

# The Carsey School and the Opportunity Finance Network – A Partnership for Education and Advancement

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by:

*Katie Rascoe*

The [Carsey School of Public Policy](#) at the University of New Hampshire is known throughout New England for its commitment to public service education, but equally so for its national research, policy analysis, and civic engagement work. Carsey collaborates with select partner organizations that share a community-focused mission, among them the Opportunity Finance Network (OFN).

The partnership between OFN and the Carsey School offers OFN employees and board members – as well as employees and board members of OFN-member Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) – the opportunity to advance educationally and professionally. Austin Vasko, a student in the [Carsey School's Master in Community Development \(MCD\) program](#), is just one of several students who has taken advantage of the [OFN-Carsey Partnership Education Award](#). An employee of [Aeris Insight](#) (an OFN CDFI member), Vasko received \$2,500 to pursue Carsey's MCD through this partnership.

Vasko recently shared some information about Aeris Insight's background, explaining that the company was conceived as a project within OFN nearly two decades ago, became an independent rating agency in 2013, and now is positioned at the intersection of CDFIs and impact investors. Today, Aeris helps ensure transparency of CDFI financial performance by supplying lenders and investors with digestible metrics reported by CDFIs.

Vasko said this of the importance of CDFIs: “These institutions create a significant impact in the communities they serve and, in the case of this pandemic, fulfilled the role of financial ‘first responders,’ bringing relief to some of the hardest-hit communities nationwide.”



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**AUSTIN VASKO**

As organizations such as OFN and Aeris continue to be recognized for their positive impacts, they gain more interest from private financial parties. According to Vasko, Aeris’ customer base has largely been “CRA-motivated financial institutions, mission-

driven charitable foundations, and government,” but they are experiencing a shift, now attracting the interest of “private wealth and impact fund managers, as well as more mainstream investors looking for impact investment opportunities.”

This expansion of the market segment demonstrates that creating the space for equal opportunity can inspire others to also take action for the improvement of their communities. The steps taken by OFN and other CDFIs today to support community organizations and struggling families provide the building blocks for a more equitable and sustainable world for future generations. The Carsey School is excited to support professionals like Austin Vasko who seek higher education as a way to fuel their passions for making a difference in underfunded communities worldwide.

You can learn more about the OFN-Carsey partnership, and Carsey's other Education Award partnerships, on the [Carsey Partnership webpage](#).

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