



**ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND**

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Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

2016  
ANNUAL  
REVIEW



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear AEF Friends & Supporters,

Reflecting on our last year, I want to take this opportunity to share some highlights from our 2016 scholarship season and to thank you for your continued support.

AEF was founded with a straightforward mission, to enable and encourage higher education and professional achievement for the immigrant community. Immigrants across the nation face new challenges post the November election, but all of us at AEF remain committed to our scholars and future generations of immigrant students. Regardless of ethnicity, national origin or immigration status, we envision every exceptional student in New York City as having the same educational and professional opportunities.

Thanks to your support, we continued to execute on our mission in 2016, building on the momentum from our three previous years. In 2016, we received the prestigious “Invest in the Dream” grant from the Educators for Fair Consideration. We are starting the year with over \$40,000 in scholarship funds!

Our Third Annual Gala in 2016 was a true success with 100 people in attendance and \$6,000 raised from the silent auction alone. Our Fourth Annual Gala in 2017 featured a menu from Food Network’s Chef Ronaldo, and a comedy set from Cristela Alonzo. The gala resulted in our biggest impact yet, and we can’t wait to share more details later this year.

In 2016, we received 350 applications and awarded \$63,000 (97% of funds raised<sup>a</sup>), in college scholarships to eight deserving students, in line with scholarship funds raised in 2015.

Our proudest achievement continues to be our Scholars, who embody the diversity and perseverance of our immigrant community. Our eight AEF Scholars achieved an average GPA of 3.3 and were awarded a total of \$63,000, with an average award of \$7,875. They are citizens and non-citizens, some attending Ivy League colleges, others starting at community colleges, and representing countries such as Germany, Nigeria, and China.

As I reflect on our incredible fourth year, it is not possible to imagine we would have come this far without your help. In particular, I want to recognize a few individuals who dedicated countless hours and resources to making 2016 a success- Adrienne Serrato, Snehal Amin, Arthur Li, and our entire Gala Committee.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank you for your support in helping us to “Elevate our Community through Higher Education.”

Warmest Regards,

Julissa Arce  
AEF Chairman of the Board

a. Funds raised includes net profits from the third annual gala, and all other funds raised throughout the year.



# AEF BY THE NUMBERS

**33** AEF  
Scholars

**OVER**  
**\$200,000**

in scholarship awards

**63** COUNTRIES  
&  
**25** UNIVERSITIES

All  
Boroughs **5** of  
NYC

**3.3** average GPA

## INTERNSHIPS COMPLETED:

General Electric, Goldman Sachs, Mayor's Office of New York City, New York State Department of Health, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, New York City Council, Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, One Heartland, NICE Systems



## ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

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Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

# IN OUR FOURTH YEAR

We selected eight scholars, who embody the diverse immigrant community in New York City and represent China, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Germany, Belize, Ghana, Suriname, and Nigeria.

We awarded a total of \$63,000 (including \$21,190 from our “generosity by Indiegogo campaign”) - in line with our prior year.

We hosted our third annual gala, with nearly 100 people in attendance and over \$6,000 raised in our silent auction alone.

## OUR MISSION

TO ENABLE AND ENCOURAGE HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY.

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## WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

1. **We make a time and capital intensive commitment to our scholars.** Our awards are between \$2,500 and \$20,000, and we enroll all Ascend Educational Fund Scholars in an intensive academic and professional Mentorship Program.
2. **We serve all immigrant students regardless of national origin, ethnicity and immigration status.** Most college scholarships limit their awards on the basis of ethnicity and immigration status. We target and serve all immigrants, from Bolivian to Japanese, from citizen to non-citizen.

# AEF SCHOLAR SELECTION PROCESS



AEF scholars were selected based on qualities traditionally valued and demonstrated by the immigrant community: hard work, resourcefulness, perseverance in the face of adversity, academic achievement, leadership, and commitment to one's community. All candidates submitted an application including two required essays: (1) Tell us how you plan to contribute to your community through your academic and career goals. If you feel that you have already contributed to your community, tell us how; and (2) Describe how your experience as an immigrant or a child of immigrants has affected your life and how it will contribute to your future success.

Over 1,500 applications were opened online, and 350 completed applications were submitted. Of the completed applications submitted, 69% were by females and 31% were by males. Our Selection Committee, comprised of 36 volunteers, selected the top 17 candidates to interview in person (5% of applicants). Interviews were conducted in early June, and all finalists completed two interviews. While all were deserving of an AEF Scholarship, we selected eight scholars representing China, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Germany, Belize, Ghana, Suriname, and Nigeria.

Our applicants represented all five boroughs of Manhattan: 20% Bronx, 9% Manhattan, 37% Brooklyn, 28% Queens, and 6% Staten Island.



# AEF SCHOLAR SELECTION DATA

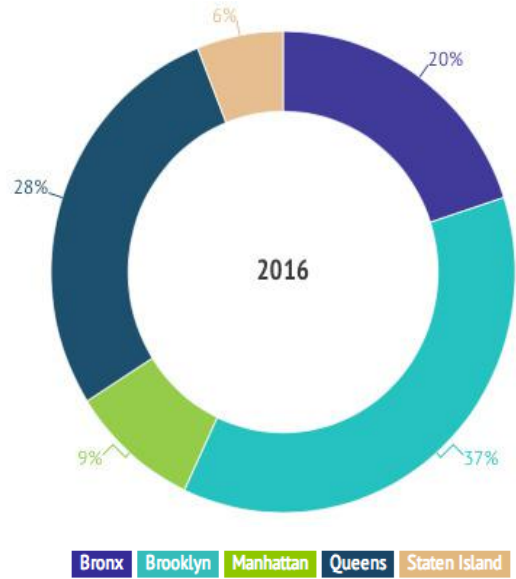
Regardless of ethnicity, national origin, or immigration status, we envision every exceptional student having the same educational and professional opportunities.

## APPLICATIONS BY NATION OF ORIGIN

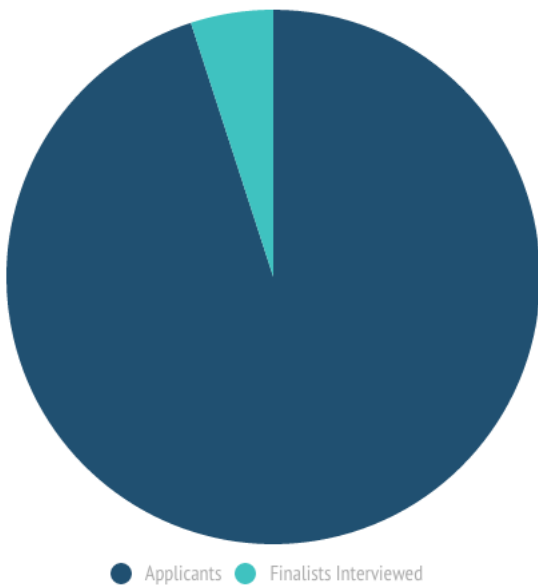


In 2016, we received over 350 applications from 78 New York City High Schools. Our applicants represented 63 countries.

## APPLICATIONS BY BOROUGH



## FINALIST INTERVIEWS



## M/F FINALIST RATIO



## AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

**\$37,200**  
Average household income for applicants



# MEET OUR 2016 AEF SCHOLARS



A young woman from **Belize**, this scholar immigrated to the US when she was 12 years old. Despite being undocumented and thinking she would not be able to attend college, in her own words, she is not letting her circumstances define her. She has kept working and pushing to create a path to higher education. She scored a four or above on three AP exams and has worked with the Coro New York Mayor's Youth Leadership Council to design change projects to improve life in New York City. With her school's Students for Social Responsibility Club, she raised funds for MetroCards that were awarded to refugees in the Bronx. She was later invited to speak at the United Nations' International Day of Peace to highlight the results of their campaign. This **Everett Castaneda Scholar** plans to pursue a degree in criminal justice or the sciences and will attend Dartmouth College this fall.

A young woman of **Turkish and Persian** background, this scholar emigrated from Germany at the age of 11. She, along with her family, has struggled through severe hardship and has had to navigate life in three different shelters throughout her time in high school. She has made school her own sanctuary. She has explored journalism, media and writing at Princeton University's Summer Journalism Program. Despite being undocumented, she believes her circumstances have pushed her to search for a better life and carve out her own path. This **Amin Educational Scholar** plans to pursue a career as a behavioral analyst with the FBI and will attend CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice this fall.

A young man from **Ghana**, this scholar immigrated to the US in 2014 at the age of 17 to reunite with his mother, who came to America when he was only a child. Although he has only been in the US for 2 years he has excelled in the classroom and beyond. He was part of the National Honor's Society, president of the Red Cross Club, founder of the Renewable Energy Club and named student of the month in October 2015 for his positive impact helping other students. He ranked in the top 2% of his graduating class of 790 students. This scholar plans to pursue a career as a pediatrician and will attend **Middlebury College** this fall.

A young woman of **Curacaoan-Dominican** origin, this scholar emigrated from the **Netherlands Antilles** at the age of 4. Being undocumented has taught her how to navigate obstacles in life while remaining persistent and determined in her pursuit of success. Her determination and hard work earned her multiple awards during her high school career. She was awarded the Quest Bridge Award recognizing top low-income students in the nation. She graduated high school with an almost perfect GPA. Since 2015, she has interned with Harlem Biospace as a research entrepreneur engineer. In addition, she won a Newsies Award which resulted in her article "My History Matters Too" being published in the New York Daily News. This scholar plans to pursue a career as a bioengineer and will enroll at the **University of Pennsylvania** this fall.

After only 6 years in the US, a **Chinese** immigrant who spent every day in the library reading books and listening to CD's to learn the language and graduate in the top of her class. She lent her hard-earned English skills to the next generation by volunteering at a local organization and tutoring other Chinese children free of charge. One of her life goals is to establish tuition free vocational schools for immigrants: allowing them the ability to earn a stable income, have a secure work environment, and contribute to American society. This **Alwyn Andrew-Mziray Scholar** will attend **Northeastern University** in the fall and plans to pursue a degree in Finance.

A **Chinese American** student who found her passion in art and used murals as mediums for promoting social change. She experienced poverty first hand, and sought to find a way to brighten her neighborhood and encourage conversation. The murals she helped bring to life highlighted the rare peaks of nature in the concrete jungles of New York City and the diversity of cultures and beliefs in her community. In her school's volleyball team, she was transformed and focused on moving forward and having the capacity to change the game. She will attend the **University of Southern California** in the fall where she will pursue her interest in Computer Science.

A young woman of **Nigerian** origin, who was born in **Italy** and experienced racism as a person of color and immigrated to the U.S. 7 years ago. She has taken numerous AP classes and earned the Principal's Honor Roll. She is part of the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault where she teaches Black, Hispanic, and South Asian youth about sexual assault. One of her teachers said the following, "She draws lessons from her own personal struggles as an immigrant, first-generation, low-income young black woman in order to demonstrate greater empathy for her peers. She has been able to turn her struggles into strengths through painstaking effort, which illustrates her resilience and tenacity." Her career goal is to become an educator so she can increase tolerance, social justice and educational equity. She will attend **Brown University** in the fall.

A young woman from **Suriname**, this scholar immigrated to the US when she was 4 years old. Her dedication to her community through the MinKwon Center for Community Action, as well as her efforts at a local food bank is sparked by her relentless desire to better the society around her. A stellar student, this scholar strives to improve access to English as a Second Language classes and awareness of other public benefits so that fellow immigrants can continue to improve their lives and give back to the NYC community. This **Chris Cornett Scholar** plans to pursue a degree in social work and will attend **Hunter College** this fall.



# AEF SCHOLAR EVENTS



## FOURTH ANNUAL PICNIC

We hosted our fourth annual Mentorship Picnic on Saturday, July 9 at WeWork Chelsea. 2016 Scholars were able to meet their mentors for the first time, and network with both the scholars and mentors from our prior three years, in addition to select AEF volunteers. Approximately 30 people were in attendance.

The highlight of the afternoon was a panel discussion with the 2013, 2014, and 2015 Scholars on best advice, lessons learned, resources available, and other personal insights on the transition to college. The 2016 Scholars were encouraged to engage with their mentors, particularly during the first semester at school.

## SECOND CAREER READINESS WORKSHOP

AEF hosted its second annual Career Readiness Workshop in partnership with the Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks program on July 19. The event gave 13 of our AEF Scholars an opportunity to learn about resume writing, communication and networking skills, interview preparation, and they even had an opportunity to participate in three rounds of mock interviews with eight Goldman Sachs professionals. This year, AEF scholars crafted elevator pitches and brought copies of their resumes to engage with the volunteers in order to make specific and actionable updates.

The scholars' favorite part of the day was delivering an impromptu speech on various topics and engaging with additional Goldman Sachs professionals on a panel discussing career readiness, mentorship, and community involvement.



# AEF FUNDRAISERS

## THIRD ANNUAL GALA

We hosted our Third Annual Gala, “Elevating the Next Generation of America’s Leaders” on Saturday, Feb 27 at the WeWork Bryant Park Ballroom. We had nearly 100 supporters in attendance, making it one of our most memorable galas! We raised over \$6,000 from our silent auction alone for scholarship awards.

Two of our 2015 AEF Scholars, Johileny (New York University) and Vidur (Princeton University), provided candid remarks about their paths to success and stories of perseverance.

We would like to thank the Chinese Center on Long Island, Srinidhi Raghavan and Sahasra Sambamoorthi, and DJ JFuse for the uplifting cultural dance and musical performances. We also send a special thank you to our gala sponsors, Marchburn and Tito’s Handmade Vodka.

## SPRING CAMPAIGN WITH GENEROSITY BY INDIEGOGO

We launched AEF’s Third Annual Spring Campaign on April 19, 2016 with “generosity by Indiegogo” and hosted a Spring Bash event at The Ainsworth Park in Gramercy.

Over 40 supporters joined us for an evening of networking and to spread the word of the generosity campaign in our final push for funds for our 2016 scholars. Through the generosity by Indiegogo campaign, we beat our \$20,000 goal and successfully raised \$21,190 in one month.



## AEF ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Council for AEF consists of thoughtful leaders who are instrumental in ensuring the longevity of our organization by providing advice and guidance to the Board of Directors.

ARTHUR LI  
ADRIENNE & SNEHAL AMIN

## FRIENDS OF AEF



Friends of AEF are recognized as supporters who contribute at least \$1,000 to our scholarship funds.

JAMES HERNANDEZ



Learn more about how you  
can support AEF at  
[www.ascendfundny.org](http://www.ascendfundny.org)

