



INDIANAPOLIS AFRICAN AMERICAN QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE

Request for Proposal

Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative For Education

Comprehensive Literacy Development for All Ages & Culturally
Responsive Education

Issued:

July 7, 2025

Responses Due:

August 11, 2025

11:59 pm (Eastern Time)

For Submission Requirements, see www.iaaqli.org



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Introduction

Indianapolis Urban League (IUL), with support and in partnership with the National Urban League (NUL), the African American Coalition of Indianapolis (AACI), its member organizations, community groups, faith-based organizations, corporations, foundations, local and state public agencies and individuals, is implementing the Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI). Funded through a \$100 million grant from Lilly Endowment to NUL, the IAAQLI is mobilizing African American resources while also building collaborations and partnerships to enhance the quality of life for African Americans in Indianapolis and Marion County.

IAAQLI focuses on six priority issue areas affecting the quality of life of African Americans in Indianapolis: Business & Entrepreneurship, Education, Employment, Health and Wellness, Housing and Homeownership, and Leadership and Civic Engagement. This Request for Proposal addresses the issue of **Education**. IAAQLI invites eligible applicants to submit projects/programs that address the strategies to Improve Educational Outcomes for Black Students in Marion County.

Funding requests may vary in size, with individual grants awarded based on the scope, scale, and alignment of proposed activities with IAAQLI's broader mission to advance racial equity and improve the quality of life for African Americans in Indianapolis.

Funding Overview

IAAQLI is pleased to announce the availability of **\$1,000,000** in funding to support innovative, community-centered projects that strengthen literacy and educational outcomes for African American residents of Indianapolis and Marion County. This funding opportunity is designed to improve early childhood and adult literacy, promote culturally relevant curriculum, and support lifelong learning through accessible, equitable, and empowering educational experiences.

Eligible applicants are invited to submit proposals that align with IAAQLI's strategic priorities in education, including culturally affirming instruction and comprehensive literacy development across all age groups. Individual projects may request funding of **up to \$250,000**, with a **minimum grant allocation of \$100,000** for a defined grant period.

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Background and Purpose

The Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI) is committed to addressing the systemic educational disparities faced by African American communities in Marion County. One of the key factors contributing to these disparities is the lack of adequate literacy skills across all age groups, from early childhood through adulthood. The ability to read, write, and comprehend is foundational not only for academic achievement but also for personal empowerment and socioeconomic mobility.

African American children and adults in Marion County face unique challenges in literacy development, including limited access to culturally relevant educational resources, insufficient early childhood literacy support, and a lack of comprehensive adult literacy programs. Additionally, the rapid digitization of society has created a digital divide, leaving many community members without the skills needed to navigate technology effectively. To address these challenges, IAAQLI is launching a comprehensive literacy initiative that focuses on both early childhood and adult literacy, while integrating digital literacy as a critical component of lifelong learning.

This RFP invites organizations, nonprofits, educational institutions, and community-based organizations to submit proposals aimed at implementing innovative, culturally relevant, and sustainable literacy development programs. Selected grantees will collaborate with schools, community leaders, and local partners to ensure that Marion County's African American population has access to high-quality literacy resources.

Objectives

The primary objective of this funding opportunity is to improve literacy outcomes for African Americans of all ages in Marion County by promoting lifelong learning, closing the literacy gap, and supporting access to culturally responsive educational resources. Proposals should focus on developing inclusive, scalable programs that foster literacy across the lifespan.

Proposals should address one or more of the following strategic priorities:

1. **Strengthen early childhood literacy** by ensuring that children are reading proficiently by the third grade through targeted interventions, family engagement, and school-based support.
2. **Expand adult literacy programs** that serve individuals lacking basic reading, writing, and comprehension skills, with flexible formats to meet the needs of working adults.



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3. **Bridge the digital divide** by delivering comprehensive digital literacy education, particularly in underserved communities, to equip residents with essential skills for modern learning and employment.
4. **Build cross-sector partnerships** between schools, community organizations, libraries, and local businesses to support literacy at every stage of life and across generations.

This initiative aims to eliminate barriers to literacy, empower individuals through education, and advance equitable learning opportunities that support long-term academic and economic success.

Strategies

To be considered for funding, applicants must address at least one of the following strategies and at least one key action:

Strategy 1: Culturally Relevant Curriculum & Integration of African American History

Purpose: Foster an inclusive, empowering educational experience by integrating culturally relevant curriculum and African American history, ensuring that students of all backgrounds see themselves reflected in their education.

Key Actions

1. Curriculum Development:

- Collaborate with educators, historians, and cultural experts to design curricula that reflect the history, contributions, and lived experiences of African Americans, ensuring that African American students feel seen and heard.
- Provide professional development and training for educators on effective methods for integrating culturally relevant content into existing curricula, promoting an environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and engaged.
- Ensure that the curriculum materials include diverse perspectives that encourage critical thinking about social justice, equity, and historical narratives, helping students develop a deeper understanding of their world and the systems that shape it.



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2. Community Engagement:

- Host workshops, town halls, and forums with families and community members to solicit feedback and ideas on how to best implement and shape the curriculum. This ensures that the curriculum development process is reflective of the community's needs and aspirations.
- Forge partnerships with local cultural institutions, museums, libraries, and African American historians to enrich curriculum offerings with resources that bring history to life, making it more accessible and engaging for students.
- Create mentorship opportunities by linking students with community leaders and activists who can provide real-world insights into the history and impact of African American contributions.

3. Resource Allocation:

- Allocate dedicated funds to develop and distribute culturally relevant teaching materials, including books, multimedia resources, and digital content, to schools and educational institutions.
- Provide grants to schools for piloting and evaluating innovative curriculum initiatives, enabling the development of scalable models that can be adopted across multiple schools and districts.
- Support the creation of digital platforms that enhance accessibility to African American history and culture, ensuring that resources are available in various formats to cater to diverse learning needs and preferences.

Strategy 2: Comprehensive Literacy Development for All Ages

Purpose: Enhance literacy skills for individuals of all ages, addressing educational disparities, promoting lifelong learning, and empowering individuals to navigate the complex demands of modern society. The initiative seeks to broaden the definition of literacy to encompass academic, digital, financial, and life skills—equipping individuals with tools to thrive in all aspects of their lives

Key Actions

1. Early Childhood Literacy:

- Implement programs to build strong foundational literacy skills from an early age, ensuring that children are ready to read and write before entering formal schooling.



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- Focus on ensuring literacy by the 3rd grade, as this is a critical milestone for academic success. Support tutoring, reading programs, and family engagement initiatives that encourage reading at home and in the community.
- Create accessible learning materials and resources for parents to help foster a literate environment at home, equipping them with the tools to support their child's early literacy development.

2. Adult Literacy Programs:

- Develop flexible and tailored adult literacy programs that address unmet literacy needs, including basic literacy and GED preparation. These programs should be available in various formats, including evening and weekend options, to accommodate working adults.
- Collaborate with businesses and community groups to promote lifelong learning, emphasizing that literacy extends beyond reading and writing to include financial literacy, digital literacy, and health literacy.

3. Digital Literacy:

- Equip individuals with essential digital literacy skills, such as navigating the internet, understanding online safety, and accessing digital services. This is crucial for students, adults, and seniors who may not have access to traditional learning environments.
- Offer workshops and online tutorials in underserved communities, ensuring that all individuals have access to the resources they need to succeed in an increasingly digital world.
- Collaborate with local libraries, community centers, and schools to provide access to computers and the internet, enabling individuals to engage in online learning and apply their newly acquired digital skills in both personal and professional contexts.

4. Parent and Family Education:

- Support parents in navigating the educational system by offering workshops on how to engage with teachers, understand curricula, and advocate for their children's needs.
- Provide tools for parents to track their child's academic progress and access necessary support services, from special education programs to after-school tutoring.



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- Expand the focus of literacy to include “quality of life literacy,” which teaches parents and families how to make informed decisions about health care, social services, and community engagement, all of which directly impact their children's success.
- Help parents understand their rights and responsibilities within the educational system, ensuring that they are active participants in shaping their child’s learning environment and opportunities.

5. Financial Literacy and Quality of Life Literacy:

- Develop community-wide financial literacy programs to provide individuals and families with the tools to manage their finances, understand tax laws, invest in their future, and achieve home ownership.
- Offer workshops on basic financial concepts such as saving, investing, and understanding credit, with a focus on reducing financial disparities in underserved communities.
- Expand “quality of life literacy” to include financial decision-making, health care access, housing, and employment, providing individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate systems that affect their daily lives. This literacy empowers individuals to make informed decisions that improve their overall well-being and quality of life.

6. Language and Communication Skills:

- Incorporate language skills into broader literacy initiatives, particularly for non-English-speaking or bilingual communities. Programs should focus on enhancing language proficiency to improve educational outcomes, career advancement, and community participation.
- Provide translation services and bilingual resources in educational settings to ensure that language barriers do not hinder learning or family engagement in the educational process.

Pillar Benchmarks

IAAQLI priorities for Education, in their totality, are meant to address the goals of the *education journey* for Black students, including the following benchmarks:

- a) Participation in high-quality Pre-K
- b) Achieve 3rd-grade reading proficiency
- c) Achieve 4th-grade math proficiency
- d) Achieve 8th-grade math proficiency



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- e) Complete Algebra 1 by 8th grade
- f) Participate in & Successfully Complete the 21st Century Scholars Program
- g) Enter 9th grade on track for graduation
- h) Complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)
- i) Graduate with Core 40 or Honors Diploma, and enter a career or matriculate through college

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible organizations are encouraged to submit a response to this RFP in accordance with the guidelines outlined below. Include all required sections with your response. Incomplete documents will not receive consideration.

This RFP is open to organizations classified as public charities under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code that provide education-related services and supports, such as nonprofit education organizations, college access programs, out-of-school time providers, youth development agencies, and other community-based educational entities. Traditional K–12 schools and school districts are not eligible to apply.

Preference will be given to African American-led organizations that are deeply rooted in and actively serving African American communities in Marion County, Indiana, with a demonstrated commitment to advancing educational equity and improving outcomes for Black students and families.

Applicants may apply individually or in collaboration with other entities. If applying as part of a partnership or consortium, proposals must include signed letters of support from each collaborating organization. These letters should clearly outline the collaborator's role in the proposed project, relevant expertise or experience, and specific contributions to program implementation. While partnering organizations are not required to be African American-led or not-for-profit organizations, preference will be given to those based in Indiana, particularly those located in Indianapolis.

In addition to meeting eligibility requirements, applicants are strongly encouraged to include a clear plan for measurable milestones, outcome reporting, and the use of collaborative project or program teams. Proposals that demonstrate a structured approach to evaluation and cross-sector collaboration will receive priority consideration during the review process.



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Elements of Proposal

I. Application Requirements

1. The application form is available online at <https://app.smarterselect.com/programs/103798-laaqli>.
2. All applications will be reviewed and screened by IUL, NUL and its IAAQLI partners. Criteria will include certification of Code section 501(c)3 public charity status (including a Letter of IRS Determination), the 990 of the organization, Certificate of Insurance (COI) and clear identification of the IAAQLI strategy your organization plans to address, and adherence to other program requirements.

II. IAAQLI Grant Application

The following section provides a general overview of questions grant seekers will need to answer in the application process. Applications will be submitted through the IAAQLI Smarter Select system. Applications should address or include the following:

1. The target audience for the proposed project/program, including the geographic location served and points of service (including where the services will be offered and how the Black community will be able to access the services).
2. A detailed project budget to accompany the applicant's grant request material. The budget must be completed on the IAAQLI Budget Template.
3. A description of how the project/program activities will meet the eligibility criteria of the proposed funding strategy.
4. A description of the project/program team and the management structure for the project/program; a description of the organization's leadership and staffing.
5. How the project/program will address the gaps for African American residents and how it will contribute towards the achievement of the application's objectives and expected results. *(The information should describe what you are offering, how you will deliver, your proven track record, past experiences, and your level of expertise related to the proposed funding strategy. If your project or program involves collaborations with other organizations, please also describe their role, track record, experience, and expertise.)*
6. Key activities you will undertake in this project/program and the proposed length of the project/program.



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7. Describe how the applying organization plans to continue offering this program/project/operational activity after exhausting IAAQLI funding.
8. A statement of Revenue and Expenses for the organization's most recently completed fiscal year.
9. A commitment that IUL will receive a certificate of insurance ("COI") naming NUL as an additional insured from each individual or organization receiving funding from NUL under IAAQLI.

Procedure for Prospective Grant Applicants

1. Applicants must submit responses to this RFP online by the indicated deadline.
2. Subgrant Agreements are sent to funded organizations and must be signed by an authorized officer of the organization and returned by the indicated due date.
3. Funds are delivered after award approval, setup of the organization profile in the Build Back Black Portal, and receipt of a signed Subgrant Agreement.
4. Grant recipients are required to submit Grant Summary Reports at six-month intervals. Reports should update us on the progress of your funded project/program. A final report will be required at the conclusion of the award period. Reporting requirements and dates are included in the Subgrant Agreement. Please be sure to put the due dates on your calendar. If you do not submit your reports on a timely basis, we will not be able to provide future funding until those reports are made current.

Selection & Evaluation Process

A team of evaluators will review each submitted application. An IAAQLI staff representative will oversee the application evaluation process. Each application will be evaluated based on the following criteria, among others:

- **Eligibility:** The extent to which the organization meets the criteria regarding who can apply.
- **Alignment:** The extent to which the organization demonstrates how it will address gaps and challenges in the ecosystem (focusing on racial equity within that ecosystem), in alignment with this strategy's stated objectives and expected results.
- **Experience and Capacity:** The ability of the organization to deliver on the proposed project activities and the applicant's and/or collaborator's technical



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and financial management capacity. Organizations are highly encouraged to leverage resources by fostering partnerships and by demonstrating economies of scale.

- **Feasibility:** The extent to which the project is sound and financially feasible.
- **Sustainability:** The extent to which the organization demonstrates a clear plan for sustaining the proposed project beyond the grant period, including diversified funding strategies, long-term partnerships, and/or earned revenue models.
- **Impact:** The degree to which the proposed project is likely to generate a measurable impact for Black residents and communities, particularly in areas of economic mobility, access to opportunity, and reduction of structural barriers.
- **Innovation and Responsiveness:** The ability of the organization to propose creative, data-informed, and community-responsive approaches that address emerging needs or longstanding gaps in the employment, education, or economic ecosystem.
- **Evaluation and Learning:** The extent to which the applicant presents a clear and coherent plan for evaluating project implementation, including defined success metrics, data collection methods, and strategies for tracking outcomes over time.

Anticipated RFP Timeline

RFP Date of Issue	July 7, 2025
Written Questions from Q&A session Due to Email: info@iaaqli.org	July 14, 2025
IUL Posts Answers to Questions	July 21, 2025
RFP Proposals Due to Smarter Select	August 11, 2025
Anticipated Proposal Awards	October 10, 2025

Questions and Inquiry Process

All questions and inquiries regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing by the deadline. Questions or inquiries should be submitted electronically via email to info@iaaqli.org and must be received by the date indicated above.



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Following the question/inquiry due date, IAAQLI will compile a list of the questions and inquiries submitted by applicants. Only answers posted on Smarter Select will be considered official and valid. No applicant shall rely upon, take any action, or make any decision based upon any verbal communication.

NUL and its IAAQLI partners reserve the right to publish clarifications on information submitted in response to this RFP and to conduct discussions, either oral or written, with applicants separately or in groups. These discussions could include requests for additional information, requests for cost information or technical requirements, response attachment revisions, etc. Additionally, in conducting discussions, NUL and its IAAQLI partners may use information derived from the responses submitted by competing applicants, making reasonable efforts to preserve the identity of applicants when communicating with others.

Neither NUL, its IAAQLI partners, nor any of their representatives shall be liable for any expenses incurred in connection with the preparation of a response to this RFP. Applicants understand that this RFP does not constitute an offer to enter into an agreement or a contract between any applicant and NUL, or any of their IAAQLI partners.

For all rounds of funding, the IAAQLI Management Team, in partnership with the National Urban League, the Indianapolis Urban League, and the African American Coalition of Indianapolis, has the option to transfer dollars within or across its strategies. The total dollar amount allocated for the five issue areas will not change.

This document is for information purposes only. All applicants are required to complete a full application to be considered for funding. Eligible applicants are invited to apply through the Smarter Select grants management system available at www.iaaqli.org.