



December 15, 2021
GFPB Funding Report

In 2017, Go Forward Pine Bluff (GFPB) campaigned for the GFPB sales tax to improve the city and promised to raise an additional 19 million dollars to finance initiatives that are not eligible to be funded with the tax. GFPB has raised just over \$11.7 million in grants, donations, and investments to date.

“Relationships and resources are the common denominators for successful implementation. GFPB has spent the last four years aligning the public-private partnership initiatives with several organizations and investment entities. As a result, we’ve developed a diverse revenue pool consisting of grants, philanthropy, and project investments said GFPB CEO Ryan Watley. The positive difference that citizens say they feel and see correlates to that public and private activity. Over the next year, construction projects will push private dollars beyond the goal promised to the citizens.”

In support of the Delta Celebration Series of Festival and Events, the Advertising and Promotion Commission has provided \$99,000. The festival and events include but are not limited to Forward Fest, UAPB Homecoming, Pop-Up in the Bluff, Mistletoe Magic, and the King Cotton Holiday Basketball Tournament. Sponsorship dollars to date have surpassed \$350,000.00.

The Generator, an innovation hub powered by GFPB, has played a significant role in amassing resources to improve entrepreneurship. The Arkansas Economic Development Commission - Technology Division awarded \$250,000 to facilitate the EAST lab initiative. The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) provided \$75,000 to develop a city-wide broadband plan. The Generator also worked during the height of the pandemic to secure \$130,000 from the LISC Small Business Relief Fund for local small businesses. Simmons First Foundation donated \$500,000 for an educational endowment that will support programs at The Generator. Mary Pringos also created an endowment that now has over \$75,000 for similar programs.

As part of a collaboration with Pine Bluff Economic and Community Development, GFPB obtained \$1,000,000 from The Delta Regional Authority for the streetscape project. Entergy has given \$75,000 for general operations, and State Farm Neighborhood Assist awarded \$30,000 to help renovate the Pine Bluff Community Center (formerly the Merrill Center) kitchen. The grant writer, paid for by the sales tax, has captured more than \$1.4 million in grants.

GFPB has received more than \$4.8 million since its inception to operate the non-profit and support education initiatives. \$700,000 of the education line item was allocated in 2018 to support the Teach Pine Bluff initiative. The State Department of Education has also contributed \$500,000 through the Educational Alliance to the Arkansas River Services Cooperative to hire a teacher excellence coordinator. As part of a partnership with the UAPB School of Education to improve teacher quality, the Wingate Foundation awarded \$469,419.00

The First Responder recruitment and retention program has fostered over \$650,000 in mortgages. First responders receive a maximum of \$10,000 that can be applied to renovate their home or purchase a home. In exchange, first responders must remain in service for a minimum of five years. To date, eleven officers have taken advantage of the incentive.

“We operate a budget of just over \$1 million annually to handle internal human resources, contract workers, and initiatives. Those initiatives, particularly in education, cannot be paid for with public dollars, said Watley. “The dollars and their use illustrate the value in having a private partner in this necessary work.”

Mildred Franco, executive director of The Generator, emphasized that receiving funding from the city and various partners has allowed The Generator to provide the community of Pine Bluff and Southeast Arkansas with multiple programs in digital skills and entrepreneurship that otherwise would not be available.

“We are just getting started, and even though we lost precious time due to the COVID pandemic, we have not stopped, and we will continue to serve the needs of the community as we rebuild, one small business at a time and one tech enabled job at a time,” said Franco.

Go Forward Pine Bluff has posted a detailed spreadsheet of private contributions on their website at goforwardpinebluff.org