



A path for every student.
A plan for every future.™

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAREER EXPLORATION



Request for Proposal

2020

asa.org/about



ASA Middle School Career Exploration RFP 2020

Three-year funding available to implement and expand career exploration programs for Massachusetts schools and districts

Applications due Friday, February 28, 2020

All RFP application materials can also be found at asa.org/partnerships under Grant Opportunities.

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I. OVERVIEW

To support high-impact career exploration programming for middle school students in grades 6-8, American Student Assistance® (ASA) is offering three-year grants between \$75,000 and \$100,000 to schools and districts in Massachusetts. These grants will enable schools and districts to build the capacity to develop and implement new career exploration programming, or to expand existing promising programs.

This is ASA's second round of funding for this initiative; we awarded eight grants in our first round. Beginning in 2018, ASA began actively creating partnerships with middle schools to:

1. Pilot innovative programs that have the capacity to scale.
2. Study the programs to derive data-driven insights and outcomes.
3. Test our thesis that career exploration at an early age can help students develop a clearer plan for their future.

Up to 10 winning programs will be announced in April 2020, and funds will be awarded in the early summer for implementation by fall 2020 or January 2021, at the latest.

Important Dates

- **Webinar with live Q & A: Wednesday, January 29 from 3:30 - 4:30pm ET.** This is an important opportunity for schools/districts to learn more about the grant and to participate in a question and answer session. Applicants are strongly advised to participate. Register here: https://asaorg.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bq2FhUQskECHLRH
- **Applications are due on February 28, 2020 by 5pm ET.**

“There is so much excitement around this program with students and families.”

*- Elizabeth Pawlowski,
Taunton Public Schools,
a round 1 pilot*

II. ABOUT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CAREER EXPLORATION GRANTS

Through the Middle School Career Exploration Grants, ASA will fund and study how to develop and implement promising curricula and experiential instructional practices for middle school career exploration. These grants are an exciting resource for schools and districts to:

1. Integrate experiential career exploration into existing courses or programs, or to adopt proven curricula to establish career exploration initiatives.
2. Significantly expand the number of students who participate in meaningful career exploration.
3. Serve as living laboratories to accelerate the adoption of middle school career exploration programs in other schools and districts.

Award and Allowable Funding Uses

Winning applicants will receive between \$75,000 and \$100,000, paid out over three years beginning in summer 2020. Amounts awarded each year will be determined based on submitted budgets as well as the proposed number of student participants.

Funding may be used for capacity building:

- Initial planning and development costs, including professional development for instructors and/or guidance staff, curricula purchases, and curriculum modification and adaptation efforts.
- Related implementation expenses, such as continued professional development or coaching, field trips, student supplies and equipment, teacher or guidance stipends.
- Up to 30% of the funds may be used to support the purchase of technology hardware or software, provided that applicants demonstrate they have sufficient capacity for accompanying implementation and support.

III. WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS: MIDDLE SCHOOL CAREER EXPLORATION SUPPORTS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Research has identified middle school as a time when students can benefit the most from career exploration - a process of building self-awareness, learning about potential careers, and developing a plan for reaching their future goals¹.

- Career exploration experiences and opportunities can **improve academic performance**. They also increase the likelihood that these students will complete high school and pursue post-secondary education.
- Career exploration opportunities **improve the attitudes of young people about their career prospects, motivating them to persevere in school**.
- Career exploration **improves students' knowledge of career options, encouraging them to develop and work toward goals during the critical years** when they are also beginning to venture beyond the orbit of their parents.
- Students who are involved in early career exploration are **more likely to plan their high school courses of study carefully to gain the skills they will need**.

¹ Source: <https://www.acteonline.org/career-exploration-in-middle-school-setting-students-on-the-path-to-success/>

In short, opportunities for career exploration help students “connect the dots” between school and career in ways that keep them motivated to graduate with the skills they will need for the future.

IV. OUR PILOTS’ LEARNING AGENDA and THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Working in close collaboration with our school and district partners, ASA will study student impact and implementation conditions for the success of these pilots, and share their stories and lessons with other school systems and stakeholders to inform and accelerate the adoption of middle school career exploration for students across the state and nation.

- Through the pilots, ASA seeks to gain insight into the participating students’ education and career decisions and the influences on those decisions. We will work closely with grant recipients to obtain pre- and post-survey-based information from students participating in the career exploration programs about topics including grades, academic performance, changes in attitude or awareness of education and career pathways, and likelihood to pursue additional career exploration in high school. Annually, we will develop and share reports documenting student progress with school administration and project leaders, individually and in cohorts.
- ASA will also study how promising programs can develop, grow and become institutionalized by studying our pilots’ implementation. Our goal will be to tease out what conditions and decisions promote success for our cohort.
- And, because a central purpose of these pilots is to enhance awareness and promote the spread of career exploration for middle schoolers, ASA will partner with our grantees to create and disseminate news and learnings from these pilots among a diverse audience of stakeholders locally and nationally.
- Throughout the three-year grant period we will also organize opportunities for learning and sharing among our grantees to promote the exchange of experiences and best practices across the cohort.

“[Students] are starting to make connections to skills needed in middle school and how they can be transferred to the workplace. We are also seeing an increased interest from teachers to pilot career conversations at the beginning of the year.”

- Jen Perry; Director of Teaching and Learning, Barnstable Intermediate School, a round 1 pilot

During the contracting phase, ASA will work closely with our grantees to develop our research and communication blueprints.

V. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Grants are open to public middle schools and districts in Massachusetts. We encourage the participation of districts in communities serving diverse populations. Funds will be awarded directly to schools/districts and must be used specifically for middle school programming.

Please review the questions below to discover if your school or district could benefit from this grant.

Does your school or district have...	Examples
A passion for middle school career exploration?	<p>Your community wants to integrate career exploration into its economic development policy.</p> <p>Your district has already incorporated career exploration into its priorities.</p> <p>Leadership and instructional key staff already understand the benefits of career exploration and are ready to lend their support.</p>
Some promising existing career exploration experience?	You have already implemented experiential career exploration for some students that is showing promising early results.
or	
A great concept for career exploration that needs funding for its establishment?	You have identified a proven career exploration curriculum or program that you would like to adopt or adapt.
A commitment to engaging significantly more middle school students in career exploration over the next two to three years. Your aspiration is to engage <u>all</u> students in your school or district within five years.	<p>Over the three-year grants, some ways that you might engage an expanding pool of students include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing a proven curriculum with a cohort that grows annually. • Expanding existing explorations from a single classroom to a whole grade or grades. • Expanding existing programming from one school to several or throughout the district. • Making accompanying changes in scheduling and staff capacity development to achieve this growth.
The readiness to get started on a three-year growth plan.	With summer 2020 training, your teachers or guidance staff would be ready to implement the expanded career exploration by fall 2020 or January 2021, at the latest.
A need for funds to support the costs for implementation or expansion.	You have the idea, the support and perhaps some early experience, but you need additional money to implement your plan.
A commitment to serving as a “living laboratory” for outcomes and implementation research, led by ASA, that will inform and catalyze future scaling efforts.	<p>Through partnerships with winning grantees individually and as a collective “learning community,” ASA will study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact does this approach have on students? • What are the conditions necessary to scale it? • How might they be standardized?

VI. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Applications may come from single schools, several schools or a district. Both principals and superintendents must review the application and indicate on the cover sheet that they support the proposal.
2. Please answer the following questions in the order in which they are presented below and complete the cover sheet and budget form as well.
3. Proposals should be five pages maximum, excluding the cover sheet and budget
4. Please convert all documents into a single pdf, titled:
NAMEOFYOURSCHOOLorDISTRICTMiddleSchoolCareerExplorationRFP2020
5. By Friday, February 28 by 5pm ET, email your application to Liliana Ornelas, Manager of Programs & Curriculum (lornelas@asa.org).
6. Subject line of the email should be the same as the title of your pdf.

VII. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Cover Sheet – please provide on school or district stationery

1. Applicant school(s) or district name
2. Location of school or district
3. Name and email address of each participating principal or principals and the school(s) that they represent
4. Sign-off from each principal indicating that you have participated in the development of this application and approve participating in the middle school career exploration program
5. Superintendent's name, email and sign-off indicating that you approve participating in the middle school career exploration program
6. Lead contact name, title, email and phone

Your Vision and Purpose

1. Why are you applying for this grant? How does middle school career exploration fit into your school and/or district's strategic plan? What steps have you taken so far to realize this plan?
2. What impact on the community do you wish to have? Please be as specific as possible, linking your career exploration plans to the needs of your community.
3. What outcomes are you expecting to achieve with your students? Please be as specific as possible.

Program Description

1. Please describe the career exploration class/program you will implement or expand at your school(s) by providing a comprehensive description of its design, including proposed outcomes, frequency, target grades, and in what ways the class or program is experiential.
2. Has your school(s) or district already implemented this career exploration program?
 - If yes,
 - For which students? For how long has your school or district used it? How many students participated in the last two years?
 - In what class or classes is it offered?
 - Why are you interested in expanding it?

- If no, why did you choose this model or approach?
3. What evidence/research exists that supports student success through your program?

Program Design

1. Please complete the grid below forecasting your plans for growth.

	Year 1: 2020-2021	Year 2: 2021-2022	Year 3: 2022-2023
List of schools and/or district	<i>Example:</i> Main Street Middle	<i>Example:</i> Main Street Middle Central Middle Eastern Middle	<i>Example:</i> district wide, including all middle schools (please list)
# of students total (<i>ok to provide a range</i>)			
Grades 6			
Grade 7			
Grade 8			

2. Implementation

Please describe your plan for preparing to implement the program by fall or January 2021, at the latest, with as much specificity as possible, detailing key work streams and benchmarks across the months, beginning in April 2020. For instance, depending on your program design, you may want to detail staff training, student outreach, recruitment efforts to engage professionals, and evaluation processes. Please detail:

1. Who will teach or lead the program in each school?
(NOTE: we are looking for descriptions of roles – e.g. guidance leader for each grade; science teachers, not actual names)
2. Who will oversee its implementation and quality? Is this person or persons already on staff? How does this work fit into his/her existing role?
3. Will student participation be mandatory or optional? If it is optional, how will the students be recruited?
Selected?
4. What are the primary changes you will need to make to implement or expand this program?

For instance, changing school schedules, training teachers who lead traditional courses how to incorporate career exploration into their curricula, building new relationships with local companies and industries.

5. Whose “buy-in” will you need for success at the front lines? Who will lead the process to build it?
6. What do you anticipate will be the primary challenges in implementing this new or expanded middle school career exploration strategy, especially within the timeline for a fall 2020 launch?

3. Sustainability

How do you propose to continue to support this pilot after the three-year grant period?

4. Budget

Please download and use the [budget template](#) to provide an itemized three-year budget including a brief justification of each cost item.

VIII. OUR SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Promising Program Design

- Includes experiential learning opportunities for students to allow them to visualize themselves and experience various career and educational opportunities in real life.
- Supports students to develop skills such as teamwork, communication and problem solving.
- Provides students with connections between skills, different education paths and careers.
- Program is integrated into school culture and curriculum.
- Preference will be given to applicants that:
 - Institute this program as a requirement for all middle school students (6th-8th) at participating school(s) by year two.

“Upon completing their work students are learning that their first attempt may require adjustments or changes, like the real world. There has been an increase in student communication during these projects. Students often seek feedback and understanding from each other in order to complete the project.”

- Dave Quinn, Director of Technology Integration, Miscoe Hill Middle School, a round 1 pilot

- Provide exposure to a wide range of careers vs. a STEM focus only.

2. Evidence of organizational capacity, including:

- Alignment with district or community priorities.
- Involvement of key leaders and implementers in the planning and implementation.
- Comprehensive, thoughtful three-year plan.

3. Demonstrate strong prospects to reach all middle school students in your district

- Preliminary evidence that design and implementation will achieve impact for students.
- Easy to implement and understand - rather than complex and complicated.
- High potential for sustainability after grant period.

4. Potential for Broader Influence

- Design and outcomes have the potential to contribute valuable insights to expand career exploration opportunities for middle schoolers across Massachusetts and nationally.

IX. SELECTION & LAUNCH TIMELINE

- By early April: Finalists selected; ASA conducts site visits with lead staff member, principal(s) and superintendent
- April 30, 2020: Winners notified
- June 2020: Completion of contracts
- July 2020: First round of funds disbursed
- By September 2020 optimally, or January 2021 latest: Implementation launch

X. QUESTIONS?

Please email Liliana Ornelas (lorneas@asa), ASA’s Manager of Programs & Curriculum. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions live during our webinar on January 29th.

All materials to complete the RFP application process can also be found on our website at asa.org/partnerships under Grant Opportunities.

ASA’S COMMITMENT TO ENHANCING CAREER EXPLORATION OPPORTUNITIES

Despite their proven benefits, the number of middle schools that provide opportunities for career exploration is limited. Presently, most schools and districts still lack the knowledge and capacity to implement career exploration or expand its reach beyond a few classrooms or students.

ASA is committed to transforming middle school career exploration into a norm rather than an exception. Our mission is to help kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals. We want to help kids discover their interests and skills at a young age so they can graduate high school with a plan. For more information about our planning, advocacy and partnerships check out our website at www.asa.org/aboutus.