

MINUTES
FIRST STEP ADVISORY BOARD
February 16, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://zoom.us/j/6403942999>
Meeting ID: 640 394 2999

Board Members Present:

Dr. Angie Paccione, Executive Director, Department of Higher Education
Eric Rothaus, Deputy Director, Department of Treasury
Angela Baier, CEO, CollegenInvest

Board Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Mike Blake, Chief Marketing Officer, CollegenInvest
Mike Keglovits, ABLE & Special Programs Manager, CollegenInvest
Austin Earp, Financial Literacy Program Coordinator, Department of Treasury

Call to Order:

The meeting of the First Step Advisory Board was called to order by Angie Paccione, Chair, at 9:00 a.m. Board members and staff were introduced. A quorum was present.

Director/Staff Report:

Angela Baier asked the group to introduce themselves. She noted that everyone received the legislative update and the slides from the SMART Act in advance of the call.

Mike Keglovits gave an overview of the program to date. He noted that the program has evolved from the start. In the beginning, we were just doing outreach to newborns, reaching out to hospitals like Denver Health. Approximately 50% of births at Denver Health are Spanish speaking families. Now that older children are eligible since a child born in early 2020 is 4 years old, we changed our marketing to include them and it's been more effective. We've been to over 600 nonprofits in 30 different counties with a focus on Early Childhood, Catholic Charities, RISE, and more. We also hired a full-time bilingual working outreach person and have another Spanish speaker in our call center. In November, we announced that our First Step awards passed 10,000 families and we're now at 12,000. Last May, we awarded over \$5 million in matching funds. We expect to award close to \$7.8 million this May.

Paccione asked about the contact info that we receive from Vital Records. Baier stated that we get the name and address. CollegeInvest tried direct mail in year one and it didn't move the needle. Many mail pieces were returned for incorrect address. Subsequent consumer research also showed that some people thought there was a catch, like getting \$300 from Chase if you open a checking account. We now realize it's more effective to work with trusted third-party organizations to reach parents when the child is one or two, or when they're started preschool.

Eric Rothaus mentioned that he spoke with Treasurer Young and shared his apologies for not being able to attend today's call. He asked when the advisory board met last. Baier stated that it was in 2019 and 2020. Rothaus asked if they could receive the prior reports for the SMART Act hearings. Baier stated that CollegeInvest is not part of the SMART Act because we do not receive General Funds, but Senator Fenberg requested that she attend the January meeting of the Joint Education Committee. She is always happy to attend in the future and talk about the successes of the program.

Rothaus mentioned that the Treasurer had questions about the 8 staff positions and \$600,000 for paid advertising that was referenced in the Committee presentation. Baier stated that First Step is just one small, but important, part of CollegeInvest. The financial partners like Vanguard and TIAA pay for marketing costs related to CollegeInvest. Marketing for the First Step and our other Special Programs is paid for by federal funds. While we do have staff that oversee both CollegeInvest and First Step outreach, we also have staff that is dedicated solely to First Step. Baier also mentioned the Ugift program.

Mike Blake gave an overview of the marketing efforts. CollegeInvest spends \$1 million annually on our general marketing campaign. There is a long track history about which tactics work. As mentioned earlier, direct mail was initially used for First Step until other tactics were found to be more effective. Blake noted that there were about 1,000 applicants during the first year. When additional outreach staff were added the next year, the applications doubled to 2,000. Since TV/online is so strong with our general marketing efforts, those learnings were applied to First Step. In October, we added tv/online since it was so strong with core. The take-up doubled to 4,000 accounts that year. We finished 2023 with 4,700 new accounts. This campaign is also timed with our general market campaign. For an example of the combined impact, there were 1,800 new accounts in December alone when all the marketing is running. Without the campaign, the number settles back down to 200 – 300 per month. Now after last 2 winters, we're adding to our tax season campaign to layer First Step ads in Super Bowl pregame and PBS partnership. Geofencing ads are being used to target families at family-oriented venues like the Children's Museum.

Paccione asked if Spanish language TV and cable stations were part of the mix. Blake stated that they were a huge piece of our ad buy. In fact, Hispanic tv tactics are delivering more visits to the website than English spots. The First Step website also had a bilingual toggle and we have always offered printed materials in Spanish.

Rothaus asked about social media since they oversee the unclaimed property division. They understand that people are skeptical about their own program and sometimes think it's a scam. He wondered if we had any learnings that would be instructive to them because it helps them refine. Blake responded that it is absolutely a huge part. We use social media to target new parents. Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat have been quite effective.

Paccione mentioned the request by the Governor's office to consider a usability study for the First Step application process. Baier stated that CollegeInvest is always open to improving our operations and it would be helpful if the Governor's office could give us specific examples.

Due to time constraints, Paccione suggested Austin Earp would discuss the financial education efforts in the Treasurer's office at the next meeting. She asked that this group meet again in March, April, and May. At that point, the Advisory Board could determine what their ongoing meeting schedule should be, perhaps quarterly.

New Business/Action Items

The Board discussed meeting dates and decided to meet again in March, April, and May. The future schedule will be evaluated after those meetings

Adjournment:

Paccione adjourned the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

The next scheduled meeting of the Board is Tuesday, March 25, 2024 at 9:00 am and will be held via the web conference application, Zoom. Meeting details will be posted on the CollegeInvest website www.collegeinvest.org.