



Florida Student Postsecondary Success RFP Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: March 4, 2025

Invitation-Only Proposal Information from FAQ Webinar:

1. Is there a sample proposal available for applicants to review?

We do not provide a sample proposal, as each one is unique. Applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the samples noted in each section to gain clarity on the preferred information and format. These samples have typically been informed by successful past proposals.

2. Is there a proposal checklist?

The checklist is designated by red asterisks. These represent mandatory sections that must be completed in order to submit.

3. Is there a word/character count limit?

Yes, each section specifies the word limit for responses.

4. What is the earliest start date that may be indicated?

We recommend June 1, 2025.

5. How many organizations are included in the finalists' pool?

15 organizations have been invited to Phase 2 of the RFP.

6. How many grants will be awarded?

We do not have a specific amount. The decision will focus on the quality of the proposals.

7. Can the goals in the proposal differ from what was included in the initial request (NOI)?

We can consider an expansion of your initial goals, but avoid making significant changes. Your invitation to Phase Two was based upon the information in your initial request.

8. Will we be scored lower if we serve a small subset of students?

Helios prioritizes quality service relative to an organization's purpose and goals. We understand that some organizations' proposed activities are intended for the masses, while others focus on a more narrowed group such as one-on-one mentoring. The plan is to ground our decision on evidence-based practices that advance college enrollment and college attainment.

9. Will our program metrics be used for scoring?

Program metrics will be used in the proposal evaluation process. However, organizations should only include metrics that align with your proposed project and activities.

10. Can we indicate scaled numbers in the participation table?

Yes.

11. Can we indicate scaled numbers in project budget?

It is not a requirement, but Helios typically prefers that organizations illustrate reduced dependence on Helios' funding over time. We view this as an indication of sustainability.

12. Is a project evaluator included in the proposal?

A project evaluation must be included; however, we intend to remain flexible with the selected methodology. This may include a third party, consultant or internal component. There is no preference in approach for this RFP. The implementation table must include a milestone on evaluation and describe your methodology.

13. Will there be a completeness review or any request for additional information before final recipients are selected?

We may reach out for clarification on proposals, but this will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

14. Is it probable that all finalists will be awarded provided they complete the proposal requirements?

Phase 2 of the RFP remains highly competitive. Helios seeks to maximize its limited resources by remaining strategic and prudent with funding opportunities.

Organizations are encouraged to work towards submitting clear and concise proposals to strengthen consideration. Regardless of the outcome from the RFP, we hope this process leads us to a continued relationship with the organizations that have participated.

15. Is Helios open to funding more than one grant in a particular county?

Yes.

16. Can the name of the project be changed from what was noted in the initial request (NOI)?

Yes.

17. How important are letters of support?

Letters of support and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) are crucial for demonstrating the commitment of your collaborative partners.

18. How should letters of support be addressed?

There is no standard format for addressing letters of support.

19. How many letters of support are needed?

There is no set amount. It is based on the specifics of your project and role of your partners.

20. If one partner is the school district, can the letter of support be from the Chief Academic Officer?

Yes.

21. What is meant by “natural alignment” related to collaborative partners?

“Natural alignment” refers to a clear, mutually beneficial partnership with an established relationship and shared goals that align with the proposed project.

22. When is the full grant due?

Monday, March 10th-5:00 pm-Eastern Standard Time.

Budget:

23. How should I format my project budget?

In the Phase 2: Invitation-only Proposal, the project budget information should be submitted in the Excel template provided by Helios with a detailed narrative budget section, organized by year. The project budget template includes:

- All revenue expected for this project (pending and approved)
- All projected expenses by clear categories, such as staff/salaries, supplies, convenings, project evaluation, etc.

- Indirect costs should not exceed 10% and should be added as an individual line item, if applicable.
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24. Can the budget in the proposal differ from what was included in the initial request (NOI)?

The decision to move NOI applicants to Phase Two was made with consideration of the information you submitted, including your requested budget amount. If there are minor changes to your budget due to support for data collection, we can consider that change. We fully expect that an applicant's budget will stay in line with what they initially proposed.

Here are a few considerations:

- Budgets that rely on multiple funders to operate will generally demonstrate organizational commitment, showcase diverse community support and offer the potential for sustainability beyond Helios' funding.
- We expect most grants will range from \$150,000 to \$300,000/year for up to three years. Requests could be more or less depending on the project's needs.
- The budget request amount to Helios should not represent more than 25% of an organization's overall budget.
- We encourage applicants to consider their request with an eye to sustainability. Projects that have elements of their budget that demonstrate sustainability beyond Helios' grant funding will be looked upon favorably.

25. Is it possible that you will fund a project, but at a decreased budget amount?

Yes; however, this would include a discussion with the organization to understand the details of the project budget and the impact to a reduction in the amount.

26. Will Helios fund indirect costs?

Applicants may request up to 10% of their overall requested project budget for indirect costs. Please see the [RFP Glossary.docx](#) and review the Indirect Costs definition for more information.

27. Do we need to break out the indirect costs or can we just use the blanket 10%-line item?

Helios' allowable indirect is up to 10% of the amount requested from Helios. There is no need to break out the actual expenses.

28. How do we account for overhead expenses as a freestanding organization?

Overhead expenses are captured in our allowable indirect expense percentage.

29. Will Helios fund capital expenditures?

Helios will not fund capital expenditures for buildings, vehicles, furniture or renovations. Technology requests directly related to implementation and justified in the project activities can be requested.

30. While the proposal budget should include diverse funders, is there a percentage that should be funded by these other donors?

Helios is not prescribing a percentage of other funder contributions needed for a particular project. However, we encourage applicants to think about the diverse group of funders as a sustainability strategy. When evaluating applications, one consideration will be around the potential for sustainability after the Helios funding ends.

31. Will Helios fund personnel costs, including benefits?

Helios will fund personnel costs directly related to the implementation of the proposed project. Applicants should allocate the appropriate portion of an employee's cost for the time the employee will spend on this project. Partial or full employee costs will be considered.

Project Application:

32. What do you mean by “historically underrepresented students”?

For the purposes of this RFP, historically underrepresented students are those that data show are least likely to enroll in college and/or complete college and this gap has been demonstrated over time. Gaps for students can also be found in evidence-based college enrollment and college completion data in categories such as, “participating in and/or obtaining credit for accelerated coursework,” “high rates of chronic absenteeism,” or “low FAFSA completion rates.” Helios will rely on applicants to provide the data to support their identification of historically underrepresented students as aligned to our key metrics and outcome areas.

33. Should the proposal focus only on “historically underrepresented students”?

We are seeking proposals that close the opportunity gaps for historically underrepresented students. If other students benefit as well, Helios sees that as a positive outcome.

34. If the applicant is implementing a set of successful strategies in a small group of schools, can an expansion project test using these strategies in a new set of schools with an underserved population that is different than the schools currently served?

Yes.

35. Does the proposal have to align with any metrics?

Yes. Helios has Community Investment Impact Metrics, a system of quantifiable metrics for each pillar to measure the effectiveness and impact of a project. Each proposal should include and align to at least one metric.

36. Is Helios focused on a particular age range of students?

Proposals should align to at least one of the Helios Community Investment Impact Metrics in the areas of College Going and/or Postsecondary Attainment and serve a population of students directly impacted by activities that improve outcomes in those areas. Based on the Helios Community Investment Impact Metrics, we expect that proposals will serve students in 8th grade through 12th grade and/or traditional college-

age students (ages 18-25). Helios is not focused on bringing working-age adults (ages 25-64) into college.

37. Is there a desired number of students to be served through project proposals?

There is not a required minimum or maximum number of students to be served by projects proposed through this RFP.

38. The proposal focuses on college enrollment and postsecondary attainment, but does this also include Helios' focus on 3rd grade reading proficiency as a means to college readiness?

For the purposes of this RFP, we are not considering proposals aligned to our 3rd grade reading pillar. If you have an interest in that area, please send an email to FloridaRFP@helios.org.

39. Since high school graduation or GED attainment is an essential step toward college-going, can our proposal focus on increasing high school graduation or GED attainment rates?

While high school graduation or obtaining a GED are important steps toward postsecondary education, they do not serve as key predictors by themselves for college enrollment or success in postsecondary education. Successful proposals will include other key activities and metrics as outlined in the Helios Community Investment Impact Metrics in College Going and/or Postsecondary Attainment.

40. Do you have a preference for organizations providing direct services to young people versus those working on systemic changes in/with schools/districts to increase college-going rates?

Both types of organizations and approaches are eligible through this RFP. We also support organizations working both in direct service and systems change.

41. Can scholarships be included as a primary activity and budgetary expense?

Supporting financial access to college remains a high priority for Helios and scholarships are an allowable expense in the RFP. However, research shows that financial support alone is not enough to get students to and through college. Additional student support may be needed to help students access and graduate from college.

42. Can our proposal focus on students going into a postsecondary career technical certification pathway and not one that will end in an associate or bachelor's degree?

Helios is supportive of all postsecondary education pathways. Helios' articulated focus is on assisting students completing 2- or 4-year degrees. If your project clearly links a career technical certification pathway to 2- or 4-year degree completion, we will consider proposals with that focus.

43. What is Helios' definition of "expansion" of a project/program? Could you provide a few examples of acceptable expansion activities?

Expansion within this RFP could be the addition of new students, new activities and/or new goals within an existing programmatic framework. Helios is looking for new and innovative approaches to increasing college enrollment and degree attainment and not just providing funding to ongoing work.

44. Can I save my work in the application and come back to it later?

Yes. Applicants may save their work in SmartSimple by clicking the SAVE DRAFT button. It is recommended that organizations consider building their proposals in a word document first and then copying it into SmartSimple. A copy of the full proposal content can be viewed at <https://www.helios.org/latest/news/request-for-proposals-florida-student-postsecondary-success/> under More Resources.

General Information:

45. What is the difference between the Request for Proposals (RFP), the Notice of Interest (NOI) and the Invitation-only Proposal?

The RFP is the phrase being used to describe the entire two-phase application process: Phase 1 is the NOI and Phase 2 is the Invitation-only Proposal. Organizations who submit an NOI in Phase 1 will be considered for Phase 2: Invitation-only Proposal.

46. Where can I find additional information about the RFP?

There are several resources available. Please refer to the following link to the Helios website: <https://www.helios.org/latest/news/request-for-proposals-florida-student-postsecondary-success/>

- RFP FAQ document, which will be periodically updated as needed.
- Glossary of Terms
- RFP Full Proposal Content
- Florida Student Postsecondary Success RFP Overview
- Recording of the January 15th webinar, January 29th NOI Question and Answer session and February 24th RFP Question and Answer session.

All inquiries regarding the RFP process, including technical questions about SmartSimple (the application submission platform) should be sent to FloridaRFP@helios.org. Applicants can pose questions via email for clarification about the questions asked in the NOI and Invitation-only Proposal; Helios will not provide guidance on the specifics of an individual application via email.

47. Will there be a presentation or interview stage?

In Phase 2 of the RFP, invited applicants may have the opportunity to meet with Helios staff to present their proposal and answer questions.

48. Is there minimum eligibility criteria required by Helios for an organization to receive a grant?

All organizations receiving potential funding must meet the following criteria.

- Be a qualified 501(c)(3) organization (subtypes 509(a)(1) and 509(a)(2) only) or a public entity (e.g., city government, public school district, etc.) Applicants may utilize a fiscal agent to assist in the submittal process. The fiscal agent's information must be provided in Phase 1 of the RFP. Please be advised that formal evidence of the relationship (Memo of Understanding, Letter of Agreement) will be required if approved for Phase 2 of the RFP.
- Must be in operation for at least two fiscal years.
- Must be in good standing with the IRS and Florida Division of Corporations.
- Provide services or programs within one (or more) of our six focus counties (Hillsborough, Pinellas, Orange, Osceola, Broward, and/or Miami-Dade).
- Have, and be in compliance with, an Equal Employment Opportunity Policy.

49. Who is Helios seeking to fund through the Florida Student Postsecondary Success RFP?

- Organizations based in Florida, meaning the organization is either incorporated in Florida or has a permanent physical presence (i.e., staff and/or office) in Florida.
- Educational organizations that provide instruction, training or improvements to an individual's capabilities (e.g., school, college or university); education support organizations (e.g., Local Education Foundations, reform support organizations or other education-related intermediaries); or groups that provide instruction to the public on subjects useful and beneficial to the community (e.g., cultural organizations or community-based organizations).
- Programs and organizations within Helios' focus counties, including Hillsborough, Pinellas, Orange, Osceola, Broward and/or Miami-Dade.

- If the organization focuses on supporting college students, the colleges or universities should be within one of these counties or the students being served at the colleges or universities should come from one or more of these counties.

50. If an organization works in an education setting, but does not explicitly list education advancement as part of its mission statement, does that make them ineligible?

It is not a requirement for education to be listed in an organization's mission statement to be eligible for this RFP. Education strategies can be employed by the organization as a means to meet the organizational mission.

51. Our organization is based in one of the areas you have identified but serves college students statewide. Should we focus on the students we serve in the identified areas only?

For the purposes of this RFP, Helios is only interested in serving students in the six counties identified. Students from outside the area can be served by your organization, but not through this RFP.

52. Why would an organization need a fiscal agent to apply?

Some organizations won't meet our organizational eligibility requirements and may select a fiscal agent to apply on their behalf.

53. Can specific high schools or a school district apply to the RFP?

If a specific high school or school district meets the eligibility criteria described above, they are eligible to apply through this RFP process.

Post Award Information:

54. When will we be notified of the groups that are awarded the grants?

Late Spring 2025.

55. What happens after a proposal is selected for an award?

If your proposal is selected for an award, the primary contact will be notified and our team will begin to work with you on a grant agreement, which includes a reporting schedule, grantee check-in calls, and a payment schedule.