



Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course

For what purpose do you plan to utilize these funds?

A grant from the Nonprofit Giving Course would directly support Let's Get Ready's College Success Program at Framingham State University, which is the third stage in our program model. Our six-year continuum of programming begins with the College Access Program. This program is fully run by college students and offers participants SAT preparation and assistance with all aspects of the college admissions process. Upon completion of the Access Program, students are automatically enrolled in the Transition Program for support throughout senior year and during the vulnerable period between college acceptance and matriculation. This program offers remote support (through calls, texts, and emails), guidance, and tools to ensure students' successful matriculation to college. Once students set foot on their college campus, they are enrolled in the Success Program. Through our Success Program, offered remotely or on-campus at Peer Success Sites, LGR ensures that students remain connected to highly relevant and timely resources that support their academic success while bolstering their social-emotional skill development.

The program at Framingham State is one of our on-campus Peer Success Sites. Each year, this program supports approximately 60 students from low-income backgrounds who are the first in their family to attend college, as they transition to college and navigate the path to graduation. All students in the program start with Let's Get Ready in 11th grade, and everyone in the FSU Success Program has completed LGR's Access and Transition Programs. The Success Program provides one-on-one and group mentoring for first and second year students, plus texts and emails about resources and support navigating towards college graduation for third and fourth year students.

In addition to supporting approximately 60 students with direct programming, LGR employs one third or fourth year FSU student to serve as a mentor to the first and second year students in the program. This coach is managed by an LGR program manager and benefits from leadership development and workforce training. The students who serve as coaches have often gone through LGR's program and/or come from a similar background as the students we serve (low-income, first-generation-to-college).

Funding from this grant would go to direct costs including the stipend that we pay the coach, plus materials and supplies for coach training and student events. Funding would also support indirect costs of running the program including LGR program staff time to manage the program, travel, recruitment, and partnership building.

What are your other sources of funding?

Let's Get Ready is fortunate to receive broad and enduring support from both institutional and individual supporters. This funding provides both general operating support as well as targeted programmatic support for specific geographic locations and/or programs. The New England

region of LGR has an annual budget of about \$1 million; the total organization budget is about \$3 million (relatedly, about one-third of students served come from the New England region). Major corporate supporters include Wellington Management, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Liberty Mutual, and Eastern Bank. Major foundation funding comes from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Cradle to Career Initiative (part of the Boston Foundation), Davis Family Foundation, Highland Street Foundation, Poorvu Family Foundation, Janey Fund Charitable Trust, Essex County Community Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Llewellyn Foundation, and the Move the World Foundation. Individual donors provide funding mostly through our annual gala, which happens each fall and raises about 20-25% of annual revenue for the New England region. Finally, we have a small amount of earned income, which comes from partnerships with colleges (Boston College and Tufts University for example), who sponsor programs for students from the communities around their campuses, as well as community-based organizations (such as Squashbusters) for whom we provide closed programs specifically for their students (all other programs are open to any students).

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

The ultimate goal of LGR is to work with and support students from low-income backgrounds, from underrepresented communities, as they pursue and earn their college degrees. This fits into LGR's larger mission of making a college education accessible to all students, regardless of their background or life circumstances. Going to college and earning a degree is a dream for many young people across the region, but the guidance, SAT prep, and mentorship that LGR's programs provide can help make that dream a reality. LGR participants improve their SAT scores, learn about colleges that are a good fit, and complete admissions and financial aid applications. They acquire skills, knowledge, and confidence to transition successfully to college and career. They gain important exposure to careers and professionals, and many enjoy their first workforce training and leadership development by returning to serve as LGR Coaches and Site Directors. LGR's programs provide students with a continuum of support for six years, helping them overcome obstacles accessing college, transitioning to college, and ultimately graduating.

Additionally, LGR endeavors to develop social entrepreneurship and civic engagement in the student leaders who serve as Coaches and Site Directors. Our peer-based program model has a double positive impact, enabling development and learning for both the mentor and the mentee. Undergraduate students who administer the program receive training that includes a rigorous and unique introduction to leadership and management skills, teaching practices, and the diverse array of issues surrounding access to education in America. Many students, inspired by their experience, continue on to pursue careers in education and public service and become leaders in their communities.

Let's Get Ready's short-term goals are to increase the accessibility of a college education for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds by:

- Providing students from low-income and/or first-generation-to-college backgrounds with the academic skills and SAT preparation needed to gain acceptance and make a successful transition to colleges that best match their achievements and aspirations.
- Guiding students transitioning between high school graduation and the start of their freshman year as they navigate college essays, financial aid forms, and the college application process, ensuring that they reach matriculation.

- Supporting students while in college through near-peer mentorship, workshops, and connections to resources and critical information on an ongoing basis, easing the adjustment to college and providing social support.
- Engaging college students in volunteer service that builds their interest and involvement in their local community, in public service, and in the field of education.

The specific goals of the Access Program are to prepare students to take the SAT and increase their scores as well as preparing them to apply to college. The goals of the Transition Program are to ensure that students successfully navigate the college admissions and financial aid processes and enroll and matriculate at a “good fit” college. For the Success Program, our aim is to support students as they work toward the ultimate goal: college graduation. For all three programs, we strive to create strong mentoring relationships between the students and their near-peer mentors.

Our longer term goals are to increase the number of students served in our current communities, strategically expand and scale to new communities, continue to improve programming to best meet the changing needs of our students, and to continue to improve the college graduation rate for our students. Additional indicators of success five years from now will be a significant increase in students served in our current communities, an increase in our geographic reach, an increase in college volunteers, and an increase in financial resources to ensure we are able to support these goals.

Why are staff members passionate about the work they do?

Let’s Get Ready staff members are a diverse group of individuals with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, but to a person, everyone on the team is passionate about LGR and the work they do because they believe in the mission of the organization. Many staff members are first generation college graduates themselves, and either benefitted from a similar program or wish that they had had the support of an organization such as LGR when they were navigating the college process. Others come from more privileged backgrounds and have seen the inequity built into our country’s education system and are committed to paying their privilege forward to help close the opportunity gap. When asked directly, here is what some staff members had to say:

“I am very passionate about Let’s Get Ready’s mission and vision. It is a huge injustice that students from low-income backgrounds are much less likely to attend college because of the barriers they face. I am happy to be a part of closing the rich-poor college access gap. Hopefully one day, every student, no matter what their background is, will have the opportunity to attend college.”

“I am passionate about what I do because I believe that education has the power to change people’s lives. Students who graduate from college have the ability to change not only their life circumstances but that of their family’s and even their next generation. To me, education is the only true path out of poverty and that is why I do what I do.”

“I am passionate about my work at Let’s Get Ready because I care about breaking down barriers for underrepresented students who want to pursue college, including students who are first generation to college, low income, and from rural areas and communities of color. The evidence is clear - a college degree provides greater career opportunities, increased lifetime

earnings, and reduces the risk of unemployment and poverty. We also know that the playing field is not level, and students from under-resourced backgrounds pay the price as shown through lower levels of college enrollment, persistence and ultimately graduation. I'm proud to work at Let's Get Ready to help close the equity gap and provide the support that our students deserve."

"I'm passionate about this work because there are so many issues in higher ed that feel unsolvable. Seeing the relationships that younger students make with their older classmates and hearing from them the ways that that relationship makes a difference in their lives helps me see the impact of this work on what feels like the big, intractable problem of college access and success. I'm convinced that high-quality peer mentorship is a critical part of the solution and that makes me excited to come to work every day."

"This summer I reconnected with a Let's Get Ready student who I knew from her high school experience - she immigrated to the US from Haiti after the earthquake and had to quickly learn English and succeed in high school. LGR played a small role in her significant accomplishments, including her graduation (as Salutatorian) from City College. She is now at the start of her early childhood career and I am so inspired by her and by the thousands of other LGR students - that is why I'm passionate about this work."

"With the inequities built into the testing and college process, LGR leverages its resources to even out the playing field for students who are most vulnerable in the college going process. In doing so, with the help of college students, the mentoring support a student receives could be invaluable to the decisions they make as they maneuver the process and ultimately close the gap of inequality in higher education."

"For me - I really wish I had had a service like this growing up since I was the first in my family to go to college. It's really lovely to be able to give back something I didn't have access to."

What impacts have you made in the local community?

Since our founding in 1998, we have served more than 35,000 students and have achieved tremendous results. In order to assess our impact and best serve our students, we track and benchmark a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data. This includes (but is not limited to) program attendance and participation, engagement with coaches and mentors, changes in SAT scores between baseline diagnostic and final exams, and student satisfaction and changes in knowledge and confidence regarding the SAT, applications, and the college process. We also track students' college enrollment (and college choices), persistence, and graduation using data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and other sources, and we obtain data on SAT performance from the College Board.

A recent independent study confirmed that participants in Let's Get Ready significantly improve their SAT scores, learn about colleges that are a good fit, and complete their admissions and financial aid applications. They acquire skills, knowledge and confidence that help them transition to college and go on to earn a degree. Each year, approximately 85% of LGR students enroll in college, as opposed to half of students from similar backgrounds; of those students who enroll in college, 85% enroll in a four-year school and 15% enroll in a two-year program. Approximately 70% of LGR students graduate from college within six years, compared to about 15% of peers from similar backgrounds. More than 90% of students report building a

positive relationship with a near-peer Coach or Site Director and 91% would recommend LGR to a friend.

What makes your organization stand out as distinct?

Let's Get Ready stands apart from other college access and success programs in a number of ways. First, near-peer mentoring model harnesses the motivation and talent of college students from the community, meticulously trained to administer LGR's specially designed curriculum. These Coaches are the heart of our model and the key to our success — they have the intimate knowledge of the college application process as they've just lived through it themselves and can meet students "at their level." Additionally, many come from similar backgrounds as the students we serve and can therefore build trust and strong relationships very quickly.

Another component that makes us distinct is that there are no academic requirements to participation, and all programs are free. This means that there are really no barriers to becoming an LGR student and as such we are able to serve many students who have college aspirations but might not be eligible for, or have access to, other programs. Prior to enrollment, students complete a very short application and are asked to self-identify as coming from a low-income background (i.e. qualifying for free or reduced price lunch) and whether they will be in the first generation in their family to attend college. Priority is given to students who check one or both of these boxes, but we keep a waitlist of all other students and in almost every case we are able to serve everyone who signs up. Additionally, we have a broad geographic reach and in many communities where we operate, we are often the only full spectrum college access and success program available to the students we serve.

Finally, our program is low-cost to implement, highly adaptable, and highly scalable. These are critical attributes in our constantly changing world, and have been especially valuable over the past few weeks as we navigate the unprecedented circumstances that our students are facing with the disruption of the coronavirus. We have been able to move quickly to switch our in-person programs online, to continue to deliver our virtual programs, and to increase content and add resources and information to our curriculum to make sure that students have the support they need to get through this challenging time and stay on track to earn their college degrees. We are also working with a number of partners and funders to potentially ramp up programming to serve additional students who could really use mentoring and extra guidance and support at this time.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.