



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Meeting the Moment

TRANSFORMING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

February 2023



CONTACT EMAIL: EducationRFP@barrfoundation.com

MEETING THE MOMENT: TRANSFORMING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The Barr Foundation requests proposals from teams of school and system leaders from local education agencies (LEAs) in New England who are ready to engage in an intentional year of learning, dreaming, and planning to transform the high school student experience so that all students, especially historically marginalized students, thrive in and after high school. A LEA is eligible for an award of up to \$100,000 to support internal learning and planning, stakeholder engagement, and project management from July 2023 - July 2024. Because the Barr Foundation has learned that leadership commitment and alignment at the school and system levels is key to moving toward a vision for school change, LEAs will need to engage system and school leadership in a collaborative and cohesive design process to address system conditions *and* school transformation. Facilitated quarterly convenings and technical assistance via a community of practice will be provided, at no cost to grantees, throughout the 2023-2024 school year. By Spring 2024, participating LEAs will have a clarified vision and defined plan for meeting this moment to transform the high school student experience.

INSIDE THIS DOCUMENT

OVERVIEW	2
About the Barr Foundation and its Education Program	2
About the Opportunity	3
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE	4
LEARN: Summer-Fall 2023	5
DREAM: Winter 2024	6
PLAN: Spring 2024	6
COMMITMENTS	7
ELIGIBILITY	8
TIMELINE	9
APPLICATION PROCESS	10
Grant agreement language	13

OVERVIEW

About the Barr Foundation and its Education Program

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 nearly \$3 billion, and has contributed more than \$1 billion to charitable causes.

The Barr Foundation Education Program is dedicated to reimagining the high school student experience in New England to support equitable student access and equitable student outcomes. Three core strategies anchor our work:

1. We **Catalyze New Models** by partnering with high schools and systems committed to building equitable, excellent high schools where all students thrive.
2. We **Invest in Educators** by developing the pipeline of diverse, skilled, and effective teachers and school leaders who bring new models of high school to life for their students.
3. We **Build Public Will** by partnering with advocates to garner community support and demand for high-quality schools.

This opportunity is part of the Catalyze New Models strategy. All high school students deserve to have an excellent educational experience that lifts up their strengths, provides meaningful learning experiences, helps them to chart paths based on their passions, and prepares them to embrace the opportunities and challenges life will present. We believe that all young people – regardless of their background – can thrive in and beyond high school. However, this vision is not yet a reality for many students in New England, particularly those who have historically been most marginalized by our systems. Too often, current school and system structures, policies, practices, and belief systems limit opportunity and access for historically marginalized groups of students, and contribute to inequitable outcomes for students of color, low income students, students learning English, and students with special needs.

Schools and school systems must fundamentally change in order to break the patterns that have prevented students from thriving, and design new models and systems that change the status quo. Fundamental change is complex because the full set of conditions, priorities, structures, and ways of being must be reexamined, rethought, and rebuilt. Rather than working on a single solution or one narrow piece of complex, interconnected issues, the Barr Education program's Catalyze New Models strategy supports schools and systems to set a new vision with a comprehensive strategy and roadmap to meaningful, deep, and lasting change.

We believe that education equity for young people requires high-quality instruction, and therefore, addressing the instructional core is a necessary focus of any fundamental change effort in the high school space. We have seen firsthand from our school and system partners that high-quality, personalized high schools that are grounded in **positive youth development** theory can disrupt cycles of systemic inequity and create the conditions for all young people to thrive. We support high schools

and school systems in doing high school differently by creating and implementing new models based on their local context, centered around:

- Rigorous, relevant, and purposeful learning experiences
- High expectations for all students
- Authentic opportunities for student voice and choice
- Intentional systems that ensure all students are known and supported

About the Opportunity

Now is the time to challenge the status quo and move towards a vision of educational excellence that our students deserve. Now that many pandemic restrictions have been lifted, it is tempting to go back to the way things were. Yet, the way things were was not working for many students. **Barr seeks to partner with high schools and systems who are ready to embrace a pivotal opportunity to pause, understand the context and student need more deeply, challenge assumptions about how things need to be, and move toward a vision of excellence that our students deserve.**

This is a unique opportunity that is designed intentionally for teams to pause and deeply reflect on what currently is and what could be. The year-long experience will provide time, resources, and facilitated support for school and district leaders to step out of the day-to-day whirlwind of urgent needs to come together and engage in the necessary deep conversations and rigorous planning that this moment demands.

At the end of the year, we hope participating teams will be able to answer big questions:

- What is our vision of excellence at both the high school and system levels?
- What do we need to change or create at both the high school and system levels to make that vision a reality for *all* of our students?

Applicants are invited to submit a proposal for up to \$100,000 for one year of support to engage in a learning, dreaming, and planning process with local stakeholders. Investments may support collaborative work time; facilitation, project management, and/or data collection support; and/or other local needs related to this work. This initial one-year phase of work may lead to further planning, design, and early implementation funding for selected applicants.

We know reimagining the high school experience takes more than financial resources, which is why the Barr Foundation is committed to long-term, side-by-side partnerships with our grantee partners. We will establish a community of practice of up to ten local education agencies (LEAs) working teams who will convene throughout the year to receive technical assistance and learn, dream, and plan together. Additional details about the scope and sequence of the community of practice are included in the following section.

All questions related to the RFP should be submitted to EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

We have learned that deep commitment at both the high school and system levels is required in order to set a shared, meaningful vision for long-term change. Both school and system leadership must have a deep understanding of the long-term vision and an active role in creating the conditions needed to move forward. To this end, the community of practice is intended for joint participation of high school building leaders (e.g. Principal, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, etc.) in partnership with system-level leaders (e.g. Superintendent, Principal Supervisor, etc.) as an opportunity for alignment and coherence across the school and system levels.

Through a community of practice, school and system leaders will:



LEARN: Deepen collective capacity to understand and respond to the students served; utilize and enhance leadership experiences; and identify how policies, practices, and organizational systems contribute to or prevent students from thriving in our schools.



DREAM: See what’s possible through interactions with and potential visits to bright spot schools/districts.



PLAN: Develop a plan for a transformed high school experience and system customized to the local context.

LEARN		DREAM	PLAN
Grounding Convening	Internal Data Dive	Inspirational Site Visits	Strategic Work Planning
July 25–27, 2023	November 14–16, 2023	January (TBD), 2024	March (TBD), 2024

Additional Supports:

- Quarterly team coaching sessions
- 1.5 day Springpoint School Observation Visit and a debrief meeting (between September 18 – November 3)
- Invitations to optional learning excursions

While school and system leaders will be the primary participants in all community of practice events, there may be opportunities for staff and students to participate in a particular community of practice activity. Throughout the year, school and system-level leaders share the responsibility for regularly

convening, consulting, and engaging all stakeholders in the local community to learn, dream, and plan together.

► LEARN: Summer-Fall 2023

The **summer grounding experience** will bring the full community of practice together to:

- Build relationships within and among teams. Relationships, trust, and understanding are a prerequisite for rigorous and purposeful shared learning. Knowing ourselves, one another, and our different school and system contexts more deeply will allow us to accelerate our learning, challenge our assumptions, and risk doing hard things together.
- Build common understanding and tools to evaluate and envision new systems. To ultimately develop plans and strategies that will meet the needs of all students in the “Plan” phase - and particularly those students who have been historically marginalized in schools - teams will utilize an equity-centered systems thinking approach¹. Systems thinking encourages us to see a holistic picture of patterns and interrelationships, rather than focusing on individual components. We will deepen our equity consciousness and illuminate the ways that systems and structures intersect with and impact the lived experience of different groups. By making visible the constructs, constraints, outcomes, and unintended consequences of existing organizational systems, we can then work to rebuild them for more equitable outcomes.

The **fall data dive** will help answer key questions about how students are experiencing high school, what their current outcomes are, areas of strength and celebration, and the root causes of any identified gaps. Teams will collect a variety of qualitative and quantitative data to bring to a November data deep dive and “meaning-making” experience with the community of practice. The necessary data will include:

- Collecting key accountability data disaggregated by student subgroups, including academic proficiency metrics; student absenteeism; student discipline trends; grade 9 outcomes; advanced coursework enrollment and completion; high school graduation rates; college entrance, persistence, and completion rates (if available); and other relevant data.
- Administering a student and staff survey (and family survey, if available) that covers school climate and culture and academic challenge and relevance. *(Note: Schools/systems may use their own student and staff surveys if the timing and survey content align well. Surveys should be from spring 2023 or fall 2023 to reflect the most current data. The Barr Foundation will also have a survey option available for grantees to consider administering in fall 2023, if needed. For our early planning purposes, please note in your application if your LEA might be interested in a fall survey option provided by a Barr partner. Please contact EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org if you need additional information or would like to discuss the options.)*
- Conducting student shadows and student focus groups/listening sessions to more deeply understand the student experience.
- Conducting instructional rounds and observations of professional learning, instructional leadership teams, and teacher collaborative planning.

¹ Senge, P. (2006.) *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (revised ed.). New York: Currency, Doubleday.

- Schools hosting a 1.5 day Springpoint School Observation Visit and system leadership participating in a debrief. The school observation visit uses the **Indicators of School Quality (IoSQ)**, a high school specific framework developed based on research and practitioner insights by the national school design organization, **Springpoint**. In alignment with Barr's values and goals, the framework takes a comprehensive approach to looking at high school quality and covers the mindsets, policy, and practices that must all be addressed in integrated ways. We believe that excellent high schools come in many different forms, and this framework recognizes that quality components can be actualized in a variety of ways. School Observation Visits are a highly acclaimed benefit of Barr partnership among current Barr partners.

► DREAM: Winter 2024

The purpose of the “Dream” phase is to see inspirational examples of what is possible in the high school experience. School visits and learning tours to other schools have consistently been reported by Barr Catalyze New Models grantee partners as transformative experiences that expanded their thinking and helped shape their future plans for school design. There will be one required trip (3 days) that the community of practice will attend together, as well as additional options for individual teams based on interest. The community of practice will also utilize case studies of “bright spot” schools to engage in deep discussion about the why, how, and what of their transformation stories as another way to surface new ideas and dream big together about what high school could be.

► PLAN: Spring 2024

In the final “Plan” phase, teams will apply their learning and dreaming to the priorities and plans taking shape for their own schools and systems. The community of practice will come together for a strategic work planning and design workshop to assist with teams’ development of a plan of action.

We expect that the priorities and activities outlined in each action plan will likely look different because they will be anchored in each team’s local context and unique learning and dreaming. Therefore, next steps in a future phase of work could range from continued system/community-level engagement to developing a new high school model, with many options in between. Some action steps from other Catalyze New Models grantees are included below as examples. This is by no means an exhaustive list of possible action steps, but gives a sense of the range of possible priorities after the completion of the grant period:

Some examples of future system-level action steps could include:

- Develop a Portrait of a Graduate, a community-driven vision to name what all students should know and be able to do when they graduate high school.
- Develop a system-wide instructional vision.
- Develop a system-wide strategic plan.
- Conduct additional research and analysis on current strengths and gaps in the school or system to inform next steps.
- Conduct outreach and training with various stakeholders on the learning from year 1 to build demand for change.

- Design a new high school option.

Some examples of future school-level action steps could include:

- Launch an inclusive high school design team with students, families, staff, and administrators to more deeply assess current school quality, explore inspirational school models (school visits), and begin to articulate a vision for a redesigned school model and learning experience (or the development of a new high school).
- Pilot activities aligned with the learning from year 1, with intentional feedback loops to inform system and school design work.
- Develop professional learning communities (PLCs) and/or staff training aligned with the learning from year 1 (developing an instructional vision, conducting a curriculum audit, etc.).

COMMITMENTS

LEAs selected for this opportunity commit to:

- School and system leadership demonstrating a belief in and commitment to equitable student outcomes.
- Creating a working team that includes school system leadership and at least 1-2 members of the high school leadership team from each focus high school to consistently attend the Barr-sponsored community of practice. Engaging with the learning community through full participation in all opportunities offered, including convenings, webinars, learning excursions, and other in-person and virtual technical assistance and events, approximately 12 days of off-site shared learning for each member of the working team.
- Regularly convening, consulting, and engaging all stakeholders in the local community - including staff, students, families and community members - to learn, dream and plan together.
- Participating in data dives, including both supplying and collecting needed data in order to more deeply understand student experiences and outcomes.
- Participating in a structured, developmental school observation visit to receive tailored feedback and recommendations specific to each high school site.
- Participating in visits to other school models as inspiration for what is possible in high school design.
- Applying learning to disrupt the status quo and creating strategic plans for doing high school differently

As a partner to selected LEAs, The Barr Foundation commits to:

- Covering costs associated with the Learn, Dream, and Plan phases of the community of practice experience.
- Providing LEAs with mission- and values-aligned partners for technical assistance at each phase of the community of practice experience.
- Being a thought partner throughout the process.

ELIGIBILITY

This opportunity may be for you if:

- You are ready to engage in a new strategy, visioning, and/or planning process, or
- You are looking for a complementary set of supports for a strategy, visioning, and/or planning process that is already underway, or
- You have a current strategy, vision, or plan that needs to be reimagined to be more about transformative, equity-driven change.

Eligibility requirements:

- Applicants must be open to considering new possibilities for fundamental change at both the high school and school system levels (i.e., bring a learner's mindset rather than a predetermined set of solutions).
- Public Local Education Agencies (LEAs), including districts and charter organizations, are eligible to apply. A group or regional consortium/collaborative of LEAs or schools organized around common goals or interests may also apply.
- This opportunity is open to LEAs serving students in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or Vermont.
- Each LEA must include students in at least one high school grade and serve a minimum of 100 high school students.
- Current Barr Foundation grantees with high schools that are not yet active in Barr-supported transformation efforts are eligible to apply. Please connect with your current Program Officer if you have questions regarding eligibility.
- The Barr Education Program's strategy focuses on high school options that provide equitable access for all students; high schools with selective/screened admissions are ineligible to apply.
- Single-school LEAs (e.g., a single site charter school) are ineligible to apply for this particular opportunity due to the dual school-level and system-level focus.
- Successful applicants must have a student need that warrants a substantial level of investment to transform for equity. A description of the current understanding of student need should be included as part of the response to question #2 in the proposal narrative. Eligibility for this opportunity can be met through at least one of the following options:
 - LEAs with a high school population that is at least 50% high needs students (composite rate of at least 50% across all high schools included). (*Note: Using the **MA DESE definition** of high needs: "A student is high needs if he or she is designated as either low income (prior to 2015, and from 2022 to present), economically disadvantaged (from 2015 to 2021), EI/former EI, or a student with disabilities. A former EI student is a student not currently an EI, but had been at some point in the four previous academic years."*)
 - LEAs who have experienced significant recent growth in their high needs high school student population.

- LEAs with a significant population of high school students who are not being served well by the current model of school and whose unique experiences, strengths, and needs must be centered as part of an overall plan to reimagine high school.

TIMELINE

RFP release: Wednesday, February 1, 2023

Office hours (optional): Week of February 13 and week of March 6

- Applicants are encouraged to sign up for office hours if you would like to discuss your questions or proposal with a member of the Barr Foundation team.

Please email EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org to sign up for office hours.

Webinar: Wednesday, March 1 (3–4 p.m.)

- Please register for the informational webinar about this RFP [here](#). We encourage questions to be submitted ahead through the field on the online registration form or via email at EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org. All questions will also be answered via the FAQs that will be published on the RFP webpage after the webinar.

Proposals due: Wednesday, March 15, 2023 by 5 p.m.

Awards announced: By July 1, 2023

Grant period: July 2023–July 2024

All questions related to the RFP should be submitted to EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Email all application materials to EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 15, 2023. Materials should be in pdf, Word, or Excel document format. Please embed any links within the documents.

A. Cover page: Organization information for the LEA receiving the grant funds

- Organization information:
 - Organization name
 - Organization address
 - Main phone
 - Main fax
 - Website URL
 - 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)
- Budget information:
 - Organization budget (income and expense) approved by the board for the fiscal year, with the actual-to-budget comparison for the year-to-date
 - Most recent independent audit or account review (as required by law) for the organization, if applicable
 - Organization tax ID
 - Start of fiscal Year
 - Grant amount requested (up to \$100,000)
- Information for community of practice:
 - Name, title, phone, and email of each working team member
 - Name, title, phone, and email of lead data contact
 - Please note if you plan to administer your own student and staff survey (in spring 2023 or fall 2023) and what survey instrument you plan to use **OR** note if you are interested in accessing the survey option supported by Barr. Please contact EducationRFP@barrfoundation.org if you need additional information or would like to discuss the options

B. Proposal narrative (please limit to no more than 6 pages)

1. **Purpose/why:** Why is the moment right for your high school(s) and school system to engage in this opportunity? What is the opportunity and need that your work will address in the high school space and with respect to how factors impact school transformation system-wide?
2. **Current context:** Describe your current understanding of student need and eligibility for this opportunity (see “Eligibility” section). What do you already know about your students’ experiences in high school and outcomes after high school (including any qualitative or quantitative data)? To what extent do these experiences differ for different populations of students (e.g., by race/ethnicity, income level, students with special needs, or students learning English)?
 - If existing planning efforts, strategies, initiatives, and/or projects are currently underway to improve students’ experiences in high school as well as their postsecondary outcomes, please describe those at a high level.
 - If applicable, please attach any existing strategy documents such as a strategic plan, school improvement plan, Portrait of a Graduate, instructional vision, etc. that will help illuminate current efforts. (Please embed any links within a pdf or Word document.)
3. **Areas for learning:** What questions about students’ experiences in high school and outcomes after high school do you want to explore and learn about during the grant period? What data do you need to better understand these experiences and outcomes? Include in your response 3-5 examples of questions about your high school students you envision addressing through participation in this project.
4. **Working team members:** Please describe your proposed working team members (at least one school leader and one system leader), how their roles are situated within the broader organization, and their influence over key decisions. What structures are in place or may need to be created for these working team members to regularly collaborate, lead change efforts, and include other stakeholders (for example, students, staff, families, and community members)?
 - Please also identify a lead data contact who will support the working team’s efforts. Contact information for the working team members and the lead data contact should be included in the cover page above.
 - If available, please attach an existing organizational chart for the system and/or high school.
5. **Stakeholder engagement:** Please describe your anticipated strategy for working team members to regularly convene and engage stakeholders in the local community (students, staff, families, etc.) to learn, dream, and plan together.
6. **“Beyond the Grant” supports:** What types of expertise, resources, and supports do you expect will be most helpful to your team? What do you hope to gain through participation in the cohort learning community? *(Note: For your reference, at the end of this document is the language we include in our grant agreement with partners that both shares what Barr is committing to offer, as well as what we expect our partners to engage in to maximize the benefits of the grant award.)*

C. Grant Period Outputs and Outcomes

Draft up to 5 outputs and up to 5 outcomes for your proposal. Please refer to Barr's [guidance on developing strong outputs and outcomes](#). An output is a concrete deliverable which your team plans to produce as part of the work. Outputs should showcase major milestones and be as specific as possible. An outcome is the result of project activities, often expressed in terms of changes in behavior, knowledge, attitudes, capacities, or skills for the school, staff, school, or system. Strong outcomes represent what your team is intending to accomplish through the delivery of one or more outputs.

Each output and outcome should be focused on what will be accomplished during the 12-month grant period. Each output and outcome should include how you will measure it, using language such as "as measured by" or "as evidenced by." When relevant, be specific about the number you are aiming to reach. Also note that the outputs and outcomes do not need to have a 1:1 correlation. For example, you may have three outputs that are all related to one outcome.

At a minimum, applicants should include the following topics (including how they will be measured by your team) in the outputs and/or outcomes:

- Examining multiple sources of data to understand how different groups of students are experiencing high school, what their current outcomes are, and where the gaps may be (Learn phase);
- Seeing what's possible in high school and system design through bright spot visits and case studies (Dream phase);
- Developing a plan for a transformed high school experience and system (Plan phase); and
- Engaging stakeholders throughout the grant period.

D. Budget Narrative

Provide a detailed narrative on the use of the grant (up to \$100,000) using the provided [budget template](#) for the year-long grant period. These funds cannot be used for ongoing operating costs of any school or program, nor can they be used on facilities-related expenses.

Examples of how funds may be used include, but are not limited to:

- Stipends or coverage/partial position backfill for working team members and for other community members who will be engaged in learning, dreaming, and planning, such as teachers, families, or students;
- Facilitation or project management support from external organizations or individuals;
- Meetings and community gatherings;
- Learning tours/travel to site visits beyond those supported by Barr as part of this grant;
- Internal or contracted analyst to support data collection and/or analysis;
- Stakeholder focus groups (e.g. current students, graduates, etc.); and
- Design and production of materials for external communication.

Participation in the facilitated learning community, and access to the learning community expert technical assistance providers, will be supported directly by the Barr Foundation and does not need to be included in the budget proposal. The learning community will include at least three in-person convenings and at least one multi-day school visit; the costs associated with travel and participation in these convenings and visits will be covered by the Foundation directly.

Grant agreement language

In addition to the direct support provided through grant funds, we value offering our high school grantee partners additional supports in their journey to develop excellent high school models. Based on grantee feedback and direct conversations with our partners about their interests and needs, we have prioritized additional supports that provide 1) expert feedback and coaching and 2) opportunities to connect with peers across the Catalyze New Models portfolio.

Our grantee partners have found the expert feedback from school observation visits to be invaluable in providing concrete, actionable guidance and informing future priorities in their school design work. The opportunity to join communities of practice has facilitated cross-cohort connections and learning across schools in different stages of school model development and provided rich peer learning experiences on relevant topics and problems of practice.

To maximize the benefits of the grant award, grantees in the Catalyze New Models strategy of Barr's Education Program are expected to:

- Engage in one or more communities of practice through full participation in all opportunities offered by the learning community facilitator(s), including convenings, webinars, and other in-person and virtual technical assistance and events (at no cost to the grantee; this support is covered by Barr)
- Host site visits for Barr Foundation staff and/or other grantees
- Participate in structured, developmental school observation visits to receive tailored feedback and recommendations specific to the grantee high school site(s)
- Participate in research and evaluation activities as specified by Barr Foundation staff. Activities may include, but are not limited to, student-level data collection and sharing, interviews, focus groups, on-site observations, and surveys.