



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ROCKFORD PROMISE NIU SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM November 2020

Rockford Promise is a non-profit 501(c) (3) location-based scholarship program that offers full-tuition scholarships to deserving graduates of Rockford Public School District 205 (RPS 205). Modeled after Promise programs around the nation, its goal is to increase educational attainment in the community while providing a powerful economic incentive for residents and businesses to locate in the Rockford region. Since its founding in 2006, Rockford Promise has provided more than \$1 million in scholarships to nearly 150 Promise Scholars at Rock Valley College and Rockford University.

Now, the City of Rockford, through the leadership of Mayor Tom McNamara and the City Council, is proposing to fund a significant expansion of Rockford Promise in 2021 and beyond. With the proposed City contribution, eligible students of RPS 205 would be able to earn a bachelor's degree from Northern Illinois University with all tuition and general fees paid by Rockford Promise. The proposed collaboration now heads to the governing boards at NIU, RPS 205 and Rockford Promise and the Rockford City Council for final approval.

Below is a general list of Frequently Asked Questions about the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship:

Who is eligible for the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship?

To be eligible a student needs to live inside the City limits of the City of Rockford by the first day of freshman year in high school, attend RPS all four years of high school and earn a cumulative 3.0 grade point average (GPA).

Students currently enrolled in an RPS high school as freshmen, sophomores, juniors or seniors, who live in the City of Rockford as of November 10, 2020 and earn a cumulative 3.0 GPA, are eligible for the program without the four-year residency requirement.

How was the 3.0 GPA requirement determined?

In reviewing other Promise programs and speaking with education experts, setting certain minimum high school standards will give students a goal to achieve to earn the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship, and will help ensure students are well prepared to enter NIU and meet degree-completion requirements.

What if the student lives in a County “pocket,” doesn’t pay City taxes, but attends RPS?

To be eligible for this program, students **MUST** live within the City of Rockford municipality.

Do parents or guardians need to continue to live in the City of Rockford while the student is in college?

Yes. In order to remain eligible for the program, a parent or guardian must continue to live within the City of Rockford while you the student is in college. Special exceptions to this policy would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Are there minimum academic requirements to meet once a student is enrolled at NIU?

Yes. Students must be enrolled for 12 credit hours per semester and maintain a 2.5 cumulative GPA at NIU.

How long does the scholarship last for each student?

The scholarship terminates after four years of enrollment or upon graduation, whichever comes first.

What if the student fails to meet the academic requirements? Is the scholarship no longer available?

Students must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5 at NIU to remain eligible for the scholarship. Students whose cumulative GPA falls below 2.5 may be placed on probation for a period not to exceed one semester.

Students who fail to maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.5 for two consecutive semesters will not be eligible for the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship.

Can a student defer if they are joining the military? If so, for how long?

No, there is not a deferment for military service.

Is this a “first dollar” or “last dollar” program?

The Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship is a last-dollar program. In this structure, funding from Rockford Promise is applied AFTER all other forms of financial aid, such as federal Pell Grants, merit-based scholarships and other funding sources have been applied.

Does the award cover room and board and fees?

No. The Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship covers tuition and general fees only.

What is the deadline to apply for admission in Fall of 2021? When will funds be available?

February 1, 2021 is the deadline to apply, with funds available for students beginning in the fall semester of 2021.

Does the scholarship have to be used immediately following high school graduation?

Yes. Enrollment must begin in the first semester following high school graduation.

Are there household income restriction?

No.

What will this cost the average student?

Tuition and general fees will be covered by the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship. Students would be responsible for other costs such as housing, food and books.

How will funds be dispersed?

Funds will be paid directly by Rockford Promise to Northern Illinois University each eligible semester to cover the student's tuition and general fees.

Do students have to live in Rockford while at NIU?

No. They can live in DeKalb while in the program. However, their principal residence of their parent(s) or guardian must be Rockford while they are attending NIU.

Is this program ONLY for students RPS 205?

Yes.

Are home-schooled students or those in private or parochial schools eligible?

No. All Rockford Promise programs, including the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship, are currently only available to RPS 205 students.

What about the dual-credit courses at RPS 205. How will those be impacted?

Students will work with their RPS counselors and NIU counselors to determine the best path for course enrollment and this would include students taking dual-credit courses at RPS 205.

Can students take the money from the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship and attend another college or university?

No. Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship funds can only be used to attend NIU.

How long does a student have to finish the program if funded by the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship?

Students will be required to complete their bachelor's degree at NIU in four years or less.

How will the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship help students?

In general, Rockford Promise, and similar Promise programs, helps eliminate the greatest barrier many students have—the financial challenges associated with college and career preparation. Promise programs have sent students to college and job training who LITERALLY would not have been able to attend without these programs. Covering tuition also eliminates the need for many students to have to work while attending classes—a benefit that helps students focus more on their class work and training.

Perhaps most importantly, this represents a cultural shift for our community. When you can speak to a middle-school student and tell them that they'll be able to attend college without paying tuition, you provide an incredibly powerful incentive to succeed in high school.

What support is available for first-generation college students?

Many Promise students will be the first in their families to attend college. RPS 205, NIU and Transform Rockford have committed both to preparing students for and mentoring students in the program. This will include advising, financial aid and course counseling to ensure their success.

Is there an “employment” incentive or a “community” incentive to stay in Rockford once a student graduates from NIU?

The community needs and wants students to remain here or return here after school. Rockford Promise, the City of Rockford and other partners will continue to develop incentives and programs to make our students successful while in college and to help them secure jobs and careers after college.

Does Rockford Promise stay in touch with recipients when they graduate or finish their program?

Regular communication with Rockford Promise are a requirement of the scholarship program. Throughout their time, scholars develop lasting relationships with mentors and others. Upon graduation, Rockford Promise keeps in touch with graduates, celebrating and sharing their successes as they continue their education or go on to successful careers. We hope those graduates can someday become mentors to the next generation of Rockford Promise Scholars.

Are there programs with Rockford University and Rock Valley College?

Since 2015, Rockford Promise has collaborated with Rockford University and Rock Valley College to provide limited full-tuition scholarships paid for through private donations. To date, nearly 150 students have received scholarships to RVC and RU. Those programs will continue with the hope they will expand in the future.

Will other colleges and universities be added in the future?

With additional private funding, Rockford Promise hopes to add additional eligible schools.

Do I have to “return” to the area after college?

Students are not required to return to Rockford after graduation. However, the partners certainly hope they do!

For employers, how will this impact their company?

There are several benefits. Area companies can use Rockford Promise overall, and the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship specifically, to attract and retain talented employees. And, they can develop relationships with current Promise Scholars to enhance their pipeline of future employees.

Are there internships and shadowing opportunities?

Rockford Promise will continue to partner with businesses and organizations to offer students real-world shadowing, internship and employment opportunities to its students.

Who is funding this?

Rockford Promise has been funded by numerous individuals and businesses. The Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship specifically will be funded initially by the City of Rockford. The City, Rockford Promise, RPS 205, and NIU have agreed that NIU will pay tuition and general fee rate in excess of \$6,000 annually per eligible student. The City of Rockford's funding will come from non-property tax revenues (such as gaming and government emergency medical transport revenue).

How much will the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship cost the City of Rockford?

Mayor McNamara is asking the City Council to approve a \$1.5 million annual investment. This would cover tuition and general fees for all RPS students living in the City of Rockford who wished to attend NIU each year, based on recent college enrollment data of RPS students.

Why is the City of Rockford paying for this?

Mayor Tom McNamara, in his 2018 State of the City address, called for "full funding" of Rockford Promise by 2025. He did this because he believes, and the data has shown, that our city's lower rates of education attainment impacts our ability to attract and retain companies and residents, grow our employment base, provide strong city services, reduce crime, increase property values and lower tax burdens.

He believes that aggressively funding Rockford Promise in general, and the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship specifically, and providing tuition-free college and career training to our public school students, will have a positive and transformational impact on current and future generations. This tells our young people they belong here and can have a bright future here.

What other benefits will this bring to the community?

With this program, we anticipate that Rockford Promise will deliver community-wide benefits on an even broader scale than it does now. This may include: increased high school graduation rates and public school performance; higher overall educational attainment; enhanced workforce readiness; higher property values; decreased crime rates; decreased social costs due to increased high school graduation rates and powerful economic incentives for residents and businesses to move to and remain in Rockford.

How long will the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship be available?

The Mayor is asking City Council to approve the investment for an initial term of 17 years. Upon any future termination, any students in the Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship Program or enrolled in high school at the time of the termination notice would still be eligible for the scholarship.

Could a future Mayor or City Council decide to eliminate this funding?

Yes. However, there is protection in the termination notice requirements that would require all Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship recipients and all students enrolled in high school at the time of termination notification to receive their full Rockford Promise NIU Scholarship as long as they continue to meet eligibility requirements.