Request for Proposals

An Opportunity to Strengthen School Leadership in Massachusetts

The Barr Foundation invites groups of Massachusetts schools to apply for a grant that would support a planning process to develop locally relevant plans to address an important goal: ensuring a high-quality principal in every school.

RFP Released Thursday, June 20, 2019
Proposals due by 4 p.m. EST Tuesday, September 10, 2019

All questions related to the RFP should be submitted via email to SchoolLeadershipRFP@barrfoundation.org

All RFP materials and updates will be made available on the Barr Foundation website at: https://www.barrfoundation.org/strategies/strengthen-school-leadership-rfp

All completed proposals and attachments should be submitted via FormAssembly at: https://www.tfaforms.com/4745727
About the Barr Foundation

The Barr Foundation’s mission is to invest in human, natural, and cultural potential, serving as thoughtful stewards and catalysts. Based in Boston, Barr focuses regionally, and selectively engages nationally, working in partnership with nonprofits, foundations, the public sector, and civic and business leaders to elevate the arts, advance solutions for climate change, and connect all students to success in high school and beyond. Founded in 1997, Barr now has assets of $1.8 billion, and has contributed more than $911 million to charitable causes.

Through our Education program, the Barr Foundation seeks to open doors to rigorous, personalized education so that more young people have real opportunities to thrive. Our Education portfolio spans New England, with emphasis on secondary education. With high quality learning, students can enter college and attain a degree without remediation, or connect to a certificate program and find a good job. They grow their awareness and abilities to be part of vibrant communities. But too many New England students leave high school early—or graduate without being prepared for what’s next. They often struggle as adults to participate fully in the economy and community where they live.

We seek to nurture the development and expansion of new secondary school models across New England. Schools must change because the world students live in has changed and so have the knowledge and skills necessary for success in life. Barr believes that all students can graduate from high school, successfully transition to postsecondary education, and engage in meaningful career opportunities. This belief is grounded in our firm conviction that all students can be:

• Exceptionally well prepared for next steps in life;
• Informed of opportunities to connect to success in high school, college, and career; and
• Empowered to make choices that prepare them for success.

Three core strategies anchor our work:

1. **Catalyze new models** by fueling fresh designs that fit local contexts and transform the high school experience, to put success within reach of all students.
2. **Build public will** by engaging parents and students, educators and civic leaders, and all residents as informed advocates for high-quality schools.

3. **Invest in educators** by developing the pipeline of diverse, skilled, effective teachers and school leaders who bring new educational models to life for their students.

A significant opportunity exists to support this vision by helping more students connect to success in secondary and post-secondary endeavors, arguably one of the most crucial junctures in young people’s lives. To this end, Barr is excited to join a growing national movement to rethink secondary education and definitions of student success.
A Focus on Strengthening School Leadership

Principals have a significant impact on student achievement. Studies have shown that after teachers, principals have the second-highest in-school effect on student learning.¹ This makes sense, given their role in supervising and supporting teachers, setting the tone for school culture and climate, and implementing instructional and curricular priorities. But as districts and school networks across Massachusetts go to work on making significant improvements to student experience and outcomes, many find that they lack the leadership capacity at the school level to effectively implement and manage these efforts.

In Massachusetts, the supply of principals with the necessary skills, vision, and profile is not meeting demand. In 2017, fifty-six percent of principals hired statewide had never held a principal position before, and high-poverty schools are even more likely to hire novice principals.² Districts and school networks across the state struggle to recruit, develop, and retain the high-quality principals that they need—and this deficit is often felt most keenly in schools serving our students with the greatest need.

Massachusetts is not alone in this problem—it is garnering widespread attention nationally, most recently through initiatives and research funded by The Wallace Foundation—but the Commonwealth also faces unique challenges.

A Closer Look at the Issue

In order to more deeply understand the challenges of sourcing, supporting and retaining capable school principals in Massachusetts, the Barr Foundation convened a Working Group beginning in fall 2018. The working group comprised leaders of school districts, charter management organizations, state education agencies, and principal training and development programs, as well as representatives from private foundations. Together group members examined data on the Massachusetts principal pipeline landscape, reviewed local and national case studies on effective solutions to strengthening school leadership, and engaged with principal preparation programs that prioritize responsiveness to districts needs and measuring the impact of their graduates on student outcomes. The group also devised recommended action steps for state policymakers, school system leaders, principal preparation program providers, and funders.


² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education analysis, 2018.
The Opportunity

This request for proposals (RFP) builds on the working group’s findings as detailed in the report, *Strengthening School Leadership in Massachusetts*, by offering groups of schools the opportunity to receive funding to **develop plans for addressing their local needs to ensure a high-quality principal in every school**. Over the course of approximately nine months, a cohort of grantees will engage in a process to better understand the components of approaches to strong school leadership, unpack unique local and/or regional challenges, unearth and evaluate potential solutions, and develop a tangible course of action. Barr will provide grantees with technical assistance through [Attuned Education Partners](#) to support the phases of work described in the Request Details section of this document starting on page 8.

Barr anticipates funding three to five partnerships that include public schools to participate in the planning grant cohort. (Please see the Eligibility section starting on page 10 for more details on which schools are eligible.)

**Estimated project timeline:**

- **June 20, 2019**: RFP released
- **July 25, 2019 (at 10:30AM)**: Webinar for prospective applicants
- **August - September 2019**: Optional conference call during Barr staff office hours
- **September 10, 2019**: Proposals due
- **October 2019**: Interviews with finalist candidates
- **November 5, 2019**: Awards announced

All RFP materials and updates will be provided on the [School Leadership RFP webpage](#) as they become available.
Building on the Evidence

What will it take to ensure there is a high-quality principal in every school in Massachusetts? Extensive research and the experiences of many working in the field today suggest a set of key challenges and evidence-based solutions that may lead us there. Detailed in the report *Strengthening School Leadership in Massachusetts*, along with action steps for specific stakeholders, these challenges and solutions are shared below. Grant applicants are encouraged to build on this body of knowledge.

**PREPARATION**
Principal preparation programs must prepare sufficient numbers of qualified principal candidates who can achieve excellence in instructional leadership and support all students to achieve at high levels. Today these programs are limited in demonstrated efficacy and lack alignment to school system needs. Potential solutions may be derived from high-quality principal preparation programs that build on effective practices such as rigorous coursework, data-driven feedback, and on-the-job learning. To achieve greater alignment, university-based preparation programs may be redesigned in collaboration with schools and systems that hire their candidates.

**COACHING**
Principals, just like teachers, need ongoing support to develop their skills in leading instructional excellence. But principal supervisors have limited capacity to support and develop principals as instructional leaders. Potential solutions include evidence-based focus areas and standards for supervisors to guide coaching, support for novice principals, and principal development. Supervisor roles may be redesigned to include a greater emphasis on instructional leadership, supervising a smaller caseload of principals, systematic training, succession planning, and fewer non-instructional responsibilities. And instructional leadership training may improve alignment across roles that include teacher leaders/instructional leadership team members, assistant principals, principals, and principal supervisors.

**SCOPE**
Instructional leadership is an essential lever for positively impacting student outcomes. But principals are being asked to take on so many other responsibilities that together greatly diminish their capacity to focus on instructional excellence. Potential solutions include distributed leadership models that take other responsibilities off principals’ plates so that they can focus on instructional leadership.

**REPRESENTATION**
Research shows that having both teachers and principals of color has positive impacts on student outcomes, especially for students of color. And yet the racial diversity of principals does not reflect the racial diversity of the students served. Stakeholders in Massachusetts consistently cite lack of diversity among principals as a critical challenge to serving students.
better. We may draw lessons from programs that beat the odds in preparing leaders of color at rates that substantially exceed the national average.

**Strategic management and collaboration.** Even the most promising solutions are not quick, one-time fixes. Building a robust and strong pipeline and bench of high-quality principals means consistently anticipating future hiring needs; strategically recruiting and retaining high-quality principals to meet those needs; and ensuring there are high-quality development opportunities for those in the pipeline. This takes ongoing, strategic management, and it requires devoted people, time, and resources. Collaborative efforts, where districts and other school systems work together to understand these challenges and implement solutions in a robust way, may be most effective.
Request Details

The Barr Foundation is seeking proposals from groups of Massachusetts public schools to engage in a strategic planning process in support of local projects aimed at strengthening school leadership. Competitive proposals will clearly convey the local or regional challenges currently being faced, express an understanding of the various components of a thriving pipeline and approach to school leadership management and commit to designing and implementing strategies to address their specific needs in this area. Applicants are encouraged to think holistically about the principal pipeline and bring an open mind to exploring the myriad considerations on both the supply-side (i.e., principal preparation and training) and demand-side (i.e., the factors affecting those in the role). In addition, schools working together in a system may benefit from collaborating with other systems and independent schools to find solutions that meet their collective needs. During the planning process, applicants will explore their own challenges and solutions to ensuring a high-quality principal in every school with the Strengthening School Leadership in Massachusetts report as a starting point for that process.

Applicants are invited to submit proposals for $100,000 to $200,000 to support nine months of planning (December 2019 to August 2020) resulting in the development of a feasible, effective plan to strengthen local or regional school leadership management.

The Planning Process

All grantees will undertake a three-phase planning process to help ensure that the implementation plans developed are grounded in an understanding of local context and challenges and informed by exploration of potential solutions that align to those challenges, as well as lessons learned from the similar work of others. The phases include:

1. **Information Gathering and Analysis:** Collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to formulate a comprehensive picture of the current principal pipeline context and challenges.

2. **Discovery of Potential Solutions:** Explore options for strengthening the principal pipeline across all elements and key leverage points. These include, but are not limited to, anticipating leadership needs, aligning principal preparation and development with district needs, and establishing methods for understanding the effectiveness of preparation strategies.

3. **Implementation Planning:** Select the strategies likely to have the greatest impacts on the principal pipeline within the specific context and develop a plan that includes appropriate sequence and timeline, as well as an associated budget and description of other anticipated needs related to support or resources.
Based on the quality and feasibility of the implementation plans, Barr may invite some awardees to apply for a subsequent multi-year implementation grant.

**Technical Assistance**

Grantees also will also receive support from [Attuned Education Partners](https://attunedpartners.com/) throughout the planning process. Attuned will guide grantees through the three phases noted above, providing a structure for how to sequence the work, data gathering and analysis support, thought partnership to make sense of the findings throughout the three phases, facilitation of group meetings, and support in developing the implementation plans. In addition, Attuned will convene two in-person day-long meetings in Boston during the planning process, bringing together the full cohort of grantees to learn and share collaboratively.

To better understand the support provided from Attuned, the planning process, and the time commitment anticipated to participate in the planning process, please see the Appendix. Learn more about Attuned on their website ([https://attunedpartners.com/](https://attunedpartners.com/)).

**Use of Grant Funds**

Applicants may submit proposals for $100,000 to $200,000 of grant funds to ensure the planning process yields a deep understanding of what it will take to create a robust and rigorous approach intended to result in a high-quality principal in every school. Grantees may find that grant funds are best used to do the following:

- **Facilitate a strong process**, for example, by hiring additional project-related capacity such as project management or analytical support, by creating printed materials for meetings, etc.

- **Ensure key people have the time and support to engage in the process**, for example, by adding staff capacity to allow for pullout and reallocation of responsibilities, by providing travel stipends to meetings and cohort sessions, etc.

- **Engaging critical internal and external stakeholders during the process**, for example, by conducting focus groups or surveys, by providing food for meetings, etc.

- **Supporting robust discovery and due diligence of potential solutions**, for example, by providing travel stipends to visit other school systems and partners, by providing backfill time to allow for staff to make those visits, etc.

This is not an exhaustive list of possible uses of grant funds. These funds cannot be used for ongoing operating costs of any school or program, nor can they be used on facilities-related expenses. We expect the proposed budget to align to both the set of challenges and the gaps identified in the proposal narrative, as well as the complexity of the partnership.
Eligibility

This opportunity is available for a single Massachusetts public school system (district or charter) meeting the criteria below. This opportunity is also open to partnerships of Massachusetts schools that represent a commitment across geographic or governance boundaries that could be better equipped to understand and address school leadership pipeline challenges altogether. Thus:

• A single applicant may consist of a single local education agency (LEA), a partnership spanning multiple LEAs, or a partnership that includes a LEA(s) and independent schools.

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

• Applicants must span a total of at least three public high schools across all schools, but may also include schools across the K-12 spectrum.
• The lead applicant intending to receive the grant and drive the work must be a LEA that serves 50 percent or more high-needs students, as defined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: students who are economically disadvantaged, current or former English Language Learners, and/or enrolled in Special Education.

Please see the school data table located in the appendix for more clarity on the eligibility criteria.

Note: Priority will be given to applicants that serve a significant number of high-needs students.

Proposal Support

Prospective applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the following opportunities for proposal support:

Webinar for Prospective Applicants: July 25, 2019 at 10:30AM. Join Barr staff and fellow grantseekers in a live session to learn more about the opportunity. Visit the School Leadership RFP webpage to learn more about the webinar and RSVP. We strongly encourage questions to be submitted in advance of this session to SchoolLeadershipRFP@barrfoundation.org.

Office Hours Conference Call with Barr Education Program Staff. Optionally schedule a conference call to discuss any ideas or questions with our staff. Office hours will be available during select times between August 7, 2019 and September 5, 2019. To schedule office hours, please email: SchoolLeadershipRFP@barrfoundation.org.

Questions and Answers. Email any questions related to the RFP to SchoolLeadershipRFP@barrfoundation.org. Responses to all questions—including those posed during the webinar and separately—will be published in a Q&A document on the School Leadership RFP webpage, along with all materials and updates.
Proposal Submission

All applications are due by 4:00 PM EST on September 10, 2019. Applications should include all elements described below under “Proposal Requirements.”

Complete applications should be submitted via the online application form.
Proposal Requirements

A. Organization Information
   The “Lead Applicant” (this will be the direct recipient of grant funds, if awarded, and must meet the eligibility criteria) will supply:
   - Organization name
   - Organization street, city, state, and zip code
   - Main phone
   - Main fax
   - Website URL
   - Annual organization budget
   - Organization tax ID
   - Start of fiscal year
   - Name, title, phone, and email of chief executive of your organization
   - Name, title, phone, and email of staff person other than the chief executive managing this request (optional)
   - Name, title, phone, and email of lead development staff person handling this request (optional)

B. School Data
   Applicants complete the school data table (see: appendix) outlining the schools and student populations served across the applicant.

C. Proposal Narrative
   Applicants submit a narrative proposal describing their current principal pipeline and support challenges and outlining how they would use this grant opportunity to engage in analysis and planning to address those challenges to ensure that all schools in the district or region are led by highly qualified, effective principals. The maximum length for the Proposal Narrative is 10 pages. Applicants should respond to the following:

1. What are the primary challenges you seek to solve in your LEA or partnership related to ensuring high-quality school leadership in every school? In your response, please describe how you know the challenges exist.

2. (Only for those applicants representing a partnership across geographic and governance boundaries.) Why do you think this partnership will increase the opportunity for impact versus approaching the work individually?

3. What programs or initiatives do you currently have in place to address the challenges noted in #1? In your response, please describe how you might look to reimagine these current approaches as you develop a plan for going forward.
4. How will this grant advance your understanding of your school leadership pipeline and management challenges and potential solutions? What are you hoping to learn through this grant opportunity?

5. What gaps do you have (capacity or information) currently preventing an understanding of your challenges related to ensuring high-quality school leadership and developing a plan for potential solutions? What supports would you need to fill those gaps?

6. Which stakeholders (internal and external to the school system) will be champions of this work, and how do you know? Which stakeholders do you anticipate being potential barriers to the success of this work, and how do you know? How do you intend to engage both the champions and those less enthusiastic stakeholders as part of the planning process? Please provide letters of support and commitment from the superintendent (or equivalent) of each participating LEA and independent school in the partnership. If additional letters of support are also available, please submit those as well.

D. Grant Period Outputs and Outcomes
Applicants provide up to five outcomes and up to five outputs that outline what you are hoping to achieve if you are selected to participate in this planning process. An outcome is the result of planning process activities, often expressed in terms of changes in behavior, norms, decision-making, knowledge, attitudes, capacities, motivations, skills, or conditions for the stakeholders involved. Strong outcomes represent what your team is intending to accomplish through the delivery of an output. An output is a concrete deliverable which your team plans to produce as part of the planning process. Outputs should showcase major milestones along the nine-month planning process and be as specific as possible. Please refer to the Barr Foundation outcomes and outputs reference document for additional guidance.

E. Budget
Applicants submit a line-item budget on the use of a $100,000 to $200,000 grant using the provided budget template for a nine-month grant period (December 2019 to August 2020). These funds cannot be used for ongoing operating costs of any school or program, nor can they be used on facilities-related expenses. We expect the proposed budget to align to both the set of challenges and the gaps identified in the proposal narrative, as well as the complexity of the partnership. (See page 9 for examples of potential grant fund uses.)

F. Administrative Requirements
The “Lead Applicant” submits these administrative documents as part of their proposal.
1. Name, position, and email of all school committee members
2. Most recent independent audit or account review (as required by law) for the organization, if applicable
3. Organization budget (income and expense) approved by the board for the fiscal year, with the actual-to-budget comparison for the year-to-date
4. If using additional funding for this potential project: Provide a list of companies, foundations, and government entities being approached to fund this proposal, including dollar amounts requested and an indication of which sources are committed, pending, or anticipated
5. Organizational chart
6. A completed Diversity Data Form
7. 501(c)(3) Determination Letter, if applicable
Appendix – More detail on technical assistance support provided by Attuned Education Partners

Attuned’s supports during the planning process could include the following (note activities subject to change pending needs of grantees):

1. Review quantitative and qualitative data for each local team to generate a comprehensive assessment of strengths and growth areas with regard to principal pipeline and support.
   • Review and synthesize key organizational quantitative data.
   • Administer and synthesize an open-ended survey of school leadership and others.
   • Conduct interviews with 5-10 key team members and focus groups as needed
   • Synthesize the findings from quantitative data, survey responses, and interviews into an easily digestible report on system’s strengths and growth areas.
   • Discuss implications of all data and analysis with the grantee planning team

2. Facilitate a group cohort session in Boston to help grantee teams explore options for strengthening principal pipeline and support.
   • Have teams share reflections on strengths and challenges.
   • Share and discuss learnings from the goals, practices, challenges, and successes of key local and national school leadership programs.
   • Meet with and learn directly from the leaders of evidence-based local and national school leadership programs and from school system leaders who have implemented successful principal pipeline and support solutions.

3. Provide individualized planning support for each team to draft a feasible, impactful implementation plan with the following components:
   • Defined outcome goals.
   • Key initiatives with mapped deliverables over a 3-5 year period, with input goals.
   • Milestones/key steps with owners and due dates for each initiative.
   • A staffing and budget model aligned to the needs for execution of each initiative.

4. Facilitate opportunities for teams to receive feedback on draft plans.
   • Facilitate a group cohort session and individual local focus groups in which each team shares and receives feedback on its draft plan.
   • Facilitate each team to revise its plans as needed.

5. Develop tools and systems to present and monitor the plan.
   • Create a scorecard to measure progress toward outcome and input goals.
   • Create a deck of slides for your team to present the plan internally and externally.
   • Facilitate the team and local boards through to plan approval.
   • Create tracking tools and recommend cadence and structure for ongoing management.
Appendix – School Data Chart
Complete this chart to provide an overview of the schools included in your proposal. (*Note: the data chart will not be counted towards the 10-page maximum for the Proposal Narrative.*)

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<tr>
<th>Town or region</th>
<th>Lead Applicant</th>
<th>Partner 1</th>
<th>Partner 2</th>
<th>Total (across public schools only)</th>
<th>Total (across all schools)</th>
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<td>School Governance Model (e.g., district; charter; parochial; independent)</td>
<td>must be public (district or charter)</td>
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<td># of Schools</td>
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<td># of Secondary Schools (serving grades 9-12)</td>
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<td>% High Needs Students across all schools (High Needs = low-income, current or former English Language Learners, and/or students with disabilities)</td>
<td>must be ≥50%</td>
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<td>High School Graduation Rate (four-year cohort)</td>
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