



Request for Proposal Afterschool & Summer Enrichment & Learning for All

Background

We envision a Colorado where afterschool and summer enrichment opportunities are available to all children. This is because we know these experiences aren't nice to have - they are a must have. Research and kids tell us the same thing: the opportunity to discover things we are passionate about through sports, arts, music and more, is essential to growing up. And, the benefits span academic achievement and wellbeing. Young people feel less stress, are more likely to build relationships with trusted adults and peers, and feel more connected to their community. As one kid told us, "When I'm playing basketball, all my worries melt away." We're convinced that we need more basketball (and soccer and choir and more)!

However, right now access to these essential experiences is unequal. Middle and high-income families can - and do - spend thousands of dollars a year on these experiences, while lower-income families can spend a fraction of that. That's why we at Gary incubated and supported the launch of [My Spark Denver](#). My Spark Denver equipped over 4,000 free and reduced price lunch eligible middle school students with \$1,000 to spend on the afterschool and summer learning and enrichment programs of their choosing. Thanks to initial and continuing investments from the City of Denver, as well as Denver Public Schools and the leadership of the DPS Foundation, Denver has become a leader in working towards ensuring all kids have transformational afterschool and summer experiences.

This RFP seeks to identify local systems ready to replicate My Spark-like programming ([see program case study](#)) in other locations throughout Colorado and to model the future of out-of-school learning — one where access is universal, funding is sustainable, and all kids have opportunities to find their spark.

Description:

Gary is seeking to identify a cohort of approximately 3-5 public systems (counties, cities and school districts) and/or the intermediary partners that seek to dramatically scale their out of school enrichment and learning opportunities, particularly for lower-income kids, through My Spark-like programming. The key components of My-Spark like programming are:

- 1) Resourcing kids and families directly with funds to spend on afterschool and summer enrichment opportunities

- 2) Supporting a wide variety of afterschool and summer providers - from arts to sports to tutoring and more - and including nonprofit, business and government providers
- 3) Prioritizing student choice and interest

The goal of this grant is to understand how My Spark-like programming would support their community and to build the key components that would need to be in place for a scaled launch. Further, they will be preparing themselves to potentially make use of the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit in HR1 that is expected to support public school students in afterschool and summer enrichment and learning. With this planning grant, successful applicants will map their needs and assets, identify potential sources of funding, and identify the operational details that would need to be in place such that they could launch scaled programming in 2027 or beyond. Applicants who successfully complete the planning period will be considered by Gary for a larger grant to support launch of this programming but future funding is not guaranteed.

Objectives:

We are looking for proposals that can be executed over an eight-month planning period. In particular, by the end of the grant period (December 31, 2026), we expect that communities will:

- 1) Deeply understand the afterschool and summer landscape in their region
- 2) Assess whether My Spark-like programming is feasible for their region
- 3) Develop clear plans for potential implementation and ongoing funding

Proposal Requirements (What we are looking for):

We are specifically looking for proposals that:

- Commit fully to meeting the grant expectations and deliverables.
- Demonstrate a strong, executive-level commitment to afterschool and summer enrichment and learning.
- Have a vision for scale that gets to all kids who need it in their geography (with time).
- Use the [My Spark model](#) as concept inspiration. Some iteration off of the My Spark model is expected, but the non-negotiables are:
 - 1) Resourcing kids and families directly with funds to spend on afterschool and summer enrichment opportunities
 - 2) Supporting a wide variety of afterschool and summer providers - from arts to sports to tutoring and more -and including nonprofit, business, and government providers
 - 3) Prioritizing student choice and interest

Priority will be given to proposals that:

- Serve Metro Denver (Adams, Arapahoe, Denver and Jefferson counties), though Colorado locations outside of Metro Denver will also be considered.
- Represent public/private partnerships - we believe that ultimately both public and private stakeholders need to be at the table to make this successful.

Proposals are unlikely to be considered if they:

- Do not address the objectives of this RFP.
- Do not prioritize the engagement of predominantly low-income students.
- Do not provide thought toward scale up and sustainability.
- Request funds for capital expenses (buildings, vehicles, etc.).

Grant Awards:

We anticipate awarding grants of up to \$40,000 for successful proposals. Application budgets should be commensurate with the scope of work. We anticipate awarding between 3-5 planning grants. There is no guarantee of subsequent launch funding though recipients of this planning grant will receive consideration from Gary.

Expectations of Grant Recipients: Applicants that receive this grant will be expected to:

1. **Kid and Family Demand: Develop a clear understanding of the kid and family demand and needs in afterschool and summer in their region.** In particular, after completing this work, a grantee should understand the specific student age range, target demographic and, if applicable, target regions/subregions they are seeking to build programming for.
2. **Providers: Identify and build a database of community providers in afterschool and summer enrichment and learning.** This includes community nonprofits, small and large businesses, and government providers (schools, Parks and Recreation Departments, others) - with a focus on kid choice and interest, this should be optimizing for volume in the region. This would include understanding organizations and their specific offerings, costs, location, types of kids served (ages, regions, etc.), available slots and capacity to grow. This analysis should reveal where there are opportunities and gaps.
3. **Champions: Identify and bring in well-positioned community champions.** This includes understanding public and private supporters of the work that could help operationalize it (moving from planning to action), publicize it to kids and families, and support the strategic direction of public funds toward this work.
4. **Funding: Identify potential private and public sources of funding.** This is a program that requires ongoing resources, likely from a mix of philanthropy and public funds. A final product would have identified sources of funds (local, state, federal, private and public) and made progress on securing some of those funds. As noted earlier, under HR1, it is expected that this programming could be funded in part by the new scholarship tax credit. Part of the technical assistance a grantee can expect is support to be eligible for those funds, to the extent allowable per federal and state regulations.
5. **Operational Plan: Should steps 1-4 yield high feasibility, develop an operational plan for scaled pilot execution in 2027 and beyond.** This would include identifying a timeline, responsible parties, evaluation metrics, technology infrastructure, administrative capacity and deliverables to launch the work.

We anticipate grant funds would be spent largely on a consultant or staff time in order to produce these deliverables (identified above in kid and family demand, providers, champions, funding, and operational plan), though some funds may be used for engaging families and afterschool and summer providers, surveys, focus groups, reviewing existing data sources, updating previous research, and more.

Services/Support from Gary to Grant Recipients:

Gary Community Ventures will provide the following services and support to grantees in this cohort:

- Shared learning opportunities with other grantees
- Technical assistance in scaling My Spark programming from the team at Gary that founded My Spark Denver
- Opportunity to work with experts to further model out-of-school time costs and identify potential revenue sources in your region, including using HR1's scholarship tax credit

Application Components:

The proposed work/project should include the following components which are detailed in the application that can be accessed [here](#).

RFP Process:

- Invitation to Apply Released: January 12, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time
- Applications Due: No later than February 9, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time
- Notify Finalists: March 6, 2026
- Kickoff: April 1-15 (date will be finalized with grantees)
- Grant period: April 1- December 31, 2026.

Applications will be reviewed during the month of February. Finalists will be notified no later than March 6, 2026 and may be asked for additional information, which could include interviews and/or site visits.

Questions:

For questions regarding this RFP, please contact Angie McPhaul at amcphaul@garycommunity.org.

Informational Webinar: There will be an optional webinar on January 20th from 10-11AM, where you can learn more about the grant and ask questions. Please login here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86572942744>