

FRIENDS OF WHEELS STRATEGIC PLAN 2021–2026

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The Friends
of WHEELS Team



OUR HISTORY

Founded to ensure all WHEELS students have the best options for college and beyond.

Friends of WHEELS was founded by teachers and leaders from the Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School, a public, district, unscreened preK–12 school. We are one of the few NYC nonprofit organizations dedicated to supporting all of its students—not just the highest-performing—to identify and persist in reaching their college and future goals.

Friends of WHEELS began by serving the first class of WHEELS graduates in 2012 and has served 750 students and alumni in the years since.



100%

of WHEELS students who
have applied to
college have received at
least one acceptance

88%

College matriculation rate
(first fall enrollment)
for WHEELS students

This is more than
18% higher than the
citywide average

70%

of the class of 2012 have
completed their bachelor's
degree within 6 years

This is more than
double the national
average for first
generation students!



Our Mission:

Friends of WHEELS amplifies youth and community power by inspiring, guiding, and advocating for youth to determine their college, career, and leadership futures.

Our Vision:

Friends of WHEELS envisions equitable preK–college opportunities that propel all youth to thrive in postsecondary life and strengthen our communities.

Our Core Values:

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY We will work to change the deep educational inequities rooted in systemic racial and socioeconomic segregation, lifting up every child’s right to a quality education.

RACIAL JUSTICE We will work to undo the structural racism that permeates every part of our society in order to build a just and equitable future in which all people can reach their full potential.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP We will work to ensure that young people’s voices are included in the decisions that affect their communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE We will work to combat climate change by improving the environmental conditions in Washington Heights and Northern Manhattan.

COMMUNITY We will work to create and sustain community partnerships to win results and spark change, rooted in our commitment to Washington Heights.



WHY WE EXIST

College and career pathways are deeply inequitable.

Underrepresented students—BIPOC youth, youth from low-income communities and first generation college students—face significant institutional obstacles at every step of the journey to access college and career opportunities that align with their goals and dreams for adulthood.

And at the same time, youth bring many assets to solving complex social issues. Communities benefit when organizations like Friends of WHEELS provide youth with robust opportunities to contribute, advocate and organize.

1:221

Average ratio of college counselors to students in NYC public schools

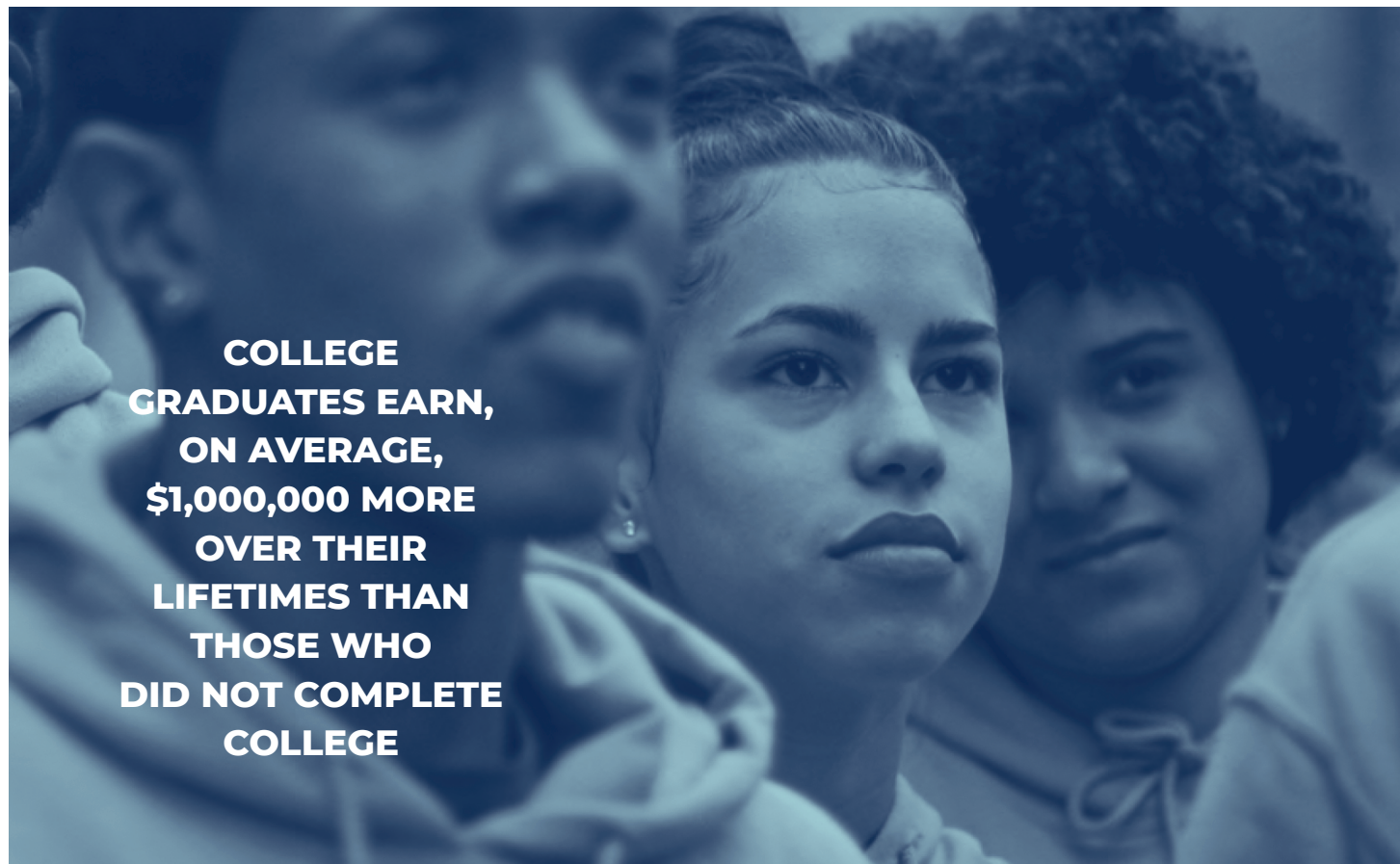
LESS THAN

1 in 3

National graduation rate for first generation college students

COLLEGE GRADUATES EARN, ON AVERAGE, \$1,000,000 MORE OVER THEIR LIFETIMES THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT COMPLETE COLLEGE

YOUTH VOICES ARE FAR TOO OFTEN UNDERVALUED AND UNDERLEVERAGED



Building on eight years of impact-driven experience, we will leverage three strategies to achieve our goals.

1

STRATEGY:

**DEEPEN OUR
WORK WITHIN
WHEELS**

- We will provide a trajectory of experiences for WHEELS students to include leadership development training and mentoring, while matching students with an external paid work-based learning opportunity and after school and summer enrichment experiences.
- We will spearhead a new alumni program model, training alumni as peer mentors, as well as mentoring WHEELS students, while connecting WHEELS alumni with a career-focused mentoring community of professionals.
- We will support the development of external partnerships for the preK–8th grade, as we look ahead to 2027 to launch a full preK–12 program.

2

STRATEGY:

**GENERATE
A REPLICABLE
MODEL**

- We will conduct an evaluation of our model with an external research partner.
- We will develop a toolbox for others to advance equitable postsecondary pathways, leverage and expand youth leadership and advocate for and secure additional resources.
- We will generate resources, technical assistance tools and trainings for other youth, schools and communities to achieve greater impact for more young people.

3

STRATEGY:

**EXPAND OUR
REACH BEYOND
WHEELS**

- We will support youth leadership to build a Clean Air Green Corridor in the community, improving environmental justice in Washington Heights and developing a model of youth-led climate justice for other schools and communities- and youth-led community development.
- In collaboration with Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) in Canada, based on nine years of groundbreaking YPI programming led by WHEELS teachers, we will launch YPI NYC, reaching 20 high schools in NYC through the program.
- We will expand our work to and lead our program with two other Washington Heights high schools.

By 2026, our key actions will result in the following achievements:

DEEPEN
OUR WORK
WITHIN
WHEELS

1

Work-based learning and leadership development will be included as essential activities of college and career access.

GENERATE
A REPLICABLE
MODEL


2

All NYC high schools will have access to a universal model of college access, career and post-secondary support.

EXPAND
OUR REACH
BEYOND
WHEELS

3

More high school students in Northern Manhattan will experience improved leadership and post-secondary outcomes.

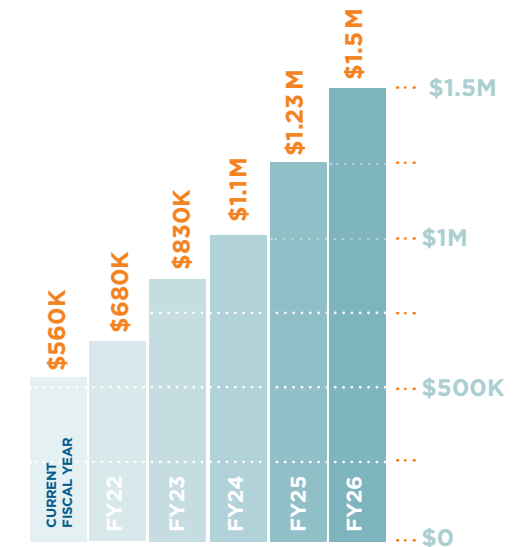
A photograph of four diverse high school students standing in a library. From left to right: a young man in a dark polo shirt, a young woman in a light-colored top, a young man in a dark suit and bow tie, and a young woman in a light-colored top and glasses. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books.

"I HAVE CONCRETE
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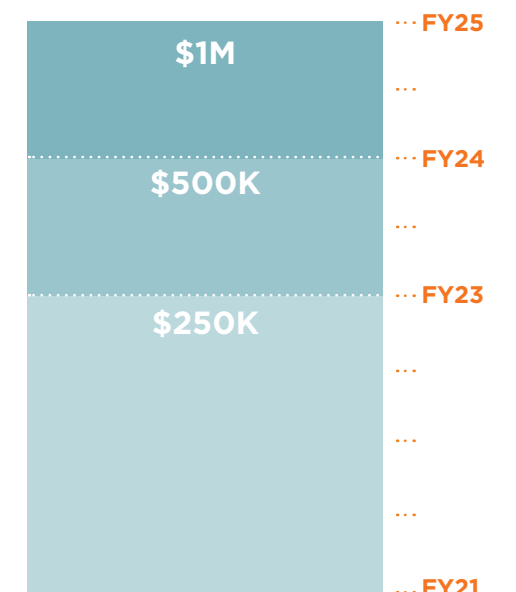
OUR FUTURE: KEY STEPS & TIMELINE

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1 DEEPEN OUR WORK WITHIN WHEELS	Implement first phase of leadership, work-based learning and mentoring for WHEELS students	Implement second phase of leadership, work-based learning and mentoring for WHEELS students	All WHEELS high school students participate in comprehensive leadership, work-based learning and mentoring	Secure ten new partnerships for WHEELS Lower and Middle Grades	Achieve increased post-secondary and leadership and wellness outcomes with 1,500 WHEELS students and alumni
2 GENERATE A REPLICABLE MODEL	Develop proprietary curriculum	Develop proprietary toolbox of resources	Launch 3 year program evaluation	Generate income through sharing our toolbox	Complete evaluation and disseminate results
3 EXPAND OUR REACH BEYOND WHEELS	Rebrand and identify new name, logo and brand identity	Launch YPI NYC	Secure long-term facilities in Washington Heights; expand Corridor work and YPI; identify two new partner high schools to scale our model	Launch program model at two Washington Heights high schools	Achieve full vision for the Clean Air Green Corridor; Reach 20 high schools with YPI; and, achieve significant results with two new high school partners, serving 1000 students in new school communities in Washington Heights

Operating budget:
We will achieve a 30% growth rate over the next five years.



Impact revenue:
We will generate \$1M additional revenue to build reserves and impact capital.



THE FRIENDS OF WHEELS TEAM

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Staff

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Molly Delano <i>Executive Director</i>
Lisa LoFaso <i>Director of Postsecondary Pathways</i>
Sittra Omer <i>Fund Development and Communications Manager</i>
Rocco Rosselli <i>Lead College Counselor</i>

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