grant of \$110,000 to UNCF (United Negro College Fund).

Originally reserved for five schools through Toyota's partnership with UNCF's Emergency Student Aid Program, the donation now extends across six additional institutions to include relief precipitated by COVID-19. And it isn't just surprise expenses creating an emergency for this vulnerable student population; with the closing of campuses has come the loss of critical tuition-paying jobs.

"Countless students were impacted by the disruption that the coronavirus outbreak caused," says Jessica Taylor, who leads Workforce Readiness and Community Connections at Toyota. "For example, students who participated in work-study programs were left unemployed when campuses closed. As a result, many students were put in a financially precarious place, and we just want to provide support and relief to those in need."



The UNCF Emergency Student Aid (ESA) program typically covers six areas: emergency retention grants, degree completion aid, emergency loans, natural disaster relief, food insecurity grants and housing insecurity payments. But during the COVID-19 crisis, funds will help address additional unanticipated needs caused by the outbreak.

“In response to the current health pandemic, UNCF is working hard to administer as many scholarship dollars as possible to our member-HBCUs. We can only help one out of every 10 students who apply for financial assistance in the best of times, so this help comes at an especially critical moment,” explains Dr Michael L.

Lomax, president and CEO, UNCF. “Toyota’s allocation of funds to our Emergency Student Aid program could not have come at a better time. The support will address the immediate and urgent needs of UNCF students.”

The challenges for UNCF students are often sizable. [Studies](#) show that while the world grapples with the global coronavirus pandemic, many minorities and disadvantaged populations are at greater risk of impact due to ongoing inequalities in access to adequate health care, education and economic opportunities.

According to [*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*](#), even under normal circumstances the college graduation rate for African American students in the U.S. stands at 42%, as opposed to 62% for their white counterparts. However, [UNCF reports](#) that, while HBCUs only make up 3% of the nation’s colleges and universities, they enroll 10% of all African American students and produce almost 20% of all African American graduates. Financial assistance is a key factor to successful graduation outcomes within this demographic.



“We believe that the lack of access to quality education and opportunities are some of the barriers prohibiting professional success,” says Taylor. “By partnering with HBCUs, we’re connected with institutions that share our core values and put us in direct contact with a diverse pipeline of talent. Investing in students’ education is something we’re proudly committed to.”

Diversity and inclusion are long-held commitments at Toyota, grounded in the company’s foundational principles of respect for people and continuous improvement. In the spirit of allyship, Toyota engages with its partners and team members to create the kinds of opportunities that offer pathways to success. Workforce

development initiatives champion diverse groups and a culture of inclusion drives new ideas, opens dialogues and nurtures talent. But a passion for diversity and inclusion is just the start. Positive and sustained action are where lasting change becomes possible.

“Toyota is a highly valued UNCF partner,” Lomax adds. “The company has generously and consistently supported the college aspirations of UNCF students by reducing financial barriers through the funding of renewable scholarships. Toyota’s scholarships allow students to focus on their demanding class loads and persist to graduation. Persistence is central to the lives of HBCU students but, without support, it’s often not enough. During such an historic crisis, it’s even less possible to weather the storm simply by hanging in there.”



“These are unprecedented times, and we’re devoted to working with our partners to support their efforts in providing students with assistance,” says Taylor. “We lean on our partnerships to help alleviate pressures affecting the communities in which we serve.”

And it’s in partnership where the strengths of allies can do the most good.

Below is a list of the schools each receiving a \$10,000 contribution through UNCF’s Emergency Student Aid program from Toyota’s gift:

1. [Talladega College](#) in Talladega, AL
2. [Tuskegee University](#) in Tuskegee, AL
3. [Miles College](#) in Fairfield, MS
4. [Rust College](#) in Holly Springs, MS
5. [Tougaloo College](#) in Jackson, MS
6. [Wilberforce University](#) in Wilberforce, OH
7. [Clafflin University](#) in Orangeburg, SC
8. [Benedict College](#) in Columbia, SC
9. [Bethune-Cookman College](#) in Daytona Beach, FL
10. [Jarvis Christian College](#) in Hawkins, TX
11. [Texas College](#) in Tyler, TX