

Postsecondary Educational Attainment

Request for Proposals

Application Deadlines

Round 1: Wednesday, April 20, 2022. Noon (12:00 PM). Eastern Standard Time.

Round 2: Friday, September 9, 2022. Noon (12:00 PM). Eastern Standard Time.

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Introduction to the Richard King Mellon Foundation

The Richard King Mellon Foundation's (Foundation) mission is to improve the competitive position of the region; strengthen the vitality of southwestern Pennsylvania, particularly the City of Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods; and protect important habitats and amenities in western Pennsylvania and other key landscapes. Founded in 1947, the Foundation is the largest foundation in southwestern Pennsylvania, and one of the 50 largest in the world. The Foundation's 2020 year-end endowment was \$3.1 billion, and its Trustees in 2020 disbursed \$130 million in grants and program-related investments. The Foundation focuses its funding on six mutually reinforcing funding programs, delineated in [its 2021-2030 Strategic Plan](#). These funding programs are: Conservation; Economic Development; Economic Mobility; Health and Well-Being; Organizational Effectiveness; and Social-Impact Investments. All six programs invest in bold, evidence-informed solutions that align with the Foundation's mission and contribute to positive change.

Economic Mobility Funding Program

[Economic Mobility](#) is one of the six programs defined in the Foundation's 2021-2030 strategic plan. The Economic Mobility program serves children and youth ages 0-24 years old who reside in low-income households in Allegheny or Westmoreland counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. Through the Economic Mobility program, the Foundation invests in pathways to opportunity for vulnerable children and youth so that they can overcome obstacles to achieving prosperity in adulthood. The Foundation recognizes that investing in children and youth is imperative to achieve the Economic Mobility program's vision: that all children and youth living in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties will be able to access their most promising future.

The Foundation organizes its Economic Mobility program into four investment areas: Educational Attainment; Future of Work; Supportive Living Environments; and Places of Opportunity. Collectively, these four investment areas describe the Foundation's approach to addressing the problem of limited economic mobility for children who reside in low-income households. Each investment area contains priorities and outcomes that further describe the Foundation's funding interests and the changes that the Foundation hopes to create.

Background: Postsecondary Education and Economic Mobility

Postsecondary education is education, occupational training, or skills development that occurs after obtaining a high school diploma or GED and that results in a certification, diploma, or degree. Postsecondary education plays an important role in economic mobility. In general, greater levels of postsecondary credential attainment correspond to increased individual lifetime earnings. Expanding the number of individuals who complete postsecondary education also has broader social benefits, such as a larger tax base, reduced reliance on public assistance programs, and a workforce that is more prepared to navigate economic disruptions.

However, the postsecondary educational landscape is complex, and barriers to enrollment and completion affect student populations in nuanced ways. One example is the growing costs of higher education and the difficulty for lower-income families to pay these costs. According to the Postsecondary Value Commission, "the full price (adjusted for inflation) of postsecondary education has increased by more than 170 percent over the last 40 years. Today, students from low-income backgrounds must find a way to finance an amount equivalent to 157 percent of their family's annual income to pay for one year at a four-year college ([page 11](#))."

Another barrier is the challenge of assessing the economic return on postsecondary education. Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce notes that "a higher level of education does not guarantee higher earnings, while less education does not always result in lower earnings... much of the variation in earnings within education levels results from differences in the field of study and occupation ([page 4](#))."

Lastly, students may encounter barriers associated with their identity or background. The Postsecondary Value

Commission notes that “Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds face barriers to college access, lower completion rates, and affordability challenges. They—and women—also experience lower economic returns in the workforce, impacting the value they reap from their studies” ([page 13](#)). The Postsecondary Value Commission also describes how “Low-income students from rural communities ... are less likely to have access to college, and especially to the most selective institutions in the country” ([page 14](#)).

Request for Proposals

The Richard King Mellon Foundation is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) that aims to serve young adults ages 14 to 24 years old who are from low-income households in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties as they navigate enrollment, persistence, and completion of postsecondary education. For the purposes of this RFP, postsecondary education includes any type of education, occupational training, or skills development that occurs after a young adult obtains a high school diploma or GED and that results in a certification, diploma, or degree. The Foundation will consider all submitted proposals that:

- expand the number of these young adults who enroll in and complete postsecondary education within six years of enrollment
- assist students with maximizing the potential economic and personal benefits that they might gain from their postsecondary education

The Foundation also strongly encourages collaborative proposals that engage multiple partners in the proposed activities, including sharing missions and goals, co-creating and sharing programs and services, and partnering in systems change.

Examples

Examples of ideas that may be considered include, but are not limited to, the items noted in Table 1. These are solely illustrative and not proscriptive. Applications may include a variety of services, products, or technologies. The Foundation welcomes a range of ideas and encourages thoughtful experimentation.

Table 1

Economic Mobility Program Priority	Sample Ideas
K-12 Academic Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customized postsecondary planning and advising that extends into grades 6-8 and engages students and parents • programs facilitating the attainment of college credits while in secondary school
Post-Secondary Education Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assistance with FAFSA completion and interpretation of financial assistance offers • peer or near-peer mentoring programs to support enrolled students • targeted advising interventions for students at-risk of not completing their credential • programs to expedite credit accumulation and degree completion

Eligibility Criteria

The Foundation's general eligibility criteria apply to the RFP. Please review the Funding Policies on the [Apply](#) page of the Foundation's website and the [General FAQs](#) found on the Foundation's Nonprofit and Public Sector Partners webpage.

For the purposes of this RFP, the Foundation offers additional guidance about proposals from public sector and nonprofit organizations.

Public sector organizations:

- may serve as the lead agency submitting a proposal for Planning and Innovation grants
- may participate as collaborating partners on both Planning and Innovation and Scalability grants submitted by nonprofit organizations serving as the lead agency
- include entities such as school districts, courts, or departments of health or human services

Nonprofit organizations:

- may serve as the lead agency submitting a proposal for Planning and Innovation grants or for Scalability grants
- may participate as collaborating partners on both Planning and Innovation or Scalability grants

Funding Guidelines

The Foundation expects to provide two types of support through this RFP.

Planning and Innovation grants:

- focus on experimentation and the development of new ideas. Recipients might describe activities such as piloting services or completing a feasibility study. Any evaluation activities should focus on understanding successes, challenges, and future possibilities resulting from the grant.
- will provide up to \$250,000 and funded activities should be completed within 12 to 18 months after the grant award

Scalability grants:

- sustain and expand promising, evidence-informed initiatives. Recipients might describe activities, projects, and ideas that have been tested within one population group or in one geographic area with promising success and require an infusion of funds to expand the reach of the program to other population groups or geographic areas
- will provide up to \$400,000 and funded activities should be completed within 18 to 24 months after the grant award

Grant funds awarded through this RFP may be used for a variety of expenses such as program and service delivery, consultant fees, evaluation, or "overhead" or administrative expenses. A limited amount of capital expenditures that are essential to accomplish the outcomes of the proposal may be included.

If an application is truly exceptional, the Foundation may consider providing more than \$250,000 for Planning and Innovation grants or \$400,000 for Scalability grants. Successful grants may be invited to apply for follow-on funding or additional capacity-building funding opportunities at the conclusion of the grant.

What the Foundation Will Not Fund

The Foundation will not fund the following items through this RFP:

- Endowments
- Advocacy, political causes or events
- Existing deficits or retroactive funding
- Event sponsorships
- Student scholarships

Application Timeline

Funding is expected to be awarded in two rounds during 2022. Applications for Planning and Innovation grants and Scalability grants will be accepted in both rounds.

Round 1	
Wednesday, April 20, 2022. Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications submitted https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_5499?SA=SNA&FID=35046
Thursday, June 30, 2022	Funding Status Notification
Friday, July 15, 2022	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants
Round 2	
Friday, September 9, 2022 Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications submitted https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_5499?SA=SNA&FID=35046
Wednesday, December 21, 2022	Funding Status Notification
Friday, December 23, 2022	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants

Inquiries

Please contact Lynne Ventress (lventress@rkmf.org) at the Foundation to discuss questions regarding this RFP. However, a discussion is discretionary and not a requirement.