



2026 Community Experts Fund RFP

Support for Youth Mentoring

This is a different kind of RFP: Designed by and for the community

This grant initiative is led by the Tower Foundation's Community Experts Team, a group of young adults with lived expertise relating to the Foundation's funding areas and with ties to the communities where services will be delivered.

Engaging Community Experts Team members in the grantmaking process both amplifies community voice and informs the Foundation's grantmaking with the concerns, insights, and priorities of the young people we serve.

2026 Fund Focus

In 2026, the Community Experts Fund will award grants to organizations offering mentoring and coaching support.

Grants will benefit programs that provide mentoring and coaching support to young people with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health challenges, or substance use disorders. The fund is not intended to create mentoring capacity in organizations not already providing mentoring services.

In 2026, the Community Experts Fund has a total of \$375,000 to award. Applicants may request up to \$25,000. The Community Experts Team expects to award 15-20 grants. Applicants must submit a brief proposal by September 4, 2026 in order to be considered.

*Featured portraits are of 2025 Community Experts Team members: Justin Corl, Alex Liang, Renata Peiffer, Savant Williams, Lauren Richardi, and Emily Buss.
Credit: Kalvin Booker / Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions*



Eligibility Criteria

Eligible organizations/collaborations are youth-serving nonprofit organizations that:

- Work directly 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
- Applicants to the Community Experts Fund in 2025, whether funded or not, may reapply in 2026.

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.

What Makes a Strong Application?

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

- A focus on incorporating youth voice in all aspects of programming
- The use of peers (people with similar lived experiences)
- Sustained support for populations that face funding cuts and other challenges in the current funding and policy landscape (e.g., immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities)
- Inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive program design for people with disabilities, races/ethnicities, income levels, and for those who speak different languages or communicate differently



Eligible Expenses

Eligible costs include a range of program expenses. The following are some examples of eligible expenses. This is not a comprehensive list; other expenses may be considered.

- Funds to support ongoing mentoring or coaching programming for young people with mental health challenges, intellectual disabilities, substance use disorders, and/or learning disabilities.
- Funds to encourage youth engagement (e.g., salaries/stipends for participating youth, transportation costs)
- Event costs, guest speakers, activity fees related to recreational or community-based activities
- Supply and food costs in support of mentoring and coaching programs
- Training/certification costs for youth or staff (e.g., Mental Health First Aid, Motivational Interviewing, peer mentor certification)
- Applicants will complete a budget template that accompanies an application narrative. The Foundation permits an overhead rate of up to 30%. [Example: For a \$25,000 request at the full 30% overhead rate, \$17,500 would be allocated to direct costs, \$7,500 to overhead.]

► Proposal Process and Timeline

Applicants will be asked to submit a brief application and budget through the [Tower Foundation grants portal](#). Specifically, the application includes the following:

► Organizational Information

Applicants provide brief organizational background, including diversity information, and contact information.

► Brief Narrative Application

Applicants respond to the questions described in the application preview on the following pages.

► Budget Template

Applicants complete the budget template provided in the online system, including a description of expenses and the amounts requested by category.

September 4, 2026: All applications must be received by 11:59 PM

► Decision Notification

Team members will convene for a full day retreat in early November to deliberate on grant decisions. We expect decisions to be shared no later than November 25, 2026.

