

Plough Foundation Awards \$1.7M to Talent Dividend

By Aisling Maki

The Plough Foundation has awarded a \$1.7 million grant to the Memphis Talent Dividend College Attainment Initiative, whose purpose is to build a stronger city by increasing the number of college graduates in the Memphis metropolitan area by 1 percent over the next five years.

Organizers say a 1 percent increase in college attainment, which would generate about 8,000 additional college graduates, would yield a \$1 billion increase in personal income, giving the community a significant economic boost.

Memphis Mayor A C Wharton Jr. joined representatives from Leadership Memphis, the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library system and The Plough Foundation Thursday, March 29, to announce the grant.

The \$1.7 million award will fund the creation, staffing and operations of a college resource center called Graduate Memphis, which will be dedicated to post-secondary education attainment among adults.

The program will be funded over a three-year period, with the center housed at the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library and expected to open in July. It will offer information through a website, interactive kiosk and individual counseling, both in person and through a toll-free hotline.

“Without guidance counselors, information on scholarships, assistance with forms and deadlines, this population – seemingly the low-hanging fruit for raising the attainment rate – is not likely to return and finish college,” said Memphis Talent Dividend director Fred Turverey.

Leadership Academy president and CEO [David Williams](#) called the project “a huge win for Memphis.”

“There are only three other similar centers in the U.S.,” Williams said. “It’s the result of leaders working together to shape a vision and being determined to see it come to reality. Leadership Memphis is honored to have convened the Memphis Talent Dividend supporters who have cooperated to bring a vision to life. ... What was just a dream will now be a dream come true, thanks to the Plough Foundation.”

The Memphis area is home to an estimated 200,000 adults ages 25 and older who have started a college education but never completed their degrees.

The Memphis Talent Dividend College Attainment Initiative, led by Leadership Memphis, consists of more than 100 individuals, companies, church groups, institutions of higher learning



Memphis Mayor A C Wharton Jr. joined in last week’s announcement that The Plough Foundation has awarded a \$1.7 million grant to the Memphis Talent Dividend.

(Photo Courtesy of Leadership Memphis)

and neighborhood associations working to increase the number of college graduates.

The concept sprang from a comprehensive 2008 study by Chicago-based nonprofit CEOs for Cities, which looked at three areas of great importance to cities: talent, poverty and the environment.

The research, prepared by [Carol Coletta](#) of CEOs for Cities and economist Joe Cortright, showed how the Talent Dividend could have a major positive impact on cities.