

Missouri College Access Network

Press Kit



This press kit is provided by the
Missouri College Access Network
November 2020
mocollegeaccess.org



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History of the Missouri College Access Network

In December 2018, the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, Missouri Scholarship Loan Foundation, and Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development convened a planning committee in collaboration with the National College Access Network (now known as the National College Attainment Network) to explore establishing a statewide network focused on college access and success. The planning committee dedicated months of work to creating the framework and vision for what would become the Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN).

The planning committee brought together some of the best from around Missouri, including many already working in the college access and success space. The participating organizations included: Active Advocacy Coalition, KC Degrees, KC Scholars, Mid-America Regional Council, Missouri Association for College Admission Counseling, Missouri Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Missouri Association of Student Financial Aid Personnel, Missouri College Advising Corps, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, Missouri Diversity Officers in Higher Education, Missouri Scholarship & Loan Foundation, Missouri School Counselor Association, Prosper Springfield, rootEd Alliance, St. Louis Graduates, Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, and Southeast Missouri State University TRiO.

In 2019, MOCAN hired their first Executive Director, followed closely by two additional full-time staff in 2020.

Mission, Vision, & Values

The mission of the Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) is to increase career and college awareness, preparation, access, and completion in Missouri, particularly for the underrepresented and underserved. We do this by:

- Advocating for public and institutional policies that promote postsecondary access and success.
- Coordinating statewide career preparation and college access and success activities for service providers.
- Leveraging and connecting providers, professionals, and other stakeholders to strengthen and grow programs, and to eliminate service and equity gaps.
- Centralizing knowledge-sharing and technical training for career and college program providers.
- Identifying, summarizing, and actively sharing standardized data collection measures and relevant research regarding career preparation and college access and success.
- Fostering a collective voice to communicate postsecondary educational and training opportunities to all people in Missouri.

At MOCAN, we believe that success in college and career begins in K-12, but can be achieved at any point. We use the term “college” to refer to the attainment of valuable postsecondary credentials beyond high school, including technical certificates and academic degrees. We believe that postsecondary opportunity and attainment are a public good critical to create a just and equitable society, robust economy, and healthy communities.



Recent News Releases

Missouri College Access Network Received Greene County CARES Act Funding

Springfield/Columbia, MO – September 30, 2020 – The Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) received a grant of \$360,000 from Greene County as part of the CARES Act—and the impact is expected to be felt by over 3,000 families throughout the County.

The funds are provided to administer five specific programs, all of which go toward MOCAN's mission of increasing career and college awareness, preparation, access, and completion in Missouri, particularly for the underrepresented and underserved.

“One of the exciting things about this grant is the way it addresses technology needs,” says Francine Pratt, MOCAN Executive Director. “By partnering with the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, we learned how the pandemic brought the need to focus on internet access and affordability to the forefront. We can assist in making sure students have access to the internet for their studies—at least through the fall semester,” she says, “to help students regain what they may have lost by converting to online learning half way through the spring semester and help students stay current in their studies, which includes adult learners.”

She adds, “These funds are designed to work with organizations who know the K-12 students, their families and adult learners already. They know who needs access and who needs equipment—we don't have to make those decisions. MOCAN's role is to act as a convener, pulling the various components together to ensure we are working with the local organizations and educational institutions to reduce barriers to educational needs for those who need assistance.”

A full listing and description of the grant funding is available at mocollegeaccess.org/greene-county-cares-act-fund. A summary shows:

- Access to affordable internet for educational purposes for Fall 2020, which will be processed mostly through the Community Partnership of the Ozarks and MOCAN coordinating with the schools and local non-profits.
- A technology scaled lease program, which will also be coordinated through the Community Partnership of the Ozarks and other organizations. As many as 200 devices will be purchased and loaned through identified organizations to provide a scaled lease of the equipment to students of color and adult learners who are Pell eligible. Fortunately, Springfield Public Schools provides chrome books and internet access for their 26,000 students. However, sometimes additional devices are needed such as printers/scanners and related supplies.
- Mentoring & tutoring programs aimed at those students most impacted by the lack of affordable access to internet services, which caused many students to fall behind during the last semester. Students for this program will be recommended by community-based and faith-based organizations as well as Springfield Public Schools and the Greene County higher education institutions.
- Establish the Bridge Springfield: Brother to Brother programs with the Grant Beach Boys and Girls Club and with Springfield Public Schools Middle Schools and High Schools. This is a development program and support system for mainly male students impacted by historical inequities: African American males and males from underserved populations who were faced with the greatest disparities because of COVID-19.
- An outreach program to provide information about recent workforce and short-term job training programs developed locally and by the Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development.

Organizations identified to receive funds have been established previously in Greene County. The plan is also to use local vendors, when possible, to purchase equipment and supplies, according to Ms. Pratt. While she expects CARES Act funds to be released throughout the state, she explains that “Greene County was a



priority since it has the broadband and infrastructure already in place to move quickly. I expect the work we do here to serve as a model for further statewide projects that focus on addressing Internet access and affordability. I also want to publicly thank the Green County Commissioners, the three-stage review process and Dr. Foster for recognizing MOCAN's focused attention to the students and their pursuit to increase their education."

Greene County has established a "transparency dashboard" where reports of funding distributions are updated on a regular basis. That dashboard can be accessed at greenecountymo.gov/cares/awards/. Funds received by MOCAN have to be spent by December 30, 2020, showing the importance of addressing immediate needs within Greene County due to the pandemic.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act is a \$2 trillion relief program passed by Congress on March 27, 2020 with the stated intent that it "provides fast and direct economic assistance for American workers and families, small businesses, and preserves jobs for American industries." You can find more information about the CARES Act at home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares.

Missouri College Access Network Launches Website with a Focus on Historically Underserved Students

Columbia, MO – August 12, 2020 –If you missed the virtual launch of our new MOCAN site, it's available to view online. Any coverage is appreciated as students look for a resource as they make college and career decisions this month. Our website is specifically designed to provide assistance to those who are underrepresented and underserved. You are free to take any piece of the launch presentation and use it in your stories, in lieu of an interview.

MOCAN Executive Director Francine Pratt is also available for individual interviews via phone, Zoom, or reporter interview with appropriate physical distancing. Please call her at 573-554-4601 to set up a time.

Missouri College Access Network Launches New Communications Site

Springfield, MO – August 11, 2020 –The Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) launched a new website designed specifically to help students and others find resources all in one place. It will be demonstrated to members of the media in a "virtual launch" on Tuesday, August 11, at 1 p.m. in Springfield, Missouri. The walk-through will be done via Zoom, with the ability for media to ask questions either in the comment section or by indicating they would like to ask a question on screen.

The website is part of the development of MOCAN, a member of the National College Attainment Network. The mission of the Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) is to increase career and college awareness, preparation, access, and completion in Missouri, particularly for the underrepresented and underserved. MOCAN joins other state college access networks, including ones in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, Florida, Michigan, South Dakota, and Tennessee. "It's important for Missouri to offer this service to its communities," says Francine Pratt, the MOCAN Executive Director. "Our intent is to provide education and college-centered direction resources and services across the state with an intentional focus for students of color and low-income populations. We also provide career direction—recognizing that career and certificate training are great solutions in today's economy."

"We are excited about providing an online resource that offers a one-stop-shop style of information about higher education as well as career training opportunities," says Pratt. "We have a great board of directors who have been instrumental in making sure MOCAN could be brought to life in a timely manner," she adds. The site offers information about Missouri's educational and funding initiatives, links to institutions of higher education across the state, and assistance for counselors and organizations as well as directly for the



students. It also has a special section on the implications of COVID-19 and higher education. “Our goal is for MOCAN to provide the most up-to-date research and data on the landscape of access and completion in higher education, specifically within Missouri,” emphasizes Pratt.

Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) Hires New Executive Director

Columbia, MO – April 27, 2020 – The Missouri College Access Network (MOCAN) Board of Directors welcomes the new MOCAN Executive Director, Francine Pratt, who was hired April 20, 2020. Francine Pratt served as the Prosper Springfield Director for the past three years in Springfield, MO with oversight of the city and county goals to reduce poverty and increase postsecondary attainment. Francine’s other professional experience includes serving as Missouri State University’s Executive Director for Multicultural Programs and as an instructor of Introduction to African American Studies for several years. She also served as a corporate project director, a project manager and in several statewide leadership positions in California.

Ms. Pratt was a member of the MOCAN planning committee that was responsible for creating the design, mission, and vision for MOCAN. The planning committee started meeting in June 2018 and later that year, MOCAN formalized as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. The planning committee nominated board members and Ms. Pratt was selected as the vice chair for the MOCAN board of directors. In February 2020, the first MOCAN Executive Director, Pam Fowler, gave notice. Ms. Pratt stepped down from the board and served as a consultant to lead MOCAN through the strategic planning process. Francine replaces Ms. Fowler, who was hired in September 2019. Ms. Fowler was instrumental in establishing the infrastructure for MOCAN.

Ms. Pratt stated, “I am excited for this opportunity to work with students and stakeholders across the state of Missouri to create an interconnected system that will increase access and success for students with pathways to careers and college. I am very thankful for the insight of the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority aka MOHELA, Missouri Scholarship and Loan Foundation and the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development when they first discussed the concept with the planning committee in June 2018.” The National College Attainment Network has been instrumental in helping MOCAN with its design and strategic focus. For more information about MOCAN, please visit the MOCAN website at mocollegeaccess.org or contact Ms. Pratt at 573-554-4601.

Copies of all news releases can be found on our website at mocollegeaccess.org/news-releases/.

Staff Bios

Francine Pratt, Executive Director

Francine Pratt, MOCAN Executive Director since 2020, is an accomplished Project/Program Director with over 25 years’ experience in leading government, private, public, and non-profit organizations with a focus on developing sustainability, customer service, and addressing organizational behavior to increase program performance in the public and private sectors. She had extensive responsibility for local and statewide operations while consistently increasing program improvements and strategies that enhanced community engagement and program performance.

Her past positions include Missouri State University, Multicultural Programs Executive Director, Drury University Diversity Coordinator, Springfield Chapter NAACP President, Isabel’s House Executive Director, Missouri Department of Social Services Deputy Director, and other private industry and State of California leadership positions. Her most recent position was Director of Prosper Springfield, a Springfield, Missouri community collective impact model, charged with reducing poverty by five percentage points and increasing postsecondary educational attainment to 60 percent, both by 2025. She is also co-owner of Pratt Consultants with a focus on community engagement, business infrastructure development, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and diversity training (including bias-based police training).



Francine has been recognized at the local and state level for her commitment to helping others. The Springfield Business Journal named her one of the twelve People You Need to Know in 2019. In 2020, Francine received the Springfield Chamber of Commerce ATHENA Award for her excellence and commitment to helping other women in their professional journey.

In addition to her work with MOCAN, Francine serves on the Board of Directors for Leadership Springfield, as well as the Parkview High School Leadership Academy Advisory Council and the Missouri State University Bears LEAD Advisory Council.

Her greatest passion is to share opportunities for career and college pathways with youth and adults who do not know all that Missouri has to offer anyone who calls Missouri home. Her favorite saying is: If you always do what you have always done then you will always get what you already have so do something different!

Keri Gilbert, Senior Associate Director

Keri Gilbert, Senior Associate Director of MOCAN since 2020, started her career in financial aid at the University of Missouri-Columbia and rapidly discovered her passion for helping students. This passion and dedication quickly propelled her to a Senior Assistant Director over student services. During her time at Mizzou, she focused on removing barriers for underserved and underrepresented students, taking special care to highlight programs and resources for former foster and homeless students. She has a deep love for advocacy and has visited with legislators in Jefferson City and Washington, D.C. to fight for program funding and initiatives to simplify the financial aid process.

Keri's passion and dedication to students and their success is infectious, and she has been recognized at both the state and regional level for her work. She has received numerous awards for her committee efforts, and is a recipient of both the MASFAP Bob Berger Newcomer Award and MASFAA Outstanding New Professional Award. Keri is also one of only 65 individuals from across the nation to have earned all seventeen NASFAA credentials, and has been certified as an NCAN Access Advisor.

In addition to her work with MOCAN, Keri serves on the Executive Board of the Midwest Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators as well as the City of Columbia New Century Fund, Inc. Board.

Keri received her Master of Public Affairs degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Karla Briggs, Senior Administrative Assistant

Karla Briggs, MOCAN Senior Administrative Assistant since 2020, started her career in higher education in 1999 with the Missouri Department of Higher Education. During her time there, Karla co-administered the federally funded Default Prevention Program for 18 Missouri institutions totaling over \$500,000. From MDHE, Karla moved to the institutional side. She has served as both an admissions and financial aid counselor which has led to a robust knowledge of the college-going process from start to finish. She has seen first hand what students are striving for – the chance to improve their lives by obtaining their lifelong dreams through education. Her unique experience has found her in roles at a public 2-year, public 4-year, and private 4-year college – all in Missouri. Karla has also served as an adjunct faculty member teaching career exploration, money management, and study skills.

Karla received her Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Central Missouri State University.

A list of staff and their bios can be found at mocollegeaccess.org/our-staff/.



Board of Directors

The leaders chosen for the Missouri College Access Network reflect years of experience in the most respected facets of education and career in Missouri. The experience culminated in our Board of Directors provides the forward-thinking vision required to offer a vast array of opportunities and guidance — benefiting them individually and the state as a whole.

Chair

Jim Matchefts, General Counsel, Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority

Secretary

Melissa Findley, Executive Director, Missouri Scholarship & Loan Foundation

Treasurer

Brian Fogle, President and CEO, Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Members

Lisa MacDougall, Principal, BDT & Company

Zora Mulligan, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development

Dr. Shari Sevier, Director of Advocacy, Missouri School Counselor Association

Dr. Beth Tankersley-Bankhead, President and CEO, KC Scholars

Dixie Williams, Director of Admissions, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Laura Winter, Project Director, St. Louis Graduates

A list of all board members, and their bios, can be found at mocollegeaccess.org/board/.

Contact

The Missouri College Access Network can be contacted via phone at 573-554-6535 or e-mail at info@mocollegeaccess.org.



The mission of the Missouri College
Access Network (MOCAN) is to
increase career and college
awareness, preparation, access, and
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