



The Aspen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants Request for Proposals (RFP)



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.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute

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"I am full of hope that this will drive innovation through public and private partnership and create change that can remove structural barriers to success."

—Michelle Rhone-Collins, chief executive officer of LIFT and an Ascend National Advisor



Overview: The Aspen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants

Purpose: [Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) will select up to three states, counties, or cities to plan and implement policies and programs to promote postsecondary completion for parents by increasing their access to supports and public benefits such as child care, health care, housing, financial support, and asset building. These efforts will be carried out in partnership with local and/or state agencies and organizations and will be informed by data and student input to support parent postsecondary and economic success. Successful applications must focus on either innovations that support **single mothers**, potentially in addition to student parents more broadly, or a focus on **student parents enrolled in community college pathways**.

Eligibility: This opportunity is open to any U.S. state, county, or city executive office or agency, with one applicant per jurisdiction.

Support: Grantees will receive technical assistance, peer learning opportunities, and a grant of up to \$150,000 to support an 18-month engagement.

RFP issue date: Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Optional webinar for interested applicants: Thursday, October 1, 2020

Optional virtual office hours for interested applicants: Wednesday, October 21, 2020; Wednesday, November 18, 2020

Deadline for proposals: Friday, December 11, 2020

Notice of grantee selection decision to applicants: Friday, January 29, 2021

Public announcement: Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Grant period: February 2021 through September 2022

Ascend lead: David Croom, Assistant Director for Postsecondary Achievement and Innovation

Please direct questions to: aspenpapg@aspeninstitute.org

Summary

Ascend at the Aspen Institute announces its Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants to promote student parent success at the city, county, and state levels. These grants recognize the opportunity and urgent need to support the economic security of parents in postsecondary programs and to dismantle longstanding economic and social inequality.

Ascend will award 18-month grants of up to \$150,000 to three public sector entities to work in partnership with key stakeholders, such as peer agencies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, postsecondary education and training providers, and employers, to build and improve policies and programs that support postsecondary attainment among parents, including single mothers. Grantees will receive financial resources and technical assistance to accelerate current partnership efforts in their jurisdictions that support student parents and their families by increasing access to



supports like early childhood education, housing, health care, and other supports that increase postsecondary access and success for parents. This grant opportunity will place special emphasis on applications that prioritize supporting single mothers in the range of postsecondary systems as well as efforts to build and support career pathways for parents at community colleges, where student parents are most prevalent.

Selected grantees will accelerate partnerships and collaborations at the state and/or community level to establish shared goals and design policies and/or programs to improve postsecondary outcomes for parents through system alignments and coordination among community colleges; higher education institutions; economic development programs; workforce development programs; early childhood programs; human service agencies; or other stakeholders, such as child care agencies, food security organizations, nonprofit advocacy and research organizations, parent groups, business leaders, and more.

In addition to funding, selected grantees will receive a complement of technical assistance and peer-learning opportunities designed and coordinated by Ascend. Grantees will have their work and outcomes amplified by the [Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative](#) and [Ascend Network](#).

Purpose and Background

Investing in parent postsecondary success is one of the most effective strategies for accelerating their economic and social mobility, addressing longstanding inequalities, and building state and local economies. When public sector agencies and their key partners are given the time and space to coordinate, align their efforts, and innovate, they can build supportive pathways toward meaningful degrees and credentials that lead to careers offering good pay and benefits, dignity, and advancement opportunity for parents. When parents attain postsecondary degrees and credentials, children benefit through higher family earnings, better school readiness, and a greater likelihood of pursuing higher learning themselves.¹



“Being a student parent is incredibly difficult but one of the most difficult parts is feeling unheard – like nobody cares. Participating in the process of advocating for policy change gives me something to fight for and a way to be heard.”
— **Michaela Martin, Ascend PSP Parent Advisor**

¹ Dubow, E. F., Boxer, P., & Husemann, L. R. (2009). Long-Term Effects of Parents’ Education on Children’s Educational and Occupational Success Mediation by Family Interactions, Child Aggression, and Teenage Aspirations. *Psychology Faculty Publications*, 55(4), 224-249; Duncan, G. J., Ziol-Guest, K. M., & Kalil, A. (2010). Early-Childhood Poverty and Adult Attainment, Behavior and Health. *Child Development*, 81(1), 306-325.



Meeting the Moment to Equitably Rebuild States and Communities

The far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 have been especially hard on parents and families with low incomes, women and communities of color, and those who have lost jobs. The unprecedented COVID-era challenges experienced by postsecondary students are especially intense for parenting students, who struggled with child care and heightened financial challenges even before the recent economic downturn. An equitable recovery must increase workforce development and postsecondary attainment for parents by deploying resources and innovative policy strategies across public institutions and systems. As we navigate this health and economic crisis, we have an opportunity to rebuild our systems to better support parents of young children, which will reduce racial, ethnic, and gender-based asset gaps and promote economic development overall.

Student Parents Are Especially Likely to be Women of Color

One in five students pursuing higher education are raising dependent children, and among student parents, 43 percent are single mothers. More than half of student parents have children under age 6. Women of color are especially likely to be raising children while they attend school, with 40 percent of Black women and 36 percent of Native American women, for example, raising children while in college. Student parents are more likely to attend community colleges than any other institution type, but they are dramatically over-represented at for-profit colleges,² which often provide poor value and leave students with high debt but no degree.

Betting on the Strengths and Contributions of Postsecondary Students with Children

Investing in parents brings a powerful set of assets to families, communities, employers, and the economy. Student parents bring life experience and maturity to their campus and communities and have higher grade point averages than other students.³ Parents who attain college degrees earn far more than those without degrees or other high-quality credentials. Single mothers who complete bachelor's degrees, for example, earn more than twice as much over their lifetimes than those with high school diplomas only — even when considering the cost of education and years of lost earnings while in school. Research shows that supports like child care, coaching and case management, and additional financial assistance can dramatically increase parents' likelihood of completing college and more than pay for themselves through years of increased tax contributions and public benefits savings after students earn degrees.⁴

Policy Acceleration and Partnerships Needed to Address Challenges

Despite the substantial earnings gains enjoyed by parents who attain A.A. or B.A. degrees and other high-quality credentials, parents are much less likely than other students to complete postsecondary programs for a variety of reasons. Parents have far fewer financial and time-based resources to contribute toward their training and education compared with other students, given high child care

² Aspen Institute Ascend and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). (2018). *Students in College: By the Numbers*. Washington, DC. <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers/> (retrieved August 19, 2020).

³ Ascend and IWPR 2018.

⁴ Reichlin Cruse, Lindsey, Jessica Milli, Susana Contreras-Mendez, Tessa Holtzman, and Barbara Gault. (2019). *Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: National and State Estimates of the Costs and Benefits of Single Mothers' Educational Attainment to Individuals, Families, and Society*. Washington DC: Institute for Women' Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/R600_Investing-in-Single-Moms-National.pdf (retrieved 8/19/20).



expenses and the time they must devote to caring for children, often combined with work.⁵ Parents in education and training programs have high rates of food and housing insecurity: a 2019 survey of more than 23,000 student parents found that 53 percent had recently experienced food insecurity, and 68 percent had experienced housing insecurity.⁶

Student parents may also be required to work excessive hours, in addition to attending school, to receive child care and other public supports. A small and shrinking number of colleges have child care available to students on campus, and most of these centers have long waiting lists for students.⁷ And a recent national survey of student parents found that three in four student parents were unaware that the cost of child care could be considered when determining their financial aid awards.⁸

The Role of the Public Sector in Accelerating Change

Embracing an intentional focus on the more than four million student parents enrolled in postsecondary pathways, and their potential, is critical to achieving federal, state, and local workforce development and educational equity goals. The 2018 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) named [opportunity youth](#) (of which nearly one-third are parents) and single parents as target populations. Forty-one percent of workforce development boards identify parents as a target population.⁹

Despite growing recognition of the importance of educational attainment among parents, and the cost-effectiveness of serving them, few system-wide investments support parenting students across workforce, postsecondary education, and human service programs. Some innovative states and communities, however, have coordinated education, human services, and private sector investments to support their student parent population, recognizing the short-term and long-term benefits of investing in parents who are fiercely dedicated to attaining degrees and economic security. For example, [Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning worked together with the Technical College System of Georgia](#) to create a [grant opportunity](#) to help communities connect early learning, postsecondary, and workforce systems. In 2019, the state of New York launched a pilot program to provide child care and coaching supports for single parents attending targeted State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) campuses.¹⁰ Five cities and counties in Colorado recently forged partnerships across community colleges and child care agencies to provide child care navigation and access to a family friend and neighbor child care network to support technical training participants (see Table 1 below).

⁵ Aspen Institute Ascend and IWPR 2018; Wladis, Claire, Hachey, Alyse C., & Conway, Katherine (2018). No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(6), 807-831.

⁶ Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Carrie R. Welton, and Vanessa Coca. (2020). *Parenting While in College: Basic Needs Insecurity Among Students with Children*. Philadelphia: The Hope Center for Community, College, and Justice.

⁷ Gault, Barbara, Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, and Rachel Schumacher. (2019). *Bridging Systems for Family Economic Mobility: Postsecondary and Early Education Partnerships*. Report, IWPR #C482. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

⁸ Generation Hope. (2020). *National Student Parent Survey Results and Recommendations: Uncovering the Student Parent Experience and its Impact on College Success*. Washington, DC. <http://supportgenerationhope.org/student-parents-report>.

⁹ Spaulding, Shayne. (2020). *How Local Workforce Development Boards Support the Needs of Parents*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97421/how_local_workforce_development_boards_support_the_needs_of_parents_2.pdf.

¹⁰ Cawthorne Gaines, Alexandra, Bonino-Britsch, Michael & Hannah Matthews (2019). *Parents and Children Thriving Together: A Framework for Two-Generation Policy and Systems Reform*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association and Center for Law and Social Policy, for more details and examples.



A variety of innovative and creative policy strategies can leverage existing programs to promote postsecondary access and completion for parenting students. Policymakers can incentivize partnerships, name students who are parents as special or target populations, and facilitate financial aid processes that address the needs of families. States and counties can take steps to ensure that public benefit programs like TANF cash assistance or child care subsidies allow postsecondary education to count as an allowable required activity. Sites can build new partnerships to connect, align, or co-locate college with subsidized child care or Head Start/Early Head Start. States and localities can also, for example, leverage WIOA’s identification of single parents as a target population to prioritize funding and provide supportive services, such as child care, transportation, and coaching, that can enable parents to participate in programs.¹¹ Such policy changes can address the critical supports students raising children and their families need for successful completion: affordable and quality child care, financial aid, wraparound services, and workforce preparation.

More coordinated efforts, with strong public sector leadership and involvement, will improve family outcomes, increase economic mobility, and help meet demand for skilled workers during the impending economic recovery. Through its Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants, Ascend seeks to seed and accelerate promising public sector initiatives to invest in the success of parents building their families’ futures through postsecondary education.

Please see the Ascend resources [here](#) for more context on student parents and the services that can support their educational and economic advancement.

Table 1: Examples of Policy Innovations to Support Student Parents

- The 2019 **California** budget stated that “to expand opportunities for low-income student-parents and increase their graduation rates, and to reduce child poverty, the Budget proposes ... to increase or provide access awards for students with dependent children attending the UC, the CSU, or the CCCs.” Almost \$100 million was appropriated to increase the CalGrant (need-based financial aid) to up to \$6,000 for parents.
- In the 2019 budget in **New York**, the state allocates funds to “launch a pilot program providing customized supports for single parents attending participating SUNY and CUNY community college campuses. This innovative program will support up to 400 parents a year for three years. Participants will receive on-campus childcare, intensive personalized advisement, educational supports including tutoring, career counseling and assistance in transitioning to a 4-year school.” The final budget included \$3 million for this program.
- In the 2019 **Pennsylvania** budget, \$2.5 million in state funding was appropriated to the Pennsylvania Parent Pathways Pilot, which seeks to establish community-specific comprehensive models to support access to, and success in, postsecondary education and training for single parents. The resources will invest in holistic models that address the needs of parents and children together and successfully leverage partnerships in postsecondary, housing, and early childhood. As of May 2020, the pilot will be paused indefinitely due to COVID-19’s impact.¹²

¹¹ Ascend at the Aspen Institute. (2020). *Strategies and Innovations That Support Student Parents: Leverage State and Federal Policy Opportunities*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute. <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/strategies-and-innovations-that-support-student-parents-leverage-state-and-federal-policy-opportunities/> (retrieved 8/19/20).

¹² This effort was led by Teresa Miller, secretary of human services, and Pedro Rivera, former secretary of education in Pennsylvania, along with other partners.



- **Georgia's** Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and the Technical College System of Georgia announced a grant opportunity in 2018 (which was reupped in 2020) — the Two-Generation Innovation Grant — that will help institutions pilot or expand community initiatives that connect the early learning, postsecondary, and workforce systems at the local level to deliver benefits to both children and their parents. These strategies will help children access high-quality early learning and strengthen opportunities for parents to obtain jobs paying family-supporting wages and to achieve economic security. These grants were a continuation of their 2017-2019 Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) efforts, which included technical assistance led by National Governors Association, CLASP, and Ascend.
- In Colorado, the cities of **Aurora and Denver**, as well as Arapahoe and Denver counties, the Community College of Aurora worked with the Denver Office of Economic Development, the Colorado Office of Early Childhood, the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, the Colorado Advanced Manufacturing Association, and other partners to provide workforce training participants with access to a child care navigator and friend and neighbor child care network. The effort was supported through a US Department of Labor Strengthening Working Families Initiative grant.¹³
- The **Chicago** Department of Family and Support Services works with and provides resources to the City Colleges of Chicago to fund 100 Head Start slots available to children of student parents and other community members across five early childhood lab schools operated on the community college system's campuses.¹⁴

About Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative

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, D.C., the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, and an international network of partners.

[Ascend](#) is a program of the Aspen Institute and national 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. The approach recognizes that families come in different shapes and sizes and that families define themselves. 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 gender and racial equity lens to analysis; a racial equity lens includes examining the ways that economic well-being and stability

¹³ Overview of the H-1B Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Grant Program Project Summaries. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/employers/pdfs/SWFI_Grantee_Abstracts.pdf (accessed August 18, 2020).

¹⁴ Gault, Barbara, Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, Tessa Holtzman, and Susana Contreras-Mendez. (2019). *Head Start-College Partnerships as a Strategy for Promoting Family Economic Success: A Study of Benefits, Challenges, and Promising Programs*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C485_Colleges-Head-Start_web.pdf (accessed August 26, 2020).



in communities of color have been short-circuited by structural racism. In addition, we are deepening our knowledge and capacity to advance work around the intersections 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 2Gen best practices and 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.

Ascend is fueling innovation to increase postsecondary completion rates for parents through an established and growing network of action-oriented and outcomes-driven leaders. This network of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, combined with the expertise and guidance of parents, leverages the Aspen Institute’s well-respected convening and thought leadership platform. The efforts are organized under the [Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents \(PSP\) Initiative](#).

The extensive nature of the PSP’s reach and potential impact required laying solid groundwork that built and promoted an understanding of population needs, existing supports, challenges, and innovations and promising practices. Over the last two years, we have built a foundation for this movement. Strategic [landscaping and research efforts](#), through the engagement of parents, academic and social researchers, practitioners — especially those providing comprehensive services to families — and policymakers, helped create a “state of play” for parent postsecondary success. Now, through its Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants, PSP is building on that foundation of knowledge to accelerate exciting policy and program efforts by innovative public sector leaders.

The Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants Opportunity

The Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants are designed to help cities, counties, and states strengthen their economies by creating pathways to economic mobility and well-being by investing in the potential of student parents. The grants will provide resources for innovative public sector leaders to address longstanding inequalities by fortifying and expanding partnerships, building on prior initiatives, and planning and testing strategies to increase parents’ human capital attainment in the wake of COVID-19. Selected participants will have a unique opportunity to learn from policy models in the field, such as exciting initiatives that link child care with postsecondary education, workforce development, and employment opportunities in states and communities across the country, and to build policies that create efficiencies by drawing on the strengths, resources, and experiences that communities can leverage by working together. By offering resources to nurture strong and inclusive partnerships and policy strategies, designed with families and parents at the center, Ascend will work with state and local governments to build more powerful pathways for parents to attain credentials and careers that provide living wages, access to opportunities for advancement, and continued learning in sectors with high growth and demand.

Ascend seeks to engage up to three teams working at either the city, county, or state level that will draw on existing efforts and partnerships and develop and test action plans to increase parents’ attainment of



high-quality degrees and credentials. Eligible applicants will be government entities seeking to support students who are parents. Those selected will receive resources to convene leaders from human services, early childhood, postsecondary education, workforce, housing, nonprofit, for-profit, and/or other organizations to coalesce around a postsecondary goal (or subgoal) in support of parents' education to determine what policy and system changes are needed to meet this metric.

This work will focus on improving access not just to bachelor's degrees, but to any credentials, degrees, and learning that lead to meaningful earning and advancement opportunity and guide parents to an opportunity for intergenerational economic security. Successful applicants will build on and accelerate existing efforts, with a focus on aligning resources — postsecondary, health and human services, early childhood, and workforce — to support parents throughout their postsecondary journeys.

Ascend will convene the Policy Acceleration Partnership sites regularly to share information and address challenges. Ascend is collaborating with a group of [National Advisors](#) that is providing guidance throughout the process and will help strengthen the Policy Acceleration Partnerships, including providing input, reviewing applications, and providing ongoing feedback to inform the initiative.

Funding for the Policy Acceleration Partnerships is provided primarily by [ECMC Foundation](#), with additional support from [Imaginable Futures](#) and other funders. The funding opportunity will prioritize the acceleration of innovations that support single mothers and parents enrolled in community college pathways.

Policy Strategies and Approaches that May Be Supported by the Funding Opportunity

Through the Policy Acceleration Partnerships, states, cities, or counties will seek to align postsecondary and workforce systems with related funding streams, regulations, and policies to coordinate and/or create accessible, high-quality programs. The effort must include wraparound supports in early childhood education, economic assets, social capital, and/or health and well-being that are aimed at improving the welfare of children, strengthening all families, and supporting parents through postsecondary education and into the workforce.



If selected for funding, sites chosen will:

- Leverage effective and proven postsecondary policy innovations (such as the models shared in Table 1).
- Utilize data and information from across agencies, where relevant, to understand needs and opportunities among student parents.
- Include the voices and experiences of parents in designing an improved system prioritizing parent postsecondary completion.
- Initiate and advance new conversations with diverse stakeholders about designing services and policies to better support both children and families to promote parents' postsecondary success; this will include at least three convenings (in-person or virtual) held in each site with postsecondary, health and human services, early childhood, workforce, and/or other agencies coalescing around policies to serve student parents. These convenings will be led by the sites with input from Ascend.
- Develop a sustainable Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan articulating the roles of key partner agencies, the governor/executive, and/or legislative leaders and other partners in improving parent postsecondary success through engagement across systems. The plan will build on existing work and momentum to support student parents or other 2Gen efforts.
- Pilot, test, and begin to implement elements of the actions laid out in the Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan.
- Develop and apply an equity lens that addresses race, ethnicity, and gender across institutions and structures that create systemic barriers to combatting intergenerational poverty.
- Participate in an Ascend Policy Acceleration Community, including a virtual convening early in the grant period and an in-person national convening where sites will share results, lessons learned, and recommendations for the policy, philanthropic, and broader human services/postsecondary education fields. At least two representatives of each site are required to attend.
- Prepare and submit written reports on actions taken and lessons learned.



Projects should include policy/program activities to improve access to tangible resources and supports to promote student parent success, such as:

- **Access to Critical Services and Public Benefits (including Child Care):**
 - Ensure that students who are parents know about benefits programs and how to use them.
 - Improve eligibility rules for public benefits, such as child care, health care, and food stamps, to ensure that they are easily accessible to college students with children (e.g., eliminating excessive work requirements or requirements that students attend school full time to receive benefits).
 - Improve processes, such as having one application for benefits that provides information across systems and programs to reduce duplication.
- **Case Management and Coaching:**
 - Implement case management and coaching with parents in college, utilizing respectful and empowering coaching methods to ensure that parents have a consistent point of contact and access to information about supports and benefits.
 - Implement training and practices for case managers and coaches informed by scientific findings on trauma, resilience, and brain science.
- **Asset-Building and Financial Aid Opportunities:**
 - Develop savings or asset development vehicles, such as child savings accounts or cash transfer programs, across the public and private sectors.
 - Take measures to ensure that parents are proactively informed about the financial aid and other public supports to which they are entitled.
 - Build new public or public-private scholarship programs for student parents.
- **Aligning, Coordinating, and Co-locating Supports and Opportunities:**
 - Utilize flexibility in workforce, postsecondary, and public benefit (such as WIOA, TANF, Perkins, SNAP, CCDBG, and Head Start/Early Head Start) funding to provide wraparound supports (such as child care) for parents in education and training.
 - Craft cross-agency pilot programs, such as programs to co-locate new child care or Head Start facilities.
 - Build pathways between student parent programs and key high-wage, in-demand employment opportunities.
- **Engagement, Public Education, and Leadership:**
 - Build and coordinate student parent leadership councils.
 - Elevate student parents and their successes and share their stories to build community support and investment.
- **Data and Information:**
 - Improve data systems to provide information on the prevalence of postsecondary students with children, their circumstances, and their outcomes.
 - Collect, analyze, and publish available quantitative and/or qualitative data reflecting student parents, their circumstances, and their needs.



Learning, Collaboration, Planning, and Implementation for Improved Student Parent Policy

This opportunity is designed to accelerate existing partnerships and initiatives focused on promoting student parent success and to encourage and support public sector leadership and coordination in such partnerships. While applicants will specify the general contours of the partnership project and goals as a part of their application, selected grantees will have the opportunity, early in the grant process, to learn and engage stakeholders in designing a Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan that draws on research and others' experience in the field in meeting their acceleration goals.

The government entities involved will begin by conducting an assessment of how well the systems and services of interest are meeting the needs of families with parents pursuing education and training. Then they will conduct a scan of opportunities to more adequately serve these families, potentially by aligning federal, state, and local postsecondary dollars and/or supports with other benefits — such as housing, Medicaid, WIC, TANF, CCDBG, and SNAP. Using the assessment, as well as input from parents and other stakeholders, teams will identify targeted opportunities for improving student parent success within their jurisdiction that will address the goals laid out in their proposal. Each site will then develop their action plan for implementing innovative, evidence-based strategies to improve student parent success through systems and programs improvements, community coordination, and/or regulatory, executive, or legislative action.

Implementation of action plans will begin in the second year of the grant. Resources for implementation beyond the funds provided by Ascend should be identified and secured as a part of the planning process. It is understood that some elements of the Action Plans may take longer than the grant period and may require budget allocations or fundraising that could extend beyond the period of performance. Action Plans should be designed, however, with some significant elements that can be implemented during the second year of the grant period or earlier.

Sites will engage in a multiyear Acceleration Community to document and share lessons learned, resources, progress, outcomes, opportunities, and challenges to informing and building local and state policy solutions. Ascend will work with grantee sites to analyze existing federal, state, and local resources and policies that might be leveraged to implement plans and offer strategic advice for addressing regulatory or administrative challenges.

Grantees are expected to allocate the time and resources necessary for policy and practice development, grant and results reporting, and participation in convenings, check-in calls, and in-person meetings. Grantees will have input into convening agendas, and their work will be elevated and highlighted by the platform of the Aspen Institute. Minimally, two senior leaders from each grantee partner will be expected to participate in each of the two learning convenings. This is a professional leadership opportunity as well as a contribution to the Acceleration Community. Before submitting a proposal, applicants are advised to consider whether they have the capacity and commitment to effectively participate in these opportunities, as well as if they have the mechanisms in place to engage parents in their projects. Please note that Ascend will provide participants with at least two months' notice of any in-person convening dates or notification of virtual engagement in lieu.

Types of Entities That May Serve as Partners

Applicants must be city, county, or state executive offices or agencies. Applicants may choose to identify one or more lead partners with whom grant resources may be shared depending on planned level of effort required and resource needs. Applicants may also select additional collaboration partners that will participate as advisors and contributors to the Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan.



Applications to the Policy Acceleration Partnerships Grant Program will require demonstrated support from potential lead partner agencies, such as letters of endorsement.

Lead partners and collaboration partners can belong to the public, private, or nonprofit sectors and could be involved in an array of systems related to student parent success, including higher education, workforce and employment, early childhood, public health, and/or human services, among others.

Defining an “Acceleration” Grant

This opportunity is designed to accelerate, broaden, deepen, or expand existing work rather than seed brand new initiatives. Successful applicants will be operating in states, counties, or cities with existing partnerships and momentum to support student parent postsecondary education. For example, a government entity may wish to strengthen a partnership with a college or workforce training program that already has a strong infrastructure of campus child care. The new partnership could seek to expand access to public resources (such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant or SNAP benefits) for parents participating in campus child care programs and involve agencies and partnerships in the effort that would help to attain that goal. Or a state or county that has already piloted cross-agency programs to serve student parents might wish to plan an expansion to include more sites. Or a city housing agency may wish to partner with a strong nonprofit serving student parents, along with the city early education agency and local philanthropies, to create a public-private partnership model to expand supports throughout a city. Many other partnerships and initiatives would be possible given that the site has a strong track record of work to promote student parent success.

Allowable Uses of the Acceleration Grant Funds

The Acceleration Grants are intended to support the learning, planning, experimentation, and testing required to significantly expand, grow, improve, or re-envision existing initiatives focused on student parent success through expanded and new partnerships, innovative alignment of funding streams, and by building sustainable policy infrastructure to support parents in postsecondary education. The funding is intended to build public sector involvement and partnerships in student parent support rather than cover program and service costs for an existing program. Funds can be used to pay for staff time associated with assessing needs, coordinating agencies and other stakeholders, holding convenings, and preparing the action plan, travel, and coordinating implementation of the action plan.

Although grant funds could be used, in a limited fashion, to fund services associated with a pilot program, they are primarily intended to cover the staff time and convening expenses associated with planning, design, and initial policy/program implementation. For example, if a county workforce agency wanted to begin offering eligibility determination supports at workforce training sites (to allow parent participants to apply for a child care subsidy or publicly provided health insurance), some funds could be used to test the eligibility supports by paying for a portion of staff time to provide those services to a small group of students. The full costs of implementing the program, however, would need to be obtained through other sources.

Benefits of Becoming a PSP Policy Acceleration Partner

In addition to financial resources to support policy and practice development rooted in family voices, partners selected to receive grants will have the opportunity to join the [Ascend Network](#) (if they are not already partners), a diverse group of more than 400 thought and action leaders from across the country who are creating pathways to opportunity for families with low incomes.



Benefits of participation include:

- The opportunity for a minimum of two senior program leaders to participate in two Ascend-hosted convenings to share and discuss evidence-based practices to promote student parents through policy and programs (Convenings will include other grantee partners, National Advisors, Parent Advisors, and expert speakers.);
- Online and media platforms for leaders and organizations to showcase solutions, challenges, outcomes, and voices of families;
- Peer learning and technical assistance on resource opportunities and design possibilities for student parent policies and programs;
- Opportunities to share learning and impact with other policy, program, media, and philanthropic leaders; and
- Opportunities to join Ascend Network convenings.

Timeline, Grant Amounts, and Deliverables

The grant period for this project will last for **18 months, from February 2021 to September 2022**, and grants will be up to **\$150,000**. The funds may be used to support program and travels costs, personnel costs (strategic communications, publication, and dissemination), and operational support in an amount no greater than 10 percent of the total project budget. The expectation is that at the end of the 18-month period, the grantee partners will have an established action plan (associated with a student parent success goal) and will have made progress toward changing systems.

Timeline of Grantee Activities:

Year 1 (months 1-12)

- Engage with Ascend and technical assistance experts to inform grantees' Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan.
- Participate in Acceleration Community and strategic convenings to discuss a variety of strategic policy possibilities.
- Engage with [PSP Advisors](#), including National Advisors, [Parent Advisors](#), and the Postsecondary Leadership Circle, as well as with additional experts as needed, to obtain technical assistance.
- Designate stakeholders within each site to contribute to opportunity/needs assessment and create action plans.
- Identify, engage, and convene established and new leaders at the city, county, or state level — including the voices of families — to inform new practices and policies.
- Identify opportunities to align, direct, and leverage public funding to produce better outcomes and to serve student parents through program and policy innovation.
- Produce and share a Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan that includes input from key partners and stakeholders.



Year 2 (months 13-18)

- Begin implementation of the Postsecondary Success for Parents Action Plan.
- Ascend staff and relevant external experts visit sites.
- Participate in technical assistance calls, peer-learning, or webinars that address specific challenges each site is facing and make connections to relevant external experts.
- Share experiences, findings, and lessons learned with Ascend, other grantees, and assembled stakeholders at a national convening.

Application Requirements and Selection Criteria

Eligibility:

All U.S. cities, counties, states, commonwealths, and territories may apply. Submissions must be made through the office of the mayor, lead county executive, executive agency leader, or governor.

Key Selection Criteria:

Ascend will consider proposals that demonstrate the following:

1. Prior, existing, or ongoing efforts and commitment to support parents in postsecondary systems, or similar efforts to support parents and children through a 2Gen approach;
2. Awareness of the need for and potential benefits of policy innovation to support student parents;
3. Capacity of several key agency leads to engage in an ongoing student parent learning process and action plan development;
4. Recognition of and a strategy for an equity, inclusion, and intersectional approach;^[15]
5. Capacity and demonstrated track record of policy innovation across agencies and by leveraging broad partnerships to serve families;
6. Commitment to participating in and actively contributing to a learning community with other grantees;
7. Engagement with colleagues and partners from diverse perspectives;
8. Demonstrated capacity to engage parent voices and experiences as a part of the policy development process; and
9. A focus on either innovations that support single mothers, potentially in addition to student parents more broadly, or on student parents enrolled in community college pathways.



Required Proposal Components:

1. Cover Sheet that includes the following information (please complete in the form provided here):

- a. Name, title, and employer of lead applicant (senior official of applicant office or agency)
- b. Name, title, and contact information (phone and email) for project director
- c. One-sentence summary of project purpose
- d. Amount of funds requested from the Aspen Institute
- e. Date of proposal submission

2. Application Narrative (application must be in 11-point font or larger and may be single spaced):

- a. Executive Summary of the proposal (1/2 page)
- b. Project Need and Rationale (up to 5 pages)

Please describe:

- i. Why the agency/office is interested in participating in the Policy Acceleration Partnership Grants opportunity. Discuss the goals the applicant office/agency is trying to achieve.
- ii. A summary of current understanding of the circumstances and policy needs related to student parents and their children.
- iii. How the project will fit with broader strategic priorities within the city, county, or state.
- iv. How the project might expand on and/or build on existing policies that support parents in postsecondary education and training (here applicants should mention policy/program ideas that have been discussed and are likely to be considered as a part of their planning process). You may also mention outcomes of existing initiatives and provide links or include attachments with any relevant documentation on existing student parent initiatives.
- v. The likely or potential systems changes that the project may undertake.
- vi. Desired outcomes for parents and families associated with the project.
- vii. How the work might benefit single mothers in addition to the student parent population more broadly.
- viii. The extent to which the initiative is likely to focus on parents in community college pathways vs. a broader set of postsecondary opportunities (if known).
- ix. How the project fits with the agency's priorities for gender and racial/ethnic equity in access to economic opportunity.

3. Action Planning Process and Results (up to 2 pages)

a. Please describe:

- i. The agency's track record for advancing policy to support parents' postsecondary attainment.
- ii. How the perspectives of key stakeholders and parents will be considered as a part of this effort. Describe any convening or data collection strategies.
- iii. The process for gathering input from diverse voices and for considering a range of potential innovations and areas of alignment. Describe planned meetings or convenings, the types of stakeholders that will be engaged, and how results will be captured.



- iv. Facilitation strategies to prioritize goals among the community of diverse stakeholders (e.g., human-centered design or other approaches).
- v. Results and outcomes that applicant hopes to achieve through this grant effort.

4. Lead Office and Partner Agency Capacity (up to 2 pages)

- a. List key agency partners and lead contacts within them (up to five key partners may be listed, with letters of commitment required from each).
- b. Discuss how/why the office or agency/collaboration is well-equipped to achieve the results described above.
- c. How will your office/agency consider racial equity, inclusion, and intersectionality in the development and implementation of the proposed work?
- d. Please provide an example of another cross-agency systems change collaboration that you've been involved with, including outcomes achieved (any links to publications or reports from this effort may be included or attached).
- e. How does your office/agency consider gender in its work? How will your organization consider gender in the development and implementation of the proposed work?
- f. Please describe your office/agency's communication capacity or potential dissemination network (e.g., size of your e-news distribution list, Twitter followers, other networks or venues where you might share the results of your efforts).
- g. Please note any previous affiliation or engagement your agency/office has had with the Aspen Institute.
- h. Is this work likely to be sustained after the grant period has ended? If so, please discuss how.

5. Budget

- a. Please utilize the form [here](#).

6. Budget Narrative

- a. Complete the Project Budget attachment.
- b. Include a description of each line item in your project budget (Note: Please include description in the open space under the budget line items) and how the costs were calculated (e.g., personnel line item includes 50 percent of the project director's time, meeting costs line item includes food and beverages for three convenings, etc.).
- c. **Note:** Each grantee will be invited to send two senior representatives to participate in two cohort convenings. Ascend will cover lodging and food costs for participants, but applicants should budget air and ground transportation for two participants to attend two convenings over the course of the grant period.
- d. Ascend will also consider asking each agency/office in the cohort to bring a parent leader from their networks to convenings. Please discuss how you might identify a parent leader to participate and cover air and ground transportation for a parent leader to attend each convening.

7. Endorsements and Biographies of Key Staff

- a. Letter of support from the mayor, county executive, or governor
- b. Letters of commitment from leading participating partner agencies
- c. Biographies of key project staff and a table showing race/ethnicity and gender of project staff
- d. List of key partners and/or employers who will be engaged in the proposed work



Grantmaking Process and Timeline

RFP issue date: Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Optional webinar for interested applicants: Thursday, October 1, 2020

Optional virtual office hours for interested applicants: Wednesday, October 21, 2020; Wednesday, November 18, 2020

Deadline for proposals: Friday, December 11, 2020

Notice of grantee selection decision to applicants: Friday, January 29, 2021

Public announcement: Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Grant period: February 2021 through September 2022

Ascend lead: David Croom, Assistant Director for Postsecondary Achievement and Innovation

Please direct questions to: aspenpapg@aspeninstitute.org

**Submit your proposal (cover sheet, narrative, and attachments) by
11:59 pm ET December 11, 2020 via [FormAssembly](#)).
Please direct questions to aspenpapg@aspeninstitute.org.**

