



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

School Readiness Initiative

Family Support for Early Learning and Development Program

Request for Proposals

Stage 1: Letters of Intent

Letter of Intent Deadline: October 30, 2026; 4:00 p.m. CT

If invited to submit a Full Proposal, deadline is January 18, 2027; 4:00 p.m. CT

I. Introduction

The mission of The Rapides Foundation is to improve the health status of Central Louisiana. The Rapides Foundation focuses its work in three strategic areas:

- Healthy People, to improve access to healthcare and promote healthy behaviors;
- Education, to increase the level of educational attainment and achievement as the primary path to improved economic, social and health status; and
- Healthy Communities, to improve economic opportunity and family income, and enhance civic and community opportunities for more effective leaders and organizations.

Through this Request for Proposal, The Rapides Foundation seeks to improve school readiness by providing a child's first teacher, their parents or caregivers, with knowledge, tools, and connections to the resources needed to support healthy child development and learning. The program will support the implementation of coordinated family-support services for families expecting or families with children birth to three. All programs must be implemented in the Foundation's nine parish service area; Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.

II. Background

In support of its mission, the Foundation seeks to increase the level of educational attainment and achievement as the primary path to improved economic, social and health status.

A report titled *Exploring the Social Determinants of Health* by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation states:

"Everyone knows that without a good education, prospects for a good job with good earnings are slim. Few people think of education as a crucial path to health. However, a large body of evidence strongly—and, with very rare exceptions, consistently – links education with health, even when other factors like income are taken into account."

For example, in 2019 in the United States, the overall life expectancy for a 25-year-old with less than a high school degree is ten years shorter than a 25-year-old with a college degree or higher. For women, the amount of education achieved is a key determinant of the welfare and survival of their children. The Louisiana infant mortality rate is almost double for infants of mothers with less than 12 years of education compared with those with an associate degree or higher. Higher levels of education also may increase the likelihood of obtaining or understanding health-related information needed to develop health-promoting behaviors and beliefs in prevention.

Research from Harvard University's Center for the Developing Child shows that children experience rapid brain development from birth to age 5. 80% of brain development takes place from birth through age 3, and 90% by age 4. Babies are born with millions of neurons, but the connections among these neurons are rapidly being built and refined over the first few years of life. Simple neural circuits develop before more complex ones, hence the brain architect established in the first few years creates building blocks for all future learning and development. Interventions during the first five years have long lasting impacts not only on education, but also health and economic mobility.

Early childhood experiences help determine which neural circuits become strong and which ones are eventually pruned. A young child's interactions with a responsive adult are one of the most important developmental experiences. Thousands of ordinary interactions such as talking, reading, singing, comforting, playing, responding to sounds and gestures help strengthen neural pathways involved in language, emotional regulation, attention, learning and social development. This is especially important from birth to 3 when the brain plasticity is high.

For over 10 years, The Rapides Foundation and partners have been providing professional and leadership development to early childcare education centers, Head Start and public Pre-K programs. The trainings focus on teacher-child interactions and have increased the quality ratings of centers throughout the nine-parish service area. However, not all children participate in early childhood education programs, and children spend more time at home with their parents or caregivers than at a center. Early childhood professionals have had the benefit of years of training on positive interactions. However, this information is rarely shared with parents.

A caregiver's interactions with their child are often influenced by their awareness of the value of those interactions and the state of their own wellbeing. Research shows that if a young child experiences prolonged adversity without adequate supportive adult relationships, it can disrupt the development of healthy brain architecture. Healthy, knowledgeable caregivers are capable of providing positive and supportive interactions that help build the foundation for future learning and health. There are evidence-based programs and existing resources that can give families the support they need.

III. Purpose for Request for Proposals (RFP)

The purpose of the program is to increase school readiness for children birth through age 3 by equipping parents and caregivers with evidence-based knowledge, skills, resources, and connections to strengthen their child's development and learning.

The program will support coordinated evidence-based efforts in the Foundation's nine parish service area that includes, but is not limited to, addressing two or more of the following for expecting families or families with children birth through 3:

- Parenting and responsive interactions to support learning

- Awareness of best practices to support healthy childhood development
- Family resource navigation
- Parent/family goal setting and planning for economic stability
- Maternal mental health education and referrals

Successful proposals will provide at least three points of connection with the families per year. One-time events will not be considered.

IV. Eligibility Requirements

The primary applicant (grant fiscal agent) must meet all the following requirements:

- Classified as a Section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code or a governmental entity.
- Cannot be a private foundation under Section 509(a).
- Must be an organization within The Rapides Foundation Service Area or seeking funding support for projects restricted to the Foundation's nine parishes.

V. Funding Guidelines and Grant Terms

The Foundation will consider large and small grants for a minimum of one year up to 3 years. Organizations can ask for up to \$100,000 per year for up to a three-year period with a maximum request of \$300,000.

The Foundation will consider only one application per organization; however, it is permissible for an organization to be listed as a partner in multiple applications. Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to secure matching funds and/or in-kind support.

[This funding opportunity is limited and offered on a competitive basis; therefore, it is possible not all applicants will receive funding. Competitive proposals will be evidence-based, community-driven and budgets will be appropriate to the size of the population impacted. We reserve the right to award less than the amount requested. We reserve the right to not award any grants through this Request for Proposals.](#)

Grant funding may be used for:

- Personnel
- Convening and Facilitating
- Training
- Curriculum
- Program Supplies
- Marketing/Outreach
- Travel or mileage
- Indirect cost rate: Expenses that are not incurred directly to produce a service or program. Indirect costs cannot exceed 10% of the total funds requested.

Grant funds may **not** be used for:

- Clinical services or treatment.

- Lobbying or political programs or events.
- Activities, projects, or programs exclusively benefitting members of sectarian or religious organizations.
- Biomedical, clinical, or educational research.
- Direct support to individuals or endowments.
- Funding that supplants existing sources of support.
- Individuals, including patient assistance funds.
- Social events or similar fundraising efforts or telethons.
- Projects outside of the Foundation’s service area.
- Direct funding for medical or social services already funded through existing third-party reimbursement sources.
- Operating expenses not used for significantly expanding the services of ongoing organizations.
- Vans or other vehicles.
- Building purchase.
- Renovation not explicitly linked to enhanced programmatic implementation or development.

VI. Grant Proposal Submission

This is a two-stage process consisting of a Letter of Intent and a Full Proposal by invitation only. All applications should be submitted using The Rapides Foundation’s online application process. You can find links to the online application and to all grant materials for the Family Support for Early Learning and Development Program Grant on the Foundation’s website at www.rapidesfoundation.org, under the “Grants” tab.

A Letter of Intent (LOI) is submitted to The Rapides Foundation describing the applicant’s proposed project. The LOI will be used as a screening device to determine whether the applicant is proposing a project or program that has a reasonable chance to be implemented in an effective manner and whether the project meets the general program interests of The Rapides Foundation. Upon approval of the LOI, applicants will be invited to submit a Full Proposal.

Timeline for Submission

LOIs are due October 30, 2026, and will be considered at the November Budget & Grants Committee meeting. Notification to submit a Full Proposal will be released December 11, 2026. Full Proposals are due January 18, 2027, and grants will be awarded at the February Board meeting.

Online deadline submission is no later than 4:00 p.m. CT on the dates listed above. In fairness to all applicants, late or incomplete submissions are not considered. *Please note, the Letter of Intent and/or Full Proposal must be fully submitted by the deadline; therefore, you must begin uploading documents prior to 4:00 p.m. on the day of the deadline. We suggest you allow a minimum of three hours for the upload process.*

Program Grant Cycle

Letter of Intent due	October 30, 2026
LOI Notification of Selection	December 11, 2026
Full Proposal due	January 18, 2027
Full Proposal Notification of Selection	March 5, 2027
Grant Start Date	April 1, 2027

Pre-submission Consultation

Prospective applicants are encouraged to schedule a call or a meeting with Foundation staff to discuss alignment and feasibility of their proposal before submission. Contact the Foundation at 318.443.3394 to request a meeting. Please schedule the meeting at least two weeks before the submission deadline.

The Rapides Foundation Contacts:

Questions about grant opportunity:

Jennifer Cowley

jennifer@rapidesfoundation.org

Direct Line: 318-767-3003

Questions about online submission:

Courtney Keys, Programs Assistant

courtney@rapidesfoundation.org

Direct Line: 318-767-3013

The Rapides Foundation: 318-443-3394 or toll-free 800-994-3394

VII. Letter of Intent Requirements

All applicants are required to answer the following questions as well as upload the required documents, utilizing provided templates where noted.

1. **Cover page.** *Answer directly in the online portal.*

- a. Organization name.
- b. Name, title, phone number and email address of the proposed project coordinator or key contact person from the applicant organization.
- c. Project title.
- d. Requested funding amount. Total Project amount.
- e. Intended project period starting no sooner than the dates listed above.
- f. Brief program description.

2. **Narrative.** *Answer all parts of the following questions and upload the document when completed into the online portal.*

- a. Describe the problem or need to be addressed by the proposed project or program. Be specific as to how the issues impact your proposed target group(s) or community(ies).
- b. What are the needs and/or assets of your community and organization that led to the development or design of this project to address the problem? Who are the stakeholders necessary for the success of the project and what is the plan to engage them (or have they already been engaged) in the work?
- c. What are the strategies to be used and how have these strategies helped communities like yours achieve the kind of results your project seeks? Describe the project with a summary of the timeline, activities, partners and other factors necessary to consider in assessing the potential for effectively impacting the problem or issue described above.
- d. Describe the proposed results of the project in the short term and long term in measurable terms. How will you collect and measure the information?
- e. Describe how the project can be sustained both financially and organizationally after the proposed Foundation funding concludes.

The following items are requested as a part of all applications.

1. Preliminary Budget and Budget Narrative explaining how the grant funds will be used.
2. Copy of the applicant's 501(c)(3) nonprofit designation letter from IRS (if appropriate).
3. Applicant's most recent IRS 990 report or most recent audit.
4. List of board members, including names and addresses, professional/community affiliations and board tenure.