

Community Scholars Initiative Grant Guidelines



San Diego Foundation (SDF) is committed to inspiring enduring philanthropy and enabling community solutions to improve the quality of life in our region. The SDF Education Initiatives were established through the Strategic Plan and the SDF vision for just, equitable and resilient communities to advance educational equity for all San Diego students.

San Diego Foundation seeks innovative, high-impact funding proposals for the newly re-envisioned [Community Scholars Initiative](#) (CSI) program that supports students who identify in any of the following student groups; students with disabilities, foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, and English language learners. Successful applicants will submit a proposal that outlines the most promising and impactful strategies and programmatic interventions that contribute to increasing college access, persistence and completion among one or more of the priority student populations.

Contingent on funding availability, awarded organizations will participate in the Community Scholars Initiative as long-term partners and will receive multi-year funding, capacity building and networking opportunities, the opportunity to refer their eligible program participants to an exclusive CSI scholarship fund, and access to annual responsive funding for program participants.

The deadline to apply is April 18, 2024, at 3:00 pm PST. If you have any questions, contact Cassie Guarena at cguarena@sdfoundation.org. We encourage all interested applicants to review and use the applicants' resources listed below, including these grant guidelines, the [grantseekers forum](#) and [office hours](#).

Funding Rationale

Community Scholars Initiative's History and Impact

Founded in 2015, the goal of CSI as a data-driven program is to increase the persistence and completion rates of underrepresented student populations in our region's post-secondary graduating class so that all students are prepared for fulfilling opportunities in work and life. CSI's mission is to help San Diegans prepare for, pay for and persist through college by providing financial support paired with critical wraparound services that bolster academic achievement to increase equity, build a representative local workforce and create resilient communities. Since 2017, the initiative has supported 574 first-generation college students from low-income families and underrepresented communities with over \$1.6 million in scholarships. CSI has supported community-based partners with over \$1.8 million in grants to support vital college readiness programs and over \$142,000 for emergency assistance and additional scholarships to CSI students. To date, 66% of CSI-supported students graduated from college or are on track to graduate from their respective pathways.

In 2023, CSI underwent a program evaluation to understand how to better meet the current needs of the region. The evaluation process reviewed internal programmatic data and disaggregated data on educational outcomes in San Diego County to understand the regional needs and barriers to college matriculation,

Applications are due no later than 3:00 p.m., Thursday, April 18, 2024.

persistence and completion. Through deep learning, data consulting, and community conversations with stakeholders and youth, SDF sought to better understand the support systems available and the gaps for San Diego students.

The evaluation process concluded that to increase educational equity in the region CSI has an opportunity to narrow our focus on specific student populations that are facing the greatest barriers to completion: English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and foster youth.

Dropout Rates

San Diego leads the state with a high school graduation rate of 85%, and a low high school dropout rate of 7%. Still, the disaggregated data for the four student groups suggest that students who identify in one or more of these groups are dropping out at much higher rates and graduating at lower rates.

Table 1 provides the region’s data on high school graduation rates and high school dropout rates on the four core student groups. Note that high school graduation rates reference students who graduated within a 4-year cohort. Foster youth have the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate in the county (Source: [Ed-Data](#)).

Table 1
High School Graduation and Dropout Rates, by Demographic

Demographic	Graduate of High School (%)	Dropout of High School (%)
Students Experiencing Homelessness	65%	19%
English Language Learners	69%	16%
Students with Disabilities	69%	10%
Foster Youth	55%	22%

Preparedness for Postsecondary Education

Disaggregated data for the priority student groups (English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and foster youth) show they are the furthest from accessing post-secondary education in the region. In the region:

- 64% of San Diego students will enter postsecondary education right after high school.
- 58% of students in San Diego will complete their A-G requirements in high school, making them eligible for admission to the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems.

Table 2 shows the level of preparedness for each student group in the region’s graduating class. Foster youth are not graduating from high school with eligibility to access state public universities. Youth experiencing homelessness are least likely to enroll in higher education (Source: [Ed-Data](#) and [CDE](#)).

Table 2

UC/CSU Eligibility and Postsecondary Enrollment, by Demographic

Demographic	UC/CSU Eligible (%)	Attend College (%)
Students Experiencing Homelessness	33%	39%
English Language Learners	29%	45%
Students with Disabilities	27%	42%
Foster Youth	15%	39%

When compared to their peers, students from these groups are not prepared to matriculate and persist in post-secondary education upon high school graduation.

Postsecondary Supports:

In the higher education system, the level of support available for the priority student groups does not meet the level of need they encounter.

- In California, nearly 20% of students in postsecondary education are students with disabilities. Students with disabilities often struggle to access the rights guaranteed to them in the higher education system. The UC system has an average of one disability specialist for every 500-1,000 students. Due to the minimal level of support, this student group has a lower sense of belonging on campus than their able-bodied peers.¹
- Homelessness in higher education has been a longstanding issue. In California, 1 in 5 community college students, 1 in 10 CSU students, and 1 in 25 UC students will experience homelessness during their time in postsecondary education.²
- In California, foster youth have a bachelor’s completion rate of 3.6%.⁴ 1 in 8 English language learners who start in postsecondary education will complete their degrees.⁵
- The identified student groups also struggle to complete degrees at the rate of their peers. Nationally, the bachelor completion rate is around 62%.³
- All of these student groups lack a substantive system of support in higher education and struggle to persist because of this.

Through a more intentional approach to equitable college access and success, Community Scholars Initiative will continue its work with students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and low-income backgrounds. [Data](#) shows that Native American, Black and Latino students are more likely to fall within one or multiple of the student groups identified. Additionally, data from [California Department of Education](#) shows that a majority of students who identify with one of more of these groups come from low-income backgrounds. Through a commitment to English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and foster youth, San Diego Foundation recognizes the intersections students face and will double-down on our commitment to racial and economic equity in education.

Funding Opportunity

SDF seeks proposals from community-based organizations that provide college success programming to one or more of the identified priority student populations to join the Community Scholars Initiative as partners. Each partner will be part of the CSI cohort and will receive a four-year conditional funding commitment from San Diego Foundation and will be a recipient of the following:

- **Annual Programmatic Funding:** Organizations will be eligible for annual grants in the range of \$125,000-\$150,000 for up to four years to support programmatic operations. The unrestricted operational dollars allow organizations the flexibility to direct dollars where needed to provide robust college access and success programming to students.
- **Annual Emergent Needs/Responsive Funding:** Organizations will be eligible for annual grants to maintain a \$20,000 responsive fund for basic and emerging needs for CSI-awarded students.
- **Technical Assistance Support:** Organizations will have access to support for professional development opportunities.
- **Networking and Capacity Building Support:** Organizations will participate in periodic SDF-sponsored and/or -hosted convenings that are focused on capacity building, professional development and networking.
- **Student Scholarships:** Organizations will refer their eligible graduating high school seniors to a dedicated needs-based two-year renewable scholarship.

Cohort Opportunity

Awarded organizations will have the opportunity to participate in a cohort designed to provide ongoing supportive and technical assistance activities. The cohort will meet at quarterly convenings designed around an annual learning arc focused on capacity building and professional development to support the organization in serving the target student population. The learning arc will be co-designed annually with partner collaboration. Awarded organizations are expected to engage in this highly collaborative environment.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Intentional, strategic partnerships will be essential to positioning organizations for potential funding. Applicants are encouraged to apply with partner organizations that complement your organization's unique competencies in serving these student groups and/or college success programming. Applicants are encouraged to explore how new and unique organizational partnerships can help reach more priority students with effective, life-changing programs. In the case of a partnership submission, one organization will need to serve as the project lead for the purposes of submitting and managing the grant. Projects must clearly demonstrate in the application how the collaboration and/or partnership roles will be complementary and additive. All collaborating organizations, and the roles they play in rendering your proposed program, must be disclosed even if the organization/s will not receive funding as part of the proposed project.

Tentative Program Timeline

Interested organizations can use the following tentative outline of CSI’s grant program components to help support the writing of their proposals.

Grant Components	Year 1 Fall 2024 to Fall 2025	Year 2 – 4 Fall 2025 to Fall 2028	Year 5 Fall 2028 to Fall 2029
Annual Programmatic Funding	X	X	
Emergent Needs/ Responsive Funding		X	X
Technical Assistance Support	X	X	
Network and Capacity Building Support	X	X	
Student Scholarships Referral		X	X

Eligibility

Minimum Requirements:

- Nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) public charity status in good standing.
- Located in San Diego County with existing track record serving San Diego County.
- A 501(c)(3) public charity may serve as a fiscal sponsor for another applicant to administer the grant and provide regular financial reporting to San Diego Foundation so long as the applicant is in San Diego County and serving San Diego students.
- This grant opportunity will not fund endowments; existing obligations/debt, singular events, such as one-time workshops, or projects that promote religious or political doctrines.
- Any organization may be part of more than one proposal but may only serve as the lead applicant for one proposal. Only lead applicants will receive the grant and be responsible for correspondence with, and reporting to, San Diego Foundation. All other coordination and communication should occur directly between the lead applicant and their program partners.

Organizational and Operational Requirements

All awarded organizations must meet minimum operational standards for working with youth and minors to be eligible for funding such as conducting appropriate background checks and security clearances, ensuring staff meet TB Testing requirements enforced by Local Education Agency (LEAs) and are equipped to follow appropriate COVID-19 and other health and safety protocols that are a standard and best practice in serving children and youth. Successful applicants will demonstrate that student-facing staff has the appropriate and required professional credentials to serve unique student populations. Awarded organizations will affirm their understanding of and compliance with the obligations set forth by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Applicants that are submitting as a partnership of two or more organizations will clearly define the contractual relationship between the organizations and the ability of the lead applicant to ensure compliance of subcontracted partners with the standards outlined above. Awarded organizations will demonstrate the data collection capacity required to report on student and student-facing staff demographic information that includes, but is not limited to, race and ethnicity, school of residence, and unique populations and college-going data.

If you do not currently meet these requirements but are interested in increasing your capacity to meet them, please include this in your full proposal so we can explore ways SDF may be able to assist your organization in building this capacity.

Program Requirements for College Success Programs

SDF will partner with organizations that provide rigorous college access and success programming. Successful proposals will incorporate all the following requirements of a rigorous college success program.

1. Case management of individual student progress toward high school graduation and postsecondary preparation (i.e., A-G tracking)
2. Assistance with completing financial aid forms such as FAFSA/ CA DREAM Act and providing financial advising: understanding financial aid letters, scholarship support and strengthening financial literacy
3. Family engagement programming: workshops, parent meetings, field trips and/or other relationship-building activities
4. College application support and assistance with school selection
5. Alumni support and postsecondary transition guidance

Proposals may be strengthened by including any of the additional programmatic elements:

- a. Programs that offer supportive services, such as mentoring and tutoring/homework help for students
- b. Programs that support students' access to Advanced Placement or college dual-enrollment courses
- c. Programs that support students in developing their self-advocacy, communications and leadership skills
- d. Programs that provide career transition programming such as internship support and resume building
- e. Programs that have and leverage relationships that allow students to gain direct access to college, university and industry representatives

The above program elements were informed by [The National College Attainment Network \(NCAN\)](#), the [College Readiness Indicator System \(CRIS\)](#) published by the [John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities](#), and the [California Department of Education's College/Career Indicator](#).

Other Criteria for Consideration

CSI partner programs must focus on increasing access to postsecondary education for one or more of the four target student populations: English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and foster youth. In addition to reflecting the components above, successful applicants seeking to join the Community Scholars Initiative will demonstrate all or many of the following features in their proposals.

Organizational Qualities

- a. Strong background in college access and success or demonstrated partnership with an organization with a strong track record in providing robust college access and success programming.
- b. Organization reflects the diversity and lived experience of the communities they serve in staff, executive and board composition, or are demonstrably working to achieve this representation.
- c. Organization is based in or embedded in the community they serve with a strong track record of serving students furthest from opportunity.

Target Student Population

- a. Has a strong track record of working with one or more of the student groups: students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, and/or English language learners, or demonstrated partnership with an organization with a track record of serving these student populations.
- b. Programs with a focus on providing rigorous college access and success programming to K-12 students and alumni in postsecondary education.
- c. Programs with a strong outreach strategy to reach disengaged students and expose and prepare them to higher education opportunities.

Program Design

- a. College access and success programs that have an innovative, specific and dynamic design to support one or multiple of the identified groups' unique needs and barriers.
- b. Organizations with an already existing college access and success program and/or an innovative program that can be created to better support the priority student population(s).
- c. College access and success programs that integrate student and family touchpoints as early as elementary school, with special attention for grades 9 to 12.
- d. Programs that support a smooth handoff for graduating seniors as they transition to higher education, connecting them to resources at their selected campus.
- e. Programs with an innovative and individualized design aimed at supporting target student groups in postsecondary education to ensure retention, completion and transition to a career.
- f. Programs that center and lift students' voices.

- g. Ability to evaluate individual student financial need, or willingness to build this capacity and make scholarship recommendations to SDF for eligible students.
- h. Ability to track student data and provide data on student outcomes.
- i. Culturally affirming programs that celebrate students' cultural, racial, ethnic heritage, build community and nurture feelings of belonging.

Partnerships

- a. While a partnership is not a requirement to qualify for funding, San Diego Foundation encourages proposals that establish partnerships between organizations, schools, districts or higher education entities.
- b. Only one organization may serve as the lead applicant, partnerships with grassroots and community-embedded organizations as the lead applicant will be prioritized.
- c. Organizations may be an implementation partner for more than one awarded proposal but may only serve as the lead applicant for one proposal.

Application Process

Review the questions below, all official submissions must be submitted on [Foundant](#) by 3 p.m., Wednesday, April 18, 2024. If you have any questions, please contact Cassie Guerena at cguerena@sdfoundation.org. We encourage all interested applicants to review and use the applicants' resources listed above including the grantseekers forum and office hours.

Review Process

Responses to this request for proposals will be initially reviewed and qualified by San Diego Foundation staff. Proposals that meet the prequalifying criteria are then reviewed by an independent committee of community members with experience in curriculum design, youth programming, and college access and success. Based on staff and reviewers' scores, final recommendations are submitted for approval by the San Diego Foundation Board of Governors. Funding decisions and awards will be communicated in June 2024.

Timeline and Dates

Dates	Milestones
February 23, 2024	RFP Launch
March 5, 2024	Grantseekers Forum
March 7, 2024	Office Hours 1
March 14, 2024	Office Hours 2
April 18, 2024	Application Submission Deadline

June 2024	Grantees Notified
July 2024	Funding Checks Issued
August 2024	CSI Partner Orientation

Draft Application Questions Preview

Organization Information

1. *Name of Organization:
2. *EIN Number:
3. *Organization Website:
4. *Organization Address: Please input the official address or PO Box associated with the organization (residential addresses are not allowed). If awarded, the grant check will be mailed to the organization's address listed below unless your organization has a fiscal sponsor.
 - Street Address:
 - Suite Number:
 - City:
 - State:
 - Zip Code:
 - Phone Number:
5. *Primary Contact: This is the contact person in your organization who is submitting this proposal, can answer questions about the program and serves as a key contact.
 - First Name:
 - Last Name:
 - Email:
 - Phone Number:
6. *Signatory Contact: This is the person in your organization who has the legal authority to execute the grant agreement on behalf of your organization, usually the CEO, Executive Director, or Board Chair.
 - First Name:
 - Last Name:
 - Title:
 - Email:
 - Phone Number:
7. Fiscal Sponsor Information (if applicable)
 - Fiscal Sponsor Organization Name:

- Fiscal Sponsor Organization EIN:
 - Street Address:
 - City:
 - State:
 - Zip Code:
8. *Program Partnerships: Will your organization collaborate with partner organizations?
 9. *Program Partnership Names: In bullet form, list the name(s) of partner organizations that will support program implementation. What specific departments or programs from these organizations are you partnering with? What specific role will each partner play in rendering your proposed program? (For example: San Diego Foundation – Education Department, facilitating the college access & success programming) (Up to 2000 characters)
 10. *Program Partnership Narrative1: Provide details on how the partnership(s) will be additive to your implementation. What expertise do the selected partners bring that will strengthen your program?
 11. *Program Partnership Narrative2: How will these partnerships help your program reach more priority students with effective, life-changing programs?
 12. *Organization’s History and Track Record: For the main applicant and any partner organizations, describe the history and track record in college access and success and include the history and track record for working with any of the identified student groups. (Up to 3000 characters)
 13. *Lived Experience: Describe how your organization (staff/board) reflects the lived experience of the identified student groups you hope to serve or how the organization is working to achieve this representation. (Up to 1300 characters)
 14. *Organization and Operational Requirements: Do you and your partner organizations meet all organizational and operational requirements outlined in the grant program guidelines? (Yes/No) – If No, explain your interest in increasing capacity and how SDF may be able to assist in building these capacities.

Program Information

15. *Program Name:
16. *Identified Student Group: Select the priority student populations this program is designed to serve. Programs must be targeted to one or multiple groups to be eligible for funding.
 - Foster Youth
 - Students with disabilities
 - Students experiencing homelessness
 - English language learners
17. *Program Type: Is this a new or existing program for your organization?

18. *Grade Level of Students Served: Select all grade levels that you will deliver programming for and list the anticipated number of students served by each grade level. Place a zero next to the grade levels your program will not serve.

- Preschool-Kindergarten
- 1 (Elementary/ Primary)
- 2 (Elementary/ Primary)
- 3 (Elementary/ Primary)
- 4 (Elementary/ Primary)
- 5 (Elementary/ Primary)
- 6 (Junior High/Middle School)
- 7 (Junior High/Middle School)
- 8 (Junior High/Middle School)
- 9 (Secondary/High School)
- 10 (Secondary/High School)
- 11 (Secondary/High School)
- 12 (Secondary/High School)
- College Students
- Graduate Students

19. *Anticipated Number of Total Students Served: On an annual basis, how many total students do you intend to serve with this grant?

20. *Service Area (Check all that apply): Indicate which of the following region(s) you will deliver all or the majority of your program. [Refer to this map](#) to determine service areas.

- Central San Diego County
- East San Diego County
- North Central San Diego County
- North Coastal San Diego County
- North Inland San Diego County
- South San Diego County
- All of San Diego County

Program Description

21. *Elevator Pitch: Provide a brief elevator pitch for your program. This should include your proposal's approach, program format for delivery, priority student population, and what makes it unique. (Up to 550 characters)
22. *Program Eligibility: Does your program incorporate all five required program elements for a rigorous college access program? (1. Case management, 2. assistance with completing financial aid forms, 3. family engagement programming, 4. college application support and 5. alumni support and postsecondary transition guidance)
- Yes
 - No: If No, explain your interest in increasing capacity to meet all five requirements and how SDF may be able to assist your organization in building these capacities.
23. *Other Programmatic Components: Select the other programmatic components your proposal will incorporate. Select all that apply.
- Mentoring for students
 - Tutoring/homework support for students
 - Support with access to Advanced Placement courses
 - Support with access to college dual-enrollment courses
 - Support in developing students' self-advocacy
 - Support in developing students' leadership skills
 - Support with securing internships
 - Resume building support
 - Direct access to college and university representatives
 - Other
 - Our program does not incorporate any of the additional components
24. *Additional Program Features: In addition to the components above, select the additional components your program will feature. Select all that apply.
- Organization is based in or embedded in the community they serve with a strong track record of serving students furthest from opportunity
 - Organization reflects the diversity and lived experience of the communities they serve in staff, executive and board composition, or are demonstrably working to achieve this representation
 - Programs with a strong outreach strategy to reach disengaged students and expose and prepare them to higher education opportunities
 - College access and success programs that integrate student and family touchpoints as early as elementary school, with special attention for grades 9 to 12
 - Programs that support a smooth handoff for graduating seniors as they transition to higher education, connecting them to resources at their selected campus

- Programs with an innovative and individualized design aimed at supporting priority student groups in postsecondary education to ensure retention, completion and transition to a career
 - Programs that center and uplift student voice
 - Ability to evaluate individual student financial need, or willingness to build this capacity
 - Ability to make scholarship recommendations to SDF for eligible students
 - Ability to track student data and provide data on student outcomes
 - Culturally affirming programs that celebrate students' cultural, racial, ethnic heritage, build community and nurture feelings of belonging
 - Proposals that establish partnerships between organizations, schools, districts or higher education entities
 - Grassroots and community-embedded organization as the lead applicant
25. *Additional Program Features Narrative: Provide additional details about any of the selected features above that will provide SDF with more insights on your proposed program. (Up to 3500 characters)
26. *Additional Program Features Capacity Building: Provide additional details about any of the above features not selected that you would like to build capacity in. (Up to 3500 characters)

Program Delivery

27. *College Access Programming: Do you plan to develop and implement your college access and success curriculum internally?
- Yes
 - No: If No, provide details on where the curriculum will come from and who will implement it. If you are partnering with an outside organization, provide its name.
28. *Program Location: Where will your program take place? If your program has multiple locations, list all that apply.
29. Program Strategy: For each student group your program will serve, describe how your program works to address their specific barriers toward access and completion. Include your program strategy and how you come to determine and define these strategies. Explain the ways your programming will be unique to each student community. Be as specific in describing programmatic components. Use bullet points to separate responses for each student population that you intend to serve.
- Foster youth
 - Students with disabilities
 - Student experiencing homelessness
 - English Language Learners

30. *K-11 Student Programming: Describe the specific touchpoints and programming for each grade level you will serve. How do these programmatic elements prepare a student for college success and completion?
31. *12th Grade Student Programming: Describe your proposed programming for graduating high school seniors. How will your organization help prepare them to attend and transition to postsecondary education?
32. *Alumni/Current College Student Programming: How will you support program alumni while they are in college? Will you have a structured program of support? If not, how will you ensure students are persisting toward graduation?
33. *Student outreach: What is your outreach strategy, and how does it work to reach students who are otherwise not engaged? How does it engage and retain priority students in programming?
34. *Expected Outcomes: Summarize your expected outcomes in a bulleted form of no more than three to six points that this funding can either fully or partially help you achieve. Use the SMART framework: Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Results-focused, and Time-Specific. The outcomes should be clear metrics that your organization can report on annually. If awarded, outcomes will form the basis of the grant agreement.
35. *Implementation Timeline: Describe how you will implement your program for academic years 2024-2025, 2025-2026, 2026-2027, 2027-2028. (Up to 4000 characters)

36. *Implementation Supports: Describe any support needed to aid you in your implementation.

Budget and Financials

37. *Enter the organization's current year total operating expense budget.

38. *Total Amount (\$) Requested:

39. *Program Budget Overview: Attach a program budget that details your anticipated expenses for your proposed program over the next four years. Include any additional sources of funding (secured or possible) toward your program budget. [Click here](#) for the link to the Budget Template. Download and mirror this format when submitting your budget.

40. *Upload Program Budget

41. *Budget Narrative: Provide details to help SDF understand how funding will be used. (3,000 characters)

- If you have other funders queued to potentially support your program, provide additional details about the potential.
- If this is a new program for your organization, how will this funding be used for its planning and implementation?
- If this is an existing program, how will this funding allow your organization to build capacity?

42. *Partner Grant Distribution: If you are collaborating with partner organizations, describe how all partners may materially benefit from the grant. This may include: distribution of funds as subcontracts or fee for service to the partner organizations identified in the proposal; expending a portion of the grant and making goods, services, and resources purchased with grant funding available at no cost to the partner organizations; or details on another financial arrangement that is mutually agreed upon by all partners. (3,000 characters)

Additional Comments

Provide any additional comments or information not addressed elsewhere that may support your proposal.

References

1. [Ed Source: UC disability services require a transformative investment](#)
2. [UCLA: State of Crisis- Dismantling Student Homelessness in California](#)
3. [National Student Clearing House](#)
4. [Chapin Hall: An Early Look at Predictors of College Degree Completion at Age 23 for Foster Youth](#)
5. [AIR: Serving English Language Learners in Higher Education](#)