



A CONTINENT OF CHANGE

How can a foundation develop leadership capacity within a single nation, let alone across an entire continent? The Mastercard Foundation has taken on this critical challenge across Africa.

With the largest population of 16–24 year-olds on the planet, Africa expects to grow and prosper from the “talent dividend” of this rising youth population. Yet to make their dreams come true for their communities and nations, young Africans need increased access to formal education to more fully develop their individual skills and abilities. To date, the opportunity for young Africans to pursue secondary education has been constrained by limited availability, inadequate resources, and insufficient preparedness; the same is even more true at the tertiary level, where leadership is often molded.

Scholars Program

The Mastercard Foundation, an independent foundation established in 2006 as the result of an initial public offering of its corporate namesake, has chosen to focus its resources on the immense opportunity across Africa. In 2012, the Foundation launched the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, initially billed as a \$500 million initiative to develop 15,000 young African leaders through a global network of educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. With an additional \$300+ million in resources dedicated in 2016, the reach target has now doubled to ready 35,000 young African leaders of change. A further expansion of the Program at the tertiary level is planned over the next three years.

Working with its partner organizations, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program provides access to secondary education and higher education for young Africans who have demonstrated leadership potential and a commitment to serving their communities of origin, but whose talent exceeds their means. The program provides the Scholars with holistic support, including financial aid to cover educational costs; wrap around services, including counseling, mentoring and leadership development opportunities; skills training to prepare for employment; transition resources as Scholars ready themselves for the workforce; and a network of alumni.

According to Mastercard Foundation president and CEO Reeta Roy, “We ask our Scholars to think about how they will give back to society—much more deeply than working on a project, but how they will give back over a lifetime.”

Patricie Uwase, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at University of California Berkeley, speaks to fellow Engineering graduates about the power of a dream.





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– REETA ROY

The First Five Years

How did the Mastercard Foundation develop its own infrastructure to identify, recruit, and support dedicated and exceptional young leaders? Reflecting on the first five years with its first learning partner Mathematica Policy Research, the Foundation described and refined its theory of change, logic model, learning framework, and named four key program elements:

- High-quality secondary or university education partners that are selected on the basis of alignment of values and mission, as well as a track-record of delivering high-quality education and wrap-around support to young people, particularly disadvantaged youth;
- Holistic financial, social and academic supports, such as mentoring and tutoring;
- Training and mentorship to reinforce the core values of transformative leadership, and delivered through such activities as an annual convening, working groups, and real-time individual feedback; and
- A network of like-minded young African leaders committed to service.

During the first three years (2012-2015) of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, the team did targeted outreach, including visits, to established education institutions both in Africa and abroad. Then in 2015, they selected an additional set of partners through a request for proposal (RFP) process that enabled them to leverage existing relationships and clarify expectations. A robust management information system was also installed to monitor individual and institutional activity. During the early days, Associate Director of the Scholars Program Shona Bezanson reports that the team was focused on just “making the program work.” As the program progressed, a strong partner network and Scholars community developed, and these partners and Scholars have since become the Program’s primary ambassadors and communicators.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program now has a network of 27 global education partners, including secondary and tertiary education partners in Africa, North America, the Middle East, and Europe. These partners include leading African institutions, such as the African Leadership Academy and Ashesi University College, and global higher education institutions, such as Arizona State University and McGill University. Beyond committing to Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program goals, these institutions have demonstrated the ability to address the individual needs of Scholars, who generally require highly-personalized support to ensure their degree completion. And, in some cases, they replicate and scale

YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS OF CHANGE

One Mastercard Foundation Scholar is Patricie Uwase, who was appointed the Permanent Secretary in Rwanda's Ministry of Infrastructure in 2018. With support from the Davis Foundation's Projects for Peace Award Program, she has also launched an annual camp to mentor young women in life skills and introduce them to STEM careers. As a Mastercard Scholar, Uwase pursued her Master's in Civil Engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, where she focused on transportation engineering and planning. She had previously earned her bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Rwanda. Now the 28-year-old Uwase is helping to build Rwanda's sustainable roads and bridges toward the future as well as fostering the next generation of African women in STEM.

Joseph Munyambanza is another scholar who exemplifies the ideals of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program and the multiplier effect of such scholarships. A Mastercard Foundation Scholar at Westminster College in Missouri, he is a graduate of the [African Leadership Academy](#) and the co-founder of [COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa \(CIYOTA\)](#), a youth-led, volunteer educational and training organization that works across several African countries. Munyambanza founded the organization while living in the Kyangwali refugee settlement in western Uganda. "In our view, finding a seat in school is only the first step; we want to inspire children to become leaders and entrepreneurs, and to apply skills learned in school to improving their communities and countries. As refugees, our goal has always been empowerment through self-sufficiency." Hundreds of students now attend CIYOTA primary and secondary schools. CIYOTA graduates are also pursuing tertiary education, and some have even been selected to be Mastercard Foundation Scholars.

components of the Scholars Program in service of other students within the wider campus community.

In the early years of the Program, the majority of Scholars were pursuing secondary education, and most were from Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, or Rwanda. Over time, the Program has gained a greater proportion of tertiary-level Scholars, with a focus on facilitating undergraduate studies in Africa, and graduate studies abroad.

Program Framework

After five years of implementation, the Mastercard Foundation articulated four distinct yet interlinked stages of Program progression: Recruit, Educate, Prepare, and Transition:

- During the **Recruit** phase, program partners are responsible for the selection of Scholars who meet the Foundation's core criteria of academic talent, economic disadvantage, and leadership potential.
- In the **Educate** phase, Scholars prepare themselves through academic coursework and leadership training.
- During the **Prepare** stage, which overlaps with the Educate stage, program partners offer mentoring, career counseling, internships, service projects, and other network-building opportunities to the Scholars.
- Finally, during the **Transition** phase, academic and nonprofit program partners help the Scholars pursue further education, entrepreneurship, or employment so they can evolve into ethical leaders.

While the Mastercard Foundation has codified this overall framework for its program, Bezanson emphasized the complexity of ensuring high-quality program implementation for individual Scholars, now numbering thousands. She urges others to not "underestimate the level of complexity. We're dealing with young people at a particular moment in their lives." For example, students may experience mental health issues; the Scholars need to feel fully supported by the program especially during their most difficult times, and not just when they are recognized for a special achievement.

The most critical factor-to-success for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has been selecting the right institutional partners, both in Africa and abroad; finding partners that can sustain an alignment of program principles, purpose, and vision is essential. Such scholarship programs have also found learning by doing is often the best route to success. Bezanson encouraged other scholarship supporters to be nimble and flexible, create space for Program adjustment, and really listen to and amplify the voices of both the Scholars and institutional partners.

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The program is designed to inspire and influence change at many levels.”

– SHONA BEZANSON

Joseph Munyambanza, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar and African Leadership Academy (ALA) alumnus shares his story about his work in Kyangwali.



Creating Change Across a Continent

How does the Mastercard Foundation support change within African nations and across the continent through the Scholars Program? According to Bezanson, “the program is designed to inspire and influence change at many levels.” At the individual level, leadership development is crucial; education and training of such leaders is perhaps “obvious, but not easy to do.” Each student has individual needs, so a highly-personalized approach to success is essential.

At the institutional level, the Foundation has encouraged higher education institutions inside and outside of Africa to pilot new approaches that provide greater access to qualifying candidates; both institutional practices and policies have been reformed and revised, such as those pertaining to the recruitment, selection, and admission of candidates. A major change in program delivery has also been embraced by the Mastercard Foundation program: online learning options now offer high-quality academic instruction at low cost for many Scholars.

To achieve even greater change at the systems level, the Mastercard Foundation is not only developing a critical mass of Scholars who can lead and scale national change, but they are also establishing an evidence base and engaging their Scholars in various public efforts to “shift perceptions,” including its [Envision A World Open Gallery](#).

In early 2018, the Mastercard Foundation announced its [Young Africa Works](#) strategy. This audacious initiative has the goal of enabling 30 million young Africans, especially women, “to secure dignified and meaningful work” by 2030. The launch of this new employment-focused initiative has many implications for the Scholars Program; the Mastercard Foundation team is now exploring how to create more intentional linkages between its education and employment support. An alumni network of Mastercard Foundation Scholars is also being formed. These complementary initiatives, along with other Mastercard Foundation efforts addressing financial inclusion, will undoubtedly prepare and propel young African leaders who can promote more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable nations across the continent.

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For more on the Mastercard
Foundation Scholars Program visit
mastercardfdn.org/all/scholars.

This case study is one of 12 in a suite of case studies focused on how donors are supporting scholarships to create change. These case studies showcase the rich and varied narratives of giving in the scholarships space, giving insight to the philanthropy landscape and approach for foundations, academics, and practitioners.

The case studies have been developed in companionship with Candid's project [Scholarships for Change](#), a dynamic hub that pulls together data and knowledge to tell the story of how philanthropic dollars are supporting transformative scholarships. It includes a mapping tool and a repository of reports and case studies to learn from peers. The site was made possible through the generous support of The Ford Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Please visit scholarshipsforchange.org to explore further.