

VT Community Health Equity Partnership Community Project Funding to Address Health Inequities: Funding Application

Deadline: Midnight on September 9, 2022

Funding is intended to assist **NEK Prosper! Caledonia + Southern Essex Accountable Health Community** to address health inequity(s) experienced in the St. Johnsbury District which were exacerbated during COVID-19, and which are described in a **Data Driven Problem Statement** as: **Due to stigma, marginalization and systemic inequalities, not everyone in Caledonia and Southern Essex Counties has fair and just opportunity to prosper (be financially secure, mentally healthy, physically healthy, well-housed and well-nourished), nor safe, accessible and inclusive opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making about the health and well-being of themselves, their families and their communities. This is true particularly for those experiencing stigma, marginalization and avoidable systemic inequalities associated with socioeconomic status; race, ethnicity and culture; sexual orientation and gender identity; visible and invisible disabilities; trauma, mental health and substance misuse disorders, and justice-involvement.**

NEK Prosper! is interested in supporting projects which help us achieve a **Vision** of prosperity for all and our **Aspiration** to build our collective and community capacity to dismantle systemic inequality and marginalization, foster community leadership and community-driven solutions and ensure fair and just opportunity to health and prosperity.

1. Type of Applicant:

Non-profit Organization Group/Association^ Individual* Other (please describe):

2. Name of Applicant (organization, group, individual):

Vermont Learning-Support Initiative, Inc. (VLSI)

c. Applicant's (organization or fiscal sponsor as applicable) **Street Address** (Street/Road, City, State, Zip Code):

Spark 165 Wilson Street Greensboro, Vermont 05841*

***Not a mailing address**

4. Primary Contact Person Name (for project):

Bradford Smith, Executive Director

5. **Primary Contact Person** (for project) **Email Address:**

bsmith@vermontlearningsupport.org

6. **Primary Contact Person** (for project) **Preferred Phone Number:**

802.310.5374

7. **Tax Identification Number** (organization or fiscal sponsor as applicable):

81-2645995

8. **Amount Requested** (no less than \$2,500 or more than \$50,000):

\$8,375

9. **Schedule of Work:**

- Start Date: November 1, 2022
- End Date (no later than May 31, 2023): May 31, 2023

10. **Project Name** – Provide a one-line name for your project:

Not “Invisible”! NEK Accepting Neurodivergence

11. **Project Purpose Summary** – Provide a short three to four sentence summary of the purpose of your project:

VLSI will pilot community- and school-based efforts to engage with and support local neurodivergent learners and their families, through afterschool programming for middle-school students and regular family-inclusive meetings featuring discussions, presentations, and affirming activities. We will also expand our efforts to the same population in the St. Johnsbury area. By sharing experiences and finding common ground, our goal is to promote self-esteem and resilience in parents and their youth, who know the painful reality of being marginalized and stigmatized because they learn differently.

12. **What Vermont town(s) will be directly served by your project?**

Hardwick, Greensboro, Craftsbury, Albany; St. Johnsbury

13. **Describe the Project** - the work you'll do, the overall timeline and how you'll use the requested funds (will also need to attach a Project Budget – see example on Page 3) (funded portion must be complete by May 31, 2023) (no more than 1,500 characters):

There are two related parts to the project: an afterschool program for neurodivergent middle-school students with distinct modules, and a community-based neurodivergent youth & family program featuring regular meetings to socialize, learn, share experiences and have fun. The afterschool component is designed to offer three separate empowerment curricula, each roughly ten weeks in length. The community-meeting component is designed to offer twice-monthly gatherings, ranging from informative presentations on group-selected topics to social activities and fun events. Both parts are now being launched in the greater Hardwick/Craftsbury area; once established, VLSI will expand the project to the St. Johnsbury area in 2023. Funding will support the project in both locations.

Timeline & Activities:

- By November 1 - Fully operational with both parts of project in Hardwick area.
- By January 30 - Begin work in St. Johnsbury area on both parts of project, including a local outreach campaign offering relevant resources to neurodivergent youth and their families. Identify school partner for afterschool program.
- By March 1 - In each location, identify and support leadership development for at least one Peer Advocate and at least one Parent Advocate.
- Mid-March - Engage in Neurodiversity Celebration Week in each location.
- By May 31 - Wrap up for school year, with group-determined direction in each location for summer activity and beyond.

14. Describe the Focus Population (who will benefit?) (no more than 500 characters):

The NEK Not “Invisible”! Project will focus on those students and their families/guardians who may or do identify with this part of humankind, and in particular on youth in Grades 7-9 or the home-school equivalent. Neurodivergence in its various forms (Specific Learning Disabilities, ADHD, Autism Spectrum) describes roughly one in five individuals, with many more likely in the general population who have never/not yet received clinical evaluations.

15. Describe how this project was identified or designed by the intended beneficiaries (no more than 500 characters):

All of VLSI’s work is informed by neurodivergent individuals. Our board, our contractors, our interns—all share this identity to a significant degree. This project is the outgrowth of years of effort to make neurodiversity acceptable among the wider, neurotypical population, and is driven by first-hand knowledge on the part of many who advise, support,

and work with VLSI that equity remains elusive. We believe that progress toward that goal must begin in the learning years.

16. Describe the Project Goals and Desired Results (what will success look like?) (no more than 500 characters):

We anticipate:

- Participation of at least 8 youth and 8 parents/guardians overall in each location (with an average of 50% attendance at each event);

As determined by survey:

- 1/2 of youth participants feel less alone in their journey;
- 1/2 of parents/caregivers feel the meetings are something they and their families have benefited from;
- 1/2 of parents/caregivers feel more hopeful;
- 1/2 of youth participants say they find the meetings worth attending.

Desired results will include:

- Decrease in likelihood of participant isolation and negative self-image by providing socially and contextually appropriate messaging;
- Increase in likelihood of mental wellness by providing safe opportunities for participating youth to become more comfortable with their own and their peers' differing neurological identities.

17. Identifying milestones provides a way to monitor the progress of your project and make course corrections, if needed. When and how will you identify milestones for this project? (no more than 1,500 characters):

When seeking engagement with stigmatized and marginalized people, young and older, a huge potential problem is trust. While the afterschool part of the project may succeed more easily, nothing about our community-based plan to bring neurodivergent youth & parents together on a regular basis will progress without an honest, authentic appeal to participants. It must be clear to those families that they are being heard, that their voices matter. Monitoring this engagement closely is essential, and may require effort well beyond a twice-monthly schedule.

The NEK Not "Invisible"! Project's first benchmark will be to measure how well the word is being spread through regular and irregular community channels, and to adjust outreach accordingly. The second milestone will be to assess the impact of meetings on those

who attend, without being overly reliant on standard Results-Based Accountability protocols. Those behind the voices know whether someone is really listening, or just checking boxes.

If attaining a critical mass of attendance proves problematic, VLSI will consult with members of the local neurodivergent population to address that. We know the importance of patience in connecting with those whose ability to trust may have been compromised. But the bottom line for this work will remain: with engagement, there is progress.

- 18. Describe your team** (the project champions and any community partners you are working with / intend to work with to achieve these results). **If not yet working with these partners, please describe your plan to outreach and engage these partners** (no more than 1,500 characters):

A major partner for this project will be the Rural Arts Collaborative in Greensboro, also known as WonderArts, which has partnered with us for several years on previous projects. VLSI is contracting with Rural Arts to provide a neurodivergent educator for the afterschool component as well as to furnish safe meeting space in Hardwick for the youth & family community gatherings. In addition, project champions there include local teachers and community members who are essential in getting the word about this work to those students and families who might benefit.

Our network of support is stronger in the Hardwick area currently than in St. Johnsbury, but VLSI will build on its previous partnerships with Catamount Arts and NEK Youth Services, among others, as we ramp up our effort in that community. We are pursuing a working relationship with the St. Johnsbury Community Hub at the urging of several community members, including one who also serves on the VLSI Advisory Committee. In addition, VLSI has previous and pledged grant support from the Greensboro Association, and has received funding previously from NVRH through its Community Fund.

- 19. Please explain how the intended work may positively impact the data driven problem statement and/or help NEK Prosper! achieve our Vision and Aspiration described above** (no more than 1,500 characters):

This pilot work is meant to provide safe places where a sense of belonging among neurodivergent youth can occur, incorporating positive messaging about being who they are as well as existing family support structure. Navigating the public school system, where they can feel unappreciated, inadequate, even invisible, can be harrowing for these learners and their families. We will create affirming activity and meeting opportunities where they can instead feel seen and heard, connected and valuable. In these affirming spaces, families benefit by interacting with others facing similar challenges, while our afterschool programming encourages learners to believe in themselves and their future. Both elements are critical to the ability of neurodiverse students to realize their potential, thereby reducing

the high risk of self-destructive coping strategies such as substance misuse and antisocial or other unhealthy behaviors.

20. **(Optional) Feel free to provide additional information you think may be useful to the reviewers in evaluating this application. What else should we know about the project that we didn't ask? (no more than 1,500 characters):**

A healthy community depends on the health of its individuals; when a significant number of those individuals carry increased health risks due to stigmatization and misunderstanding, the consequences extend well beyond personal suffering. Even prior to the pandemic, research indicated that 30% to 50% of neurodivergent students experience anxiety and depression. For just one neurodiverse group, according to JAMA Pediatrics “ADHD doubles the risk of depression (and when ADHD co-occurs with depression and conduct disorder, multiplies the chances of suicide) [and] nearly doubles the risk of addiction to alcohol, drugs, or nicotine.” These should be house-on-fire connections in any month, not just in Suicide Prevention Month. School failure and incarceration—recent studies reveal 30-40% of incarcerated individuals to be functionally illiterate, with many of these having undiagnosed neurodivergent conditions—are life outcomes correlated with these learners as they become adults. Our communities pay a heavy price for failing to meet the needs of such students when they are young.

Project budget is in a separate document.

Applicant Name: Vermont Learning-Support Initiative (VLSI)					
Project Name: Not "Invisible"! NEK Accepting Neurodivergence Project					
Applicant Address: P.O. Box 8 Hardwick, VT 05843					
	Description/Justification	Funding Requested	Other Funding	Secured Funding	Total
PERSONNEL					
Bradford Smith	VLSI Director, in charge of project planning/execution (November 2022-May 2023, 10hrs/wk/31 wks@\$30/hr). Remainder of salary covered by individual donors, grants and in-kind contributions.	\$ 4,000.00	\$2,800.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 9,300.00
Rural Arts Collaborative	Educator, project afterschool programming (November-May, 7hrs/wk/23wks@\$25/hr)	\$ 2,000.00	\$ -00	\$ 2,025.00	\$ 4,025.00
TBD	Undergraduate Intern, program assistance, St. Johnsbury (January-May, 8hrs/wk/13wks@\$15/hr)	\$ 600.00	\$ 960.00	\$ -00	\$ 1,560.00
TBD	Guest Presenters (6), youth & family programming (November-May, \$100 each)	\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 600.00	\$ 600.00
Total Personnel Costs		\$ 6,600.00	\$3,760.00	\$ 5,125.00	\$15,485.00
NON PERSONNEL/OPERATING					
Advertising/Marketing	NEK initial/subsequent outreach, posters, local media	\$ -00	\$ 200.00	\$ 200.00	\$ 400.00
Equipment	iPad for check-in procedure, software	\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00
Materials/Supplies	board games, activity/presentation supplies	\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00
Training/Education	Youth Mental Health First Aid (for volunteers, intern)	\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00
Travel	to/from activity sites (gas cards)	\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00
Professional Fees/Consultants	Mental Health Consultant	\$ 500.00	\$ -00	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,000.00
Activity Space Rental		\$ -00	\$ -00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00
Other	curriculum module	\$ 375.00	\$ 375.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 850.00
					\$ -00
Total Non Personnel/Operating Costs		\$ 875.00	\$ 575.00	\$ 2,700.00	\$ 4,150.00
Total Direct Costs		\$ 7,475.00	\$4,335.00	\$ 7,825.00	\$19,635.00
INDIRECT/ADMINISTRATIVE					
Indirect Costs		\$ 900.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 2,400.00
GRAND TOTAL		\$ 8,375.00	\$4,835.00	\$ 8,825.00	\$22,035.00