



Community Grants Program 2017 Request for Proposals

Invitation to Apply

College Spark is inviting nonprofit organizations and education institutions in Washington state to submit a Letter-of-Interest (LOI) for grant funding to support improving the college readiness of low-income middle school, high school, and college student. Projects funded in the 2017 grant cycle must be designed to improve one or more of the College Spark Community Grants Program outcome indicators:

Projects Serving Students in Middle School:

- *Decrease* the percentage of total middle school students who trigger two or more of the three early warning indicators:
 - Five or more absences per semester
 - Course failure
 - Suspension or expulsion

- *Improve* the math performance of students in middle school, at least one measure of which will be the percentage of total 8th grade students that have SBAC math scores of at least 3.

Projects Serving Students in High School and College:

- *Reduce* the percentage of students who are required to enroll in developmental education (pre-college credit) courses during college.

- *Increase* the percentage of students who earn their first college credits in English or math – either while in high school, after taking developmental education classes, or directly upon enrolling in college.

Applicants may propose any approach they believe is best designed to influence these outcomes. College Spark Washington encourages projects that take an innovative approach to meeting the needs of low-income students. Only proposed projects that have the potential to generate knowledge that is useful to other organizations will be selected for funding. College Spark Washington expects to disburse approximately \$1.4 million in new grant funding under the Community Grants Program in 2017. Grants typically range from \$20,000-\$150,000 total over one to three years. Grant requests outside this range are not encouraged.

Some of the strategies that have been shown promise at improving these outcomes for low-income students include:

- Reform to school discipline policy and practice, including alternatives to suspension
- Focused and comprehensive attendance campaigns
- Integrating trauma-informed instruction and discipline practices
- Improved access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses or other methods of earning college credit in high school coupled with improved supports for low-income students in those courses
- Improvements to the rigor of high school instruction

- Corequisite remediation replacing a prerequisite developmental education sequence
- Increased curricular alignment between colleges and their local feeder high schools
- Reform of college placement instruments and practices
- Alternative methods of delivering remediation, including embedded supports and acceleration
- Professional development opportunities that are well-defined, well-developed, and delivered by skilled professionals or respected colleagues

Application Process and Timeline

Eligible applicants may indicate their interest in funding by completing a pre-application Letter-of-Interest (LOI). College Spark uses an on-line application system for both the LOI and the Grant Proposal. **The LOI will be available at tinyurl.com/collegespark on September 1, 2016.**

- Applicants are encouraged but not required to participate in an informational webinar prior to submitting a LOI. An Introduction to Community Grants Program Webinar will take place on July 13, 2016 at 10:00. A webinar focused on the content of the LOI form and tips for applicants will take place on September 15, 2016 at 10:00. To receive logistics information for a webinar, email rachel@collegespark.org to register. Webinars will be recorded and posted to the College Spark website.
- The LOI must be completed and submitted online by **5:00 PM on Friday, October 14, 2016.**
- **Additionally**, two PDF copies of the completed online LOI form and all attached documents must be mailed to College Spark Washington and **postmarked no later than October 14, 2016.** You must create the PDF of the LOI and all attachments by clicking on the Print Packet icon at the top left corner of the LOI screen. Please do not print and submit a screen view of your LOI.
- Selected organizations will be invited by **December 2016** to submit a full proposal.
- Organizations invited to submit a full proposal must complete the online proposal form by **Wednesday, January 18, 2017.**
- Additionally, two PDF copies of the completed proposal form and all attached documents must be mailed to and College Spark Washington postmarked no later than **January 18, 2017.**
- Final funding decisions will be announced by **early May 2017.**

If you have questions, need technical assistance to complete your application, or would like to discuss project proposals, we encourage you to contact Rachel Clements, Program Officer, (rachel@collegespark.org, 206-461-5480) at any time throughout the grant application process.

Multi-Year Requests

If you wish to be considered for a multi-year grant, your project must clearly demonstrate the need for multi-year implementation. You must also be able to identify and meet specific programmatic goals during each year of funding, up to and including three years. The release of grant funds for years two and/or three is contingent upon the applicant meeting performance targets. Total grant funds for all three years will not exceed \$150,000.

Grants awarded under this Request for Proposals may be eligible for renewal funding in cases where additional funding would clearly enable grantees to achieve a dramatic increase in their impact or generate learning that is relevant to the field. Grant renewals will be awarded sparingly and will require submitting an application for renewal.

Eligibility for Funding Consideration

To be eligible to apply for College Spark funding, applicant organizations must have a staffed physical presence in Washington and be

- Organized and operated for purposes described in IRC Section 501(c)(3); OR
- A university, college, school or other institution described in IRC Section 170(c)(1); OR
- A Public agency, unit of government, tribal government, or tribal program under IRC Section 7871.

Funding Prohibitions

Funding will not be provided for

- Endowments
- Special event sponsorship or any other type of fundraising
- Political campaigns or candidates
- Lobbying activities
- Deficits or debt-retirement
- Organizations that unfairly discriminate in any manner
- Organizations that would re-grant funding received from College Spark, unless to a partner organization that will support the College Spark-funded services as described in the project budget or unless with express permission from College Spark.

Because the College Spark Community Grants Program is focused on program refinement and improvement, funding is not provided for on-going program or operation support. However, applicants may include funding for administrative costs associated with programs or projects eligible under the RFP to the extent that the costs are necessary to implement the proposed project or services.

Types of Grants Available

College Spark assists organizations and education institutions at all levels of program development and operation in our focus areas. Therefore, several types of grants are available:

- **Planning grants** of up to \$50,000 to support the planning and development of new programs or strategies.
- **Program improvement projects** designed to improve project outcomes; increase project scope by enhancing existing services offered; implement newly-developed programs; or improve program infrastructure, thereby making it more effective. Please note: programs seeking funding for expansion will only be considered if there is an additional program or organizational capacity-building component included in the proposal.
- **Research projects** that analyze local and national data, best practices, trends, and/or approaches directed at Community Grants Program outcome indicators.
- **Evaluation projects** that evaluate the current effectiveness of programs in existence for a minimum of three years.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria upon which funding decisions will be made include

- Ability to provide evidence that a substantial number of students served by the program or project are low-income. It is rare for College Spark Washington to fund projects in which less than 50% of the students are low-income and we prefer projects in which 75% or more of students served are low-income. Projects that serve a significant number of students are more competitive. We define low-income students as being from families with incomes that qualify them for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program or for Pell Grants. Alternative measures of income must be approved by College Spark.
- Projects that demonstrate clearly that funding will increase the program's effectiveness at improving College Spark Washington's successful transition from high school to college outcome indicators.
- All projects must use baseline measures or comparison groups and collect appropriate data to show change in outcome indicators. We prefer projects with a comprehensive evaluation plan that helps you improve your program over time.
- Projects must produce knowledge and/or data that will be valuable to College Spark Washington, other programs, or policymakers. College Spark Washington values continuous learning and improvement, which requires understanding weaknesses and challenges as well as strengths.
- Projects that show potential for sustainable, long-term benefits that persist after the grant period ends.
- Projects that are very likely to be replicated elsewhere or to create systemic impact.
- Projects with strategies that are supported by research and evidence or, if evidence is not available (e.g. this is a new method or strategy), are based on research-tested assumptions and include reliable methods of evaluation.
- Projects that are innovative in that they have an approach, theory of change, or implementation method that has not been used in Washington state and can make a strong case for potential impact.
- Fulfillment of specific regional or community needs; location in an area of the state that is lacking similar or adequate services.

Background of College Spark

College Spark Washington funds programs across Washington state that help low-income students become college-ready and earn their degrees. College Spark began supporting access to higher education in 1978 by managing student loan programs. In 2004, the loan operations were sold and an endowment created to support its grant-making mission. For more information about College Spark Washington and our grants, please visit our website at www.collegespark.org.