More than a single program or organization, the University of South Dakota Women in Philanthropy network is a movement – a uniting of like-minded women using diverse talents, backgrounds and experiences to enhance the university and positively impact its students.

Inspired by a shared mission, USD Women in Philanthropy provides a platform where women can pool their resources, passion and philanthropic insight to make a difference not only in the lives of students but also in their respective communities. By providing opportunities for engagement, women discover their passions and interests and connect with other women to become visionary investors supporting the University of South Dakota.

USD Women in Philanthropy is making a difference far beyond financial contributions. Together, we are:

- Giving women a collective voice at the University of South Dakota.
- Fostering invaluable multi-generational mentoring opportunities.
- Celebrating a powerful and accomplished network of USD women and empowering them to lead.
- Creating opportunities for students to reach their potential and preparing the next generation of leaders.

2022-23 Initiatives

| Charlie’s Career Closet | Coyote Beginnings Fund | USD Knudson School of Law Women Leaders Speaker Series |

USD Women In Philanthropy

‘When women come together, they get things done.’

- USD President Sheila Gestring
Charlie’s Career Closet

The 2022 USD Women in Philanthropy’s signature initiative is Charlie’s Career Closet, a new campus endeavor to prepare students for success in their next stage of life: a career.

Many students do not have a professional wardrobe, limiting their outfit options or forcing them to buy new ones – which many students cannot afford – when interviewing for jobs, internships, graduate programs and more. Charlie’s Career Closet looks to address this discrepancy by collecting lightly worn professional clothing for women and men that is available to all USD students. When students look their best, they will feel their best.

In addition to providing students with professional clothing, Charlie’s Career Closet will also offer other professional development opportunities, such as resume help, mock interviews and mentorships.

Having access to professional clothing without a cost barrier and these additional opportunities will have a profound impact on students’ confidence when pursuing their post-graduation dreams.

Coyote Beginnings Fund

The University of South Dakota has a storied history of educating the leaders, teachers, visionaries, entrepreneurs and so many others who make our state great. As we recognize and honor our past, we seek new opportunities to help students realize their full potential.

Through the Coyote Beginnings Fund, we will inspire students to pursue their higher education dreams by investing in their abilities. We will help them envision the endless possibilities for their future and seize opportunities to make it a reality. Our legacy lies in educating those who work hard to make a difference; Coyote Beginnings keeps moving us forward by making higher education accessible to all.

USD Knudson School of Law Women Leaders Speaker Series

The USD Knudson School of Law has a tradition of excellence, service and leadership. This is apparent when you consider the many alumnae who have changed the trajectory of their communities by putting these traits into action. This speaker series, now in its second year as a Women in Philanthropy initiative, brings law school alumnae to campus for panel discussions focused on excellence, service and leadership to help current female law students learn how they can build a career path and be an advocate for these values. This is an investment in the legal capabilities of South Dakota and future lawyer leaders.
A Track Record of Success

The initiatives invested in by USD Women in Philanthropy have a proven impact on students. In its first year, Women in Philanthropy helped launch a leadership development program, Elevate, for the Coyote women’s basketball team. Charlie’s Cupboard – USD’s on-campus food pantry to fight food insecurity among students – has served more than 3,000 students since it opened in 2020. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Women in Philanthropy’s investment in mental health and counseling services proved invaluable in supporting students through stressful times.

Last year’s initiatives continued Women in Philanthropy’s track record of success:

- The President’s Senior Leadership Institute (PSLI) had 37 students complete the program during the 2021-22 academic year. The program kicked-off with a retreat, followed by four monthly sessions that were focused on building hard and soft skills for life after graduation, such as financial literacy, responsibly citizenship, job readiness mixer and an etiquette dinner.

- The Native American Cultural Center’s Living Learning Community boosted Native American student recruitment, retention and engagement rates with its programming and community building efforts. The program’s 2021-22 retention rate was 71% – compared to the overall university’s Native American retention rate of 58%. The LLC hosted weekly events that included cultural film screenings, dinners with Native faculty and presentations from Native alumni and speakers. Several students have said the LLC’s opportunities are what made them choose USD over other schools.

- The USD Knudson School of Law Women Leaders Speaker Series in its first year hosted an event each semester that featured a dinner and panel discussion with female lawyers from the state. More than a dozen students attended each event and had great conversations on topics such as service to your community and leadership.

- The final 2021-22 initiative, the Cultural Wellness Coalition, aims to bridge the gap between cultures at USD. The coalition hosted a film festival and Juneteenth celebration to bring members of the USD and Vermillion communities together.
Networking & Mentorship

Different backgrounds, shared purpose. USD Women in Philanthropy represents a variety of ages, personal interests and life stories, which allows members to meet women from a breadth of experiences. Women have the opportunity to:

- Network with other women who share their passion for and commitment to the university.
- Participate in mentoring other passionate USD women.
- Encourage the current and future generation of female philanthropists.

Impact – Get Involved!

Be empowered as philanthropists to celebrate the strength of combined giving and inspire others to do the same. Discover how your impact can:

- Support change-making programs with strategic and high impact gifts.
- Inspire and empower the next generation of women to be philanthropists and leaders in their communities.

All women who are alumni and friends of USD are welcome to join USD Women in Philanthropy. We want the voices of women to be heard and believe they can play a significant role in shaping the future of the University of South Dakota.