

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

COLLEGE
BOUND AZ



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collegeboundaz.org

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Leadership Message

For nearly two decades, College Bound AZ has walked beside students as they pursue brighter futures through education. What began as a grassroots effort to help students navigate college access has grown into a powerful persistence engine serving students across Maricopa County.

Embedded at East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT), the College Bound AZ RISE Scholars program serves students from multiple school districts, charter schools, homeschool environments, and underserved communities. Our work extends beyond helping students enroll in college. We remain committed to helping students persist, complete credentials, and transition successfully into meaningful careers.

This year, College Bound AZ supported hundreds of students through college access advising, FAFSA completion, scholarship assistance, career readiness activities, laptop scholarships, food insecurity supports, and workforce pathway development.

In 2026, we launched our Tech for Tomorrow E-Waste Initiative, transforming donated technology into educational opportunity while promoting sustainability and workforce innovation.

Every scholarship awarded, every laptop provided, every FAFSA completed, and every student mentored represents a future changed.

To our students, donors, partners, volunteers, and supporters — thank you for believing in the power of education.

Together, we are building futures.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Paulus".

Liz Paulus, Founder

Mission and Vision

Our Mission

College Bound AZ is a community resource that shares the journey to and through college with underrepresented students through scholarships, guidance, mentorship, and educational support resources for their advancement to a better future through education.

Our Vision

We envision a future where every student, regardless of income, background, disability, or circumstance, has equitable access to higher education, workforce credentials, and meaningful career opportunities.



Our Model

College Access and Persistence Support

College Bound AZ provides comprehensive college access and persistence support that helps students navigate the path to higher education and beyond. Our services include FAFSA completion assistance, college admissions guidance, scholarship navigation, and college transition coaching to remove barriers and increase opportunity. Through ongoing persistence and retention support, we help students overcome challenges that can derail their educational goals.

Student Resource Assistance

Laptop and tuition-assistance scholarships, and other emergency supports students receive the assistance needed to stay enrolled and focused on their goals. Our Fueling Minds with Heart program provides food and basic necessities, while Bright Paths offers specialized support for students with disabilities and neurodiverse needs. Together, these resources create a strong foundation for academic persistence, well-being, and long-term success.

This Year In Review

243

STUDENTS TRANSITIONED TO A NEXT SCHOOL!

We're celebrating the 243 students who selected a "next school", whether a 2 or 4-year college, a trade school, or even the military. They are attending 27 next schools coast to coast, from the University of Oregon to Bluefield State University, WV.

45% will attend one of Arizona's three state universities, 15% will attend a private university, and 38% will attend a community college. Two students are attending a trade school and two have joined the military.

30 college-ready laptops will accompany our students, along with 29 direct tuition-assistance scholarships. The scholarships range from \$1,000 to \$2,500, with some being multiyear awards. Four new scholarship opportunities were established this year, providing targeted support for students pursuing careers in aviation and veterinary science, as well as students of Native American heritage. An Arizona America250 scholarship was also awarded to celebrate America's proud heritage.

Overall, **\$8.3 million** in financial awards supports the RISE Scholars Class of 2026.



Demographics

College Bound AZ serves students whose determination, talent, and perseverance inspire us every day. They represent the next generation of leaders, innovators, and changemakers who are building stronger families, stronger communities, and a brighter future for Arizona.

.....

GENDER

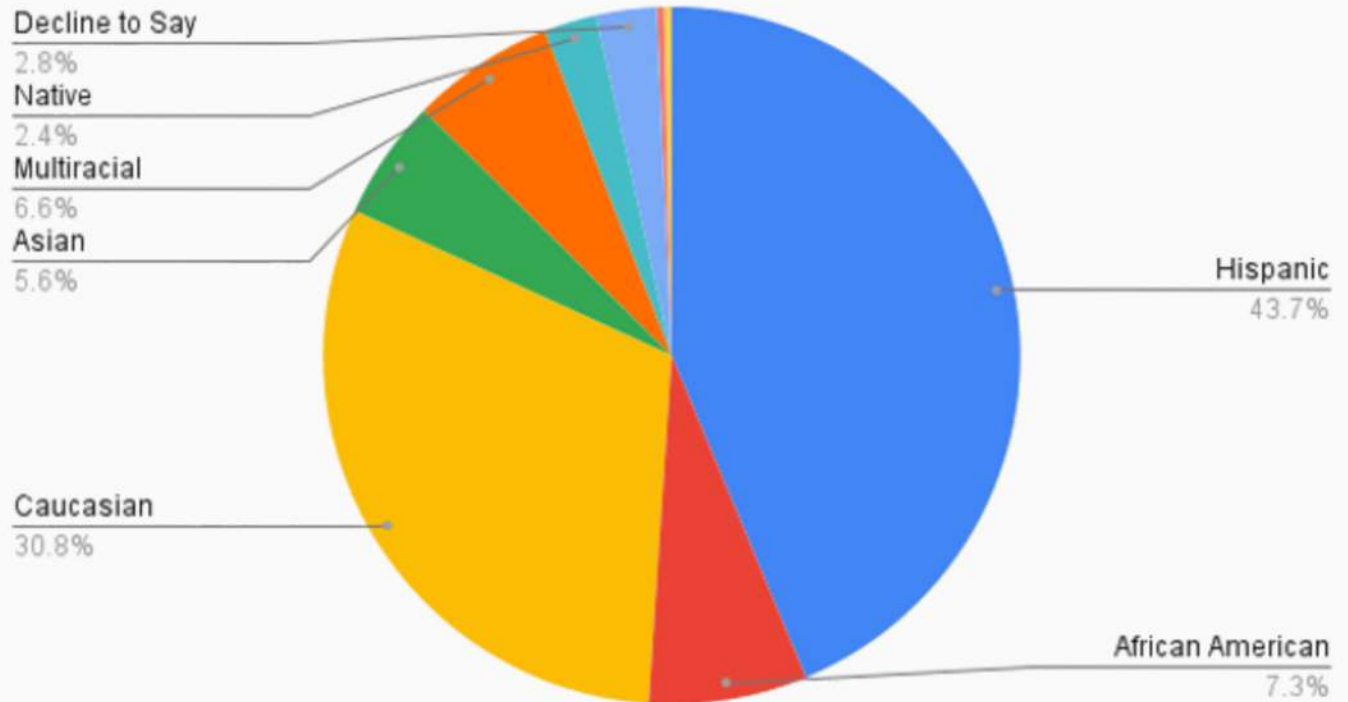
28% Male



72% Female



ETHNICITY



SERVING OUR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

College Bound AZ's model is specifically designed to support students facing significant barriers to education.

Our wrap-around supports are essential for a student body that includes and is not limited to:

52% First Generation

18% Special Needs

CITIES WHERE STUDENTS RESIDE

College Bound AZ is located at the East Valley Institute of Technology, the crossroad of an education ecosystem. Through this relationship, we are able to serve students from 11 school districts, charter schools, and those homeschooled. They come from more than a dozen different cities, including:

40%	Mesa
16%	Gilbert
14%	Chandler
8%	Phoenix
5%	Tempe
4%	Queen Creek
4%	San Tan Valley



Scholarship and Student Supports

College Bound AZ believes that even modest financial barriers can prevent talented students from completing college.

This year, we strategically coordinated scholarships, tuition assistance, laptops, emergency support, and wraparound services designed to keep students enrolled and progressing toward completion.

STUDENT SUPPORT AREAS

- Laptop scholarships
- Tuition-gap assistance
- FAFSA workshops
- Scholarship coaching
- Food and hygiene supports
- Peer mentoring
- Referrals for family support



FUELING MINDS WITH HEART

The Fueling Minds with Heart initiative continued providing food insecurity support through grab-and-go food items, weekend support bags, hygiene resources, and student-centered care.

These services not only meet basic needs but also increase trust, belonging, and persistence among students navigating educational challenges.

MEALS SERVED: 3,534



BRIGHT PATHS

At College Bound AZ, we are dedicated to creating pathways to college for all students, including those with disabilities, learning differences, neurodiverse needs, and other barriers that may impact educational success. Through Bright Paths, we provide guidance, resources, and support to help students navigate the transition to postsecondary education and access the accommodations and services they need to thrive.

As a Certified Autism Center, our support connects families and their students to the Disability Resource Center at their next school, and also provides a unique scholarship for aspiring students.



CAREER PATHS

College Bound AZ students pursue a wide range of educational and career pathways aligned with Arizona's workforce needs.

TOP AREAS OF INTEREST

- Nursing and Health Care
- Engineering and STEM
- Aviation and Aerospace
- Information Technology
- Behavioral Health
- Education



How Your Support was Invested

Total FY 2025–2026 Educational Expenses: \$182,358

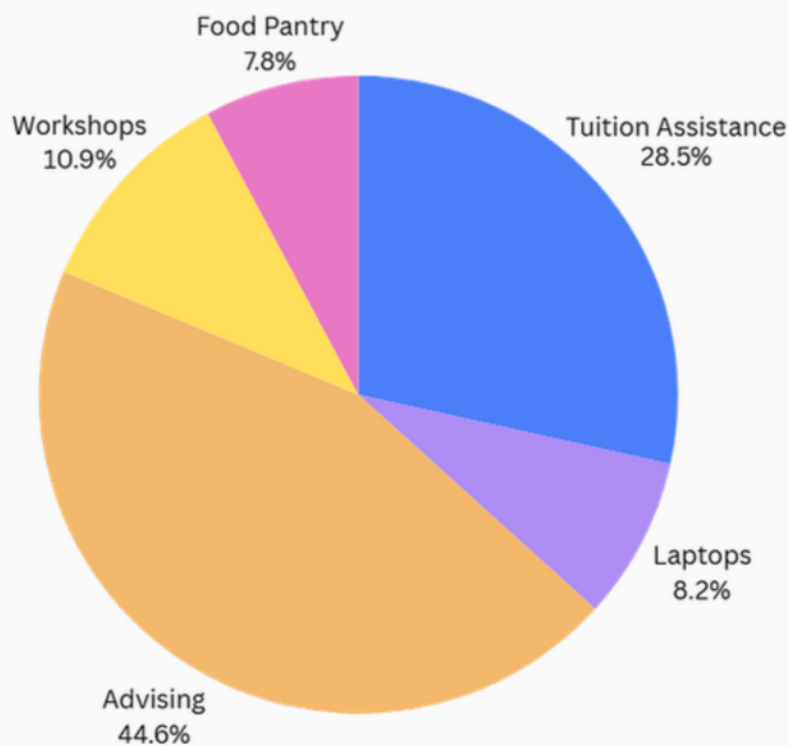
Scholarships,
Tuition-assistance: \$51,950

Scholarships, Laptops: \$15,000

Student Workshops: \$19,813

Advising: \$81,329

Fueling Minds with Heart Food Pantry: \$14,257



Tech for Tomorrow: E-Waste Initiative

In 2026, College Bound AZ launched the Tech for Tomorrow E-Waste Initiative as an innovative sustainability and technology access strategy.



The initiative collects donated technology equipment from businesses and community partners, helping divert electronic waste from landfills while generating educational opportunity. We can:

- Expand access to affordable student technology
- Promote environmental sustainability
- Build corporate partnerships

The first major collection effort with Vantage West Credit Union and partner Bits n' Bytes Computers demonstrated strong community interest and established a foundation for future expansion.

College Bound AZ

Student Success: Angel Mendez Solis

Angel Mendez Solis' quiet demeanor belies his ambitious goal.



A 4.0 student attending Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Angel received both a STEM tuition-assistance scholarship and a laptop scholarship through College Bound AZ. "Laptops run about \$700, so getting this is a pretty big deal for my family," Angel shared.

Access to technology remains one of the most important factors supporting student persistence in higher education. Community support helps ensure students begin college equipped for success.

Community Partners

We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners, whose unwavering support is the bedrock of our success. Your generosity has created tangible change in the lives of our students and their families, and we are honored to be part of a community so committed to our mission.

A Special Thank You...



East Valley Institute of Technology

EVIT has been a vital partner in many ways, from providing us office space and utilities, to allowing us to meet with our RISE Scholars during school hours. Their support allows us to reach 300-400 students each year.



Arizona State University

As one of the nation's largest universities and generous supporter of College Bound AZ, ASU has been a sponsor for our galas and provided peer mentors for our student success. Their strong financial support programs for low-income students bear witness to their charter which establishes inclusivity as a core value.



Mesa West Rotary

One of the foundational concepts of Mesa West Rotary is support of youth. Each year Mesa West Rotary sponsors three scholarships for our RISE Scholars program, removing a major barrier to student success.



A business organization with a philanthropic heart, BNI Foothills Sharks members contributed a refrigerator to grow the food pantry's available items. We now offer cold and frozen items. Members donate regularly to keep food in supply for growing young minds.



College Bound AZ is grateful for Bits n' Bytes Computers, whose leadership and expertise have helped transform our Tech for Tomorrow E-Waste Initiative into a meaningful community impact program. Together, we show how innovative partnerships can protect the environment, bridge the digital divide, and create brighter futures for the students and families we serve.



Coax Consulting

College Bound AZ has been remarkably blessed by the partnership of two exceptional marketing firms working in tandem to advance our mission. Maxify Marketing generously donated the design and development of our website, creating a digital home that reflects our commitment to Equity Through Education and the students we serve.

Every student success story deserves an audience. Through the generous donation of their time, creativity, and professional expertise, COAX Consulting helps College Bound AZ share stories of hope, perseverance, and achievement. Their partnership amplifies our voice, inspires community investment, and advances our mission of Equity Through Education.



Vantage West Credit Union joined the College Bound AZ family this year by being the first corporation to donate significantly to our E-Waste program. The revenue from this donation will allow more students to receive laptops in the future. They also supported our White and Gold Celebration with gifts and words of encouragement for each graduate.

Commercial Partners

Sun State Builders	Art of Framing
The Structures Group	Eves Pet Hospital
Kroger	Franz Bakery
The Arizona Republic	
FiberFirst	
Moses SEO	
Cuties Lemonade	
Blue Cross and Blue Shield	

Nonprofit Organizations

Midwest Food Bank	Beatty Martinez Foundation
Arizona Career Pathways	
Valley of the Sun United Way	
Otto and Edna Neely Foundation	
Tempe Diablos	
Benedictine University	
Positive Paths	

Cities

City of Mesa

Scholarship Donors

Mesa West Rotary

Matt Watson, State Farm

Eduardo Vidal

O'Lectric (The O'Brien Family)

The Fiechter Family

Douglas and Sandy Larson

The Sneed Family

Super Ready Mix

The Paulus Family

Invest in Our Future

We thank you all for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to workforce development.

At College Bound AZ, every student represents potential—a future nurse, engineer, teacher, skilled professional, or community leader. Your support helps remove barriers and create opportunities that change the trajectory of a student's life through education and workforce training.

Together, we are building stronger families, a stronger workforce, and a brighter future for Arizona. Use the AZ Tax Credit Program to make your impact while reducing your state taxes dollar-for-dollar. We are charity #22096.

What a gift does:

- Provides scholarships
- Funds student laptops
- Supports food insecurity programs



You can also:

- Donate technology to Tech for Tomorrow
- Become a corporate sponsor

Every gift creates opportunity. Every student changes the future.

Acknowledgements

We thank you all for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to workforce development.

College Bound AZ Staff

Elizabeth Paulus
Executive Director

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Director of Development

Board of Directors

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**Turning Dreams into
Degrees**



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