

United Way of Southwestern Indiana
Thriving Next Gen Pathway to Potential
Fall 2026 Request for Proposals



United Way of Southwestern Indiana (UWSWI) requests proposals for the Thriving Next Gen Pathway to Potential impact grant. Through our Thriving Next Gen Pathway, UWSWI strives to equip children and youth with skills to thrive both socially and academically. This initiative, along with our other Pathway to Potential grant opportunities, aligns with our desire to end intergenerational poverty through a [2Gen Approach](#), integrating services for children and adults to create a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next.

Grant Purpose Statement

United Way of Southwestern Indiana is dedicated to increasing economic upward mobility for residents of Spencer, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties. We invest in high quality, nonprofit programs; we support direct services to low-income individuals and families; we facilitate dialogue across sectors; and we advocate for equitable public policy. All our efforts are driven by a desire to see our neighbors achieve economic self-sufficiency and break cycles of generational poverty.

Poverty is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. To address the multidimensional nature of poverty, UWSWI prioritizes the following Pathways to Potential to support upward mobility:

Empowering Employment	Mental Health
Social Stability & Growth	Thriving Next Gen

The purpose of this Thriving Next Gen Pathway Grant is to support student's school engagement defined as **the extent to which students are emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively involved in school and learning activities, reflecting their participation, sense of belonging, and investment in academic success** in order to promote preparedness for their future success and improved financial stability

This Request for Proposals (RFP) aligns with UWSWI's Thriving Next Gen Pathway to Potential. Our funding strategy strives to integrate three evidence-aligned lenses: [2Gen approaches](#) supporting children and caregivers simultaneously; the [Affective-Behavioral-Cognitive \(ABC\) framework](#) focused on youth development around feelings, actions, and thinking; and [Raj Chetty's research](#) demonstrating childhood environments, schools, neighborhoods, and cross-class relationships shape long-term economic mobility.

The future of our youth will be shaped by family economic security, school quality, neighborhood conditions, adult relationships, and access to networks that open doors. Two-generation approaches build family well-being by intentionally supporting children and caregivers together. The ABC framework helps programs

develop resiliency in the areas of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive growth. Raj Chetty's Opportunity Insights research highlights economic connectedness and place-based opportunity as powerful predictors of upward mobility.

There is a direct and measurable connection between poverty and lower levels of student engagement. Students facing economic hardship often experience barriers that disrupt their attendance, academic confidence, and active participation in classroom and extracurricular activities. Local data reinforces these assumptions. For the UWSWI's three-county service area, recent data indicates approximately 18,000 students (43.7%) qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. For these students:

- ✓ Pass rates on ILEARN exams are 6.6% to 19% lower and
- ✓ High school graduation rates are 4.4% to 10.3% lower

than their peers from more financially stable households.

Extensive research into youth development has demonstrated that communities with strong schools are more likely to see their children break cycles of generational poverty. Through consultation with local school districts and volunteers with professional expertise in education, United Way has selected [school engagement](#) as the outcome focus of our Thriving Next Gen Pathway grant.

The three major dimensions of this definition include:

1. **Affective (Emotional) Engagement:** Students' feelings about school, teachers, classmates, and learning, including a sense of belonging and interest.
2. **Behavioral Engagement:** Participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities, including attendance, effort, and following school rules.
3. **Cognitive Engagement:** The psychological investment students make in learning, including persistence, self-regulation, and willingness to exert effort to understand complex ideas.

Additional research from Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child demonstrates the importance of supportive relationships with adults to help children develop 'resilience,' or the set of skills needed to respond to adversity and thrive.

Through the Thriving Next Gen Pathway Grant, UWSWI seeks to invest in nonprofit programs working collaboratively with our public schools to foster strong school engagement in students.

Grant Priorities

For UWSWI's 2026 Thriving Next Gen Pathway grant cycle, we are seeking proposals which:

- Primarily serve low-income students (*defined as those who qualify for free or reduced lunch benefits*).

- Reflect programs and services aligned with [research proven or best practices](#) in the field of youth development.
- Demonstrate strong partnership with our area's public schools.
- Offer continuous services and/or multi-year interventions with youth and families.

The minimum grant request is \$50,000.

Eligibility Requirements

In order to be considered for this grant opportunity, applicants must:

1. Be either
 - a 501(c)3 organization registered and in good standing with the IRS, or
 - a community group with a 501(c)3 organization serving as its fiscal agent/sponsor.
2. Serve a majority (50% or more) low-income students and families.
UWSWI defines low-income students as students who are eligible for [free or reduced lunch](#) or whose household income is less than 185% of the [Federal Poverty Level](#).
3. Provide services in Spencer, Vanderburgh, and/or Warrick counties.
Funds awarded by UWSWI are restricted for use in Spencer, Vanderburgh, and/or Warrick counties.
4. Work in collaboration with public schools
Verifying documentation must be submitted with the grant application.
5. Serve school-age children between pre-K and completion of 12th grade.
Proposed programs do not need to serve the entire age span; however, services must focus on an identified subpopulation within this range.
6. Maintain and comply with a policy that prohibits discrimination based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, or any other legally protected characteristic.

Grant Timeline:

- Application Opens: September 9, 2026
- Application Submission Deadline: September 30, 2026, before 5:00 pm
- Award Announcement: December 2026
- Grant funding will be disbursed quarterly starting January 2027 and ending October 2028.
- Grant reporting will reflect services provided between July 1, 2027, and June 30, 2029.

Application Review Process

All grant proposals are reviewed and scored by an Expert Task Force consisting of community volunteers with knowledge and experience in the field of education and youth development.

Any information in the proposal which would identify the applicant organization will be redacted to support a blind review process.

Applications are scored in the following areas with scores weighted as noted below:

- Program Model and Services (35%)
- Program Participants (20%)
- Theory of Change (15%)
- Evaluation Plan (15%)
- Service and Program Goals (15%)

In addition, past recipients of the Thriving Next Gen Pathway Grants will be expected to demonstrate significant outcomes from currently funded activities. If a previous grantee has received two or more UWSWI Pathway to Potential grants, their application should include a detailed plan for the development of other financial support for program sustainability.

Questions should be directed to:

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