2020 Application Guidelines

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Program 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 goal 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.

YSIG 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. We ask 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 on youth.

Applicants should describe their organization’s mission and the 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 adversely 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 adversely affects participants’ experiences. Beyond these examples, we welcome other compelling needs for service improvement.
Our Focus on Reducing Inequality in Youth Outcomes

In 2018, we took stock of YSIG 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 few 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. People of Mexican-descent are 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 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. We also 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, or 2) have existing programming tailored specifically to Mexican-descent or LGBTQ youth, or 3) have leaders (executive directors or CEOs) who are people of color and/or members of the LGBTQ community. Through these grantmaking priorities, we hope YSIG will facilitate service improvements that enhance development and well-being for 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.

The Foundation will award up to six new Youth Service Improvement Grants annually.

In addition to providing grant support, grantees will participate in technical assistance activities designed to help them meet their improvement project goals. We have partnered with the Youth Development Institute to provide one-on-one support as well as learning community cohort meetings over the term of the grant. One-on-one support will allow each grantee to receive customized assistance that will help them work toward the successful implementation of the improvement project. The learning community cohort meetings will focus on peer-based learning and coaching, allowing grantees to discuss challenges, seek advice from peers and colleagues, and collaborate across projects in a supportive space.
Eligibility

All YSIG applicants must be youth-serving community-based nonprofit organizations based in any of the five boroughs of New York City whose staff have direct programmatic contact with youth at the point of service. Applicants must meet all organizational criteria to be eligible.

Organizational Criteria

1. 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. The applicant’s staff must have direct contact with youth at the point of service.

2. Have their own 501(c)(3) tax-exemption. If an applying organization is separately incorporated but tax-exempt through a group ruling (religious institutions), the applicant should supply the 501(c)(3) letter of the parent organization and documentation that it is part of the group.

3. 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.

4. Have most recent financial statements reviewed by an auditor, per New York State law requirement.

5. Have filed IRS Form 990.
To receive priority consideration, applicants must meet at least one of the reducing inequality criteria in addition to all organizational criteria.

Reducing Inequality Criteria

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
- CD 16 – Brownsville

Organizational offices do not need to be based in one of these community districts, but the service targeted for improvement must currently operate in one of the districts. Organizations can identify the community districts in which they serve youth on the New York City Department of City Planning’s Community District Profiles webpage (https://communityprofiles.planning.nyc.gov/).
2. Have existing 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, if services were not specifically designed for these populations, then the applicants are not eligible for priority consideration under this criterion.

3. Have a leader (executive director or CEO) who is a person of color and/or is a member of the LGBTQ community.
What we do not support

The YSIG program only supports improvement activities at the point of service for youth. 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.
- Capital fund projects, scholarships, endowments, lobbying, real estate purchases, 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.
- Organizations that utilize fiscal sponsors/conduits.
- Organizations that are based outside the five boroughs of New York City.

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

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. If you use acronyms that may not be familiar to a lay audience, please be sure to spell them out the first time. If you use terms that are not commonly known, please provide relevant context and explanations.

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 adversely 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, 2020.

- 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.
Application Materials

Prepare the following three documents for your online application: Background Information, Narrative, and Improvement Project Budget. Items 3-10 should be uploaded with the online application.

Applicants must use the Foundation’s forms, which are provided in the resources section of the website and on our grants management system. Do not edit or delete instructions from the forms. Only applications that use our forms will be reviewed.

Submission instructions will be available in late-January.

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 (six pages total)

- Youth Services Targeted for Improvement (two pages maximum).
  
  - Do not mention the improvement project activities in this section. Instead, describe the current youth services you want to improve. What does a participant experience on a day-to-day basis in the program? 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.
  
  - Which and how many staff are involved with the services (state names and titles)? What is the training and experience of front-line staff?
  
  - If you are seeking special priority through the improvement of existing services specifically for 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 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 (two pages maximum)

  - Clearly identify and explain the problem in the program’s direct services that you are seeking to improve. Describe how this problem has adversely 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 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, 2020.

— 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 also prepare and upload a budget justification using the Improvement Project Budget Justification Form (available on our grants management system). All items included on the budget must be directly related to the improvement. Identify any portion of the budget that will be funded by sources other than this grant, including 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. List of 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. List of board of directors

8. Most recent audited financial statement

Upload the most recent audited financial statement (2018 or more recent year). The audit must be uploaded with the application on the due date, and drafts are not acceptable.

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).

10. IRS Form 990
Must my organization fit the Foundation’s priority considerations focused on reducing inequality?

No. Any organization that fits the organizational eligibility criteria may apply. Organizations that meet the organizational criteria AND any of the three reducing inequality criteria 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 organizational eligibility criteria and has an established youth-serving program in one of the identified 10 community districts may apply for special consideration. Serving some youth from the 10 community districts in locations outside of the community districts does not make an organization eligible for priority consideration.
RECENT YOUTH SERVICE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

Program assistant training: Rocking the Boat

Rocking the Boat provides boatbuilding, environmental, and sailing programs to African-American, African, and Hispanic young people in the Bronx. Program assistants are alumni who have technical knowledge, but need leadership skills, knowledge of youth development principles, and teaching techniques.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Rocking the Boat will revise their training curriculum for the program assistants and increase the duration of the training periods. The program assistants’ curriculum will have a greater focus on leadership skills and teaching techniques. Rocking the Boat will bring in external experts to help revise the curriculum and staff training.

By improving an existing program in Bronx Community District 2, Rocking the Boat meets the Foundation’s priority consideration on reducing inequality.

Services for young teens from the LGBTQ community: Hetrick-Martin Institute

Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) provides free services to youth in the LGBTQ community. Services include mental and physical healthcare, academic enrichment, job readiness training, emergency, and basic needs services.

Recently, HMI has seen an increase in younger people (ages 13-15) accessing its services compared to the 18-21 year-old population it has traditionally served. HMI believes that LGBTQ young people are coming out at a younger age due to increased national social and political inclusivity, but their
services do not effectively address the developmental stages and needs of younger teens.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, HMI will redesign its youth service curriculum to include and meet the needs of LGBTQ youth ages 13-15. They will also create a tracking system to ensure that youth attend all their services and put into place adequate and appropriate plans for the future. Finally, HMI will train staff to carry out the curriculum and create an annualized on-boarding training module for future staff.

By improving an existing program designed for youth in the LGBTQ community, Hetrick-Martin Institute meets the Foundation’s priority consideration on reducing inequality.

Computer science and technology services for minority youth: New York on Tech

New York on Tech (NYOT) aims to create pathways for minority youth in New York City to obtain degrees and careers in computer science and IT. NYOT’s Tech Flex Leaders program embeds weekly computer science and technology classes at local companies and provides participants with professional internships.

Tech Flex Leaders participants gain a high level of proficiency in the technical, engineering, and coding aspects of computer science and IT, but do not currently receive training in the creative and design-centric aspects of computer science.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, New York on Tech will hire a consultant to work with staff to revise its curriculum to include teaching modules and workplans on website and software design applications. Tech Flex Leaders staff will also be trained to implement the enhanced curriculum.
Because their executive director is a person of color, New York on Tech meets the Foundation's priority considerations on reducing inequality.

**Support and training for coaches: PowerPlay NYC**

PowerPlay NYC’s Sports Training and Role-model for Success after-school program provides elementary and middle-school age girls with sports and formal instruction on topics such as substance abuse avoidance, bullying, body image, and positive study habits.

PowerPlay NYC hires coaches with backgrounds in physical education, community development, and sports, yet coaches do not have the training in youth development and conflict resolution necessary to run the non-sports, social-emotional components of the program.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, PowerPlay will hire several consultants, including UP2US Sports and SPARK, to create a tailored, comprehensive training series to meet the needs of the coaches. The consultants will train the coaches in topics that include promoting positive behavior, creating inclusive programs, and understanding triggers and de-escalating conflict.

By improving an existing program in Bronx Community Districts 4 and 5, PowerPlay NYC meets the Foundation’s priority considerations on reducing inequality.

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**Substance abuse treatment for young people in the LGBTQ community: LGBT Community Center**

The LGBT Community Center’s Youth Recovery program provides substance use treatment for LGBTQ young people ages 13-25. Youth are assessed and then provided with
individual and group services, such as counseling, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, along with referrals as needed.

While the Center provides services to youth in the LGBTQ community, they do not have recovery curricula designed specifically for youth. Instead, staff adapt adult LGBTQ and youth hetero/cis-normative recovery curricula, but those curricula do not adequately align with LGBTQ youths’ lived experiences.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, The Center will collaborate with Dr. Jeremy T. Goldbach from USC’s Center for LGBT Health Equity to develop a treatment curriculum to address the recovery needs of young people in the LGBTQ community.

Because they are improving an existing program that serves youth in the LGBTQ community and their executive director is a member of the LGBTQ community, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community meets the Foundation’s priority considerations on reducing inequality.
Preparing student athletes for college: South Bronx United

South Bronx United’s (SBU) Academy provides South Bronx youth in grades 6-12 with sports training and academic/college preparation services.

Although 91% of SBU graduates enroll in college within one year of graduation, only 25% earn a bachelor’s degree in four years, and 46% earn the degree in six years. SBU’s Math and English programming is not well aligned with New York State’s Regents curriculum, and they begin providing this programming in the 10th grade, which may be too late for the program’s students.

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, SBU will develop a New York State Regents-aligned academic college preparatory curriculum, and teach it to participants earlier. SBU will also hire qualified ESL tutors to work one-on-one with English Language Learners.

This grant to South Bronx United meets the Foundation’s priority considerations on reducing inequality because the organization is improving an existing program in Bronx Community Districts 4 and their executive director is a person of color.
Questions regarding the Youth Service Improvement Grants program may be sent to Sharon Brewster: sbrewster@wtgrantfdn.org.