



Frequently Asked Questions — Strengthening School Leadership: Driving Instructional Improvement RFP

Eligibility

Who can apply for this opportunity?

Public Local Education Agencies—districts and charter organizations—in Massachusetts are welcome to apply if they:

- Consist of at least 6 schools, including at least one high school
- Have a total student enrollment of at least 2,500 students
- Have at least 950 students in grades 9-12

Districts who do not meet these requirements as standalone systems may partner with one or more school districts in order to maximize the impact of this opportunity.

My district meets all but one of these eligibility requirements, should I still apply?

Probably not, unless the process feels worthwhile to your system. We have been very intentional in our thinking about who this opportunity is right for, but that doesn't mean we know everything. This request for proposals is as much an invitation to school systems to reflect on school leadership and plan for opportunities within their own contexts as it is a funding opportunity. We anticipate that we will only be able to directly fund a handful of the eligible, strong proposals that we receive and do not anticipate being able to give consideration to systems that do not meet all criteria. It is our hope that any system that reflects on these application questions will be further along in their work because of it, even if they do not advance in our process.

Can a district who is already a current Barr grantee apply?

Yes you may, but we will expect you to thoroughly respond to the prompts that address this possibility. In the application, we provide specific questions and guidance for current Barr grantees to reflect on how this opportunity might advance coherent progress across other Barr-funded initiatives. We encourage you to talk to the Barr program officer with whom you are already in contact to consider how your current Barr-funded efforts may be complemented and bolstered by this new opportunity.

What are the criteria for a group application of multiple Massachusetts LEAs?

If a single school district doesn't meet the above criteria alone, they are welcome to apply with others as a group or regional consortium/collaborative of LEAs organized around common goals or interests, with one LEA serving as the lead applicant.

Barr will not be matching individual school systems; rather, we hope you will find and foster the partnerships that most make sense to you. A successful group application should have a clearly shared goal and rationale for why a collaborative approach would be beneficial. As one illustrative example, the initial cohort funded a collaborative of multiple school systems in the North Central region of Massachusetts organized around common interests, with the Gardner Public Schools serving as the lead applicant. Together, these districts have collaborated to leverage the Strengthening School Leadership opportunity to pursue opportunities at scale that would have been harder to develop and sustain as independent systems, especially beyond the initial philanthropic support for the initiative.

External Partner Selection and Work

Would a proposal where a nonprofit organization or other external technical assistance provider applies (in collaboration/partnership with a district) align with this funding opportunity?

No. For this particular RFP, the applicant must be the district/LEA. This requirement is due to the focus on school- and system-level leadership and their key role in leading the work this grant opportunity will fund. External partners will play a key and vital role in later stages of this effort, but this is an opportunity for eligible Massachusetts local education agencies.

If we already have an existing external partner supporting aligned work, should we apply together?

No, but we encourage you to include that important context in your application. The time to select and plan with an external partner will occur several months into the first year of this grant. If you have a strong partnership already that you think could be key to your future visioning, please be sure to describe that relationship under 5c in the [application](#).

This opportunity is focused on planning and pilot implementation towards future multi-year implementation focused on systemic change. If your vision is already clear, this opportunity may only serve to slow you down. If you already have a strong sense of the challenges and opportunity in your context to strengthen school leadership and have already identified a partner to work with, we encourage you to pursue that work outside of this grant.

How are implementation partners selected? Can we expand work with an existing partner or will there be a curated list of potential partners?

There is no Barr-approved providers list for this effort, because we truly want you to own the relationship with the implementation partner you select. There will be support through the planning process to help you consider potential external partners who might be best suited to help you advance the specific initiative you will choose to focus on. Our hope is that you remain open, and let the work lead in your choice when the time comes. You may have a great relationship with a current technical assistance provider and they may ultimately play a significant role in your plan moving forward, but as your thinking evolves in the coming months there is a chance that their role in this opportunity may shift. We want to support you in navigating these vital relationships with care as you consider what is best for your context.

How do the partners work with districts and school leaders? What structures or systems are set up?

As leaders in your school systems, we believe that you will be best placed to decide what these partnerships look like in service of your schools, leaders, teachers, and the students you serve. The current design of this opportunity is meant to provide space for learning what the structures, systems, and rhythms of partnership could and should be. There may be regular meetings with school or district leaders, and there may be professional development and/or coaching for the changemakers on your team. In some of the contexts of the first cohort, partners also helped with data gathering and analysis and worked directly with school teams to develop a cohesive instructional vision. This is a learning process, and there is always openness to evolve and adjust with the learning.

Grant Activities

What do you require districts to do/deliver as recipients of the funding?

All grant applications at the Barr Foundation are built upon a set of outputs and outcomes that flow out of every grant proposal. We have provided an [application template](#) to help illuminate what to think about as you build your proposal along with a timeline for various phases of this planning and pilot implementation grant. You will see more guidance on how to structure your outputs and outcomes on page 3 of the application template.

We also expect all selected grantees to participate in all the provided supports with Attuned Education Partners, and the Barr selected research partner, as well as the annual convenings Barr hosts for the cohort, this year scheduled around Thursday, November 6th and Friday, November 7th, 2025.

Finally, one of the core deliverables we expect is for you to thoughtfully select and retain an external partner to help your team advance the work in your pilot year as you learn and plan together around a larger, multi-year implementation effort in 2027 and beyond.

Budget/Use of Grant Funds

Is there guidance regarding the appropriate amount of support to request in the budget portion of the application?

Yes, we have tried to offer guidance in the first tab of the [budget template](#). This opportunity has been designed for each applicant to receive up to \$200,000 for this first phase of planning and pilot implementation, in addition to the direct support they will receive from Attuned Education Partners, our research partner, and Barr Foundation program staff. In developing your budget request, we don't expect you to have all the answers yet, and we understand that plans can change. The requested amount may vary depending on factors specific to your context, like the number of schools in your LEA or regional partnership, etc. We encourage you to be thoughtful and honestly consider your context. Requesting less funding will not necessarily make your application more attractive and requesting a modest increase in funding given a unique context could strengthen a strong application. It is our hope that your proposal, including your budget, represents your best thinking right now.

Is there an expectation about the size of the LEAs financial contribution relative to the grant size?

No, and there is no requirement for LEAs to make a direct financial contribution to this effort in order to receive grant funding. For some grantees, the grant may fund 100% of the work, while others might have financial or people-time resources they are able and willing to contribute to get the most out of this initiative. For instance, if you have staff who will be focusing a considerable amount of their time towards leading or supporting this initiative, you could choose to account for that as a contribution from your LEA to this project, but we have no standard expectations for how to account for that. Your budget should reflect your priorities and your planning for this opportunity and feel connected to your narrative application and outputs and outcomes. How you choose to account for that is entirely up to you.