



# GRAD Last Mile Fund Guidelines

*Updated January 2025*

## **Goals**

The goal of the GRAD (Graduate Ready to Achieve Degree) Last Mile Fund is to provide financial support for students nearing graduation. Specifically, this fund supports students that demonstrate financial hardships which are preventing them from obtaining the final credits needed to graduate. While there are many different programs that offer financial support to students, there is still a group of students who inevitably don't qualify, or who aren't able to secure enough aid to make it through the entirety of their collegiate programs. The funding from GRAD Last Mile Fund can be used for unexpected expenses the students might have and while it can be used for tuition, it is intended for unexpected financial hardships.

## **Guidelines**

The following guidelines for the GRAD Last Mile Fund should be treated as guardrails for our partner colleges and universities. These guardrails are broad, intentionally, so that each college and university can build a process that best helps them identify candidate students and provide them with needed resources.

Students eligible for funds through the GRAD Last Mile Fund must:

- Be on track academically to graduate in the next semester; or for 4-year colleges on track to graduate in the next two semesters;
- Have a demonstrated financial need;
- Be a resident of Massachusetts. Students are not required to be graduates of Boston Public Schools, but we will track those that are.

The funding amount per student is up to a maximum of \$3,000. The school should review financial need, and the award amount should reflect what is needed (i.e. not every award should be the maximum).

Effort will be made to award a diverse group of recipients by gender, race, country of birth, age, etc. Priority should be given to students who:

- Have unmet financial need beyond university costs (i.e., a non-academic hardship);
- Have not registered for their final semester or paid tuition by a pre-established cutoff date;
- Have exhausted other sources of aid available;
- Are undocumented and/or DACA students with limited options for financial assistance.; and/or
- Are parents and/or veterans.

## **Funds Administration and Distribution**



The fund is administered by The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI) at The Boston Foundation, in collaboration with the partner colleges and universities. Annual allocation of the GRAD Last Mile Fund to the colleges and universities generally occurs in July / early August.

The partner colleges and universities are responsible for the primary marketing of the scholarship, recruiting of students who meet the eligibility requirements, and tracking of the awards and funds.

While every college and university will have some flexibility on specific program design, each will be expected to track and evaluate program participation and the success of students who have received the GRAD Last Mile funds. Each college and university will also be responsible for tracking funds and reporting the amount remaining in the fund.

### **Implementation of the Fund**

Universities should designate a point person who will be responsible for receiving inquiries into the GRAD Last Mile Fund. Students should be referred to each college/university's financial services office to be considered for the fund. Referrals are expected to come from advisors, faculty, coaches, and other support service staff.

Each college/university's financial aid or financial services office should have a brief application available for students to complete. We advise that schools collect information on the front end via the application form that coincides with the data points they will have to provide at the end of the year. They will report the number of credits earned, document the financial difficulty they are facing, and be asked for any other pertinent information.

Students should be encouraged to meet with an advisor to make sure they are on track for degree completion and/or connect to any other support services that may be appropriate to help the student reach degree completion.

Disbursements may be made to aid students who have non-academic costs that are preventing them from completing their degree, and to help pay university costs, if no other university-based fund is available. Funds that are used to help pay college/university costs should only be disbursed if the student has a non-academic cost that would prevent them from being able to cover tuition and fees. Procedures should be in place to distribute funds to students quickly, ideally within 7-10 business days.

### **Evaluation and Data Collection**

Each college/university is responsible for tracking recipients and for reporting aggregate student outcomes and individual student success stories to TPI.

This information should be reported back to TPI after each semester (for example, the Fall semester report should be submitted by January). We ask for consolidated interim data in the mid-year (December/January), and for more extensive student data at the end of the school year (August). Please see attached sample poster and data tracking forms. A detailed explanation is required if funds have been disbursed for academic costs, rather than for external emergency aid.



Each college/university should have a specific point person that is responsible for reporting this data. An example report template is attached.

**Current Participating Schools:**

- UMass Boston
- Bunker Hill
- Ben Franklin
- Roxbury Community College
- Mass Bay
- UMass Lowell
- UMass Dartmouth
- North Shore Community College
- Urban College
- Mass Art
- Middlesex Community College
- Salem State University
- Cambridge College
- Bristol Community College
- Framingham State