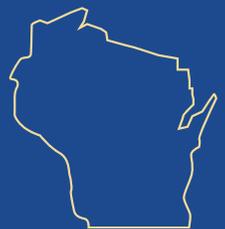
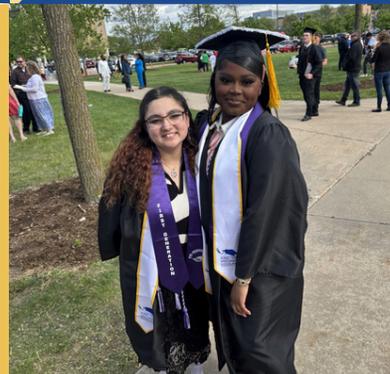


FUND FOR WISCONSIN SCHOLARS

EXPANDING OUR STATE OF MINDS

Two-Year Strategic Plan 2025–2027



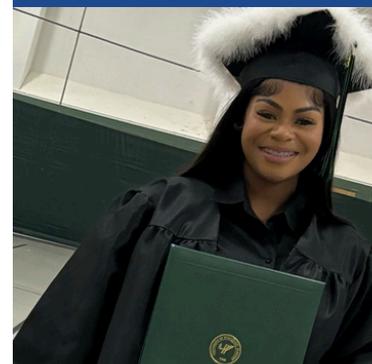


Mission

The Fund for Wisconsin Scholars' mission is to increase access to and completion of college through need-based grants and scholar outreach for Wisconsin public high school graduates attending the Universities of Wisconsin four-year colleges. FFWS helps Wisconsin higher education scholars stay engaged in campus life and ultimately graduate with less debt, poised for growth in life, and positioned to have a positive impact in their community.

Executive Summary

John and Tashia Morgridge established the Fund for Wisconsin Scholars, Inc. (FFWS or The Foundation) in 2007 with a \$175 million endowment. FFWS is a private, charitable foundation built on the belief that every person has equal value and is worthy of the opportunity to enrich one's life and well-being through education. FFWS believes that increasing the number of Wisconsin adults who hold a bachelor's degree will improve Wisconsin residents' quality of life, increase learning opportunities, and enable greater education options. By helping to ensure a highly educated workforce, FFWS helps create the economic viability necessary for meeting the challenges that face us today and tomorrow. When higher education is more affordable, scholars have less stress and are better able to access the opportunities and resources available to them making graduating from college more attainable.





Intended Impact Statement

Pell eligible, Wisconsin residents who attended public high schools and enrolled in WI public universities will graduate poised for growth in life, positioned to have a greater positive impact in their communities and the world around them. Our success is measured by the number of FFWS scholars, the percentage that graduate, the debt at graduation, and the comparative graduation rates.

Guiding Principles

The **FFWS Guiding Principles** allow us to navigate our work, our decision-making process, and our support for FFWS scholars through mutual understanding across the organization.

1 Dollars to Scholars

FFWS maintains efficient operations to prioritize providing the most needs-based financial support to the greatest possible number of qualified scholars.

2 Maximize UW system partnerships for improved scholar opportunities

To better serve the needs of scholars, allowing for self-determination to guide their path.

3 Strengthen the Pell scholar experience and FFWS voice

Using actionable student research to amplify student impact and implement systemic improvements that directly enhance educational outcomes.

4 Organize for Learning through research

FFWS makes data-based decisions using learnings from internal data and external analysis on FFWS and similar programs to better achieve our impact.

5 Consistency, Relationships, and Care

FFWS is known as a consistent partner throughout a scholar's undergraduate journey and UW system experience, demonstrating support financially and otherwise to improve graduation rates.

6 Poised for Growth post-graduation life

To empower scholars, with less debt, to succeed in the next phase of their life while fostering a shared commitment of FFWS alumni to positively influence future scholars' journeys.



Long-term Goals

Our vision is for our scholars to obtain a college degree with little to no debt.

We anticipate that with the right amount of funding and support, at the right time, FFWS scholars will be able to work less and participate more, gaining access to high-impact practices and opportunities that other university scholars can afford with available time and resources.

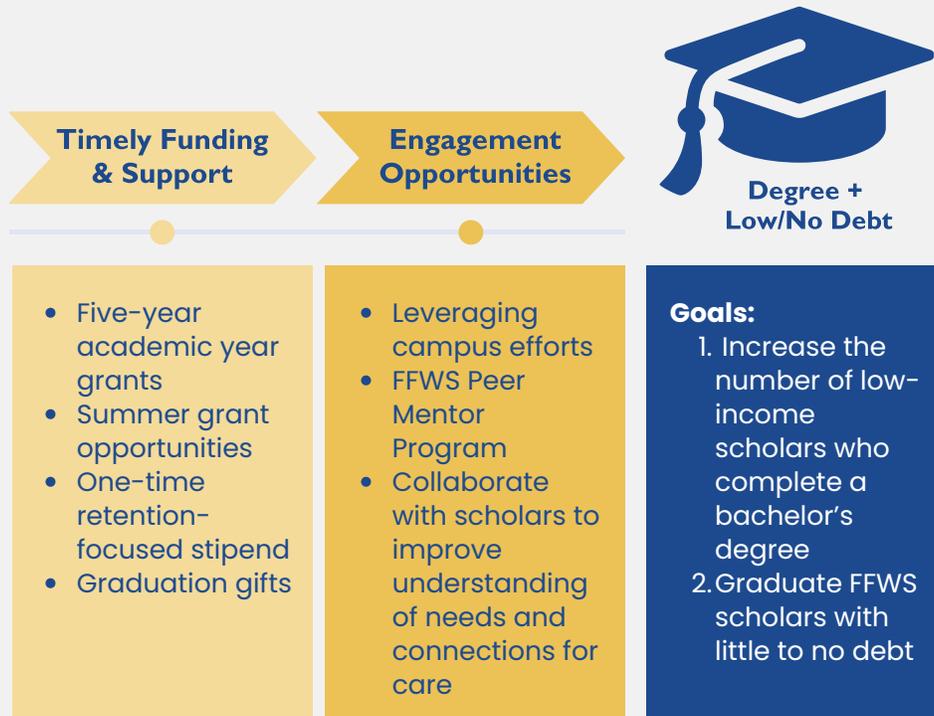
Our long-term goals are to:

 Increase the number of low-income scholars who complete a bachelor's degree, ultimately eliminating the graduation gap between the published Universities of Wisconsin graduation rates with those of FFWS Pell-eligible scholars consistently over time.

 Graduate FFWS scholars with little to no debt.

Vision → Outcomes: Scholar Journey

With the right support at the right time, Pell-eligible scholars can graduate with little to no debt.



Programs

FFWS provides needs-based grants through the following grant programs:

- Five-year consecutive academic year grants (up to \$4,500 per year) to eligible randomly selected FFWS scholars
- Summer grant opportunities for FFWS scholars (up to \$1,200 per summer)
- One-time retention-focused stipend for FFWS and non-FFWS scholars in need
- Monetary graduation gifts to bridge FFWS scholars to alumni

FFWS provides on-campus support by:

- Leveraging campus efforts to enhance student engagement and navigate access to high-impact practices and opportunities.
- Supporting a FFWS Peer Mentor Program at each participating campus, offering direct peer mentorship, on-campus resource referrals, and community engagement opportunities.
- Collaborate with scholars to improve university-level understanding of needs and connections for care.



15+ years of commitment

Since our first cohort graduated in 2012, FFWS scholars earned **4,400+ Baccalaureate Degrees (BA) and 400 associate degrees**. 100% of these scholars graduated with less debt than they would otherwise have had, reducing anxiety, increasing mental health, and allowing these scholars to invest more.

Thanks to the continuous generosity of John and Tashia Morgridge, the FFWS endowment is strong. FFWS grew our cohort sizes each year between 2022 and 2025 allowing for increased impact and strengthening our resolve to learn more about what is working, what is not working, and share our lessons learned with the broader higher education community.

2025–2027 Strategic Plan

FFWS will use the 2024–25 academic year as a benchmark to measure our outcomes through 2027.

In 2024–2025, FFWS:

- Graduated **475 BA scholars**.
- Supported **4,000+ continuing scholars**.
- Maintained a four-year pooled **six-year graduation rate of 64%**.
- Reduced debt with **58% of scholars self-reporting less than \$5,000 in debt** upon graduation.

Environmental Assessment

FFWS designed this two-year strategic plan to strengthen our consistency and commitment to scholars, amplify FFWS' voice in support of low-income scholar needs, and remain flexible to the ongoing needs of the Wisconsin resident scholars we serve each year. A two-year strategic plan will allow for organizational flexibility in terms of the goals, priorities, and metrics outlined below as new challenges and opportunities arise.

Strategic Goals, Priorities & Metrics

Strategic Goals (2025–2027)

 **Reduce the graduation gap:** Reduce the gap between Pell eligible and non-Pell eligible scholars to 6% for FFWS scholars.

 **Minimize debt:** Aim for at least 65% of FFWS scholars to graduate with less than \$5,000 in debt (vs. state average of \$24,000).



"2025 was a year of great uncertainty for low-income scholars in Wisconsin and across the nation. First-generation and low-income scholars often do not have the resources necessary to navigate the risks related to the current changes in federal and state policies. Through these challenging times, FFWS aims to provide consistent support and care to our scholars."

**Kelly Ruppel, FFWS
Executive Director**

2025–2027 Strategic Plan

Strategic Priorities (2025–2027)

FFWS has identified our most important strategies to achieve our mission and drive our intended impact over the next two years. Our strategic priorities for 2025–2027 are:

1 Use Research to Understand Impact

Continue to refine strategies to organize for learning and meet need with opportunity. FFWS will use best practice learnings, student voice, innovation pilots, and conduct and gather research measuring impact where needed to better understand how strategies are leading to impact. We will leverage this data to influence and strengthen the system.

2 Strengthen University Partnership

To deliver on impact efficiently, FFWS cannot do it alone. To ensure success, we will strengthen and deepen the UW system and individual campus partnerships to improve outcomes for both FFWS scholars and other Pell scholars.

As we have learned through student and alumni feedback, creating a community of care and belonging is important. To foster a sense of care and belonging on all campuses, we will establish community standards for current and alumni scholars, building a community based on shared values and positively improving the likelihood of retention, graduation, and community participation after graduation.

3 Distribute Grant Aid Efficiently & Effectively

Continue to prioritize the distribution of financial grants to FFWS scholars in a timely, efficient, and effective manner, within the parameters of the board bylaws and policies.

4 Align for Organizational Excellence

FFWS will define and refine roles, resources, and capacity to right size the responsibilities of staff, build capacity and diversify the board, and drive programmatic excellence across all programs, including peer mentoring, while delivering on identified priorities and defined impact.

Strategic Priorities (2025–2027)

1
Use Research
to Understand
Impact

2
Strengthen
University
Partnership

3
Distribute
Grant Aid
Efficiently &
Effectively

4
Align for
Organizational
Excellence

2027 & Beyond Strategic Themes

FFWS extends a deep appreciation to the many dedicated employees of the Universities of Wisconsin who serve their students with high quality and care every day. Without their deep commitment to higher education and partnership, FFWS would not be possible.

FFWS is committed to supporting our scholars and partnering with the Universities of Wisconsin to increase retention and reduce the gap to graduation for low-income students for years to come.

This 2025–2027 Strategic Plan focuses on strengthening our commitment and consistency to our current and future scholars, while building on our role as participants in the higher education research community to improve graduation rates for FFWS scholars and across the State. The 2028 & Beyond Strategic Plan will focus on expanding FFWS’ reach, adapting to the current research, and sharing what we have learned through our own research and implementation.

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