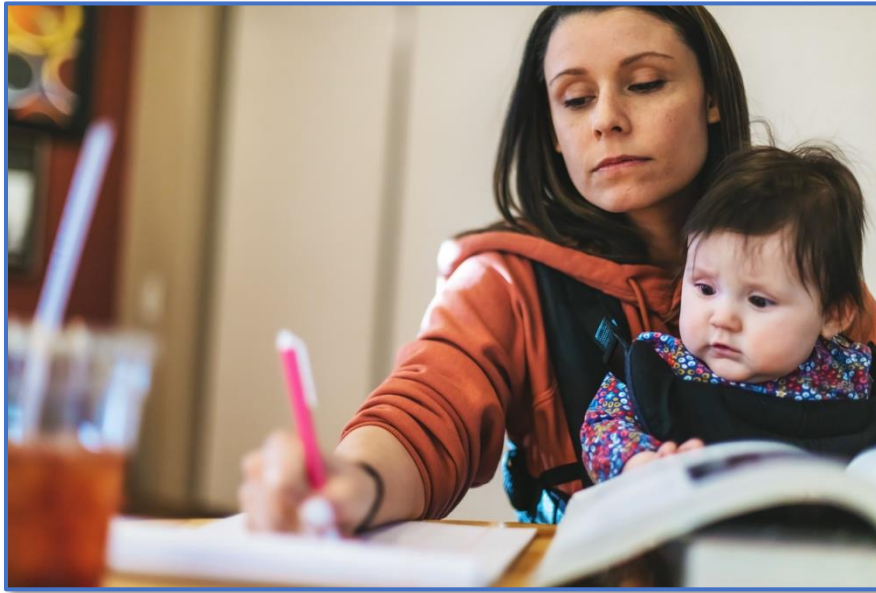


## The Aspen Parent Powered Solutions Fund Request for Proposals (RFP)



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

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

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**Ascend at the Aspen Institute**

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*“If you want to see more families succeed in the process, they should be a part of that process. We want to be a part of the process because that makes us want to be more successful.”*

*— Rynn Bell, Ascend Parent Advisor at the 2019 Aspen Forum on Children & Families*



## Overview: The Aspen Parent Powered Solutions Fund

**Purpose:** The Aspen Parent Powered Solutions Fund was created by the [Ascend Parent Advisors](#) to the [Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents \(PSP\) Initiative](#), and funded by [Imaginable Futures](#), to support nonprofit organizations focused on increasing postsecondary success among parents. The Fund’s activities will expand the capacity of its parent leaders to engage in philanthropic decision-making and enhance their ability to provide technical assistance to other parents and emerging nonprofit organizations. Ascend will chronicle all aspects of the Fund to document learnings and develop a model for the philanthropic sector to replicate and scale.

**Who should apply:** This Fund was created by parents to provide financial resources to programs that are supporting parents in completing postsecondary programs, including workforce development, career and technical education, and baccalaureate degree programs. Applicants must highlight how their models lead to postsecondary completion and how they elevate parent and family voice to improve their models. Pilot and established programs within 501(c)(3) nonprofits and institutions of higher education are welcome to apply.\*

**What we will support:** The Fund will support and advance solutions, practices, and innovations that support student parent engagement and postsecondary completion. Among other methods of direct engagement, resources can be used to include students who are parents in decision-making processes, to hire students who are parents, to have parents as consultants on work, etc.

**Grant details:** Six grantees will be selected to receive \$25,000. Grantees will have a yearlong term, with grants awarded in October 2020 and ending in September 2021.

\*Additional eligibility requirements are outlined in “RFP Guidelines.”

## Background: The Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative






**Objective:** To advance solutions and innovations that support students who are parents through postsecondary completion.

Postsecondary pathways for parents have long been of interest to Ascend and are a core component of our [two-generation \(2Gen\) approach](#). We know that incorporating the voices of parents and families in conversations where decisions are made is critical to designing and implementing sound policy and practice.

In November 2018, Ascend at the Aspen Institute launched the [Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents \(PSP\) Initiative](#) — a multi-year effort to increase the completion rates of parents seeking to achieve a postsecondary degree or credential. Through our partnership with Imaginable Futures and ECMC Foundation, Ascend has had the opportunity to convene parents, practitioners, and researchers in the field of postsecondary success to develop a deeper understanding of the opportunities, barriers, and challenges facing students who are parents.

Ascend entered Phase II of the PSP Initiative in July 2019 focused on collaborating with postsecondary leaders to implement programs, advance strategies, and create resources on college campuses and in workforce development programs for students who are parents.

To learn more about the PSP Initiative and the student parent space more generally, access the Ascend resources below:

-  [Accelerating Postsecondary Success for Parents: Leveraging the 2Gen Approach in Policy](#)
-  [Accelerating Postsecondary Success for Parents: Leveraging the 2Gen Approach in Practice](#)
-  [Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative: Success in Workforce Programs for Parents](#)
-  [Accelerating Postsecondary Success for Parents: Identifying and Addressing Mental Health Needs](#)
-  [Parents in College: By the Numbers \(joint publication with the Institute for Women's Policy Research\)](#)

## **Background: The Aspen Institute and Ascend at the Aspen Institute**

**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 at the Aspen Institute** 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 advance a two-generation (2Gen) approach to build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and parents together. We also take an equity lens to our work and emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion across our practice, policy, and research

areas. This includes bringing a gender<sup>1</sup> and racial equity<sup>2</sup> lens to analysis. Moreover, a racial equity lens includes examining the ways that economic well-being and stability in communities of color have been short-circuited by structural racism.<sup>3</sup> In addition, we are deepening our knowledge and capacity to advance work focused on the intersectionality of class, geography, age, and perspective.

## The Ascend Parent Advisors



Prior to the formal launch of Phase I, Ascend convened a cohort of 16 Parent Advisors — mothers and fathers who were still on their postsecondary journey (or recently graduated) — to serve as experts and influencers for our work. They joined a group of researchers, practitioners, and advocates for the first PSP Initiative convening in July 2018 to launch this work and begin a yearlong landscape analysis of the opportunities and challenges for student parents.

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<sup>1</sup> 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](#).

<sup>2</sup> 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>.

<sup>3</sup> 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. For more information, see: <http://www.demos.org/publication/asset-value-whiteness-understanding-racial-wealth-gap>.



Ascend convened a second cohort of Parent Advisors for Phase II to develop programmatic and policy recommendations and guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of the first Parent Powered Solutions Fund. Similar to the Phase I cohort, this group of 11 Parent Advisors are representative of the demographics of the students who are parents across the United States. Collectively, they advise the work of the Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative and are the leaders of the Parent Powered Solutions Fund. Their voices are illustrative of the approximately [four million student parents](#) enrolled in postsecondary programs across the country.

The Parent Advisors' passion and dedication in leading this initiative comes from their lived experiences and a desire to see these innovations at and beyond their own institutions. They have been true leaders, working across governmental institutions, nonprofit organizations, school boards, equity initiatives, and higher education institutions to bring awareness to the needs of student parent, share their voice, and advocate for change for student parents. Please find their mission statement below.

**The Ascend Parent Advisors to the Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative are dedicated to the highest quality of education, inspiration, and engagement in the national student parent community. Parent Advisors advocate for equitable access to postsecondary education, training programs, and family support for students who are parenting by sharing knowledge and best practices.**

Each Parent Advisor shares a deep commitment to the sustainability of this work and a shared enthusiasm for the innovative solutions that will come about as a result of the Fund. With collective experience from their work with the Aspen Institute ThinkXChange, Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC) Family Resource Center, and the City University of New York (CUNY), in addition to meetings with state legislators and former First Lady Michelle Obama, among others, these Parent Advisors are leading the way for student parents.

**Key learning questions that Parent Advisors will explore and respond to throughout the course of the Ascend Parent Powered Solutions Fund selection process include:**

- What are the strongest outreach strategies that postsecondary institutions are using to identify and engage students who are parents?



- What are the best strategies to support parents enrolled in postsecondary programs?
- How are organizations preparing students who are parents for the workforce after postsecondary completion?
- How are organizations establishing partnerships to build effective social networks for parents?

To learn more about the Parent Advisors, access the resources below:

- [Ascend Parent Advisor Cohort II Biographies](#)
- The Ascend Parent Advisors wrote blog posts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - [I Am a Mom, Intern and Student – the Pandemic Made Me a Teacher and Speech Language Pathologist Too](#) by Yoslin Amaya Hernandez
  - [A Philosopher’s Perspective on Parenting During a Pandemic](#) by Jesus Benitez
  - [One Student Parent Shares the Impact of the Crisis](#) by Lesley Del Rio
  - [What New Normal? This is My Life](#) by Drayton Jackson
  - [1L of a Year](#) by Michaela Martin
  - [An Unfinished Thought: My Life in Quarantine](#) by Savannah Steiger
  - [Student Voice Op-ed](#) by Ariel Ventura-Lazo
  - [I Will Not be Deterred from My Goals as a Parent in 2020](#) by Waukecha Wilkerson

## [This is the Moment for Student Parents](#)

Institutions are ready to bolster supports for students who are parents on and off campuses. Across local, state, and federal policy we also see an increased emphasis on the needs of parents to advance the well-being of all students. In the unprecedented times of COVID-19, we are presented with the opportunity to rebuild systems with students who are parents at the forefront. Through this Fund, we seek innovative ideas that put parents at the center of action and change on college and university campuses. True innovation harnesses the aspirations of the parenting student and practices power-sharing in a way that really moves the needle on student success — all while facing one of the biggest threats to student parent support momentum we have seen.

In spite of the impact of this pandemic, we still have to advance the work that ensures strong outcomes for student parents. In doing so, we will come together to continue to build bridges and provide supports for this population. Through the Parent Powered Solutions Fund, we are committed to creating a community that builds supports that withstand this pandemic and prevails in the face of future barriers. Now is the time to act in a way that will forever change history and the way we look at students who are parents.

## [Details: The Aspen Parent Powered Solutions Fund](#)

Building on Ascend’s track record of engaging parent voice and expertise, we will support a **Parent Powered Solutions Fund** that will be led and designed by the Ascend Parent Advisors to

support nonprofit organizations focused on increasing postsecondary success among parents. The Fund’s activities will expand the capacity of its parent leaders to engage in philanthropic decision-making and enhance their ability to provide technical assistance to other parents and emerging nonprofit organizations. Ascend will chronicle all aspects of the Fund to document learnings and develop a model for the philanthropic sector to replicate and scale.

**The Parent Powered Solutions Fund has four goals:**

- 1. Place parent voices and their experiences at the center of philanthropic decision-making;**
- 2. Expand opportunities to share parent and family narratives and recommendations with practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists at local and national levels;**
- 3. Better understand and support community-based organizations in strengthening their programming and advocacy for parents pursuing postsecondary degrees and credentials; and**
- 4. Surface and support solutions parents believe to be most effective.**

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 2Gen approaches. 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?**

The Parent Powered Solutions Fund will provide practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists with vital insights and impactful personal accounts to illuminate the work they do on behalf of families. The Fund will ensure parents have the capacity, resources, and positioning to influence practice, policy, and philanthropy on behalf of other parents. As one Ascend Parent Advisor shared, “Who better than those of us who have fallen through the cracks to point out the solutions?” By building on established relationships with organizations

and our track record of fostering parent leadership, we are committed to ensuring that policies and practices are guided by the insights and leadership of parents.

#### **Anticipated outcomes include:**

- Increased investment in parent voice; advocacy; and expert engagement by philanthropists, systems leaders, institutions, and practitioner organizations;
- Parent leaders who can develop their own capacity to assess organizations and have the ability to meet advocacy needs; and,
- A model of parent engagement and parent-led solutions that can be replicated by the public sector and private philanthropy.

**In addition to the implementation or strengthening of parent engagement practices, selected partners will be required to attend the Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative Strategy Session III on March 25-26, 2021. Partners will also be required to share insights and provide updates in an interim and a final report. Requirements will be shared when grants are awarded.**

#### **Report Dates:**

- **Interim Report Deadline:** March 15, 2021
- **Final Report Deadline:** November 30, 2021

## **RFP Guidelines**

### **Eligibility**

**To be eligible for the Parent Powered Solutions Fund grants, applicant organizations must be:**

- Working to implement or expand undergraduate (or first postsecondary credential) programs and policies that benefit parents and engage them in creation and iteration;
- Serving parents with low income up to 200 percent below the federal poverty line;
- Committed to documenting and sharing results, learning, and tools with the field;
- A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (excluding K-12 schools) including, but not limited to, programs that support postsecondary access and completion for parents and programs that provide supports during the summer before enrollment; and
- Located within the United States.

### **Priority**

**Priority will be given to applicants whose organizations:**

- Bring a racial equity and intersectional lens to their work;
- Propose producing new tools, knowledge, and strategies;
- Include parents in decision-making;
- Hire students who are parents to serve other student parents; and
- Serve the children of the parents in their program.



## Proposal Guidelines

Proposals must include the following items:

### 1. Cover sheet

The cover sheet must include the following information:

- Name of applicant organization
- Employer identification number (EIN)
- Address of organization
- Website of organization
- Executive director/CEO's name, title, phone number, and email
- Project director's name, title, phone number, and email (*Note: 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 Parent Powered Solutions Fund (*Note: Organizations can apply for funds up to \$25,000*)
- Total project budget
- Total organizational budget

### 2. Narrative

This section should be no longer than 3 pages. Please answer the following questions.

1. **Program:** What is the proposed program for which you are requesting funding? Does your organization use the two-generational (2Gen) approach? How long has the program/initiative worked with student parents? Are supports provided for the children of the parents? If so, what kind?
2. **Data:** How do you identify participants of your program? How do you collect or intend to collect data on students who are parents? Please share high-level demographic data about parents served in your program.
3. **Engagement:** How do you engage parents in your work and/or how do you plan to use these funds to engage parents? If you already engage parents, how is parent learning being measured?
4. **Impact and Success:** How do the student parents in your program build [social capital](#)? What are your anticipated parent postsecondary outcomes in one year and in three years? What will this funding support, and how will you sustain your program beyond this funding?

5. **Racial Equity:** How does your program demonstrate its commitment to racial equity? If there are no clear indicators, how will you use these funds to apply a racial equity lens to your program?
6. **Aspen Institute Connections:** Please note any previous affiliation or engagement your organization has had with The Aspen Institute.

### 3. Budget Narrative (1 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 percent of project director's time, meeting costs line item includes food and beverages for three focus group sessions, etc.)

### 4. Parent Reference (1 submission)

- Provide a written reference from a parent participant (or potential participant) of your program.
  - The reference should be no longer than 2 pages.
- OR**
- Provide a video testimonial from a parent participant (or potential participant) of your program.
  - The video should be no longer than 3 minutes.

**Note:** *Ascend at the Aspen Institute's review of your application may include a review of your organization's most recent Form 990 tax return available at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org).*

## Grantmaking Process and Timeline

The timeline for the Ascend Parent Powered Solutions Fund is provided below:

- **RFP Released:** July 14, 2020
- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** August 28, 2020
- **Proposal Review:** September 1, 2020 – October 1, 2020
- **Grantees Announced:** October 8, 2020
- **Mandatory Introductory Webinar:** October 13, 2020
- **Beginning of Grant Cycle:** October 30, 2020
- **Interim Report Deadline:** March 15, 2021
- **Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative Strategy Session III:** March 25-26, 2021
- **End of Grant Cycle:** October 31, 2021
- **Final Report Deadline:** November 30, 2021

## Submitting a Proposal

Please submit the following via the link below.

- \_\_\_ **Cover sheet** as outlined above
- \_\_\_ **Narrative** responding to the “Proposal Guidelines” (up to 3 pages maximum)
- \_\_\_ **Budget Attachment** (up to 1 page maximum)
- \_\_\_ **Parent Reference** (1 submission maximum)

**Submit your proposal (cover sheet, narrative, and attachments) by**

**11:59 pm ET on Friday, August 28, 2020 to**

**<https://www.tfaforms.com/4837567>**

**Please direct questions to:**

**[aspenppsRFP@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:aspenppsRFP@aspeninstitute.org)**