

Every Day Counts

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

About the Every Day Counts Initiative

1. What is the Every Day Counts initiative?

Every Day Counts is A Better Chicago's new initiative focused on reducing chronic absenteeism and strengthening student belonging, particularly in the post-pandemic context, through collaboration, innovation, and bold action. The initiative recognizes that attendance is both an academic and relational issue and seeks to support evidence-informed approaches rooted in connection, prevention, and trusted relationships.

2. What problem is this RFP seeking to address?

Chronic absenteeism has reached crisis levels in Chicago, increasing more than 100 percent since 2018. Persistent absence is associated with lower academic achievement, reduced graduation rates, and diminished long-term outcomes for young people. Attendance challenges are especially acute at **key transition points**, including the transition from middle to high school.

Applicants are encouraged to review the **Landscape Analysis** referenced in the RFP to better understand the context and opportunity. [You can find the Landscape Analysis here.](#)

Communities and Student Populations

3. What communities are prioritized through Every Day Counts?

This initiative has six communities of focus: Austin, Englewood, Garfield Park (East and West), South Lawndale, South Shore, and Woodlawn.

Applicants must demonstrate the ability to serve students in at least one of these focus communities. Proposals should be informed by the [Communities of Focus & Priority Funding Areas](#) and align with the age bands identified in the analysis referenced in the RFP.

4. Which student populations should proposals target?

Proposals should be informed by the Communities of Focus & Priority Funding Areas and align with the age bands identified in the analysis referenced in the RFP.

Priority populations include:

- **Elementary students** experiencing at-risk or moderate absenteeism
- **High school students** experiencing severe or acute chronic absenteeism.

Proposals should clearly identify the grade level(s) served and the attendance band(s) targeted.

5. Can a proposal focus on more than one priority community?

Yes. Proposals may serve students across multiple priority communities, provided the applicant can demonstrate the capacity, partnerships, and community knowledge needed to implement effectively in each location. Applicants should clearly describe how programming will be tailored to each community context.

Eligibility and Application Requirements

6. Who is eligible to apply?

Eligible applicants include:

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations
- Collaboratives with a fiscal sponsors
- For-profit organizations with a fiscal sponsor or as part of a collaboration

This pilot requires a formal partnership with one or more schools in target communities. Schools may not apply independently. All school-based proposals must include a community-based organization partner and a formal agreement (e.g., MOU or letter of commitment).

7. Are current or past A Better Chicago grantees eligible to apply?

Yes. Current and past A Better Chicago grantees are eligible to apply. Proposals should clearly articulate how this work is distinct from or builds meaningfully beyond currently funded activities.

8. Can organizations based outside Chicago apply?

Yes. Organizations based outside Chicago with a tested or promising approach to addressing chronic absenteeism are eligible to apply. However, all applicants must demonstrate strong community partnerships, deep knowledge of local context, and established relationships with schools and community-based organizations in the priority communities.

9. Can an organization submit more than one proposal?

Organizations may submit only one proposal under this RFP. Applicants are encouraged to put forward their strongest and most aligned concept for the Every Day Counts initiative.

Program Design and Strategy

10. What types of strategies is A Better Chicago seeking to fund?

We know that many approaches to attendance—mentoring, incentives, case management—can be effective.

What we're looking for is not whether your idea is familiar, but how intentionally it is designed to address the specific drivers of absenteeism in your context—and especially how schools and community partners can work together in new ways to strengthen belonging, engagement, and relevance for students.

We are interested in **evidence-informed approaches** that:

- Foster belonging, connection, and joy in learning
- Strengthen school–home relationships and trust
- Support students at critical transition points (especially 8th–9th grade)
- Address root causes of absenteeism, including mental health, safety, health, and structural barriers.

Approaches may operate at the **individual, school, or systems level**, though school-connected strategies are strongly encouraged.

Below are some tips and guiding questions as you develop your proposal:

- **Start with your “why?”** *What specific drivers of absenteeism are you trying to address in your community or school? Whose attendance challenges are you designing for? Which students are most affected, and why?*
- **Reimagine “common” interventions.** *How is your approach different from what schools or CBOs are already doing? What assumptions about attendance are you challenging? How will your approach make school feel more relevant, affirming, or motivating for students?*
- **Avoid parallel work; push for true integration.** *What will schools and CBOs do differently because of this partnership? Where is the handoff between school and community—and how will it feel seamless to students and families? How will power, decision-making, and data be shared across partners?*
- **Innovate in structure, not just programming.** *What new roles, routines, or touchpoints will this partnership introduce? How might time, space, or staffing be used differently to support attendance? What barriers in existing systems are you intentionally redesigning around?*

11. Does the proposed work need to be new or innovative?

Yes. Proposed work should be **meaningfully new, expanded, or pilot-oriented**. While proposals may build on existing programs, the RFP is not intended to solely sustain current operations without adaptation, learning, or growth.

12. What does “evidence-informed” mean?

Evidence-informed approaches are those grounded in research, practice-based evidence, or well-established frameworks (e.g., mentoring models, student success systems, family engagement strategies). Organizations are not required to have definitive impact results but should clearly articulate the rationale behind their approach.

13. Will A Better Chicago fund planning or design phases?

No. This RFP is intended to support the implementation of a defined pilot. While learning, refinement, and continuous improvement are expected throughout the grant period, standalone planning or design phases are not eligible for funding.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

14. Are partnerships required?

Yes. Strong partnerships—between schools and community-based organizations—are central to the Every Day Counts strategy. Partnerships may be **in development at the time** of application; however, all grants are contingent upon having a fully executed agreement (e.g., MOU, contract, or letter of commitment) with at least one school partner prior to award.

Organizations may also partner with other organizations to deliver coordinated interventions, though this is not required.

15. What qualifies as a “school partner”?

For the purposes of this initiative, a school partner must be a public or charter school. Partnerships with private schools are not eligible. Proposals must include at least one qualifying school partner and describe the school’s role in implementation, data sharing, and student engagement.

16. Are letters of commitment or MOUs required at the time of application?

Partnerships may be in development at the time of application. However, all awards are contingent upon having formalized agreements (e.g., MOUs, contracts, or letters of commitment) with required partners—particularly school partners—prior to grant award. Applicants should clearly indicate the status of partnerships and the timeline for formalization.

17. How should proposals demonstrate knowledge of the community?

Strong proposals will demonstrate deep understanding of the community context through authentic partnerships, local experience, and community-informed design. Applicants should describe how relationships with schools, families, and community-based organizations inform their approach and ensure the work is responsive to student and community needs.

Funding, Budget, and Timeline

18. How many grant proposals will be awarded? How much funding is available?

A Better Chicago has not set a goal on the number of grants to be awarded in the first year of the pilot. However, applicants can apply for **up to \$500,000 per year** with an initial grant period of **12 months**, with the potential for annual renewal based on performance and outcomes. We anticipate awarding at least three grants in the first year.

19. Are indirect or administrative (overhead) costs allowed?

Yes. Reasonable administrative and overhead costs may be included in project budgets, provided they are clearly justified and directly support implementation of the proposed work. A Better Chicago prioritizes resources being directed toward program delivery and outcomes, and budgets should reflect that emphasis.

20. What is the expected timeline for funded work?

Applicants should be prepared to **launch programming during the 2026–2027 school year**. Funding decisions are expected to be finalized no later than July 2026.

Application Process and Review

21. Where do I apply?

Applications will be accepted online via <https://forms.gle/MhEbzrb1DYuptpdC8>. Additional information about the Every Day Counts initiative and related funding opportunities will also be available on A Better Chicago’s website.

22. When are applications due?

Applications are due by **5:00 PM CT on February 27, 2026**. Late submissions will not be reviewed.

23. Who can I contact with additional questions? Will A Better Chicago staff be available to discuss our proposal prior to submission?

Our team is happy to respond to clarifying questions about eligibility, application requirements, or the overall RFP process. Please email everydaycounts@abetterchicago.org. To promote transparency and equitable access to information, A Better Chicago staff will not meet individually with applicants or provide feedback on specific proposals prior to submission.

We will host a virtual information session on Thursday, January 29th to review the RFP and respond to general questions. To register visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/every-day-counts-improving-student-belonging-and-attendance-info-session-tickets-1980570584935>. Responses to frequently asked questions will also be posted in an updated FAQ.

24. What is the application review process?

Applications will undergo a multi-stage review process designed to assess alignment, readiness, and potential for impact. Due diligence includes interviews with organizational leadership, staff, and key stakeholders; review of programmatic and operational documents; and, where appropriate, site visits.

25. When will applicants be notified of funding decisions?

Applicants can expect an initial follow-up from A Better Chicago within several weeks of submission. Final funding decisions will be communicated as part of the full review process.

Learning, Evaluation, and Support

26. What data and reporting requirements should applicants anticipate?

Every Day Counts is designed as a learning partnership. Funded organizations should expect quarterly check-ins with A Better Chicago, participation in a shared learning community, and reporting on implementation progress and agreed-upon outcomes related to attendance and belonging.

Grantees will be asked to track and share key metrics outlined in their proposal. Specific reporting formats, timelines, and data-sharing expectations will be finalized collaboratively with selected partners at the time of award.

27. If awarded, what supports are provided beyond funding?

A core component of Every Day Counts is shared learning and evaluation aligned with A Better Chicago's venture philanthropy model. Grantees will work with a dedicated evaluation partner to support measurement, learning, and continuous improvement.

In addition to funding, A Better Chicago provides:

- Capacity-building support
- Thought partnership and strategic advising
- Opportunities for learning and connection across A Better Chicago's portfolio