



Youth Advisory Council
Created September 2025

**NEXTGEN GRANTMAKERS
INITIATIVE**

TOOLKIT

1. Introduction & Purpose

GOAL

To center youth in funding decisions that impact their lives and communities. This toolkit supports the creation of an equitable, transparent, and youth-led grantmaking process.

Key features of the initiative include:

- **Youth-led Decision Making:** Grant decisions made entirely by youth.
- **Capacity Building:** Training and mentorship in grant evaluation, equity, and leadership.
- **Community-Centered Focus:** Funding support initiatives rooted in community needs and youth vision.
- **Transparent Process:** Open call for proposals, inclusive review, and public sharing of outcomes.

2. Core Values of NextGen Grantmakers Initiative

EQUITY & INCLUSION

Prioritize marginalized voices where those most impacted lead the way.

TRANSPARENCY

Clear, open, and accessible communication at all steps.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Youth develop leadership and decision-making skills as changemakers.

ACCESSIBILITY

Materials and process should be youth-friendly, inclusive, and have limited barriers to participation.

CREATIVITY & INNOVATION

Embrace unique and efficient ideas for creating positive change

3. Designing the Process: Step-by-Step

Step 1 | Assemble a NextGen Grantmakers Committee

- Recruit youth ages 12–24 who represent a wide range of identities, experiences, and backgrounds.
- Ensure representation from communities impacted by the funding.
- Provide onboarding training on (but not limited to):

- Orientation to Participatory Grantmaking
- Understanding the Grant Process
- Using the Scoring Rubric
- Equity, Bias, and Inclusion Training
- Site Visit Preparation (if applicable)
- Confidentiality & Ethics
- Decision-Making & Consensus Building
- Evaluation & Reflection

See Appendix for more detailed info.

Step 2 | Define Funding Priorities

Facilitated Youth Discussion Topics:

- What issues matter most to you and your peers (urgent needs and policy themes)?
 - Safety program development and programming for youth;
 - Mental health, well-being, and emotional intelligence;
 - Youth initiative – youth leadership development and personal growth;
 - Bridging the gap between youth and young adults regarding professional development; and
 - Youth and adult driven programs – including both.
- What issues do you think most impact your community?
 - Safety and not having enough programming for youth.
- What types of organizations or projects do you want to see?
 - Organizations that care about youth leadership and development and prioritize it in their organization.
- Who should be eligible (e.g., youth-led orgs, grassroots groups)?
 - Organizations that prioritize youth health and well-being.

OUTCOME Clear funding priorities and focus areas that inform the RFP.

Step 3 | Draft the Request for Proposals (RFP)

EXAMPLE RFP

Overview

We are excited to announce the launch of a youth-led grant opportunity through our NextGen Grantmakers Initiative. This RFP invites youth-led or youth-serving projects to apply for funding to support ideas that make a positive impact in their communities.

Who Can Apply

- Not for Profit organizations serving youth ages 10–24.
- Projects that benefit young people or address issues impacting youth.
- Projects in the St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, Jefferson County, and Franklin County in Missouri; St. Clair County, Madison County, and Monroe County in Illinois

Funding Available

- Grant amounts: range \$10,000–\$20,000 per project
- Number of grants available: 5-10 grants
- Funding period: 12 months

What We're Looking For

We welcome projects that:

- Are led by or meaningfully involve youth.
- Create positive changes in the community.
- Show creativity and originality.
- Are inclusive and promote equity.
- Have a realistic and achievable plan.

Projects can focus on any topic important to young people, such as education, mental health, arts, social justice, environment, or civic engagement.

EXAMPLE RFP (continued)

How to Apply

Applicants must complete the following:

1. Application Form (includes contact info, project narrative, timeline)
2. Project Budget

Applications must be submitted by: September 26, 2025

Submit your application to: bit.ly/NextGenGrantmaking

Selection Process

- Applications will be reviewed by the **NextGen Grantmakers Committee** made up of young people ages 12–24.
- Projects will be scored using a youth-friendly rubric based on leadership, impact, creativity, feasibility, equity, and diversity across geography.
- Final decisions will be made by youth, with support from adult allies.

Timeline

- RFP Released: 9/2/2025
- Application Deadline: 9/26/2025
- Review Period: 9/29/2025 – 10/29/2025
- Grantees Notified: 11/21/2025
- Project Start Date: 12/1/2025
- Project Completion: 12/1/2026

Support & Questions

We're here to help! If you have general questions or need support with your application, please contact: vcr@visionforchildren.org; for technical questions about the grant portal FormSite, please email GrantHelp@deaconess.org.

Let's fund your vision.

This is your opportunity to lead, create, and make change. We can't wait to see your ideas!

Step 4 | Prepare a Press Release

See Appendix for example

Step 5 | Design the Application

Make the application short, accessible, and inclusive. Consider:

- Avoid jargon
- Example questions:
 - Who is leading this project?
 - What's the goal of the project?
 - How will it impact youth in your community?
 - How will the grant funds be used?

Step 6 | Create a Youth-Friendly Scoring Rubric

EXAMPLE SCORING MATRIX

NextGen Grantmakers Initiative Scoring Rubric

Overview

This scoring rubric is designed for youth ages 12-24 who are reviewing grant proposals as part of a participatory grantmaking process. It aims to ensure a fair, inclusive, and youth-friendly assessment of all applications. Each reviewer will score 5–10 projects using the following criteria.

Scoring Scale

Each criterion is scored on a scale from 1 (Low) to 5 (High). Use the descriptions to help decide your score.

Criteria

1. Youth Leadership

Does the project center youth voices and leadership?

- **1:** Youth are barely involved.
- **3:** Youth are somewhat involved in planning or implementation.
- **5:** Youth are leading the project and making key decisions.

EXAMPLE SCORING MATRIX (continued)

NextGen Grantmakers Initiative Scoring Rubric

2. Creativity & Innovation

Is the project idea original or using new approaches?

- **1:** The idea is common or predictable.
- **3:** Some creative aspects are included.
- **5:** The idea is highly creative and brings something new.

3. Feasibility

Is the project realistic and doable with the resources available?

- **1:** The plan is unclear or unrealistic.
- **3:** The plan is mostly clear and doable.
- **5:** The project has a strong, realistic plan with the right resources.

4. Inclusivity & Equity

Does the project include or support underrepresented or marginalized groups?

- **1:** There is little or no focus on inclusion or equity.
- **3:** Some elements of inclusion are present.
- **5:** The project strongly centers equity and inclusivity.

5. Community Impact

Does the project positively affect the community or a specific group?

- **1:** Impact is unclear or limited.
- **3:** The project has a clear benefit for a specific group.
- **5:** The project will have a strong, lasting impact on the community.

6. Measuring Impact

Is tracking progress built into the project with space for adjustments?

- **1:** Baseline Data Collection: Collect data before the project begins to compare against post-project results.
- **3:** Community Feedback: Use surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather input from those affected by the project.
- **5:** Ongoing Monitoring: Track progress throughout the project to ensure it is on course and make adjustments if needed.

Total Score: ____ / 25

EXAMPLE SCORING MATRIX (continued)

Comments Section: (Optional)

- What are the project's biggest strengths?
- What concerns or questions do you have?
- Would you recommend funding this project? Why or why not?

Instructions for Reviewers:

- Review each application carefully.
- Use this rubric to assign a score for each criterion.
- Be honest, fair, and respectful.
- Use the comments section to share your thoughts and help the group make decisions.

Criteria	Description	1 (Low)	3 (Medium)	5 (High)
Youth Leadership	How much are youth involved in planning, decision-making, and leading the project?	Minimal or token involvement	Youth involved in some aspects	Youth are leading and making key decisions
Community Impact	How much will this project positively impact the community or a specific group?	Limited or unclear impact	Clear benefit to a group or area	High potential for positive, lasting impact
Creativity & Innovation	Is the idea fresh, unique, or using new approaches?	Common or familiar approach	Some original or interesting elements	Highly creative and innovative
Feasibility	Is the project realistic? Can the team carry it out with the time and resources?	Not realistic, lacks clear plan or resources	Mostly realistic, some details missing	Very realistic with clear plan and resources
Inclusivity & Equity	Does the project serve or include underrepresented or marginalized youth?	Little attention to inclusivity or equity	Some inclusive practices or equity focus	Strong commitment to inclusivity and equity
Sustainability <i>(Optional)</i>	Will the project have a lasting effect or plan to continue?	One-time or short-lived with no follow-up plan	Some elements of sustainability	Strong plan for long-term impact or sustainability

Step 7 | Review & Selection Process

- Youth review applications individually or in pairs.
- Host facilitated review sessions to:
 - Share scores
 - Discuss differences
 - Come to consensus or vote
- Staff support the process to ensure due diligence across the board before funding decisions are finalized (checking 501(c)3 status, making sure organizations are in good standing, budget, etc.).

Step 8 | Notify Applicants

- Use accessible, encouraging language.
- Offer feedback to non-selected applicants if possible.
- Celebrate selected grantees publicly (with permission).

Step 9 | Ongoing Support & Evaluation

- Conduct site visits at a 6-month and a 12-month midpoint to check in.
- Youth committee can check in on projects or host storytelling sessions.
- Close the loop: host a reflection session for youth reviewers or conduct a survey.



APPENDIX

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reagan Herzog

RHerzog@GroupGordon.com

(212) 784-5707

Deaconess Foundation Invests \$100,000 in NextGen Grantmakers, a Youth Participatory Grantmaking Initiative Powered by Vision for Children at Risk

ST. LOUIS – September 2, 2025 – [Deaconess Foundation](#) today announced its partnership with [Vision for Children at Risk](#) (VCR), an organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of youth and their families, to launch a transformative youth participatory grantmaking initiative – [NextGen Grantmakers](#) – aimed at placing funding decisions directly in the hands of young changemakers. This approach shifts traditional grantmaking power structures to youth—not just as beneficiaries, but as decision-makers—who will design, lead, and allocate grant funds to efforts that matter most to them and their communities.

VCR will guide the program through strategic facilitation, capacity building, and logistical support. NextGen Grantmakers will be led by a diverse cohort of youth, part of VCR's Youth Advisory Council, who will decide how to allocate the funds following training on equitable grantmaking practices. Together, they will manage the distribution of \$100,000 in grant funds to youth-led and/or youth-serving projects that prioritize equity, justice, and community impact.

"We believe young people carry wisdom and lived experience that our region urgently needs. We trust their voices, and we stand with the priorities they set," said Bethany Johnson-Javois, President and CEO of Deaconess Foundation. "By funding this initiative, we are not only championing youth-led solutions but also advancing the broader field's knowledge of the important role of intermediaries, community-stewarded funds, and participatory philanthropy."

Key features of the initiative include:

- Youth-led Decision Making: Grant decisions made entirely by youth.
- Capacity Building: Training and mentorship in grant evaluation, equity, and leadership.
- Community-Centered Focus: Supporting initiatives rooted in community needs and youth vision.
- Transparent Process: Open call for proposals, inclusive review, and public sharing of outcomes.

"Youth are not just the future – they are the present, and their voices are essential in shaping the change they want to see," said Sanaria Sulaiman, President and CEO of Vision for Children at Risk. "Through this youth-led initiative, our Youth Advisory Council members are leading with purpose, making funding decisions that directly impact their

communities. This is what true youth leadership looks like – authentic, informed, and driven by lived experience.”

“Serving on the Advisory Council has greatly shaped my perspective on connecting with my generation through meaningful, solution-driven conversations,” said Abraham Blue, VCR Youth Advisory Council (YAC) member. “Focusing on other youth through strategic planning has been at the core of my leadership, and YAC has embodied that vision. I truly appreciate the positive impact it’s making on the generation.”

The request for proposals for NextGen Grantmakers will open on Tuesday, September 2, 2025. Proposals must be submitted by Friday, September 26th, 2025, at 11:59 pm. Eligible organizations are serving youth ages 10-24 and proposing efforts in alignment with our three priority areas: (1) youth mental health, well-being & emotional intelligence, (2) safety programming for youth, and (3) youth leadership development & personal growth programming within Deaconess’ seven county footprint. Interested youth organizations and initiatives can learn more and apply at <https://deaconess.org/funding-opportunities/>.

About Deaconess Foundation

Deaconess Foundation envisions a community that values the health and well-being of all and gives priority attention to the most invisibilized. Deaconess seeks to create conditions where liberation is the lived reality within seven generations. A ministry of the United Church of Christ, Deaconess has invested more than \$100 million to improve the health of the St. Louis community since 1998. Our grants and cultivated relationships support the accelerated change in conditions through policy, advocacy, and/or organizing efforts building and wielding power to transform systems to respond to the will of the people.

The Foundation’s advocacy and grantmaking footprint includes St. Louis City, St. Louis, Jefferson, St. Charles and Franklin Counties in Missouri and Madison, St. Clair and Monroe Counties in Illinois. For more information, visit deaconess.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter and Instagram @deaconessfound and on Facebook at facebook.com/deaconessfoundation.

About Vision for Children at Risk (VCR)

Vision for Children at Risk is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. For more than 30 years, we’ve worked to challenge and transform the deep-rooted inequities in our region’s systems, especially those that impact young people and those who care for them.

We believe that sustainable change starts by listening to those closest to the challenges. That’s why we center the voices, creativity, and leadership of youth and community

members in everything we do. Their lived experiences guide our work, spark new ideas, and inspire lasting solutions.

At VCR, we're committed to empowering families, uplifting communities, and creating spaces where young people are not just heard—but supported, included, and equipped to lead. Through deep collaboration, innovative thinking, and a relentless focus on equity, we work to ensure that every child and youth has the opportunity to thrive.

###

Training Topics NextGen Grantmakers

1. **Orientation to Participatory Grantmaking**
 - What is participatory grantmaking?
 - Why youth voice matters.
 - The role of the Youth Advisory Council.
2. **Understanding the Grant Process**
 - Overview of the RFP and application process.
 - Timeline of review, scoring, site visits, and evaluation.
 - Roles of youth vs. adult allies (e.g., decision-making vs. logistical support).
3. **Using the Scoring Rubric**
 - Walk-through of each rubric criterion (leadership, impact, feasibility, etc.).
 - Practice scoring using sample/mock applications.
 - Group discussion to ensure consistency and fairness.
4. **Equity, Bias, and Inclusion Training**
 - Understanding implicit bias and how it can affect decision-making.
 - How to evaluate projects fairly, especially from under-resourced or marginalized groups.
5. **Site Visit Preparation (if applicable)**
 - What to look for during a site visit.
 - Asking respectful and effective questions.
 - Taking notes and reporting back to the group.
6. **Confidentiality & Ethics**
 - Respecting the privacy of applicants.
 - Handling conflicts of interest.
 - Group norms (respect, listening, professionalism).
7. **Decision-Making & Consensus Building**
 - How to discuss differences in scoring respectfully.
 - Strategies for group decision-making.
 - Building consensus while honoring multiple perspectives.
8. **Evaluation & Reflection**
 - How to give feedback on the process.
 - Learning from the experience to improve future cycles.