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WIN awards \$168K to support veterans and students

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Women Investing in Nebraska (WIN) has awarded two grants that total \$168,000 to help Nebraska's veterans with legal services and help University of Nebraska students with the cost of learning materials.

WIN awarded Legal Aid of Nebraska an \$84,000 grant to assist in its services to military veterans in the care of the Veterans Administration Hospital. WIN also awarded the University of Nebraska an \$84,000 grant to assist a program that lowers the cost of textbooks and other materials for students at three of its campuses.

The grants brings WIN's cumulative donations to University of Nebraska and Nebraska community projects to nearly \$1.39 million.

This year, 178 members contributed to make the grants possible, and grants were awarded through a proposal review process. WIN's membership consists of women with an interest in using collective giving and grantmaking to positively impact issues of concern to Nebraska.

“In our own way, we are responding to the problems and challenges that the pandemic brought us,” said WIN Chair Candy Henning of Lincoln. “Both programs are aimed at easing the financial challenges faced by veterans, students and their families.”

Ann Mangiameli, managing attorney for the Health, Education and Law Project (HELP) at Legal Aid of Nebraska, leads the project that currently partners with health care systems and hospitals in Lincoln, Omaha and Columbus with plans to expand to Grand Island and Kearney.

Because VA regulations prohibit the use of federal funds to provide civil legal services for veterans, receiving the \$84,000 grant from WIN is especially important.

“Over the last year or so, we have been looking for funding so that we could provide veterans the services they so badly need to be healthy,” Mangiameli said. “This grant has been a huge opportunity to provide services for people who have served our country and who otherwise are going to have legal needs that would go unmet.”

As Legal Aid of Nebraska assists veterans in need of guardians, it will also be recruiting other veterans to volunteer for those who do not have family available to help, which could be the first such program with that focus.

WIN Grants Committee chair Cassie Kohl said that kind of problem-solving is appealing to WIN members.

“One of the reasons this project stood out to WIN was the innovative aspect of veterans acting as power of attorney for other veterans,” Kohl said. “In addition, this would be the first medical-legal partnership benefiting veterans in Nebraska and one of only 29 in the country.”

The University of Nebraska program reduces textbook costs for undergraduate students.

WIN’s grant of \$84,000 to the University of Nebraska supports a program that helps reduce the costs students incur for textbooks and other learning resources. The program provides access to open educational resources — digital materials available freely or at reduced cost — as well as assistance for faculty members who seek the appropriate academic materials for their classes at lower costs for students.

The Inclusive Access and Open Educational Resources Program began in 2017 with a series of initial grants from the university and has saved students an estimated \$2.5 million.

In addition to the grant from WIN, the University of Nebraska office of the executive vice president and provost will match the grant with another \$84,000 to support the program. With this combined support, it's estimated the program will reach its goal to save students and families \$10 million by 2023.

Jaci Lindburg, University of Nebraska assistant vice president for IT strategy and learning technology, leads the program's partnership between academic affairs, libraries and information technology efforts across the university to leverage free and lower-cost digital resources.

"This is such an exciting program for us, one that we are so eager to rally around even more with this additional funding, because it's all about the students," Lindburg said. "First, of course, it impacts their ability to be successful in a class, because they have access to the materials they need in the course to complete readings, assignments and exams. The cost savings also allow students to redirect these funds to take additional courses they need toward their degrees."

The opportunity to support a program that would benefit so many University of Nebraska students appealed to WIN members, Kohl said about the grant awarded.

"This project was specifically exciting for WIN, because it involves three campuses — the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Kearney and the University of Nebraska at Omaha," Kohl said. "One of the goals of WIN is to reach as much of the state with our dollars as possible. In addition, with the pandemic and a lot of the world switching to remote options, this is a very timely issue and solution."