Ascend at the Aspen Institute

Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund

Request for Proposals (RFP)

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.

Summary of RFP: The Ascend Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative requests proposals for the Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund from members of the **Postsecondary Leadership Circle**, and other invited community colleges or systems that are committed to improving the college completion of student parents, especially single mothers, at their institutions. Selected Fund partners will receive $75,000 in grant funding, expert technical assistance, and opportunities to learn from peer institutions dedicated to advancing the success of student parents.

The Ascend at the Aspen Institute Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund

Recognizing that community colleges are uniquely positioned to increase student parent outcomes, especially for single mothers, and the pandemic's impact on moving student parent efforts forward at these institutions, **Ascend,** with support from **ECMC Foundation**, is launching a new fund to accelerate institutional investment into expanding effective, equitable, and culturally-informed student parent supports at three community colleges and/or systems.

Building on the learnings and momentum of Ascend's **Postsecondary Leadership Circle,** community colleges and/or systems that participated in that effort are eligible to apply. Additionally**,** community college and/or system leaders that Ascend has existing relationships with and whose institutions have pre-established student parent efforts and are primed for success in this project will be invited to apply. Community colleges and/or systems also must have an indicator in their student information systems that identifies which students are parents to be eligible.

This 2-year effort, from August 1, 2023 to July 31, 2025, will provide $75,000 grants to three community colleges and/or systems.

During this project, Fund partners will leverage an existing or establish/re-establish a cross-campus or cross-system task force to identify, plan, and implement two strategies that align with their current efforts and will contribute to increasing student parent, especially single mother, persistence and attainment. Partners will receive technical assistance from Ascend

during each step of the process and participate in peer learning through a community of practice with their fellow grantees.

Through the Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund, we aim to implement promising practices that can increase access and success for student parents attending community colleges with a special focus on single mothers. Fund partners' efforts will be showcased through a culminating brief that will be shared with Ascend's network, a virtual event, and other forms of media like blog posts and podcasts.

Institutional Eligibility

This opportunity is open to community colleges and/or systems that participated in Ascend's **Postsecondary Leadership Circle.** Additionally, community college and/or system leaders with whom Ascend has existing relationships and whose institutions have pre-established student parent efforts and are primed for success in this project will be invited to apply. Community colleges and/or systems also must have an indicator in their student information systems that identifies which students are parents to be eligible.

Grant Activities

Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund partners will identify and implement **two strategies** to increase student parent, especially single mother, persistence and attainment at their institutions.

Within this project, partners will:

- Leverage an existing or reestablish/establish a cross-campus or cross-system task force dedicated to student parent success;
- Identify two strategies that complement current efforts and increase student parent, especially single mother, persistence and attainment from their Postsecondary Leadership Circle action plan and/or *Tapping the Talent of Student Parents: A Playbook for Postsecondary Leaders*;
- Develop a detailed action plan to implement and sustain the two strategies, including data tracking activities to measure short-term student outcomes;
- Establish or refine a process for respectfully including and responding to student parent voices and experiences; and
- Begin implementing the two identified strategies.

Strategy Guidelines

Strategies must be systemic, measurable, sustainable, and target the root causes preventing student parent enrollment, persistence, and completion and post-completion outcomes. To be eligible, strategies must be new to the institution or in an early stage of implementation.

Examples of eligible strategies include but are not limited to:

- **Strategy 1**: An ongoing process that identifies pregnant and parenting students, monitors and analyzes their outcomes and potential barriers to success, and designs and improves interventions to increase their persistence and completion of credentials.
  - *Component examples*:
    - Winward Community College's Student Parent Story Dashboard
    - Montgomery College's Student Parent Questionnaire

- [Results of Data Analysis at Monroe Community College](#)
        - [George Mason University's Patriot Success Survey Questions on Caregiver Status (40 & 41)](#)
        - [George Mason University's Focus Group Flyer](#)
        - [Amarillo College's Supporting Student Parents and Their Children Presentation](#)

- **Strategy 2**: Annual, mandatory professional development curriculum and supplemental materials for all staff and faculty on Title IX protections and best practices for pregnant and parenting students.
    - *Component examples*:
        - [Concordia University Requires Annual Training for Faculty, Staff, and Employees](#)
        - [Northern Virginia Community College's Pregnant and Parenting Students' Rights: FAQs for Faculty and Staff](#)
        - [University of Colorado, Colorado Springs Title IX – Accommodations: Pregnant and Parenting Students Slides](#)
        - [Delta College's Faculty Guidelines for Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Students](#)
        - [University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Pregnant and Parenting Students Suggested Syllabi Language](#)
        - [Bowie State University's Policy on Pregnant and Parenting Students – Required Annual Training](#)

- **Strategy 3**: A campus-wide plan to create family-friendly facilities (e.g. lactation spaces, changing tables in bathrooms, study spaces, resource centers, parking for pregnant students), ensure future buildings include those facilities, and map and promote those facilities to students.
    - *Component examples*:
        - [Eastern Kentucky University's Center for Student Parents](#)
        - [Oregon State University's Family Friendly Spaces](#)
        - [California State University Long Beach's Lactation and Baby Changing Stations Map](#)
        - [Amarillo Colleges' Family Friendly Spaces List](#)
        - [California State University Fresno's Expectant Student Parking](#)
        - [George Mason University's Kids Krate Initiative](#)

- **Strategy 4**: New or expanded childcare services offered by the institution, such as an on-campus childcare center, drop-in childcare services, evening or weekend childcare, childcare grants, or a childcare referral system.
    - *Component examples*:
        - [Mount Wachusett Community College's Child Care Grants](#)
        - [Central Connecticut State University's Drop-in Child Care Center](#)
        - [Hawkeye Community Colleges' Evening Childcare](#)
        - [Dallas College's Child Care Subsidy](#)
        - [East Central University's Child Care Resource and Referral Agency](#)
        - [University of California Davis' Babysitter Directory](#)

- **Strategy 5**: An ongoing multimedia outreach campaign designed to create a sense of belonging for student parents; highlight institutional supports, resources, and events

targeted toward student parents; inform student parents of their Title IX protections; and connect student parents to each other.

- ○ *Component examples*:
  - [University of California Santa Cruz's CareBubbles](#)
  - [North Central College's Title IX Pregnant and Parenting Students Resource Guide](#)
  - [University of California Berkeley's Student Parent Center Media Highlights](#)
  - [University of Massachusetts Amherst's Student Parents Program Newsletter](#)
  - [University of California Berkeley's Parents Slack Channel](#)
  - [Portland State University's Services for Students with Kids Instagram](#)

- **Strategy 6**: A physical one-stop and/or virtual one-stop with "live" forms of support for student parents, such as webpage(s) with chat functionality, a campus resource center, a designated staff member, or a student parent program.
  - ○ *Component examples*:
    - [Frederick Community College's Parents Lead program](#)
    - [Santa Fe Community College's Student Parent Success Program](#)
    - [University of California Santa Cruz's Student Parent Resource Guide](#)
    - [Concordia University's Resource Guide for Pregnant and Parenting Students](#)
    - [Wilson College's Single Parent Scholar Program](#)
    - [Bunker Hill Community College's Special Programs Coordinator: Student Who Are Parents](#)

Timeline of Grant Activities

The grant period for this project is 2 years, from August 2023 through July 2025. By January 2024, Fund partners will conclude the project planning period and begin implementation of their action plans. Partners will meet with Ascend and other cohort members monthly for technical assistance, peer learning, and tailored one-on-one support from Ascend as needed.

Year 1 (August 2023 – July 2024)

- Attend virtual kick-off webinar on Wednesday, July 19, 2023 from 2-5 pm ET and virtual monthly project meetings;
- Leverage an existing or reestablish/establish a student parent task force;
- Identify and solidify two strategies that complement current efforts and increase student parent persistence and attainment;
- Develop detailed action plan to implement and sustain the two strategies;
- Begin implementation of the two strategies using action plans; and
- Attend in-person midpoint convening from July 16-18, 2024.

Year 2 (August 2024 – July 2025)

- Submit interim grant report;
- Attend monthly virtual project meetings;
- Continue implementation of the two identified strategies;
- Host in-person site visit for Ascend staff;

- Participate in interviews and provide relevant materials to aid Ascend in the development of a publication codifying learnings from the project;
- Take part in webinar showcasing collective learnings and recommendations;
- Submit final grant report; and
- Attend in-person closing convening from July 15-17, 2025.

No personally identifiable student data will be requested during this project.

Allowable Uses of Grant Funds

As a capacity building fund, this project aims to improve Fund partners' ability to support student parents by strengthening institutional commitment and staff development and capacity. Grant funds should be allocated to staff time and other expenses needed for cross-campus or cross-system task forces to complete the project's planning steps and begin strategy implementation. Allocation of grant funds will vary depending on the two strategies your institution or system intends to implement.

Only a limited amount of funding can be allocated toward the implementation of student services or resources such as providing on-campus childcare or developing a campus family resource center. The full cost of implementing these supports would need to be obtained through other sources. Seeking this additional funding and/or resources will be part of the planning process and a section of the action plan will be dedicated to fully implementing and sustaining efforts.

Besides staff salary and benefits, examples of allowable uses of grant funds include incentives/stipends for student parents to participate in elements of the project; consultant services if needed due to lack of internal capacity; staff and faculty professional development; and costs associated with convening relevant staff, faculty, students, and partners.

Proposal Components

1. **Cover sheet that includes the following information (please complete in the form provided here):**
   a. Institution name
   b. Name, title, email address, and phone number of lead applicant (a senior institutional leader)
   c. Name, title, email address, and phone number of project director (if different from lead applicant)
   d. A one-paragraph summary of project purpose
   e. Project director (or lead applicant if the individual is filling both roles) bio
   f. Date of proposal submission
2. **Application Narrative:**
   a. Proposal executive summary (half page)
   b. Project rationale (up to 5 pages)
      Please describe:
      i. Why your institution is interested in participating in the Postsecondary Leadership Circle Activation Fund.
      ii. Discuss the goals your institution is trying to achieve.
      iii. A summary of the current understanding of your institution's student parent population, including an estimate of how many student parents are currently enrolled at your institution.
      iv. How the project fits within your broader institutional priorities, including those related to equity and inclusion.

   v. How the project might expand or build on existing institutional practices or policies that support student parents, including efforts during and after Ascend's Postsecondary Leadership Circle, if applicable. Applicants should mention outcomes of existing efforts, and links or attachments can be included with any relevant documentation on current student parent initiatives.

   vi. The likely or potential institutional changes (i.e. policies and practices) the project will include. Applicants should mention potential strategies that have been discussed and are likely to be considered for implementation as a part of this project.

   vii. How the work might benefit single mother students in addition to the student parent population more broadly.

   viii. A summary of how your team understands the **2Gen approach** within a postsecondary context.

3. **Action Planning Process (up to 2 pages). Please describe:**
   a. Methods your project director will use to successfully manage the project.
   b. Strategies your task force will use to ensure effective collaboration.
   c. Current systems/processes your institution uses to identify student parents and track their educational and other outcomes.
   d. How your institution plans on engaging the voice and experiences of student parents to help inform this effort.

4. **Institutional Capacity (up to 2 pages)**
   a. List the names and titles of the lead applicant, project director (if different from lead applicant), and other cross-campus or cross-system leaders and practitioners who will serve on the project task force. Task forces must have a minimum of five members. Institution board members and external partners may also serve on the task force. Task forces (or similar groups) already in existence may qualify if they have work connected to student parent success.
      i. Required representation from financial aid, institutional research, and student affairs.
      ii. Recommended representation from academic affairs, the faculty, the Title IX office, child development center, and counseling services, dependent upon their existence on your campus.
   b. Discuss how/why your institution is well-equipped to achieve the results described above.
   c. Is this work likely to be sustained after the grant period has ended? If so, please discuss how.

5. **Budget and Budget Narrative**
   a. Please use the form **here**.

6. **Letters of Commitment**
   a. Letters of commitment from the president/chancellor and a student parent representative.

7. **Partner List (if applicable)**
   a. List of key community-based and other external partners who will be engaged in the proposed work.

Proposal Selection

Selection Criteria:

Ascend will consider proposals that demonstrate the following:

1. Existing systemic institutional efforts to support student parents or student parents and their children through a 2Gen approach;
2. Awareness of the need for and potential benefits of institutional practice and policy innovation to support student parents;
3. Capacity and commitment of several key institutional or system leaders and cross-campus or system practitioners to engage in an ongoing student parent learning process and action plan development and implementation;
4. Desire to actively engage in regular technical assistance provided by Ascend throughout the grant period;
5. Commitment to participating in and actively contributing to a community of practice;
6. Demonstrated capacity to engage student parent voices and experiences as part of the action plan development process;
7. A focus on innovations that support single mother students; and
8. Dedication to sustaining efforts focused on student parent access and success beyond the grant period.

Scoring Key:

5 = Very Strong: clear, aligned with criteria, evidence of successful track record in the category, candidate for final review
4 = Strong: clear, aligned with criteria, some evidence of track record in the category
3 = Moderately Strong: clear, somewhat aligned with criteria, limited evidence of track record in the category
2 = Not Strong: not always clear, minimal alignment with criteria, limited evidence of track record in the category
1 = Weak: not clear, very little alignment with criteria, little to no evidence of track record in the Category
0 = Missing: Category is absent or fully unaddressed in proposal

Review Rubric:

Selection Criteria	Very Strong	Strong	Moderately Strong	Not Strong	Weak	Missing
Proposed Strategies: How well did the applicant describe their proposed strategies to increase student parent persistence and attainment? Are the proposed strategies systemic, and do they address the root causes preventing student parents from being academically successful? How strongly do the proposed supports align with the purpose of this project?						

Policy and Practice Change: How well did the applicant address the need for and benefits of institutional policy and practice change to better support student parents? How strong is the evidence that the applicant understands the need for and benefits of innovative policy and practice change in relation to this project?					
Capacity and Commitment: How well did the applicant demonstrate the capacity and commitment of several of its key institutional or system leaders and cross-campus practitioners to engage throughout this project? Have at least five individuals been listed to serve on the project task force, including representation from financial aid, institutional research, student affairs, and a senior institutional leader? How strongly does the capacity and commitment described align with the level of capacity and commitment needed for success in this project?					
Technical Assistance: How well did the applicant demonstrate their desire for technical assistance (TA) and commitment to actively engage with Ascend throughout the project? How strongly does their described desire for and commitment to technical assistance align with monthly TA and assistance through every step of the project?					
Community of Practice: How well did the applicant demonstrate their desire and commitment to participate in a community of practice? How strongly does their described desire to participate in a community of practice align with a commitment to actively contribute to monthly peer-learning?					
Student Parent Engagement: How well did the applicant describe their capacity and proposed methods to engage					

student parent voices and experiences in the development of their action plan? How strongly do the capacity and proposed methods of engaging student parents described align with Ascend's tenet of co-creating innovative approaches alongside parents and families?					
Single Mother Student Focus: How well did the applicant describe proposed innovations specifically focused on single mother students? How strongly do the innovations described align with the project's goal of developing promising practices that increase student parent persistence and attainment, particularly for single mothers?					
Sustainability: How well did the applicant demonstrate their dedication to sustaining project efforts beyond the grant period? How strong are their proposed strategies to sustain efforts after this project?					

Proposal Submission

To learn more, join us for an [informational webinar and Q&A](#) on Wednesday, April 26, 2023 from 1-2 pm ET.

Interested applicants must meet with Ascend staff for a 15-minute virtual consultation before submitting a proposal. Consultations will be offered between April 27 and May 25, 2023, and scheduling must occur at least a week in advance. Schedule your consultation by completing this **[Doodle poll](#)**. Only one person per institution/system should complete the poll by adding their name and email address. Once an Outlook calendar invitation is sent, that individual can forward the invitation to other staff or faculty members who would like to join.

Submit all required proposal components by 11:59 pm ET on Thursday, June 1, 2023 via [FormAssembly](#).

For all other questions, please contact us at **[ascendpsp@aspeninstitute.org](#)**.

Grantmaking Process and Timeline

RFP issue date: Thursday, April 20, 2023

RFP information webinar: Wednesday, April 26, 2023 from 1-2 pm ET

Mandatory 15-minute virtual proposal consultations: Offered between April 27, 2023 and May 25, 2023 as availability permits.

Deadline for proposals: Thursday, June 1, 2023

Grant period: August 1, 2023 through July 31, 2025

Mandatory kick-off webinar: Thursday, July 27, 2023 from 2-5 pm ET