

Career Exploration Evidence Fund

Funding Opportunity &
Invitation for Letters of Interest

November 16, 2026

PROJECT EVIDENT

Executive Summary

Career exploration is a continuous, open-ended, hands-on, immersive process which happens over time, in which young people investigate themselves and the world of work. Career exploration is growing fast in middle and high schools, but the field still lacks a shared definition of quality or evidence of what works for students. The Career Exploration Evidence Fund aims to expand access to high-quality career exploration by building credible evidence of its impact on young people. The fund will focus on co-developing deeper outcome measurement, collaborative learning, and evidence generation. **We are seeking school districts, public charter schools, nonprofit organizations, and technology providers that deliver comprehensive career exploration programming and are interested in partnering to advance evidence for the field.**

TO BE ELIGIBLE, APPLICANTS MUST:

- Be a nonprofit, a school district, a technology provider, or a public charter school.
- Deliver comprehensive career exploration programming.
- Serve students in grades 6–10 during the school year.
- Have the ability to collect and share data at the student level.
- Have a reach of at least 500 students.
- Serve young people furthest from opportunity.
- Be interested in partnering to advance evidence for high-quality career exploration.

PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT A FIT:

- One-time experiences.
- Programs built around a single career or field.
- Programs delivered in private schools.

GRANTEES WILL RECEIVE:

- Up to $500,000 in funding over 30 months.
- Support for deeper measurement of career exploration.
- Customized technical assistance for measurement and program improvement.
- Structured opportunities to share through a collaborative learning community.
- Opportunity to generate evidence.
- Platform for field-building leadership.

WORKING WITH GRANTEE PARTNERS, THE FUND WILL SEEK SEVERAL OUTCOMES:

- Build shared measurement that works for practitioners.
- Generate evidence of what works, for whom, and under what conditions.
- Strengthen and expand high-quality career exploration.
- Refine the definition of career exploration and share what we learn.

KEY DATES:

Informational webinar	December 2, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. ET (Register here)
Deadline for questions	December 8, 2026
Letter of Interest due	December 15, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET
LOI decisions and full proposal invitations	Early January 2027
Full proposals due (by invitation only)	Early February 2027
Awards announced	Early March 2027

How to apply: See Invitation for Letters of Interest. The LOI takes about one to two hours to complete. **Questions:** See the Applicant FAQ or email careerexploration@projectevident.org.

The Career Exploration Evidence Fund

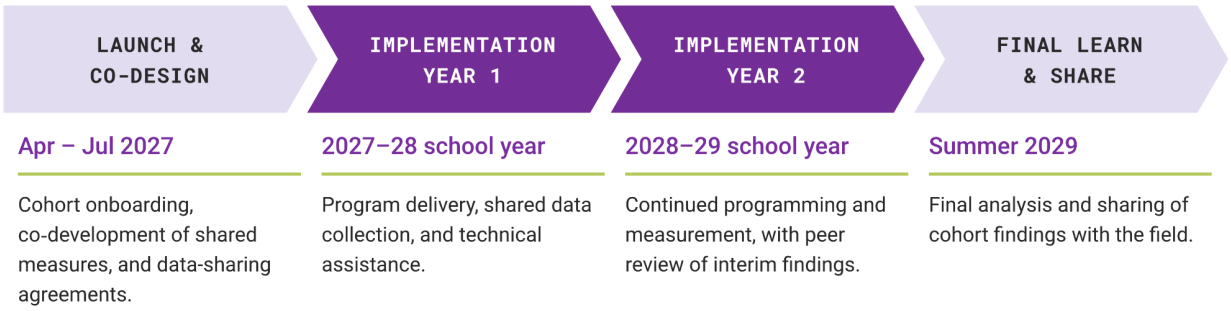
Career exploration is a continuous, open-ended, hands-on, immersive process which happens over time, in which young people investigate themselves and the world of work. It gives young people repeated opportunities for real-world experiences, ongoing reflection, building relationships and social capital, and revising plans as they learn, so they develop the awareness, skills, and agency to make, and remake, informed choices about careers and pathways. Please see Appendix A for background on designing career exploration for outcomes.

Project Evident has worked with the Walton Family Foundation and Britebound as inaugural investors to launch a fund to expand access to high-quality, well-defined career exploration by funding practitioners doing the work and building credible evidence of its impact on young people. **The focus will be on career exploration programs with a formal connection to schools or run by school districts, that serve all or a subset of the 6–10 grade range, with a preference for programs that reach students furthest from opportunity.**[1] Following portfolio selection in spring 2027, grantees will work together to co-develop a practitioner-centric measurement framework for career exploration grounded in the work discussed above. Project Evident will provide technical assistance and partner closely with grantees to implement the measurement framework in their existing sites or schools during academic years 2027–28 and 2028–29. During this time, grantees will work to track program context and student-level data on career exploration and academic outcomes, producing reports on what has been learned about outcomes and the conditions for high-quality implementation.

Working with grantee partners, the fund will seek several outcomes:

- **Build shared measurement that works for practitioners.** Grantees and Project Evident will co-develop a measurement framework for career exploration.
- **Generate evidence of what works, for whom, and under what conditions.** Using program context data, as well as student-level data on career exploration and academic outcomes, the fund will examine which activities and implementation conditions generate promising outcomes.
- **Strengthen and expand high-quality career exploration.** The fund will help grantees explore ways to evolve their programs to deepen quality based on the existing evidence and analysis of the data generated in partnership with the grantees.
- **Refine the definition of career exploration and share what we learn.** Evidence from the fund will be used to test and sharpen the definition of high-quality career exploration.

[1] This is defined in the eligibility criteria.



Support for Grantees

Grantees will join a cohort of organizations working on the same questions and contributing to the field of career exploration. Support will include:

- **Up to $500,000 in funding over 30 months.** The funding is meant to build on programs that are already in place by adding capacity for program improvement, measurement, and data.
- **Support for deeper measurement of career exploration.** Grantees will co-develop shared measures and learn collectively about outcomes.
- **Customized technical assistance for measurement and program improvement.** TA will support measurement capacity and program adaptation to enhance outcomes.
- **Structured opportunities to share through a collaborative learning community.** Grantees will share what they're learning about implementation and learn from other programs.
- **Opportunity to generate evidence.** Analysis will be provided to each organization for internal program insights and aggregated to provide insights for the field.
- **Platform for field-building leadership.** The work of the grantees will be featured in case studies, field-facing reports, and presentations focused on concrete examples of what high-quality exploration looks like and what it achieves.

Grantee Commitments

The fund is a partnership, and what the cohort is able to learn and share depends on the engagement of the grantees. We ask that grantees commit to the following:

- **Deliver career exploration programming across both academic years.** Grantees will maintain programming through academic years 2027–28 and 2028–29.
- **Help build and adopt shared measures.** Grantees will fully engage to co-develop the fund's measurement framework and put it into practice with exploratory targets.
- **Collect and share student-level data, including academic data.** With support from the Project Evident Data Hub, grantees will gather student-level contextual, programmatic, and outcome data on career exploration as well as academic outcomes, consistent with applicable student privacy laws.
- **Use evidence that has been generated.** Grantees will leverage insights from data and technical assistance to inform program adaptation for stronger outcomes.
- **Take part in the learning community.** Grantees will participate in quarterly peer learning sessions and in-person convenings, sharing what has been learned.

- **Contribute to field learning.** Grantees will also contribute to case studies, field-facing products, and presentations that celebrate the work and share the fund's findings.

Invitation for Letters of Interest

The application process begins with a brief Letter of Interest (LOI). Applicants selected at the LOI stage will be invited to submit a full proposal. The LOI is expected to take one to two hours to complete.

> **HOW TO APPLY:**
>
> Submit the online Letter of Interest form by **11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, December 15, 2026.** The LOI questions are also provided in Appendix B for reference.

APPLICANT SUPPORT:

To ensure all applicants receive the same information, Project Evident will host an informational webinar and respond to questions through a public FAQ.

- **Informational webinar:** Wednesday, December 2, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. ET. The session will cover the opportunity, the selection criteria, and the LOI. Register for the webinar. After the webinar, the recording and slides will be available in the Applicant FAQ.
- **Questions:** For answers to frequently asked questions, please see the public Applicant FAQ, which is updated at least weekly. New entries are marked with the date added. Additional questions may be sent to careerexploration@projectevident.org by Tuesday, December 8, 2026.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their LOI in early January 2027. Invited applicants will receive detailed instructions for the full proposal, which will be due in early February 2027. Full proposals will be accepted by invitation only.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility is open to a broad range of career exploration programs, including both in-person and technology-first models provided by schools and their partners. We recognize career exploration can take many forms, including information and awareness activities (career assessments, guest speakers, and workplace tours); advising, planning, and coaching (individual career and academic plans, career coaching, and mentoring); work-based learning (job shadowing, internships, and summer jobs); and applied learning (project-based learning, career-connected academic courses, and summer or afterschool STEM programs). We believe activities alone do not define effective exploration; what matters is that the activities deliver young people repeated opportunities for real-world experiences, ongoing reflection, building relationships and social capital, and revising plans as they learn, so they develop the awareness,

skills, and agency to make, and remake, informed choices about careers and pathways. **The requirements below describe which programs are eligible and which are not a fit, so that organizations can tell whether to submit a Letter of Interest.**

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS MUST:

- **Be a nonprofit organization, a school district, a technology provider, or a public charter school.** Programs with multiple sites can select a subset of sites for the application to meet the other eligibility criteria below.
- **Deliver comprehensive career exploration programming.** Career exploration is a clearly defined focus of a program that has been in place for at least one academic year. The activities feature at least three elements of the framework for high-quality career exploration.
- **Serve students in grades 6–10 during the school year.** Programs serving any subset of grades 6–10 are invited to apply. Programming must run during academic years 2027–28 and 2028–29, when data collection will take place. Summer programs are not eligible unless they are part of a school-year program.
- **Have the ability to collect and share data at the student level.** Readiness to gather student-level contextual, programmatic, and outcome data on career exploration as well as academic outcomes, with support from the Project Evident Data Hub and consistent with applicable student privacy laws. School district and charter school applicants must have a process to be able to share de-identified data. Nonprofits and technology providers must have a data-sharing agreement with relevant sites in place by the full proposal.
- **Have a reach of at least 500 students.** The program serves at least 500 students annually in grades 6–10. If the application is being made with a subset of sites, then the sites that are included in the application reach at least 500 students.
- **Serve young people furthest from opportunity.** At least 30% of students served must be from the population furthest from opportunity, which includes students from low-income families, students in rural communities, and other young people with barriers to career exploration access (such as students from families with no history of college-going or students who otherwise would not have access to career exploration activities).
- **Be interested in partnering to advance evidence for high-quality career exploration.** Willing to engage with co-developing measurement, and the framework for high-quality career exploration, as described in Grantee Commitments and in Strengthening Career Exploration (Appendix A).

PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT A FIT:

Some programs share features with career exploration but fall outside this fund's scope. This reflects what the fund is designed to learn, not the value of their work. The fund does not support:

- **One-time experiences** (e.g., career fairs, field trips, or single-day events) **or stand-alone services** (e.g., work-based learning, academic advising, college counseling, or career navigation services) that are not part of a broader career exploration program.

- **Programs built around a single career or field**, specifically programs whose primary purpose is preparing students for a single occupation or industry, without structured opportunities to explore other fields or revisit their choices, such as stand-alone apprenticeships or single-sector training programs.
- **Programs delivered in private schools**, since the fund's evidence is intended to inform public school systems. Organizations that work in both public and private settings may focus their application on public school sites.

Full Proposal Selection Criteria

Applicants should address eligibility criteria at the LOI stage. For candidates that move to full proposal, reviewers will apply, at minimum, the following criteria:

- **Comprehensiveness.** Programs that address more of the five framework components, and connect them in ways that build on one another, will be stronger candidates.
- **Track record of measurement.** Programs with a longer track record of measuring activities, dosage, and outcomes will be stronger candidates. Programs with administrative data access or data systems in place will be stronger candidates.
- **Middle-to-high school transition.** The portfolio will include programs serving students in subsets of grades 6–10. We are particularly interested in programs that can show experience spanning the transition from middle to high school.
- **Serve young people furthest from opportunity.** Stronger candidates will serve a greater proportion of students furthest from opportunity as described above.
- **Program maturity and organizational capacity.** Reviewers will consider the program's track record of quality and the organization's financial and operational stability to sustain the program beyond the grant period. They will also consider the program's potential to reach more students.
- **School and district partnerships.** For non-district applicants, reviewers will consider the strength and depth of school and district partnerships. This includes access to students, school records such as attendance, and the settings where the program is delivered, as well as partners' commitment to the fund's learning goals.

We look forward to hearing from you…

Young people deserve experiences that widen what they believe is possible. Career exploration programming is expanding faster than the evidence behind it. If you are excited by the opportunity to partner, build evidence together, and develop a deeper understanding of how career exploration can drive outcomes for young people, please submit a Letter of Interest by December 15, 2026. We look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix A: Strengthening Career Exploration

Career exploration is a continuous, open-ended, hands-on, immersive process which happens over time, in which young people investigate themselves and the world of work. It gives young people repeated opportunities for real-world experiences, ongoing reflection, building relationships and social capital, and revising plans as they learn, so they develop the awareness, skills, and agency to make, and remake, informed choices about careers and pathways.

Why is Career Exploration Important?

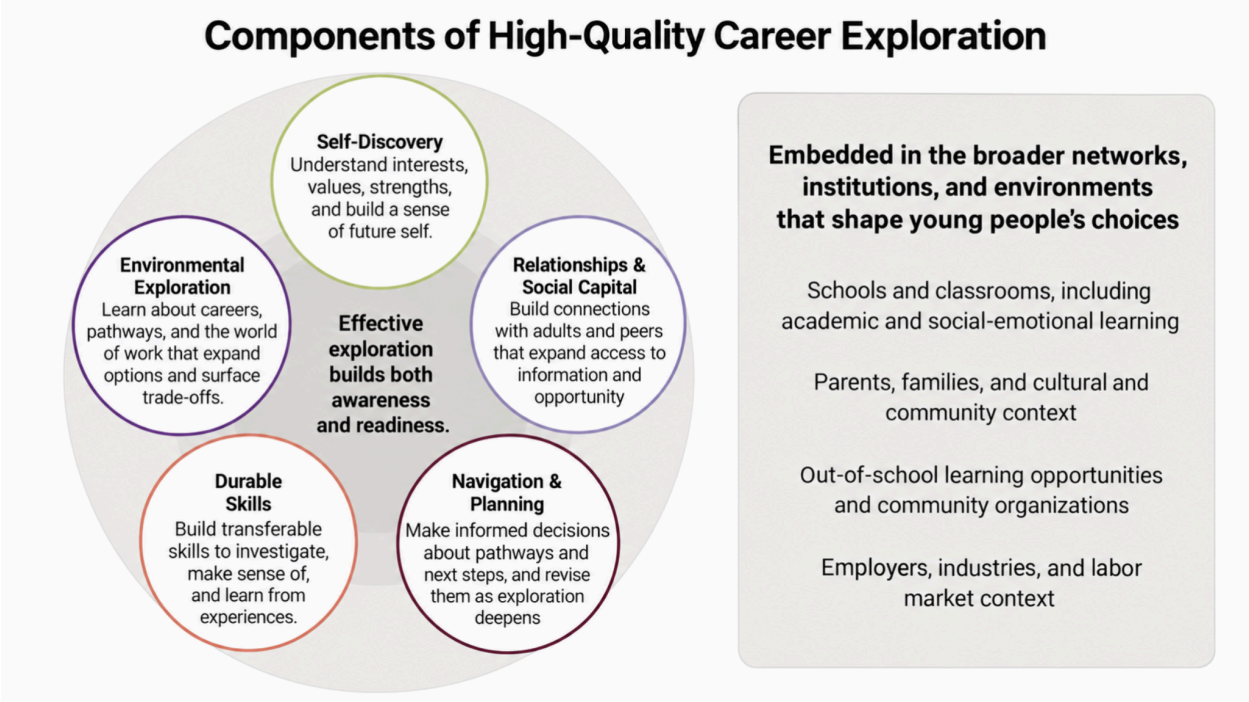
Young people begin narrowing what they believe is possible by their early teens, often based on what they've seen and who they know.[2] Exploration that starts in middle school and builds through high school can widen the paths they consider and strengthen their connection to school, especially for students who don't get these experiences through family or community networks. The evidence points the same way. Long-term studies across OECD countries link teenage career conversations, workplace visits, and part-time work to better adult outcomes, including employment, earnings, and career satisfaction.[3] Exploration appears most effective when it's woven into curriculum, advising, and employer engagement.[4] In U.S. middle schools, teaching core subjects through a career lens has improved student engagement and math achievement.[5] Career exploration should give every student the experiences and relationships to discover what careers fit them, see more options than they first imagined, and connect school to the life they want to build.

Career exploration programming is expanding rapidly in middle and high schools across the country — yet schools, practitioners, and funders lack a shared definition of what quality exploration looks like, actionable evidence of its impact on young people, and the measurement infrastructure (and measures of success) needed to evaluate outcomes. This fund aims to build evidence and strengthen the knowledge base to guide more effective design, implementation, and investment in career exploration.

Designing Career Exploration for Outcomes

Project Evident outlined what we know from research and practice in career exploration in a series of reports called *Advancing K-12 Career Exploration: An Assessment of Evidence and Opportunity*. This work was based on conversations with practitioners, a review of the relevant literature, and input from researchers and key stakeholders. Featuring a framework for quality career exploration (shown below), and accompanied by a practice brief, it was designed to be actionable for career exploration practitioners. The assessment pointed to the following components as core ingredients for meaningful career exploration:

[2] Gottfredson (1981)
[3] Covacevich et al. (2021)
[4] Mann, Denis, & Percy (2020); OECD (2021)
[5] Orthner et al. (2013); Woolley et al. (2013)



Read more about the framework for high-quality career exploration in this white paper. Together, the five components build toward the knowledge, awareness, beliefs, skills, and connections young people need to continue learning and adapting over time. Outcomes that high-quality career exploration enables include: identity, purpose, and belonging; agency and self-efficacy; an informed view of options; access to relationships and networks; durable skills; adaptability; and academic engagement and persistence.[6]

Exploration is often defined as a low-intensity stage of awareness building that precedes more intensive experiential and applied learning. This new framework positions high-quality exploration as a set of connected components that recur and deepen across middle and high school. Career exploration can take many forms, and while the five-component framework is not a checklist, it does provide practitioners with guidance as to what programming our existing research indicates will be most effective for middle and high school students. We are looking for career exploration partners with existing programs to build evidence together for this deeper understanding of how career exploration can drive outcomes for young people.

[6] The Evidence Brief defines these constructs and reviews the evidence for each; see Table 2, Key Career Exploration Outcomes and Evidence, and the outcome categories.

Appendix B: Letter of Interest Questions

This appendix is provided for reference only. Please submit your Letter of Interest through the online Letter of Interest form by 11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, December 15, 2026.

The LOI is designed to be brief and is expected to take one to two hours to complete. We encourage concise responses, and guidance on response length is provided below. Some questions apply only to certain organization types; these are marked accordingly.

For answers to frequently asked questions, please see the Applicant FAQ, which is updated at least weekly. Additional questions may be sent to careerexploration@projectevident.org by Tuesday, December 8, 2026.

Contact & Organization
Organization name:
Organization type: ☐ Nonprofit ☐ School district ☐ Public charter school ☐ Technology provider ☐ Other (describe)
Address (street, city, state, ZIP code):
Website:
Year founded:
Annual operating budget: ☐ Under $1M ☐ $1–5M ☐ $5–10M ☐ Over $10M
Primary contact (name, title, email, phone):
Executive director or authorized signer (name, title, email):

Eligibility
Eligible applicants must: • **Be a nonprofit organization, a school district, a technology provider, or a public charter school.** Programs with multiple sites can select a subset of sites for the application to meet the other eligibility criteria below.

- **Deliver comprehensive career exploration programming.** Career exploration is a clearly defined focus of a program that has been in place for at least one academic year. The activities feature at least three elements of the framework for high-quality career exploration.
- **Serve students in grades 6–10 during the school year.** Programs serving any subset of grades 6–10 are invited to apply. Programming must run during academic years 2027–28 and 2028–29, when data collection will take place. Summer programs are not eligible unless they are part of a school-year program.
- **Have the ability to collect and share data at the student level.** Readiness to gather student-level contextual, programmatic, and outcome data on career exploration as well as academic outcomes, with support from the Project Evident Data Hub and consistent with applicable student privacy laws. School district and charter school applicants must have a process to be able to share de-identified data. Nonprofits and technology providers must have a data-sharing agreement with relevant sites in place by the full proposal.
- **Have a reach of at least 500 students.** The program serves at least 500 students annually in grades 6–10. If the application is being made with a subset of sites, then the sites that are included in the application reach at least 500 students.
- **Serve young people furthest from opportunity.** At least 30% of students served must be from the population furthest from opportunity, which includes students from low-income families, students in rural communities, and other young people with barriers to career exploration access (such as students from families with no history of college-going or students who otherwise would not have access to career exploration activities).
- **Be interested in partnering to advance evidence for high-quality career exploration.** Willing to engage with co-developing measurement, and the framework for high-quality career exploration, as described in Grantee Commitments and in Strengthening Career Exploration (Appendix A).

I have read the eligibility criteria and confirm that my program meets them. ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Optional) Any comments? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Program Overview

Program name (if different from organization name):

Briefly describe your career exploration program. (Short answer, up to 100 words)

How many years has this program been running?

Grades served: ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ Other: ____

What is the total reach of your career exploration programming? (Short answer, up to 100

words)

Guidance: This can include all of the schools in a district, or the scale of operation for a national organization or provider. Include where you operate and the approximate number of students served in grades 6–10. You will describe program activities in a later question.

If you are focusing on a subset of locations or schools for this funding opportunity, what is the reach of that focus? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Guidance: Some larger providers may choose to focus on the sites or programs that are most comprehensive and ready for deeper data collection. Include where these programs operate and the approximate number of students served in grades 6–10. Together, the selected sites must serve at least 500 students.

Program Details

Describe your career exploration programming in more detail. (Long answer, up to 250 words)

Guidance: Describe the specific activities students take part in through your program, such as mentoring, workplace visits, career-focused projects in core classes, or digital exploration tools. Include when, how often, and for how long students participate (for example, weekly during the school day, or monthly after school, and the typical number of years per student). If you have a theory of change for career exploration (or if it is included in a larger theory of change), feel free to upload it below

(Optional) Upload a theory of change or program description.

Guidance: Please do not create anything new, but we welcome existing theory of change or program description materials.

NONPROFITS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ONLY

What role does technology play in your program, if any? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Describe the students your program serves, including how it reaches young people furthest from opportunity. (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Guidance: Students furthest from opportunity includes students from low-income families, students in rural communities, and other young people with barriers to career exploration access (such as students from families with no history of college-going or students who otherwise would not have access to career exploration activities).

Which of the five framework components does your program address? Select all that apply.

- ☐ **Self-discovery** supports young people in understanding their own interests, strengths, values, and goals. The ability to discover oneself creates a basis for evaluating new experiences and determining what is meaningful and possible.
- ☐ **Environmental exploration** introduces young people to careers, industries, education and training pathways, and workplaces, which expands the possibilities perceived by students and supports them in evaluating trade-offs.
- ☐ **Durable skills** allow young people to turn their experiences into learning. Students need skills like communication, problem solving, reflection, and decision making to ask questions, analyze and

compare options, and make sense of what they experience.

- ☐ **Relationships and social capital** enable young people to gain greater access to information, guidance, role models, and opportunities through ongoing connections with peers, educators, employers, and community members.
- ☐ **Navigation and adaptive planning** provide young people with tools to translate the results of exploration into actual decisions. Students need assistance to understand the criteria for selecting a particular path, compare alternatives, select near-term actions, and revise plans as they learn more or as options change.

(Optional) Provide brief reflections on how your program addresses the components you selected. (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Guidance: As a reminder, we are looking for programs that address at least three of the five framework components.

Data and Learning

What do you currently measure about your program and the students it serves? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Guidance: Examples include participation, student surveys or feedback, and school records such as attendance and grades. Describe the tools or data sources you use and how you use the results.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ONLY

Does your district or school have an existing process for sharing de-identified student data for program improvement and research? ☐ Yes ☐ In progress ☐ No

What barriers or concerns, if any, do you have about sharing data as described in this funding opportunity? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

NONPROFITS AND TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ONLY

Describe your access to student-level data through school or district partners, such as attendance, grades, or student surveys. (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Do you have a data-sharing agreement with a school or district partner for this program? ☐ Yes ☐ In progress ☐ No

What barriers or concerns, if any, do you have about sharing data as described in this funding opportunity? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

What do you hope to learn through participating in the fund? (Short answer, up to 100 words)

Guidance: For example, are there questions about your program or its outcomes that you would like data to help answer?

Additional Information
Have you previously received support from Project Evident, Britebound, or the Walton Family Foundation? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, briefly describe the type of support and approximate year(s).
(Optional) How did you hear about this opportunity? Select all that apply. ☐ *Designing Career Exploration for Outcomes webinar* (November 16) ☐ Project Evident website ☐ Project Evident newsletter ☐ Colleague, partner, or another organization ☐ Britebound ☐ Walton Family Foundation ☐ Social media (e.g., LinkedIn) ☐ Conference or event ☐ Other (please specify): _____

End of LOI questions.