



ASPEN FAMILY PROSPERITY INNOVATION COMMUNITY

PHASE II



REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTENT

Ascend at the Aspen Institute
2300 N Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

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Vision: *We envision an America in which a legacy of educational success and economic security passes from one generation to the next.*

Mission: *Ascend at the Aspen Institute is the hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success, economic security, and health and well-being.*

The Aspen Prosperity Innovation Community: Overview

Who: Cohort of up to twenty (20) leading organizations, with strong policy expertise and/or on-the-ground service delivery expertise; passionate about innovation; achieving greater impact; and working collaboratively with a focus on families 200 percent or below the poverty line and an emphasis on solutions that move those families into living-wage, quality jobs. A select group of organizations will be invited to submit a proposal following an open-sourced request for letters of intent (LOI). In addition, Ascend at the Aspen Institute will be creating a National Advisory Board of experts and innovators to provide additional perspective, expertise and partnership. This cohort will be part of Phase II of the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community, which launched with Phase I in December 2017 with six policy partners; 10 community-based partners; and 13 Advisors. More on Phase I can be found [here](#).

What: The [Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community](#) (Family Prosperity) is a learning and action community focused on developing bold strategies and solutions that strengthen parents' and families' employment, economic security, and health and well-being with an equity lens. These solutions will shift behaviors and mindsets of employers, policymakers, health providers, and influence public-private partnerships, resulting in a portfolio of strategies with significant potential for transforming the lives of working families. Ascend will invest up to \$2.6 million in grants in the selected organizations.

How: Rethink, develop, and advance policies and practices that strengthen the health and economic stability of families with low incomes, with an emphasis on solutions that power well-being where it has been short-circuited. Family Prosperity will provide financial support to policy experts and community innovators to deepen and leverage their organizations' expertise and capacity to enhance their impact as well as the collective reach and results of the learning community. In addition to the grant award, Ascend at the Aspen Institute will design and host convenings and support collaborative work, including a communications and messaging strategy, as well as leverage a group of Advisor experts. The Robert Wood Foundation (RWJF) is supporting this work, which is Phase II of the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community.

Where: Aspen Institute campus in Aspen, CO; Chesapeake Bay, MD; Washington DC; and other locations, in addition to virtual tools that facilitate collaboration. Select site visits may be offered as well.

When: June 2020 – July 2022

The Aspen Prosperity Innovation Community: Expectations and Results

Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community Objective: To rethink, develop, and align bipartisan and cross-sector solutions and strategies that tap the creativity, knowledge, and assets of organizations and the families they serve to advance family health and stability through stronger workplace, early childhood, and health services.

With its partners, Ascend is working to shift mindsets and create conditions for policies, practices, and systems to ensure a legacy of educational success, economic security, and health and well-being is passed from one generation to the next. This learning and action community is committed to spurring collaborations and approaches that promote intentional implementation across state and local agencies and structures, funding streams, and services that puts the health and well-being of child and family outcomes at the center. Its work consistently reflects a commitment to racial and gender equity. Critical to this work is ensuring all families have access to the education and workforce training, social supports, and health care, including mental health care, they need to create a lasting legacy of economic stability and overall well-being that passes from one generation to the next.

The Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community (Family Prosperity) was launched in late December 2017 with a cohort of leading policy organizations with the vision that family and individual well-being is built, much as a house is constructed, with a variety of materials including opportunities to learn, access to health care, and social relationships. The materials needed at different stages of life vary. In the earliest stages of life, when the brain is developing, children need opportunities to learn and grow. Young adults with children may need access to meaningful, sustaining work and access to quality early learning environments for their children. Yet, currently, nearly 45 percent of all children – more than 32 million – live in families with low incomes, and young adults with children experience the highest rates of poverty in the United States. There is much more to do if we want our communities to enjoy the civic, social, and economic well-being that comes when family well-being is built, maintained, and shored up during life's storms.

Family Prosperity takes a strategic lens on increasing the economic mobility and health and well-being of families, recognizing there is also an opportunity to more effectively communicate new learning and action among leading organizations around the country who do not otherwise collaborate or find themselves aligned on these issues. **Family Prosperity Phase I launched with six leading policy organizations; 10 on-the-ground community organizations; and 13 expert Advisors, and we are launching Phase II of Family Prosperity with a strengthened objective to continue to build the case and set of strategies that support this important premise: the policies that support families' economic stability and workforce participation must also acknowledge parents' multifaceted roles and responsibilities are essential to family well-being.**

What Organizations Will Contribute: To ensure a stronger, deeper, more relevant set of policies and practices are in place at the local, state, and federal levels to advance whole family stability and health, and engage employers in private and public sectors, Ascend is requesting letters of intent (LOI) for a learning and action community which is Phase II of Family Prosperity. Ascend will identify up to twenty (20) organizations to receive funding in the amount of between \$75,000-\$125,000 over 24 months. This funding will support the development of actionable ideas, strategies, products, and tools to improve parents' and families' lives at the intersection of work and health, and grantees' participation in a series of convenings focused on advancing forward-thinking policies and communications strategies for family health and economic supports in the United States.

For purposes of this grantmaking round we are focused on results in the categories of innovation, influence, and impact, as defined below.

Innovation: *The improvement of an existing policy or practice with the goal of producing better outcomes for both children and parents.*

Influence: *Increased engagement and education of policy leaders, employers, and influencers who have the capacity to make changes in policies and/or funding that allow for the implementation or expansion of approaches that serve families holistically.*

Impact: *The effect that policies and practices have on workplace and early childhood supports to build family health and stability.*

In evaluating the LOIs, Ascend will assess the innovation potential of policy development and service delivery; capacity to shift mindsets and cultures within and beyond organizations, with a special focus on the public and private sectors, notably those who employ workers with low incomes; and impact of the policy and communications strategies that result.

Key learning questions that Ascend will explore and respond to through the course of the Aspen Ascend Family Prosperity Innovation Community (Phase II) include:

1. How do the motivations, feedback loops with employees, understanding of regulations, leadership approaches, and capacity to implement policies impact decisions that employers make on behalf of their employees? How can those lessons be leveraged for better outcomes for families?
2. What are ways to (including models) and conditions that promote effective and equitable opportunities for families (i.e., young parents) in low-wage work industries, including promoting entry and advancement opportunities in high-growth sectors?
3. How to identify and increase awareness of the connections among, and implications of the connections among, economic asset-building, family mental health, and child health and early development outcomes?
4. How to improve coordination between organizations committed to family stability, childhood health, and elimination of structural barriers that create disparities?
5. In a divided political climate, how to bridge gaps, create fresh framing, and engage new partners across sectors and parties in the effort to move all families toward economic

stability? What are the opportunities at different levels of government – local, state, and federal – that may be ripe for partnerships to advance innovations for families with low wages and incomes?

Organizations are expected to allocate the time and resources necessary for policy and practice development and packaging, evaluation and data collection activities, grant and results reporting, participation in convenings, check-in calls, and in-person meetings. Organizations will have input into the agenda for convenings and their work will be elevated and highlighted by the platform of the Aspen Institute. Specifically, at least two senior policy/program leaders from each grantee partner will be expected to participate in each of the three learning convenings. Selected organizations will also be invited to nominate parent participants for convenings and technical assistance, as parent voices will be critical to informing the solutions that emerge from Phase II of Family Prosperity. Applicants are advised to consider whether they have the capacity and organizational commitment to effectively participate in these opportunities before submitting an LOI, as well as the mechanisms that they have in place to engage parents in their projects.

Convening dates:

- ❖ **September 22-25, 2020 at the Hyatt Regency in Chesapeake Bay, Maryland**
- ❖ **April 6-9, 2021 at the Aspen Institute campus in Aspen, Colorado**
- ❖ **October 12-15, 2021 at the Aspen Institute campus in Aspen, Colorado**

Background

Who we are: The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, and an international network of partners. **Ascend is a policy program of the Aspen Institute and hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success, economic security, and improved health and well-being.** We believe that education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being are the essential components needed to build opportunity and extend it across generations. We take a two-generation (2Gen) approach to our work — approaches that build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together. We also take an equity lens to our work, focusing on the importance of diversity and inclusion across our practice, policy, and research areas. This includes bringing a gender¹ and racial

¹ A gender lens examines whether programs, policies, or systems can affect women and men differently because of their different social situations. For example, a higher percentage of women than men in the United States are low-income. For more information, see [Grantmaking with a Gender Lens](#).

equity² lens to analysis and a racial equity lens includes examining the ways that economic wellbeing and stability in communities of color has been short-circuited by structural racism.³ In addition, we are deepening our knowledge and capacity to advance work around the intersectionality of class, geography, age, and perspective.

As a model of social innovation, leadership development, and cross-sector collaboration, we are engaged in three strategies to spread, scale, and implement solutions for families with low incomes:

- ❖ **Building a vibrant network of diverse leaders** through the national Ascend Network and Ascend Fellowship;
- ❖ **Elevating and advancing two-generation best practices, policies, and aligning resources** through research, publications, convenings, media, online platforms, and financial investment; and
- ❖ **Engaging the perspectives, strengths, resilience, and aspirations of families to inform program design and policy development** through focus groups, storytelling, and forums.

Context: Meaningful work, underpinned by education, relevant skills, and networks, is essential to economic and social mobility. Yet in America, far too many families struggle to achieve intergenerational opportunity. This gap in economic security has profound health implications. [As Healthy People 2020](#) highlights, poverty and education strongly influence peoples' ability to achieve and sustain good health. While the economy in early 2020 is strong, it is not working for all. To capitalize on this moment we must accelerate robust innovation; advance effective policies, practices, and pathways to meaningful work and opportunity; and, build the political will necessary to implement new solutions for families with low incomes. To achieve this, we believe Family Prosperity, now in Phase II, is well-positioned to provide a cohort of up to 20 organizations with the following opportunities:

- ❖ Give cross-sector stakeholders and experts, who share common goals and values but differ on policy approaches, access to trusted spaces where they can speak freely and bridge their divides.

² According to the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, racial equity is the substantive alternative to structural racism. It is a social outcomes “picture” in which race is not consistently associated with privilege and disadvantage. The goal of racial equity is to produce fairness and social justice – race would no longer be a factor in the assessment of merit, or in the distribution of opportunity. For more information, see: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/images/Roundtable%20on%20Community%20Change%20RETOC.pdf>

³ Economic exclusion and inequality are deeply linked. The racial wealth gap is one significant reason for the persistence and growth of economic inequality along racial and ethnic lines. For example, according to data from the Survey of Consumer Finances, the median white household possessed \$13 in net wealth for every dollar held by the median black household in 2013. That same year, median white households possessed \$10 for each dollar held by the median Latino/a household. <http://www.demos.org/publication/asset-value-whiteness-understanding-racial-wealth-gap>

- ❖ Offer national and community-based organizations, policymakers, advocates and stakeholders who rarely or inadequately tap local models guiding sources to inform and accelerate their discussions, policies, and actions.
- ❖ Infuse family voices that are absent from discussions about effective solutions for meaningful work and leverage undervalued talent, to close the disconnect between the people who make policy and those who are impacted by it.
- ❖ Improve policymakers' and the public's understanding of how just workforce policies can also promote a more productive and successful workforce.
- ❖ Eliminate the siloes in which discussions about policies that impact families occur. These stifle innovative collaborations across the fields of health and economic security.
- ❖ Establish policy frameworks that embrace the combination of research, family expertise, best practice and innovation.
- ❖ Engage employers who are innovators in promoting family supportive policies so they can contribute to a solutions discussion.

We also believe that creating a legacy of economic security and educational success for all families requires the work of many organizations and many types of effort. Our point of view is that the most effective policy and systems change is informed by the voices and experiences of families, data and research, and best and promising practices. We embrace co-creating solutions and dynamic collaborations with leaders from all sectors of society. We seek partners who are committed, strategic, forward-thinking, and passionate in pursuit of improving the lives of children and their families through innovative, evidence-based, family-informed policies and practices. These policies and practices are one aspect of two-generation strategies, which provide opportunities for and meet the needs of children and their parents together. Ascend engages in policy advancement at multiple levels, and works with the Ascend Network to increase access to family supports through a range of 2Gen approaches. We focus on strategies that align services and policies for children and their parents, but our “North Star” is ensuring a cycle of well-being is built and passed on from one generation to the next.

What Can Selected Partners Expect?

In addition to financial resources to support policy and practice development rooted in family voices, partners selected to receive investments from Family Prosperity will have the opportunity to join the Ascend Network (if they are not already partners), a diverse group of more than 390 “thought and action” leaders from across the country who are creating pathways to opportunity for families with low incomes. Requirements and benefits of participation in Family Prosperity include:

- ❖ A minimum of two senior program leaders' participation in three (3) Ascend at the Aspen Institute-hosted convenings that result in policy and practice recommendations, briefs, and resources – such as guidelines and case studies – to advance local, state, and federal policies and practices (dates included in this LOI);
- ❖ Guidance and input into a research/learning agenda for family-supportive innovations in key policy levers, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Childcare Tax Credits

(CTC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), as well as other policies such as paid leave, workforce supports, and systems such as Head Start and Medicaid.

- ❖ [Online and media platforms](#) for leaders and organizations to showcase solutions, challenges, outcomes, and voices of families;
- ❖ Briefings for targeted audiences and webinars designed to influence and elevate innovations and recommendations from work across the cohort;
- ❖ Influence strategy with private sector employers, including contributing to briefings and outreach sessions;
- ❖ Peer learning, training, and technical assistance, particularly around communications and messaging;
- ❖ Opportunities to share learning and impact with policy, program, media, and philanthropic leaders; and
- ❖ Opportunities to join Ascend Network convenings, including the [Aspen ThinkXChange](#).

LOI Guidelines

Eligibility

The Aspen Ascend Family Prosperity Innovation Community is limited to organizations with a demonstrated track record in delivering results. This LOI is being circulated widely in order to ensure a broad net is cast across forward-thinking organizations; however, we are seeking organizations with multi-issue policy and practice depth and an understanding of the interplay and nuances of policy innovation and implementation at the local, state and federal level. We also seek organizations with a track record of serving families in communities effectively, through innovative partnerships and strong workforce collaborations. Our emphasis is on action, results, and learning. We are looking for efforts that are well-positioned to plan, test, and implement policies and practices that will significantly improve the lives of parents and their children, with an explicit focus on supporting parents in achieving economic stability through education and work. Grants must lead to documented results and/or learning in the categories of influence, innovation, and impact during the grant period.

To be eligible for Aspen Ascend Family Prosperity Innovation Community Phase II grants, applicant organizations must be:

- ❖ Working to implement or expand policies that benefit families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level;
- ❖ Focused on or highlighting cross-sector or cross-issue collaborations that lead to improved and aligned policies and resources to produce better outcomes for children and parents;
- ❖ Committed to participating in and contributing to Family Prosperity and its objectives;
- ❖ Committed to documenting and sharing results, learning, and tools with the field;

- ❖ A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (*Note: Public and for-profit entities should identify 501(c) nonprofit partners with whom to submit LOIs.*);
- ❖ Governed by a board of directors; and
- ❖ Located within the United States.

Applicants with submissions selected to move on to the full-proposal phase will be notified by March 25, 2020. Grant recipients will be notified of their status by May 28, 2020. Note that all grant agreements will be due to Ascend by June 12, 2020 and all grants will begin on June 15, 2020 and end on July 29, 2022. Alternate grant periods will not be considered.

Priority

Priority will be given to applicants whose organizations:

- ❖ Have a track record of leading a policy and/or practice effort with significant potential to shift mindsets and impact policies and outcomes for families with low incomes;
- ❖ Interested in fully collaborating with new or unlikely partners with the aim of developing new mindsets and approaches to solving problems and advancing their existing or new ideas;
- ❖ Have a strong relationship with local and/or national employer(s);
- ❖ Bring an equity and intersectional lens to their work;
- ❖ Demonstrate capacity to engage parents' voices to inform and shift policies and practices internally and externally;
- ❖ Propose to produce new tools, knowledge, and strategies; and
- ❖ Have access to and broad reach within a system or potential dissemination network.

LOI Guidelines

LOIs must include the following items:

1. Cover sheet – a cover sheet that includes the following information:

- ❖ Name of applicant organization
- ❖ Employer Identification Number
- ❖ Address of organization
- ❖ Website address of organization
- ❖ Executive Director/CEO's name, title, phone number, and email
- ❖ Project director's name, title, phone number, and email (this is the person who is responsible for overall project management of the proposed work)
- ❖ One sentence summary of project being proposed
- ❖ Amount of funds requested from the Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community (*Note: organizations can apply for between \$75,000 and \$125,000.*)
- ❖ Total project budget
- ❖ Total organizational budget
- ❖ Date of the LOI submission

2. Narrative – that includes the following items (maximum of three pages, minimum 12-pt. font, one-inch margins; LOIs of more than five total pages long, including cover letter and budget narrative, will not be considered):

- ❖ One paragraph: A brief statement about why the organization is interested in joining the Family Prosperity cohort, the demographics of the population that will be served, and what the organization hopes to contribute to and receive from both the cohort and the Ascend Network;
- ❖ One paragraph: Purpose of the request (need being addressed, how the project will impact the economic well-being of parents and children at the national level, relationship of the request/proposed project to the organization's primary mission);
- ❖ One paragraph: Policies and/or practices being addressed and shifted as a result of proposed project (i.e., federal, state, and/or local policies and levers; focus on EITC, CTC, and/or TANF, or other policies and practices);
- ❖ One paragraph: A description of how voices and perspectives of parents with low incomes and/or children will inform or be elevated by the proposed work.
- ❖ One paragraph: Please specify the results and learning that will emerge from this project. What is your organization's plan for assessing and documenting results and lessons learned about the project? How does evaluation fit into your project? How will learning be shared with the cohort and the larger field? What tools will result? What learning question(s) are you looking to address?
- ❖ One paragraph: Include a statement on the organization's mission, history, and significant accomplishments in the last two years, and address both the existing or potential role of a two-generation approach in your work and how the organization accounts for racial and gender equity.
- ❖ One paragraph: Please describe your organization's systems change reach and how your proposed project is well-positioned to shift, inform, or change systems, including through strategic communications (if applicable, include quantitative data, such as the size and scope of your membership, number of site or locations in which you operate, and any formal networks of which your organization is a member).
- ❖ Please note any previous affiliation or engagement your organization has had with the Aspen Institute.

Budget Narrative (One page)

- ❖ Complete the Project Budget attachment.
- ❖ Include a description of each line item in your project budget and how the costs were calculated (e.g., personnel line item includes 50% of Project Director's time, meeting costs line item includes food and beverages for three focus group sessions, etc.).
- ❖ Note: Each Family Prosperity partner will be invited to send two senior program representatives (e.g., CEO, Executive Director, or other senior program staff person) to participate in the three (3) cohort convenings. We will also consider organizations sending a senior communications representative. Ascend will cover lodging and food costs for participants, but applicants should budget air and ground transportation for two (2) participants to attend three (3) convenings over the course of the grant period.

- ❖ Ascend will also consider asking each organization in the cohort to bring a parent leader from their networks to convenings. Please consider how you might do so in other parts of the LOI and identify costs in your budget.

Note: Ascend at the Aspen Institute's review of your LOI may include a review of your organization's most recent Form 990 tax return available at www.guidestar.org.

Grantmaking Process and Timeline

The grant selection process for the Aspen Institute Ascend Innovation Community funding for Phase II is comprised of multiple stages. Those stages are:

1. **Letter of Interest (LOI) released** (February 4, 2020)
2. **Optional webinar on LOI process** (February 11, 2020)
3. **LOIs due to Ascend** (February 21, 2020)
4. **Notification of LOI status and distribution of Request for Proposals (RFP)** (March 25, 2020)
5. **Webinar with Ascend staff** (April 2, 2020)
6. **Proposals due to Ascend** (April 20, 2020)
7. **Final selection** of grantees (May 28, 2020)
8. **Grant agreements start** (June 15, 2020)
9. **Mandatory webinar for organizations selected** (June 17, 2020)

Submitting an LOI

To submit an LOI, please submit the following in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and/or PDF format (other electronic formats will not be accepted):

- ___ **Cover sheet** as outlined above
- ___ **Narrative** responding to the "LOI Guidelines" (up to three pages maximum)
- ___ **Budget Attachment** (up to one page maximum)

**Submit your LOI (cover sheet, narrative, and attachments) by
5:00 pm ET on February 21, 2020, to:**

AspenFamilyProsperityLOI@aspeninstitute.org

Please direct questions to:

Lucy.Gibson@aspeninstitute.org