

ANCHOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

A WAY HOME WASHINGTON STUDENT STABILITY INNOVATION GRANTS GUIDELINES

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I. INNOVATION GRANTS OVERVIEW

During the 2018-2019 school year, 6,439 students experienced unaccompanied homelessness or housing instability in Washington state. Housing instability and homelessness risk disrupting students' emotional and physical wellbeing and also their education. A 2019 report by Schoolhouse Washington showed that students experiencing homelessness in WA have academic outcomes well below those of their housed peers.¹ Schools are often a first port of call for students experiencing homelessness and can play an integral role in their stabilizing if equipped with sufficient resources, cross-systems relationships and a strong commitment to equity. In 2018-2019, 62% of all students experiencing homelessness in WA² were people of color (POC), making student homelessness a racial justice issue.

Across the US, schools and homelessness systems have historically faced challenges in collaboration to resolve unaccompanied student homelessness. Mismatched definitions of homelessness have meant that there are few resources students experiencing homelessness can access, and referral relationships have broken down because of this. Schools systems are regularly asked to provide a full suite of services to young people and families as inequality grows, on top of providing education. Structural silos between these systems makes it harder to serve young people and maximize the impact of available resources.

A Way Home Washington is committed to building a yes to yes system in our state, meaning that any time an unaccompanied young person needs support, we have safe, affirming systems in place to prevent or immediately resolve housing instability. Ending homelessness for youth and young adults requires deep, intentional collaboration between school and homelessness systems. It also requires a targeted effort to uplift Black Indigenous and POC (BIPOC), trans and queer students and eliminate harms homelessness and education systems create and reproduce.

Ending student homelessness has been an important focus for the past several years, and efforts to address unaccompanied student homelessness has been growing. Important work is being done across the US and internationally to identify the most effective and impactful system interventions to end student homelessness. This project seeks to add to that learning.

¹ Lemon, M. (2019). Students experiencing homelessness in Washington's K-12 public schools: 2015-2018 trends, characteristics and academic outcomes. Seattle, WA: Schoolhouse Washington, a project of Building Changes https://schoolhousewa.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolhouseWA_OutcomesReport_2019.pdf

² OSPI data 2018-2019 <https://schoolhousewa.org/data/dashboards/local-data-and-outcomes/>

A. Purpose and Structure

We believe that to end unaccompanied student homelessness, our communities need:

1. housing options that unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness are eligible for;
2. to eliminate system barriers keeping unaccompanied students from stable housing; and
3. school environments that meet the needs of these students.

The Student Stability Innovation Grants Project provides a limited number of grants up to \$5,000 per project for Anchor Communities to test truly innovative system changes to prevent and end housing instability for unaccompanied students. Anchor Community Core Teams will use their continuous improvement process and ACI coaching support to set measurable goals, identify barriers, and create small tests of change to eliminate those barriers. Through this process of testing and learning, we will identify highly creative promising practices that can be scaled in and perhaps beyond Washington state.

In order to receive funding, projects must be short term in nature, meaning the test period is no greater than 3 months, and relate to one or more of the following:

- Preventing students aged 12-24 from experiencing unaccompanied homelessness (reducing inflow into homelessness)
- Improving data quality and referral connections between education systems and the homelessness system
- Increasing safe and stable housing placements for unaccompanied students
- Addressing racial and LGBTQ+ disproportionality in student homelessness

AWHWA will provide robust data support for communities to identify baseline data, expected and actual outcomes, and to help communities identify potential changes to system level data. We will publish our learnings and promising practices at the end of the project.

A Way Home Washington's Role	Anchor Communities' Role
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review grant applications• Approve or deny grant applications• Provide feedback on applications• Provide access to subject matter experts• Provide coaching support• Provide technical assistance on data collection plan• Provide technical assistance on youth engagement• Facilitate cross community conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete and submit applications• Design improvement projects• Implement tests of change (including some developed by young people)• Build relationships with schools and education workers• Gather baseline data• Set measurable goals• Track own progress• Complete and submit project completion form

All resources, updates, links to relevant forms and tools can be found on the ACI Resource Hub, [here](#).

Definitions of 'Unaccompanied Homeless Youth' and 'Young Adult'

Homelessness response systems are often divided into subpopulations with service providers often specializing in providing services to one specific population - e.g. Families, Single Adults, Veterans, Chronic, Domestic Violence, and unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults. Unaccompanied youth and young adults (often shortened to homeless youth, YYA or HYA in homelessness systems) are young people between the ages of 12-24 who are disconnected or not living with/cared for by a parent or guardian. Unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults often fit into multiple subpopulation categories and therefore can be eligible for services in different systems, in addition to those provided by youth and young adult-specific providers focused on their unique needs.

A Way Home Washington defines youth and young adult homelessness as unaccompanied young people ages 12-24 who are considered homeless under Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition, but expands the definition further to include young people who are unstably housed, couchsurfing and/or doubled up.

Public education systems are governed by the federal McKinney Vento Act definition of homelessness, which uses the FRA - fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence - definition of homelessness. This definition includes the HUD definition but expands to include youth and young adults who are also doubled up, couchsurfing, or are migrant children. The Act provides that if young people meet this definition for one day out of the school year they are eligible for services for the entire school year.

Fundamentally, if a young person is between the ages of 12-24, is unaccompanied, and is experiencing homelessness under the McKinney Vento definition of homelessness, they are eligible to be served by Student Stability Innovation Grants projects and all A Way Home Washington projects.

Young people (12-24) who meet AWHWA's definition of homelessness and who are pregnant or parenting fall into the definition of family homelessness and youth and young adult homelessness and communities can use Innovation Grants to target this population as well.

Please see appendix G for a detailed description of these definitions.

B. Core Principles

Learn by doing: We believe that in system improvement processes, we learn what specific system changes will work best by testing new ideas on a small scale and iterating based on new information. We encourage communities to start very small and start now, then adapt projects based on new findings.

Ending disproportionality: Homelessness disproportionately impacts young people of color, LGBTQ+ young people, gender expansive and Queer and Trans BIPOC (QTBIPOC) young people. At AWHWA, we know that to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness we need to end

that disproportionality. We prioritize targeted, culturally specific interventions that will create more just outcomes for these young people, and strategies that strive to eliminate system-created/perpetuated disparities in housing placement rates, experiences of unsheltered homelessness, and duration of homelessness.

Data driven culture: Throughout the ACI, we use real-time quality data to set goals, drive reductions and measure progress towards functional zero. For each grant, communities will be expected to identify the baseline data they will be using to improve from, the data they will track over the test period and an explicit prediction of the change they expect to see, [using this tool](#)³. At the end of the test period, communities will articulate what actually happened as a result of the grant and what they learned as a community from that experience.

Youth engagement: Young people with lived experience of homelessness are best positioned to identify barriers and create solutions to address them. AWHWA is investing additional youth and young adult stipend funding in each community, along with expert coaching to support communities to engage in high-quality youth engagement while undertaking this project. Our granting process prioritizes projects that involve young people in the development and/or implementation of the idea.

See our [Gold Standard for Youth and Young Adult Engagement](#) and our [ACI Stipend Guidelines](#) here!

C. Role of Innovation Grants within Anchor Community Initiative

The Student Stability Innovation Grants Project is a strategy to support the Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness in four communities in Washington state by the end of 2022 by reaching functional zero or ‘yes to yes.’ Targeted specifically to address student homelessness, this effort will build on the relationships between schools and homelessness systems that communities have been building over the first two years of ACI implementation to create opportunities to partner together in new ways to end student homelessness.

Anchor Community Core Teams receive targeted coaching support from AWHWA. Core Teams will use the ACI continuous improvement model to develop and test creative solutions to tangible system-level barriers. Communities will receive technical assistance from the ACI Coaching and Data teams to:

- brainstorm change ideas
- set data-driven goals using their real-time data
- problem-solve challenges
- develop measurement strategies to track and document progress

³ Copy the link to your Google Drive or download an editable Excel Version

On a high level, this project will support ACI goals by:

- Improving referral relationships and data quality for students experiencing homelessness
- Reducing inflow into the homelessness system from schools
- Expediting outflow for students experiencing homelessness or housing instability
- Reducing disproportionality of students of color, LGBTQ students and gender expansive students experiencing homelessness and housing instability

D. Relationship to the Centralized Diversion Fund

The [Centralized Diversion Fund \(CDF\)](#) is a resource for Anchor Communities to directly support young people experiencing homelessness in stabilizing their housing situation. Through the CDF, communities are provided high-quality training in facilitating creative housing conversations with young people and flexible funds to create new opportunities for housing or to remain housed. Unaccompanied students who are eligible for McKinney Vento services and experiencing a housing crisis aged 12-24 are eligible for CDF resources. Specialized training about accessing the CDF on behalf of students is available to school staff by AWHWA.

The Student Stability Innovation Grants Project complements the CDF by providing small grants to address system barriers faced by students to achieving stable housing, including barriers that may hinder students from being able to connect with resources such as the CDF. This two-pronged approach will help communities develop the connections, knowledge, and resources needed to ensure students have access to the support they need for stable housing.

II. PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Student Stability Innovation Grants project has two primary objectives: 1) to remove barriers for communities in their attempts to prevent and end unaccompanied student homelessness and 2) to expand on current research in this area to uncover new promising practices. During project implementation we expect to see:

1. Increased collaboration between ACI Core Team and local school districts within Anchor Communities, resulting in better data quality and stronger referral connections between schools and the homeless response system;
2. Increased innovative housing solutions and options for unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness, especially minors;
3. Increased utilization of the Centralized Diversion Fund in schools located in Anchor Communities; and
4. Identification of tested, scalable interventions that are proven to reduce unaccompanied student homelessness and address race/LGBTQ+ equity to further add to the ACI knowledge bank

At the end of this project AHWHA will publish a formal report of key learnings and highlight promising practices to disseminate widely. In that report we will discuss the following research questions:

1. System-level outcomes

- a. What did we learn about reducing inflow?
- b. What did we learn about reducing disproportionality for young people of color and LGBTQ+ young people?
- c. What did we learn about housing placements for minors?

2. Improvement projects

- a. What did we learn from each project, including both successes and failures? What was the impact of each project, even if it didn't have the expected outcome?
- b. Which projects were “successful” and under what conditions?
- c. Was youth involvement in creating the idea a factor in the success of the project?

3. Process

- a. What was the overall impact of the project on the relationship between schools and the homelessness system?
- b. What impact does ACI coaching have on the process?
- c. Does the structure and parameters of this granting process result in truly innovative change ideas, including ideas that haven't been tried in Washington before?

A. Data Collection

Communities must track and document their own data and progress made toward their goals, as outlined in their measurement strategies for each project, [using this tool](#) (either copy the document to your Google Drive or download the editable Excel version) At the conclusion of the project, the grantee must complete the Project Completion Form (appendix B) and provide any data that was collected throughout the project.

Project Leads should quantify their goals and progress with dates and numbers wherever possible. Using statements such as:

- Between August 15 and September 30 we increased housing placements/referrals/outreach contacts by [100%] from [10] a week to [20] a week by...[describe actions took]
- In our system level data we noticed a [50%] increase in the number of minors housed between [July and August]

III. GRANT REQUESTS

Core Team members in Anchor Communities are eligible to apply and receive Student Stability Innovation Grants of up to \$5,000 to test projects focusing on ending unaccompanied student homelessness for a limited period of time. Core Team members may apply on behalf of service providers or schools in their community. The following section outlines the granting process, required reporting, application review, approval information, and selection criteria.

A. Grant Parameters

Application timeline:

- Applications will be **accepted on a rolling basis commencing February 11, 2021.**
- Grantees will have **6 months to engage in project work and spend** any grant amounts they receive.
- Note: If the grantee completes the improvement project and there are still remaining funds, they should indicate this on the [Project Completion Form](#) (appendix B), and identify how they would use the remaining funds to pivot to another student homelessness-related system improvement; use of leftover funds requires approval from the ACI Project Director to move forward.

Distribution between Anchor Communities

There is no strict designation of the number of Student Stability Innovation Grants that an Anchor community can receive and no set amount of funds dedicated to each community. AWHWA will accept applications from any community on a rolling basis as funds are available, while making every effort to ensure equitable distribution of funds across Anchor Communities.

B. Process for making a grant request

Applicant Eligibility:

Only ACI Core Team Members in active affiliation with their organizations can submit the Grant Request Form for a Student Stability Innovation Grant. Core Team members are active, regular participants in the Anchor Community Initiative who attend bi-weekly meetings and are usually members of service providers, other social service or local government organizations. Even though only Core Team members can submit the Grant Request Form, the grantee organization itself *does not need* to be represented on the Core Team. However, any recipient- grantee organization must commit to collaborating closely with the relevant region's ACI Core Team members in its project implementation and data collection.

Applicants must complete and submit the [Grant Request Form](#) (appendix A) which consists of the following information:

- **Project Details:** name of project, project manager/lead, name of school contact and/or youth provider you are partnering with, start/end date, amount requested (under \$5,000)
- **Description of the improvement idea:** what change idea do you want to test?

- **Anticipated outcome(s)** - What change are you expecting to see as a result of this improvement project? (Make your goal SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based)
- **Race and LGBTQ+ equity:** How the project will impact disproportionality
- **Youth engagement:** How young people were/will be engaged in the development and/or implementation of the project
- **Measurement strategy:** the baseline data being used, how you will know if you succeeded, and how you will track progress

Applicants can expect to hear back from the ACI Team about the outcome of their application within 10 business days.

C. Process for Reviewing and Approving Requests

1. Review Committee

Evaluating proposals and selection process:

- The AWHWA Anchor Community Initiative and Data & Evaluation Teams together with youth and young adult consultants will review applications as they are received on a rolling basis. At a minimum, someone from the ACI Coaching Team, Data and Evaluation Team, and someone with lived experience of homelessness as a young person will review every Grant Request Form.
- Conflicts of interest will be avoided by ensuring that grant applicants and members of their organizations will not be involved in reviewing application

2. Criteria

Proposals must receive a “Yes” on all of the compulsory criteria in order to be funded:

- Project has a clear relationship to one or more "program purposes"
- Project has a quantifiable and time-bound measurement strategy
- Project leads are clearly identified
- Local school(s) and/or service provider buy-in

The following criteria will be scored 1-3 points each, and a minimum score of 9 is required for a request to be accepted:

- Project involves young people with lived experience in development and/or execution
- Project takes action on Racial/LGBTQ+ disproportionality
- Timeframe for project completion is no greater than 3 months
- Project is creative/innovative
- Project can feasibly be completed in the test period and with the resources available

3. Declined Requests

A grant request may be declined for a number of reasons, including:

- Scoring below the minimum requirement of 9 on scored criteria
- Lack of communication with AWHWA

- If a community has outstanding [Project Completion Forms](#) for other grants that must be submitted, AWHWA may request they be received before approving more Grant Requests
- To support equitable distribution of funds across all Anchor Communities
- Funding is requested for a long-term project

If a request is declined, AWHWA's coaching team will work with the project lead to strengthen the grant request for possible resubmission when possible. Communities are encouraged to resubmit requests that have been strengthened.

The purpose of this project is to discover new and creative ideas to find out what works to end student homelessness in Anchor Communities. AWHWA cannot continue funding past the test periods, but can support communities to advocate for sustained funding for successful and scalable projects.

IV. EXPECTATIONS FOR COMMUNITIES

A. Grant Reporting Obligations

Within one month of project completion, the grantee must inform AWHWA of the actual impact of the improvement project and provide any associated data by completing [Project Completion Form](#) (appendix B). AWHWA maintains the right to withhold future Student Stability Innovation Grants if there are outstanding Project Completion Forms that need to be submitted.

B. Communication with ACI staff

Communities are expected to maintain communication with AWHWA staff through implementation of projects, including responding to reasonable requests for more information, following through on contracts, and giving updates to their lead coach.

C. Youth Voice

We expect communities to make an effort to center youth voices where possible using any appropriate methods. These may include involving Youth Action Boards (YABs), holding focus groups, supporting young people to be project leads on change ideas, or other methods.

D. Data Tracking

Communities should use [this data tool](#) to document baseline data and actual data collected during their tests, in order to track and reflect on results, and create a culture of continuous improvement.

APPENDICES

- A. [Grant Request Form \(Print Version\)](#)
- B. [Project Completion Form \(Print Version\)](#)
- C. [Process Flow](#)
- D. [One-Pager](#)
- E. [Ending Student Homelessness Change Package](#)
- F. [FAQ](#)
- G. [Definitions](#)
- H. [ACI Resource Hub \(all Innovation Grants resources\)](#)