American Student Assistance®

2025 Grants Guidelines

Last updated February 2025

About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit at the forefront of changing the way kids learn about careers and prepare for their futures through equitable access to career readiness information and experiences. ASA helps middle and high school students to know themselves—their strengths and their interests—and understand their education and career options so that they can make informed decisions. ASA fulfills its mission—in schools and beyond the classroom—by providing free digital experiences, including Futurescape® and Next Voice™, and EvolveMe®, directly to millions of students, and through advocacy, research, impact investing, thought leadership, and philanthropic support for educators, intermediaries, and others. ASA fosters a generation of confident, crisis-proof young people who are ready for whatever path comes next after high school. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-asa.

About ASA's Grantmaking:

ASA offers grants (up to three years) to nonprofit and community-based organizations that are leading innovative initiatives for middle and high school students. Through our grantmaking, ASA partners with mission-driven organizations to expand access to impactful programs, identify effective practices for student success, advance the field with new solutions to persistent challenges, and use these insights to influence policy change.

This document outlines ASA's grantmaking priorities and processes for organizations interested in applying.

For more information about ASA's grantmaking, visit www.asa.org/csr.

Impact With Intention

Our Mission: Change the way kids learn about careers and prepare for their futures through equitable access to career readiness information and experiences.

Who We Serve
Middle and high school-aged learners and the education-to-career ecosystem in all U.S. communities, with an emphasis on historically underserved communities who lack access to career-connected learning (CCL), including rural youth, systems-involved youth, youth of color, Indigenous youth, immigrant youth, English language learners and youth with disabilities

What We Fund		
Explore Career exploration and readiness programming focusing on self-awareness, life readiness, skill-building, education planning, career exposure and identifying unique strengths	**Experiment** Experiential learning including hands-on real world experiences such as internships, apprenticeships, project-based learning, career mentoring, entrepreneurship and profession-based learning	**Navigate** Tools and research promoting informed post-high school decision making through career counseling or mentoring, post-secondary educational experiences and credentials, including early college, non-degree paths, and launchpad jobs

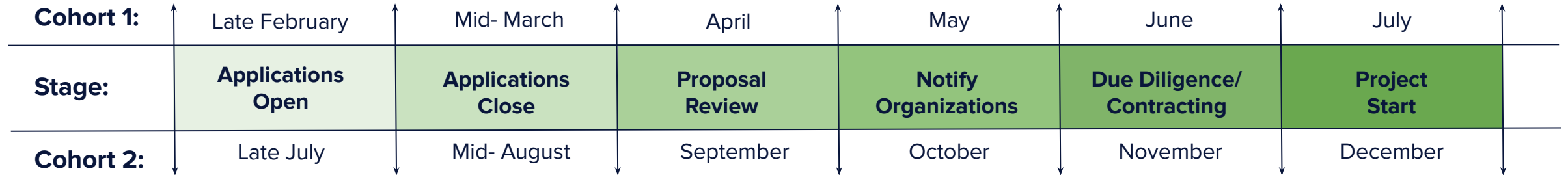| What We Hope to Achieve |
| --- |
| • Meaningful direct impacts on kids that result in **increases in knowledge, gains in confidence, and changes in behavior** as related to career readiness and future planning.
• Greater opportunity for all students to be career ready through **raised awareness, influenced policy changes and increased coordination or integration of CCL in education systems.** |

Eligibility Criteria & Funding Pools

In order to be eligible for funding, prospective partners must:

✔ Align with ASA's vision for impact with intention and our approach
✔ Have valid 501(c)(3) nonprofit certification, fiscal sponsorship, or infrastructure for managing philanthropic grants
✔ Propose an initiative that benefits middle and/or high school youth
✔ Consider removing barriers for all youth to participate in career connected learning (CCL), with emphasis on historically underserved or underrepresented populations

We do not fund:

✕ Programs that only address academic outcomes, with limited ties to CCL
✕ Individual pursuits such as tuition/scholarships or travel costs
✕ Direct lobbying efforts
✕ Religious activities
✕ Fundraising events or galas
✕ Capital campaigns for building renovations or acquisitions
✕ Costs of sustaining an existing program, with limited plans to expand or scale
✕ Programs for adult learners (18+) only

We offer 3 types of funding:

Systems Change (Up to $1.5M over 3 years)	Direct Service (Up to $300k over 3 years)	Research (Up to $250k over 2 years)
● Changing local, regional, state or national education-to-career systems and provide large scale opportunity for CCL ● Changing public opinions, understanding or awareness of an issue related to CCL	● Digital or in-person experiences that can help students identify their unique strengths and sense of purpose, and expose to post-secondary educational experiences ● Career exploration, career experimentation, skill building activities ● Career focused mentoring/social capital building	● Researching what works/does not work for career connected learning policies or programs ● Researching an initiative, policy, system, or practice that will provide new learnings for the field of CCL ● Research what specific CCL policies or practices to better support target populations

Timeline & How to Apply

Cohort 1:	Late February	Mid- March	April	May	June	July
Stage:	**Applications Open**	**Applications Close**	**Proposal Review**	**Notify Organizations**	**Due Diligence/ Contracting**	**Project Start**
Cohort 2:	Late July	Mid- August	September	October	November	December

Instructions:

1. Please submit an eligibility form through our website.

2. ASA's CSR team will review your submission and respond within 2 weeks. Our team may reach out for additional information to assess alignment. Eligible organizations will be invited to submit a full application for consideration.

3. Funding decisions will be made according to the timeline provided above.

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Review Criteria

Proposal Alignment to ASA's Mission	Organization provides or promotes career connected learning (CCL) through exploration, experimentation, or navigation *(see prior slides)*
Innovation	The organization will implement new practices (digitally or in-person) or demonstrates significant potential for advancing the field. Organization can clearly articulate its strengths or capacity for advancing the field, as well as what sets it apart in the regions they operate within.
Evidence of Community-centric Approach	The organization demonstrates a strong commitment to removing barriers for participation in CCL, which is clearly reflected in its mission, vision, and values. This commitment is further evident through well-defined programs or plans, as well as representation of the lived experiences of those served by the organization at the executive and board levels.
Thought Leadership	Ability to impact or engage key audiences ● Students ● Educators ● Employers ● Parents/guardians ● Researchers ● Community Partners ● Program/Product Partners ● Policy Makers
Impact: Potential for Scale	Implementation plan can easily be expanded beyond initial audience and/or replicated in other contexts. Funding would be used to expand on existing programming by adding a new component, population served OR widening program scope by location or content area.
Impact: Likelihood to be Effective	Programming has clearly defined goals and outcomes for target audience and processes in place to measure success. Intended program is strongly supported by appropriate research and by prior track record of success.

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2025 Strategic Considerations

In addition to our review criteria, we will also take into account portfolio fit and areas for exploration which may include:

- **State-wide strategies** to support agency leaders in identifying what skillsets or experiences youth should gain through the education system, or expand access to career connected learning (CCL).

- Approaches that remove barriers for **employers** to participate in or offer CCL.

- Strategies or resources for **parents and guardians** in navigating school choices or supporting their youth in post-secondary planning.

- Innovations in professional development or resources to better prepare **educators** in implementing or integrating CCL in schools.

- Support for **public school districts, including charter school networks,** to scale up or pilot new CCL programs to new locations or populations.

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Reporting Requirements

- We work closely with each grant organization during the contract phase to establish reporting metrics and impact measures that are **mutually relevant**, aligning with both your organization's priorities and our strategic objectives.

- Organizations can expect to submit **at least one written annual report**, tailored to the size of the organization, the scope of the proposal, and the type of grant. These reports are straightforward and focus on the agreed-upon measures of success and impact, combining both qualitative insights and quantitative results.

- While some organizations may be asked to participate in additional check-ins, these are designed to be **informal and require minimal preparation**, making it easy to share progress.

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Grant Application Questions

Systems Change	Direct Service	Research
Recommended word limit: Up to 500 words per long form question	**Recommended** word limit: Up to 300 words per long form question	**Recommended** word limit: Up to 300 words per long form question

Systems Change

Recommended word limit: Up to 500 words per long form question

- Estimated annual #of individuals (ex. youth, parents/guardians, educators, employers, community members) directly served through ASA funding **and** across the organization.
  - If the work _does not_ involve youth: Provide estimated # of youth indirectly served through ASA funding **and** across the organization.
- Please provide brief background information on your organization including:
  - mission
  - existing programs provided
  - time in operation
  - examples of prior success in projects of this kind
  - and your organization's capacity and experience in (1) driving system change efforts or (2) thought leadership campaigns, as applicable.
- What systems and areas of career connected learning are you looking to impact?
- What will your approach be to implementing the change you seek and what are the key outcomes for this project?
- Describe the strength of your current networks and partnerships that will support these efforts. Additionally, provide any specific opportunities for collaboration with ASA beyond funding.
- How will this proposal demonstrate a strong commitment to removing barriers for participation in CCL?
- What is your organization doing to elevate the voices of the youth served? Please provide specific examples.

Direct Service

Recommended word limit: Up to 300 words per long form question

- Estimated annual #of individuals (ex. youth, parents/guardians, educators, employers, community members) directly served through ASA funding **and** across the organization.
  - If the work _does not_ involve youth: Provide estimated # of youth indirectly served through ASA funding **and** across the organization.
- Please provide brief background information on your non-profit organization including:
  - mission
  - existing programs provided
  - time in operation
  - and examples of prior success with programs serving youth.
- For what career connected learning initiative are you seeking funding, and what makes this program unique, innovative or highly impactful?
- What will your approach be to implementing change and what are the key outcomes for this project?
- How will this proposal demonstrate a strong commitment to removing barriers for participation in CCL?
- Describe your sustainability and/or scalability plan for this initiative.
- What is your organization doing to elevate the voices of the youth served? Please provide specific examples.
- Please provide any specific opportunities for collaboration with ASA beyond funding.

Research

Recommended word limit: Up to 300 words per long form question

- Please provide a brief background of your organization including:
  - mission
  - existing programs
  - time in operation
  - prior success with initiatives of this kind and your organization's capacity to conduct or manage the execution of large-scale research initiatives.
- What career connected learning (CCL) initiative, policy, system, or practice are you seeking to gain knowledge on, in order to advance the field? Provide specific research questions you anticipate studying.
- What are the desired outcomes of this research (including anticipated audience #s) and how do you plan to disseminate your findings to broader audiences? Include how you demonstrate a strong commitment to removing barriers for participation in CCL.
- Describe the strength of your current networks and partnerships that will support these efforts. Additionally, provide any specific opportunities for collaboration with ASA beyond funding.

Frequently Asked Questions

More Questions?
philanthropy@asa.org

Can we submit a single proposal that covers all three funding types?
We encourage comprehensive proposals that address elements of all three funding types we offer. For reporting purposes, please select the primary funding type that best aligns with the proposal's outcomes or key deliverables.

Can I submit multiple proposals?
Yes, you can submit multiple proposals for different funding categories, as long as each proposal is unique and focuses on distinct objectives.

What is the maximum amount of funding I can apply for?
See Slide 4.

Do you provide support for general operating expenses?
We aim to fund proposals with up to 20% of the requested amount allocated to operating costs.

What are the reporting requirements for funding?
We will request annual updates on your reporting metrics. Additionally, ASA may conduct virtual informal check-ins to monitor progress and explore ways to further support your work.

What if we serve everyone and don't have a specific target population for our programs?
If your program or initiative doesn't focus on a specific population, we recommend clarifying how you ensure equitable access to career-connected learning for all participants. For more details, please refer to Slide 3 under "Who We Serve."

Can I schedule a 1:1 meeting with ASA to discuss funding opportunities?
To respect your time, we ask that you first submit an eligibility form at asa.org/grant-funding-eligibility-form. If there is alignment, we will reach out directly to discuss a potential proposal or further conversations.

What if I'm a current ASA grantee? How can I apply for renewal?
If you are a current ASA grantee, we will schedule a meeting after your final report to review your existing grant and discuss potential opportunities for continued collaboration.

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