



Parent-Powered Solutions Fund

Request for Proposal (RFP)

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Powered by 2023 Ascend PSP Parent Advisors

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1. About Ascend at the Aspen Institute

[Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) is a catalyst and convener for diverse leaders working across systems and sectors to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being by intentionally focusing on children and the adults in their lives together. We believe in the power of co-creation. We are a community of leaders – well-connected, well-prepared, and well-positioned – building political will that transforms hearts, minds, policies, and practices.

Ascend Founder Anne Mosle set out with a mission to spark and spread breakthroughs in how we achieve intergenerational family prosperity and well-being. For a decade, Ascend has catalyzed a modern two-generation (2Gen) approach – one that intentionally focuses on children and the adults in their lives together, honors lived experience, and encompasses racial, gender, and economic equity through an intersectional lens.

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.¹ In addition, we are deepening our knowledge and capacity to advance work focused on the intersectionality of class, geography, age, and perspective.

[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.

¹ 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>.

2. Overview of the Parent-Powered Solutions Fund



A. Summary of the RFP

The Ascend Postsecondary Success for Parents (PSP) initiative requests proposals for the Parent-Powered Solutions Fund. This fund was created by parents to provide financial resources to programs that support parents in completing postsecondary programs, including workforce development, career and technical education, and baccalaureate degree programs. The fund will support and advance solutions, practices, and innovations that support student parent engagement and postsecondary completion. Selected fund partners will receive up to \$50,000 in grant funding and participate in a yearlong peer-learning cohort.

B. Applying to the Parent-Powered Solutions Fund

The Ascend at the Aspen Institute Parent-Powered Solutions Fund was created by the [Ascend Parent Advisors](#) to the [Ascend at the Aspen Institute 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 PSP Parent Advisors 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?

Organizations and institutions that are supporting parents in completing postsecondary programs, including workforce development, career and technical education, and baccalaureate degree programs, are welcome to apply. Applicants must highlight how their work leads to postsecondary completion and how they elevate parent and family voice to improve their efforts. Pilot and established programs within 501(c)(3) nonprofits, K-12 systems, and institutions of higher education are eligible.*

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, hire students who are parents, include parents as consultants on work, etc.

Grant Details

Organizations may apply for awards of \$12,500; \$25,000, and \$50,000. Selected partners will have a yearlong term, with grants awarded on November 15, 2023, and ending on October 15, 2024.

*Additional eligibility requirements are outlined in "RFP Guidelines."

Objective

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

Ascend has long worked to expand postsecondary pathways for parents, which are a core component of a [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 [Ascend at the Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents \(PSP\) initiative](#) – a multi-year effort to increase the completion rates of parents seeking a postsecondary degree or credential. Through our partnership with Imaginable Futures and ECMC Foundation, Ascend has convened 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 III of the PSP initiative in June 2022 with a goal to increase attainment rates for parents in postsecondary systems through solutions that are parent-informed, have potential to scale, and will lead to high-quality learning as well as a deeper understanding of a two-generation approach.

[The Ascend Parent Advisors](#)

Prior to the formal launch of Phase I, Ascend convened a cohort of 16 Parent Advisors – mothers and fathers 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. 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 II cohort, this Phase III cohort of 11 Parent Advisors is representative of the demographics of the students who are parents across the United States. Collectively, they advise the work of the Ascend at the Aspen Institute Postsecondary Success for Parents (PSP) 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 come 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 student parents' needs, share their voice, and advocate for change for student parents.

Each Parent Advisor shares a deep commitment to the sustainability of this work and an enthusiasm for the innovative solutions that will result from the fund.

Learning Questions

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

- What are the strongest outreach strategies that postsecondary organizations 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 collecting and utilizing data to improve programs for student parents?
- What are the best strategies for making enrollment more equitable for student parents?
- How do organizations anticipate that the funding will impact the children of student parents?

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

- [Ascend Parent Advisor Cohort III](#)
 - [New Parent Advisors Will Help Shape Ascend's Expanded Commitment to Student Parent Success](#)
 - [Ascend PSP Parent Advisor Biographies](#)
 - [Listen to the 1 in 5 Podcast](#)
 - [Early Learning Nation Article by Mikah Jorgensen](#)
 - [New York Times Article featuring Brittnee Marsaw](#)
 - [Snapshots in the Journey of a Student Father by Christian Ortiz](#)

Goals

Building on Ascend's track record of engaging parent voice and expertise, we will support a Parent-Powered Solutions Fund that the Ascend Parent Advisors will design and lead to support nonprofit organizations focused on increasing postsecondary success among parents. The fund's activities will expand the capacity of PSP Parent Advisors 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 five goals:

1. Support solutions that make pursuing postsecondary degrees and credentials accessible and equitable for parents.
2. Foster the growth of organizations that provide individualized, holistic support (e.g., emotional, personal, professional, financial) to parents and their children.
3. Place parent voices and their experiences at the center of philanthropic decision-making.
4. Expand opportunities to share parent and family narratives and recommendations with practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists at local and national levels.
5. Surface and support solutions that parents believe are most effective.

We also believe that creating a legacy of economic security and educational success for all families requires many organizations focused on different efforts. We believe 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 about 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 (local, state, and federal) 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 that 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?” Building on established relationships with organizations and our track record of fostering parent leadership, we are committed to policies and practices that are guided by the insights and leadership of parents.

Outcomes from some of our 2020 Parent-Powered Solutions Fund partners:

- [BeyondHome](#) (CO) used the fund to provide members of its Women with a Cause Scholar Program and student parents in its Self-Sufficiency Program with mental health and financial counseling, life skills, parent coaching, youth and children programming, and direct financial assistance.
- [Briya Public Charter School's](#) (Briya) (DC) funding supported parents in its workforce programs as they earned child development associate or medical assistant credentials. After completing their workforce credential, the student parent then entered credit-bearing classes at one of Briya's partner schools, the University of the District of Columbia or Trinity University. Briya also provided high-quality infant and toddler education to the student parents.
- [Project Self-Sufficiency](#) (PSS) (CA) used the fund for its Client Services Program, which offers single-parent college students flexible financial support and long-term case management until six months after graduation. Financial support included emergency rental assistance, textbook assistance, child care assistance, auto repair, and other aid as needed. PSS also offered dental reimbursement, professional development opportunities, holiday assistance, and mental health counseling.
- [Raise the Barr](#) (RTB) (CA/MN) invested in student parents as expert consultants and incorporated them into all aspects of planning, programming, and decision-making. RTB added two student parents to its advisory board and compensated them for their time. Student parents also served on RTB's

scholarship and emergency grant review committees to help create student-centered applications and review submissions.

Examples of projects/services we are interested in funding (this list is not exhaustive and serves only as an example):

- Extending child care program hours to accommodate the schedules of student parents and their children.
- Hiring a student parent or recent graduate for a Student Parent Coordinator position.
- Creating a student parent study space that is child friendly.
- Programs that assist student parents in the transition period after completing their postsecondary program.

In addition to the implementation or strengthening of parent engagement practices, selected partners will be required to attend Ascend's Collaborative Action for Student Parents Convening on April 10-12, 2024. Partners will also be required to share insights and provide updates in an interim meeting and a final report. Requirements will be shared when grants are awarded.

Report Dates

1. Kick-Off Meeting and Bimonthly Virtual Peer-Learning and Sessions: November 2023, January 2024, March 2024, May 2024, August 2024, October 2024 (dates TBD)
2. Interim Meeting Deadline: May 31, 2024
3. Financial Interim Report Deadline: May 31, 2024
4. Final Report Deadline: November 15, 2024

3. RFP Guidelines



A. 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 their creation and iteration.
- Serving parents with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Committed to documenting and sharing results, learning, data, and tools with the field.
- A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (K-12 schools are eligible to apply if they fit within the funding parameters) including, but not limited to, programs that support postsecondary access and completion for parents and programs that provide supports during the summer before enrollment.
- Located within the United States.

B. Priority

Priority will be given to applicants whose organizations:

- Bring a racial, gender, and economic equity lens to their work;
- Utilize existing tools, knowledge, and strategies informed by research;
- Include parents in decision-making;
- Hire students who are parents to serve other student parents;
- Serve the children of the parents in their program;
- Bring a holistic approach to their work; and
- Contribute to the geographic diversity of the fund.

C. Proposal Guidelines

Proposals must include the following items:

1. Application

The application 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 requested from the Parent-Powered Solutions Fund (Note: Organizations may apply for grants of \$12,500; \$25,000; and \$50,000.)
- Total organizational budget

2. Narrative

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

1. **PROGRAM:** Please describe the proposed project. How will this project impact student parents? Does this project provide holistic services to student parents and their children? Could you describe if/how your services are customized to meet individuals' unique needs? Is there an age restriction to your program? How would you define your 2Gen approach?
2. **DATA:** Do you currently collect data on student parents? If so, please provide a brief description of the data collected, how often it is collected, and how it is used.
3. **ENGAGEMENT:** How are you currently engaging student parents in your work? How do you plan to utilize student parents' lived experiences and voices in this project?
4. **EQUITY:** How does your organization apply a racial equity, gender equity, economic equity, and intersectional lens to your work?
5. **IMPACT and SUCCESS:** How strong of an impact will the proposed project have on student parents? How strong of an impact will the proposed project have on the children of student parents? How will you measure success?
6. **ASPEN INSTITUTE CONNECTIONS:** Please note any previous affiliation or engagement your organization has had with The Aspen Institute.

3. Budget Attachment (1 page)

- Complete the Proposal 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. Student Parent Reference Survey

- We would like to hear from the student parents within your program! We ask that 2-3 parent participants fill out [this brief survey](#) about their experience. As a student parent-led fund, this feedback is important to us.

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

D. Grantmaking Process and Timeline

- RFP Released: July 20, 2023
- Proposal Submission Deadline: September 8, 2023
- Proposal Review: September 8–October 23, 2023
- Selected Partners Notified: October 26, 2023
- Mandatory Introductory Webinar: November 15, 2023
- Bimonthly Peer-Learning Sessions: November 2023, January 2024, March 2024, May 2024, August 2024, October 2024 (dates TBD)
- Interim Financial Report Deadline: May 31, 2024
- End of Grant Cycle: October 15, 2024

E. Submitting a Proposal

Please submit the following via the link below:

- ___ **Application** as outlined above
- ___ **Narrative** responding to the “Proposal Guidelines” (up to 3 pages maximum)
- ___ **Budget Attachment** (up to 1 page maximum)
- ___ **Student Parent Reference Survey** (2 submissions minimum)

**Submit your proposal (application, narrative, and attachments) by
11:59 pm ET on Friday, September 8, 2023, to the
[Parent-Powered Solutions Fund Portal](#).**

**Please direct questions to:
ascendpsp@aspeninstitute.org**



“Please continue to learn from us, ask us about our expertise, compensate us, and know that we are committed to this work because this is our lives.”
— Isis Patterson, 2023 Ascend PSP Parent Advisor