

Cap and Gown Get Down

Grant Type

Annual Grant

Application Type

Final Application

Project Manager 1 Name

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Project Manager 1 Status

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Project Manager 1 Department

Thrive Center

Project Manager 2 Name

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Student

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Project Manager 2 Role

Co-lead

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Project Advisor Department

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SSRI

Requested Funding Amount

Enter numbers only. Only enter this number after completing the budget sheet, as the budget template will round up your request.

Annual Grants may request \$10,000 up to \$50,000.

Year 1:

\$29200

Project Name

Cap and Gown Get Down

Primary Project Category

Social Sustainability

Secondary Project Category

Sustainable Sourcing

Background and Context

This section can be used to share information about the team and the context for the project, while the questions below provide space to go into detail about the proposal.

Your response should include:

- Relevant background about your organization or team, including its mission and expertise.*
- An explanation of how the project is new, or how it complements, builds upon, or scales existing initiatives.*

Response:

Financial Wellness, an initiative under the Thrive Center/Dean of Students, approaches its mission in supporting student wellbeing through a holistic approach by recognizing the diverse identities, lived experiences, and challenges that shape academic and personal journeys for students. In response, Financial Wellness (FinWell) has been designed to provide opportunities for our students to develop and build on skills, knowledge, and confidence in their financial well-being to make informed

decisions during higher education and beyond. As a team, our expertise lies in delivering accessible and interactive financial education through collaborative learning, individualized guidance with students, and customized presentations that allow us to meet the specific needs of diverse student groups, like first-generation and low-income college students.

The rationale for this new proposed project is that financial insecurity can alter student experiences, including those leading to graduation. These challenges disproportionately affect students from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities, amplifying inequities in academic and wellness outcomes. During Fall and Spring semesters, as graduations near, the FinWell team engages in the Last Mile Grant (LMG) process. This grant is for students in their final semesters who have utilized all their financial aid and have a lingering balance on their account. Through this, we have seen the number of students who need further financial support as graduation looms, to which regalia for the occasion may become an afterthought for this group of students. For these reasons, the Cap and Gown Get Down project aims to alleviate some of the stress, financial burden, and other significant weight that purchasing regalia may bring. Aside from the financial lens, the sustainability component is amplified by those who have the means to purchase this often one-time use item, which then gets disposed of almost immediately.

FinWell creates and implements programming from a first-generation college student lens, which knowingly designs projects that build help-seeking skills for students to use. Even as students have been navigating the higher education system before graduation, there is no checklist associated with graduation celebration or participation. This project will promote a culture of celebrating the navigation skills, persistence, and determination that many students have as they approach graduation. More importantly, through a financial sustainability lens.

Project Description, Alignment, and Metrics

Please describe your project, explain how it supports the university's sustainability goals, and identify the metrics you will use to demonstrate its impact. In a later section, you will have the opportunity to provide more narrative on environmental and social sustainability impacts.

The proposal must align with at least one goal from the university's draft Sustainability and Climate Action Plan. The proposal must also include output- and/or outcome-focused metrics, along with the Campus Sustainability Fund's required standardized metrics, and context on how metrics will be tracked. Review standardized metrics, Action Plan goals, and output/outcome metrics to inform this response.

Your response must include:

- A thorough, clear, and compelling project description.*
- Identification of one or more specific Action Plan goals to which the project is directly aligned.*
- Strong output- or outcome-focused metrics that demonstrate tangible impact, along with the Campus Sustainability Fund's required standardized metrics.*
- An explanation of what will change as a result of the project.*

Response:

The Cap and Gown Get Down is a pilot program with the purpose of establishing a sustainable recycling program for graduation regalia. For many students, graduation is something that is planned for including access to purchasing required regalia. However, for many students, financial

constraints and timing can hinder the celebration of their graduation achievements.

The origination of this idea sprouted from the 5-7 remaining “free” graduation caps and gowns from early funding from Arizona Assurance Program. As funding is now dedicated to assisting students directly with funding into their bursar accounts to cover their cost of attendance semester to semester. Although this effort was short lived as there was no available funding to purchase new gowns directly from the Campus Bookstore, the need amongst students was still there. This new effort is a pivot from the purchasing of new gowns and focuses on aiding students with items in a timely and cost-effective manner through the implementation of a feasible and sustainable program plan.

The logistics for this pilot program are straight forward as this first phase would call for gathering and maintaining a maximum of 400 gowns. To avoid gown loss over time, gowns will be embroidered. They will be numbered using this technique and associated with student name (and their non-UA) contact as gowns are checked out. Furthermore, we have created a request form for students to complete upon participation in the program. This request form will collect data that will determine the impact of the program. One question on the request form will be “If this program were not available, how would you obtain your graduation regalia?”. We will also send out a post-participation survey that will collect the graduation year, degree, and track if the gown is returned. We will also collect two additional pieces of information through the following questions: If this program were not available, would you have participated in graduation ceremonies? And how much of a financial burden did this program relieve you?

Storage of these gowns would be in the Thrive Center, located in the Student Success District. This initiative aims to implement knowledge and skills from FinWell Fast Fashions series and incorporate hemming and repairing gowns when needed.

Funding is being requested to execute the collecting, washing, fixing, and ironing of as many gowns as we can obtain from the Spring 2026 graduation, with a small amount of funding to purchase new undergraduate and graduate level regalia. Most of the funding would be going to the student staffing needed and OPS for the Financial Wellness professional staff member overseeing the student staffers.

Data collected will be in the form of a request system that will gather student information to provide this data back to university administration to better understand which student are in need of support to celebrate their graduation and to assist administration in understanding that being part of the Arizona Wildcat journey also means support up and through graduation, especially from a financial lens.

There are a range of students who are in need of regalia, often students who are international/out of state, independent (or self-supporting) and non-traditional students who are obtaining their first undergraduate degree.

Timeline

Please provide a timeline that outlines the key steps of your project. The timeline may be provided in list or narrative format. Your response must include:

- Anticipated timeframes for when major activities will begin and be completed.
- Identification of critical deadlines or milestones that must be met.

Response:

The timeline for this grant is a little off from what would be ideal, however it is still possible to complete.

March 2026- May 2026-soft launch of marketing materials to colleges/departments requesting students to recycle their regalia after 2026 convocations. Financial Wellness team to execute this part prior to grant funding being available. Collection of these items will be housed in the Thrive Center or with Campus Closet until Student Worker can be hired.

May 2026- June 15th 2026- Post summer position for student worker (15 hours starting July 2026).

July 1, 2026- Start training Student Worker. Sort and send for cleaning. Purchase of materials for storing and collecting of gowns for 2026-2027 academic year.

August 2026- Promotion of available regalia for student to use for Fall 2026 graduation ceremonies/photo ops.

September- November 2026: collect information regarding student needs for graduation regalia. Promotion of marketing materials to all colleges/departments.

December 2026- place bins at graduation ceremonies for Fall graduates

January 2027- Mend, clean, and steam collected gowns.

February 2027- May 2027: Disburse gowns for use during photos and ceremonies. Inform recipients to return their regalia to the bins once done using them.

May 2027- June 2027. Mend, clean, and steam collected gowns.

Project Feasibility and Logistics

Please describe the steps you have taken to ensure your project is feasible, including work completed to date, and any necessary approvals that have been obtained or partnerships that have been formalized.

If relevant partners have been coordinated with, please identify them in your response. If you have received authorization to complete your project, such as from Facilities Management/ Parking and Transportation, please indicate those collaborators. If the proposed project will make modifications to campus, please address if you have written authorization or official quotes from Facilities Management to accurately identify the cost of labor and supplies.

Your response must include:

- The steps that have been taken to ensure the proposal can be successfully completed.
- Any necessary approvals, authorizations, or partnerships that have been secured.

Response:

Presently, we have obtained two letters of support from key campus partners. First is Presidential Events and Ceremonies, a key partnership. Monthly, they have meetings with general and event coordinators from each department and share information that is disseminated to graduating students. This partnership was initially established as Thrive Center's First Cat Initiatives delivers first-generation college student graduate pins to multiple departments/colleges. This is the basis for our promotion of the project, the collection of gowns, and serves as the key feedback that we need to get this pilot program more inscribed into the fabric of preparing students for graduation. More importantly, this partnership is crucial to be able to place bins at the larger convocation exits to increase the number of gowns collected. The collection of these gowns for both the 2026 and 2027 graduating class is what we will use to request funding from other entities, like Helios Education Foundation or Tucson Foundations, to sustain this program beyond the pilot.

Partnership with Campus Closet is in place to support the project on two different levels. Campus Closet has tried for years to get a similar program up and running but lacked support for professional staff and student staff. With Financial Wellness moving under the Dean of Student's office, where Campus Closet is housed, this pilot project is entering a prime time to be executed, sustained, and possibly shelved if campus support or community funding is not available or secured in time to continue year to year. Campus Closet has tried to establish this project for years and has not been able to clear the red tap with the financial service policies that state that money cannot be used to purchase "personal items" for students. Although graduation regalia is classified as "personal use", recycled regalia is a workaround to establishing a sustainable option and financial fit option for students and their given/chosen supporters.

The feasibility of the project comes from obtaining data and documentation of student need. As stated above, this is not a new concept on campus, presently, the Graduate and Professional Student Council has a program for Graduate students to rent out their regalia; however, their program seems to be undergoing changes as they have not been responsive to our requests to partner. By blending the roles and responsibilities of the partnerships listed above, this pilot year will serve as a determining factor for how the Cap and Gown Get Down project can fulfill the needs of multiple students. The need for this program ranges in the students that will be served, as a variety of students with diverse backgrounds will benefit and establish a common identity will be established celebrated Arizona Wildcat graduate.

Budget Narrative

Provide justification of the funds (personnel and operational) requested in your budget sheet and how they support your project's goals. If requesting personnel funding, describe the position, responsibilities, and timeline. If your team has matching or supporting funds, identify the source, amount, and their purpose. Your response must include:

- A reasonable, clear budget that is aligned with project goals.
- Sufficient justification for all requested expenses.
- Identification of any matching or supporting funds, including their amount and purpose.

Response:

Most of the funding is going to support a student staff worker (\$10,395) to establish the project outline, agenda, and marketing plan that can be used in future years. The responsibilities of this student worker will be to facilitate the day-to-day needs of the project including documenting the hours needed for promoting, cleaning, maintaining, and sorting the collected gowns. As gowns are gathered and eventually disbursed, this student will establish the distribution process of the gowns including inventory, student contact information, and department/college specific contact information for future needs as the project grows.

\$7,915.00 will be utilized for purchasing hamper bins, closing hangers, steamer and clothing racks, and other supplies to store and preserve gown quality. These can be repurposed with for everyday use by Campus Closet (in future semesters) if the project does not generate enough buy in. With the purchase of these materials from this grant, this project has sustainability within its own as the materials being purchased will have a future use. \$4780 is tagged for cleaning and steaming 400 gowns, as this is a pilot project, this number was obtained from calculating the most recent graduates in Spring 2025 (over 9,000 of which 6,000 were undergraduate per UAIR) and the 30.3 % Pell eligible students per year (First Cat Professional Development training with Thrive), 400 gown accounts for 1 in 4 students donating their gowns.

Presently, there is no matching funding outside of the requested grant; however, this project is designed to only need initial funding. Outside of cleaning the recycled gowns obtained, this project can eventually shift to cleaning and steaming future gowns on their own. Graduation gowns cannot be washed or dry cleaned, and for this reason, collecting recycled gowns is the only way to use institutional funding.

Environmental and Social Sustainability Impact

Please provide a narrative description as to how your project will advance environmental and social sustainability on campus. Environmental impact can take many forms, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving water, improving energy efficiency, managing waste responsibly, or enhancing biodiversity and ecological health. Social sustainability can include strengthening food security, improving health and well-being, addressing disproportionate burdens on frontline communities, building community resilience, or fostering a sense of belonging. Please review how the CSF defines both environmental and social sustainability on its Guides and Tips webpage.

Your response must include:

- Clear identification of environmental and social sustainability benefits.

Response:

This project is rooted in sustainability and social sustainability. Beyond assisting students with a creative and frugal way to obtain needed graduation regalia, this program also centers the need to recycle clothing that is made and promoted to be a one-time only use. In working with Sparkles Cleaners, they have committed to assisting the project by adhering to clothing tag instructions for “no dry cleaning or washing”. They have provided instructions on how these gowns can be reused through steam cleaning services they offer.

Social sustainability changes are also rooted in the request for funding of this project. Currently, there are only a tiny number of regalia available for undergraduate students to be borrowed. These pieces have been housed in the former cultural/resource centers and presently are unaccounted because of recent restructuring. The Thrive Center used to have over 30 cap and gown bundles available for Arizona Assurance Scholars and in recent years, they have depleted to less than 7 left, many of which are too small for most people who connect with our center to use.

Marketing around “you could be the 1 in 4 to donate your gown” will be used to promote a sustainability message and a building of a “giving back” culture within the graduating community on campus.

Student Relevance and Involvement

Please describe how your project will demonstrate relevance to students and provide broad benefit to the student body. This benefit may come through direct involvement in project activities, indirect outcomes that improve the student experience, or opportunities for education and engagement. If students will participate in planning, implementation, or leadership, include details on their roles and responsibilities, as well as how you will recruit, solicit, or market these opportunities.

Your response must include:

- An explanation of how the project will benefit or involve students.
- A description of meaningful opportunities for student leadership or professional development, if applicable.

Response:

This project revolves around students. Their primary form of involvement is to either donate or be the recipient of graduation regalia. Although temporary and essentially a small gesture, a students' involvement can be active in donating their used regalia or passive by helping to spread the word that this project is underway.

The student worker that is looking to jump start this project can build their portfolio in a variety of ways. First, by advocating for the students who would be in financial constraint if they had to purchase their entire regalia package out of pocket. Next, they can establish a project that could be sustained beyond the first years' work and with little effort if the documented plan is executed in a manner that best utilizes the grant money. And finally, the student will be able to demonstrate working from starting to finish a grant project that will have financial, environmental, and social sustainability on the University campus. Not to mention, the student will be compensated for their time and effort, including work over the summer, which is not often available for students.

Although the primary role of assessment and data collection will be the responsibilities of the professional staff, the student worker will be hands on with understanding the function of the project and help to document the journey and the impact that will have on students. The student worker will have the opportunity to present this project at future conferences like the Arizona HSI consortium and the Financial Wellness Conference that Financial Wellness will host in Spring 2027.

Education, Outreach, and Behavior Change

Please describe how your project will provide opportunities for the campus community to learn about sustainability. Explain how the project will educate or engage individuals, including those not currently involved in sustainability efforts, and how it will incorporate outreach or behavior change strategies. Include how you plan to communicate the project's impacts to the wider campus community.

Your response must include:

- How you will educate the campus community about sustainability.*
- An explanation of how you will communicate the project's impacts to the wider campus community.*

Response:

There is no place on campus that is actively making the connection to reusing one time clothing like graduation regalia and financial/social sustainability. The effort that will be put into this project will involve the heavy lifting upfront within this first pilot year. The gradual growth of this project will eventually be housed in Campus Closet, where the campus community can see the impact of this project each year. As word spreads through campus, especially with a generation of students who have experienced drastic documented climate change, a low effort project like this can help dissolve the stigma of "used clothing" as a faux pas on the University campus. Communication and marketing will also aim to influence donations from target audience groups within the Community Cultural Hub. Support from the community will also be geared towards reaching out to UArizona alumni for used cap and gown donations. As of right now, we have 15 gowns and hope to grow this amount. Further outreach for gowns will be extended to UAHA alumni, Fraternity & Sorority Programs Alumni, and alumni from UArizona Community Cultural Hubs.

Throughout this pilot year, promotion and marketing will be used to highlight two important areas of this project: sustainability efforts and financial wellness. These impacts are constantly cited as a need in higher educational spaces, and the University of Arizona has the community built a campus cultural shift to promote both.