CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Assembly Grant Program

New Solutions That Connect Families With Learning Options

Background and Context

Seven in ten parents are interested in exploring new learning options for their children, whether changing schools or finding different out-of-school options.1 Many express interest in extracurricular activities, tutoring, or alternative learning formats like learning pods, microschools, and home-schooling.2 Declining enrollment in public schools suggests that many families are looking for something the traditional school experience doesn’t provide.3 The demand for flexible, personalized learning options is on the rise.

Whether families are looking for learning options to supplement or replace the traditional school experience, however, their access to those options too often depends on their financial means and the time and energy they can devote to identifying the options that work best for them.

An increasing number of states have policies that provide direct-to-family funding to defray the costs of learning options. To meet family and student needs, long-standing learning options have expanded and innovative new options have emerged. But the scale of family demand and the increasing complexity of the learning ecosystem demand new scalable and sustainable solutions to the challenges of navigation.

In partnership with the Walton Family Foundation, Bellwether invites applications for up to $100,000 to support the design or development of new solutions to help families furthest from opportunity access flexible, personalized learning options. Select grantees will be invited to apply for a second round of up to $300,000 to support implementation in early 2024.

Questions? Email proposals@bellwether.org.
Grant funding may be used to support a wide variety of activities, including user research or stakeholder engagement to identify unmet needs; the design of new tools, resources, or approaches to providing support to families; or the piloting of advancements in new technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence) or services and their refinement in response to feedback. What applications must do is propose a new solution that will improve how families access one or more of the following:

**Funding**
Streamline how families enroll in programs that provide public funding to defray the costs of learning options.

**Information**
Provide the information families value most in searching for and selecting available learning options.

**Guidance**
Support families in selecting learning options, including but not limited to the quality of options and how options align with students’ individual needs.

**Eligible Entities**
Entities eligible to apply for funding include family-serving organizations, technology companies or providers, and state agencies or state program administrators. All applicants and partners must be registered or incorporated in accordance with applicable state and local laws, as well as maintain a primary place of business in the United States. An eligible entity may not be the lead on more than one application.

For-profit entities are eligible to apply if they intend to use the grant for charitable purposes and agree to comply with procedures for assuring that grant funds are spent solely for the charitable purposes intended.

**Competitive Priorities**
Bellwether will give special consideration to applications that propose:

- Partnerships between two or more eligible entities that enable coordinated solutions for families and students furthest from opportunity.
- Solutions that have leveraged or will leverage user research, human-centered design, and/or stakeholder engagement to ensure solutions are responsive to the experiences, needs, and perspectives of families and students furthest from opportunity.
- Solutions that facilitate or will facilitate participation in and satisfaction with publicly funded programs, such as state education savings account programs or microgrant programs, in which
  - Families have direct control over funding,
  - Families can use funding for a variety of learning options that supplement or replace a traditional school experience, or
Families can use funding for expenses that may include but are not limited to school tuition.

**Application Process**

Grants will be awarded in two phases. Phase 1 will provide up to $100,000 for the design or development of new solutions, and Phase 2 will provide up to $300,000 for the implementation of new solutions.

**Phase 1: Design or Development**
- July 11, 2023: Bellwether releases the Call for Applications.
- August 22, 2023: Phase 1 applications due.
- Late September 2023: Applicants are notified of whether their application will be funded.
- Mid-October 2023: Grantees receive up to $100,000 in funding.
- October 2023 through January 2024: Grantees design or develop new solutions.
- Late January 2024: Grantees report Phase 1 outputs of their work.

**Phase 2: Implementation**
- February 2024: Select grantees are invited to apply for additional funding up to $300,000 to support the implementation of new solutions.
- March 2024: Phase 2 applications due.
- April 2024: Applicants are notified of whether their application will be funded and receive up to $300,000 in funding.
- April through September 2024: Grantees implement their new solutions.
- September 2024: Grantees report outcomes of their work.

**Phase 1 Application Questions**

To apply, complete the [online application](#) no later than August 22 at 11:59 p.m. PDT. You may view or edit your responses at any time before you submit them.

The [Grant Program Brief](#) and [Grant Program Rules](#) include important context and guidance for the Call for Applications. These documents provide information related to metrics, budget submission, intellectual property, conflicts of interest, and more, along with example solutions.

**We encourage you to read the Grant Program Brief and Grant Program Rules in full before completing your application.**

1. Who is the target population for which you are designing or developing the solution? How does this population meet the definition of families and students furthest from opportunity in the Grant Program Brief? (Word limit 150)
2. What barrier(s) to access does the target population face? How do you know? How will you ensure your understanding of the barriers is informed by families’ and students’ needs, experiences, and perspectives? (Word limit 300)
3. How will your solution address the barrier(s) faced by the target population and increase their access to flexible, personalized learning options? (Word limit 300)

4. Who will lead this work? What are their roles, areas of expertise, and responsibilities for the successful design or development of the solution? (Word limit 150)

5. What is your plan for scaling and/or sustaining the solution after initial design, development, and implementation? (Word limit 150)

6. In Phase 1, what one to two metrics will you use to assess your success in designing or developing the solution? How will you provide evidence of the design or development of your solution? (Word limit 150)

7. If you advance to Phase 2, what one to two metrics do you anticipate using to assess your success in implementing your solution? How will you provide evidence of the implementation of your solution? (Word limit 150)

8. How will you share what you learn from the design or development of your solution with others working to study or solve similar challenges? (Word limit 150)

9. If your solution addresses the competitive priorities listed above, please answer the questions below.
   a. Partnerships between two or more eligible entities: How will you and your partners collaborate to ensure successful, coordinated solutions for families and students furthest from opportunity? (Word limit 150)
   b. User research, human-centered design, and/or stakeholder engagement: In what ways have you used (or will you use) user research, human-centered design, or stakeholder engagement to ensure solutions are responsive to the experiences, needs, and perspectives of families and students furthest from opportunity? (Word limit 150)
   c. Participation in public programs: In what ways will your solution facilitate participation in and satisfaction with public programs such as state education savings account programs or microgrant programs? In what state(s)? (Word limit 150)

10. Please submit a 2- to 3-minute video telling us about yourself, your organization, and how your solution will increase families’ access to flexible, personalized learning options.

11. Please submit a budget that outlines the intended use of funds for a Phase 1 grant up to $100,000. How will the funds advance the design or development of your solution? What other resources, if any, will you dedicate to the design, development, and implementation of the solution? (Word limit 300)
About Bellwether

Bellwether is a national nonprofit that exists to transform education to ensure systemically marginalized young people achieve outcomes that lead to fulfilling lives and flourishing communities. Founded in 2010, we work hand in hand with education leaders and organizations to accelerate their impact, inform and influence policy and program design, and share what we learn along the way.

In summer 2022, Bellwether launched Assembly, an effort to advance how families customize their child’s learning by accessing more personalized and flexible options. Through research and analysis on the current state of play and discussion and debate with a diverse group of experts and stakeholders, Bellwether identified several barriers that could prevent access to flexible learning options – first and foremost, the challenges families face in navigating their options in an increasingly complex ecosystem. For all families to have equitable access to the benefits of Assembly, they must have the funding, information, and guidance to select learning options best aligned with their students’ needs, interests, and goals.

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