Upward Momentum: Bridging Divides

Open Call Proposal Information and Criteria

Upward Momentum is a Missouri-based philanthropic initiative launched in August 2024 to address the root causes of generational poverty and enhance economic mobility across the state. Three strategic pillars guide our work:
- Caring for Families: Re-centering and re-imagining what it means to "care" for families and their economic well-being.
- Navigating Work: Providing guidance and comprehensive support to help individuals effectively engage with labor market systems
- Strengthening Communities: Equipping communities with the conditions, coordination, and capacity needed to support long-term economic mobility.

Across the three pillars, our work is guided by our Bridging Divides initiative. Within Bridging Divides, we focus on the power of collective learning and collaborations to help leaders in rural and urban communities understand common issues, align resources and efforts and collectively find solutions to obstacles to opportunity that families and individuals experience across the state. The goal of this initiative is to reach as many communities as possible across Missouri by creating an exchange of ideas and approaches that can be adapted in both rural and urban settings.

We are pleased to announce a second round of funding under Bridging Divides. We want to hear from community-led, community-driven nonprofit organizations in Missouri with a demonstrated capability to advance upward mobility for populations facing the greatest need. This open call aims to support initiatives that are looking to grow or expand promising work that can help leaders and institutions collectively drive change and sustainable impact. Proposals should aim to bridge across rural and urban communities through shared solutions that are effective in both environments. This could involve a rural approach that can be adapted for an urban setting, or an urban approach that can be replicated in rural areas.

Successful applications will demonstrate:
1. A track record of impact: Ideas that have made measurable and meaningful impacts on the quality of lives and economic mobility of the focus population.
2. Focus on proven concepts: Initiatives that have traction and can provide proof of concept that shows potential for successful implementation. We also look for concrete plans for work in rural and urban environments.
3. Potential for scaling: Ideas that can be replicated/adapted and scaled beyond the local level to make an impact on the lives of all Missourians.
4. A commitment to dialogue and community engagement: Ideas that actively promote open and inclusive communication among diverse community members and stakeholders,

promoting mutual understanding.

5. A commitment to collaboration: Ideas that focus on addressing common issues and aligning resources and efforts.

Five (5) organizations from across the state will be selected based on published criteria. We have allocated $1 million for this open call, with each selected organization receiving a $200,000 1-year grant to support and amplify their efforts to create lasting, transformative change in Missouri communities. Selected organizations will also participate in a year-long learning cohort.

Applications are due on March 31st, 2026 at midnight. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to grants@upwardmo.org

To apply, please send your application in a PDF to grants@upwardmo.org. Please title the email as "Upward Momentum 2026 Open Call". Please provide all of the information requested in the application including required uploads.

Upward Momentum
Advancing Economic Mobility for All

Application Questions

Please provide a brief description of your organization, including mission and primary activities:

Who will serve as a primary contact for this grant?

What communities or populations do you primarily serve?

What issue or need does this project address?

Provide a clear summary of the proposed project. Include your project goals, timeline, and state who will be responsible for implementing the project.

How will you track and evaluate success? Please outline specific metrics and outcomes you anticipate.

Provide a detailed budget for the project.

Provide a budget narrative.

Please attach your latest Form 990 and organizational operating budget for the current year.

Proposal Criteria details:

A Track Record of Impact:

Rating	Details
1-Minimal Impact	The proposed solution has not been tried before or has no clear evidence of impact. There is little to no measurable data showing positive outcomes. Any results are anecdotal. It is unclear whether the project could deliver long-term benefits for many people.
2-Limited Impact	The proposed solution has been tried in a limited way. It shows some measurable impact, but results are small in scale or short-term. Evidence is limited, and it is uncertain whether the project can deliver long-term benefits for a large number of people.
3-Moderate Impact	The initiative has been implemented before and shows a measurable, positive impact. Results suggest meaningful benefits for a moderate number of individuals or communities. There is reasonable evidence that the project could deliver longer-term outcomes.
4-Significant Impact	The idea has a strong track record of measurable impact. It has been implemented before with clear evidence of long-term, positive outcomes. Results show sustained benefits for a large number of individuals or communities.

Focus on Proven Concepts:

Rating	Details
1-Unproven Concept	The proposed solution is still in the idea phase. There is little to no evidence that it is feasible or likely to succeed. The logic model is missing or unclear. There is no

	proof of concept or track record of implementation. It is unclear how the idea would work in a rural setting.
2-Early Stage Concept	The proposed solution shows some promise, but feasibility is still uncertain. The logic model is basic or partially developed. The idea has some initial traction but limited proof of concept, with only early evidence of success. It is somewhat clear how the idea would work in either a rural or urban setting, but not both.
3-Demonstrated Concept	The proposed solution is feasible and supported by a mostly clear logic model. It has a proof of concept with evidence of successful implementation in real-world settings. There is a reasonable plan for how the idea would work in either a rural or urban setting.
4-Established Concept	The proposed solution is clearly feasible and has substantial proof of concept. It has a clear and well-developed logic model. It has been successfully implemented before with a record of achieving intended outcomes. There is a concrete plan for how the idea will work in both rural and urban settings.

Potential for Scaling:

Rating	Details
1-Low Potential for Scaling	The idea is highly local and tied to a specific place or group. It is difficult to replicate in other communities. It does not address a broader issue beyond the local context. It may be constrained by unique local factors or resources.
2-Moderate Potential for Scaling	The idea shows some potential for replication, but it may require substantial adaptation to be effective in other contexts. Its impact is mostly limited to similar communities. Broader application

	is uncertain.
3-High Potential for Scaling	The idea is replicable and has demonstrated potential for scaling beyond the local level. It could be adapted to different contexts with relative ease and could have a broader impact with additional resources.
4-Exceptional Potential for Scaling	The idea is highly scalable with a clear plan for replication across multiple regions (urban and rural). It has strong potential to make a widespread impact on the lives of all Missourians and beyond.

A commitment to dialogue and community Engagement:

Rating	Details
1-Minimal Engagement	The idea shows little to no effort to promote dialogue or community engagement. Community members are not meaningfully involved. Diverse voices are missing, and the idea does not help bridge divides.
2-Limited Engagement	The idea includes some community engagement, but it is limited or uneven. Dialogue is mostly one-way or includes only a narrow group. Efforts to bridge divides are unclear or weak.
3-Active Engagement	The idea actively promotes dialogue among diverse community members. It includes concrete ways to engage people and build understanding. It can help bridge divides, though engagement could be deeper or more inclusive.
4-Exemplary Engagement	The idea shows a strong commitment to ongoing, inclusive dialogue and community engagement. The proposal shows a specific and practical way to bring together diverse voices in meaningful ways. It has a strong potential to help bridge divides and build mutual

	understanding and trust.

A Commitment to Collaboration:

Rating	Details
1-Minimal Collaboration	The idea is mostly a standalone effort led by a single organization. It does not meaningfully involve other organizations or key stakeholders. Resources, planning, and delivery are handled in isolation, even though other actors work on the same issue.
2-Limited Collaboration	The idea includes some collaboration, but it is limited or informal. Partners play narrow or short-term roles. Coordination is weak, and collaboration does not meaningfully shape goals, design, or outcomes.
3-Strong Collaboration	The idea emphasizes collaboration with multiple organizations and stakeholders, focusing on aligning resources and efforts to address common issues. There is a clear commitment to working together, though there may be opportunities to deepen these relationships. There is some potential to engage this network for resources and learning.
4-Exemplary Collaboration	The idea is built on strong, sustained collaboration across multiple organizations and sectors. Partners share goals, roles, and responsibility for results. Resources and efforts are fully aligned to achieve collective impact on a common issue. There is a significant potential to engage this network for resources and learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Upward Momentum's 3 pillars?

1. Caring for families: Re-center and re-imagining what it means to care for families and their economic well being.
2. Navigating Work: Navigational and wrap-around support that improves the odds of people successfully accessing and interacting with key systems in the labor market.
3. Strengthening Communities: Equipping communities with the conditions, coordination, and capacity needed to support long-term economic mobility.

What is Bridging Divides?

The purpose of Bridging Divides is to facilitate collaboration among leaders and institutions to address common challenges and implement large-scale solutions across both urban and rural communities. A key focus is to bridge the divide between rural and urban communities through supporting solutions that are effective in both environments.

Last year, 10 organizations received awards:
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri (St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, and St. Charles, MO)
- Per Scholas (Kansas City and St. Louis, MO and seeking expansion into rural areas)
- Launch Code (St. Louis, MO and seeking expansion into rural areas)
- East Missouri Action Agency (Park Hills, MO and eight rural counties)
- HOSCO Shift (Kansas City, MO)
- Job Point (Columbia, MO)
- Center for Urban Agriculture (Columbia, MO)
- Connections to Success (Kansas City, MO)
- Heartland Center for Jobs & Freedom (Kansas City, MO and rural communities)
- St. Francis Community Services (St. Louis, MO and Washington County)

Who is eligible to apply?

- Nonprofits in Missouri who work in one of the three pillars (Caring for Families, Navigating Work and/or Strengthening Communities). Applicant programs also must have the potential to be scaled to other urban and rural communities.

What is the funding amount range?

Each grantee will receive a total of $200,000 for one year.

How many grants will be awarded?
5 grants will be rewarded, each at the amount of $200,000.

How will organizations be selected?

Applications will be assessed across five areas, including track record of impact, focus on proven concepts, potential for scaling, a commitment to dialogue and community engagement, and a commitment to collaboration.