

Illinois Postsecondary Wraparound Supports Initiative



Evidence-driven supports. Better outcomes. More completions.

The Illinois Postsecondary Wraparound Supports Initiative supports postsecondary institutions in strengthening, expanding, or launching wraparound support programs that address barriers to student persistence and completion. Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), eligible 2- and 4-year, public and private, not-for-profit institutions located in (or with a campus in) Chicago and Lake County are invited to propose wraparound support programs that address barriers to student persistence and completion, promote equitable outcomes, and use data and evidence to inform continuous improvement.

Selected institutions will receive grant funding to evaluate, strengthen, expand, or launch wraparound supports and participate in a cohort-based professional learning community facilitated by the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®). Grantees will also receive individualized coaching and technical assistance from AIR.

The initiative aims to strengthen institutional capacity to deliver effective, student-centered wraparound supports, while contributing to shared learning and informing future regional strategies to improve postsecondary persistence, completion, and equity.

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated October 13, 2026)

What are the geographical requirements for eligibility?

Eligible applicants must be public or private, not-for-profit, degree-granting postsecondary institutions located or serving students in Chicago or Lake County, Illinois, including institutions with a physical campus in either region.

How is the 20% Pell Grant recipient requirement calculated?

This eligibility requirement is calculated using data submitted to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). At eligible institutions, 20% of *degree-seeking students* must be Pell Grant recipients according to IPEDS data.

Can nonprofit organizations that support institutions apply?

The primary applicant must be a postsecondary institution, but nonprofit/community-based organizations may be named as subcontractors. A key consideration is that any partnership supported by this grant should be sustainable beyond the life of the grant.

How many proposals may be awarded per institution?

For institutions with one campus, only one proposal per institution will be awarded. For institutions with more than one campus, only one proposal per campus will be awarded. Proposals submitted on behalf of a college system will be considered separately from individual campuses and will not affect an individual campus's ability to apply.

What is expected of grantees?

Grantees will be expected to implement their proposed project, participate in the professional learning community and coaching activities facilitated by AIR, collect and use data to support continuous improvement, engage in peer learning and feedback activities, complete required grant reporting, and develop both an evaluation report and a dissemination plan. Grantees are also expected to center student voice in their work and actively engage in evaluation and learning activities throughout the grant period.

What are the benefits for grantees?

Grantees will receive funding to evaluate, strengthen, expand, or launch wraparound supports. In addition, they will participate in a cohort-based professional learning community; receive individualized coaching and technical assistance from AIR; learn from peer institutions; and receive guidance on program design, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. AIR will also provide support for dissemination activities in the final year of the grant.

What does the review process entail? Is it the same for all projects?

All proposals will first be reviewed to confirm they meet the basic eligibility requirements outlined in the RFP, including institutional eligibility, geographic requirements, and alignment with the focus on wraparound student support programs. Eligible proposals will then undergo a competitive review process. Each proposal will be reviewed by at least two reviewers with substantial subject matter expertise who will independently assess proposals. Reviewers will assess proposals using a common rubric aligned with the published review criteria. Reviewers will consider factors such as the clarity and feasibility of the proposed project, alignment with the goals of the initiative, meaningful integration of student voice, institutional capacity to implement the work, commitment to participating in technical assistance and peer learning activities, the quality and feasibility of the evaluation approach, and plans for sustainability and long-term impact. Because this initiative is designed to support a range of projects—from launching new supports to strengthening, expanding, or evaluating existing programs—reviewers will consider proposals within the context of their stated goals, scope, and stage of development. Applicants are not expected to propose the same types of activities or evaluation approaches; rather, reviewers will assess whether the proposed approach is appropriate and feasible for the proposed project.

What criteria will be used to evaluate proposals?

Eligible proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Program design and rationale:** Strength of the proposed project, clarity of goals, alignment with institutional and initiative priorities, and feasibility of implementation
- **Centering student voice:** Meaningful and ongoing incorporation of student perspectives into project design, implementation, and evaluation
- **Evidence, data, and evaluation:** Use of data and evidence, quality of the evaluation approach, and plans for learning and continuous improvement
- **Institutional capacity and staffing:** Qualifications of project staff, institutional commitment, and capacity to successfully implement the proposed work
- **Participation in learning and technical assistance:** Commitment to engaging in the professional learning community, coaching, and peer learning activities
- **Budget and use of funds:** Alignment of the budget with project goals and the appropriateness of proposed expenditures
- **Sustainability and long-term impact:** Potential for sustaining successful practices and achieving long-term benefits for students and the institution
- **Overall quality and clarity:** Organization, completeness, and responsiveness of the proposal

When can I expect to hear back about my application?

Award decisions are expected to be made and applicants notified by February 24, 2027. Grant awards are anticipated approximately 30 days after notification, depending on institutional review of grant agreements.

Who should be on my project team?

The proposed project lead must be employed by the institution submitting the proposal. Project teams should include individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and authority to successfully implement and evaluate the proposed work. This may include staff with expertise in wraparound supports, student success initiatives, advising, student affairs, program implementation, institutional decision-making, data collection and analysis, and continuous improvement. Applicants are encouraged to include individuals with experience collecting and analyzing quantitative and/or qualitative data; working with institutional research or data systems; and, where applicable, navigating institutional review board processes. Institutions should also identify staff responsible for participation in grant activities and coordination with AIR.

What qualifies as a wraparound support for proposed projects?

Wraparound supports are coordinated services and connections designed to address barriers that affect students' ability to persist in and complete their education. Examples include basic needs

supports such as food, housing, and transportation assistance; targeted financial assistance, such as emergency aid or completion grants; academic coaching and tutoring; holistic coaching, advising, and mental and physical health support; and career development or job placement assistance. Applicants are not limited to these examples and may propose other approaches that align with the initiative's goals.

What kinds of projects may I propose?

Projects should focus on strengthening, expanding, launching, or evaluating a wraparound support program. Examples of projects that may be a good fit include the following:

- Scaling or strengthening an existing wraparound support model that has shown promise
- Holistic advising, success coaching, or coordinated student support approaches
- Comprehensive first-year experience initiatives, including advising, onboarding, orientation, courses, interventions, or other supports designed to improve persistence
- Basic needs support programs addressing food, housing, transportation, technology access, or related barriers
- Emergency aid, micro-grants, completion grants, or other targeted financial support strategies
- Academic or nonacademic peer support models, including peer mentoring and peer coaching
- Cohort-based student support models
- Efforts to improve coordination across academic and nonacademic services
- Evaluation and improvement of existing wraparound support programs
- Institutional capacity-building efforts that strengthen the use of data, evidence, and continuous improvement to support student success

These examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Applicants are encouraged to propose innovative approaches that respond to the needs of their students and institutional context.

What kind of student outcomes should we focus on/include in the evaluation?

Applicants should identify outcomes that align with their proposed project and are feasible to measure during the grant period. These may include both academic and nonacademic outcomes. Examples include retention, persistence, engagement, belonging, utilization of supports, or other indicators that demonstrate progress toward longer term goals. For projects designed to affect outcomes that may not be observable during the grant period, such as graduation or credential attainment, applicants are encouraged to identify meaningful leading indicators of success. AIR will provide technical assistance and one-to-one coaching focused on evaluation and continuous improvement throughout the grant period, including refining outcome measures in collaboration with grantees as appropriate.

Is there a required timeline for projects?

Projects will operate during the grant period, from March 2027 through February 2030. Applicants should submit a project timeline and work plan that include major activities, milestones, and deliverables across this period.

Are grantees expected to share student-level data with AIR?

No. Grantees will be expected to collect and use data to support their own evaluation and continuous improvement efforts, but they will not be required to share data with AIR. AIR will provide coaching and technical assistance related to evaluation and data use.

What is the allowance for indirect costs?

Indirect costs are allowable but may not exceed 15% of direct expenses. Applicants should include indirect costs in their proposed budget.

What constitutes allowable or unallowable expenses?

Allowable expenses include personnel, salaries, fringe benefits, consultants, travel, supplies and materials, trainings, meetings, evaluation activities, and participation in required grant activities.

Can funding be used to “buy out” course time for instructors/faculty at institutions?

Yes. Applicants may propose to use funding to buy out course time for faculty and instructors.

Can funding be used for subawards to external partners?

Yes. Applicants may propose subawards to external partners (such as community-based organizations), provided the postsecondary institution remains the lead applicant and primary participant in grant activities. Proposals that include subawards should provide a clear justification for the partnership and explain how the work will be sustained after the grant period.

Can funding be used for scholarships or renovation costs?

Proposed projects should center on a support, program, or intervention that can be evaluated and sustained. If a scholarship or renovation is critical to the execution of the larger initiative, you may include this in your proposal, but it should not be the primary expense.

Can funding be used for direct student supports (e.g., emergency aid, transportation assistance)?

Yes, funding can be used for such supports. Proposed initiatives that include such supports should include a clear plan for how they can be evaluated and sustained.

Is there a minimum and/or maximum funding level that will be considered?

Projects may request up to \$250,000 per grant year, for a maximum of \$750,000 over the 3-year grant period.