



2024 Community Experts Fund

A different kind of RFP: *Designed by and for the community*

This grant initiative has been developed by the Tower Foundation’s Community Experts Team, an 18-member group of young adults with lived expertise relating to the Foundation’s funding areas.

The design and administration of this grant opportunity is spearheaded by young adults with ties to the communities where services will be delivered. Their engagement in the grantmaking process both amplifies community voice and informs grantmaking with the concerns, insights, and priorities of the young people that are the focus of the work.

Applicants will submit a brief proposal in writing or by video. **Applications must be submitted by Friday, August 30, 2024 in order to be considered.**

In 2024, the Community Experts Fund will focus on initiatives that amplify youth voice within organizations.

▶ Eligibility Criteria

Eligible organizations are youth-serving nonprofit organizations that:

- Work with young people with an intellectual disability, learning disability, mental health challenge, or substance use disorder; and
- Currently provide services in one or more of these regions:
 - Massachusetts: Barnstable, Dukes, Essex, or Nantucket County
 - New York: Erie or Niagara County



Eligible Funding Requests

In 2024, applicants may request support for initiatives that amplify youth voice within their organizations.

Context: The 2024 Community Experts Team discussed a wide range of topics of interest to them and their peers. These included the need for mental health and substance use disorder treatment, the importance of equipping young people for success during major life transitions, like college, or employment, and the need for support with housing, finances, and social skills.

Throughout these conversations, no matter the topic, the team expressed particular interest in **programs that promote and encourage youth leadership**. Each of the Community Experts Team members recognize how critical it is for organizations to hear from the young people who are directly affected by their programs and to act on this input. Team members also see the personal benefit to young people when they are meaningfully involved. They grow in self-advocacy skills, in confidence, and in professional experience. This year's priority for the fund grew from these sentiments.

Eligible Youth Leadership Opportunities

Eligible requests may include one or more of the following:

- supports for youth advisory boards (new or existing)
- leadership training for young people
- creation and support for advocacy roles for young people (awareness campaigns; local, state, or federal legislative issues)
- training and support for the work of youth peer advocates
- development of leadership-focused curricula
- recruitment/promotion for youth leadership opportunities
- development of mentoring opportunities for youth (e.g. building activities and instructional materials to be used with younger children)

Additional items may be considered. If you have ideas that are not on this list, please reach out to Nick Randell to discuss ahead of your submission ngr@thetowerfoundation.org.

What Makes a Strong Application?

Strong applications will address the following:

- Role of youth voice in program design, implementation, and assessment
- Inclusion, belonging, and accessibility (support for differences across race, gender, and ability)
- Uniqueness and creativity of the approach
- Evidence for success of the approach (track record, community buy-in)

▶ Request Amount & Eligible Expenses

The Community Experts Team has a total of \$225,000 to award in 2024. Applicants may request any amount up to \$25,000.

Applicants may apply for funding to support youth leadership in their organizations in a variety of capacities. The following is a list of potential expenses. Other reasonable expenses for supporting your program work may also be considered.

- Stipends for youth participation
- A percentage of staff time to oversee and manage youth engagement activities
- Transportation and accommodation (e.g., transportation for young people to programming and related overnight expenses)
- Program supplies and food
- Community and recreational programming
- Outreach and promotion of youth leadership opportunities
- Technology and equipment (e.g., laptop or Zoom costs)
- Training (within or outside of agency)

Overhead rates of up to 20% are allowed.

▶ Proposal Process and Timeline

Applicants will be asked to submit a brief application in writing or by video. Specifically, the application process includes the following:

▶ Organizational Information

All applicants provide some brief organizational background, including diversity information, and contact information into the online application.

▶ Complete Brief Application

Applicants respond to the questions described in the application preview on the following pages, either in writing, or by way of a brief video (10 minutes or less).

August 30, 2024: All applications must be received by 11:59 PM

▶ Decision Notification

The Community Experts Team will review applications and make decisions about which grants to award. The Tower Foundation will notify all applicants of the outcome of their grant application by October 15, 2024.

▶ Contact Information

Questions will be accepted up until the week of the deadline. Please reach out should you have any questions about this RFP: Nick Randell, ngr@thetowerfoundation.org

Community Experts Team Application Preview

The following is a preview of what to expect when completing an application for funding from the Community Experts Fund. **Applications must be received by Friday, August 30, 2024 by 11:59 PM.** To complete an application, please visit:

<https://towerfdn.link/community-experts-2024>

I. Organizational Information

- Contact person & contact information
- Organization EIN and address
- Tower Foundation populations served
- Tower Foundation geographies served

II. Equity Information

To help the Tower Foundation's Community Experts Team understand more about your organization and the people you support, grant applicants are asked to share:

- If your organization is led by a Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color or person with a disability/disabled person.
- If your organization's leader shares a key identity with the population served.

III. Project Snapshot

We will ask you to share:

- Project title
- Brief project summary (50 words or less)
- How much money you are requesting
- How you will respond to the application questions (in writing or by video)

As a reminder, the Community Experts Team has a total of \$225,000 to award in this cycle. Applicants may request any amount up to \$25,000.

IV. Application Narrative

Applicants will be asked to briefly respond to the following questions in writing or by video. The strongest applications will address criteria included in the *What Makes a Strong Application?* section of the RFP.

- **Written application word limits:** For each question, there is a 400 word limit. This is a bit less than a page, single spaced.
- **Video application time limits:** In total, video applications should be no longer than ten minutes.

IV. Application Narrative Continued

1. Organization Information & Population Alignment

Tell us about your organization and the programs that you offer to young people with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, learning disabilities, and/or intellectual disabilities.

2. Youth Leadership Background

Tell us about the ongoing or proposed youth leadership work at your organization. Tell us about the population that is involved and how young people are invited or engaged in the work.

3. Youth Leadership Request

What is your plan for the funding from the Community Experts Team? Please tell us what you propose to do with the funds to incorporate youth voice and perspective into your organization.

4. Youth Experience

Please share with us a real or hypothetical example of someone participating in the program you are describing. What is the experience like for them, or if this is a new program, what do you imagine the experience will be like?

5. Project Learning

What are you most interested in learning from this project? If the work is ongoing, tell us what you have learned so far, and what you hope to learn with this additional investment. Knowing that this funding is only for one year, do you have any plans to carry this work forward beyond a one-year investment?

To complete an application, visit:

<https://towerfdn.link/community-experts-2024>

Accommodations & Contact Information

Please drop us an email if an accommodation would make it easier for you to apply (e.g., application translation or discussion of alternate submission formats).

Contact: Nick Randell, ngr@thetowerfoundation.org