



tn educational equity coalition



Request for Proposals

Educational Equity and Excellence in Tennessee

May 1, 2019

Introduction

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition is a group of diverse civil rights and education advocacy organizations that have built a shared policy agenda to address chronic disparities in achievement and opportunities for historically underserved students in the state of Tennessee. The Coalition, formed in the spring of 2016, is convened and led by Conexión Américas, a Nashville-based non-profit that serves the Latino community.

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition is pleased to announce its fourth year of providing Statewide Advocacy Grants that support policy and advocacy projects that promote educational equity and excellence in Tennessee. These grants are designed to advance the capacity of advocates and organizations as well as increase the influence and impact of the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition statewide. The purpose of the grant is to support grantees as they become leading voices on behalf of communities and students of color, and those living in poverty.

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition will award up to six grants, of up to \$40,000 each, to fund activities over a 12-month period. Funding awards must have a clear policy and advocacy agenda that supports the development and implementation of our shared priorities and policy recommendations. Grant recipients will receive targeted coaching and support in policy analysis and advocacy strategy from the policy team at Conexión Américas, and will connect with statewide experts in their project's area of focus.

The Challenge

Tennessee, like many states, is experiencing significant demographic shifts. In the 2017-18 school year, students of color comprised over 33 percent of the student population in Tennessee, with 9.7 percent of students classified as Latino and 24.1 percent as African American.¹ The population of students that are Latino has increased from 7.3 to 9.7 percent over the last five years, while students classified as English Learners steadily increased to 53,000 students in the 2016-17 school year.²

¹ Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/report-card.html>

² TDOE. <http://tn.gov/education/topic/report-card>.

While students across Tennessee improved their academic performance over the last several years, significant and chronic gaps between students of color and their white peers persist. Students of color face persistent challenges in Tennessee that impact their K-12 academic performance and limit their opportunities beyond high school. Latino and African-American communities are often over-represented in low performing schools, lack consistent access to high quality teachers and instruction, and have unacceptable levels of college readiness and post-secondary employment.

Tennessee, like many states, is experiencing significant demographic shifts. In the 2017-18 school year, students of color comprised over 37 percent of the student population in Tennessee, with 10.4 percent of students classified as Latino and 24 percent as African American.³ The population of students that are Latino has increased from 7.3 to 10.4 percent over the last six years, while students classified as English Learners has steadily increased between 2013 and 2017, with over 44,000 students identified in the 2017-18 school year.⁴

While students across Tennessee improved their academic performance over the last several years, significant and chronic gaps between students of color and their white peers persist. Students of color face persistent challenges in Tennessee that impact their K-12 academic performance and limit their opportunities beyond high school. Latino and African-American communities are often over-represented in low performing schools, lack consistent access to high quality teachers and instruction, and have unacceptable levels of college readiness and post-secondary employment.

According to the Tennessee Department of Education, Latino students lagged behind white students by 15 percentage points in math assessments and 17.1 percentage points in readings assessments in the 2017-18 school year. African-American students trailed their white peers on these assessments as well, with public data reporting a 22.6 percentage point gap in math and a 21.2 percentage point gap in reading. And of the 44,000 English learners in Tennessee, just 21.4 percent were proficient in any subject-area in 2017-18, compared to 39.1 percent of the general student population.⁵ Despite a renewed focus by the State and school districts on closing these critical achievement gaps, there has been mixed success with much more work to be done.

³ Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). <https://reportcard.tnk12.gov/districts/0/page/DistrictOverall>

⁴ TDOE. <https://reportcard.tnk12.gov/districts/0/page/DistrictOverall>

⁵ TDOE. <https://reportcard.tnk12.gov/districts/0/page/DistrictOverall>

In higher education, students of color continue to lag behind their white peers in enrollment and attainment. According to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission⁶, students of color made up 29 percent of enrollment at public institutions in the 2016-17 school year. The majority of students of color are enrolled in two-year colleges or at Tennessee Board of Regents' institutions. Across all four of the University of Tennessee schools, only 19% of students are students of color. Even more alarming, in the 2015-16 school year, across all public institutions, only 23.1 percent of degrees awarded were to students of color.

For the Fall 2011 cohort, the 6-year graduation rate from two-year colleges was 11 percent and 26.5 percent for African American and Latino students respectively. For four-year colleges, the 6-year graduation rate for African American students was 40.8 percent, and Latino students had a 56.2 percent graduation rate, compared to their white peers who had a 62.3 percent graduation rate.

For far too long the voices of communities and students of color have been absent in local and statewide conversations about inequities in education in Tennessee, and the persistent gaps in achievement and college and career readiness. The pace of change has been too slow, too microscopic, and the creative energy applied to it, especially in the work to help underserved students, is not netting results.

The Opportunity

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition believes that the key leaders and organizations that represent communities and students of color must come together and develop advocacy networks to drive equitable policy changes. These networks have the opportunity to elevate a shared policy agenda and these grants aim to provide advocates and organizations with the financial resources needed to help enhance their advocacy capacity. Through these grants, recipients will identify and address gaps in policy, and advocate on a local and statewide level to bring about equity-focused change.

Proposals must be for one-year projects, and will have the possibility for renewal. Current grantees are invited to apply annually for a maximum of 3 years of funding. Multi-year funding will be made available only to applicants that demonstrate measurable progress towards their policy and advocacy objectives.

Coalition Priorities

⁶ Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) 2017-2018 Tennessee Higher Education Fact Book. https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thecc/bureau/research/other-research/factbook/2017-18%20Fact%20Book_Suppressed_Final.pdf

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition has built a shared policy agenda that includes four priorities. Successful applicants will address one of the following priorities and align their project to one or more of our recommendations:

Priority 1: Excellent Teachers and Leaders for Every Child

- *Belief Statement*

We believe that every student deserves a passionate and highly effective teacher and that we must do more to develop a pipeline of well-trained, highly compensated and appropriately supported teachers who reflect the communities they serve.
- *Recommendations*

Improve educator quality in Tennessee, with a focus on:

 - Recruiting and retaining an educator workforce that reflects the racial and ethnic background of students in our state
 - Increasing access to strong teachers and leaders for historically underserved students

Priority 2: Strong Accountability Systems

- *Belief Statement*

Over the past decade Tennessee sent a clear signal to districts and schools that they must raise achievement for all groups of students, and must make more progress for groups of students who are behind. We believe that our accountability system, the Tennessee Succeeds ESSA State Plan, is a powerful tool for improving opportunity and achievement for all students by highlighting schools that are exceeding expectations, but also sending a strong signal when schools or students fall behind.
- *Recommendations*

Continue Tennessee’s commitment to school and district accountability under the Tennessee Succeeds ESSA plan, which includes the following:

 - Maintaining high expectations through rigorous standards and aligned assessments
 - Develop a comprehensive plan, with educator input, for successfully implementing TNReady
 - Ensuring there is transparent, accessible and disaggregated reporting on annual student and school performance
 - Providing strong oversight and comprehensive supports for school improvement for the state’s lowest performing schools, with expectations for community engagement in the process

Priority 3: Appropriate and Equitable Resources

- *Belief Statement*

Although Tennessee has made important progress in recent years, many students remain behind because of the inadequate and inequitable allocation of resources to their schools. While increased funding for education in Tennessee is necessary, it is the

deployment of those dollars that matters most. Tennessee must ensure that districts evaluate inequities not only between schools, but also within schools, and between groups of students within those schools.

- *Recommendations*

Ensure there is an equitable and appropriate distribution of resources to districts and schools, with a focus on:

- Increasing access to rigorous, grade-level instruction and materials across all schools in Tennessee with corresponding teacher training and support
- Providing resources, training and expectations to reduce the rates of chronic absenteeism and school discipline disparities
- Addressing unique education challenges in rural communities, including: lack of adequate broadband connectivity, limited access to advanced or early post-secondary courses, and low college enrollment and completion

Priority 4: Higher Education Access & Success

- *Belief Statement*

Tennesseans know that a postsecondary education is a stepping stone to increased social mobility and financial security. The imperative is clear, yet our current postsecondary system has fallen short for specific populations in our state. To ensure an increase in postsecondary attainment for all, a deliberate focus on the part of state leaders, postsecondary institutions, and stakeholders is required.

- *Recommendations*

Promote postsecondary success for all Tennesseans, with a focus on:

- Researching and implementing policies that improve the academic preparation of all students before entering postsecondary education
- Leverage funding and technical assistance to tackle remaining college affordability challenges in Tennessee
- Working with colleges and universities to increase the number of highly qualified college advisors to promote individual student success
- Expanding access to postsecondary education for incarcerated persons by lifting ineligibility statutes regarding state financial aid, and for undocumented high school graduates by creating access to in-state tuition rates

Guidelines for Proposals

Requirements

Successful proposals will include each of the elements described below, with as much specificity as possible in each response.

- Executive summary
 - Include a summary of the theory of action, key audiences, proposed activities, and intended outcomes.
- Organizational description

- Successful applicants will clearly describe how the organization’s mission, vision, and theory of action address the Coalition’s policy priorities.
- Include a description of the organization(s) involved in the grant. If more than one, explain the relationship and roles of the partner organizations.
- Designate a lead agency and a point of contact; including title, organization, email and phone number.
- Include brief examples of past successes that highlight your advocacy efforts or your organization’s ability to drive change.
- Include examples of your organization’s engagement with the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition or in education policy more broadly.
- **FOR CONTINUING GRANT APPLICATIONS ONLY**
 - *ADVOCACY WORK: Describe any advocacy work you and/or your organization has done with the state and local policymakers on priority areas and associated issues as part of the 2018-19 grant funding.*
 - *IMPACT ON PRIORITIES: What difference did your 2018-19 grant funding make in your community and for the population you served, as relevant to the priority area(s) for which you were funded.*
- **Policy Advocacy Strategy**
 - Successful applicants will include a descriptive report that includes the following components:
 - Community need: describe the educational equity and excellence needs within the community. Identify the problem or gap your project will address.
 - Audience: describe the critical and influential decision-makers and policymakers whom you plan to target. Include an explanation of why these audiences are important in the community and their potential influence on your project aims.
 - Policy levers: identify the local or state policy levers and legislation you will target to drive changes that address the problem or gap identified. Address the potential impacts of targeting these policies.
 - Advocacy agenda: Develop a plan for how the project will strategically drive change. The plan identifies appropriate targets, tactics, major activities, and expected, measurable results.
 - Communications: A written media plan/strategy with objectives, targets, and timelines.
- **Proposed activities**
 - Successful applicants will propose activities that clearly align with the priorities of the Coalition, the purpose of the grant, the applicant organization, and the community being served.
 - Successful applicants **must** include plans to complete and execute the following activities:

- One to three convenings of community stakeholders to share established priorities, promote action, and engage appropriate audiences and decision-makers;
 - Capacity building of network partners, organizational constituents, or community members to support the intended outcomes of the grant;
- Successful applicants **may** also implement:
 - An advocacy campaign around a policy or set of policies aligned to grant priorities;
 - A public education campaign that seeks to elevate organizational and constituent voice around educational equity and excellence; or
 - A media strategy that results in substantive media attention to the priorities of the organization and its constituents.
- Include organizational capacity to complete activities, including:
 - Current staff,
 - Current organizational priorities, and
 - Current budget
- Include an explanation of how the activities will work to elevate the organization's role in serving their community and with the target audiences that have been identified. Include descriptions of both short and long term impact.
- Include a clear timeline that details the implementation process for activities proposed within the grant. The timeline should include specific measurable outputs that will demonstrate success in implementation; outputs include activities that occur as part of the funding, e.g., programs, trainings, workshops offered – outputs represent 'what you do.'
- Budget
 - Successful applicants will demonstrate throughout the proposal how the requested funds will be used to meet the needs and achieve the outcomes of the grant.
 - Complete the attached budget template.
 - Include a budget narrative that explains the rationale behind each major budget item.
 - Allowable costs
 - Applicants can request up to \$40,000 over a 12-month period.
 - Funds should be used to directly support activities as planned in the grants.
 - Funds cannot be used for major infrastructure purchases such as equipment, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Extenuating circumstances should be clearly described both in the grant and budget narrative.

- Funds cannot be used for direct lobbying activities⁷.
 - Funds can support up to 50% of a full-time staff member who will spend the corresponding time on an initiative designed to further our priorities
 - Hiring of part-time staff or interns is allowable.
 - Funds cannot be used for direct service delivery to individuals, clients, students, or families⁸, or for scholarships.
- Format
 - No more than 10 pages, single-spaced, inclusive of budget and budget narrative, exclusive of any cover pages or appendices.
 - Applications should be sent as one PDF via email to vilmaris@conexionamericas.org

Who Can Apply

Proposals are encouraged from non-profit and educational advocates, organizations, or collaboratives, with experience working with students and families disproportionately affected by disparities in gaps in achievement, graduation rates, college going and completion rates, school discipline, and access to resources. We are particularly interested in proposals from advocates or organizations that have demonstrated connections, history, and roots in communities of color, or those disproportionately affected by the disparities mentioned above.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on the degree to which the proposed activities advance the priorities and recommendations of the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition. Specifically, proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- The degree to which the proposed activities advance the priorities of the Coalition, Conexión Américas, the grant, and the community being served,
- An effective demonstration of a need within the proposed community,
- The establishment of concrete and measurable outcomes,
- Evidence of organizational capacity to achieve stated goals,
- Appropriate use of funding and
- The degree to which the organization is led by or can demonstrate clear connections to communities of color, including a history and roots within those communities.

Grant Recipient Expectations

The Statewide Advocacy Grants are designed to allow for specific communities to develop greater advocacy capacity, and also to build an enduring statewide coalition of advocates and

⁷ Indirect lobbying activities include issue-based and policy-based activities are acceptable. Funds cannot be used to advocate in direct support of a particular piece of legislation at the local or state level including particular school board or city council resolutions. Funds cannot be used to advocate in direct support of elections.

⁸ Funds cannot support the provision of direct services such as counseling, tutoring, provision of food or clothing beyond that associated with meetings, or any other activity that is not directly related to the grant priorities.

organizations. It is the expectation of Conexión Américas that grant recipients will participate in activities including, but not limited to the following⁹:

- Active participation in the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition Events
 - Summer 2019 Regional Meetings: attend, co-host and promote
 - Education Annual Summit and Coalition Day on the Hill, February 2020
 - Advocacy with state and local policymakers on priority areas and associated issues, as scheduled by Conexión Américas staff team.
- Grantee meetings (in person)
 - Beginning of grant convening, August 2019
 - Midyear convening, January 2020
- Participation in meetings with representatives of the Tennessee Department of Education, the State Board of Education, or the State Legislature as applicable per grant project, in consultation with Conexión Américas staff team
- Reporting: Measuring the impact of your project is imperative to ensure intended outcomes. Therefore, applicants will demonstrate a commitment to the goals and outcomes of their project at multiple points during the grant period through the following:
 - Advocacy Capacity Tool: a 44-item survey on organizational advocacy capacity - completed in July 2019 and June 2020
 - Mid-Year Report: Recipients will complete a report (template provided) halfway through their grant funding cycle (mid-December) communicating their progress towards their project and advocacy goals and proposed outputs and outcomes. Receipt of the second half of grant funding is dependent upon demonstrated progress and impact.
 - End-of-Year Report: Recipients will complete a report (template provided) at the end their grant funding cycle communicating progress towards (1) project and advocacy goals, (2) proposed outputs and outcomes, and (3) the Advocacy Capacity Tool.
 - Evaluation Consultation (Recipient's location): September through November
 - Periodic check-ins (online/phone/in-person, TBD): September 30, November 15, April 1, May 20

⁹ Please note that funding for these activities does not need to be included in the budget proposal. Conexión will cover the cost of all activities related to the sub-grant partner expectations.

Timeline and how to apply

| Requirement | Description | Deadline |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Release of RFP | | Wednesday, May 1, 2019 |
| Letter of Intent | <p>Applicants must complete an emailed letter of intent indicating their desire to apply for the grant. The letter of intent should include a one-sentence description of the partners submitting the proposal, and a one-paragraph explanation of the proposed grant activities (maximum 200 words).</p> <p>Letters of intent should be emailed to Vilmaris González, Engagement and Leadership Development Manager vilmaris@conexionamericas.org Applicants will be notified of acceptance to the proposal phase via email by May 15th.</p> | Friday, May 10th, 2019 by 5 p.m. CDT |
| Webinar for applicants | Conexión Américas staff will host a webinar to clarify requirements and answer general questions from applicants. Details for the webinar will be sent along with acceptance to the proposal phase. | Friday, May 17th, 2019 @ 1 p.m. CDT |
| Final application | Final applications should be emailed to Vilmaris González, Engagement and Leadership Development Manager vilmaris@conexionamericas.org | Monday, June 3, 2019 by 5 p.m. CDT |
| Applicant notification | Applicants will be notified of award status via email to the designated point of contact. | Wednesday, June 19, 2018 by 5 p.m. CDT |

