

# Prioritizing Mental Wellness Amidst Virtual Learning

*Request for Proposals*



# About the Nellie Mae Education Foundation

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation is committed to using our power and privilege as a philanthropic institution to advance racial equity in public education. We are committed to championing efforts to prioritize community goals that challenge racial inequities and advance excellent, student-centered public education for all New England youth. We are proud to have been part of efforts over the last ten years to advance personalized, student-centered approaches to learning across the New England region. We learned that for student-centered practices to flourish, the structural racial inequities present in our education system needed to be addressed. We are focusing our grantmaking strategically on addressing structural racism and white supremacy in our education system, so that all youth have access to an excellent and equitable public education.

## Background

One of the Foundation's values is ***Put Youth at the Forefront***: *We must widen the lens of education to encompass the socio-cultural contexts of youth and families. Every decision the Foundation makes rests on its potential for improving the lives of our region's youth least well-served by current systems.* To live into this value, we asked three young people to take the lead in designing this grant fund. They are here to describe its priorities in their own words:

### ***The Grant Fund Designers***

#### **Niamiah Jefferson, ARISE**

I am a freshman at Wheaton College and native of Providence, Rhode Island. I am currently a Lead Organizer as part of ARISE and am a strong believer in liberation through education. I have worked with Nellie Mae for over a year as a community advisor and am excited to be a part of this team where I will support in the decision-making process of allocating funds to communities that mirror the very communities who supported my growth and helped me to get to where I am today.

#### **Lydia Mann, Granite State Organizing Project**

I am currently attending Manchester Central High School in New Hampshire. I have recently started with the Granite State Organizing Project as well as Nellie Mae, so I am still learning about both groups. I joined these teams so I could make an impact for my community. I am unable to go to the BLM protests or movements, so I joined to become involved and informed about what is happening during these times, along with COVID.

## **Mealakthey Sok, ARISE**

My name is Mealakthey Sok, and I am currently a first year at Smith College. I am currently the Artistic Organizer at ARISE; however I was a part of the first cohort of the leadership program, starting in 2017 as a Youth Leader and Junior Facilitator. I have worked with the NMEF in the past as a consultant in the community advisory group. I joined the design team because I believe that it is important to acknowledge and support communities and youth who lack the resources to thrive during a period of time where both COVID-19 and racism are disproportionately affecting them.

We came together to talk about the moment we are in right now, where the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and anti-Black structural racism are both causing so much need. After thinking about the needs we see most in our communities, we decided to focus on two: **mental health** and **virtual learning**. We focused on these areas because:

- *Students are grappling with mental stress and trauma from all of the events that have taken place in the past year, are beginning a school year that is very different than usual, and need support.*
- *Being remote for almost a year with a lack of social and physical interaction can affect the mental and emotional state of individuals, especially young people.*
- *Remote learning is not equitable for all students. Some students have to support their families through work or caring for siblings, and not everyone has access to reliable internet service or devices.*

As the pressures on youth continue to mount, we have developed this RFP to support creative solutions – short-term projects led by districts, schools, or community-based organizations that serve youth in K-12 public schools and address mental health and/or remote learning for youth in vulnerable communities. Please read the Criteria and Eligibility sections carefully for more details.

Requests should not exceed \$20,000. It is expected that the majority of the proposed budget will directly support a project that is specifically focused on mental health support for youth and/or remote learning; that said, we understand that many youth and families are struggling to have basic needs met. While it is not a requirement or expectation, budgets may include a line item for basic need supports (COVID necessities [masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, etc.], food, clothing, school supplies, etc.) for the youth and families participating in the proposed project.

## Funding Priorities

The following are some examples of projects that will be considered for funding. It is not an exhaustive list but is meant to provide a picture of the types of projects the Youth Leaders and Foundation seek to support. Please read the Criteria and Eligibility sections carefully for more details.

### Mental Health

- Peer support groups
- Individual or group counseling
- Space for students to learn self-agency within or outside school
- Space for youth to learn where they can get help/assistance – i.e.: a resource center
- Opportunities that offer safe physical interactions
- Supports for youth who are being targeted because of their race – i.e. accusations of being responsible for COVID, misguided policies that constrain or prevent students of color from feeling safe and empowered.
- Self-care kits or events that bring joy to students
- While this RFP is not designed to provide operating or on-going programmatic support, requests for additional social work or professional counseling hours are eligible

### Remote Learning

- Individual or group remote tutoring
- Technology needs not being met by the district – Wi-Fi connection, hardware, IT support for students
- Quiet safe spaces where students can go to get online for their remote learning

## Proposal

Please respond briefly to the following on the application portal. (See portal access instructions in the Submission section below)

1. Briefly describe the community (i.e., classroom, school, neighborhood, or city) this project would impact.
2. Briefly describe the youth in your community, including their demographics and access to resources/supports. How are students currently engaged in learning in your community (in person, virtual, hybrid)?
3. Describe the project. What challenge(s) or condition(s) will it address? What would this funding be used for and what do you hope to accomplish?

4. Please share how your organization is rooted within the community and why it is in a position to lead this project. How does the proposed work align with the mission of your organization?
5. If the requested amount is less than the total budget, briefly explain how the remaining budget needs will be met.

## Criteria for Selection

- Grant request must respond to a time-sensitive, unanticipated event, urgent challenge, or need in communities. *This grant is not intended to support ongoing programs and projects.*
- Organizations have an established focus on providing support for mental health, and/or resources for educational success.
- Population organization serves is at least 50% people of color. Organizations serving Black and/or Indigenous youth will be prioritized.
- The project must be completed within six months of receiving the rapid response grant.

### **Rapid response funding will not support the following requests:**

- Requests from individuals or religious groups
- Capital campaigns
- Scholarships or fellowship programs
- Debt reduction or cash reserves
- Building construction or renovation
- Operating support or on-going programs. However, staff time to manage a short-term project is an allowable expense if the project is outside the staff person's established responsibilities.

## Eligibility

- The project takes place **within New England (MA, RI, NH, VT, ME, or CT)**
- Communities have at least one Title 1 school (Schools in which children from low-income families make up at least 40 percent of enrollment are eligible to use Title I funds to operate schoolwide programs that serve all children in the school in order to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) also must use Title I funds to provide Title I services to eligible children enrolled in private schools. More information about Title I and other ESSA programs is available [here](#).)
- Organizations must be directly serving youth enrolled in K-12 public education.

- The Foundation funds public entities such as districts and public schools and 501(c)3 educational organizations that fall under the tax designation 509(a)(1) or 509(a)(2) and have an education focus, as evidenced in their articles of incorporation. Due to the Foundation’s tax status, private foundations (described in section 509 (a) of the Internal Revenue Code) and supporting organizations (described in section 509 (a)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code) are NOT eligible grantees.
- Organizations may apply for a rapid response grant at any time but can only receive one rapid response grant within a 12-month period. Organizations that received either a Racism is a Virus Too or Educators for Black Lives Rapid Response grant are not eligible.

## Additional Information

The Foundation aims to review proposals and disburse funds to selected applicants within 2 weeks of receiving the proposal. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and funds will be distributed until the limited pool of resources is exhausted or December 4, 2020, whichever comes first.

If you need assistance submitting a proposal or have questions about your eligibility, please contact Stephanie Cheney at [scheney@nmefoundation.org](mailto:scheney@nmefoundation.org).

## Proposal Submission Directions

Applications will be accepted using our [online application portal](#). Signup for an account if you are a new user or log-in if you have used our system this year. Once you are logged in, navigate to the “Grants Opportunities” tab and select the “Rapid Response Fund – Prioritizing Mental Wellness Amidst Virtual Learning” opportunity to start your application.