



**ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND**

---

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

# 2015 ANNUAL REVIEW



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear AEF Friends & Supporters,

On behalf of everyone at the Ascend Educational Fund, we wish you a happy and safe 2016. As we enter our fourth scholarship year, I want to take this opportunity to share some highlights from our 2015 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. 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 2015, building on the momentum from our two previous years. In 2015, we launched additional programming to aid our scholars in pursuing their professional goals. We hosted our first annual Career Readiness Workshop, Clothing Drive and Dress for Success workshop.

Our Second Annual Gala garnered media coverage from Univision and Al Jazeera America, allowing us to raise additional award funds, and to increase the number of applications we received by more than 40%. AEF has received national media attention from NBC Latino to Bloomberg and others, elevating the important work we do.

In our third year, we received 491 applications and awarded \$63,000 (95% of funds raised<sup>a</sup>) in college scholarships to ten deserving students, in line with scholarship funds raised in 2014.

Our proudest achievement, however, continues to be our Scholars, who embody the diversity and perseverance of our immigrant community. Our ten AEF Scholars achieved an average GPA of 3.3 and were awarded a total of \$63,000, with an average award of \$6,300. They are citizens and non-citizens, some attending Ivy League colleges, others starting at community colleges, and representing countries such as Peru, Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines.

As I reflect on our incredible third 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 2015 a success: Adrienne Serrato, Snehal Amin, Antonia Bernal, 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 second annual gala, and all other funds raised throughout the year.



## ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND

Elevating Our Community Through Higher Education

# IN OUR THIRD YEAR

We selected ten scholars who embody the diverse immigrant community in New York City and represent Ecuador, Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, Guyana, Nigeria, Dominican Republic, and Peru.

We awarded a total of \$63,000 (including \$16,356 from our Indiegogo campaign), which is in line with our prior year.

We hosted our second annual gala, with over 140 people in attendance and over \$10,000 raised in our silent auction alone.

## OUR MISSION

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

## WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

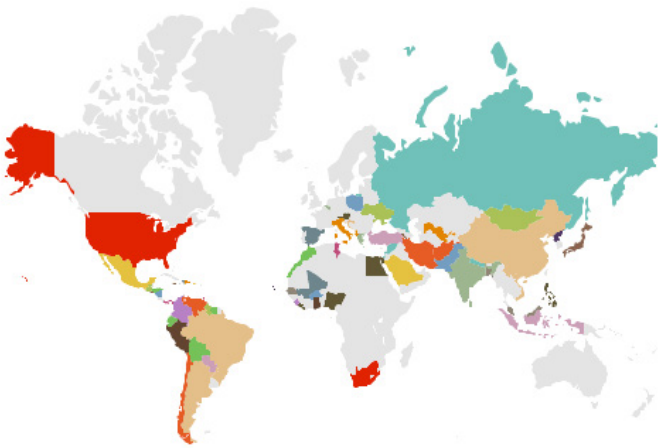
- 1. We make a time and capital intensive commitment to our scholars:** Our awards are between \$2,500 and \$20,000, and we enroll all Ascend Educational Fund Scholars in an intensive academic and professional Mentorship Program.
- 2. We serve all immigrant students regardless of national origin, ethnicity 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

## CANDIDATE DATA

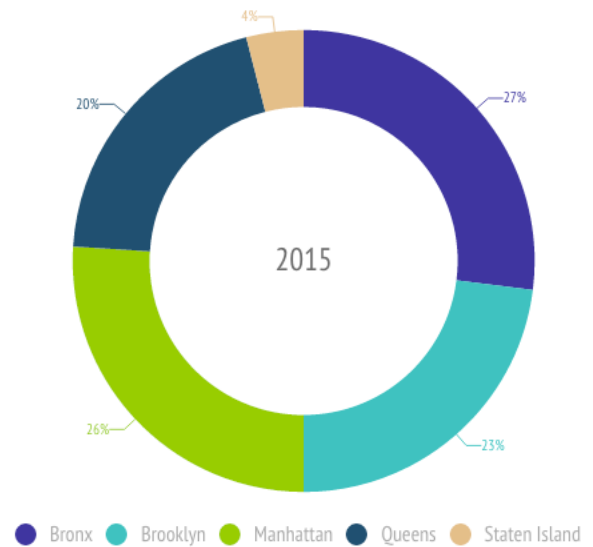
Regardless of ethnicity, national origin, or immigration status, we envision every exceptional student having the same educational and professional opportunities.

## APPLICATIONS BY NATION OF ORIGIN

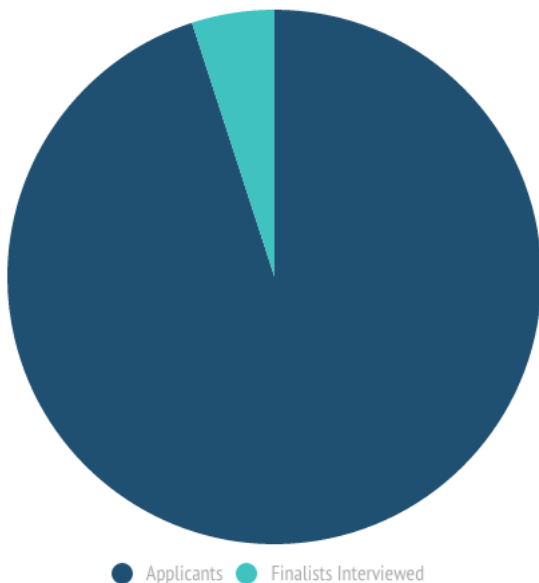


In 2015, we received nearly 500 applications from 208 New York City High Schools. Our applicants represented 82 countries.

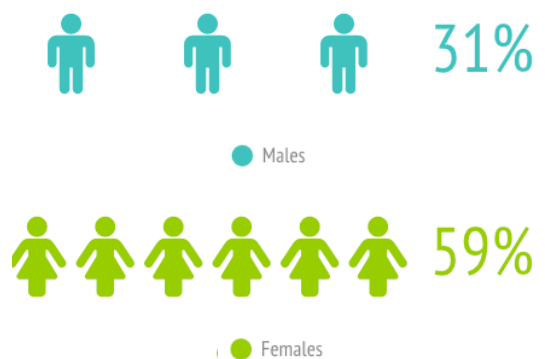
## APPLICATIONS BY BOROUGH



## FINALIST INTERVIEWS



## M/F FINALIST RATIO

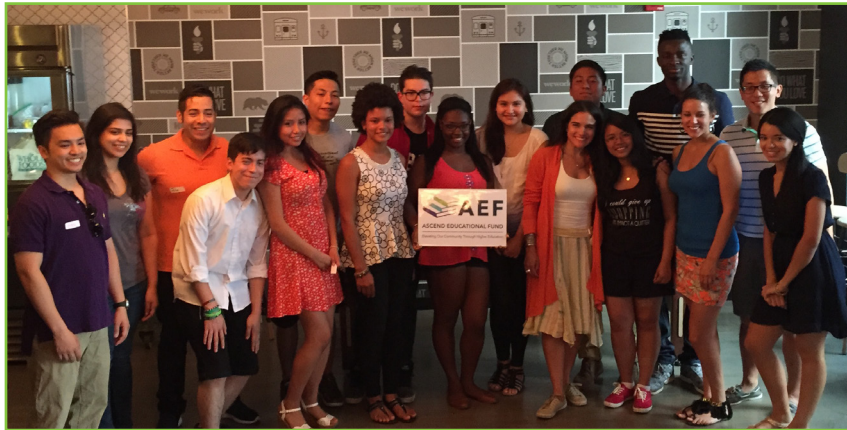


## AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

**\$37,400**

Average household income for applicants

# MEET OUR 2015 AEF SCHOLARS



A **Guyanese** American student who has made community service a vital part of his life. With Project Happy, he volunteers on Saturdays to assist and mentor children and young adults with disabilities, primarily autism or mobility impairments. He is also a tutor to his peers through the Arista National Honors Society. His family has survived extreme hardship, including domestic violence, poverty, and his mother's uterine cancer. He will graduate with an Advanced Regents Diploma and expects to attend Princeton in the fall.

.....

A student who immigrated from **Mexico** and loves mathematics and working with numbers as "the language of pure logic." Despite facing a number of personal trials, including his stepfather's recent death and becoming ill during his senior year, he will graduate as Valedictorian of his class. He is a leader of Respect for All, a program that facilitates social injustice discussions with students in the more junior classes of his Bronx community, and he has participated in the Bloomberg Arts Internship and New York University College Access Leadership

Institute programs. He plans to attend Skidmore College and major in Mathematics.

.....

A young woman from **Peru** who immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 4. She plans on becoming a doctor, first attending The City College of New York to earn her degree in Biology. She is an exceptionally resilient young woman who has endured great hardship. Her counselor describes her as someone who has navigated difficult home situations and grown from setbacks that would have discouraged other students. She spent many weekdays in high school tutoring 8th grade students in math and science.

.....

A young man of **Ecuadorian** descent who found his way to the US after moving to Spain at age 2. He has been in the US for the past three years and now lives in the Bronx. Despite his recent move and a new language, this recipient maintained a 4.0 GPA in high school. Realizing that the current educational system can be tough on

immigrants, this scholar strives for excellence and hopes to reshape the opportunities available to other immigrant scholars. He is active in the community through organizations like New York Cares and Changing the Odds. This **Puentes Barrera Distinguished Scholar** recipient will attend Hunter College this fall and wishes to have a career at the United Nations.

.....

A young man who immigrated from **Jamaica** and is pursuing his life long dream of becoming a pilot. This **Serrato-Amin Scholarship** recipient will attend SUNY Farmingdale to study aviation and enroll in flight classes. Bouncing around the foster care system, this student eventually reunited with a family member in the New York City area but ultimately faced homelessness. Despite a tumultuous living situation and a four hour commute to his high school, this scholar had 100% attendance and maintained a 92 grade average. Overcoming all obstacles thrown in his way, this scholar remains optimistic and steady in his pursuit of his aviation dreams.

.....

A young woman who immigrated from the **Philippines** four years ago and is graduating as Valedictorian of her high school. She received a score of 3 and above on four AP exams. As a student she organized workshops called "myth busters" to inform and teach her classmates accurate information about college, in addition to assisting over 600 students submit their college applications. She will be attending the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education at The City College of New York where she will obtain a BS and MD degree in seven years. As a medical doctor she plans to provide quality care at an affordable price, focusing on the immigrant community.

.....

An **Ecuadorian** young woman that was raised in a single family household faced with critical hardships, such as the inability to meet basic needs of food and housing. She has persevered in the face of adversity and excelled academically by maintaining a 3.9 GPA. Early on in high school, she realized many of her classmates lacked mentors and tutoring, and through her involvement in student council she started a Big Brother/Big Sister Initiative for upperclassmen to mentor and tutor 9th and 10th graders. More

than 40 students are currently participating in this initiative, and she hopes to expand the program and involve college student as mentors in the future. This **Shardaben Amin Scholarship** recipient plans to attend Hamilton College this fall.

.....

A young man who moved to New York from a small town in the countryside of **Mexico City** surrounded by poverty. The town lacked resources and a common reason for an incomplete assignment was due to inconsistent electricity. It is in these poor conditions that he found his passion for engineering, with his dream of providing modern infrastructure to his former community. When not participating in soccer for the Downtown United Soccer Club and focusing on his studies, he works as a cashier/stock boy. He will attend the City College of New York where he will major in Computer Engineering.

.....

A young man who immigrated from **Nigeria** two years ago, to escape war and poverty, with the promise of playing basketball at a high school in North Carolina. After denying him admittance as an international student, he was used only to play basketball. He was then recruited to Georgia, but was falsely enrolled for his junior year (instead of his senior year). While in Georgia, his friend told him about the Covenant House New York, a non-profit that serves as a homeless shelter for young adults, where he currently resides. He will attend Ithaca College and pursue a career in physical therapy.

.....

A young woman from the **Dominican Republic** who has been homeless twice, aided her mother through her terminal fight with cancer, and will graduate valedictorian of her senior class. She is also editor of the school newspaper and a college ambassador to her peers. Her own battle with cerebral palsy, which left her paralyzed at the age of eight, has inspired her to become a pediatric oncologist. She has never let her physical disabilities stop her, and she wishes more people knew that physical disabilities do not impair mental capacity. This **M.P. Amin Educational Scholarship** recipient expects to attend New York University.



# 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) Describe your academic and career goals and the initiative you have taken to fulfill those goals. In achieving those goals, have you acted as an exemplary role model in your community, if so, please describe? 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 2,000 applications were opened online, and 491 completed applications were submitted, up 43% from the prior year. Of the completed applications submitted, 69% were by females and 31% were by males. Our Selection Committee, comprised of 59 volunteers, selected the top 23 candidates to interview in person (5% of applicants). Interviews were conducted in mid-May, and all finalists completed two interviews. While all were deserving of an AEF Scholarship, we selected ten scholars representing Ecuador, Philippines, Jamaica, Mexico, Guyana, Nigeria, Dominican Republic, and Peru.

Our applicants represented all five boroughs of New York City: 27% Bronx, 26% Manhattan, 23% Brooklyn, 20% Queens, and 4% Staten Island.



# AEF SCHOLAR EVENTS



## THIRD ANNUAL PICNIC

AEF hosted its third annual Mentorship Picnic on Sunday, July 12 at WeWork in the Financial District. 2015 Scholars were able to meet their mentors for the first time, and network with both the scholars and mentors from our prior two years.

The highlight of the afternoon was a panel discussion with the 2013 and 2014 Scholars on best advice, lessons learned, and other personal insights on the transition to college.

## INAUGURAL CAREER READINESS WORKSHOP

AEF hosted its inaugural Career Readiness Workshop in partnership with the Goldman Sachs Community TeamWorks program on July 14. The full day event gave 14 of our AEF Scholars an opportunity to learn about resume writing, the internship process, interview preparation, and they even had an opportunity to participate in mock interviews with Goldman Sachs professionals.

The Scholars' favorite part of the workshop was a panel hosted by the GS Firmwide Hispanic/Latino Network, in which panelists provided

candid advice on career readiness, mentorship, professional achievement, and community involvement.

## INAUGURAL DRESS FOR SUCCESS CLOTHING DRIVE

On Tuesday, September 29, AEF hosted its inaugural professional clothing drive for supporters to donate gently used professional clothing. Many of our scholars do not have the financial resources to invest in a professional wardrobe that supports their career goals, including clothes to attend academic conferences, career fairs, job interviews, and internships. These donations greatly increase the chances of our Scholars achieving their career and professional goals.

We subsequently hosted a "Dress for Success" event on Saturday, November 28 for our scholars in partnership with QUINN, where the Scholars received the donations from the clothing drive. We discussed the essentials on dressing for interviews and the workplace, and understanding and enhancing their personal brand, including their online presence.

A very special thank you to our mentors who joined!





# AEF FUNDRAISERS

## SECOND ANNUAL GALA

We hosted our Second Annual Gala, "Celebrating America's Immigrant Heritage" on Saturday, March 14 at the Prince George Ballroom in Gramercy. We had nearly 150 supporters in attendance and over 50 silent auction items. From the silent auction alone, we were able to raise over \$10,000 for scholarship awards.

Two of our 2014 AEF Scholars, Israel and Jin, provided candid remarks about their paths to success and stories of perseverance. Our keynote speech by Pulitzer award winning journalist and filmmaker, Jose Antonio Vargas, also inspired attendees to pay it forward and to celebrate America's immigrant heritage.

The Gala received media coverage from Al Jazeera America and Univision.

We would like to thank Kinding Sindaw, BNB Indian Dance NYC, Mariachi Citlalli, and DJ

Chill Withers for the uplifting dance and musical performances. We also send a special thank you to our gala sponsors, CUNY, Marchburn, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Tequila Baron, Ai Fiori and Brooklyn Cupcakes.

## SPRING CAMPAIGN WITH INDIEGOGO

We launched AEF's Second Annual Spring Campaign on April 17, 2015 with Indiegogo and hosted a Cinco de Mayo event at The Chester Midtown in Manhattan.

Over 40 supporters joined us for an evening of margaritas and to spread the word of the Indiegogo campaign in our final push for funds for our 2015 scholars. Through the Indiegogo campaign, we successfully raised \$16,356 in one month.



## AEF SUPPORTER CIRCLE

AEF Supporters must commit to at least \$5,000 toward our scholarship funds.

SNEHAL AMIN

## 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.

RAJ AMIN  
DANAUS CHANG  
ARTHUR LI  
ADRIENNE SERRATO

## FRIENDS OF AEF



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

NIRA DESAI  
CHIRAG AMIN



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

ASCEND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC  
P.O. BOX 538  
NEW YORK, NY 10008

[www.ascendfundny.org](http://www.ascendfundny.org)  
[info@ascendfundny.org](mailto:info@ascendfundny.org)