



Youth Service Improvement Grants

2022 Application Guidelines

Updated January 2022

2022 Application Deadline:

March 10, 2022, 3:00pm ET



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Introduction

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 organizations' 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.

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.

Priority Consideration: Reducing Inequality

As part of the ongoing evolution of YSIG, which is one of a variety of good-neighbor grantmaking strategies the Foundation has pursued since the 1970s, Foundation leadership took stock of the program in 2018. This effort focused on assessing the landscape of youth inequality in New York City in order to gain insight into how we could do more to support young New Yorkers.

Ultimately, three major themes emerged:

- Inequality corresponds with geography, with poverty rates well over 40 percent in some neighborhoods and too little of Foundation grant dollars going to those communities.
- A purely place-based approach to grantmaking would neglect under-resourced 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.
- There is a notable lack of racial, ethnic, gender identity and sexual-orientation diversity among executive directors and CEOs of youth serving organizations.

Today's Youth Service Improvement Grants program capitalizes on these insights by prioritizing applications from organizations that: 1) provide direct services to youth in eleven 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 members of the LGBTQ community.

Awards

- Awards are \$25,000 each and support projects lasting one year, starting on September 1 of the award year.
- The Foundation will award up to six new Youth Service Improvement Grants annually.
- 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 as an indication of organizational commitment to the improvement project, especially in larger organizations.



NOTE

In addition to grant support, the Foundation also provides grantees access to technical assistance, including one-on-one support as your organization works toward successfully implementing the improvement project. In addition, cohort-wide “learning community” meetings allow for peer-based learning and coaching, as well as opportunities to discuss challenges, seek advice from peers and colleagues, and collaborate across projects in a supportive space.

Eligibility

NOTE

The YSIG program awards grants only to youth-serving community-based nonprofit organizations 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.** Organizations previously funded under either of the Foundation's Youth Service Grant programs cannot apply again for at least 18 months after the end of their award.

Organizational Criteria

- 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.
- Have their own 501c3 tax-exemption. If an applying organization is separately incorporated but tax-exempt through a group ruling (religious institutions), the applicant should supply the 501c3 letter of the parent organization and documentation that it is part of the group.
- Have an operating budget between \$250,000 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 \$250,000 and \$5 million.
- Have most recent financial statements reviewed by an auditor, per New York State law requirement. If the organization's annual budget is under \$750,000, then certified public accountant's reviewed financial statements are required.
- Have filed IRS Form 990.

i NOTE

To receive priority consideration, applicants must meet **at least one** of the following reducing inequality criteria **in addition to all** organizational criteria.

Priority Consideration: Reducing Inequality

- Provide youth services in one of the eleven 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
- CD 12- Williamsbridge

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 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/>).

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

Many programs serve Mexican-descent and LGBTQ youth, but only those organizations with programming specifically designed for these populations are eligible for priority consideration under this criterion.

- 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 do 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.
- Public and private schools.
- Organizations that utilize fiscal sponsors/conduits.
- Organizations that are based outside the five boroughs of New York City.

Application Materials



NOTE

The online application will open on January 4, 2022. Applications are due by March 10, 2022 (3:00 p.m. EST), for decisions in September 2022.

We accept applications only through our online application system, which is accessible through our website. Instructions for creating and submitting your online application are also available online.

All applications must use the Foundation’s forms, which can be downloaded from the “resources” section of the YSIG webpage, or from within the online application. The forms include guiding questions from the background information and narrative sections below. Do not edit the forms or delete instructions from them. Only applications that use our forms will be reviewed. All documents should be uploaded to the online application.

1. Background Information on the Organization (two-page total)

- Describe the organization’s overall mission and goals.
- Briefly describe the current services you provide for all populations served.
 - If applicable, describe which reducing inequality criterion you meet. If your organization currently provides youth services in one or more of the eleven community districts and wants to improve those services, please state which community district(s) will be the focus of the application.
 - 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)

Description of youth services targeted for improvement (two pages maximum).

Do not mention the improvement project activities in this section.

- Describe the current youth services you want to improve, including participation in the programming:
 - 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) to be improved? What is the training and experience of staff, including front-line staff who have direct contact with youth?
- If you are seeking priority consideration for improving existing services specifically designed 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 the 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 that demonstrates the improvement activities can take place within a one-year grant period, beginning on September 1, 2022.
- 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 in the online application).
- 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 Financial Statement

- Upload the most recent audited financial statement or certified public accountant's reviewed financial statements (most recent year). The audit or certified public accountant's reviewed financial statements must be uploaded with the application by the due date.
- Drafts are not accepted.

9. 501c3 Tax-exempt Letter from the IRS

- Upload the organization's 501c3 Tax Exempt Letter. Please make sure that the EIN or FIN number is listed on the 501c3.

10. IRS Form 990

Review 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.



NOTE

In general, strong applications: 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.

Applications will be reviewed against 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 of the award year.
- 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.

Appendix A: Ask the Grants Administrator

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 eleven 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 11 community districts may apply for special consideration. Serving some youth from the 11 community districts in locations outside of the community districts does not make an organization eligible for priority consideration.

Appendix B: Recent Youth Service Improvement Grants

Edible Schoolyard New York: Social-Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Instruction in Edible Education

Background

Edible Schoolyard New York partners with New York City public schools to provide students in grades 3K -8 culturally relevant, hands-on cooking and gardening so that youth are empowered to make healthy food choices.

Need

ESYNYC aims to be a safe space for students to de-stress, re-focus, and build self-confidence, but the organization currently lacks the training and resources to foster social-emotional learning or implement trauma-informed instructional practices.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Edible Schoolyard New York will identify best practices and frameworks for social and emotional learning and trauma-informed instruction and integrate them into its lessons and curriculum. ESYNYC will then train its staff in the new curriculum.

Chess-In-The Schools: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training for Staff and Curriculum Update

Background

Chess-In-The Schools' (CIS) three core programs provide services to students in grades 2-12 in Title I New York City public schools. The program organizes weekly classroom instruction and after-school clubs where chess training and coaching are provided to elementary and middle school students. The second program, Scholastic tournaments, is held on the weekends and during school holidays. The third program, College Bound, provides high school students with college preparatory and job readiness programming, in addition to advanced chess instruction.

Need

CIS conducted an assessment in 2020 to understand the needs of its staff, partner schools, and program participants, particularly in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The results of the assessment showed that CIS needed to better integrate DEI into its programming and staff training.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Chess-In-The Schools will contract with two consultants to better integrate DEI in its work: First, an education consultant will refine in-person and remote curricula, bringing both in line with common core standards and DEI values. Next, a DEI consultant will create DEI training modules for staff, including a train-the-trainer plan to enable CIS to train their staff themselves in the future.

Ballroom Basix USA: Updating, Informing, and Improving Ballroom Basix services to Better Include and Serve LGBTQ+ Youth

Background

Ballroom Basix USA (BBX) partners with New York City schools to provide Ballroom, Latin, and Line dance instruction to youth in grades 4-8.

Need

Traditional Ballroom culture and etiquette tends to support gender binaries and heteronormative structures, and doesn't consider the diverse personal identities and orientations of BBX's participants, CEO, board, and staff. BBX wants to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are not marginalized by its programming.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Ballroom Basix will contract the Ali Forney Center to help revise its curriculum (including standard language, protocols, gender-based physical configurations) to create safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth. The consultant will also work with BBX to create cultural and linguistic competency/DEI training for staff and board members. Finally, The Ali Forney Center will help create orientation materials and protocols for incoming staff and board members in order to sustain the targeted improvements as part of the organization's infrastructure.

Girl Be Heard: Girl Be Heard Leadership as Ensemble Curriculum Redesign

Background

Girl Be Heard (GBH) provides services for young women and gender expansive youth ages 12-21. Girl Be Heard's primary programs are the Girl Empowerment workshops, which are held after school and on Sundays, where participants work on original theatrical materials based on social justice issues. The second core program, the Mainstage Theatre program, has GBH participants audition to create and perform in annual mainstage shows.

Need

Girl Be Heard believes that its current programming does not address the needs of its majority Black and Brown participants. The curriculum and framework are old and were not created with a focus on these populations.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Girl Be Heard will hire an arts-education specialist to help revise the curriculum to be more culturally inclusive and to have a leadership component for youth of color.

CitySquash: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative

Background

CitySquash provides services to youth of color in low-income neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn. CitySquash's services include academic enrichment, school support, high school and college preparation, and squash instruction and practice after school and on weekends. The goal of the program is to have squash help participants gain entry to elite high schools and colleges.

Need

CitySquash has found that its participants are in the minority at these predominately White institutions and that their students' encounters with wealth and privilege can give way to feelings of marginalization and trauma.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, CitySquash will develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum to be integrated in all areas of its programming. To sustain this work, CitySquash will have regularly scheduled conversations with staff throughout the year about DEI and will develop workshops focused on transitions for students entering elite, predominantly White institutions.

Red Hook Initiative: A Transformative Justice Approach to Promoting Emotional Health and Healing Among BIPOC Youth in Red Hook Brooklyn

Background

Red Hook Initiative (RHI) provides youth ages 12-14 with developmentally targeted academic support, job readiness, part-time employment, college access, and emotional health support. RHI's free emotional health support offers wellness check-ins with youth to identify and address issues proactively before a crisis emerges. Licensed

counselors run emotional health groups, and short- and long-term counseling are provided as needed

Need

Many participants do not engage in emotional health services even when they are facing a difficult situation. Some reasons why youth don't participate are: the stigma attached to mental illness, and the perception that social workers will call the authorities and make a problem worse.

Improvement Plan

For their Youth Service Improvement Grant, Red Hook Initiative will engage consultants with expertise in Transformative Healing and Restorative Justice to design and deliver training for RHI's youth program staff, counseling team, and peer counselors. Following the training period, restorative justice and transformative healing will be integrated into all aspects of RHI's programming.

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

If you encounter technical difficulties, please use the contact form located at the bottom of each page in the online application.



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