



Notice of Request for Proposals

Advancing Ideal Learning in the Public Sector

June 2018

Overview

Trust for Learning (the Trust), a project of New Venture Fund, is a group of grant makers that works to ensure that each child has access to high-quality early education that meets them where they are, prepares them for success in school, and takes them to where they want to be in life. To achieve this goal, the Trust works to increase the supply of developmental early childhood programs while also helping practitioners to increase public demand through effective advocacy and communications.

A 501(c)(3) established in 2006, New Venture Fund (NVF) is dedicated to supporting innovative and effective public interest projects by providing professional insight and services to institutions and individuals seeking to foster change through strategic philanthropy. This notice of Request for Proposals (RFP) builds on the Trust's work by supporting collaborative efforts among providers to increase the supply of Ideal Learning programs and strengthen the demand for these approaches within the public sector to serve more diverse communities. The following provides context for this RFP and outlines the specific priorities, eligibility criteria, program requirements, and terms for this grant.

Background

Since its inception eight years ago, the Trust has been a champion for quality in early childhood education, working to support exemplary models of early learning that focus on whole child development. These "Ideal Learning" approaches represent the highest quality experience that parents overwhelmingly want for their children—highly personalized, content rich, emotionally and intellectually engaging environments that nurture each child's unique development.

Ideal Learning assumes that children best achieve their potential through experiences that activate their interests, abilities, and talents, as well as build knowledge, know-how, and confidence. Children, parents, educators, and communities work together to create lifelong learners who thrive in childhood and throughout adulthood.

Over the past several years, the Trust has brought together providers of Ideal Learning approaches into a community of practice, called the Ideal Learning Roundtable, to strengthen their collective capacity to influence policy and practice in the field. Together, they embrace a shared set of [principles](#) that form the foundation of high-quality, early education programs, including:

- Decision-making reflects a commitment to equity;
- Children construct knowledge from diverse experiences to make meaning of the

world;

- Play is an essential element of young children’s learning;
- Instruction is personalized and child-focused to acknowledge each child’s individual development and unique abilities;
- The teacher is a guide, nurturing presence, and co-constructor of knowledge;
- Young children and adults learn through relationships;
- The environment, as “teacher”, is intentionally designed to facilitate children’s exploration, independence, and interaction;
- The time of childhood is valued; and
- There is a continuous learning environment to support adult development.

These principles draw from the strong theoretical underpinnings of multiple early learning approaches and an emerging evidence base that should continue to be explored. They provide an anchor for educators to reflect on their work, inform professional learning, affect decision-making, and influence policy.

A national survey of [*Parents as Consumers of Early Education*](#), shows that these offerings are exactly the type of early childhood experiences that parents want for their children. Parents, regardless of race or income, value high-quality early education, know why it is important to their children, and want access to it to fulfill their mission as parents. Yet too often, families must settle for less-than-ideal options due to challenges such as cost, transportation, and the need for full-time care. The research findings expose the need to make Ideal Learning approaches more accessible and affordable for families who are eager to have their children participate in high-quality early education.

In order to meet this demand, substantial work needs to be done to increase the supply of Ideal Learning programs. A recent landscape analysis commissioned by the Trust, estimates that less than 3% of children from birth to five are enrolled in Ideal Learning approaches. This accounts for approximately 10% of children enrolled in formal early care and education. In addition, these data show that the current supply of programs is largely based in the private sector and underrepresents children from low-income families and rural areas. Data also show that children who attend public preschool programs are often in economically and racially segregated programs due to public funding restrictions, despite research showing that there are significant academic and social benefits associated with more diverse classrooms.

The growth of public investment in early learning in many states and cities over the past several years presents a promising opportunity to increase the supply Ideal Learning in a way that has the ability to reach a more diverse population. Programs and policies must be intentional, however, in order to provide the highest quality Ideal Learning experiences to all children. The Trust seeks to catalyze action through this RFP.

Priorities

Trust for Learning seeks proposals that will grow the footprint of Ideal Learning in the public sector to ensure that more children, particularly those in underserved communities, have access to the high-quality education that they deserve. The Trust will consider collaborative efforts among two or more

Ideal Learning approaches or providers to increase access to these programs. Such requests shall include innovative strategies and programs that address one or more of the following priorities:

- 1) Develop or implement research tools and solutions that will enhance public sector accountability of Ideal Learning programs;
- 2) Influence systems change within states and/or districts that will enable participation of Ideal Learning providers in publicly funded early childhood programs; and/or
- 3) Implement effective practices aligned with the [Principles of Ideal Learning Programs](#) in a publicly funded district or community. For example, if focused on professional development, the proposal must align with the continuous learning environment principle, including requiring that all educational staff engage in a continual cycle of observation and reflection with the goals of consistent improvement and better understanding and conscious countering of systemic racism.

The Trust believes that these priorities are central to the ability of Ideal Learning approaches to expand into the public sector. Robust programs and strong leadership are needed in each of these areas to ensure that all children have access to the highest quality early learning opportunities.

Competitive Advantage

While not required, the Trust will give competitive advantage to proposals that include a partnership between two or more different Ideal Learning approaches (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, Tools of the Mind, Friends Quaker Schools, Bank Street College of Education, HighScope, etc.).

Eligibility Criteria

In order to be eligible for a grant, applicants must provide evidence showing they meet the following criteria:

- 1) Partnership between two or more approaches or providers that will work collaboratively on the proposed strategy or programs;
- 2) Alignment of the proposed strategies, models, or approaches with the Principles of Ideal Learning Programs;
- 3) An emphasis on equity and inclusion of disadvantaged populations that fosters greater integration within classrooms;
- 4) Public sector engagement, expansion, or change; and
- 5) A commitment to sharing the learnings of this grant with the [Ideal Learning Roundtable](#) and the field writ large.

Program Requirements

Applicants must present a narrative that describes how the strategies or programs that they are proposing will address the priority selected. This narrative should include:

- a rationale for why the strategy or program is needed, and how it will contribute to the overall goal of expanding Ideal Learning approaches in the public sector;

- an understanding of other players in this area of the field, and how you will be complementing or advancing this work;
- an evidence-based theory of action with measurable goals by which to assess program impact;
- an estimate of the number of additional children served or affected, and if possible, data disaggregated by race and income;
- a timeline of proposed activities;
- preliminary budget detailing projected costs; and
- a strategy for sharing knowledge and disseminating findings within the field.

Of note, proposals shall not include requests for construction, capital improvements, general operating expenses, direct lobbying work, or other activities that do not address practice, research, or policy.

Terms of Awards

The Trust will consider proposals ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000 that extend for a period of up to 24 months. Depending on the quality of applications received, the Trust anticipates making multiple grant awards. Proposals should be submitted no later than August 31, 2018.

The Trust expects to announce grant awards and provide the first installment of funds in the fall of 2018.

Submissions

Proposals must be submitted online through this form [here](#). Please note that other forms of submission will not be accepted.

To view a Word document with the questions you will be required to answer when filling out the online application form, click [here](#).

Questions

Please contact Ally Cady with any questions at ally@trustforlearning.org

Definitions

These definitions should be used for the following key terms in this notice:

Partnership. An agreed upon arrangement between two or more parties to work together where each party has distinct roles and responsibilities as part of the initiative. Documentation of such a partnership may be formal or informal and might include a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), letter of intent (LOI), or other evidence.

Provider. A non-profit organization, association, school, or other institution that 1) provides early childhood education programming or services, or 2) supports such providers through research, tools, resources, and other services.

Underserved community: A geographic area or population that has historically experienced a shortage of services, including, but not limited to, individuals of a particular income, race, ethnic class, or those with special needs.