



Family Learning Pathways to In-Demand STEM Careers: Call for Proposals

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is pleased to announce the launch of **Family Learning Pathways to In-Demand STEM Careers**, a new initiative that expands access to workforce learning and credentialing across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) for middle and high school students and their parents.

NCFL will issue **three seed grants** of up to \$50,000 per eligible community to pilot a multigenerational workforce learning program that supports relevant STEM-related education and credentialing for secondary school students (6-12th) and their parents seeking workforce advancement. Over the course of 6-9 months, award recipients will receive NCFL-led, in-depth training, resources, and ongoing technical assistance to effectively integrate the four components of family literacy in existing STEM-focused workforce learning and credentialing programs for secondary students and parents. The initiative may start at one of two different entry points—youth-first or adult-first—both designed so students and parenting adults can pursue workforce learning and credentials of value at the same time. As part of the pilot, award recipients will enroll 25 families in skill-building activities tied to in-demand STEM careers and prepare students and their parents to attain developmentally-appropriate credentials of value. All three award recipients will be invited to share their learning on a national stage at NCFL’s national 2027 Families Learning Conference.

A [new report](#) by the Bipartisan Policy Center confirms that employers across multiple sectors struggle to fill jobs with skilled American workers, and the impact of AI only accelerates this challenge.¹ The report provides a national strategy for talent development, encouraging local approaches that reflect the real life circumstances of students and workers, including adults who are “upskilling while parenting.” Despite the need for coordinated skills development efforts, current education and workforce systems treat children and adults as isolated targets, and families furthest from opportunity risk falling even further behind. Today’s families are often tasked with navigating education, workforce, and childcare systems that are disconnected, confusing, and misaligned to the realities of modern work and family expectations.²



NCFL's evidence-based multigenerational family literacy model cuts through this fragmentation. **It puts forth family literacy as a vital regional economic development strategy.** Providing opportunities for both middle and high school students and the adults in their lives who are “upskilling while parenting” creates a multiplier effect for greater economic stability and growth in which both generations benefit.

Why now?

Today's economy demands industry-recognized skills and credentials, digital fluency, and preparation beyond high school attainment or traditional “workplace readiness” programs. According to the Chamber of Commerce and the College Board, 84% of employers say high school graduates are not workforce-ready, citing a disconnect between the skills employers need and the preparation that young people receive.³ Career-connected learning and real-world work experiences, such as internships, can more effectively prepare students for the changing workplace. Even as AI rapidly reshapes the workforce, research by the [Association of Science Technology Centers](#) shows that STEM-related and high-skills professions will remain in high-demand and will continue to provide better wages and job security. However, building strong pathways for today's young people must go beyond technical skills training to effectively address the growing skills gaps across whole families.

Foundational literacy skills (i.e. reading, math, digital, and AI skills) are the bedrock of today's in-demand workforce competencies, and support adaptability in durable skills that employers increasingly value, such as communication, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving.⁴ More than half of working-age adults in the United States, many of whom are parents, lack foundational skills in reading, math, and digital-problem-solving.⁵ A recent survey of 500 employers in key industries found that **one in three employers** report their average employee lacks the necessary skills to perform their job effectively, and two in five acknowledge that low literacy is widespread in their companies.⁶ Moreover, adults with the lowest skills are significantly more likely to live in poverty than those with the highest level of skills.⁷ Lack of educational access affects whole families and persists across generations; an estimated 72% of children with parents who have low literacy will experience low literacy themselves. Children of adults with low literacy are also more likely to live in poverty and are five times more likely to drop out of school.⁸

A survey of [2,000 adults with low literacy](#), by the Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) in partnership with FTI Consulting, found that adults with low literacy recognize the



value of education and want to improve their skills, especially adults with children under 18.⁹ The vast majority of those surveyed (80%) were unfamiliar with education and training programs in their community, and identified barriers to skills development, such as perceived cost, even though most adult education and career training programs are free. The economic pressure on today's families in need of upskilling does not stay within households. The entire U.S. economy is impacted by the lack of a skilled, qualified workforce.

The Multiplier Effect of Family Literacy and Credentialing

For many students and workers, credentials of value that are aligned to specific jobs or fields, such as certifications, licenses, and microcredentials, can provide strong alternatives to traditional education, especially among adults without a college degree.¹⁰ In this model, high school students can graduate with strong academic and durable skills, industry-specific experience and credentials, and greater confidence to navigate college-level work and career pathways.¹¹ For workers, earning credentials of value can result in short-term wage gains, and according to new research by The Burning Glass Institute, reposition their skills for a rapidly changing labor market, resulting in new career entry, lateral or upward mobility, and long-term, life-changing earnings and advancement.¹²

More and more, middle and high school students are being prepped for future careers while their parents, especially those impacted by poverty or low literacy skills, are stuck trying to catch up in an economy that keeps racing ahead.¹³ Determining which credentials hold value will be critically important for the millions of adults who are currently trying to prepare their kids for the future workforce, while exploring opportunities for their own advancement.

The last three decades reinforced time and time again that family literacy is a proven vehicle for workforce advancement when adult and child outcomes are intentionally linked. Through this project, NCFL will unite the four components of family literacy with a workforce lens, including earning credentials of value for both children and parents at the center. **When parents and children can access opportunity and pursue meaningful credentials side by side, everyone benefits:**

- **For students:** They can graduate with strong academic and durable skills, industry-specific training and credentials, fundamental knowledge of how businesses operate, and greater confidence to navigate college-level work and career pathways.¹⁴
- **For families:** Parents that earn credentials of value including certifications advance their earning power and career stability¹⁵, and their children see their caregivers model



persistence, resilience, and achievement. Household income and educational expectations rise together.

- **For communities:** Stronger family stability reduces dependence on social safety nets and strengthens civic engagement. Local industries gain reliable workers with credentials in health care, education, food safety, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship.
- **For employers:** Employers value real-world experience, industry credentials, and durable skills like communication and critical thinking.¹⁶ They can reliably identify and hire local workers with the skills they need.
- **For society:** Breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty becomes more realistic when whole families, not just individuals, are equipped with marketable skills and confidence to participate fully in the workforce.

What is Family Literacy?

NCFL defines family literacy in alignment with federal law as education models that promote learning and skill-building across four key components: (1) interactive literacy activities between parents and children through (Parent and Child Together) Time®; (2) Parent Time, in which programs and community partners support caregivers' understanding and navigation of their children's education, community needs, and other literacies necessary to support family wellbeing and long-term success; (3) Adult Education, inclusive of education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, economic self-sufficiency, and personal goal attainment; and (4) age-appropriate education for children (ages 0 to 12th grade) to prepare in their success in school and life experiences.

Eligibility Requirements

Proposed programs or cross-program initiatives must be equipped to provide in-demand career skill-building and credentialing pathways for a minimum of 25 families, including at least one secondary student (grades 6-12) and at least one of their parents or caregivers. Applicants must meet **five eligibility requirements** to be considered:

1. Applicants must be a school or school district, adult education program, community or technical college, nonprofit organization, government agency, or library with established career-connected learning and credentialing pathways.



2. Offer **credentials of value** for secondary school students that align to local workforce or industry needs in STEM-related professions leading to wage and job security (example: shortage of automation engineers in manufacturing or MRI technicians in healthcare).
3. Demonstrate strong **cross-sector partnerships** that can create or increase access to adult career-connected learning, workforce development, and/or credentials of value for parents whose children are participating in aforementioned programs.
4. Commit to integrating (or preparing to integrate) the **four components of family literacy** in order to strengthen career learning and credentialing and participate in three NCFL-led training and technical assistance sessions with fellow applicants.
5. Be **geographically-based** within 50 miles of one of the following cities:

City	State
Huntsville	Alabama
Chandler	Arizona
Long Beach	California
Alpharetta	Georgia
Princeton	Indiana
Georgetown	Kentucky
Lexington	Kentucky
Ann Arbor	Michigan
Blue Springs	Mississippi
Troy	Missouri
Liberty	North Carolina
Jackson	Tennessee
Dallas	Texas



San Antonio	Texas
Buffalo	West Virginia

Benefits to Participation

- Increase multigenerational STEM-learning and credentialing opportunities and outcomes for secondary school students and their families.
- Participate in a national network of education and workforce providers with similar goals, challenges, and opportunities.
- Learn how to effectively integrate the four-components of family literacy with NCFL-led coaching and technical assistance as a model to strengthen social and economic mobility outcomes for families in your community.
- Gain visibility on a national stage at NCFL’s national 2027 Families Learning Conference (location TBD).

How to Apply

Complete the application via NCFL’s [online submission form](#) no later than **Thursday, June 18th at 11:59 pm ET**. It is recommended that applicants create a draft document to prepare all responses, then copy and paste responses into the online submission form. Applicants will be required to upload one document with their full budget alongside their budget narrative. Please read the guidelines below carefully before beginning your application, and make note of the character limits for each section. Incomplete submissions will not be reviewed.

Timeline and Important Dates

The project duration will follow the timeline below.

Date	Phase
May 18, 2026	RFP Release
June 2, 2026	Informational Webinar
June 18, 2026	Submission Deadline



Early July 2026	Notify select applicants
August-April 2026	<p>Estimated project implementation in 6-9 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1: Kickoff meeting with grant recipients and agreements ● 2-3: Family literacy training, integrated program design and recruitment plan, and technical assistance ● 3-4: Student and parent identification and/or recruitment for pilot with community partners ● 4-9: Pilot integrated family literacy activities with STEM-aligned workforce learning & credentialing preparation for 25 families, with ongoing NCFL technical assistance and support***We expect that implementation will vary depending on existing school or program timelines.
May 2027	Shared learning, project evaluation, and reporting
November 2027	NCFL's National 2027 Families Learning Conference

Review and selection

All complete applications will be reviewed by NCFL. Awards will be announced in early July 2026. Applicants will be notified by email regardless of selection status.

Questions?

Learn more about NCFL's Request for Proposals for this project: **Family Learning Pathways to In-Demand STEM Careers** by attending our [informational webinar for prospective applicants](#).

Contact **Sarah Cacicio**, NCFL project consultant, at scacicio@familieslearning.org with any questions about eligibility or the application process.



Please note: Full application details are provided below to assist you in preparing your proposal for submission. However, only applications received through NCFL's [online submission form](#) will be accepted.

Application Instructions

Please complete all sections below. Character limits are indicated for each narrative section. Responses that exceed the stated word limits may be disqualified. For budget and timeline, please attach the required Excel or table addendum.

Project Overview

For this section, please provide a title and brief summary of your proposed project. Your project summary should briefly describe the key goals, learners served, partner organizations involved, and intended impact of the pilot. It should make clear how family literacy/engagement can strengthen workforce learning and credentialing in your program/community, and how you plan to engage secondary students and their parents in multi-generational learning and earn developmentally-appropriate credentials of value tied to local, in-demand STEM careers.

1. Project Title (75 characters or less)*
2. Project Summary (Up to 2,100 characters)*

Lead Organization and Staff Contact Information

Please share information about the organization who will be responsible for receiving and administering grant funds, leading the project, and reporting on outcomes directly to NCFL. In addition, please provide information for the project's primary and secondary contact. The secondary point of contact can be an additional person from the lead applicant organization or a person from a partner organization involved in the project.

1. Organization Name*
2. Organization Address*
3. Organization Type*
 - School or school district
 - Adult Education or Family Literacy Program



- Community or Technical College
 - Local Government Office or Agency
 - Nonprofit Organization
 - Workforce Training or Credentialing Provider
 - Library
 - Other
4. If “other” is selected, please describe the type of organization.*
 5. Primary Contact Name*
 6. Primary Contact Title*
 7. Primary Contact Email Address*
 8. Primary Contact Phone Number*
 9. Primary Contact Role in the Project (Briefly describe)
 10. Secondary Contact Name*
 11. Secondary Contact Organization*
 12. Secondary Contact Title/Role*
 13. Secondary Contact Email Address*
 14. Secondary Contact Phone Number*
 15. Secondary Contact Role in the Project (Briefly describe)

Eligibility Requirements

Proposed programs or cross-program initiatives must be equipped to provide in-demand career skill-building and credentialing pathways for a minimum of 25 families, including at least one secondary student (grades 6-12) and at least one of their parents or caregivers. They must also meet **five eligibility requirements** to be considered:

1. Applicants must be a school or school district, adult education program, community or technical college, nonprofit organization, government agency, or library with established career-connected learning and credentialing pathways.
2. Offer **credentials of value** for secondary school students that align to local workforce or industry needs in STEM-related professions leading to wage and job security (example: shortage of automation engineers in manufacturing or MRI technicians in healthcare).
3. Demonstrate strong **cross-sector partnerships** that can create or increase access to adult career-connected learning, workforce development, and/or credentials of value for parents whose children are participating in aforementioned programs.



4. Commit to integrating (or prepare to integrate) the **four-components of family literacy** in order to strengthen career learning and credentialing, and participate in three NCFL-led training and technical assistance sessions with fellow applicants.
5. Op **geographically-based** within 50 miles of one of the following cities (drop-down below).

Does your organization meet the following eligibility requirements? Check all that apply.*

Applicants must:

- Be a school or school district, adult education program, community or technical college, nonprofit organization, government agency, or library with established career-connected learning and credentialing pathways.
- Offer **credentials of value** for secondary school students that align to local workforce or industry needs in STEM-related professions leading to wage and job security (example: shortage of automation engineers in manufacturing or MRI technicians in healthcare).
- Demonstrate strong **cross-sector partnerships** that can create or increase access to adult career-connected learning, workforce development, and/or credentials of value for parents whose children are participating in aforementioned programs.
- Commit to integrating (or prepare to integrate) the **four components of family literacy** in order to strengthen career learning and credentialing, and participate in three NCFL-led training and technical assistance sessions with fellow applicants.
- Be **geographically-based** within 50 miles of one of the following cities (drop-down below).

Eligible programs must take place within 50 miles of the following cities. Please select the geographic area within which you operate.*

City	State
Huntsville	Alabama
Chandler	Arizona
Long Beach	California

Alpharetta	Georgia
Princeton	Indiana
Georgetown	Kentucky
Lexington	Kentucky
Ann Arbor	Michigan
Blue Springs	Mississippi
Troy	Missouri
Liberty	North Carolina
Jackson	Tennessee
Dallas	Texas
San Antonio	Texas
Buffalo	West Virginia



Community & Workforce Landscape

Describe your local community and workforce context. Include relevant employers or industries in your region and explain the specific STEM-related education and credentialing opportunities available to secondary students and their parents. What gaps exist and why does this community need this initiative? (Character limit: 2,100)*



Project Goals and Design

What is the overall goal of the project? Describe how your proposed initiative will serve at least 25 families, including middle and/or high school students and their parents or guardians. Address the following: (1) what credentials or certifications participants will earn; (2) how



learning will be structured across generations (students and family members); and (3) how the four-components of family literacy will strengthen the program's impact. (Character Limit: 4,500)*

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Please describe the partner organizations involved, organization type, and role in the project. List all partner organizations involved in this project (e.g., employers, schools, workforce agencies, community organizations). For each partner, describe their specific role and contribution to the initiative.*

Project Timeline and Activities

Describe your operational plan and activities for piloting this project with a clear strategy and timeline. Character limit 2,100.*

Participant Recruitment

Describe how your program will identify and enroll a minimum of 25 families from your community. Include your outreach strategy, eligibility criteria, and how you will prioritize families who would most benefit from the program. (Character limit: 1,800)

Budget Narrative & Timeline

Describe how grant funds will be used across the project period. Explain key expenditure categories, the rationale for major costs, and how the timeline aligns with program milestones. Indirect costs may be no more than 10% of the budget. Please attach a full itemized budget in table format in PDF or spreadsheet as an addendum to this application.

What is your total project budget request (up to \$50,000).*

Please provide your estimated project timeline and budget narrative. (Character limit: 2,000)*



Please **upload** your itemized budget in table format in PDF or Excel sheet.*

Impact and Evaluation

Describe how you will track and measure participant outcomes. Include specific metrics, data collection methods, and how you will assess the program's long-term impact on the community — for example, career and credentialing exposure and awareness for 150 or more families. (Character limit: 4,200)*

Will your team be prepared to share findings on a national stage at NCFL's 2027 Families Learning Conference, tentatively scheduled for November 2027 ?*

Anything else you want to add about this project?*



References (in order of appearance)

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<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/a-nation-at-risk-to-a-nation-at-work-the-case-for-a-national-talent-strategy/>
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3. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, & College Board. (2025, September). *New hire readiness report 2025: Insights from hiring managers on entry-level workforce preparedness*. Washington, DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce.
<https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/new-hire-readiness-report-2025>
4. Sands, A., Cacicio, S., & Lavigne, C. (2025). *Building a resilient workforce: The critical role of foundational literacy skills*. ALL IN: The Adult Literacy & Learning Impact Network.
<https://allinliteracy.org/building-a-resilient-workforce-the-critical-role-of-foundational-literacy-skills/>
5. OECD (2024), *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris,
<https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en>.
6. “Nationwide Employer Survey Report,” The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (December 2023). <https://allinliteracy.org/reports/>
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8. Barbara Bush Foundation For Family Literacy. (2021). *National Action Plan for Adult Literacy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.barbarabush.org/national-action-plan-for-adult-literacy/>
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10. Levy Yeyati, E., Seyal, I., & Henn, S. (2025). The market value of non-degree credentials. (Working paper #196). Global Economy & Development at Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-market-value-of-non-degree-credentials/>
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12. Andreason, S., Rao, S., Spitze, S., & Wasden, D. (2026). Measuring What Matters: A New Framework for Evaluating Non-Degree Credential Quality. The Burning Glass Institute. <https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/measuringwhatmatters>
13. World Economic Forum. (2025, January 6). The Future of Jobs Report 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/digest/>
14. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, & College Board. (2025, September). New hire readiness report 2025: Insights from hiring managers on entry-level workforce preparedness. Washington, DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/new-hire-readiness-report-2025>
15. Adam, J. (2025, February 25). *20 certification programs for careers that pay well*. U.S. News & World Report. <https://money.usnews.com/careers/articles/certificate-programs-that-pay-well>
16. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, & College Board. (2025, September). New hire readiness report 2025: Insights from hiring managers on entry-level workforce preparedness. Washington, DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/new-hire-readiness-report-2025>