

Request for Information: Filling the Gap Fund

May 2022

In partnership with the Walton Family Foundation, Bellwether Education Partners is seeking initial applications for a new grant fund designed to help families and students leverage public policy to find and engage in supplemental learning options. Applicants should have bold ideas related to ensuring that families can access supplemental learning related to their child's needs, interests, and goals.

Responses to this request for information (RFI) are due no later than 11:59 p.m. PDT on Monday, June 6, 2022, after which Bellwether will invite select organizations to submit proposals for funding. Grants will range from \$50,000 to \$300,000, depending on the opportunity for impact and the maturity of the project.

Click [here](#) to apply.

The Opportunity

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but especially over the past two years, families, educators, and community leaders have created new learning opportunities to support students' needs, interests, and goals. Some provide students with access to options that are particularly relevant to those transitioning from school to career (like apprenticeships). Some offer additional help to students to support their academic growth or social-emotional well-being (like tutoring or counseling). Others are brand-new solutions that emerged to help meet urgent needs amid a crisis (like learning pods).

Policies have also emerged to *enable* these kinds of options. At their best, these policies empower families with more agency over their children's education and ensure equitable access to those furthest from opportunity. Examples of such policies include part-time enrollment, dual or concurrent enrollment, and work-based learning; "Learn Everywhere" policies, which allow students to demonstrate competency or earn credit for experiences outside of school; and policies that provide funding that families and students can use to access a wide variety of learning opportunities.

Together, creative new options and supportive policies can provide students with more customized and flexible learning. They also have the potential to better connect educators, families, and communities in ways that extend learning beyond what happens between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. every day within the walls of a school building.

This grant focuses on ensuring these policies have their intended impact. The policies of interest to us can take many forms but must share two characteristics:

- They allow students to participate in supplemental learning opportunities while remaining enrolled in their school.
- They allow families and students to select learning opportunities aligned with their needs, interests, and goals.

We are also particularly interested in policies that make public funding available to families and students who could not otherwise afford them on their own.

The current moment presents an enormous opportunity to provide students with the supplemental learning options they need to flourish. Unfortunately, these options are often underused or do not reach the students who need them most. Numerous barriers contribute to the problem, but one fundamental gap is families' limited access to essential information and support. The grants made through this RFI will seek to fill this gap.

What Are Supplemental Learning Options?

Supplemental learning options are educational experiences students participate in while remaining enrolled in their current school. They include things like tutoring, college coursework, work-based learning, occupational therapy, social-emotional support, and enrichment activities, like art or athletics.

These are examples, not an exhaustive list. We offer them to inspire — not to constrain the types of learning opportunities families and students may want to access.

Eligibility

Public schools, school systems (districts or networks), and nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply. Partnerships between schools/school systems and nonprofits are encouraged; in the case of a partnership, one eligible entity should submit the application and this entity will serve as the primary point of contact.

Who Should Apply

Eligible entities should submit applications if they have new or early-stage ideas about how to provide families with the information, resources, and support they need to leverage public policies to access supplemental learning options. Organizations that are well-positioned to support families and students furthest from opportunity are particularly encouraged to apply.

Grant Awards and Benefits

In addition to broad exposure and recognition of their work, grantees will have the opportunity to:

- Participate in a cohort of grantees to explore the most effective ways to engage and serve families and students.
- Learn from and build relationships with other grantees.
- Receive support related to strategic learning, continuous improvement, and family engagement from experts, researchers, and other partners.
- Leverage lessons and data from the cohort to improve ideas, plan for sustainability, and scale the work.

RFI Questions

Apply [here](#) no later than 11:59 p.m. PDT on Monday, June 6, 2022. You may view or edit your responses at any time before the submission deadline.

Overall, we are interested in your answer to a fundamental question:

How will your organization provide families with information and support that will help them leverage public policies and access supplemental learning options aligned with their child's needs, interests, and goals?

Section 1: About Your Organization

- Organization name
- Location
- Type of entity (choose one option below)
 - District public school
 - Charter public school
 - Public school district
 - Charter school management organization or network
 - Nonprofit organization
 - Other tax-exempt entity (please describe)
- Primary point of contact (name, role, email, phone number)
- Has your organization been a client or funder of Bellwether at any time within the past 36 months?
- Are you submitting this response in partnership with another organization? If yes, please provide the name and contact information for your partner.

Section 2: About the Policy

Your response to this section should be 500 words or less.

Tell us about the policy that enables families to access supplemental learning options. In particular:

- What policy will your work help families access?
- How does this policy enable access to supplemental learning options?
- What public funding, if any, is available to families to cover the cost of these supplemental learning options?

Section 3: About the Students

Your response to this section should be 300 words or less.

Tell us about the students you plan to serve. In particular:

- What eligibility criteria, if any, must families or students meet to benefit from the policy?
- What are the demographics and unmet needs of the students you will serve?

Section 4: About Your Approach

Your response to this section should be 500 words or less.

Tell us how you will support families and students to leverage public policies and access supplemental learning options. In particular:

- What kind of information and support do you believe families and students need in order to leverage public policy and access supplemental learning options?
- How do you plan to learn about the perspectives and needs of the families and students you serve?
- Why is your organization well-positioned to provide parents with the information and/or support they need?
- How would you describe the status of your work? (Choose one option below.)
 - My organization would use grant funding to support the planning and design of a new approach.
 - My organization has planned and designed a new approach and would use grant funding to implement it.
 - Something else (please describe).

Timeline

Responses must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. PDT on Monday, June 6, 2022.

- **May 5 - June 6:** Organizations respond to RFI.
- **June:** Bellwether reviews RFIs and invites selected organizations to develop and submit proposals for funding.
- **July:** Organizations submit proposals.
- **Early August:** Grantees are selected, and funding is disbursed.

Note: We recognize that current and recent Bellwether clients may respond to this RFI and will enlist a third party to review these applications to mitigate any potential biases or conflicts.

Illustrative Examples

Wondering about the type of ideas we might consider? We've included a few examples below. But these are just examples. They are not meant to serve as exemplars or exclude any of the creative ideas you may have.

Example A: A nonprofit organization is seeking a planning grant to help it increase families' access to information about funding for flexible learning options and build their capacity to find and participate in the best options for their child. A school district provides \$1,000 directly to families to cover the cost of flexible learning options, including tutoring, enrichment activities, and college and career learning. A key part of the organization's work will be providing families' information about the funding, assisting them in applying for it, and helping them find supplemental options aligned with their child's needs, interests, and goals. The organization will focus on serving families of children with learning exceptionalities.

Example B: A school district and its nonprofit partner are seeking funding to implement a program that helps high school students define their postsecondary goals and access college and career coursework aligned with these goals. The state provides all students with an opportunity scholarship of \$3,600, which will help ensure that families incur no cost for the college and career coursework students take while still enrolled in high school. The nonprofit organization will help students develop learning pathways based on their interests, strengths, needs, and culture. The school will help students participate in a dual enrollment program to earn college credit or career and technical training aligned with their plans. The program will focus on serving students who are experiencing poverty.