



## Last Mile Education Fund — Fact Sheet

### Mission

The Last Mile Education Fund aims to increase diversity in tech and engineering fields by addressing critical gaps in financial support for low-income women students who are within four semesters of graduation. These students have great potential and are committed to the field, but they often fall into the widening gap between federal financial aid and traditional scholarships, leaving them on the verge of financial insecurity, at risk of dropping out, needing to delay graduation, and unable to take advantage of critical networking and skill-building opportunities.

Last Mile provides rapid, just-in-time funding for financial short-falls or emergencies. It can provide students with \$599 grants within 48 hours of application and far more assistance within a week or two (as needed, upon review). We estimate that for approximately 9,000 of these students each year, emergency and last-mile funding could make the difference between dropping out and completing a degree.

Students who graduate with computing or engineering degrees earn excellent salaries in one of the highest-growth sectors. Investing in 3,000 of these students annually over 10 years will yield a cumulative \$550 million in additional earnings for women by 2033, enabling social mobility and wealth creation, increasing women's contributions to technologies, expanding their leadership and influence, and creating more diverse workplaces.

### Facts about low-income college students and tech careers

- 58% of students with three or more years of college report experiencing basic needs insecurity for food, housing and healthcare. *Source:* [The Hope Center](#)
- The wealthiest students receive 34% more non-federal financial aid per year than the poorest students. That amounts to an average of \$11,300 vs \$7,500 in aid. *Source:* U.S. [Department of Education](#)
- Only 11 percent of students from the lowest income quartile and 20% from the second lowest graduate within six years of starting college, while 58% of all students graduate within six years. *Source:* [Pell Institute](#)
- Affluent students are 8 times more likely to earn a Bachelor's degree by age 24 than low income students. *Source:* [CNN Money](#)
- Low-income students are often unable to purchase all class materials or fully participate in critical resume and skill-building activities like clubs, conferences, and hack-a-thons due to costs or the need to work when those activities take place. *Source:* [Aspirations in Computing Community](#)
- The bulk of scholarships are front-loaded, meaning they help students get started in college rather than help them finish.
- Federal financial aid and a part-time job no longer cover the cost of college, making it nearly impossible for students to work their way through college as they did in past decades.

- A technical degree is the shortest and most cost effective path to a professional level salary, typically requiring just 4 years of college compared to professions like law (7 years) or healthcare (8-12), and offering a salary premium of \$47,170 over the median of all jobs in the US. Source: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- The top paying entry-level jobs are in Computer Science (a 39% premium), Engineering (a 30% premium), and Math and Statistics (a 20% premium). Source: [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#).
- Increasing the number of women tech and engineering graduates to the same level as men could add 132,800 additional graduates to the tech and engineering talent markets each year. Source: [NCES Education Statistics](#)

## Background & Launch

Last Mile Education Fund soft-launched in late 2019, testing the model in partnership with [AnitaB.org](#), and initially investing in 18 young women from minority-serving institutions during the pilot phase. In March 2020, the needs of low-income students escalated dramatically as universities closed their campuses in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic. This left many students stranded without housing, internet, transportation, or even meals. In response, Last Mile immediately ramped up a mini-grant offering to help distressed students, disbursing over \$300,000 to 350 low-income students in 2020.

Last Mile launched publicly on January 13, 2021 with an initial \$3M fund. The Last Mile Education Fund is a fiscally sponsored project of the [Digital Harbor Foundation](#).

## Investors

To date, Last Mile has secured \$4.3 million in funding commitments. The initial funding round drew investments from [Pivotal Ventures](#), former Pinterest executive [Françoise Brougher](#), [Citadel](#), [ReBoot Representation](#), the [Patrick J. McGovern Foundation](#), the Murphy Family Fund, the [Cognizant Foundation](#), [AnitaB.org](#), the [Hopper-Dean Foundation](#), [Capital One](#), [Schmidt Futures](#), the [Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation](#), and [Snap Philanthropy](#).

To capitalize the fund for operations at scale, Last Mile Education Fund is raising \$15M in philanthropic investment over the next 10 years and predicts this investment will catalyze \$25M of additional contributions by alumni, individuals and corporate donors, which will, in total, enable investments in over 38,000 students by 2030.

Announcements about additional investments in the fund will be made this spring.

## Founders

### [Ruthe Farmer](#)

Ruthe Farmer has been advocating for equity and inclusion in technology and engineering since 2001. She is founder and CEO of the Last Mile Education Fund, and Chief Evangelist at [CSforALL](#), and previously served as [Senior Policy Advisor for Tech Inclusion](#) at the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy focusing on President Obama's call to action for Computer Science for All. Farmer has a wide entrepreneurial streak and has launched several national inclusion programs including [Aspirations in Computing](#), TECHNOLOchicas, the AspireIT outreach program, Lego Robotics for Girl Scouts, and more. She served as 2012 Chair of CSEDWeek,

was named a [White House Champion of Change for Technology Inclusion](#) in 2013, received the Anita Borg Institute Award for Social Impact in 2014, and the UK Alumni Award for Social Impact in 2015. She is passionate about helping low-income students pursue technology and engineering careers.

#### **[Dr. Sarah Lee](#)**

Sarah Lee is the Director of the School of Computing Sciences and Computer Engineering at the University of Southern Mississippi. Prior to launching her academic career, Dr. Lee was employed at FedEx Corporation, holding a variety of technical and managerial positions in information technology. Lee earned her bachelor's degree from the Mississippi University for Women in Computer Information Systems. She received her Master of Computer Science degree from Mississippi State University in 1989 and her PhD in Computer Science from the University of Memphis in 2011. A fifth generation native of Mississippi, Lee chose to pursue a second career in academia with a passion for increasing the number of women in computing careers.

#### **[Rian Walker](#)**

Rian Walker's experience as an aspiring technologist served as the inspiration for the Last Mile Education Fund. She was always an avid self-learner. She taught herself programming when her high school didn't offer any computer science courses, but challenges at home led to frequent absences. For that reason, she couldn't have qualified for traditional scholarships. Her high school counselor encouraged her to apply for the NCWIT Award for [Aspirations in Computing](#) (then led by Ruthe Farmer). The award led her to Mississippi State, where she met Dr. Sarah Lee. Walker worked full-time throughout college to get by, but that wasn't always enough. Financial hurdles — from a broken laptop to needing a safe vehicle — nearly derailed her university ambitions multiple times. Nonetheless, she stayed on track (with help) and earned a degree in software engineering. Walker is currently an Assistant Vice President and Information Security Analyst at Bank of America and is passionate about forging a smoother road for students like her.

### **Location & Contact Info**

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## Digital Presence

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