

# THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

## Partnership Meets Business Need for Truck Drivers and Paves the Way for Low-Income Mississippi Residents

By Kate O'Sullivan, Navjeet Singh, and Don Spangler

Truck driving is a tough job. At the same time, it can lead to a career with family-sustaining wages. KLLM Transport Services, in partnership with Hinds Community College and the Foundation for the Mid South, has developed a driving academy and built a very robust pipeline of new drivers in Mississippi, many of them low-income residents of the rural Mississippi Delta, African Americans, and women. Hinds and KLLM prepared nearly 1,000 highly trained drivers in the past year and over 3,000 in the last several years. Of those, 71% are African Americans and 12% are women (twice the national average for truck drivers).



### Introduction and Overview

This case study describes how a partnership between philanthropy, an international trucking firm, and a leading community college created opportunities for hundreds of low-income Mississippi residents to become truck drivers. The case study is part of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' ongoing efforts to highlight and elevate the work of its regional collaboratives and to share their successes with broader audiences. In this way, we hope not only to increase the visibility and successes of the National Fund network, but also to equip other partners and stakeholders with information to build effective partnerships that meet the needs of employers and under- and unemployed individuals.

### PARTNER SNAPSHOT

**KLLM Transport Services, LLC**, based in Jackson, Mississippi, specializes in providing high quality transportation services in North America. For over 50 years KLLM has hauled temperature-controlled and dry commodities. Currently KLLM has a fleet of 3,800 tractors and 5,500 trailers. In 2014, KLLM established its own driving academy which features commercial driver's license training with the possibility of free tuition and guaranteed employment for successful graduates.

**Hinds Community College** is the largest community college in Mississippi, serving approximately 32,000 students in academic, career/technical, workforce, secondary, and adult education programs annually. With six locations, the college draws students from every Mississippi county and ranks as the fourth largest institution of higher learning in the state.

**The Mississippi Delta Workforce Funding Collaborative at the Foundation for the Mid South** is the National Fund collaborative dedicated to improving the lives of people in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, home to 30% of the nation's citizens living in poverty. The Foundation was established to bring together the public and private sectors to strengthen educational outcomes, improve physical and mental health, build wealth, and promote community development.

- THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KLLM-HINDS PROGRAM
- EXPANDING THE PARTNERSHIP TO TAP INTO A MORE DIVERSE POOL OF POTENTIAL DRIVERS
- KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

- IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS
- PROGRAM SUCCESSES AND BENEFITS TO PARTNERS
- RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

## The Development of the KLLM-Hinds Truck Driver Partnership

For the last decade, truck driving has been among the highest demand occupations in Mississippi. One of KLLM's top challenges to continued growth was having enough drivers to handle current and future work. KLLM leaders understood that the tight labor market for drivers directly affected its ability to compete.

To address the demand for skilled drivers, KLLM considered creating its own driving school but was discouraged by the length of time it would take for accreditation. Hinds Community College already had an accredited program and was looking to partner with trucking firms on a new model for truck driving instruction. This new model developed out of a previous experience expediting the acquisition of a commercial driver's license (CDL) for returning military veterans. KLLM embraced the idea and agreed to invest \$80,000 for a pilot program to determine if the new model could produce the drivers the company needed.

In 2012 the KLLM-Hinds partnership began offering a high-quality training program with a combination of intensive classroom preparation and substantial driving experience. To encourage new recruits to enter training, KLLM offered a \$4,000 scholarship, which covered tuition costs, in exchange for a commitment to work for KLLM for at least one year after successful completion of the program.

In 2013 KLLM and Hinds opened the KLLM Driving Academy to combine all the academic and driver training components in one location. KLLM funded the development of the space, which was adjacent to the KLLM corporate office, terminal, and maintenance facility. Later that year, the KLLM-Hinds partnership leveraged that investment in a winning application for federal funding through the Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training grant. The federal funding supported the cost of instruction, while KLLM invested in the trucks, trailers, classrooms, and related equipment. The KLLM Driving Academy, accredited through Hinds, opened in spring of 2014.

## Expanding the Partnership to Create a More Diverse Driving Corps

The Foundation for the Mid South convenes the Mississippi Delta Workforce Funders Collaborative, which is part of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' network. The collaborative is committed to addressing the skill needs of area businesses and supporting low-income populations, especially in the rural Delta region in northwest Mississippi, to obtain good jobs. The foundation learned about the KLLM-Hinds partnership and the driving academy and was impressed by the company's willingness to invest its own resources to support the training program and commit to hire trainees at a fair wage.

In 2015, the Delta Workforce Funders Collaborative worked with KLLM and Hinds to leverage a grant from the Walmart Opportunity Initiative to target African Americans and women.

This enabled KLLM to access a new, previously untapped pool of potential drivers, and Hinds expanded its enrollment, preparing more Mississippians for good jobs.

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“We work closely with Hinds, identifying problems and solving them. It's a very positive relationship which I expect to last for a long time.”

– Kirk Blankenship, Vice President of Driver Resources,  
KLLM

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# Key Elements of the KLLM-Hinds Training Model

The three-phase training program is open to residents who are at least 21 years of age. KLLM imposed no educational requirements, beyond the ability to earn the CDL and demonstrate the ability to drive professionally.

## Driving Academy Instruction

In the first phase at the KLLM Driving Academy, students learn in the classroom, operate a truck-driving simulator, and practice driving trucks on a track within the academy facility. This phase typically lasts about three weeks, depending on how quickly students advance. Students train for the full day, six days a week. Classroom instruction covers work readiness, career preparation, U.S. Department of Transportation rules and regulations, and Mississippi requirements for obtaining a CDL. Qualified academy instructors are experienced drivers with at least three years driving experience, hired by Hinds as community college faculty.

Understanding that lower-skilled students might need specialized instruction, Hinds offers contextualized adult education programming designed to accelerate learning. The lessons have direct application to commercial driving and the trucking industry and include hands-on experiences in the simulator and on the driving track. Hinds uses the Mississippi Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training initiative<sup>1</sup> to provide an adult education instructor to help lower-literate individuals improve their basic reading, writing, and math skills, and a navigator who helps students stay on track and overcome challenges. In addition, trainees with disabilities have access to rehabilitation specialists. At the end of this phase, students take the exam to obtain their CDL.

## Internship

During the second phase, students intern for six weeks on the road with a KLLM driver-trainer on their regular job hauling freight and making deliveries. KLLM and Hinds specifically prepare these drivers to serve as trainers for the interns. During the internship, students earn a stipend totaling about \$2,400, paid by KLLM. At the end of the internship, the students are assessed by the trainer, complete a KLLM written evaluation, and take a driving test, after which they can join KLLM as a driver.

By the time they have completed the academy and the internship, students have had the opportunity to earn up to 17 hours of college credit, which may be used toward more advanced credentials such as an associate degree.



## WORKER SPOTLIGHT

**“Now I’m back where it all began, as an instructor. I teach students what I learned at the academy, and also draw from the experiences I encountered on the road.”**

– **Matthew Bridges II**, KLLM Driving Academy graduate, current KLLM Driver, and Academy Instructor

## Apprenticeship

Hinds and KLLM worked with the U.S. Department of Labor to develop a registered apprenticeship for drivers. The design differs somewhat from a traditional apprenticeship, reflecting the needs and realities of the driving industry. A traditional apprentice completes education while working. In this case, the academy and internship serve as the instructional portion of the apprenticeship; once hired, hours driving serve as the on-the-job portion. After completing their internship, every new driver joins the apprenticeship program. After completing 2,000 hours of driving, drivers qualify for the Department of Labor’s Certificate of Apprenticeship in truck driving. The apprenticeship launched in June 2018; as of March 2019, 450 individuals have enrolled in the apprenticeship and nine have completed it.

## Support Services

Support Services are another essential component of the training. Several types of supports are offered through KLLM, Hinds, the Foundation for the Mid South, and other partners.

### Meals

KLLM provides lunch and breakfast for students on-site each day at the academy.

<sup>1</sup> MI-BEST is adapted from I-BEST, a successful model pioneered in Washington State to accelerate acquisition of work, literary and college readiness skills, and funded through grants from the Kellogg Foundation to Mississippi community colleges.





### Shelter

Understanding that trainees come from the entire region, and many live beyond commuting distance, KLLM contracted with a nearby motel to house individuals who live outside a 10-mile radius from the academy's location near Jackson, Mississippi.

### Coordinated Resources

Services designed to support students are offered from a variety of sources, among them Hinds, Families First for Mississippi, local Planning and Development Districts, and the Foundation for the Mid South.<sup>2</sup> Partners found that providing on-site program navigators – dedicated staff who help students identify and overcome barriers – had a significant positive impact on program completion. Employed through Hinds and housed at the academy, navigators build trusting relationships with students and connect them with a variety of resources, including public benefits and other supplemental supports. Families First also provides financial literacy programming at the outset of the academy and as students transition into the internship phase of the program.

### Financial Support

Financial assistance in the form of stipends and bonuses is supported by KLLM and area philanthropies. Knowing that many trainees would need financial support during the extended training period, KLLM offers stipends and bonuses at several different stages of training, e.g. a \$250 gift card after the first week of training, and another \$250 gift card upon earning the CDL. During the in-truck internship, KLLM pays students \$16 an hour. Finally, without the \$4,000 stipend from KLLM to cover the cost of tuition, few trainees would have had the financial resources to participate.

**“Our primary goal is to train the state's workforce, but now we have a secondary goal, and that is to increase the numbers of female drivers.”**

– Dr. Clyde Muse, President,  
Hinds Community College

## Identifying Challenges and Finding Solutions

While all three partners were enthusiastic about expanding the KLLM-Hinds driver training program to specifically include more women, this presented several challenges that demanded attention and action.

### Overcome Misconceptions About Women and Driving Careers

It's no secret that truck driving is a predominately male occupation. The partnership needed to address assumptions and open women's eyes to the idea that driving could be a good option for them. With support from the Foundation for the Mid South, the partnership developed a promotional campaign targeted at women. Television and radio ads, billboards, and truck wraps featured empowering messages (e.g., “Yes, She Can!”) that center women's stories and show how short-haul trips allow for more time at home while providing wages and benefits that support a family.

“We had assumed that these were male-oriented positions and women wouldn't be welcomed. But the KLLM-Hinds partnership offered our target population the opportunity to earn good money and the potential to be their own bosses as well as entrepreneurs and owners/operators, so of course that got our attention.”

– Ivey Allen, President,  
Foundation for the Mid South

### Develop a Coordinated Recruitment Strategy

The partnership worked hard to develop a multi-directional recruitment strategy with efficient and consistent messaging where all parties are reading from the same script and providing the same information. For example, KLLM disseminates information via its robust online and television presence, but they also have a support services department that responds to inquiries with basic information on the program and refers potential students directly to Hinds. The college provides additional details and guides potential students through the admissions and enrollment processes. The Foundation for the Mid South works with its multiple grantees to direct low-income individuals to the program. Information on the program is also available at job fairs and area one-stop centers operated through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

<sup>2</sup> Planning and Development Districts grew out of efforts by local elected officials in Mississippi to address the need for a mechanism that would allow communities to collectively address problems that do not stop at political boundaries. Planning and Development Districts coordinate and perform a wide range of functions, including community, economic, and workforce development, as well as health and human services.

## Address the Lack of Female Instructors for In-Truck, On-the-Road Internship

The internship requires a trainer and a student to spend extended periods of time in a cramped cab with very limited privacy. KLLM prepared female drivers to train with female students on the road, and as the program evolved, experienced female drivers were actively recruited to train new female recruits.

## Program Successes and Benefits to Partners

Overall, the KLLM-Hinds program has trained more 6,000 people since its inception in 2012, with more than 3,000 earning CDLs.

### Program Successes

**Longitudinal data collected by the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) at Mississippi State University demonstrate the success and economic impact of the program. Of nearly 1,800 completers between 2012 and mid-2017:**

■ **24% entered the academy without a high school diploma; 36% had a high school diploma but no college**

■ **71% were African American**

■ **12% were women (compared to 6.6% nationally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics)**

■ **77% found employment in the industry within one year of completing training**

■ **70% were still employed in the industry three years after completing training**

Although initial funding from Walmart helped to get the female recruitment strategy of the ground, KLLM continued to support targeted outreach to women and is seeing increasing enrollment of women; the most recent class of 48 students had 10 women (21%).<sup>3</sup>

As much as 50% of program trainees are from the Mississippi Delta. While difficult to quantify precisely, the economic benefits for these new employees and their families are significant, as is the impact on the communities where they live. For example, KLLM estimates that most drivers make \$30,000-\$40,000 in their first year, and compensation increases from there.



### Partner Benefits

KLLM has benefitted significantly from the program. The company has secured well-trained, new, loyal employees in a very tough labor market. Based on the success in the Mississippi Delta, KLLM has replicated this training model in Chicago and Dallas.

But Hinds has benefitted as well. The partnership has enabled the college to improve educational delivery by providing fast, easy, and flexible access to programs that meet students' needs and prepare hundreds of drivers per year. Also, by leveraging KLLM's investments in equipment and infrastructure, Hinds has been able to increase the scale of operations, preparing 800-1,000 drivers per year (typically, a postsecondary driver training course would prepare fewer than 50 per year).

**“The three partners work really well together. We coordinate our efforts to try to make sure that students get what they need, and no one falls through the cracks.”**

**– Martha Claire Drysdale, Community Development Director, Foundation for the Mid South**

And there are expansion plans. Hinds and KLLM have developed a new diesel technician program based on the truck driver model, and Hinds is actively expanding the approach to additional career and technical areas and sectors, with course offerings at flexible times and independent of the academic calendar and with significant co-investment from employers.

The Delta Workforce Funders Collaborative and Foundation for the Mid South consider the partnership a model for how philanthropy and employers can collaborate to achieve their goals. With KLLM's significant financial investment, the collaborative used its resources to expand the pool of drivers by opening doors for lower-income individuals, Delta residents, African Americans, and women – providing a path toward income security.

<sup>3</sup> Class graduating in January 2019.

## Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The expanded training program has achieved numerous successes for all partners and provides several insights.

### Employer Demand Can Produce Results for Target Populations

KLLM has successfully developed a robust pipeline of well-trained truck drivers while expanding employment opportunities for significant numbers of low-income Mississippi residents, among them women and African Americans.

### Employers Are Prepared to Make Substantial Investments to Prepare a Workforce That Meets Their Needs

The KLLM-Hinds partnership has benefited from significant philanthropic investments; however, the vast majority of funding comes from KLLM, which invests millions of dollars each year. The KLLM investment has enabled the program to operate at scale and ensures that drivers are trained to their specifications, ready to become high-performing employees that keep the company competitive.

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■ ■ KLLM's level of engagement and investment changed the Foundation's perspective on which companies to target. Now, we're always comparing industry partners and their level of investment to KLLM. ■ ■

**Justin Burch**, Field Program Officer Rural LISC;  
former Program Associate, Foundation of the Mid South

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### Higher Education Institutions Adopt New Educational Strategies as a Result of Partnerships With Industry, Offering Greater Flexibility to Both Employers and Individuals

Through the program, Hinds Community College has learned how to partner successfully with employers that are willing to invest and innovate. As a result, enrollment in career fields is up substantially, balancing declines on the academic side. Overall enrollment has stabilized and is expected to grow as the new industry-focused courses and more flexible educational and administrative approaches are adopted throughout the college.

### Rural Communities Can Be Engines of Innovation

By drawing on the Delta region and the entire state, the Hinds-KLLM training program demonstrates that flexible and innovative approaches to workforce equity issues can succeed in non-urban areas.

### Truck Driving Could Present an Important Economic Development Opportunity for Rural Areas

Given the nature of the trucking industry, it is often possible for drivers to live many miles from the terminal and still make a living. People can continue to live in sparsely populated areas where there is often limited economic opportunity and still earn family-sustaining wages.

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