



## CFMC Grant Application

# COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION FOR FUNDING REQUESTS FOR THE Community Foundation of Middlesex County Competitive Cycle.

**Instructions:** Complete the application on the website. You may "Save and Continue Later" - the site will email you a link which is active for 30 days. Review instructions document for full details before completing. Complete all questions.

**Section V requires certain documents to be uploaded to the form - see the Application Instructions Document for a list of the required items. All items must be uploaded as PDF Files. The CFMC Budget Summary form is available on the website in Word. This document must be submitted as PDF file as well.**

### I. Application Information

**Legal Name of Organization**

The Connecticut RISE Network

**Division or Department Name (if applicable)**

**Other Tax Exempt Entity?**

**Are you a 501(c)3 Organization**

Yes

**EIN #**

81-4104274

If your organization is not a 501(c) 3 tax exempt entity or division/department of a 170(c)1 government agency or religious organization, please contact Thayer Talbott, 860.347.0025, for further information before completing the application.

**Total Cost associated with request \$**

156,942

**Dollar Amount Requested \$**

5,000

**Summary Statement**

This grant would support The Connecticut RISE Network's efforts to address educational inequity in student outcomes through our focus on Grade 9 on-track achievement and postsecondary success. While we work with high schools across the state, Middletown High School is one of our core network schools, receiving the highest level of programmatic support.

## II. Funding Request Information

### 1. Proposal / Purpose

#### Introduction to the RISE Network

Through innovative and data-driven partnership models, RISE facilitates improvement networks, where educators collaborate across schools and districts to advance shared goals. Our common mission is to ensure all students graduate high school with a plan and the skills and confidence to achieve college and career success. This mission is especially critical given the persistent opportunity gaps faced by Connecticut's low-income students, Black and Latinx students, multilingual learners, and students with special needs.

RISE predominantly serves students of color from low-income communities across multiple towns and cities throughout Connecticut and beyond, **including Middletown with whom we have partnered since 2019**. Our work begins as students transition between middle and high school. We focus on freshman success because research shows Grade 9 on-track achievement (i.e., whether a student earns enough credits to be promoted on time to sophomore year) is the best predictor of whether a student will graduate from high school within four years - more so than test scores, family income, or race/ethnicity. Our work to increase measurable progression towards high school degrees starts in this critical moment of transition into the ninth grade.

However, it's not enough for students to obtain a high school diploma; while 70% of Connecticut jobs require some education beyond a high school diploma, only 25% of low-income Connecticut high school graduates will go on to earn a postsecondary degree within six years of graduating from high school. The pandemic has widened these opportunity gaps in recent years. Postsecondary enrollment levels have declined in Connecticut and across the country, with overall undergraduate college enrollment dropping 5.6% since 2019 and community college enrollment decreasing by 12%. To date, these state and federal metrics have not recovered post-pandemic. That is why RISE also supports students as they transition into their postsecondary experience. In addition to on-time graduation, we are also committed to strengthening postsecondary support to ensure students experience a seamless matriculation from high school into their chosen pathway.

In October 2023, a report was released by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) that explored the needs and opportunities facing Connecticut's disengaged and disconnected young people aged 14 to 26. While sobering, the data showcase how the RISE model and data tools can help more schools and students achieve on-track and postsecondary success. Aligned to RISE's focus on Grade 9 on-track achievement, BCG found that far too many students experience challenges as they transition into high school. In fact, 19% of all Grade 9 Connecticut students were off-track in 2021-22 (the most recent year with available statewide data); off-track rates increased to one in four among students of color, and one in three among students attending high-poverty high schools. The research emphasized the predictive nature of Grade 9 success for high school graduation, with 97% of on-track Grade 9 students graduating within four years compared to only 45% of off-track students.

RISE helps schools by investing in improvement infrastructure in three key areas. First, we seek to empower educators through high-quality **data systems and supporting tools, including our flagship custom-build data tool, the RISE Data Hub**. Second, we build **educator capacity** through networked improvement and sharing promising practices across schools and districts. Third, we invest in more effective and efficient **school structures and practices** with a central focus on data teams and evidence-based practices that can support students during key transitions to, through, and beyond high school.

RISE is requesting a \$5,000 grant to support our general operating expenses as we work to continue our impact in the Middlesex County community. Our work in Middletown is approximately \$350,000 in expenses (roughly 5% of our organizational budget) and a general operating grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County will help us continue to execute and expand our work. At RISE, we are proud to direct the vast majority of organizational resources toward school-facing work, while also maintaining lean internal operations in pursuit of organizational excellence in support of our mission. Grant resources from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County would primarily support the following investment areas:

- **School Coaching:** RISE provides partner schools and educators with highly contextualized coaching around on-track and postsecondary strategies and the use of data to support continuous improvement. RISE coaches are former teachers, counselors, and administrators who work closely with educators in partner schools to build local capacity to lead improvement

efforts.

- **Cross-School Learning:** RISE facilitates professional development experiences by bringing together educators across schools and districts. That way, educators are learning with and from one another and scaling promising practices in diverse school contexts. RISE designs learning experiences that are highly relevant, engaging, and action-oriented.
- **Data Tools:** RISE provides partner schools with access to our flagship and custom-built data platform called the RISE Data Hub. This powerful web-based tool integrates data from various district source systems into one secure, user-friendly, and timely set of tools. The Hub includes student-level lists, interactive dashboards, strategic data calendars, student profiles, and more. The Hub empowers educators to monitor progress toward goals and provide equitable support for students.
- **Student Strategies:** RISE supports schools in implementing evidence-based strategies to promote on-track achievement and postsecondary success. We help schools diagnose needs and then pursue strategies, such as: on-track data teams, student conferences, on-track coaches, summer bridge programs, postsecondary planning academies, FAFSA task forces, summer melt testing campaigns, and more.

Combined, this system of support has helped schools achieve double-digit gains in improving Grade 9 on-track achievement, four-year graduation rates, and postsecondary access.

Our continued partnership with Middletown High School will focus on the following objectives and outcomes:

1. Continued increase in the Grade 9 on-track rates for students, with a particular focus on closing the gap in on-track rates for students with special needs.
2. Deepening support for students with postsecondary plans that do not include four year college.
3. Maintaining the increased FAFSA completion rate of seniors during a uniquely challenging time of transition to the Better FAFSA system.
4. Exploring models to expand the on-track structures beyond Grade 9, in line with updated findings from the University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research (<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/the-forgotten-year>)

## 2. Sustainability and Assessing Impact

Overall, RISE has a robust set of internal metrics that it holds itself accountable to on an ongoing, quarterly, and annual basis, including:

- RISE measures the on-track rates of freshmen, including with disaggregation by race/ethnicity, special education status, multilingual learner status, gender, and graduation cohort. RISE measures the postsecondary plans and application data for seniors, including with disaggregation by race/ethnicity, special education status, multilingual learner status, gender, and graduation cohort.
- RISE surveys educators to understand how their mindsets and practices are evolving through this partnership. RISE also surveys students regarding their postsecondary plans and preparation.
- RISE measures the frequency of on-track data team meetings and student engagement in on-track and postsecondary support strategies.

Additionally, through the RISE warehouse and Data Hub, we collect real-time information about student progress and achievement across partner schools. This allows us to track data aligned to our postsecondary goals, including information about students' postsecondary plans and students' completion of postsecondary access milestones (e.g., FAFSA, college applications). This reporting is done aligned to the critical milestone timelines of the academic calendar, utilizing school level calendars (quarters and semesters), as well as application deadlines set by outside organizations. We also complete biannual surveys of high school juniors and seniors to gather more information about their college and career goals. We leverage this information to build action plans that allow us to quickly respond to specific student needs and prepare for the coming year.

RISE partner schools have improved Grade 9 on-track rates by 19 points. from 65% to 84%, **tripling a student's likelihood of graduating on time**. Schools have seen some of the largest gains among Black (+29 pts), Latinx (+22 pts), multilingual (+22 pts), and students with special needs (+25 pts). 99% of the Class of 2023 (2,573 students) graduated from core network high schools last year with a postsecondary plan. FAFSA completion rates improved from 59% in July 2022 to 66% in July 2023.

On average, core network schools have seen nearly **triple the growth** in high school graduation rates compared to the state

since 2014-15 (+8 pts for core schools vs. +3 pts for the state). Our initial cohort of core network schools have improved high school graduation rates by an average of 12 points.

Middletown High School has been a part of our core network since 2019 and has seen significant progress over that period of time. Since 2018-19 (pre-RISE baseline year), Middletown High School has improved Grade 9 on-track rates by 8 points, including gains among Black (+12 pts), multiracial (+28 pts), multilingual (+22 pts - 100% of multilingual students in Grade 9 were on track in 2022-23), and students with special needs (+16 pts). In 2023, 78% of Middletown High School seniors completed the FAFSA - the highest completion rate across our entire network and a 15-point increase over the previous year.

### III. Grant Program / Project Information

#### Organization Area of Impact (choose ONE)

Education (Community Wide/Schools)

#### Grant Type (choose ONE)

General Organization Support/Improvement

#### Target Demographics (Select all that apply):

- Youth (ages 13-17)
- Women and Girls
- At Risk Boys and Young Men
- LGBTQIA+
- BIPOC

#### Geographic Area(s) Served By This Application:

- Middletown

#### Total Number of People in Middlesex County Personally Impacted

1250

### IV. Organization Information

Board of Directors / Trustees Information

#### Percent (%) of Directors/Trustees who contribute annually to Operations

Less than 50%

#### Total Number of Directors/Trustees:

9

#### Average number attending in person:

9

#### Total Number of Board meetings held last year:

4

#### Year of Return:

2022

#### Date most recent IRS Form 990 was filed:

May 15, 2023

#### Organization's Total Operating Budget

7051916

#### Organization's Fiscal Year

July 1 - June 30

#### Division Operating Budget Information

## National Organization Chapter Information

Did you RECEIVE a competitive process grant in the:

### Brief Background Statement of the Organization:

Founded in partnership with Connecticut educators in 2016, the RISE Network's commitment to breaking multigenerational opportunity gaps has propelled us to support tens of thousands of students from low-income communities in achieving high school success and pursuing their college and career goals. **Our mission is to ensure all students graduate with a plan and the skills and confidence to achieve college and career success.** Through our core and most comprehensive network, we partner with nine high schools across eight districts, including Middletown High School. We prioritize partnerships with historically marginalized communities to advance student outcomes and close opportunity gaps.

## V. Additional Information To Be Included with the Application

**Please Note: Additional information requested below MUST be uploaded in PDF files. Other document formats will not be accepted by the application form. Attempts to upload other file formats could result in a loss of all application data entered.**

### A. Current Organization Operations Budget (Required)

- CFMC-RISE-Budget-\_-3.1.24.pdf

### B. Board of Directors and Officers List (Required)

- CT-RISE-Network-\_-Board-List.pdf

### C. IRS Tax Exempt Determination Letter

- RISE-501c3-Exemption-Letter-1.pdf

### D. For Program/Project Requests only - CFMC Budget Summary Form:

### E. Organizations serving a region greater than Middlesex County - county-based budget summary:

CFMC-RISE-Budget-\_-3.1.241.pdf

### F. America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

No

### ARPA Funding detail

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**Additional financial documentation, including the organization's most recent audit, annual report, and IRS Form 990 may also be required. Only provide this information if requested.**

For programs or projects which are collaborations among two or more organizations or where an organization provides in-school or after-school programming for schools, the Community Foundation requires a list of organizations or schools partnering with your organization as well as Letters of Support.

For the purposes of this application, collaborations are defined as partnerships where two or more agencies are committed through staffing, funding, and resource allocation to the goals and objectives of the program described. Because the nature of the collaboration requires two or more entities to work together, for the purposes of funding, only one organization may complete the application, and in doing so, accepts responsibility for all evaluative and fiduciary reporting.

For all collaborations, the Community Foundation requires letters of support from the non-applicant organization(s) and/or from the school(s) and school district(s) at which the applicant organization is the program.

**Is this application in collaboration with a School(s) or School District(s)?**

Yes (Letter(s) of Support REQUIRED)

**Is this application a collaboration of two or more nonprofit organizations (NOT schools)?**

No

**If this is an On-Going Collaboration, how long has the collaboration existed?**

Since 2019

**If Yes, is this a New or On-Going Collaboration?**

On-going

**List of Collaborators**

Dr. Dawn Brooks, Principal, Middletown High School  
Bobbi-Jo Wathen, Coordinator of Guidance, Middletown High School  
Ryan Mertel, Assistant Principal, Middletown High School  
Vicky Thong, On-Track Coach, Middletown High School  
Hannah Barrett, On-Track Coach, Middletown High School  
Jennifer Melnik, College and Career Counselor, Middletown High School  
Emily Pallin, Executive Director, RISE Network  
Chris Lewine, Chief of Data Strategy and Product Innovation, RISE Network  
Nichelle Woodson, Director of Freshman Success, RISE Network  
Sherry McLaughlin, Director of Postsecondary Success, RISE Network  
Gretchen Philbrick, MHS Freshman Success Coach, RISE Network  
Abby Marcantonio, MHS Postsecondary Success Coach, RISE Network

**Letters of Support (if a collaboration with schools or other nonprofits))**

- [Brooks-for-RISE-Mar.-2024-1.pdf](#)

## VI. Organization Contact Information

### Are you a new nonprofit applicant to the Community Foundation?

Yes

#### Title

Executive Director

#### Executive Officer's Name

Emily Pallin

#### Executive Officer Email

[epallin@ctrise.org](mailto:epallin@ctrise.org)

#### Phone

(860) 705-0412

#### Title

Director, External Relations

#### Contact Person

Terrence Kneisel

#### Application Contact Email

[tkneisel@ctrise.org](mailto:tkneisel@ctrise.org)

#### Phone

(401) 440-3556

#### Mailing Address

700 State St.  
Suite 301  
New Haven, Connecticut 06511  
United States

#### Street Address

Connecticut  
United States

#### Website

[www.ctrise.org](http://www.ctrise.org)

#### Social Media Channels

Facebook: [ctrisenetwork](#); Twitter: [ctrisenetwork](#); Youtube: [@connecticutrisenetwork6748](#); LinkedIn: [connecticut-rise-network](#)

## VII. Non-Funding Needs

We deeply respect and appreciate the Community Foundation's ability to convene conversations around critical issues facing Middlesex County. We would welcome the opportunity to partner on ways to build awareness of the challenges faced by students who are off-track, at-risk of being off-track, or are already disengaged, as well as the practices that have shown promise in addressing those challenges. Hosting events to build community understanding could be something we partner on together.



## **VIII. Marketing and Public Relations**

Organizations receiving grants from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County must promote their funding awards according to the marketing and public relations guidelines established by the Community Foundation. By signing the application below, the CEO/Executive Director understands the Community Foundation's marketing and public relations requirements if awarded a grant. The Community Foundation will host a seminar on marketing guidelines and tips for grantees annually. The Community Foundation's Grantee Communications Kit may be downloaded on our website in the Nonprofit Resources section, [middlesexcountycf.org/nonprofits/resources/forms-pr-guidelines/](http://middlesexcountycf.org/nonprofits/resources/forms-pr-guidelines/).

## **IX. Tax Exempt Standing and Use of Grant Funding Certification**

By signing this application, the CEO/Executive Director/Board President is certifying that your organization is a qualified 501c3 organization or other charitable organization recognized and currently in good standing with the IRS, or 170(c)(1) governmental agencies. Should a grant be approved by the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, these funds may only be used for the purpose outlined in your original application; you must notify us if you are unable to do so. If grant funding is provided, you may only use these funds for charitable purpose as described in Section 170(c)2 of the IRS code, and funds may not be used for any political or lobbying activity. In addition, no tangible benefits, goods or services may be received by our donors or by staff members of the Community Foundation of Middlesex County in exchange for grant funding.

### **Signature Certification**

I certify that my printed name as stated and assigned below constitutes my signature and may be accepted as such.

**Title**

Director of External Relations

**Printed Name**

Terrence Kneisel

**Date**

03/07/2024