



GradBridge raises \$20 million Series A led by Acorn Investment Partners, a portfolio company of Oaktree

Series A Positions Innovative New Fintech to Launch First- Of-Its-Kind, Second-Look Private Student Lending Program for Spring 2026 Semester.

WILMINGTON, DE (Oct. 22, 2025) – [GradBridge](#), a newly launched fintech focused exclusively on second-look private student lending, today announced the closing of a \$20 million Series A funding round led by Acorn Investment Partners, a portfolio company of funds managed by Oaktree Capital Management L.P. (“Oaktree”). The equity investment will support GradBridge’s upcoming launch of a first-of-its-kind private student loan product exclusively designed for students who have exhausted federal and private options and are still committed to completing their education.

“Acorn’s principals have a long history of partnering with strong entrepreneurial businesses, and through this investment support expanded access to higher education for deserving students, while delivering attractive risk-adjusted returns,” said Yadin Rozov, CIO of Acorn Investment Partners. “GradBridge’s approach addresses a real market gap for students who are performing academically but fall just outside of traditional credit underwriting models. We are proud to lead this round and support their launch.”

Founded by former Sallie Mae executive Jen O’Donald, GradBridge is led by a seasoned team of financial services and student lending veterans with decades of experience in consumer credit, operations, and customer experience. Key leadership includes CFO Brian Carp, COO

Lisa Kaplan, and support from a network of advisors that includes Paul Thome, former President of Sallie Mae Bank and Dan Hill, former Chief Credit Officer of Sallie Mae.

To ensure operational excellence and regulatory compliance from the outset, GradBridge has partnered with established industry leaders including CampusDoor, Nelnet, Gestalt, and Maquette Advisors, who together provide the origination technology, servicing, and analytics needed to scale responsibly.

“College completion is one of the most powerful drivers of lifetime earnings and financial independence, yet every year, more than a million students are denied private loans—many by just a narrow margin. Changes to the federal student loan program will only exacerbate this reality,” said Jen O’Donald, CEO of GradBridge. “We see an unserved, addressable market for our innovative product: academically strong students who fall outside traditional student loan underwriting criteria and risk not completing their degree. With the backing of Acorn Investment Partners, we now have the resources needed to give these underserved students a second look – and a second chance to bridge the gap between ambition and opportunity.”

GradBridge is poised to address one of higher education’s most pressing challenges: helping students stay in school and graduate when traditional financing falls short. Today [more than half of undergraduates](#) at four-year schools drop out, and financial struggles top the list of reasons why. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), college dropouts earn 30% less than college graduates and are 50% more likely to be unemployed.

Ultimately, GradBridge aims to help students everywhere achieve their academic and financial goals.

For more information, visit [gradbridge.com](#), or to schedule an interview, contact GradBridge@shinepr.com.

About GradBridge

GradBridge is a fintech company focused exclusively on second-look private student lending designed to transform how students access the funding they need to graduate. Founded by veteran student loan executives, GradBridge provides a first-of-its-kind, student lending approach for upperclassmen and graduate students who are making academic progress but narrowly miss approval from traditional lenders. With a mission to close the gap between ambition and opportunity, GradBridge transforms loan denials into graduation success stories, unlocking long-term financial independence and brighter futures. Learn more at www.gradbridge.com.

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About Acorn Investment Partners

Acorn Investment Partners is a specialized investment firm focused on insurance asset management, specialty finance investments, and off-the-run special situations. The firm is led by experienced professionals with decades of combined experience across a variety of asset classes and investment types, including structured finance, insurance solutions, and growth equity. Founded in 2025, Acorn Investment Partners, a portfolio company of funds managed by Oaktree Capital Management, L.P., takes a modern and proprietary approach to asset management