

United Way Career Academies Funding Opportunity: Building a Movement

Summary: Greater Twin Cities United Way's Career Academies Initiative is releasing funding to support promising strategies to build the cross-sector connections, frameworks and relationships needed to scale career pathways across the state. Grants will be awarded in the range of \$5,000-\$10,000 to applicants who best meet the requirements of this RFP.

Applications will be accepted over three rounds of funding and notified as listed below.

Key Dates for Applicants

Round	Submit By	Notified By	Status
1	June 13, 2024	August 5, 2024	Closed
2	October 17, 2024	December 9, 2024	Closed
3	February 13, 2025	April 7, 2025	Closed
4	June 6, 2025	August 18, 2025	Closed
5	October 24, 2025	January 19, 2026	Open
6	February 13, 2026	May 4, 2026	Upcoming

Grant term of one year begins the 1st of the month that the award notification was received.

For more information, contact: RFP@gtcuw.org

Introduction

Greater Twin Cities United Way's Career Academies

Greater Twin Cities United Way set out in 2015 to re-shape how our schools prepare students for success. We founded Career Academies to provide more youth a path toward a meaningful career, while ensuring key industries have the skilled workers they need.

With support from the Pathways to Prosperity Network and Jobs for the Future (JFF) out of the Harvard School of Education, we have aligned school districts, colleges and employers behind a powerful vision: to unite public education and employment systems so that all students in Minnesota have pathways to wealth-building and purpose driven careers.

Partnering with school districts, post-secondary partners and employers across

Minnesota, Career Academies provides specialized funding, technical assistance and coaching, and a platform for peer-to-peer support focused on building sustainable career pathways alongside local businesses.

Together, we work to ensure students have equitable access to college credits, rigorous and relevant curriculums, and meaningful and supportive work experiences.

Building a Movement Fund

We see an opportunity to invest in the promising strategies that will build the cross-sector connections, frameworks and relationships needed to scale career pathways across the state. The Building a Movement Fund will provide relatively small amounts of funding coupled with coaching from subject matter experts to projects that have the potential to create new or expand existing career pathways efforts.

We know that building a movement requires the ability to adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise. In the pilot phase of this funding opportunity, our hope is to provide targeted funding, technical assistance and resources needed to meet the moment of opportunity and accelerate change in communities across Minnesota.

Community Input

In 2023, Career Academies worked with [Jobs for the Future](#) to interview key stakeholders across the career pathways ecosystem. Interviews included representation from K-12, community organizations, post-secondary institutions and employers who gave perspective on barriers and opportunities in the field that directly influenced the development of this funding opportunity.

In addition, the Career Academies initiative utilizes student and community input that has shaped our strategy. Current high school students regularly collaborate with the Career Academies team on event panels, grantmaking review teams and internal review projects to ensure our strategies are aligned with a current vision for equity as told to us directly by young people.

Funding Opportunity Overview

Career Academies Building a Movement will support promising strategies seeking to

build the cross-sector connections, frameworks and relationships needed to scale career pathways across the state and create high-quality opportunities for students. Eligible applicants include Minnesota organizations (501c3 or 501c6), school districts, charter schools, or post-secondary partners, all who may apply on their own or as part of a partnership for funding and technical assistance support. All projects should be aligned to the core components of Career Academies and focus on strengthening career pathways that include access to college credit in a high school sequence, rigorous and relevant coursework and related work experience.

- Dual enrollment-college credit in a high school sequence, post-secondary partnerships
- Rigorous and relevant coursework- career and technical education, career exploration courses, alignment to local economy
- Employer engagement and building work experiences
- General career pathways development

Visit [our website](#) to access the tools and resources to grow career pathways in your community.

Technical Assistance

In addition to funding, grantees will have access to a team of career pathways technical assistance providers with expertise in the core components of career pathways like dual enrollment, integrating youth voice in program design, employer engagement, K-12 administration and more. Technical assistance providers will work closely with grantees to identify targeted areas of growth and provide content expertise, accountability and perspective. The length of engagement, number of hours and the scope of the project provided by technical assistance providers will be determined by Career Academies staff in consultation with grantees.

Examples of Uses of Funds and Technical Assistance:

Focus*	Anticipated Outcome	Example
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Policies, practices, resource flows	Project seeks to shift policies, practices and/or resource flows	A secondary, post-secondary partnership holds a three-month working group resulting in more equitable eligibility requirements for dual enrollment students.
Relationship & Connections (partnership development)	Project seeks to improve the quality of connections, relationships and communication among stakeholders	A post-secondary institution is hoping to grow their relationships with local high schools. They use funds to organize a high school and post-secondary counselors working group to increase access to dual enrollment specifically for students of color. A school district is seeking to create an employer advisory group. They use funds to convene employers and create a strategic plan for growing partnerships and work experiences for youth.
Mental models around equity, student-voice and wealth-building	A project seeks to shift deeply held habits of thoughts or mental models that are holding inequity in place	An applicant seeks to evaluate equity in their dual enrollment courses through a youth participatory action research approach that results in recommendations to leadership on how to increase equitable enrollment.
Other	What will help your career pathways program grow? Let us know.	Framework for teacher externships, building specific pathways, strategic planning and vision setting, creating influence with various stakeholders, teacher externships.

*Focus and outcomes are aligned to FSG's framework for systems change. [Learn more here.](#)

****These funds are not intended for general operating use or individual, student level expenses such as wages or materials.**

Grant Activities

Grantees can expect to have access to and participate in the following activities:

- Attend an initial kick-off meeting with Career Academies staff.

- Participate in a mid-grant check-in with Career Academies staff.
- Participate in Career Academies [Community of Practice](#) convenings.
- Ongoing technical assistance from Career Academies staff as needed.
- Contribute to the learnings of Career Academies through information sharing and storytelling.
- Work with United Way's communications and advancement teams to elevate learnings, messages and successes.

Funding Eligibility

Organizations must meet these requirements to be funded:

- Your organization is a 501c3 or 501c6, has a fiscal sponsor who has a 501c3 or 501c6 or is a public school district or charter school.
- Project seeks to improve outcomes for one or more of the following student populations:
 - Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander and/or Students of Color
 - Family income level is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level
 - Live with a disability that presents significant barriers to employment
- Primary focus of the project is on students currently enrolled in high school or between the ages 14-22.
- Your project includes a public school district or charter school partner with existing career pathways¹ or has demonstrated momentum/interest to develop career pathways.
- Your organization meets United Way's financial standards and received an unqualified opinion on your most recent audit report. This will be determined by an assessment of your financial documents as part of the application review.
- Your organization or the fiscal sponsor has an annual budget of at least \$250,000.

Organizations funded in previous rounds of Building a Movement can apply in subsequent rounds if they apply with new partners and a new project focus. Current funded partners will not be eligible to receive funding in more than one round if applying with the same partnership and/or the same project focus.

New applicants will be prioritized in subsequent rounds of funding to ensure an equitable approach to funding across our priority populations and to ensure geographic diversity. For any additional questions around reapplying please reach out to Der Yang, Der.Yang@gtcuw.org.

For any special considerations related to these criteria, or any other questions related to the application process, please contact us at RFP@gtcuw.org.

Note on Financial Review: Your organization must meet the financial standards for Greater Twin Cities United Way grantees based on a review of financial documents to

¹ Career pathways are defined as a sequence of educational and work experiences aligned with high-wage, high-demand career fields that include access to college credit, rigorous and relevant coursework, and related work experiences.

receive funding. You will be asked to upload financial documents as part of this application. **Please note, organizations that are public school districts and/or have been funded by Greater Twin Cities United Way in the last three years DO NOT need to submit to a financial review.** Please note that charter schools are not exempt from financial review.

Funding Priorities

Criteria listed below, please review carefully. Applications that score the highest in these areas will be most competitive for funding.

- Project focus is on increasing access and improving outcomes for Career Academies' priority populations as listed in the eligibility requirements for this RFP.
- Project plans to work toward high-quality career pathways which are defined as:
 - A sequence of educational and work experiences aligned with high-wage, high-demand career fields that include access to college credit, rigorous and relevant coursework, and related work experiences.
 - Are aligned to high wage, high demand career pathways within [your local area](#).
 - Represent student voice in their design and meet a demonstrated community need or aspiration.
 - Are working to meet outcomes through local cross-sector partnerships.
- Project clearly demonstrates how leveraging cross-sector connections, relationships, or frameworks adds value and scales career pathways
 - Your application demonstrates how funds and technical assistance will result in a long-term, sustainable approach to high-quality career pathways.
- ****These funds are not intended for general operating use or individual, student level expenses such as wages or materials.**

Learning Approach and Required Information Sharing

Funded applicants will be required to share progress and reflections with the Career Academies team at the mid-point check-in and submit a summary of activity and impact at the end of the grant term.

Application Process

Applicants wishing to apply for this RFP must submit an online application by 5pm CST of the closing date of each round (listed above).

Applications will be scored by a team of Greater Twin Cities United Way staff. The application will ask questions in each of the areas below and weigh them as indicated.

Area of Assessment	% of Total Score
Strength and Approach of Project	40%
Sustainability of Work	40%
Career Pathways Programming	20%
Total	100%

Applicants with the highest scoring applications will be most competitive for funding. Greater Twin Cities United Way reserves the right to make awards that support a balanced grant portfolio that most effectively advances our mission, goals, and priorities. Toward this end, and in addition to criteria identified in this RFP, funding decisions may include considerations of geography, scale and environmental factors, among other factors.

Grant Terms, Payments and Other Grantee Requirements and Opportunities

- Grants will range from \$5,000-\$10,000; the grant term is 12 months.
- Grants will be paid in full within a month of award notification.
- Funded applicants will be asked to provide direct deposit information for payment.
- Funded applicants should expect to attend an initial kick-off meeting with Career Academies staff and a mid-year check-in with Career Academies staff. Check-ins will be a chance to update Greater Twin Cities United Way on the work, discuss any challenges and how we can help support you and access technical assistance.
- Grantees are invited to participate in the Career Academies Community of Practice, a quarterly gathering of school districts, employer partners and community organizations that hold a shared vision of career pathways centered on wealth-building for students.

How To Apply

Greater Twin Cities United Way has changed its funding portal to the software system *Andar*. To access this funding opportunity (and subsequent GTCUW funding opportunities), you will first need to register for a Grants Portal account through GTCUW, which you can do by following this [link](#) to the *portal registration form*. Once you have submitted the registration form, you will receive an email within three business days directing you to log in to your new Grants Portal account. This is where you will

complete the full Building a Movement application. If you have already submitted this form and completed your account registration, you can follow this [link](#) to access your account and sign up to complete the Building a Movement application in your portal. Please refer to this [info sheet](#) for further details on how to register for your Grants Portal account and navigate the portal.

Application Resources and Other Questions

During the application period, Greater Twin Cities United Way staff are available to answer your questions and assist with your application.

Contact us at RFP@gtcuw.org and a Greater Twin Cities United Way staff person will respond to your question within 1-2 business days.