CASE STUDY

Evaluating the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program

Consulting Team

Elizabeth Grim Consulting

Illuminary Perspectives

Partner

Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina

Focus Areas

College Readiness
Higher Education

The Context

Since 2016, the Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina's Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program has empowered students from historically underrepresented communities with the freedom to dream and the support to make those dreams real. The program is grounded in Reverend Pinckney's legacy and commitment to leadership, service, faith, and education. Through individualized support, financial resources, educational programming, and peer community, the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program helps students overcome systemic barriers and ensure student success leading up to, during, and after college.

What began with just 10 Scholars has grown into a comprehensive, three-part continuum of support: College Readiness, College Success, and the Alumni Collaborative. As of June 2026, the program has served 143 Scholars with a total of $3.2M in scholarship awards.

As a highly engaged, relational, and trusted staff, the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program team knew the individual stories of student success and high level metrics. However, **they needed a systematic way to measure and communicate their overall impact to shape strategy, improve student supports, and inform program expansion.**

Our Approach

Across 2022-2023, Elizabeth Grim Consulting and Illuminary Perspectives partnered with the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program to conduct their first ever evaluation to better understand whether, how, and why the program is successful. **Our approach was deeply collaborative, blending strong evaluation methods, the Program's deep community connections, students' unique expertise, and rooted in our shared commitment to curiosity.** This year-long mixed-methods process was designed to:

- Develop a customized, equity-focused learning and evaluation strategy
- Identify and update key metrics and data collection processes aligned with core program values
- Elevate student voices to understand their unique experiences, perspectives, interests, and needs

Values-Aligned Strategies

Elevated Student Voice

Strengthened Internal Capacity

Our Results

Our approach produced findings that were meaningful and actionable. Using a most significant change process, survey, and focus groups and interviews, we elevated what students gain through the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program, the most effective program components, and future opportunities for program improvement and expansion. We are proud that through our partnership and process, the program:

- **Developed a theory of change** and learning and evaluation strategy that can grow and adapt with the program
- **Aligned staff and student perspectives** on program experience and success
- **Informed program expansion** in a smart and impactful way, based on student feedback and existing research/programs
- **Increased confidence to tell a clear, compelling, and data-informed story** about the Rev. Pinckney Scholars Program
- **Strengthened internal evaluation capacity** to promote replication and sustainability of the learning and evaluation strategy

Lasting Impact

The impacts from our learning and evaluation partnership persist. The Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program team continues to apply and adapt learnings from the evaluation to inform programming and policy. To date the Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program has:

- **Strengthened their internal data collection and reporting infrastructure** by onboarding their first CRM (customer relationship management system)
- **Increased the maximum award** to $15,000 per year to better meet the financial needs students shared during the evaluation
- **Rebranded the work under one umbrella name** of Reverend Pinckney Scholars Program, after the evaluation findings illuminated that students experience the program as one continuum, rather than three distinct programs
- **Continued to explore offering a graduate scholarship** to support students interested in furthering their education

> *"Elizabeth Grim and Laura Richards felt like an extension of our team from the very beginning. Beyond their impressive resumes and experience, we selected them for this evaluation work because of their approach. They displayed a deep understanding and appreciation for the work we are doing and that care was evident throughout the entire process. From speaking with Scholars, surveying peer programs, and reporting out to our Board, they were true partners to us every step of the way. That collaboration strengthened our findings and how we've approached implementation of their recommendations."*
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> *~ Caroline Rakar,*
> *Senior Director of Scholarships & Programs,*
> *Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina*