



INDIANAPOLIS AFRICAN AMERICAN QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE

Request for Proposal

Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative For Employment

Enhancing Employability and Career Readiness Across the Lifespan

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

The Indianapolis Urban League (IUL), in partnership with the National Urban League (NUL), the African American Coalition of Indianapolis (AACI), and a diverse network of community-based organizations, faith institutions, philanthropic partners, corporations, and public agencies, is implementing the Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative (IAAQLI). Made possible by a \$100 million grant from Lilly Endowment to NUL, IAAQLI is designed to mobilize African American assets and strengthen partnerships that advance the quality of life for African Americans in Indianapolis and Marion County.

The initiative targets six strategic priority areas critical to long-term well-being and equity: Business & Entrepreneurship, Education, Employment, Health & Wellness, Housing & Homeownership, and Leadership & Civic Engagement. This Request for Proposals specifically addresses the **Employment** priority area. IAAQLI invites eligible applicants to submit proposals that align with the initiative's vision for expanding workforce access, advancing economic mobility, and supporting career preparation and technical skill development for African American residents in Indianapolis.

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 **\$2,500,000** in funding to support innovative, community-centered projects that strengthen technology and technical skills development for African American residents of Indianapolis and Marion County. This funding opportunity is designed to increase employability, reduce employment barriers, and promote long-term economic mobility through workforce-aligned training and digital empowerment initiatives.

Eligible applicants are invited to submit proposals that align with IAAQLI's strategic priorities in workforce development and technology access. Individual projects may request funding of **up to \$250,000**, with a **minimum grant allocation of \$150,000** for a defined grant period.



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Background and Purpose

African American residents of Indianapolis continue to face systemic barriers that impede access to stable, meaningful employment. Unemployment and underemployment rates for Black residents remain disproportionately high compared to their white counterparts, driven by structural racism, limited access to networks and resources, and the lasting impact of discriminatory hiring practices. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, African Americans in Indiana experience unemployment at nearly twice the rate of white residents, with disparities even more pronounced for justice-involved individuals and disconnected youth.

A 2020 report by the Indiana Institute for Working Families identified several key challenges contributing to this disparity in Marion County, including geographic isolation, unreliable transportation, and persistent bias in the labor market. Compounding these barriers are the disproportionate rates of justice involvement: nearly one in three working-age adults in the U.S. has a criminal record, and among African American men in Indianapolis, arrest and conviction rates are significantly higher than for other populations. These records, even absent convictions, can reduce the likelihood of a job offer by nearly 50%, exacerbating cycles of poverty and disconnection from the labor force.

At the same time, labor market shifts are creating new opportunities. The workforce is becoming increasingly diverse and technology-driven; yet employers have not sufficiently adapted their talent strategies to reflect this change. The Black population in Indiana is growing faster than the Black workforce participation, indicating a growing segment of underutilized or disconnected talent. Moreover, emerging workforce trends show that, on average, 10%-15% of young people nationally are neither working nor in school, many of whom are experiencing economic disenfranchisement and systemic exclusion.

This RFP seeks to invest in workforce development models that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and focused on equity. It supports programs that improve career readiness, employment training, and job placement for three priority populations: (1) disconnected Black youth ages 19–24 who are out of school and/or unemployed; (2) unemployed or transitioning adult heads of household; and (3) returning justice-involved individuals. By aligning training and employment opportunities with technology-oriented careers and living-wage pathways, this initiative aims to reduce systemic disparities, unlock economic mobility, and ensure that Black residents of Indianapolis are equipped to thrive in the modern workforce.



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Objectives

The primary objective of this funding opportunity is to enhance economic mobility for African American residents of Indianapolis and Marion County by expanding access to workforce-aligned training, technical skills development, and wraparound support services. This initiative is designed to prepare individuals for high-demand career pathways, reduce employment barriers, and promote long-term job retention and advancement.

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

1. **Comprehensive Career Preparation** by developing and implementing programs that build both technical and essential employability skills—including communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving abilities—needed to succeed in rapidly evolving work environments such as technology, AI, and advanced manufacturing.
2. **Technology and Technical Skills Development:** Equipping participants with industry-specific knowledge and hands-on training in high-growth sectors, such as construction, digital services, and entrepreneurship, with a clear pathway from graduation to employment.
3. **Transportation Access and Support Services:** By removing logistical and socio-emotional barriers to workforce participation, including transportation solutions and social supports that enhance participants' physical, mental, and relational well-being.

Proposals may address one or more of these strategies, and applicants addressing multiple strategies should identify the specific actions, resources, and anticipated outcomes associated with each area of focus.



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Strategies

Selected programs must address one or more of the following strategies and their key actions:

Strategy 1: Comprehensive Career Preparation

Purpose: Enhance the career readiness and long-term employability of Black residents, particularly justice-involved individuals, disconnected youth, and adult heads of household, by providing tailored support that leads to employment in career-track professions.

Key Actions

1. Enhancing Employability and Career Readiness

- Programs for All Career Stages: Provide programs that build employability skills for heads of households, the unemployed, or those transitioning in the workforce due to changes in the marketplace, plant or workforce closures, or other barriers to workforce entry. The specific focus is on potential workers (ages 30-50) to help them re-enter or remain competitive in the workforce.
- Provide tailored employment services to older youth, especially those out of school or out of work, aged 18-24, including resume-building, interview training, soft skills development, specialized career skill development, and job placement and retention services that address their unique challenges.
- Support for Justice-Involved Adults transitioning back into the community, their families, and the workforce would be another target population. Individuals with engagement in other support services related to housing, family stabilization, and healthcare would be a priority.
- Career preparation leading to immediate employment would be a priority for all three groups, especially justice-involved people and heads of households.
- All activities must lead to employment or clearly defined next steps in a career-track profession (e.g., apprenticeships, certifications, job placement), with post-placement support to promote retention and advancement.
- Any financial or technical support from other sources for the project should be noted.



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Strategy 2: Technology and Technical Skills Development

Purpose: To equip Black residents with in-demand technology and industry-specific skills through training, certification, and practical work experience that lead to employment in career-track professions and long-term workforce success.

Key Actions

1. Technology Skill Development:

- Provide comprehensive training focused on computer literacy, coding, and engineering skills.
- Establish internships for youth and young adults in technology-related fields to gain practical work experience and access to permanent employment.

2. Industry-Specific Training:

- Develop tailored training programs for high-demand industries, including manufacturing, construction, and trades.

3. Offer certifications and credentials to ensure participants are competitive in the workforce.

- Training, certification, and wrap-around services should contribute to employment and career matriculation.
- All activities should end with employment in a career track profession. Support services and coaching to employers and workers should be provided in the workplace after employment to ensure successful placement and matriculation.

Expected Outcomes

1. Enhanced Employability and Career Readiness:

- Increase the number of African Americans with the skills necessary to enter and succeed in the workforce, particularly in technology and high-demand industries.

2. Improved Access to Technical Skills:

- Equip participants with relevant, up-to-date technology and industry-specific skills through certification and practical experience.

3. Reduced Barriers to Employment:



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- Address geographic, transportation, and support services challenges to relationship building and maintenance in the workforce, ensuring target individuals can access training and gain job opportunities.

4. Connect Project/Program Participants to Employment

- Connecting participants to employment during or post career development experience will be given the highest consideration.

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, including nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, workforce development agencies, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations. Preference will be given to African American-led organizations that are rooted in and actively serve African American communities in Marion County, Indiana. **This RFP specifically seeks to engage organizations with a demonstrated commitment to expanding economic opportunities for African Americans in Indianapolis.**

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.

Elements of Proposal

I. Application Requirements

1. The application form is available online at <https://app.smarterselect.com/programs/103798-laaqli>.



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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/program includes 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.
7. Describe the evaluation plan of the applying organization, detailing specific outcomes of the proposed program activities for which funding is being requested.



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8. Describe how the applying organization plans to continue offering this program/project/operational activity after exhausting IAAQLI funding.
9. A statement of Revenue and Expenses for the organization's most recently completed fiscal year.
10. 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 be unable to provide scheduled future funding until those reports are brought up to date.

Selection & Evaluation Process

Each submitted application will be reviewed by a team of evaluators. 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 proposal advances racial equity in employment by addressing systemic barriers to economic opportunity and building career pathways for African American residents.
- **Experience and Capacity:** The ability of the organization to deliver on the proposed project activities and the applicant's and/or collaborator's technical and financial



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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, cost information, or technical requirements, as well as revisions to response attachments, 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.