



# 2026 Common Application Grant Guidelines

## Our Partnership

Since 2022, the Dr. Seuss Foundation (DSF) and San Diego Foundation (SDF) have collaborated to award nearly \$5 million to local organizations offering high-quality early educational opportunities and programs for children and families in San Diego County. To date, this collaborative grantmaking effort has supported 40+ nonprofit partners in providing critical services to more than 70,000 individuals, including 37,000 children aged 0-5.

Launched in Spring 2025 through the support of a \$15 million endowment established by the Dr. Seuss Foundation at SDF, the joint Ready to Learn initiative aims to provide sustainable, long-term funding to support early literacy efforts for children up to age 5 in the San Diego region for years to come.

In January 2026, the Dr. Seuss Foundation launched the Bright Futures initiative to support organizations that strengthen the foundations of early literacy and promote healthy social-emotional development through experiential learning opportunities for children up to age 8.

## Announcing Our Common Application

Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation invite you to consider a Common Application that will provide access to two aligned funding opportunities through a single application. Applicants will be eligible for funding from the Ready to Learn initiative, the Dr. Seuss Foundation's Bright Futures initiative, or both, based on their alignment with the grant guidelines that follow below.

The common application will allow applicants to state whether they are experiencing the loss of local, state, or federal funding. Applicants are encouraged to share the temporary or permanent funding gaps that exist, and how impacted operations might be sustained or supported. Applicants that are experiencing lost revenue are encouraged to speak to the benefits of the impacted program, its unique offerings, and sustainability strategies. Applicants may be asked to share a budget during the review process, however budgets are not required as part of the initial application.

Proposals for the Ready to Learn and Bright Futures initiatives will be jointly reviewed by the Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation. Eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations are invited to apply through 5:00 p.m. PDT, Friday, February 20, 2026.

# Grantmaking Opportunities

## 1. Ready to Learn

**Grant Goals:** The Ready to Learn initiative supports the expansion of early literacy and learning opportunities for children up to age 5, with an emphasis on literacy and language competencies as key drivers of healthy development and school success.

Ready to Learn grants will support nonprofits that provide services for children up to age 5 and their caretakers and educators. Ready to Learn grants are administered by San Diego Foundation in partnership with the Dr. Seuss Foundation.

This year, Ready to Learn is committing \$1 million in total funding to organizations working to strengthen early literacy in San Diego County. Organizations may request a maximum grant amount of \$60,000.

Proposals will be considered for programs that pursue at least one of the following objectives:

### **a. Expanding access to high-quality literacy and learning opportunities**

Expand access to evidence-based programs providing literacy-rich early learning and educational experiences in San Diego County. Ensure children of all backgrounds develop the foundational early literacy and oral language skills (or pre-language and reading skills that support this development) required to thrive in and outside of the classroom.

### **b. Building provider expertise in literacy instruction**

Provide technical assistance and training to equip early childhood educators, early care providers, and related professions with the skills, knowledge and strategies necessary to deliver high-quality, developmentally appropriate early literacy instruction. Establish collaborative approaches and meaningful opportunities for shared learning and peer-to-peer connections among literacy providers.

### **c. Promoting family-centered literacy and learning**

Strengthen efforts that engage parents and caregivers as active participants in their child's learning, using literacy as a vehicle for promoting healthy parent-child relationships. Celebrate and integrate family literacy traditions into program or service models, including shared reading, storytelling, singing, and other intergenerational learning practices.

### **d. Addressing barriers to learning through whole-child, developmentally appropriate approaches**

Provide families with the resources and concrete support needed to ensure their child's success in early literacy and learning programs. Develop and integrate curriculum, materials, and resources that are responsive to the strengths, challenges and needs of all young children, including those with disabilities, developmental delays, or other learning challenges.

## 2. Dr. Seuss Foundation: Bright Futures

**Grant Goals:** The Dr. Seuss Foundation's 2026 Bright Futures initiative aims to support early literacy and school readiness for children up to age 8, strengthen grade-level literacy skills in the early grades (PK-3rd), promote access to positive experiential activities, and expand services that nurture social-emotional development for children, their caretakers, and educators.

**Application Submission Deadline: Friday, February 20, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. PDT**

Eligible organizations must provide services that address at least one of following topics:

- Early education, literacy skills, and grade-level readiness
- Social-emotional development and strong, healthy starts for young children and their families
- Playful learning and experiential activities that integrate arts, music, and/or the environment
- Positive PK-3 pathways that support cohesive learning systems and a consistent, supportive learning environment as children progress through the early grades

This year, the Dr. Seuss Foundation's Bright Futures initiative is committing \$1 million in total funding to nonprofit organizations serving San Diego County. Organizations may request a maximum grant amount of \$60,000.

Applicants are encouraged to address how the requested funding will support at least one of the following objectives:

**a. Network Strengthening**

Foster and strengthen relationships between organizations to align resources, leverage shared tools, and exchange knowledge. This may include organizations that provide “backbone” support to groups of service providers, as well as other examples of alignment to strengthen the connections between organizations and the impact they are able to achieve.

**b. Collaboration and Systems-Level Engagement**

Strengthen and enhance services through collaboration between organizations, including but not limited to nonprofits working with schools/school districts, libraries, early care networks, and other systems or entities to increase access and effectiveness. Systems-level change efforts may utilize strategies related to policy and strategic planning to increase access to early education, literacy, and related services.

**c. Capacity Support & Sustainability**

Strengthen, enhance, or expand programs and services in response to community needs, as informed by outreach and evaluation.

## How To Apply

To access the application:

1. Log in to the [SDF grant portal](#)
2. Click the “Apply” button
3. Click “Apply” for the FY26 DSF & SDF Common Application

**Application Deadline:** Friday, February 20, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. PDT

## Grant Eligibility & Recommendations

- Each submitting organization must be a nonprofit with 501(c)(3) public charity status, operating in and 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 SDF.
- Proposals should reflect a one-year project period, with the understanding that multi-year support may be offered at the discretion of the Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation, contingent upon available funding. Organizations that indicate an interest in multi-year funding will be asked to provide a high-level summary of their implementation plan and explain how multi-year funding would expand their impact, improve their ability to collaborate with partners, and support network strengthening. Interested applicants should be prepared to share key considerations related to staffing, infrastructure, capacity, or resources, as requested during the review process.
- Programs/projects must serve children up to age 5 (Ready to Learn) or up to age 8 (Bright Futures), their parents/guardians/caregivers, childcare providers, and/or early childhood educators. Applicants will be asked to indicate in their application whether they primarily serve children aged 0-5 (0-TK/K), 6-8 (school-aged), or both. The Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation will jointly review and assess the most aligned funding opportunity for each application.
- Preference will be given to programs or projects that support low-to-moderate income communities and/or populations experiencing disparities or harmful social determinants of health.
- The Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation will not fund endowments, existing obligations/debt, scholarships, or projects that promote religious or political doctrines.

## Timeline

Dates	Milestones
January 20, 2026	Grant Guidelines released and application open
February 20, 2026	Application submission deadline
April 2026	Grant funding announcements

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do we apply?

Applications will be accepted from January 20, 2026, until 5:00 p.m. PDT on February 20, 2026. All applications must be submitted online using SDF's online portal. [Click here](#) to access the portal.

### Who is eligible to apply?

To be eligible for these grant opportunities, organizations must have 501(c)3 tax-exempt status and provide services in San Diego County. An organization may serve as a fiscal sponsor for a charitable organization that does not have 501(c)3 tax-exempt status if a cooperative relationship between the two can be clearly demonstrated. The fiscal sponsor must be willing to administer the grant if awarded. Please see Eligibility & Recommendations above.

**Application Submission Deadline: Friday, February 20, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. PDT**

**What is the grant application deadline?**

Applications will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. PDT on Friday, February 20, 2026.

**What is the target age range for proposals funded through this grant opportunity?**

Grants provided through the Ready to Learn grant opportunity are intended to support children up to age 5 and their families. Grants provided through the Dr. Seuss Foundation's Bright Futures grant opportunity are intended to support children up to age 8. Applicants will be asked to indicate in their application whether they primarily serve children aged 0-5 (0-TK/K), 6-8 (school-aged), or both.

**What if my proposal addresses more than one objective listed above?**

Applicants may select up to three objectives that best reflect their program's intended outcome. Applications will be considered in their entirety, so the selection of one objective over another will not negatively impact your application. Each of the listed objectives is weighted equally in consideration for funding.

**How do we define low-to-moderate income?**

For more guidance, view the San Diego County [Area Median Income \(AMI\) and Income Limits](#).

**What is the maximum award for this funding opportunity?**

Organizations may request up to \$60,000 per application.

**What is the grant period?**

Projects should be implemented within 12 months of grant approval. The grant timeframe is tentatively April 2026 – March 2027. Multi-year support may be offered at the discretion of the Dr. Seuss Foundation and San Diego Foundation and contingent on available funding.

**Are indirect or overhead costs permitted?**

If awarded, funds may be used to support operational costs essential to the delivery of the proposed programs/projects. Examples of appropriate use of funds can include, but are not limited to, program staff salaries, programmatic activities, space for programmatic activities, supplies or other operational costs as it relates to the program/project.

If you work within a university or other organization that requires a letter for overhead designation, please articulate that in your application.

**Will the application include space for applicants to acknowledge whether they are experiencing the loss of local, state, or federal funding?**

Applicants are encouraged to illustrate existing funding gaps, whether they are temporary or permanent, and how impacted operations might be sustained or supported. Applicants that are experiencing lost revenue are encouraged to speak to the benefits of the impacted program, its unique offerings, and sustainability strategies.

**When will applicants be notified?**

Applicants are expected to be notified in early April 2026 (tentative).

**Who can I contact if I have a question about the application or encounter any technical issues with the grant portal?**

Submit all questions regarding the application using [this form](#). Please allow at least 24 hours for a response from a member of the Community Impact team.

**Where can I learn more about the Dr. Seuss Foundation?**

The world of Dr. Seuss is one in which anything is possible. At the Dr. Seuss Foundation, we approach education and literacy with the same spirit. We fund programs that promote learning, foster imagination, and help expand opportunities for all. To learn more, visit [www.DrSeussFoundation.org](http://www.DrSeussFoundation.org).

**Where can I learn more about San Diego Foundation?**

San Diego Foundation inspires enduring philanthropy and enables community solutions to improve the quality of life in our region. Our strategic priorities are designed to advance just, equitable and resilient communities throughout our region. Learn more at [www.SDFoundation.org](http://www.SDFoundation.org).