

Community Scholars Initiative Grant Guidelines



Frequently Asked Questions

General

What is the Community Scholars Initiative Program?

The Community Scholars Initiative is a college access and success model that combines scholarship philanthropy with direct support to organizations to provide wraparound programming to students. CSI's mission is to help San Diego students furthest from opportunity to prepare for, pay for, and persist through college.

What is the time commitment awarded CSI partners should anticipate?

The Community Scholars Initiative is deeply rooted in the principles of field building, aiming to foster equitable and sustainable outcomes within the ecosystem of college access and success. We are committed to nurturing and investing in the ecosystem of organizations operating in this space. CSI is a very involved grant program, requiring profound commitment from our partners. We expect all awarded organizations to actively engage in and contribute to every aspect of our convenings, events, and opportunities, fostering a collaborative environment geared toward collective progress and impact. CSI partners are driven toward the common goal of providing robust college access and success programming to the priority student groups.

- ◆ All awarded CSI partners will participate in four quarterly cohort convenings per academic year.
- ◆ Annually, all awarded CSI partners will receive sponsorship for one staff member to attend a multi-day professional development conference.
- ◆ Annually, all awarded CSI partners will participate in mid-term check-ins and/or site visits.
- ◆ Awarded CSI partners may be provided additional opportunities for networking, capacity building, field-building or other shared learning opportunities.
- ◆ CSI partners will engage in consistent and frequent communication with SDF and other CSI partners throughout the grant period.

What exactly is the CSI cohort?

The CSI cohort provides an opportunity for awarded organizations to engage in shared professional development and learning with one another. CSI partners will work collaboratively to develop an annual learning arch that will frame the quarterly convenings. The CSI cohort will work to become a collective voice in advocating for systems change in college access and success at various levels. Awarded organizations will join as equal partners with the Foundation in a multi-year strategy to move the needle on college matriculation and completion for the identified student groups.

How many representatives from each awarded organization can join the CSI cohort?

We will require at least one representative from each organization to participate in the cohort. There may be opportunities to include other representatives from each organization through the grant period.

Can this grant support both new programs and existing ones?

This grant opportunity will support proposals for both new and existing programs.

Application Process

What type of organizations are eligible to apply?

Nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) public charity status in good standing located in San Diego County with an existing track record serving the region.

Will I need to submit a grant application if I was a CSI partner in the past?

Yes. The previous funding model for CSI will sunset after the Academic Year 2023/2024. After the sunset, CSI will have no current partners and will select partners through the open grant cycle that launched in February 2024.

When is the application deadline?

All applications must be submitted by April 18, 2024, at 3:00 pm PST. Late submissions will not be accepted.

When will I know if I am awarded?

Organizations will be notified by June 30, 2024.

How many organizations will be selected for this funding opportunity?

The Foundation anticipates selecting four-eight organizations to become CSI partners.

How many proposals will be funded per student group?

To ensure equitable support across all student populations, we are committed to representing each of the four student groups in the final selection of CSI partners. The specific number of proposals funded per student group will be determined based on the pool of proposals received. Our goal is to support all student populations effectively and the exact distribution will be determined through a rigorous review process.

What organizations will be given special consideration for this grant opportunity?

The Community Scholars Initiative is looking for partners that have the current or potential capacity to work with the four priority student populations: English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and/or foster youth. SDF will give special consideration to grassroots organizations, BIPOC-led and organizations that are firmly community-embedded.

Can organizations partner to submit?

Yes. Applicants can partner with other organizations for program proposals. Intentional, strategic partnerships will be essential, but not required, to position organizations for potential funding. An organization can be part of multiple proposals but can only serve as the lead applicant for one proposal.

What is a lead applicant responsible for?

Lead applicants will serve as the project lead when submitting and managing the grant. The lead applicant is responsible for coordinating partner teams and distributing grant funds to partner organizations. Projects must clearly demonstrate how the collaboration and/or partnership roles will be complementary and additive.

Are housing providers eligible to apply?

As a housing provider, you can partner with a college access organization and submit a partner application. In your partner application, discuss how your partnership will contribute to the purpose of the grant.

Do you take letters of recommendation?

Letters of recommendation are not required. Organizations may submit additional materials within the application, but these materials will not be used during the review process. Please do not email additional materials.

How do interested organizations apply?

Applications must be submitted through [the Foundant portal](#). If you do not have an account you will need to create one first. If you have any questions about this process, contact cguereña@sdfoundation.org. We encourage applicants to review the resources listed in the grant guidelines, including the grantseekers forum and office hours.

I was not able to attend the grantseekers forum, is there a recording available?

Yes, you can access the recording of the forum [here](#).

Funding Opportunity

What funding will CSI partners receive?

Awarded organizations will receive multi-year funding in the form of:

1. Annual programmatic dollars.
2. Annual dollars to establish and maintain a fund for emerging and basic needs for college-going CSI students.

How much funding can an organization receive?

Available funding will be determined by the proposals received; however, conditional annual operational grants are anticipated to be between \$125,000 - \$150,000 each year.

What is the difference between the annual operational grants and responsive/emergent dollars?

Annual operational grants are designed to be flexible dollars used for the programmatic expenses of your proposed project. Responsive funding/emergent needs grants are designed to provide organizations with dollars to assist CSI-awarded students with funds for basic and emerging needs while attending college.

When will funding be distributed across the four years?

Annual funding will be provided to awarded organizations in the fall of each year.

What funding will be distributed in the first year of the grant program?

Awarded organizations will receive programmatic grants in year one of the grant program. Please refer to the tentative program timeline found within the grant guidelines for more detail on funding distribution.

Program Design

How does CSI define the four identified student groups?

1. Students with disabilities: Students who have IEPs, 504s, or are currently receiving special education support or services.
2. Students experiencing homelessness: Youth who lack a fixed, adequate, and regular night-time residence.
3. English Language Learners: Students who are currently classified as English Language Learners under California education classifications.
4. Foster Youth: Students who are active or were once part of the foster care system.

SDF recognizes that applicants are experts in the field and may have differing definitions for these student groups. If your organization works with a different definition, we encourage you to explain this in your application.

Are students coming from low-income backgrounds also a priority population?

While low-income students are not specifically named as a priority group, research suggests that low-income students are disproportionately represented in all our priority groups. CSI recognizes the intersections that exist between the students in the four identified groups and through our dedication to these four student groups we are reaffirming our commitment to students from low-income backgrounds.

Is there a minimum number of students that must be served for an organization to be eligible?

No. While CSI does not have a minimum number of students each organization needs to serve, our goal is to move the needle on student matriculation and college completion in the region. CSI is more focused on partnering with the right organizations who have credibility with the student populations to build meaningful relationships with and provide impactful services. Strong proposals will demonstrate how this grant will allow organizations to scale over the grant period to effectively serve a larger student population from their identified groups.

How will SDF confirm student status and documentation?

CSI is a data-driven program. Awarded organizations are required to set up internal processes to verify each student's eligibility and capture and track essential student data. CSI will lean on partners to conduct the student verification process and collect and share student data that will help us track student outcomes and impact. Organizations will be asked to utilize and maintain a shared data platform to track multi-year student-level data. This data platform will be managed and paid for by SDF.

Do you have a data template with the required fields for data collection?

Awarded organizations will receive extensive guidance and materials on the required data collection at the CSI partner orientation. Organizations should be prepared to report on student level data such as race/ethnicity, grade level, graduation status, socioeconomic status, college matriculation and completion rates, and various other student data points.

With the robust data collection requirement, will CSI utilize a shared CRM?

CSI will use a shared data platform paid for and managed by SDF. All awarded organizations will receive information and training on how to utilize this platform to upload, collect, and track student level data.

Does my proposal need to address all four of the identified student groups?

No. It is important that your proposal centers on quality, robust programming for deep, life-changing work with students. Strong proposals will have a robust and individualized program for one/or multiple of the priority student groups, but all four are not required. SDF is looking for quality over quantity, as well as demonstrated expertise and knowledge of the unique barriers the student groups face and how your program will address them.

How will students served be balanced with quality programming when evaluating proposals?

CSI is looking to fund robust and quality programming for students from the priority student groups. There is not a minimum student count that organizations need to meet, instead, we look for robust proposals that work deeply within the target student population. Proposals must clearly explain the organization's current capacity to provide quality programming or the organization's plan to build capacity to meet quality programming requirements. If your organization serves a small student group, a strong proposal will show that you can scale quality programs over the grant period.

Can funding be used to support other student groups?

No. CSI funding can only be used to provide programming to students from one of the four identified student populations: English language learners, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and/or foster youth.

What grade levels are eligible to participate in funded programming?

Applicants have the flexibility to design their programs as they wish. SDF will give special consideration to proposals that include touchpoints before high school and through college.

Would an organization who supports only high school seniors be ineligible?

Strong proposals will include early touch points with students well-before senior year of high school. If your program only serves high school seniors, you can apply but a program working with students and families earlier in their academic journeys will be better positioned for funding.

Do programs need to provide ongoing support to college students, and what is the level of support required?

CSI considers a robust college access and success program to include ongoing support for the students as they transition to and navigate through college. Each student group may require different levels of support and each program may design what best supports their intended group. Your application should clearly explain the touch points your program will provide and how your proposed level of support will guide students through college.

Can programs engage new students each year or do we need to maintain the same students during the grant period?

CSI intends to support organizations that provide continuous support over a student's educational experience. Support must begin in secondary school, but organizations are encouraged to design programs with touch points earlier. Over the span of the grant, we are interested in supporting organizations to scale their programs to reach more students.

Will this funding support students who choose to pursue a trade or technical pathway?

No. While SDF acknowledges the considerable value of pathways to trade and technical careers, CSI is intended to support students who are attending a community college or a four-year institution. Improving the

degree conferring system and removing the considerable obstacles our priority students face when aspiring to and attempting a 2 or 4-year degree is a fundamental goal of CSI. Ensuring that every student, especially those that are furthest from opportunity, has what they need to attain a college degree, if they seek it, allows students to achieve economic mobility and our region to advance social equity and justice.

CSI will support students who choose to pursue a certification through a community college but is unlikely to award proposals that focus on trade or technical schools. While we do not have requirements for the type of credential anticipated at these institutions, only students attending a 2 or 4 year will be eligible for scholarship dollars.

What type of programming will be prioritized for funding?

CSI is looking for unique and dynamic programs that support one or multiple of the identified student groups. Proposals must display the following programming, or express interest in building capacity, to be eligible for consideration:

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

Strong proposals will incorporate all the above elements and many of the other programmatic elements detailed in the grant guidelines. Organizations are welcome and encouraged to include programmatic elements not detailed in the grant guidelines that may strengthen their proposed program.

If my organization does not meet all the program requirements, can I still apply?

Yes. If you do not meet the program requirements but still want to apply, explain in your application how you will build capacity to meet the requirements and how SDF may support this effort. Organizations should contact Cassie Guereña at cguereña@sdfoundation.org with additional questions.

Are religious affiliated organizations or schools eligible to apply?

Religiously affiliated schools and organizations are eligible to apply as long as their proposed program does not include any religious doctrine. The proposal must clearly explain how the program will differ from any religious mission or doctrines.

Are organizations outside of San Diego County eligible to apply?

Only organizations who will serve San Diego students are eligible to apply. If your organization is based out of San Diego but your proposal will support San Diego students, you are eligible to apply but your proposal should clearly explain your San Diego track record.

Can organizations in San Diego County apply or is this opportunity only for San Diego proper?

This grant opportunity is intended to support all of San Diego County and is not restricted to the City of San Diego.

Student Scholarships

Is GPA or completion of A-G requirements an eligibility criteria for the CSI scholarship?

GPA and A-G completion will not be eligibility criteria for the CSI scholarship. While not an eligibility requirement, we look to organizations to ensure students are academically prepared for four-year institutions.

How do students receive a CSI scholarship?

The CSI scholarship is a needs-based exclusive scholarship for eligible graduating high school seniors from partner organizations. The Foundation will run the administrative process of the CSI scholarship application. Awarded CSI partners will have the opportunity to refer their graduating high school seniors to the exclusive Community Scholars Initiative scholarship application and SDF will work closely with each awarded partner to confirm student eligibility.

Why are student scholarships not provided during the on-ramp year?

During year one, academic year 2024/2025, CSI will focus on supporting organizations with the opportunity to build out their program. CSI intends to support the organization in establishing or strengthening its robust college access and success program, targeting one or more priority student populations. In year two, academic year 2025/2026, eligible graduating high school seniors who have completed at least one year of the partner organization's college access and success program can apply for the exclusive CSI scholarship.

What is the process for determining need-based scholarships?

The CSI scholarship is a *gap-filling* scholarship. The intent of the scholarship is to try and fill gaps in the student's financial aid package to more fully meet their financial need. Partner organizations must work with students to determine their individual unmet financial need using students' Student Aid Index (SAI), Cost of Attendance (CoA), and any other offered aid. Once individual financial aid stacking is complete, the CSI scholarship will provide dollars first toward the remaining financial gap and then may be distributed to address any other needs. Capacity-building opportunities will be available to support organizations in determining student's unmet need.

Will the scholarship funds be available for undocumented students as well?

Yes, the scholarship fund will be available to eligible undocumented students.

Does this scholarship support students who are returning to or starting college after a gap in their education?

At this point in time, it is unlikely that CSI scholarships would be available to those returning from a gap year. An organization working with gap-year students must submit a proposal that provides rationale for post-gaps scholarships and describe how the organization serves that student during the time they are not engaged in school.

Budget & Financials

Is there a required budget template?

Yes, please use the template embedded in the [grant guidelines](#). This will be the only accepted budget template for this grant opportunity.

How do I use the budget template?

The budget template has detailed instructions on the first tab. Please follow the color-coded instructions to allow the embedded formulas to work correctly.

Does the size of an organization's operating budget impact the potential to receive funds?

The size of an organization's operating budget will not impact their potential to receive funds, if an organization can demonstrate through their proposal that they are able to sustain and operate the program. CSI has the potential to aid organizations in building capacity, and we encourage all organizations to apply.

Can the annual operational funds be used for any programmatic expense?

Applicants are encouraged to submit a complete budget that reflects the total cost of running the proposed program. SDF will look for budgets that are balanced, thorough, and reasonable.

Does the funding that the organizations receive include student scholarships?

No, the student scholarship fund is separate and is administered by San Diego Foundation. Your annual programmatic and responsive/emergent need grant funding will not go towards student scholarships.

How will the emergency/responsive grants be administered?

The emergency/responsive grant allows organizations to create and maintain funding for the immediate needs of CSI-awarded students who are pursuing college degrees. Organizations will receive \$20,000 to initiate this fund for students and are responsible for tracking and documenting dollars. CSI partners will be required to submit a detailed annual report with student information to SDF. After thoroughly reviewing the budget report, SDF may issue additional funding to maintain each organization's fund for the upcoming year.

What are the parameters for using emergency/responsive funds?

The emergency/responsive funds are intended to support CSI-awarded students who are pursuing college degrees. The dollars must be used for emergency, responsive, and/or basic needs for students on a case-by-case basis. The dollars are intended to mitigate any emergent circumstances that will very likely hinder/disrupt a student's matriculation or progress toward their degree.

For example, a commuter student's car battery dies, and they cannot afford a new one. Without reliable transportation, they are not able to attend classes or go to work. Awarded organizations may use the emergency/responsive dollars to fund the purchase of a new car battery for the student so they can continue toward their academic goals.

Awarded organizations will receive more details on the logistics for using these dollars at the CSI orientation in fall 2024.

Is there a cost-per-student organizations should be aware of when creating a budget?

CSI does not have a cost-per-student for this grant opportunity. Organizations should propose reasonable budgets for the proposed program and provide clear explanations in the budget narrative to explain budget line items.

Awarding and Reporting

Who will review my proposal?

Submitted applications 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. Finalist may be requested to attend a virtual call with SDF staff on May 17 or May 20, 2024. 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.

Will the lack of robust historical data on our current programs affect our chances of being awarded?

We are looking to partner with organizations who have a strong track record of working with one or more of the priority student populations. Your application should specifically detail how you have worked with and impacted the priority youth group. We recognize that not all organizations have the capacity to track historical data and if this relates to your organization, be sure to explain this in your application.

Will the National Student Clearinghouse be used to track student data?

CSI will use a shared data platform that integrates the National Student Clearinghouse. Organizations will be able to use and upload data from NSC within the shared data platform.

What reporting requirements should awarded organizations anticipate?

1. All awarded CSI partners are required to submit an annual narrative report for the programmatic grant.
2. All awarded CSI partners are required to submit an annual budget report for the emergency/ responsive grant funds.
3. All awarded CSI partners are required to provide reporting on student level data in a shared data platform

Awarded organizations will receive more details on reporting at the CSI orientation in fall 2024.