



For Information:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 9, 2026

Rochester Women's Giving Circle Makes Largest Annual Investment Yet ***\$265,000 in grants support women and girls seeking financial independence.***

The Rochester Women's Giving Circle at Rochester Area Community Foundation has made its largest annual contribution in 19 years: \$265,000 to 12 nonprofit organizations. Since its inception, the Giving Circle has distributed nearly \$3 million towards its mission to help women and girls transition to a lifetime of economic self-sufficiency. Since 2020, funded programs have served more than 3,200 women and girls and helped 1,000 women obtain employment.

"I'm inspired by the collective impact we've been able to make," said Rebecca Storke, member since 2025. "The Giving Circle has connected me with an incredible group of dedicated, intelligent and supportive women, while also giving me the opportunity to help support programs that I am passionate about."

The Giving Circle's 170 members invest in programs that help women obtain education, skills, mentorship, jobs, and career advancement.

"Support from local, everyday people is especially meaningful," says Judicial Process Commission's Executive Director Shermond Reid, one of the Circle's 2026 grantees. "It demonstrates that the community believes in second chances and is invested in the success of women and families rebuilding their lives."

This year's applications reflect significant need, with nearly 75% requesting \$20,000 or more and total funding requests exceeding \$800,000. One grantee shared how the needs of local women and families are more complex and interconnected than in the past, naming the increasing impact of housing costs, economic instability, and mental health challenges.

"Nonprofits are dealing with the loss of other funding sources at the same time they are trying to meet surging demand for services," says Dawn Perry, Collective Giving Officer at Rochester Area Community Foundation, where the Giving Circle is held. "The size of this grant round now, made possible by people who refuse to let this work falter, is incredibly meaningful."

Another program funded this year was the Goodwill Learning Academy, which helps adults get a high school diploma through free, flexible, and supportive classes that remove barriers to graduation. In 2024, the Giving

Circle was the Academy's first donor when the program was just getting started. This month, 25 women are on track to graduate and 58 more are entering the program.

Monroe County nonprofits interested in applying for future grants can learn about criteria at therwgc.org.

How the Rochester Women's Giving Circle Works

Rochester Women's Giving Circle, an advised fund at Rochester Area Community Foundation, is a community of people who believe they can make a greater impact by pooling their resources and giving together. Anyone who gives \$450 or more annually can become a member. In 2026, 16 members opted to take part in a rigorous six-week process to help determine which proposals receive funding.

But the Giving Circle does more than just write a check. A member is assigned to each grantee for the year after the grant is awarded. This person serves as a champion of the nonprofit, offering support, answering questions, attending events, and educating others about its mission along the way.

"Being on the grantmaking committee has truly been a highlight of joining the Circle," said Nicole Botti, Giving Circle member since 2024. "I appreciate learning more about the organizations in the community that are doing the 'hands on' work. In these sometimes bleak days, the Giving Circle is a beacon of hope for me."

Individuals interested in becoming members are encouraged to reach out using [this form](#).

Photo: [Link](#). (left to right) Robin Mitchell, Goodwill Learning Academy; the first woman graduate of the program; Laurel Pace, Rochester Women's Giving Circle member; and Jen Lake, President and CEO of Goodwill of the Finger Lakes.

2026 Grants (For more information, visit therwgc.org/grantees).

Agape Haven of Abundance: Out of School Time/Youth Empowerment, \$25,000

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Rochester: Community Mentorship Program, \$20,700

The Center for Teen Empowerment: Young Women's Leadership and Employment Program, \$25,000

Center for Youth: Flower City Change Makers, \$25,000

Foundation for Women's Financial Education: Financial Planning for Social Service Organizations, \$4,300

Goodwill of the Finger Lakes: Goodwill Learning Academy, \$25,000

Greentopia: Green Visions: Growing Healthy Futures, \$25,000

Judicial Process Commission: Women Forward Work Ready Program, \$25,000

Mary Cariola Children's Center: Teacher Aide to NYS Teacher Assistant Certification Program, \$15,000

Society for the Protection and Care of Children: Project Equip, \$25,000

The Unity Hospital of Rochester: Project Independence at Healthy Moms, \$25,000

Urban League of Rochester NY: ROC Women's Business Center Pathways to Economic Independence for Women, \$25,000