

Youth Service Improvement Grants



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Cover photo courtesy of Mark DeGarmo Dance, a 2018 Youth Service Improvement Grantee.

Photographer: Leon Anthony James.

Overview

The Youth Service Improvement Grants (YSIG) program supports activities to improve the quality of direct services for young people ages 5 to 25 in the five boroughs of New York City. The long-term goal of YSIG is to strengthen existing services by helping youth-serving nonprofit organizations address challenges or remedy problems at the point of service, where staff and youth interact.

The YSIG program is unique in that it urges applicants not only to discuss their organization's promise and potential, but to identify gaps or challenges in the services they provide. The program asks applicants to be critical and reflective, to consider why and how complications exist, and to articulate how they intend to improve the ability of their programming to provide positive impact for youth.

Applicants should describe their organization's mission and the specific current youth programming that they propose to improve. The application should clearly describe a challenge or problem at the program's point of service, outline how the organization identified the problem, and explain how the problem negatively affects the experiences or outcomes of youth participants. Next, the application should propose a specific, standalone improvement plan to address the issue, improve the targeted programming, and yield a positive effect on participants' experiences. Strong proposals will make the case that the quality of youth services would improve if the issue were resolved, and will clearly describe a feasible, sustainable, and appropriate improvement. Examples of problem areas for improvement include: inadequate curriculum, gaps in the service skills of frontline staff, or a limitation in current services that negatively affects participants' experiences. Beyond this short list of examples, we welcome other compelling needs for service improvement.

New to the Youth Service Improvement Grants Program: Our Focus on Reducing Inequality in Youth Outcomes

In 2018, we took a fresh look at our Youth Service Improvement Grants program in the context of inequality in New York City. Three themes stood out in our review. First, the geography of inequality is stark, with poverty rates well over 40 percent in some neighborhoods and too little of our grant dollars going to those communities. Because economic and racial inequality are intertwined, better serving the highest poverty neighborhoods would also mean supporting Dominican, Puerto Rican, Afro-Caribbean, African American, and Southeast Asian youth. Second, a purely place-based approach to grantmaking would neglect under-served communities that are more geographically dispersed. Mexicans, now the third largest immigrant group in the city, have high rates of poverty but few established organizations tailored to their needs. LGBTQ youth are another group that is too often overlooked and whose well-being demands greater support. Third, our review noted the lack of racial, ethnic, gender identity and sexual-orientation diversity among executive directors and CEOs of youth serving organizations.

The new iteration of the YSIG program capitalizes on these insights and aligns more closely with the Foundation's broader focus on reducing inequality in youth outcomes. We welcome all applicants who share our goal of tackling inequality, but we seek to drive more of our grantmaking to organizations that 1) provide direct services to youth in the ten community districts identified as having the highest risk to child well-being by the Citizens' Committee for Children, 2) have existing programming tailored specifically to Mexican-descent or LGBTQ youth, or 3) are led by people of color or LGBTQ individuals. Through these grantmaking priorities, we hope YSIG will facilitate service improvements that enhance youth development and well-being for those youth with the greatest needs.

Awards

Awards are \$25,000 each and support projects lasting one year. Although the Foundation is prepared to fully fund projects of \$25,000, we are also willing to co-fund larger improvement efforts with other funders. Regardless of the size of the budget for the improvement project, we encourage applicants to commit some of their own resources through in-kind support or the use of unrestricted funds. We view this action as an indication of organizational commitment to the improvement project.

In addition to providing grant support, the Foundation will secure technical assistance to assist grantees in successfully implementing their improvement plans. The consultant will organize a learning community where grantees can discuss challenges, seek advice from peers and colleagues, and collaborate across projects.

YSIG Review Committee

Applications for Youth Service Improvement Grants are reviewed by a dedicated volunteer committee of Foundation staff once a year. Committee members have a diverse range of expertise, including finance, communications, and nonprofit administration. Thus, applications should be written to address an educated lay audience.

Eligibility

To be eligible for consideration, applying organizations must:

- Have their own 501(c)(3) tax-exemption. If an applying organization is separately incorporated but tax-exempt through a group ruling, the applicant should supply the 501(c)(3) letter of the parent organization and documentation that it is part of the group. In this case, only the applying organization's budget will be considered under the YSIG eligibility guidelines. If the applying organization is a sub-unit of the parent organization and is not separately incorporated, the parent organization's budget will be considered under the eligibility guidelines.
- Have an operating budget between \$1 million and \$5 million, if the organization serves youth only. If the applying organization serves youth and other populations, its operating budget must be less than \$20 million and its youth services budget must be between \$1 million and \$5 million.
- Be a community-based organization (CBO) that provides youth services in any of the five boroughs of New York City.
- Serve youth ages 5 to 25. At least 80 percent of youth participating in the services targeted for improvement must be in this age range.
- Serve youth directly. The applicant's staff must have direct contact with youth at the point of service.

Organizations previously funded under the YSIG program cannot apply again for at least 18 months after the end of their award.

What we do not support

The YSIG program only supports improvement activities, so we would not support:

- General operations.
- Planning, needs assessment, and evaluation proposals.
- Organizational improvement activities not focused on changes at the point-of-service, such as board development or financial system updates.
- Building campaigns, scholarships, endowments, lobbying, or awards to individuals.
- Expansions or additions to programming, including changes that simply increase the number of slots in a program or result in new programming. As such, all proposed budgetary items must be directly related to the proposed improvement.
- Public and private schools.

Selection Criteria

Grantees will be selected according to the following criteria:

1. Clear description of the organization's mission and current youth services

- The applicant provides a clear, compelling explanation of how the current services create positive and meaningful experiences for youth.

2. Compelling rationale for improvement

- The applicant clearly identifies a problem at the point of service and explains how the problem has negatively impacted the experiences of participants.
- The applicant details how they identified the problem and clearly articulates its likely causes.
- The applicant makes a strong case that the quality of services to youth would significantly improve if the problem were addressed.

3. Strength of the improvement plan

- The improvement plan effectively addresses the problem: it is targeted specifically at the causes of the problem, it is likely to be effective, and it is sustainable.
- The improvement activities can feasibly be implemented within the one-year grant period, which begins on September 1, 2019.
- The applicant identifies a capable staff member or manager to oversee the improvement plan and track progress across the timeline. This is different from staff working to implement the improvement.
- The applicant outlines a compelling plan to collect and use information to determine whether the improvement project is successful.
- The applicant makes the case that the improvement can be sustained operationally and financially.
- If additional funds will be required to continue the improvement after the grant period, the applicant provides a feasible plan to achieve sustainability.

Priority Considerations Focused on Reducing Inequality

Beginning in 2019, eligible applications that meet the selection criteria will be given priority for funding if they meet any of the qualifications below:

1. Provide youth services in one of the ten community districts identified as having the highest community risk to child well-being by the Citizens' Committee for Children:

Bronx:

- CD 1 - Mott Haven
- CD 2 - Hunts Point
- CD 3 - Morrisania
- CD 4 - Concourse/Highbridge
- CD 5 - University Heights
- CD 6 - East Tremont
- CD 7 - Bedford Park
- CD 9 - Union Port/Soundview

Brooklyn:

- CD 5 - East New York
- CD16 - Brownsville

Organizational offices do not need to be based in one of these community districts, but the service targeted for improvement must be currently operating in one of the districts. Organizations can identify their community districts on the New York City Department of City Planning's Community District Profiles webpage (<https://communityprofiles.planning.nyc.gov/>).

2. Have well-defined programming tailored specifically to Mexican-descent youth or to LGBTQ youth; or

With New York City being a diverse metropolis, it is likely that many programs will serve young people that fit into these groups. However, priority consideration is reserved for applicants that have well-defined services that are specifically designed for them. Others will not receive priority consideration.

3. Have leaders (e.g., executive directors or CEOs) who are people of color or LGBTQ individuals.

Proposal Documents

Prepare the following three documents for your online application: Background Information, Narrative, and Improvement Project Budget.

Use the Foundation's forms on the website to provide the following information. Do not edit or delete instructions from the form. Items 4-9 should be uploaded with the online application.

1. Background information on the organization (one page total)

- Describe the organization's overall mission and goals.
- Briefly describe the current services you provide for all populations served.
- If applicable, explain which priority consideration(s) on reducing inequality you meet.
- Describe the financial health of your organization, including major trends, challenges, or unusual developments that have affected the funding, staffing, or enrollment of your youth services over the past two years.

2. Narrative (four pages total)

- **Youth Services Targeted for Improvement (one page maximum)**
 - Describe the current youth services you want to improve. What does a participant experience on a day-to-day basis in the program? Which and how many staff are involved with the services? What is the training and experience of front-line staff?
 - If you are seeking special priority through the improvement of existing services to Mexican-descent or LGBTQ youth, please provide an in-depth description of those current services. Describe how programming is designed and implemented with the needs and experiences of those youth in mind.

- Describe participation in the programming: How often do youth attend and for how long do they stay with the services? How many youth participate in an average session? If there is a recruitment or selection process, please describe it.
- Describe the degree to which you have fulfilled your program goals and produced the intended youth outcomes. Please give examples and, if available, data.

- **Rationale for Improvement (one page maximum)**
 - Clearly identify and explain the problem in the program's direct services that you are seeking to improve. Describe how this problem has negatively impacted your program's ability to serve youth and/or enhance youth outcomes.
 - State how you identified the problem. What information derived from your program (e.g., data, surveys, observations, or discussions with youth and staff) brought this issue to your attention? How long has this issue existed? What are the likely underlying causes?
 - Given your understanding of the problem and your investigation of its causes, explain why addressing the problem would address its negative impact on your program and youth outcomes.

- **Improvement Plan (two pages maximum)**
 - Describe the plan (include specific goals and activities) for addressing the problem and cause(s) of the problem that you have identified.
 - Clearly detail how the proposed improvement will change your existing services and participants' experiences.
 - Provide a detailed timeline for the improvement plan, and affirm that the improvement activities can take place within a one-year grant period, beginning on September 1, 2019.
 - Identify a staff member to manage the improvement plan and describe how this person will track progress against the timeline. Also identify staff members or consultants who will implement the changes.

- Describe how the organization will determine whether the improvement is addressing the problem: What information will be collected to assess short-term results?
- Describe how the organization will sustain the improvement financially and programmatically, accounting for challenges such as ongoing training needs or staff turnover. If the improvement activities will result in an increase in program costs, state how the organization will ensure financial sustainability after the grant period ends. Please be as specific as possible.

3. Improvement project budget

- The improvement budget numbers will be entered into text boxes online. All applicants must prepare and upload a budget justification using the Improvement Project Budget Justification Form (available on our website). All items included on this budget must be directly related to the improvement. Identify any portion of the budget that will be funded by sources other than this grant. Identify both support from the organization (e.g., in-kind or support from unrestricted funds) and support from third parties.

4. Total organization budget

5. Total youth services budget (required for multiservice organizations)

- If the applying organization serves only youth, simply state that. No additional budget is required beyond File 4: Total Organization Budget.
- Multiservice organizations (i.e., those not exclusively focused on youth) must upload a separate youth services budget in this section. The youth services budget must include all services to children and youth provided by the organization, not only the budget for services targeted for improvement.

6. Institutional funders of the organization

- Upload a list of institutional funders (foundations, corporations, etc.) that contributed more than \$10,000 in the current fiscal year. (In the case of multiservice organizations, a list of supporters of youth programs should be submitted.)

7. Board of directors

8. Most recent audited financial statement or certified public accountant's review report

- Upload the most recent audited financial statement or certified public accountant's review report (2017 or more recent year). The audit or certified public accountant's review report must be uploaded with the application on the due date, and drafts are not acceptable. Please do not upload your tax forms/ returns/990s.

9. 501(c)(3) tax-exempt letter from the IRS

- Upload the organization's 501 (c)(3) Tax Exempt Letter. Please make sure that the EIN or FIN number is listed on the 501 (c)(3).

Application Procedures

The online application will be open on January 3, 2019. Proposals are due by March 7, 2019 (3:00 p.m. Eastern Time), for decisions in September 2019.

1. Applications are accepted through our website, www.wtgrantfoundation.org.

- Use the “Log In” link at the top of any page.
- If you have not submitted online with us before, you will need to register as the executive director or CEO, and obtain a log-in ID and password.

2. On your homepage, select “Apply for Funding.”

- For grant program, choose “Youth Service Improvement Grants Spring 2019.”
- Complete the eligibility quiz.
- After passing the eligibility quiz, you will be brought back to your home page. Click on the “Application-Youth Service Improvement Grants” task.

3. Fill in text boxes for the following information.

- Contact Information
(Development staff applying on behalf of the executive director or CEO should enter that leader’s information in the “Executive Director or CEO contact information” section. They should enter their own information in the “YSIG Contacts” section if they are the contact person. Once in YSIG Contacts, click “add,” under “role,” select “YSIG contact,” then click “add new person” and fill in their own contact information.)
- Organization Information.
- Project Information.

4. Upload the six files (items 4-9) listed in Proposal Documents and Supporting Documents (on pages 11-12).

5. Go to Review and Submit and click “View PDF.” This will generate your online application. Review the information to make sure your materials are in order.

Note: Due to recent web browser security upgrades, the PDF might not open in a separate window. If this happens, do the following:

- Turn off all pop-up blockers or go to your pop-up blocker settings and add “easygrants.wtgrantfoundation.org” to the list of Allowed Sites, which permits pop-ups from specific websites.
- Hold down the CTRL key and click the “View PDF” button.

6. Return to “Review and Submit” and click “Submit” at the top of the page. The system will send an email confirmation of the submission.

ASK THE GRANTS COORDINATOR

Must my organization fit the Foundation's priority considerations focused on reducing inequality?

No, any organization that fits the YSIG eligibility criteria may apply for the grant. However, organizations that meet any of the three stated priority considerations for reducing inequality will receive priority for funding.

Our organization is not located in any of the ten community districts identified as having the highest community risk to child well-being, but we provide youth services in one of the districts. Are we eligible to apply for priority consideration?

Yes, any organization that fits the YSIG eligibility criteria and has an established youth-serving program in one of the identified 10 community districts may apply for special consideration.

RECENT YOUTH SERVICE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

Trauma-Informed Care at Sylvia's Place

MCCNY Charities

MCCNY Charities provides services at Sylvia's Place, a 90-day emergency shelter for LGBTQ runaway and homeless youth. MCCNY offers shelter, case management services, medical services, access to computers, and self-defense training.

Recently, there have been increased incidents of mental health crises at the shelter where youth are suicidal or behave aggressively. While staff are trained in de-escalation techniques, they are not adequately trained to address serious mental health issues.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, MCCNY engaged a social worker to develop a training

curriculum in trauma-informed care and deliver training to staff. The plan would strengthen staff knowledge on mental health issues and increase mental health services to better support youth. The social worker would also design a tracking tool for staff to document use of the training and create a pre- and post-survey for youth to assess the effectiveness of the group therapy.

This grant to MCCNY Charities also meets the Foundation's new priority considerations on reducing inequality because the organization is improving an existing program designed for LGBTQ youth.

Employment and Education Services for High-Needs Young Adults in Red Hook

Red Hook Initiative

Red Hook Initiative's Young Adult Program helps youth who are disconnected from school and work obtain high school equivalency diplomas, jobs/internships and enroll in college or vocational programs.

A quarter of the young people who enroll in the Young Adult Program drop out before the program is complete.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Red Hook Initiative hired a case manager to help participants address their underlying issues such as lack of day care, health/mental health care, and housing. Red Hook Initiative also proposed to create a workforce readiness initiative that would focus on young adults with low educational attainment and little work experience.

Questions regarding the Youth Service Improvement Grants program may be sent to Sharon Brewster: sbrewster@wtgrantfdn.org.



60 East 42nd Street
43rd Floor
New York, NY 10165

T 212.752.0071
F 212.752.1398

wtgrantfoundation.org
info@wtgrantfdn.org