



2025 Community Experts Fund RFP

Support for Youth Mentoring

In 2025, the Community Experts Fund will focus on enhancing organizational capacity to deliver high-quality mentoring and coaching support to young people with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, intellectual disabilities, or learning disabilities. Applicants will submit an application in writing or by video via the Foundation's online application platform. Applications must be submitted by Friday, August 29, 2025 in order to be considered.

This is 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, a 17-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.



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:
 - Barnstable, Dukes, Essex, or Nantucket Counties, Massachusetts
 - Erie or Niagara County, New York

*Featured portraits are of 2024 Community Experts Team members: Joshua Cuillo, Lie'Chelle Robinson Hernandez, Vincent Murphy, Angeline Pojoy, Francoise Muharareni, and Caitlin Houghton.
Credit: Calvin Booker / Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions*





2025 Fund Focus

For the 2025 Community Experts Fund, **grants will help strengthen mentoring programs that support young people with mental health challenges, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, or substance use disorders.** Mentoring should be understood as quality one-on-one time focused on youth-driven goals, distinct from case management and care coordination.

Context: The 2025 Community Experts Team began their work together by drawing on their own experiences to explore a range of potential services for young people. What made a difference in their own lives, or what do they wish had been accessible to them? The Team quickly coalesced around mentoring and/or coaching supports, while avoiding a narrow definition of either. Mentors help with needs that youth themselves prioritize, assist with progress towards personal goals, and help to weather life's ups and downs.

Team members chose to support capacity building with this year's fund. Nonprofits face daunting challenges in this moment that are not particularly conducive to taking on new program initiatives.

Youth Mentoring Explained

The Community Experts Team is interested in supporting mentoring and coaching programs that:

- Support the personal and emotional growth of the young people with whom they work;
- Offer a friendly and understanding person to talk to about relationships, emotions, family, or school;
- Provide one-on-one assistance to youth in advocating for themselves, developing as a leader, and engaging with the community;
- Support young people in identifying and achieving their goals relating to mental health, recovery from substance use disorder, employment skills and job placement, college, housing and more;
- Support young people with specific skills relating to personal goals, including communication and social skills, independent living, financial literacy, and academics.



Funding Availability

The Community Experts Fund has a total of \$350,000 to award in 2025. Applicants may request any amount up to \$50,000.

Funding Availability Continued

An overhead rate of 20% is permitted (total request including overhead may not exceed \$50,000). Please note, we ask that you include a budget for your request, but you do not need to supply quotes for goods or services.

What We Are Most Interested in Funding

Eligible Requests: This year's Community Experts Fund will focus on enhancing organizational capacity to deliver high-quality mentoring and coaching support to young people with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, intellectual disabilities, or learning disabilities. *The fund is not intended to build mentoring capacity in organizations not already providing mentoring services.*

The following are some examples of eligible capacity building expenses. This is not a comprehensive list; other expenses may be considered:

- Continued/expanded access to youth mentors (e.g., staffing, stipends, transportation)
- Professional and leadership development for mentors (e.g., Motivational Interviewing, Certification process for Youth Peer Advocates)
- Program improvement efforts for mentoring programs (e.g., supervision, evaluation)
- Mental wellness support for mentoring staff
- Marketing and communications support for mentoring initiatives
- Technology/equipment for mentors and mentees
- Facility improvements related to delivery of mentoring services (e.g., meeting or drop-in spaces)

What Makes a Strong Application?

Strong applications will describe the ways in which their organization and/or mentoring programs embrace the following:

- Affordability of services (preferably no-cost)
- Consideration for accessibility, including location convenience, transportation support, and flexible engagement approaches
- Inclusive and culturally responsive program design for people with different abilities, races/ethnicities, and for those who speak different languages or communicate differently
- Youth engagement that is directed by their own needs and interests
- Recreational and community-based activities
- A focus on incorporating youth voice in all aspects of programming
- The use of peers (people with similar lived experiences) as mentors and coaches

► 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 organizational background, including diversity information, and contact information into the online application.

► Complete Application

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

August 29, 2025: All applications must be received by 11:59 PM

► Decision Notification

The Community Experts Team will review and score applications throughout the month of September. The team and several organization partners will come together for an all-day retreat on Saturday, October 4th to make decisions about which grants to award. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their grant application by October 15, 2025.



*Phototographs of the 2024 Community Experts Team Retreat by Calvin Booker
Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions.*

► 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

2025 Community Experts Fund Application Preview

The following is a preview of what to expect when completing an application to the Community Experts Fund. **Applications must be received by Friday, August 29, 2025 by 11:59 PM.** To complete an application, please visit:
<https://thetowerfoundation.org/what-we-fund/apply-for-a-grant/>

Note to video applicants: Unfortunately, there are a few things that don't translate too well to video, like check boxes and data tables. There are also some required fields that need some form of response, or the system won't let you submit your request. As a result, sections I through III below are required to be submitted in writing as a cover sheet for your application through our online grant system. All of the questions under section IV, "Application Narrative," may be responded to in the video. Just write, "please see video" in any questions you are responding to in video format rather than in writing.

If it's a challenge for you to enter information in the grants portal, please let us know at info@thetowerfoundation.org; we're happy to lend a hand. Your video may be uploaded to this website alongside of the completed written portions of the application.

I. Organizational Information

- Tower Foundation populations served
- Tower Foundation geographies served
- Current/most recent operating budget
- Organization background information (mission, services)

II. Equity Information

To help the Community Experts Team understand more about your organization and the people you support, please share with us:

- A breakdown of the race/ethnicity of director, staff, board and people served.
- If your organization's leaders identify as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color or as a person/people with a disability/disabled.
- If your organization's leaders share a key identity with the population served.

III. Request

We will ask you to share:

- How much money you are requesting
- A project title and brief project summary
- How you will respond to the application questions (in writing or by video)

As a reminder, the Community Experts Fund has a total of \$350,000 to award in this cycle. Applicants may request any amount up to \$50,000.

IV. Application Narrative

Applicants will be asked to briefly respond to the following questions in writing or by video. **A note on word limits and video timing:** *While there are no formal word limits in the online application system, we encourage written applicants to adhere to a limit of 500 words or fewer for each question. Similarly, we ask video applicants to aim for videos of ten minutes or less.*

1. Background in Youth Mentoring/Coaching

Tell us about the youth mentoring/coaching support that you provide. Tell us about the populations you serve, and the nature and objectives of youth mentoring. How is your program inclusive of young people with disabilities, mental health challenges, or substance use disorders?

2. Youth Mentoring/Coaching Request

Please tell us what you propose to do with the funds to enhance the quality and impact of mentoring services. Budget template provided.

3. Youth Voice

Please share with us how you apply youth voice and perspective in what you do.

4. Grant Learning

What are you most excited to learn through this grant? We see this as an opportunity for mutual learning - what do you hope we'll both understand better by the end of this grant?

5. Other Relevant Information (optional)

What else do you wish we had asked you? This could include information about how your organization and the people you serve have been affected by federal funding cuts or recent changes to the landscape as a result of the Trump administration's actions.

To complete an application, visit:

<https://thetowerfoundation.org/what-we-fund/apply-for-a-grant/>



Photograph of the 2024 Community Experts Team

Kalvin Booker/Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions

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