



**Empowering  
Parents**  
HELPING THEIR STUDENTS ACHIEVE

**A story of a successful public/private  
partnership that has benefited  
thousands of Idaho families and children**

<https://empoweringparents.idaho.gov/>



## QUICK HISTORY

### April 2020 in the midst of Covid-19 School Shutdowns

- ❖ USDOE issues “Rethinking K-12 Education Models” grant opportunity
- ❖ Bluum wrote a grant in partnership with the Idaho State Board of Education called *Inspire Idaho* that sought \$20 million for parent microgrants for approximately 18,000 needy students.
- ❖ *Inspire Idaho* would have awarded microgrants of \$1,000 per eligible student, with a maximum award of \$3,000 per family.
- ❖ Bluum would have administered the program for the state, and JKAF committed administrative funding at a rate of 5% of the federal award, up to \$1 million, for *Inspire Idaho*’s operating expenses.
- ❖ Bluum would have contracted with Florida-based ClassWallet to administer the marketplace for eligible families.
- ❖ *Inspire Idaho* would have operated over three years.
- ❖ Our proposal was rejected by the USDOE.



## Fast forward to September 2020

- ❖ Governor Brad Little announced a \$50 million program – funded with CARES Act money – called *Strong Families, Strong Students*.
- ❖ The Idaho State Board of Education was tasked with administering *Strong Families, Strong Students*, and Bluum offered help in marketing, branding, outreach and strategy.
- ❖ *Strong Families, Strong Students* awarded microgrants and reimbursements of \$1,500 per child or \$3,500 for families with three or more children. All Idaho families were ultimately eligible, but needy families were prioritized. Bluum provided marketing support to help target needy families.
- ❖ Idaho contracted directly with Florida-based ClassWallet to administer the marketplace and reimbursement program for eligible families.
- ❖ *Strong Families, Strong Students* got \$50 million out to families by the end of calendar 2020.
- ❖ Bluum assists with the branding and marketing of *Strong Families, Strong Students*

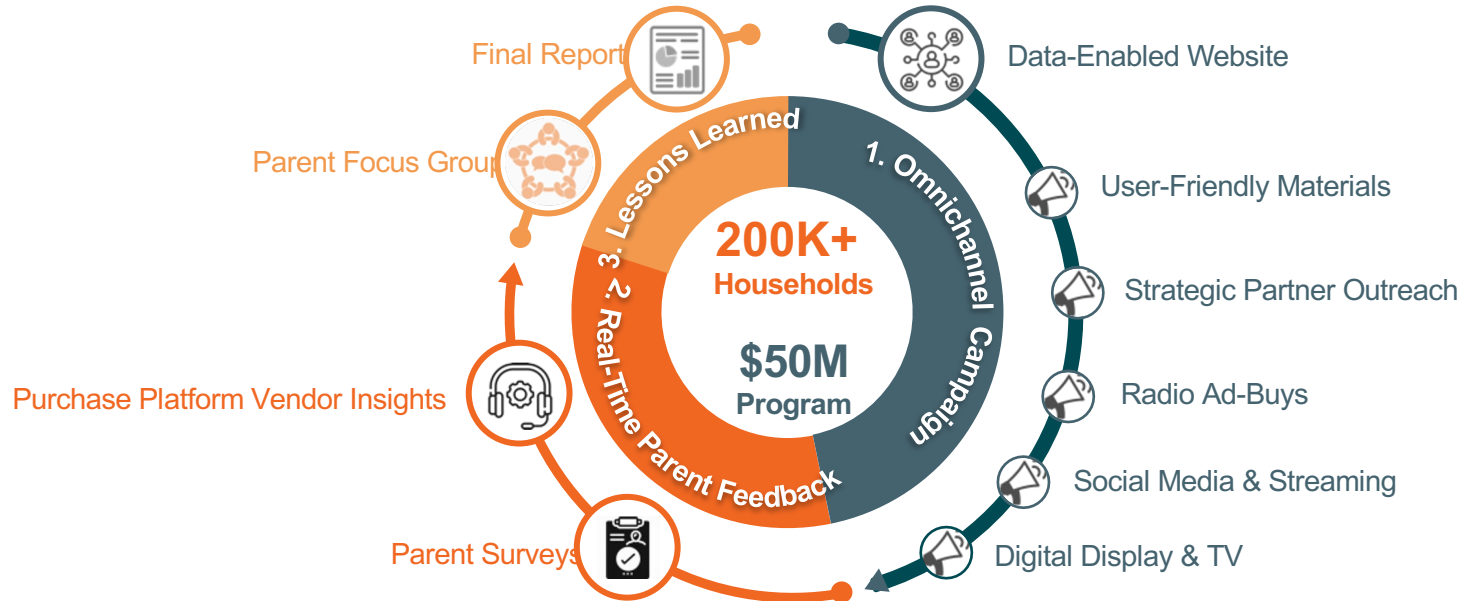


## Idaho Makes its Microgrant Program a Permanent Fixture in Education

- ❖ Building on the success of the 2020 \$50 million *Strong Families, Strong Students* initiative, in Spring 2022 the Idaho Legislature passed (34-1 in the Senate and 67-1-2 in the House), and Governor Little signed into law, SB1255, which created the *Empowering Parents Grant* Program. This program is administered by the Idaho State Board of Education and the legislature allocated \$30 million of state money during the 2023 session.
- ❖ It provides \$1,000 per student, or a maximum of \$3,000 per family, for public and non-public students. Parents can access and spend the grant funds on behalf of their child for approved educational expenses through a digital platform.
- ❖ Idaho contracted directly with New York-based Odyssey to administer the marketplace and reimbursement program for eligible families.
- ❖ A Parental Advisory Panel was established under law to help with the implementation and administration of the program.
- ❖ As part of the “Filling the Gap Fund” initiative, Bluum received \$150K from Bellwether Education Partners and the Walton Family Foundation to help Idaho create a branding campaign



**Assisting in the Marketing of the Effort:** With “Filling the Gap Fund” support, Bluum has partnered with Boise-based creative agency, SOVRN to produce a brand identity and bi-lingual (English & Spanish) campaign materials, such as a Public Service Announcement-like video(s), social media assets, one-page information/FAQ sheet, etc. Below illustrates the three phases of that initiative:





## The Bluum Marketing Campaign & Goals for its 2022-23 Effort

- ❖ All eligible families across Idaho will know they are eligible for microgrants, and they will know how to apply or at least who to for ask help in applying.
- ❖ Idaho allocates all funds appropriated for the Empowering Parents grant program.
- ❖ The primary beneficiaries of this program will be families with Adjusted Growth Income (AGI) at or below \$60,000 per year.
- ❖ Home school families will know about this program and feel welcomed to participate in it.
- ❖ Lessons learned from the implementation of this program will inform future Idaho microgrant efforts.



## The Challenges, pt 1

Reach an underserved demographic, who often have additional barriers to help and resources:

- ❖ Language
- ❖ Access to timely information\*
- ❖ Don't trust the government or wary of "handouts"
- ❖ Rural areas w/increased distance to tutors or after school programs

Being efficient with limited resources and a strict timeline. Budget isn't unlimited, can't flood the market but have to reach statewide.

**Note:** all of this work was done in partnership with the State Board and they used their network and communication channels to get information out on the grant opportunity as well.

\*Our target demographic might not read the newspaper or watch local news—without going into a deep conversation about meeting basic needs vs accessing extracurricular information. By the time they hear about the program or verify its legitimacy it might be too late and their application will be behind 30,000 other applications.



## The Challenges, pt 2

New program with limited exposure and potential for negative press.

Knowing which data and analytics to listen to and what they mean for the campaign goals.

Metrics we listen to so that we don't have "death-by-data" or "analysis-paralysis":

- ❖ Survey form on website to capture sample data of who is signing up\*
- ❖ Click-thru-rates, are people seeing the message and going to the website
- ❖ Audience size vs impressions gives you a sense of saturation

\*We asked for: name, email, zipcode, gender, ethnicity, income range, how many children in household, age range of children.

The three we learned the most from: gender lets us know if its mom or dad signing up, ethnicity gives us a snapshot of who we're reaching compared to the Idaho population, age range of children let us know if our message is appealing more to parents of young children or older children.





## The Solution & Tactics, pt 1

Using a mix of traditional and digital media to target the intended audience

- ❖ Traditional radio is great for widespread awareness
- ❖ Digital ads are very effective at targeting a specific demographic\*

Know your audience - where are they at, how to reach them, what appeals to them

- ❖ An endorsement from a radio personality is great. An endorsement from a Spanish radio personality is phenomenal within the Hispanic community\*\*

\*Within our target audience a few specific demographics that helped us focus efforts: Hispanic/Spanish-speaking, Native American, homeschooled.

\*\*Rural and agricultural workers often times listen to a lot of radio, to and from work (long drives) or during work.



## The Solution & Tactics, pt 2

Analyzing data to reallocate budget within tactics and audiences to increase performance is key. Digital media allows for real-time data.\* Media tactics we used:

- ❖ Traditional radio, English and Spanish
- ❖ YouTube Preroll
- ❖ Facebook Ads (includes Instagram)
- ❖ Streaming TV (OTT/CTV)
- ❖ Streaming Audio
- ❖ Google Display Ads

\*Media buyers tend to focus on metrics like: video-completion-rate, listen-thru-rate, impressions or other high-number data. Which is fine and great to know but usually those always tend to be high numbers, especially since you sometimes can't skip ads. But the total number of ads served or impressions compared to the audience population helps to understand how well we saturated the market.

**Note:** Click-thru-rates (CTR) are usually a decimal of a percentage, like ".15%" it might seem low but when you think about 200,000 impressions, that starts to look like 280 clicks on an ad.



## The Outcome

Target audience reached:

In 2022-23, Idaho funded 43,832 students.

- ❖ 33,060 were students from households with Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) under \$60,000.
- ❖ 1,849 were students from households with AGI under \$75,000
- ❖ 8,923 were students from households with AGI equal to or more than \$75,000.

Highlights of the marketing campaign:

- ❖ We started with a target audience of \$40k or less, but had to adjust to \$60k or less based on inventory (population within parameters) availability
- ❖ We included an adjustment week between two phases of the campaign (2 weeks on, 1 week off, 2 weeks on). This allowed us time to analyze data and make adjustments.
- ❖ With 50% of people engaging in branded search, our media tactics drove people to type in the URL or keywords once they saw or heard an ad for the grant program



## Future Challenges/Opportunities

Three years into this the greatest barrier(s) faced by eligible families has not been getting access to microgrants. More significant is helping parents move from using grants primarily for computer hardware and technology to eligible uses for supports and services such as therapies, including occupational, behavioral, physical, speech, etc., tutoring, educational programs, afterschool programs, advanced placement examinations, etc.

In fact, 95% of microgrant expenditures in 2022-23 were for hardware and technology. We know from parent survey work and the work of the Parent Advisory Panel that parents aspire to more than using the microgrants for just technology and devices.

In asking parents in January 2023 how they hoped to use their microgrants: 77% said more enrichment in areas where child already excels; 72% said for help to catch-up in subjects that their child struggles in, and 67% said participation in extracurricular activities. Yet, the vast majority of grants went to hardware and technology.



**Thank you**

For more information on Empowering Parents please go to:

<https://empoweringparents.idaho.gov/>

For more information about Bluum please go to:

[www.bluum.org](http://www.bluum.org)

**Terry Ryan, CEO**

